

VOLUNTEER HUB NEWS

Report for the National Lottery Community Fund

Year 4: May 2025 - April 2026

What we've been up to, what we've learned,
what's next?



Reaching Communities and Partnerships

End of Year progress update form

Progress Update

It is time for you to complete a progress update for your Reaching Communities funded project for the last 12 months.

It's up to you how you wish to send the information – you can send us a report that you've already created for another funder or for internal use within your organisation, or you may want to get creative and produce a video or audio update. Alternatively, you can complete this form or a monitoring form you have created and send it in to us.

However you choose to tell us about your project, the review should cover the following topics:

- **Spend** – using the budget spreadsheet agreed at application stage, you will confirm what you have actually spent over this period, detailing any budget header changes and any under or over spends. Additionally, please provide a progress update on securing any additional funds included within your project budget from other funders.
- **Impact** - tell us how you have made progress towards the intended impact for the project (this can be found in your offer letter) – you can include testimonials, case studies, evaluation reports and other examples that show the difference your project has made since it launched, as well as any specific impact measurement tools used to track the changes.
Learning - tell us more about what you have learnt, what changes you have made, and how you share that with local stakeholders – you can find more about ways to do that at [https://www.nlc.org.uk/learning](#).
- **Partnerships** - tell us more about your connection to stakeholders locally – what is working well or not, and if the project has joined or created any networks.
- Tell us about any **issues, challenges or risks** identified during the delivery of your activities.
- Confirm any **changes** to your organisation or project contacts that have taken place since the grant was awarded.

More detailed guidance can be found on our website at [https://www.nlc.org.uk/reaching-communities](#)

Well done on the progress so far! If you have any questions or would prefer to share this update in a discussion, please get in touch.

Project Overview: SUMMARY

What has the funding helped you to do? Tell us in your own words, or the words of the people you support.

In the fourth year of the Volunteer Hub programme, funding from the National Lottery Community Fund helped Rother Voluntary Action to continue to champion, promote, and celebrate volunteering across Rother. It supported RVA to strengthen collaborative networks and encourage the sharing of expertise, while developing training, resources, systems, and partnerships to nurture, diversify and grow volunteering locally.

Promotion

During 2025-6 RVA's Volunteer Hub Team continued to promote and advocate for volunteering through multiple routes, including:

- Volunteers Week promotions and activities
- Volunteer awards ceremony
- College and school events
- Employability and skills events
- Social media, email newsletters and updates
- New video content
- Development of a new CRM to enable us to reach volunteer coordinators and VCSE organisations across Rother's large rural territory in a more targeted way
- Updated web page and resources on RVA's new website (work in progress!)
- New and updated printed resources

Networking

We have continued to develop strategic partnerships, particularly around

- EEDI
- employability
- healthy ageing
- young volunteers

A key focus as the project enters its final year is to work collaboratively to position VCSEs and volunteering as a valued voice in shaping public planning. We have strengthened our partnerships with local education, employability, health and social care and government partners, neighbouring voluntary actions, along with wider national programmes so we can incorporate the voice of Rother's voluntary groups at all levels.

These partnerships have helped to form clearer pathways into volunteering for young people and those seeking to get back into employment. They have also helped to champion volunteering's role in individual and community wellbeing, and in supporting diversity and inclusion values.

Brokerage

In 2025-6 RVA promoted 56 volunteer opportunities from 33 organisations via its website, [TRIBE](#), newsletters, social media, and local events. Opportunities were also shared in person at events such as Bexhill Jobs Fair and college progression fairs.

We also supported corporate social responsibility (CSR) links between businesses and voluntary groups, although we would like to establish a better system for CSR brokerage as it is currently somewhat ad-hoc.

A key challenge is tracking how many roles are filled via RVA promotions due to limited feedback from organisations.

We focused on working to reduce the shortage of opportunities for younger volunteers, often due to organisational uncertainty around requirements.

Training and support for volunteers and trustees

In 2025-6 we continued to develop our training offer to support Rother's Volunteers and VIOs, including:

- Soft skills workshop: 16 participants from 14 organisations; covered communication and professional boundaries; highly positive feedback. This is to be repeated in June 2026 with a soft skills day
- Financial planning workshop: This small group enables tailored sessions supporting sustainability and use of tools like Excel
- Two Emergency First Aid at Work courses were well attended. These are consistently popular
- Safeguarding training was delivered with positive feedback and shared learning
- Recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers peer-led training session devised and delivered by RVA & HVA for the second time
- Allyship and inclusive communities training was delivered as part of an RVA network day
- 'Why volunteer?' presentation was delivered to 300 17–18-year-olds at Bexhill College
- A 'volunteering and healthy ageing' presentation was delivered to the East Sussex Healthy Ageing partnership
- Our trustee training programme suffered from low uptake. We know there is a need for trustee and board support, so we think the issue was in the format – the programme was too great a commitment for organisations. We have now broken this down into a lighter touch model.

Future plans include training on health and safety, and a new online module for prospective volunteers, sustainability and comms training modules.

