

# Kent Coast Volunteering

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Age-friendly and  
inclusive volunteering  
grant programme  
evaluation

January 2021



In partnership with:

# About us

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## **Centre for Ageing Better**

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

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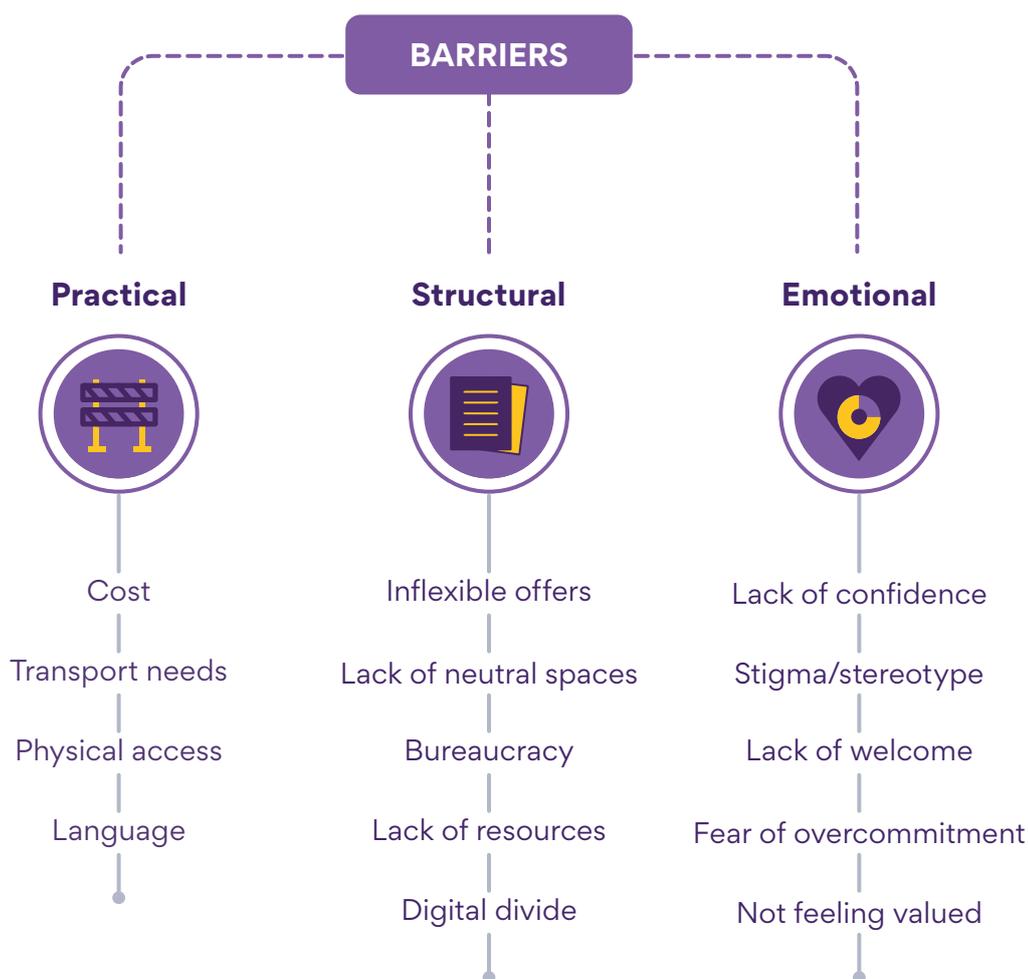
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# Introduction

The Centre for Ageing Better, in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) undertook a review into community contributions in later life in October 2018. The review found that many older people, who would benefit most from contributing to their communities, encounter practical, structural and emotional barriers that prevent them from taking part, or from remaining involved as life changes. It called on voluntary organisations to do more to tackle these barriers and set out six key principles for achieving this.

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## Barriers to participation



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## Age-friendly, inclusive volunteering is:



Flexible and responsive



Valued and appreciated



Enabled and supported



Meaningful and purposeful



Sociable and connected



Makes good use of my strengths

### Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering grant programme

Following the review, the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering fund was set up to put these principles into practice. The programme grant-funded five projects to develop and document models of good practice in supporting older people's voluntary and community activity. The focus was on those most at risk of missing out on the benefits of contributing to their communities.

#### The fund has three priorities:

- Sustaining lifelong contributions and helping people remain involved throughout major life changes such as bereavement, caring or developing a health condition.
- Helping people connect to and take part in voluntary activities and opportunities that suit their life circumstances, including informal and self-organised contributions.
- Providing practical support to include older people who currently face barriers to volunteering (for example due to health, language, and cultural or social factors).

The project initially intended to only address the priority ‘Helping people connect to opportunities to suit their life circumstances’. However, in practice, it had some impact on all priorities.

Each project received approximately £50,000 to run over a one-year period between April 2019 and March 2020.<sup>1</sup> The grant programme adopted a grant-plus model, supporting projects to maximise their learning and outcomes through project development, action-learning and evaluation support. The focus was as much on development, learning, sharing good practice and sustainability as on immediate outcomes and impact (the grant-plus model was funded through additional funding from the Centre for Ageing Better above the £50,000 for each project).

The scale and activities of the projects are different, each working with older people in different circumstances and settings and using different approaches. This provided opportunities to learn about, and measure the impact of, different models of tackling barriers to community contributions in later life and supporting older people’s voluntary and community activity.

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<sup>1</sup> The end of the project and the evaluation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted on completion of the project. Consequently, this delayed some evaluation activity and access to information, although most of the evaluation activity was conducted prior to the lockdown.

