



COMMUNITY ACTION
NETWORK

ANNUAL REVIEW 2025/26



Prepared by

KAREN LOFTUS
CAN CHIEF EXECUTIVE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
MISSION & VISION	4
LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY	5
PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION	6
CAPACITY BUILDING (FINANCIAL RESILIENCE, GOVERNANCE, TRAINING, COMMUNITY NAVIGATION)	8
VOLUNTEERING	10
CONCLUSION	13
CAN TRUSTEES	15
CONTACT US	16





THE REVD P MARTIN BROAD

CAN Chair of Trustees

Welcome to our Annual Report.

As Trustees, we see the enormous value of effective collaborations when people, passions, and resources connect. CAN believe that the voluntary sector isn't just a safety net, it is the heart of Dorset, and our job is to make sure that it beats healthily and in sync with the wider system.

Over the past year, we have focused on being a bridge. The NHS and our local Councils do vital work, but they can't always reach every grassroots corner or understand the lived experiences of every diverse community. CAN connect statutory strategies to real-world community action and bring local insight back to the decision-making tables.

When you look at what has bloomed this year, you see that effect in full swing:

- **We listened, amplified, and led:** CAN brought over a hundred organisations together to share their frontline stories. We then carried those voices directly onto dozens of strategic boards, ensuring that when the NHS or local councils design services, they are listening to community experts. We're especially proud to support hundreds of groups representing underrepresented and ethnically diverse communities, ensuring equity isn't an afterthought.

- **We built digital and human bridges:** Our community directory (ACSS) has flourished, becoming an invaluable daily tool for hundreds of health and social care professionals. Our cross-sector partnerships and prevention-first approach directly helped avoid hundreds of hospital days this year, proving that a strong community keeps people happier, healthier, and at home.
- **We nurtured and protected grassroots ideas:** Local groups are fuelled by love and dedication, but they also need solid foundations to survive. CAN has wrapped its arms around nearly two hundred local organisations this year—including dozens of brave, brand-new grassroots ideas. We provide health checks and governance mentoring and help unlock over £211,000 in vital funding, giving groups the stability they need to focus on what they do best: helping people.
- **We grew the joy of volunteering:** Volunteering is a massive community asset, and we treat it as such. Training sessions and casework support have helped organisations create safe, inclusive, and deeply rewarding environments for hundreds of local volunteers.

Everything we do is to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. CAN empowers grassroots groups, streamlines pathways for the NHS and local councils, advocates for inclusion, and shows that when you invest in community infrastructure, the positive ripples are endless.

To our incredible staff, our brilliant volunteers, and the hundreds of member organisations who make Dorset a more wholesome and life-enhancing place to live. to live: thank you.

We are honoured to stand with you.



ACTION WITH HEART

VISION & MISSION

CAN wants local communities to be strong, healthy, diverse and thrive.

Local charities, groups and services make a difference to people's lives and make communities healthier, fairer and more resilient.

CAN are a key part of this system, helping community organisations to be supported and heard.

We make sure local knowledge and experience inform service design and delivery. This helps partners understand what is happening on the ground and organisations connect more effectively.

When you work with CAN, you help hundreds of local charities and thousands of volunteers create joined-up approaches that improve the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Together, we CAN make a difference.

VALUES

Our values drive everything we do. CAN are collaborative, compassionate and inspirational, and act with integrity and respect.

We're proud to be quality-assured by NAVCA, our national membership body. Achieving this accreditation confirms our commitment to the highest standards and gives our partners confidence in the standard and effectiveness of our support.

CAN focus work around:

- Leadership and Advocacy
- Partnerships and Collaboration
- Capacity Building
- Volunteering.



1 LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

STRENGTHENING SYSTEM LEADERSHIP AND SECTOR VOICE

CAN strengthened its role as a trusted system leader and collective voice for the voluntary and community sector (VCS). By amplifying lived experiences and connecting diverse partners, CAN has ensured that local insight directly drives more responsive services and better strategic outcomes.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS & IMPACT