Funding

There is an ever-increasing need for VCSE orgs to access often diminishing funds, resulting in a sense of competition which isn't always conducive to collaborative working. RVA offers support with honing funding bids and advocates for partnership working and collaborative bids. Navigating the sea of funding opportunities can be tricky, so Volunteer Hub has recently developed and updated our online [funding grid](#), which links to our website – making it more user friendly.

Intended Impact

What progress have you made towards your intended impact? As a reminder, there is a detailed paragraph within your offer letter confirming what your intended impact for this project is.

Celebration and Promotion

RVA continues to work to raise the profile of volunteering in Rother, publicly celebrating the achievements of volunteers and supporting organisations to do the same.

AGM and Volunteer Awards



Young Volunteer

Fred Crouch
Ewhurst and Staplecross
Bonfire Society

Winner!

Fred Crouch has dedicated countless hours to supporting the Ewhurst & Staplecross Bonfire Society (ESBS) throughout his young years.

Through fundraising, marshalling, and behind-the-scenes organisation, his efforts have been vital in bringing people together and keeping Sussex Bonfire traditions alive.

Fred's reliability, energy, and willingness to help wherever needed are hugely valued. As Chairman of the Ewhurst & Staplecross Junior Bonfire Society (ESJBS), he supports fundraising and event preparation, inspiring the next generation to uphold these traditions.

Fred embodies selflessness, enthusiasm, and a genuine desire to make a difference, making him fully deserving of the Volunteer Award 2025.

This year was the 20th anniversary of Rother Voluntary Action, so we were determined to make the 5th annual Volunteer Awards an even more special showcase for Rother volunteers.

Nominations were launched in August and by the closing date in October, we had over 50 nominations.



The selection panel, which included previous winners, trustees and the volunteer co-ordinator from Hastings Voluntary Action, chose a winner and two runners up for each of four categories: Volunteer team, young volunteer, outstanding volunteer, long service. Finalists were invited to attend RVA's AGM to receive their certificate. All nominees received a certificate and were included in a printed booklet.

On Wednesday 26th November we welcomed the finalists to Cooden Beach Hotel where they received a rosette name badge and were presented with a framed certificate by Abi Newbury, Chair of Bexhill Neighbourhood Board, before enjoying a buffet lunch.



'Great to see so many enthusiastic people – especially the volunteer award winners. High standard of presentation overall.'

'Thank you for organising this event and recognising all the unsung heroes in our community.'

'Thank you for the informative and welcoming event celebrating all the great things being done in our local community.'

Bexhill Job and Apprenticeships Fair



On 6th March 2026 RVA's Volunteer Hub returned to the Bexhill Jobs Fair for the fourth year, joined by six local orgs (Bexhill Cadets, Association of Carers, Hastings Citadel and more) at our 'Volunteering Zone'. The aim was to raise the profile of volunteering as a pathway to employment, skill-building, and wellbeing. RVA had over 50 conversations and distributed 100 flyers containing role descriptions.

At this event, RVA's Comms Lead, Cheryl, filmed one-to-one interviews with many of the attending local employers, asking them 'Why do you value volunteering on applicant's CVs?'

You can [see the films here](#).



We also attended Hastings Jobs Fair in October 2025. This event was less well attended but we had around 30 meaningful conversations with adults seeking employment.

'It was very useful; we had lots of contacts and people interested in supporting us.'

Luke Williams, Royal Air Force Cadets

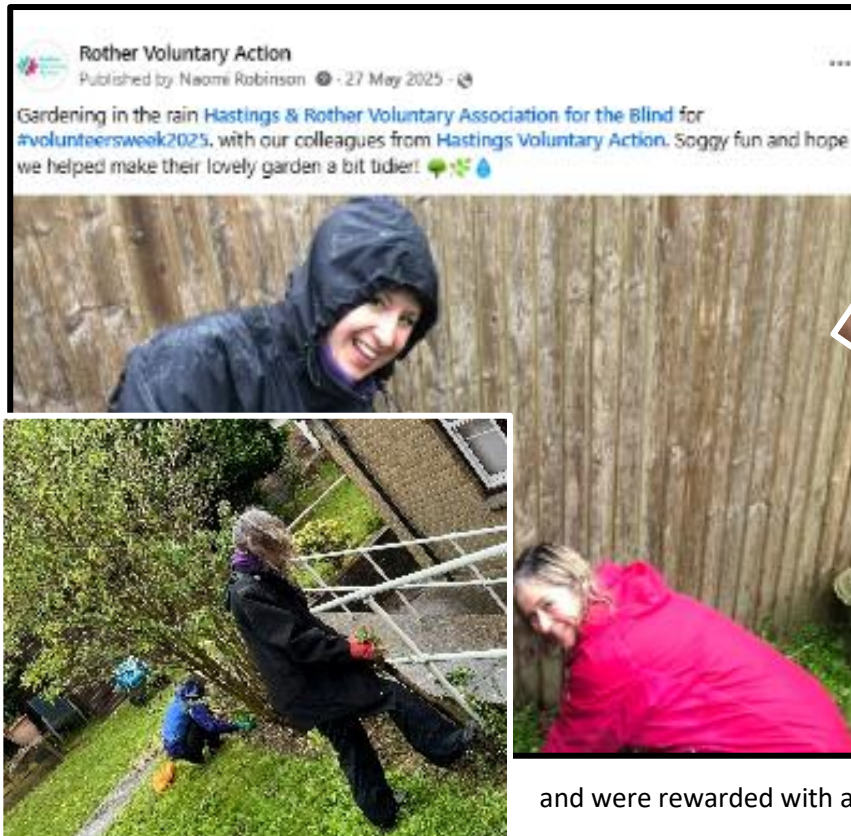
'It was a great event- it's nice to be part of a stand. I think that something more interactive might help, ways in which volunteering can boost your CV that sort of thing.'