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## **Kent Coast Volunteering (KCV): From Supported to Supporter (S2S)**

KCV supports Kent's coastal communities to improve their quality of life through the power of volunteering and social action.

The project aimed to help isolated older people, at risk of being vulnerable due to their circumstances, who have been 'supported' by KCV's community care navigation referral service or other partners, to become 'supporters' of other people. The inspiration for the model came from previous experience of moving two service users<sup>2</sup> into volunteering. The project sought to build on this ad hoc practice through a more intentional model.

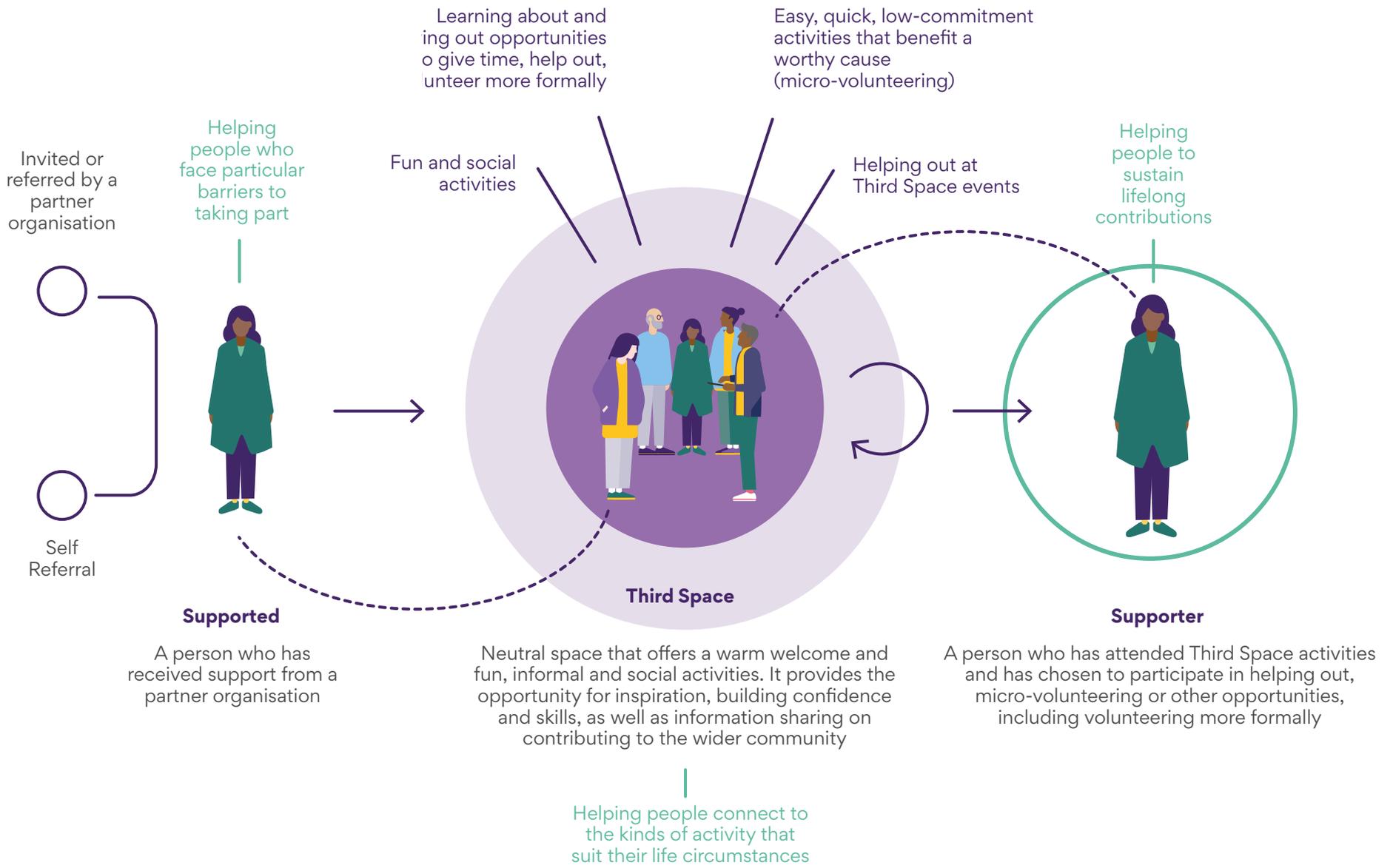
KCV sought to achieve this through a package of inspiration, confidence and skills building delivered in a neutral 'third space', and then supporting and matching people to volunteer opportunities through their existing volunteer outreach and brokerage service. Through testing and learning, the model adapted during the course of the programme. It moved away from being an overt, structured approach to supporting people into volunteering, to a more sociable and informal model in which volunteering is introduced subtly and gradually in a fun and sociable community setting. This informality provided a platform for people to micro-volunteer and increasingly get more involved in volunteering over time, to suit their circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> KCV considers the service users that use the community navigation referral service as often isolated and at risk of being vulnerable, given their support needs and the services they engage with. This is not because of their age per se, but because of their situation and circumstances at the time they are receiving support

<sup>3</sup> The nature of the project meant that this report focuses on the social events, the micro-volunteering at these events and how the events provide an opportunity for those that attended to be supported into future volunteering opportunities. It does not consider in depth the impact of subsequent volunteering, mainly because this is beyond the scope of the project in its first year, and there has only been a short period of time for people to move into volunteering.

