

## Village Agent update

Since 2011 Age Concern Hampshire (ACH) has coordinated a Village Agent (VA) initiative throughout Hampshire, focused on the most rural areas. Over that time the VA role has evolved from a simple information and advice sign posting service to one where the agents take an active role in both providing support to individuals, helping them to stay independently in their own homes, and developing community services in their area.

VAs help to bridge the gap between isolated, excluded, vulnerable and lonely individuals and the statutory and voluntary organisations which offer specific solutions to their needs.

Examples of how village agents work are:

- Providing highly localised drop in advice clinics
- Acting as representatives on GP surgery Patient Participation Groups and Parish councils
- Home visits to provide advice on items such as Benefits claims and home and fire safety
- Promoting and setting up physical activity groups and social groups (which support the falls prevention agenda and tackle social isolation)
- Promoting and developing Men-in-shed initiatives
- Building relations with Care Navigators and Community Connectors to better integrate third sector and public sector support
- Promoting and setting up lifelong learning activities especially computer and IT lessons

The VA service now has over 50 active volunteers and provides a framework to enable and empower them to work in their communities in a consistent and professional way. The framework enables VAs to increasingly work in collaboration, both with other village agents and the wider services offered by ACH, other volunteer organisations, and the public sector.

Village Agents are an example of social prescribing in action and **we fully intend to continue developing the service.**

In the increasingly challenging financial climate our funders have taken the difficult decision to withdraw their support at the end of the financial year. We want to make clear that this will not mean the service will be withdrawn. We feel the model we have developed based on an integrated volunteer network is not only highly cost effective but can also be substantially further developed into a flagship model. We are actively working to build partnerships and engage with other organisations working in local communities.

For further information please call

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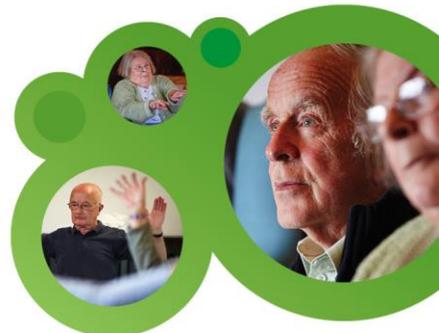
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