Kiki Prince, Volunteer Manager, Association of Carers

In-house volunteering

One of the ways RVA raises awareness of volunteering is through doing it ourselves and using this to promote volunteering.

As part of our **Volunteers Week** activity, members of the RVA team joined colleagues from Hastings Voluntary Action and East Sussex County Council to undertake some volunteering at Hastings and Rother Voluntary Association for The Blind.



It was a very wet day and a bit soggy, but we had lots of fun tidying up the communal garden and were rewarded with a jacket potato lunch.



RVA is part of Clean Up UK and has organised several team litter-picking activities this year on our own and with other local organisations, promoting volunteering as we go.

We hold equipment and publicise this on our website and in our newsletter for other local organisations to borrow for their own litter picks.



Improved resources and materials

Event kits

Regularly attending events away from the office means frequently pack up kit (stationery, tablecloths, cables, promotional activities and materials) and find a suitable portable container.



We started by having our kit in take away boxes that were easy to grab, kept everything together and took up little space. Other team members saw the benefit of these (and kept stealing them!) so it was decided to create three event kits that anyone across RVA could pick up and use.

Three small wheeled suitcases were purchased and packed up with essential items that can be added to depending on the event and being on 4 wheels are easy to move around. These small innovations make a big difference to efficiency across the whole team.



'Thanks for this Annette, the bag is packed – very swanky! Can I suggest a few things

to add to the list? -extension lead, CSR leaflets- useful as we have businesses coming along to events, a standard 'Sign up to the mailing list' form.



Volunteer opportunity booklet

This new booklet, which we update regularly, is proving a great way to give out volunteering information at events and a good conversation starter for those thinking about volunteering. We can use the QR codes to measure page visits on our website too.

Employer videos

Our Comms Lead has made a set of vox pop videos showing local employers explaining why volunteering is valued on CVs. You can [see the films here](#).

Why volunteer? presentation

This presentation was developed to present to over 300 students at Bexhill College and will be a resource we can adapt and re-use for different audiences.

Funding Grid

Volunteer Hub has recently evolved and updated RVA's online [funding grid](#) to help local voluntary organisations navigate the funding opportunities available to them.



Reaching volunteer coordinators and forming peer networks

Volunteer Coordinator Conversations

Recognising the value of peer learning, our Rother and Hastings Volunteer Coordinator Conversations—quarterly networking forums shaped by participants, have continued to gain momentum over the last year.

Uptake and feedback continue to be very positive, highlighting the value of and appetite for connection and shared learning. Below are the sessions in 2025-6.

Legacy network

June 2025



- Outdoor Volunteers Week celebration
- Discussion around challenges and joys of volunteering
- Bring a volunteer
- 14 attendees
- See [facebook video](#)

September 2025



- Introduction to soft skills
 - Training session with networking and discussion
 - 19 attendees
- 'I will focus on my communication with volunteers, particularly active listening and how quickly I speak.'*

December 2025



- The shape of volunteering landscape – discussion in response to RVA's infographic
- Introduction to T-Levels from Julie Jones, careers & employability team leader and Susan Peters, Careers & Employability Sector Lead at East Sussex College
- 23 attendees

March 2026



- Young people's pathways into volunteering
- With With Kelly Evans, Work Placement Coordinator, Bexhill College
- Julie Jones Careers & Employability Team Leader, East Sussex College
- 16 attendees



Jan Crook
Thank you all for a wonderful opportunity to chat and share, Ted and I enjoyed meeting everyone and the peer support was so valuable 😊

Volunteer listings



Over the past year RVA's listing service has listed 56 volunteer opportunities from 33 organisations on the RVA website. These are also shared on TRIBE, East Sussex County



Council's online volunteer platform, in RVA's monthly e-newsletter and on our social media platforms. We also share these in printed form at the Bexhill, Jobs Fair, Bexhill College Progression Fair(s) and other events that the RVA team attend and run.

Reflection

Our ongoing question with the volunteer opportunities that are advertised is how many of these roles are filled by volunteers who have come seen the ad on the RVA website? Generally, despite requesting feedback, we do not get any updates from the organisations as to whether a role has been filled and by whom.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

We continue to share **CSR volunteering opportunities** from Rother's voluntary organisations with local businesses.

CSR volunteering time, with staff and resources, is available from organisations like Balfour Beatty, Hastings Direct and Gaby Hardwicke. However, challenges arise in making it work for organisations with limited capacity to cater for large groups. It is also admin-heavy to co-ordinate.

We have added a tag on volunteer role listings so organisations can state if the role/project is suitable for group / CSR opportunities, but would still like to streamline our CSR matching services.