Introduction



## Learning and evaluation

A ‘light-touch’, independent, evaluation of the project has been conducted to capture learning and identify emerging impact. This is a one-year developmental programme and therefore the focus is more on evidence of good-practice models that can overcome practical barriers and embed the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles, with only an expectation of emerging individual and organisational impact. The light touch evaluation and the length of time that the project ran makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about whether the project has led to working with volunteers from more diverse backgrounds than would have otherwise happened and/or whether the volunteering experience (despite being good) was better than it would have been otherwise. However, the findings do illustrate how practice has been adapted in line with the principles of age friendly and inclusive volunteering and began to explore a new approach that hopefully with more time would lead to a greater diversity of volunteers and a better volunteering experience.

### **Specifically, the evaluation sought to capture evidence about how the model has:**

- Helped meet the fund’s priorities.
- Overcome practical, structural and emotional barriers to community contributions and volunteering.
- Tested, validated and embedded the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles.
- Impacted on individuals (both those supported and those that go on to become supporters and the people they help) and organisations involved in the project (including KCV and other partner organisations).

### **Monitoring and evaluation has been embedded in the programme and project from the outset. This includes the following activity, which has informed this report:**

- Quarterly monitoring reports and other documentary evidence provided by the projects to the Centre for Ageing Better.
- Co-creation of a Theory of Change working document to help shape the delivery of the project, establish expected outputs, outcomes and impacts, and provide a guide to evaluating the model (see appendix) (the Theory of Change was co-produced with the project at the development stage of the programme, and subsequently some elements may have evolved over time).
- Learning logs maintained by the project to capture learning, ongoing feedback, progress and impact.

- Development of evaluation materials including an experience and outcomes questionnaire and discussion guides to capture quantitative and qualitative insight from individuals and organisations involved in the project.<sup>4</sup> This included engaging with over 25 project participants and 5 stakeholders.

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<sup>4</sup> These materials were co-produced with the project and Centre for Ageing Better and are available for use in the continued monitoring and evaluation of the project and model. They were used by the evaluators towards the end of the project to independently capture learning and impacts through face-to-face, telephone and digital methods with individuals and key stakeholders involved in the project and programme.

# Learning and impact

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## What activities have taken place? Process, challenges and learning

The programme's grant-plus funding model, provided the Supported to Supporter project with **development and learning support, which the project valued and said led to positive outcomes**, including the supportive approach from the funder and an emphasis on test and learn:

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“We know that a lot of work went into designing and developing the service, which is a luxury in the voluntary sector. Normally we're just running in head first. There's a balance to be struck between planning and doing, but no doubt the project is stronger because of it. We've also found the Centre for Ageing Better to be really supportive. They're quite hands on as a funder, which is positive and they want to help you succeed, while also giving you the space to test, fail and learn. That's very rare amongst funders and can only lead to a better result.”

Stakeholder

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Initially, the Supported to Supporter project aimed to engage older people previously and currently supported by Kent Coastal Volunteering (KCV) through its community care navigation referral service in a series of workshops to support them into volunteering. KCV held four 'Sharing Your Time' sessions in August 2019 – a rolling programme of four weekly sessions, which aimed to help participants build confidence, recognise their skills and move closer to volunteering.

However, out of approximately 236 invited current and former service users, 10 people attended at least one session, only two completed all the sessions and, by the end, six wanted to volunteer. The test and learn approach highlighted the challenges helping isolated people, at risk of being vulnerable, to move into volunteering. **This process found that a structured and more formal model that is overt about volunteering may not be appropriate in the first instance** with people that are not necessarily considering volunteering as a positive opportunity at this stage in their lives:

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“ We really liked the freedom to experiment, embrace failure to learn and evolve and refine the model. The programme has felt very supportive. It gave us time to be more strategic, thoughtful and reflect. I think it’s led to a better model as a result because we moved away from a more structured and overt approach to one that was more social, subtle with volunteering less overt initially. It’s a rare opportunity to learn, reflect and iterate in the voluntary sector, but really important, we don’t do enough of it.” Stakeholder

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“ Despite lots of work and planning, the workshops in August were not really successful. They struggled to attract and engage people. I think they were too upfront that it is about volunteering and it probably scared people off. Volunteering may be good for some of our service users to help them develop independence and improve their well-being, but most are not in the right mental or practical place to actively engage with volunteering at this time in their lives or at least to think it is the right thing for them. It might not be something that matters to them when directly presented to them, but over time, if a more subtle approach is taken, it could work well for them. I also think that the sessions were very structured, almost like being in a classroom, which didn’t suit a lot of the people.” Stakeholder

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Consequently, KCV **changed the model to a more fun, sociable and information-giving approach**, inviting their service users to ‘social get togethers’, which were not overt initially about volunteering. These sessions subtly introduced fun (but purposeful and meaningful) micro-volunteering opportunities, and exposure to volunteers and voluntary organisations. The sessions then became increasingly overt, promoting the benefits of volunteering and local voluntary opportunities, with the potential to support people into volunteering:

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“ It was great that the funder allowed us to learn from the first approach, which didn’t work. We knew we had to change it. We focused on what went wrong and that we needed to be less overt about volunteering, promote the events as socials and subtly and gradually introduce volunteering. We think it worked. People came, enjoyed themselves and have left more knowledgeable and more interested in volunteering, while they’ve done some volunteering without really knowing it when they’re at the social event.” Stakeholder

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## Activities

**‘Sharing Your Time’ sessions:** a rolling programme of four weekly sessions



4 sessions in August 2019



10 people attended at least 1 session  
2 all the sessions  
by the end 6 wanted to volunteer



4 sessions in October 2019



10 people attended at least 1 session  
2 carried on to future sessions in December

**‘Social get together’ sessions:** a more social and informal approach, introducing volunteering subtly



3 sessions in December 2019



53 attended 1 or more sessions



31: 1 session      22: 2 or 3 session



3 sessions in January 2020



58 people attended 1 or more sessions



**Feedback sessions:** to inform the evaluation and future delivery, as well as continuing micro-volunteering activities



16 participants

**Training course:** participants signed-up to the principles of age-friendly and inclusive volunteering



8 participants from 7 local voluntary organisations

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## How has the model helped overcome barriers to age-friendly and inclusive volunteering?