- Convened and **delivered 46 networks** to connect partners and align local priorities.
- **316 network attendees** ensured a diverse range of frontline insights reached the wider ecosystem.
- **125 VCS organisations** attended networks, fostering a collaborative interface which ensures our advocacy is grounded in diverse community consensus.
- CAN championed the sector's voice where it matters most, attending **36 Strategic Boards**. This high-level presence ensures local insight directly shapes policy and commissioning outcomes.
- Data-backed tracking of **600+ diverse member organisations** underscores CAN's status as an equitable, credible, and trusted system leader.
- CAN (full) member organisations include **424 groups that support people with government-defined protected characteristics** (70% of our full members).
- Our focus on equity is reflected in ongoing infrastructure support for **36 Ethnically Diverse Communities (EDC) groups**.
- Supported **29 new grassroots ideas** and maintained **repeat engagement with 150 VCS groups**, demonstrating broad and efficient reach, stretching every pound to maximise localised impact.
- Achieved **£45,000+ of Earned Media Value** for the sector.
- **140 requests for promotional or media support** were actioned, giving free press coverage to VCS groups via print, radio, digital and social platforms.
- Following a CAN call-out, the National Institute for Health and Care Research Delivery Network Southwest Central (NIHR RDN SWC) **funded three community projects to spark grassroots conversations about research**.
 - Action for Children trained 6 parents of children with SEND, care leavers, and staff as 'Research Champions,' who are now co-planning future engagement.
 - A 'Body Mapping' workshop with The Lantern allowed a group of women to explore their relationship with health research alongside members of the Agile Research Delivery Team
 - Targeted youth and disability groups via STEPs Youth Club, funding two interactive 'Health MOT' events that connected the importance of personal health to the wider benefits of health research.

2. PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

DEEPEN PLACE-BASED AND CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

CAN act as a vital convenor and interface, enabling practical collaboration and co-design that delivers tangible outcomes. Our focus spans collaborative working, health and prevention system impact, grant distribution, and crisis resilience, ensuring that equity, inclusion, and digital connection are embedded across all sectors.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS & IMPACT

- Scaled our digital connection infrastructure to **2,530 Access to Community Support Services (ACSS) directory listings** (from our baseline of 1,500).
- The ACSS directory is an indispensable cross-sector tool, **used by 880 professionals** to connect people to local support (from a baseline of 500). The surge in users and listings is evidence of highly effective, trusted, and well-utilised cross-sector partnerships between CAN, statutory health services, and the VCS.
- Meaningful relationship-building with **150 VCS groups** who trust CAN enough to attend multiple training sessions, networks, or workshops.
- Awarded **86 One-Off Wellbeing Grants** totalling **£59,000** (surpassing the 24/25 baseline of 62 grants). These grants strengthen local crisis resilience, ensure that people can remain independent and reduce hospital costs.
- Place-based partnerships and prevention-first initiatives delivered **a year's worth of hospital days avoided**, driving critical cost savings back into the NHS. CAN's work is directly linked to relieving acute healthcare pressures and proof that community-centred health and prevention models deliver tangible, high-value outcomes for the wider system.
- **101 signposting activities** for BCP and Dorset Council residents via **115 Information Stations**, which anchor support directly where people live.
- Co-produced a **report to address health inequalities in seldom-heard populations** with 130+ older people. A community research project on ageing well culminated in a public exhibition and resources for Adult Social Care. BCP Council are using the findings to shape key workstreams, including their prevention strategy, Ageing Well Communities programme, Day Opportunities and wider Adult Social Care transformation.
- Built trust, engagement, and readiness for **more inclusive research participation** across Dorset, developing clear and consistent pathways for VCS organisations to connect with research opportunities and embedding the values-based referral model in practice.
- High-value collaborations **identified new volunteer roles** for young people with SEND.
- Cancer Awareness training delivered to **58 care homes and carer groups** across Dorset.

CASE STUDY

CAN NETWORKS SPARK COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

At a Community Spaces Network, Moordown Community Centre and Bournemouth and Poole College connected over a shared challenge: how to give students with additional needs real-world experience without placing an administrative burden on a busy community hub.

1st-year students with additional needs now spend 90 minutes a week at Moordown Community Centre, a living classroom with real-world tasks, from baking for the café to grounds maintenance.

"The routine aspect is vital for our students' needs. Because the tasks are relevant and the environment is welcoming, the students feel a genuine sense of accountability."

— Heather, B&P College Tutor

For Moordown Community Centre, the partnership is an opportunity that doesn't strain its resources.

- College tutors remain on-site, so the centre doesn't need insurance or specialised staff training.
- The partnership produces tangible results that enhance the experience for all centre users.
- Having students on-site adds a vibrant, inclusive energy to the building, proving that a community centre can be a space for everyone.