Case study: Helping Hands support

Helping Hands, a well-established and well-respected group in the village of Robertsbridge, approached us in the spring of 2025 for assistance in making their volunteer processes as effective and supportive as possible.

In May we had a planning meeting with Gillian from Helping Hands where we discussed the processes they currently carry out and challenges faced by them. We then worked with Gillian to plan an event with volunteers to see what things they deemed useful.



In July, as part of the annual volunteers meeting for Helping Hands, RVA held an informal workshop where approximately 25 Helping Hands volunteers came to enjoy pizza, provided by Jeremy and his wife, from the Bruderhof community (where the event was held).

Legacy resource

Overall Feedback

BEST BITS/ASSETS	CHALLENGES
👏 A unique village that can galvanise around a crisis with community support extremely quickly 👏 Unique and precious relationship with the Darvell Community 👏 Kind community 👏 Grateful villagers 👏 Meeting new people 👏 Events well received 👏 Friendships 👏 Share stories 👏 Long established/well embedded 👏 Unthreatening	👏 Interaction with GP surgery and care providers 👏 How do we start a relationship with those who need it 👏 Publicity of HH? How? 👏 Reconnect with dormant volunteers
CELEBRATE	IMPROVE
👏 Communicate all the good bits to volunteers and the community 👏 'Blow your own Trumpet' – make use of 'The Villager' with an article celebrating HH and its work 👏 Update the notice board with photos	👏 Publicise HH – reenergise 👏 Individual specialist volunteer meetings (driver, phone holders, etc.) 👏 Personalised invitations to volunteers to meetings/events 👏 Knock on doors 👏 'Bring a friend' volunteer events 👏 Connect with Robertsbridge Community College 👏 Tidying up some key features

Following the meeting we sent through a report to Gillian for her to share with her committee and volunteers, along with a list of resources that might be useful.

'We are doing some further work today to support a programme of regular visits with our more vulnerable residents, which is something volunteers were keen to take forward following your session with us. So, your session was great to get us reenergised.'

Reflection

This was an interesting process which we enjoyed. Over the years RVA has been involved in various work with Helping Hands and the Robertsbridge community so it was good to work with people known to us and to understand the challenges they face, and work with them to find ways in which the organisation can value their volunteers and move forward.

Rother Voluntary Action is 🙏 feeling grateful with Rye Bowls Club at Rye Bowls Club. ...
Published by Annette Holmes 📍 25 March at 11:22 · Rye · 🌐
Lovely to see the volunteers helping with repairs and maintenance at Rye Bowls Club this morning.
Great work #rvavolunteering



Case study: Rye Bowls Club

We also working Rye Bowls Club to support their volunteer team with training, management, retention and finding funds for their maintenance work.

Bexhill Dementia Action Alliance

The Volunteer Hub Coordinator, Annette, is a regular volunteer for Bexhill Action Dementia taking the minutes of quarterly committee meetings and helping at events.

In addition to this ongoing support, we have provided **ad-hoc guidance** to multiple organisations. This includes; sharing information and signposting, promoting activities and good news, providing contacts and information, guidance and advice around funding, rural connectivity and more. This usually happens in face-to-face conversations, meetings, online meetings or phone calls.

Developing young people's pathways into volunteering

Bexhill College is the main college serving students from across the district and further afield. The college runs around 6 Career Progression Fairs every year, providing opportunities for students aged 16-18 to meet local businesses and national universities.

Since 2022 RVA has promoted volunteering at many of these events, speaking with 50-300 students at each. We have developed a set of activities for these events to a) make our stand more engaging b) stimulate conversation around volunteering c) explore barriers to volunteering among young people d) advocate for the benefits of volunteering e) signpost how to find a volunteering activity.

RVA's stand is consistently well attended.



In March 2026 RVA, HVA and East Sussex County Council gave a joint presentation to three groups of 150 students about volunteering: what it is, the benefits and how to get into it. These were well received. This presentation is now an ongoing resource to promote volunteering more widely.

Legacy resource

In April 2026 the Work Experience Lead at Bexhill College approached RVA to find out if we could support them to host a Career Progression Fair with a charity focus. RVA contacted our network of charities from across Rother. Initially around 25 signed up to attend.

In the days leading up to the event around 9 of the charities that had signed up withdrew. This was disappointing, but it wasn't surprising: we explained to the college that local organisations and charities often sign up for events in good faith, but that capacity issues and increasing demand, along with dependency on volunteers, can often mean they have to cut commitments at short notice.

The event was still a big success. Around 400 students came, and the 15 charities that attended reported positive interactions with students. It was also attended by the Mayor of Bexhill, Chairman of Rother District Council and the Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex. RVA's Volunteer Hub team was joined by HVA and Community Action (our neighbouring VAs). Together we showcased the value of volunteering for young people, and the high level of enthusiasm and active volunteering already present among Bexhill College students.



Reflection

We have noticed a lack of volunteer opportunities for younger people. Organisations continue to feel unsure of the requirements for having young people volunteering. To help with this we have regular discussions with organisations at our quarterly Volunteer Co-ordinator Conversations, sharing information and resources, such as our Young Volunteer Toolkit. We have also had local colleges attend the meetings to explain what needs to be put in place for work experience and volunteering for students and how organisations will be supported.