The age-friendly and inclusive volunteering barriers have been reaffirmed through the experience of the project, which the model has evolved to overcome. **Practical barriers** such as transport and physical health were often cited, which the model helped address by **providing transport and offering flexible, time-limited, micro-volunteering opportunities:**

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“We were very conscious of the barriers and tried to overcome them. We organised transport for those that needed it. About a third of those attending needed transport provided. It is a barrier for some, although very time consuming and expensive to organise.” Stakeholder

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“My health is the issue. I’m just not well enough now to volunteer regularly. I’m the one that needs looking after now rather than the other way around. But I like doing some of these activities, which I now understand are a type of volunteering. It makes you feel good.” Participant

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The **use of language and the way volunteering is described and promoted acts as a significant barrier to volunteering.** The initial approach was more overt, specifically referencing volunteering, which struggled to attract and engage participants. Through iteration, the model sought to be more **subtle, gradual and creative in its approach to introducing volunteering:**

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“One of the difficulties with the initial approach was that it was quite overt about volunteering. It probably put some people off. So we took a different approach, a more covert approach really, introducing volunteering by stealth. We attracted people through promoting the events as socials, with tea, coffee and chat, but then slowly introduced volunteering, first through activities and then more overtly. In the end I’d like to think most people realised that some of what we were doing here was to promote volunteering in lots of different ways and forms, but it wasn’t the only benefit of coming here.” Stakeholder

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“When I first came here I just saw it as a social event and it is still about that. But over time you begin to realise that they’re encouraging you to think about volunteering. However, they do it in the right way, it is up to you. They don’t force you to do anything and everything they do is fun and interesting and makes it feel like you’re doing some good, without committing to do more unless you want to. They’ve got the balance right.” Participant

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**Structural barriers** such as inflexible volunteering opportunities and lack of neutral spaces were also overcome by the model through **fun, social events, flexible micro-volunteering and the use of neutral ‘third spaces’**:

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“Jumping into more formal volunteering can be a big step, especially for some of the older and more vulnerable people we were engaging with. They’ve not been in a formal, structured environment for a while. The first approach was very structured, almost like classroom-style workshops. So we tried to make these new sessions fun and informal, and as part of that weave in micro-volunteering such as writing letters to sick children or making gifts, which we used to both break the ice and give people a taste of volunteering. We felt this would give people a gentle, flexible and fun introduction to volunteering.” Stakeholder

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“We used neutral ‘third spaces’, to hold the sessions. Somewhere that was accessible in all its senses, and wouldn’t intimidate or put people off, but instead make them comfortable and relaxed.” Stakeholder

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All of the 15 participants that completed the evaluation questionnaire said they rated the experience of coming to these events as at least good. Of these, 12 said they were very good, highlighting the social and enjoyable nature of the events, which helps overcome barriers.

**Emotional barriers** such as lack of confidence and fear of over-commitment were commonly mentioned by participants, which the model helped overcome through **a social, relaxed and welcoming environment and introducing volunteering in a subtle and non-committal way**:

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“Although we encouraged people to take part in the activities, no one was forced. Our aim was to introduce volunteering in a way that people could engage with it on their terms, to suit them and their circumstances. Along with the activities, we also asked some people to help out while they’re here, making tea or helping with signing-in. We also did things like bring volunteer

organisations in to speak to people, make donations for local charities, and celebrate the work of local charities and volunteers. It was a way of subtly bringing the voluntary sector closer to people, potentially inspiring them, sowing the seed, and promoting opportunities, without forcing anyone to do anything they were uncomfortable with.” Stakeholder

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“ I like coming here. They make you feel welcome and comfortable. I was fed up of looking at the same four walls. I was very isolated. A bit lonely. Coming here is good. It gets you out and about. I’ve met new people and had some fun. I like doing the activities, they give you something to do and help break the ice, while getting to know people. I definitely feel more confident in myself after coming here.” Participant

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### **Reducing barriers and increasing access to volunteering opportunities**

The project has helped introduce people to, and engage them in, voluntary activity and community contributions. It has managed to engage with people from different backgrounds and different circumstances, some of whom had never volunteered in their lives and most of whom were not volunteering prior to participating in the project. It has subsequently introduced them to voluntary organisations and activity, and supported them to participate in micro-volunteering. This has consequently led some people to engage in more and/or longer-term volunteering activities. This has been achieved by overcoming barriers and encouraging people to participate through a sociable and supportive model, which introduces volunteering subtly, gradually and through micro-volunteering:

“ I hadn’t thought about volunteering before coming here. When I first came here I didn’t know that this was about volunteering, I just thought it was a social event. I used to volunteer when I was younger, but I haven’t volunteered for years. I didn’t really feel up to it. I like that they get us to do useful things while we’re here and learn about what the different organisations and volunteers do. It opens up your mind and makes you think that you can get involved and help people again, in some small way.” Participant

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## How has the model embedded age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles?