"Employers are sometimes reluctant to offer these students work experience, and we see it as a vital part of our role. With the tutors there, it's a seamless operation. We get a new cohort every year, and it's a joy to see them become part of the Moordown family."

— Amanda, Moordown Community Centre Manager

"We hope that it will give the public more understanding and awareness that SEND students can be such a bonus and asset to any business. It is a lovely way to give back to our local community and forge new partnerships and understanding. Amanda was brave enough to give this model a chance and both she and our students have benefited".

- Karen Chase, Work Placement Advisor , Foundation, B&P College.

This successful framework is ripe to be rolled out across the BCP Council area to support more young people with learning disabilities to gain work experience and independence.



CAPACITY BUILDING

BUILDING RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE VCS ORGANISATIONS

We strengthen the capacity of voluntary and community organisations, smaller grassroots groups and those working with underrepresented communities. Funding support, governance reviews, and targeted training ensure measurable improvements in sustainability, capability, and community-wide impact.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS & IMPACT

1. Financial Resilience

- Secured **£211,533 in funding for local groups** (36 grants).
- **Helped £2995 go to local causes** to develop learned-experience research (shown to be more relevant, empathetic, and effective in driving meaningful change).

2. Governance

- **44 VCS groups undertook Organisational Health Checks** (structured conversations to assess strengths, identify priorities, and build a clear, measurable path for sustainable growth).
- Casework support to **180 VCS groups**, including incubating **29 new groups** or projects looking to get off the ground. and **36 Ethnically Diverse Communities (EDC) groups**.
- CAN Member Zone (launched in October 2025) **shows 268 members** accessing digital resources and communications support, with members still onboarding.

3. Training

- General and specialised **VCS training for 800+ sector participants** proves that CAN is raising the baseline of local governance and delivery capability.
- Delivered **Service Finder training to 260 participants**, while **551 participants completed BCP Council Food Safety & Hygiene programmes**.
- Spearheaded a public health capability drive that trained **649 carers and care workers** on behalf of NHS Wessex Cancer Alliance.

£211,533 funding injected into local groups

£100,000 to develop BCP Council signposting tools

180 VCS groups supported

1,460+ training attendees

CAPACITY BUILDING

4. Community Navigation

- **419 individuals supported** via **115 Information Stations**, which anchor support directly where people live.
- **180 referrals** to signpost individuals to community, social, and practical wellbeing services.
- **30+ individuals given bespoke assistance** to find activities suited to their diverse needs - which translates into tangible health and wellness benefits for the community.
- Supported **over 100 activity taster sessions for people with diverse needs**.
- **Delivered and evaluated a range of pilots** evidencing the importance and impact of activities that support wellbeing, independence and confidence-building for both young people and adults accessing day opportunities, which will inform future commissioning decisions.
- **Investment of £100,000 from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport** to develop a tool for the BCP Council Adult Social Care to help people find accurate and beneficial signposting. The funding will also support CAN's work with Homewards and Accenture to develop an AI tool to identify support services.
- **Launched a community newsletter** for families living with care and support needs in partnership with BCP Adult Social Care as part of an accessible information priority under a move towards personalised and self-directed support.
- BCP Council Adult Social Care migrated to **CAN's shared dataset** for their residents directory, and has proposed connecting all directory-style content to the dataset.
- Identified **new volunteer roles within the sector for young people with SEND**.



VOLUNTEERING

ELEVATE VOLUNTEERING AS A CRUCIAL STRATEGIC ASSET & BUILD SECTOR-WIDE CAPACITY AND VISIBILITY

We champion volunteering as a vital system asset that improves quality and access, reduces barriers, and strengthens the strategic voice and value of volunteering across the region. This includes creating dedicated pathways for young people, supporting local businesses, and offering targeted infrastructure support to volunteer-involving organisations.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS & IMPACT

- **42 VCS groups** supported through dedicated casework, helping them structure safe, rewarding, and effective volunteer programs and ensure that new and existing volunteer opportunities were designed to minimise barriers and maximise inclusivity.
- Delivered **28 volunteer-related training sessions**, which included targeted webinars, focus groups, workshops, volunteer coordinator meetings, and volunteer fairs.
- **235 participants attended** volunteer-related training, ensuring high-quality practices are embedded across local groups. This directly correlates to improved coordinator confidence and higher satisfaction rates for the host organisations and the volunteers.