Looking forward

We continue to work with the Tribe team at ESCC and are currently collaborating with Tribe and our neighbouring VAs to compile sustainable tools, pathways and resources to help young volunteers find opportunities across East Sussex.



CRM Database (Civi)

In 2025 Volunteer Hub's Naomi Robinson became RVA's lead setting up Civi, RVA's new CRM database.

Legacy work



As the local infrastructure organisation supporting Rother's VCSE, RVA faces the same capacity challenges as the organisations we serve. Having a robust CRM, and staff trained to use it, is helping RVA to use our time more effectively. It also helps us monitor, reach and map Rother's VCSE sector to assess needs, identify gaps, offer relevant services, training and events to support Rother's voluntary organisations.

Civi is enabling us to better target specific organisations around themes (e.g. environment, homelessness, healthcare, older residents, mental wellbeing etc) or location. We can now get targeted sector information to the right groups more quickly and make sure that smaller, diverse and niche groups don't get left out.

Our ability to consult with Rother's VCSE sector is enhanced by civi; we can better involve community organisations in influencing local government and statutory service decisions. We can represent and advocate for voluntary groups with greater accuracy and confidence.

The data we gather using Civi is a live representation of trends, insights and issues affecting organisations in Rother. This means we can tailor our services accordingly to suit the needs of the local groups that deliver community action.

Reflection

Civi is fast becoming an essential tool in RVA's support for Rother's VCSE.

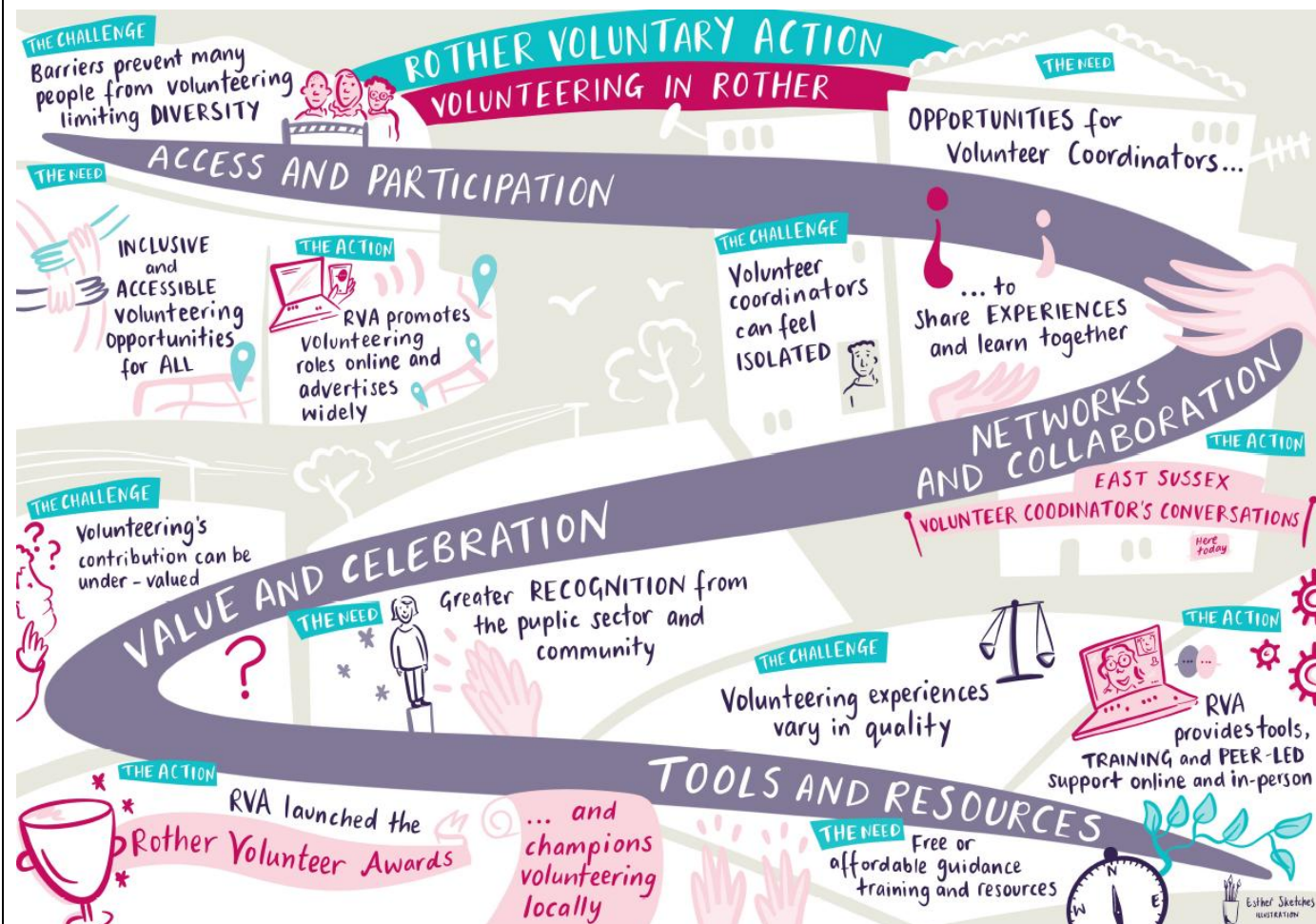
Looking forward

However, Civi is only as good as the data that is input, so staff support and training is an essential part the future.