The **model embraces the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles**, with several examples of them being put into practice and achieving positive outcomes through a **fun environment, allied with micro-volunteering, with support to access further help, services and volunteering opportunities**:

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“We think the principles are really good and important. They provide a useful guide to any organisation involved in volunteering. We went through each of the principles and it informed our thinking and plans about putting on the events, to ensure that we removed any barriers and provided a chance for people to move into volunteering opportunities to suit them.” Stakeholder

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### **Flexible and responsive:**

The project provided opportunities for people to get involved and volunteer through flexible and micro-volunteering opportunities to suit the interests and circumstances of those attending the social events:

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“I like doing some of the activities or helping out but on my terms. I’m getting too old to commit to a long-term thing. I can’t guarantee that I’ll feel up to it or I’ll be free, but I can help make the tea or write a card. That suits me. I enjoy it and it can make you feel quite good.” Participant

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### **Enabled and supported:**

The project provided practical and emotional support, such as transport, calling people up before attending, a welcoming and friendly environment, and light touch support and guidance, to help people participate:

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“Everyone is really nice here. They help you get here in the first place by providing a taxi. The activities also help break the ice and us all to get to know each other. They provide tea and cake, which is nice. They do lots of interesting activities, like groups coming in and talking about their work, like the Food Bank, which I found interesting. The staff are really kind and friendly and they’ve encouraged me to get involved with things like helping out at other events.” Participant

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**“I was a bit nervous coming at first, but they try to make you feel at ease. They called me up before coming to make sure everything was ok and to introduce themselves and they were all very friendly when I arrived.”** Participant

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**Sociable and connected:**

The project focused on creating fun and sociable events, including micro-volunteering activities, to break the ice, help people get to know each other and establish new relationships:

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**“It’s fun coming here. You have a cup of tea, chat to people, some you know and some new people you become friends with. It gets you out of the house. I felt quite isolated before, but this makes me feel better in myself and a bit more confident to try new things. From being here I’ve learnt about other places I can go and things I can get involved with.”** Participant

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**Valued and appreciated:**

The use of micro-volunteering activities not only helped break the ice and encourage people to connect, but they also provided an opportunity for people to volunteer. The project built feedback into the process so that those attending the sessions and micro-volunteering could see the impact of their involvement. This then helped people consider getting involved in further volunteering activity:

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**“The activities are interesting and fun, but you also know that they’re doing some good. We gave some donations at Christmas to a charity and they were really positive about it. I knitted some animals and they really liked it. It felt good to be doing something for others, for charity, and them appreciating it... it makes you want to carry on and do more, because you know you’re doing good and having a positive impact.”** Participant

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12 of the 15 participants that completed the feedback questionnaire agreed that attending the sessions made them feel more valued.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The feedback questionnaire was focused on outcomes and the impact of the events on individuals that attended. It did not directly ask about all the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles. Therefore, there is not quantitative data about all of the principles, and this should not be seen as a sign of a lack of support from participants about these principles.

### **Meaningful and purposeful:**

The use of micro-volunteering helped people that attended feel that the events were more than just a social event, despite that being the initial hook that attracted them in the first place, and encouraged them to keep getting involved:

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“These activities give you a real purpose when you’re here. At first you think they are a bit silly, or just to give you something to do. But they help you get to know each other as a group and have something to talk about and at the end of it you’ve created something or done something good for someone else. I’ve been to some other social groups and it’s just people sitting around talking, which can be a bit cliquy and after a while gets a bit boring. This is like a social club with purpose. It makes it feel like you’re doing something good, while having a good time and you want to keep coming back. It will be a shame if it ends.” Participant

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13 of the 15 participants that completed the feedback questionnaire agreed that attending the sessions made them feel more like they have a purpose.

### **Makes good use of my strengths:**

The variety of activities available at the events, combined with the flexible approach, meant that people felt they could get involved and contribute on their own terms, which made them feel comfortable, positive and keen to keep coming back:

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“I like making things. That’s one of my hobbies and strengths. So I’ve enjoyed coming here and making the bug hotels and doing the crafts. I get a sense of enjoyment and purpose doing that myself, and if it benefits someone else that can only be a good thing.” Participant

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“They’re not pushy. You can take part if you want and do what you want. There’s always 3 or 4 different activities and they also have speakers and people come in to talk about their work. So you can engage in the things that interest you, which I like.” Participant

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## What have been the impacts on individuals and organisations?

### Individuals

There is evidence that the model helps older people, some of whom are isolated and at risk of vulnerability according to KCV. Many participants had either never volunteered or not volunteered recently. The project helped them increase their social connections, learn to do new things, reduce their isolation and loneliness and improve their self-esteem and confidence. This has the potential for future and sustained improvements to emotional and physical well-being. People that were previously ‘supported’ appear to have become more independent and resilient, and they will potentially support others in the future:

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“I’ve enjoyed it more than I thought I would, everyone is friendly. Doing the activities breaks down barriers, breaks the ice and gets people talking. And you learn new skills and new things. I think it should be continued.” Participant

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“It’s the companionship, I’m on my own and I was fed up of being stuck indoors, alone, not seeing people from day to day and just watching TV and looking at the same four walls. This is social, you meet new people, it gives you a purpose, keeps your mind active, something to get you out of the house and look forward to and make friends at the same time. It’s made me feel better, it’s done me the world of good. I don’t feel so isolated and alone. I feel better about life and I think that’s also improved my health.” Participant

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All of the 15 participants that completed the evaluation questionnaire agreed, and most strongly agreed, that attending the sessions helped them get out and about more, meet new people, make new friends, do new things, learn new things and feel better about themselves. And most said that attending helped them feel more independent (11 of the 15 participants), more able to deal with life’s challenges (10 of 15), be more physically active and feel healthier (12 of 15).