YOUNG VOLUNTEERS PROJECT (MAY 25 - MARCH 26)

This identified a critical infrastructure gap: many groups were not equipped to host young people. CAN identified that 85% of organisations are more likely to do so via digital/remote roles and launched micro-volunteering pilots to meet this demand.

- **125+ staff and volunteers trained** in youth-specific volunteering protocols.
- **60+ groups** given Youth-Ready Resource Packs to improve safeguarding, governance, and hosting capabilities.
- Reached **289 young people** through 13 events (including the B.I.C. Careers Show).
- **200 young people** registered with the Volunteering Hub, demonstrating an appetite that exceeds available roles.

42 groups supported via casework

28 training sessions & events delivered

235 sector participants upskilled

STORIES OF CHANGE

Charlotte: From Graduate to Marketer

Charlotte's experience illustrates how strategic volunteering can bridge the gap between education and employment in the local digital economy. A Bournemouth University Film Studies graduate, Charlotte initially joined as a Front of House volunteer for a Film Festival, a role co-created by CAN to introduce young volunteers to local creatives. Recognising her enthusiasm and abilities, the project team shifted her role to a social media campaign, including conducting on-site interviews and creating high-quality digital content. This gave Charlotte a professional portfolio of work to help her secure her first professional role in Marketing.

"I worked with amazing people to promote the event around the local area. This was a new experience for me, and it was incredibly rewarding to see people engaging with the content and reacting so positively to the posts. Overall, it was a fantastic experience where I learned new skills and met inspiring people".

Charlotte



Tom



Tom's Story

For twenty years, Tom was a bus driver who managed the complex and often invisible needs of hundreds of passengers every day. It demanded constant empathy and resilience, yet Tom dismissed his own expertise, believing he could "only ever be a bus driver".

After a redundancy, the structure of his life collapsed and his mental health suffered. An ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) diagnosis helped Tom understand why he had felt like an outsider in his work life. It reframed his struggles not as failures, but as the result of a highly empathetic person working in an environment that didn't understand his needs.

Tom needed a safe bridge back into society that wouldn't mirror the high-stress environment of the buses. CAN helped him find the perfect volunteer placement.

Today, Tom has moved from needing help to providing it. As a Volunteer Supervisor at a Community Garden, he uses his empathy and gardening skills to help others grow. Now Tom is seeking work in this area, knows his value and understands his boundaries.



CONCLUSION & LOOKING AHEAD

The achievements in this report demonstrate CAN's growing impact as a trusted system leader, convenor and advocate for the voluntary and community sector. As demand and complexity rise, our work strengthens the ways organisations are supported, connected, and heard, ensuring that community insight and lived experience shape local decision-making and services.

Looking ahead, we will build on this momentum by focusing on:

- Strengthening sector voice and leadership, ensuring underrepresented communities are better heard and influence system change.
- Deepening partnerships and cross-sector collaboration, including stronger engagement with the private sector to unlock sustainable resources and shared value.
- Building organisational resilience, particularly for smaller and grassroots groups, so they can thrive and meet growing community needs.
- Growing inclusive, high-quality volunteering, creating accessible pathways and recognising volunteering as a vital system asset.

As we move forward, our focus remains clear: enabling a stronger, more connected and more inclusive VCS that plays a central role in improving outcomes for local people.

We extend our sincere thanks to our staff, trustees, volunteers and member organisations whose commitment and collaboration make this possible.

Together, we will continue to champion the sector, strengthen communities and drive meaningful system change.

Karen Loftus – CAN Chief Executive

CAN TRUSTEES

[CAN100.ORG/ABOUT-US/OUR-TRUSTEES/](https://can100.org/about-us/our-trustees/)

CAN are indebted to our volunteer trustees. They are elected by our members to provide strategic direction and scrutiny for our work.

They are drawn from the local voluntary and community sector, and bring extensive knowledge and expertise to CAN. Our co-opted board members provide essential knowledge and expertise, including safeguarding, audit and leadership.

Martin Broad remains our dedicated Chair, with Debbie Clifton (pictured right) as Vice Chair.

The Trustees' relationship with our Chief Executive is key to the charity's success.

The Finance Committee have worked productively with our Management Accountant to produce a balanced budget for the year.



CAN are grateful to those who make our work possible:



CONTACT US



Phone/
(0)1202 466 130

Email/
hello@can100.org

Website/
www.can100.org

Address/
Northmead House,
Northmead Drive,
Poole, BH17 7RP