Sector Evaluation

Following a session with VCSE stakeholders, facilitated by graphic facilitator, Esther Sketcher, RVA made a holistic evaluation of the needs of Rother's voluntary sector and how RVA might be best able to support in coming years. As part of the process, Esther created an animated infographic outlining the key needs in relation to volunteering, along with what RVA has done to meet these needs.

The graphic will evolve over the next year to include the evolution of our work.



Reflection

The process of working with VCSE stakeholder to visualise the landscape in which they operate was invigorating and helpful. It has provided a tool we can use to stimulate for future conversations around the needs of volunteering organisations, helping us see more clearly where RVA can add value.

Training and Resources

The following training has taken place:

Course	Date	No. of attendees	No. or organisations
Emergency first aid at work	27.5.25	8	3
Recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers	2.6.25	10	9
Allyship and inclusive communities	24.6.25		
Soft skills workshop	10.9.25	16	14
Financial planning workshop (expert volunteer)	8.10.25	4	2
Safeguarding	20.10.25	6	3
'Why volunteer?' training delivered to 17–18-year-olds at Bexhill College	11.3.26	300	1
Emergency first aid at work	25.3.26	13	7
Simple spreadsheets (expert volunteer)	Check		

In September as part of our quarterly Volunteer Coordinators Conversations, we held a **soft skills workshop** (communication, active listening and professional boundaries) with Renee Griffiths, formerly Training Lead at East Sussex County Council. Working with Renee was a success, she is highly experienced and engaging. So, in October she devised and delivered a **Safeguarding training session**.

'Well thought out training, lots of opportunities to speak with other organisations and network. The training was informative and great to get different perspectives.'



In October, we hosted a **Finance Planning Workshop** led by Claire Bryant, a financial specialist from Rother VCSE Network 4FP. This workshop has been run several times and allows small groups (max of 4 organisations) to plan for financial sustainability and resilience and learn how best to use tools like Excel for planning.

Attendees complete a preliminary questionnaire which allows Claire to focus on their requirements during the session.

'Very relevant and provoked thought and reflection about practice.'

'It worked well for a small group.'

We held two certified **Emergency at Work First Aid** courses, led by Jim Foster of First Aid For You. These qualifications last for 3 years. The trainer offered the course at a reduced rate for charities.

'Trainer was very knowledgeable, professional and helpful. Definitely recommend for future training sessions.'

'Great to hear from others in similar fields.'

New in-house training

During 2025-6 Volunteer Hub developed some new training modules in house, including 'Why volunteer?' which is an hour-long interactive presentation. We also developed 'Allyship and inclusive communities' for a community network event. We would like to re-use these two pieces in our 2026-7 training plan.

Reflection

The Soft Skills course was well received by attendees. First aid is always popular. Often organisations are keen to offer venues for training - it is an opportunity to showcase the work they do, and for the voluntary sector to continue to work, everyone needs to help each other out.

Looking forwards

Training planning for 2026 - 27 has begun, with more First Aid courses, a soft skills training day in Rye (May 2026), an online version of our own recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers in July 2026, as well as health and safety, lone working and basic risk assessment. We will be re-introducing RVA's Conversing Crows communication course and net zero sustainability workshops.



Trustees

We know from multiple conversations and from the results of our [online Trustee questionnaire](#), that keeping boards and trustees diverse and energised is an ongoing challenge for many organisations. This led to the development of our trustee / board peer-to-peer programme. However, when we launched this in 2025, although widely promoted, uptake was poor. We think this was due to a combination of:

- Low capacity within boards and difficulty convening boards
- Some apathy / resistance to change or challenge, particularly in organisations where the board is dormant or low engagement

To adapt for this, we have changed the format for the programme, so that the organisation can take up the offer in a modular/ bite-sized way:

1. RVA comes to the organisation at a time of their choosing
2. Boards can choose which aspects they would like to focus on
3. Sessions are short, light touch and organisation led



Boost your board in eight steps
Free peer-learning for Rother VCSE trustees

Are your trustees getting the most from their role?

Each module in this eight-step process includes simple, achievable activities, to accelerate your board's journey towards becoming more effective, engaged and energised.

- Module 1:** Organisational purpose (*in person session with lunch*) 2 hours
- Module 2:** Leadership (*online session*) 1 hour
- Module 3:** Integrity (*online session*) 1 hour
- Module 4:** Decision making, risk, control (*online session*) 1 hour
- Module 5:** Brand effectiveness (*online session*) 1 hour
- Module 6:** Equality, diversity, inclusion (*online session*) 1 hour
- Module 7:** Openness and accountability (*online session*) 1 hour
- Module 8:** Future objectives (*in person session with lunch*) 2 hours

There are seven spaces on this free programme. If you are interested in taking part, please email volunteering@rva.uk.com or let us know here.