Participating in the social get togethers has **exposed participants to the voluntary sector and voluntary opportunities:**

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“We’ve tried hard to expose people, in a subtle way, to the voluntary sector and different opportunities, so it all links together. Things like making a hamper bag for a domestic violence charity at Christmas or thank you letters and donations to the local food bank and then nine of their volunteers came to be thanked and spoke about what they did and how volunteers get involved. It helps people see the benefits of volunteering, hopefully get inspired, but also micro-volunteer in the process.” Stakeholders

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All but one of the 15 participants that completed an evaluation questionnaire acknowledged that the events were at least partly about learning more or preparing to volunteer in their community, highlighting how the model initially successfully introduced volunteering in a subtle way and gradually became more overt.

The social get togethers provided **embedded, in-situ opportunities for participants** to help deliver events or through micro-volunteering during events:

- Help setting-up events, signing-in, making teas, designing activities such as quizzes for use in the events or clearing up after events.
- Micro-volunteering during events such as making cards, crafts and gifts bags for the women's shelter or letter writing to sick children in hospital.
- Planning, hosting and creating decorations for a Christmas party to thank KCV volunteers.
- Hosting a thank-you event for volunteers at the local food bank.
- Taking part in films, photos and focus groups to inform the development of the project, toolkit and evaluation or sharing their knowledge about local social and volunteering activities to inform a local guide.

10 of the 15 participants that completed an evaluation questionnaire said that they felt like they were volunteering or doing some voluntary activities when at the sessions.

The social get togethers **increase awareness of, and interest in, volunteering** amongst those that attend:

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**“They don't bring it in straight away, but you know from the things they talk to you about and the feedback forms they ask you to fill in that some of this is about volunteering. It's done in the right way though, it's not shoved down your throat. But coming here has shown me that there's things I could get involved in. It's sparked a bit of an interest in a few things. You see what some of the people that volunteer get out of it and you think you might want to be more involved.” Stakeholders**

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13 of the 15 participants that completed an evaluation questionnaire said that coming to the events has increased their awareness of, and interest in, volunteering.

Some participants have **increased their confidence to volunteer** by coming to the get togethers, because of the social connections, supportive environment and increased knowledge about volunteering:

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“I initially got in touch with KCV because I wanted to become a befriender. But I wasn’t ready for it in the end. I’ve had ill health for a while and I’ve been isolated. I wanted to do something but going straight into befriending was a big step. Coming here has been like a stepping stone for me. Meeting new people, getting out more, doing new things, it’s made me feel more able, more ready. I want to get more involved. I want to help out more while I’m here and maybe get involved with more things, more groups, more activities. And in time I might go on to become a befriender, with a bit of help from some of the people here.” Participant

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12 of the 15 participants that completed an evaluation questionnaire said that they felt more confident about volunteering or helping out in their community after coming to the sessions.

Participation in the social get together sessions provided **a foundation and catalyst for more volunteering, helping people start their journey into potentially more formal, long-term volunteering opportunities, as well as ad hoc and micro-volunteering**. This hints at a more sustained and longer-term impact of this model:

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“There are quite a few people that have shown an interest to go on to do more volunteering and one or two that have already started doing more, outside of the micro-volunteering at these sessions. Some of this is one-off or ad hoc volunteering but a couple of people have shown interest in befriending or going on to support other charities. We plan to follow-up with all of them to sign-post or support them to take it forward.” Stakeholder

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Several of the participants that completed an evaluation questionnaire said that they have volunteered or helped or will do so more in the future or help in their community after coming to these sessions (7 of the 15 participants that completed an evaluation questionnaire).

Some examples of additional and future volunteering include

- Two participants made tea at another KCV event.
- One attendee made knitted animals in their own time at home to add into the hamper bags for the women's shelter.
- One person continues to write letters to children in hospital in their own time at home.
- One participant who had never volunteered is interested in an opportunity with the RNLI at seasonal kiosks, promoted by another attendee who is currently a volunteer of RNLI and wants more volunteers.
- Broadstairs Town Shed attended one session and spoke to each table about the local shed project. Two participants followed this up and went along the same week.
- One participant who originally signed up to be befriended, decided that after attending the sessions they felt able to become a befriender themselves.

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## Organisations

A small number of **participants in the project have directly supported KCV and other organisations through voluntary activity**, and the **micro-volunteering activities at the sessions have positively impacted local organisations**:

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**“A few people have gone on or will go on to volunteer for us or other organisations, which is a direct outcome of the project. And we've been keen for our activities to be genuine and useful micro-volunteering opportunities like sending a hamper to the women's shelter or thanking our volunteers and those from the food bank or writing to children in hospital. In this way, the project has directly benefited local organisations, including KCV.” Stakeholder**

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A training session held with eight participants from seven local organisations helped promote age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and practice with local voluntary organisations, which will be further followed-up by sharing the toolkit:

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“The training session was an opportunity to explore current practice and share good age-friendly and inclusive volunteering practice and principles. Those that took part seemed to be enthusiastic about the principles, reflecting on how they already follow the principles and what more they could do. The workshop is also a good opportunity to highlight that older people are a good volunteering resource and potentially build future relationships. These organisations will be the first port of call to receive the toolkit.” Stakeholder

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Participating in the Age-Friendly and Inclusive Volunteering Grant Programme has helped KCV **develop, embed and sustain these aspects of volunteering within the organisation:**

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“Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering is very relevant to us, as most of our volunteers are 50+. I think the programme has helped us think about and refine our practice. We probably already did these things, but we’re now more aware, explicitly so, of these principles. We’ve had the chance to reflect on them and refine our approach a little, shape things in a more thoughtful way. And it’s made us think about creating volunteering opportunities that are more flexible, more task based, not so much ongoing roles with long-term commitments. So I think it can help us extend our volunteering opportunities and bring in more volunteers to our organisation and others, and give them more suitable and better roles, which will lead to greater reach and impact in the long term.” Stakeholder

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KCV has **improved approaches and capacity to service development, learning, monitoring and evaluation** by participating in the programme:

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“The programme helped with learning and personal development, which is something we can take forward personally and in other KCV projects. The prototyping and learning log and process of development, test, learn and improve led to much more positive outcomes for the project. So did the support we got from the Centre for Ageing Better and through help with filming, design and the evaluation. This is a pilot project, with outcomes in its own right, but the main outcome was trying to develop and test the value of a model that can be replicated and shared with others and the support really helped with that. And the learning and development is an experience we can benefit from in the future.” Stakeholder

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## What is the sustainability of the project and model in the future?

KCV has **developed a toolkit and downloadable resources to share and showcase the model, helping other groups and organisations replicate it and take on good practice.** The toolkit and resources are hosted on KCV's website and available as downloadable resources, along with a small number of printed copies available. A four-week social media campaign originally scheduled for late March 2020 but delayed due to Covid-19, is scheduled to start in October 2020, which will help promote the model and the toolkit.

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**“One of the main outputs from the project is the toolkit and it is the one that could have the greatest long-term impact. We believe in the model and we think it is useful for other groups or organisations to take on. The toolkit will allow others to pick and choose the approach and activities, while promoting the [age-friendly and inclusive] principles and showing that older people have a lot to give and can be of real value to organisations looking for volunteers. It could be used as a template for one-off or occasional sessions with existing groups, to incorporate micro-volunteering and promote volunteering in a stealth-like way. It could also be used as more of an ongoing model in organisations with existing service users to adopt that supported to supporter model to turn their service users into volunteers for the organisation. It has lots of uses and will hopefully be used by KCV, local organisations and organisations nationally.”** Stakeholder

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KCV aims to **continue the social get together, micro-volunteering approach at its established ‘Your Time’ social sessions by using the toolkit and introducing more activities and opportunities for participants to get involved in volunteering during the sessions,** and by making connections with other voluntary organisation and thanking their volunteers. This has been facilitated by creating a ‘Legacy Fund’ to continue some activity for up to six months. In addition, the project aims to follow-up with participants at the social get together sessions that have expressed an interest in volunteering, while the principles and learning from the project will continue to influence the work of KCV:

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**“The funding will help us continue delivering the model within our Your Time sessions for a few months, which is a positive legacy for the future. And we’ll follow-up with people that are interested in volunteering, which in itself is a long-term benefit. We’re keen to keep as much of it going and alive as we can.”** Stakeholder

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# Case study



## **From isolation and loneliness to a sense of purpose and value in micro-volunteering, and increased confidence and interest in volunteering more in the future**

Steven<sup>6</sup> attended several of the social get togethers. Initially he heard about it from a friend and decided to come along because he had experienced isolation and depression:

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**“I heard about it from friends. We came along to the first one. This is the first time we’ve come to any groups. I’d recently come out of hospital, I spent some time on a psychiatric unit with depression. One of the recommendations of the doctors is that I should get out more.”**

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Steven said that initially he came for the social aspects, but enjoyed the activities and realised after a while that the gatherings were partly about volunteering:

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**“I didn’t know it was about volunteering at first. If I had I probably wouldn’t have come. I wasn’t interested in volunteering at the start. I came for the social side. But the activities they give you are really good. They give you something to do and break the ice, so you can start talking to people.”**

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And Steven said that the micro-volunteering and introduction to different voluntary organisations and their volunteers sparked an interest in volunteering, without being overly pushy:

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**“I like making things and I enjoyed doing some of the activities. You realise that in a way you’re volunteering because you’re giving your time and skills and making something or doing something that will be used by other people. I think that’s a good thing and it gives you a feeling of value because you’re doing something interesting and worthwhile for others. I also like that they brought groups in to speak with us. I think if this was just about a cup of tea**

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<sup>6</sup> This is a pseudonym.

and cake I'd have stopped coming, but the activities make it more interesting and give it all a purpose. They start to get you thinking about how you could get involved, but it's not done in a way that they shove it down your throat. They just offer it to you as an opportunity, if you want to consider it, that you might be interested in and they talk to you about how they might be able to support you to do more."

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Steven said that he now intends to join more groups, that attending the sessions has improved his confidence and he wants to do more volunteering:

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"I've really enjoyed coming here. It's a shame it's finishing. But they've told me about some other groups, and I'll check them out. This is the most social I've been for years and it's good for me. Coming here has made me feel better. I've enjoyed the activities. It's increased my confidence and how I feel about life and myself. Before I came here I wasn't confident about volunteering or ready to commit. But after coming here I want to do something. I want to give back to the hospital that looked after me as a 'listening volunteer'. Coming here made me more confident and has encouraged me to go on to volunteer more. I feel more ready now and coming here they inspire and support you to go on and volunteer."

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# Conclusion

KCV's Supported to Supporter project highlighted the challenges of helping people to move into volunteering. This process found that **a structured and more formal model that is overt about volunteering may not be appropriate in the first instance with people that are isolated and at risk of being vulnerable due to their circumstances**, such as some of KCV's service users. However, there may be scope for this approach to be made available to those that express an interest in volunteering, following participation in the social get togethers or to people that are more ready to volunteer.

The project demonstrates through testing, learning and iterating that **an informal approach** such as the social get togethers, which is not overt initially, but **gradually introduces volunteering, can be effective in engaging people**. This is initially through **subtle introduction of fun (but purposeful and meaningful) micro-volunteering and exposure to volunteers and voluntary organisations**. Subsequently, the approach becomes increasingly overt and promotes the benefits of local volunteering opportunities.