Rother Voluntary Action

Better Boards
diversify | engage | empower

This asks too much commitment from organisations – need to change it

Learning

- What's gone well? What's not gone well or been challenging? What's been unexpected or interesting? What have you learned that would be useful to others?
- Worked well
 - Volunteer Coordinators Conversations
 - Themed networks and volunteering linking across themes e.g. rural / age friendly / employability / youth
 - Database CRM for monitoring and network building
 - Collaborating with neighbouring VAs has been great for inspiration, capacity building and knowledge / contact sharing
 - Backing off from trying to micro-manage the direction of conversations and allowing enough time / safe space for organisations to lead their discussion and peer-learning (although dominant voices will always need some moderation!)
 - Challenges
 - Covering Rother's wide expanse
 - Not being Bexhill centric
 - Finding rural venues that are also easy to get to
 - Brokering CSR and young volunteering (opportunities are limited by organisational capacity)
 - Trustee engagement, the need is there to address board issues (mainly engagement, active trusteeship and diversity), but not always the will or capacity

Partnerships / Local Connections

- How have you joined up with what others are doing locally? How are you making the most of the strengths of your community?

Networks

In 2025-6, Rother Voluntary Action continued to champion volunteering and create meaningful connections in the district through a range of strategic partnerships and initiatives:

- Forged a collaboration with our parallel volunteering support colleagues at Hastings Voluntary Action, Sussex Community Development Association, Community Action to establish an East Sussex wide approach to supporting volunteering
- Continued to grow the quarterly Rother and Hastings Volunteer Coordinators' Conversations and have established a 'group' for this on our new database, Civi, so we can easily update and monitor membership and participation
- Continued to work with local academies, colleges, and employment services to promote volunteering to young people and develop pathways into volunteering, including supporting Bexhill College with a new annual charity and volunteering focused progression fair
- Continued as an active member of the Rother Skills and Employability Forum, including joining a working sub-group for volunteering, to promote volunteering as a pathway into employability and nurture Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) link ups
- Worked with the ICB, Adult Social Care, East Sussex Healthy Ageing Partnership, Age Friendly Rother and Active Rother to advocate for volunteering as a vital element in preventative health and community wellbeing
- Promoted inclusive volunteering through the Rother Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Forum, by completing NAVA's Allyship programme, and by hosting a community network event around creating inclusive communities.

VA Collaboration



During 2024-25 RVA began a very productive collaboration with Hastings Voluntary Action. In 2025-6 we were joined in this collaborative relationship by Community Action (formerly 3VA), which covers the remaining districts of East Sussex.

Together we share attendance at events, have co-delivered training modules, and

supported each other's Volunteer Coordinator's Forums. This connection has increased the VA's presence, reach and impact across the whole of East Sussex, inspired new ways of working and created a stronger, more sustainable offer around volunteering.

This collaborative approach is still happening at project officer level and needs to be embraced at senior level across VA teams, particularly as East Sussex moves towards devolution, and future funding challenges, shifting demand and restructuring of VA services becomes increasingly likely.

Any issues, challenges or risks?

- How have you dealt with these? Do any of the issues, challenges or risks that you've identified have an impact on delivery in the coming years(s)?

Some of the challenges faced last year are carried over to this year, along with some new ones. We have added some possible solutions in bold, below.

- **Ageing population:** Rother has the second highest population of over 65s in the UK. As Rother's population ages, and workers need to work for longer, volunteering is facing a challenge: People are working for longer which, alongside being needed for childcare or parent-care into retirement years, results in less free time. There appears to be an attitudinal shift from 'what can I do for others?' towards 'what can volunteering do for me?'. Whilst the personal benefits of volunteering are indeed motivating, this shift positions volunteering perceived as a wellbeing/lifestyle choice and may affect the types of role people are looking for.
- **Size of Rother** – Rother is 511.8km² surrounding the borough of Hastings, with 94,200 residents, many of whom access services, support and advice from both Hastings and Rother. However, the size, rural geography and transport links of the district mean that it can be difficult to find suitable locations for meetings/training/network events etc. **We have identified four main 'hubs' (Battle, Robertsbridge, Etchingham and Rye) to enable access to RVA's services from the more rural areas of Rother. RVA has also recently employed a new rural outreach worker, who helps connect the Volunteer Hub team with rural organisations.**
- **Digital engagement** – An ever-increasing opportunity gap between those who are digitally connected and those who aren't. Our experience at Bexhill Jobs Fair and other events demonstrates the importance of face-to-face contact and paper copies of volunteering roles for those considering volunteering. Most volunteering roles are listed online via our own website, e newsletter, social media or on Tribe. Does this mean that potential volunteers are missing out? In addition, small organisations that are less digitally engaged may not be listing their opportunities online and thus struggling to connect with potential volunteers. **Our printed booklet is helping us reach potential volunteers who are less digitally engaged.**
- **Sector capacity** – Many of the organisations RVA liaise with are small, often with part time staff and are restricted by the time they can allocate to attend meetings. **Our new network on our CRM helps us keep organisations in the loop, even when they can't make it to a meeting.**
- **Stress and cost of living** - With finances more stretched than ever, and people taking on additional work, time for volunteering is (perceived as) increasingly limited. **Invest time in promoting ad-hoc / flexible opportunities.**
- **Venues** - Due to geography of Rother and sometimes poor transport links, finding suitable venues that are accessible and affordable can be a challenge. **We have learned that VIOs are often happy to offer their own spaces. We are also exploring more flexible formats, such as offering an online as well as in-person for some meetings / training sessions.**
- **Skills gaps (esp. around funding)** The voluntary sector in Rother faces significant skills and knowledge gaps that impact its ability to operate effectively and sustainably. Many organisations struggle with financial planning, lacking the necessary expertise to manage budgets, plan, or navigate financial crises, particularly in response to funding losses. Additionally, there is widespread uncertainty and lack of confidence in preparing funding bids, with many organisations finding the application process overwhelming and complex.
- **Diversity, inclusion and accessibility in volunteering** – It is clear from conversations with organisations that there is a will to diversify volunteers to include less engaged communities, young people and people with additional needs. Working with diverse volunteers requires additional capacity for outreach and support that many organisations lack.