**This model helps generate positive outcomes** such as increasing social connections, reducing isolation and loneliness, and building self-esteem and confidence. This in turn can potentially help improve emotional and physical well-being, **helping people that were previously 'supported' to become more independent and resilient and potentially support others**.

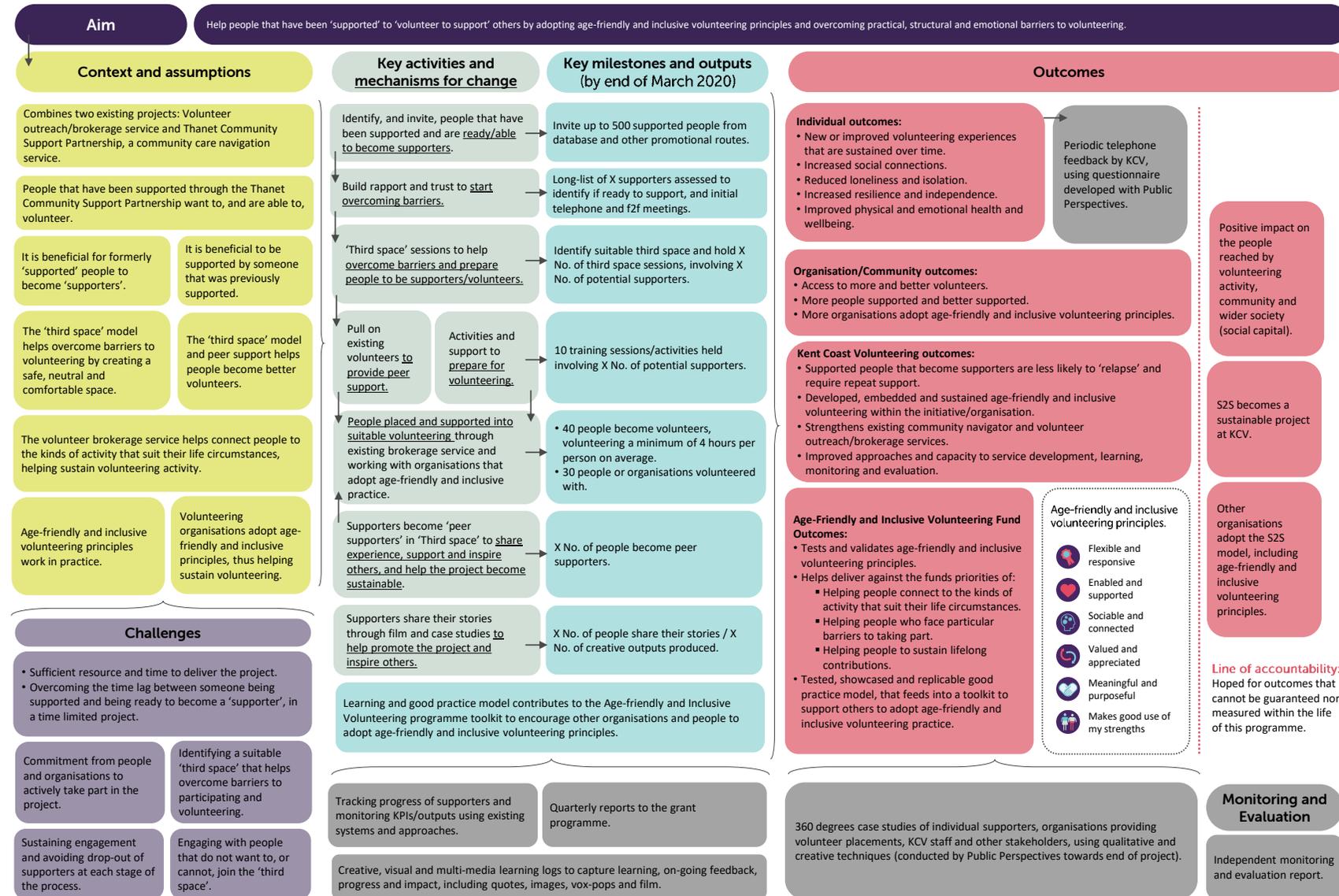
The model directly **involves people in micro-volunteering, which is a positive outcome in its own right** and uses this to, subtly at first and then explicitly, **increase awareness and interest in volunteering, and help prepare and support people to get involved in more volunteering in the future**. The **model provides a foundation, stepping stone and catalyst for more volunteering**, helping people start their journey into potentially more formal long-term volunteering opportunities, which hints at a more sustained and longer-term impact of this model.

The project has **generated positive and potentially sustainable volunteering outcomes for organisations** by supporting some people into further volunteering and promoting age-friendly and inclusive practice and principles within KCV and other local organisations. It has **developed a multi-media and accessible toolkit that will be widely promoted to share and showcase good practice, and potentially allow the model to be replicated elsewhere**.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the project has shown how to **overcome practical, structural and emotional barriers** for people that have received, or are receiving support from service providers and may be isolated and at risk of being vulnerable. It has demonstrated how people can be **encouraged and inspired through a fun setting, in a neutral third space, to connect to and take part in voluntary activities and opportunities that suit their life circumstances**. This may be through flexible volunteering opportunities such as in-situ, micro, ad hoc or more formal and ongoing volunteering. Consequently, **the model has the potential for people in later life to begin, restart or continue community contributions and volunteering** through major life changes such as bereavement, caring or developing a health condition

# Appendix: Kent Coast Volunteering Theory of Change



Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.  
**Let's make ageing better.**



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