Organisations have expressed a need for a collaborative approach that makes it easier for them to make volunteering inclusive and accessible inc.:

- Simple ways to create opportunities for young people to try volunteering.
- Resources for working with young volunteers, including 'youth' friendly language around volunteering.
- Peer-led comms in which diverse groups promote the benefits of volunteering and break down barriers to participation
- Accessible resources and support around working with volunteers with additional needs

- **Devolution:** We are watching closely to assess how East Sussex's approaching devolution to centralised administration will impact on the voluntary sector. **Our evolving partnerships with neighbouring VAs will help demonstrate a cross-county approach to volunteer support ahead local government reorganisation.**
- Training provision: Finding trainers with the right expertise, alongside organisations having capacity to attend, can be difficult.
To address this, our new website will introduce improved signposting to high-quality external and online training via our website. We are working on creating a county-wide training rotation in collaboration with our neighbouring VA's, HVA, 3VA and SCDA. This will enable us to deliver consistent, wide-reaching programme that meets the shared needs of VCSE across the county.
- 1:1 support: Demand for more in-depth, ongoing support continues, but limited capacity across a large rural area restricts this.
We are partially addressing the gap through Volunteer Coordinator Conversations, online resources, and follow-up advice after one-off meetings. In 2026,7, and beyond RVA's Volunteer Hub team will integrate more closely with our Rural Outreach workers to embrace rural organisations more consistently.
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Smaller organisations often lack the capacity to host group volunteering.
We are exploring a cost-recovery model for businesses, while also developing an "expert volunteer" offer as a more flexible alternative. However, both these options are proving admin intensive and not very sustainable on limited staff capacity. We will work with other VA's and Tribe project in our new co-working group to identify a more effect way to broker CSR opportunities.
- Young people: More organisations are now open to involving young volunteers, and interest is high. However, access to first opportunities remains limited and often depends on personal networks. School-based volunteering could help, but capacity is a barrier.
We now have strong relationships with work experience teams at local colleges and are developing a regular update of links to young people's volunteering roles to be sent out to students in their e-newsletters.
- Volunteer engagement: Engagement is strongest through in-person outreach at events and community spaces, though this is resource-intensive.
Additional support, such as a dedicated outreach volunteer, could strengthen this work. In the longer term this would enable us to offer a more bespoke, individualised volunteer matching service.
- **Trustee recruitment and best practice** – ongoing gaps in skilled and knowledgeable boards threaten the sustainability and efficacy of many VCSE groups. Board apathy, lack of engagement combined with limited capacity make it difficult for organisations to begin positive transformation of their boards.

Has anything changed?

- From the experience you have gained during delivery to date, what have you / will you be changing for the next delivery period, if anything?
- As the project moves into its last year, we will continue to promote volunteering, provide training, resources and networking for Rother's volunteering community.
 - There will be no major changes to our delivery plan, however our focus will now be on ensuring sustainability and legacy as well as planning for the future. This includes
 - a legacy of comprehensive resources, signposting and online tools
 - sustainable systems for listing and recruiting volunteers
 - an enduring peer network of volunteer coordinators
 - a co-working and integration with our neighbouring Voluntary Actions to share resources, networks and training efficiently
 - We will plan for a focus on areas with the most benefit for enhancing VCSE's capacity and efficacy for stretched volunteering organisations, in particular:
 - Trustee and board support, with the role out of our trustee pilot sessions
 - Funding training and updates, specifically encouraging volunteering costs and management to be built into funding bids, plus wide sharing of RVA's improved updated funding grid
 - We will continue to use our network of volunteer coordinators to understand the volunteering landscape in Rother to inform where East Sussex VAs can add the most value
 - We will increase usage of our new CRM to improve targeting
 - Continue to advocate for volunteering in Rother at local government level (and national govt via NAVCA)
 - An internal restructure at RVA in 2025 led to a shift in our training planning. A new training schedule is taking shape, now in collaboration with our fellow-VAs. Together we are developing a shared training plan, suppliers and dates to ensure a more joined up, comprehensive offer across East Sussex. RVA will re-introduce our in-house VCSE Comms training programme and Sustainability training (provided by two colleagues who will shortly return from maternity leave).
 - We still intend to develop ideas for a more accurate system for monitoring RVA's volunteer brokerage's effectiveness (beyond click rate analytics) and how many volunteers are finding roles through it.