



# Better together

**SPARK**  
**SOMERSET**  
Inspiring communities

**Our impact**  
2023/24

# Introduction

For more than 40 years - as Spark Somerset, previously SSVCA and before that Yeovil CVS - we have worked with voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations (VCFSE) to enable them to learn, grow, collaborate and influence. Somerset's VCFSE sector and our communities are at the heart of everything we do.

It has been another difficult year for our sector, with financial uncertainty to navigate, rising demands to respond to and a growing realisation that we absolutely have to work together better in order to meet the challenges ahead. Never has the work of Spark Somerset, and the role we play, been so critical.

Within this context, we have had to prioritise partnerships. Our relationships are our greatest strength and we pride ourselves on our approach to collaborative working, whether that is working with the VCFSE, communities, businesses, Somerset Council, parish and town councils or the NHS. There's no doubt that we are better together.

We hope this report provides you with an insight into the positive change we are making together. We would not be able to do this without the support of all the people, organisations, partners and funders we work with across the County. Thank you to you all.

**Grahame Paine, Chair**  
**Katherine Nolan, CEO**

A special thanks goes to our fantastic staff, trustees and volunteers, who continuously go above and beyond in their roles to support Somerset's communities. They are what makes Spark Somerset so great.

**This is a snapshot of our work over the last 12 months.**



# Our mission, vision & values

Our vision is of a Somerset where anyone can make great things happen for their communities and our mission is to support and champion Somerset's voluntary and community organisations to help change lives and build healthy, resilient communities.

## Our values

- We are collaborative
- We are empowering
- We have integrity
- We are responsive
- We are inclusive



# Funding & development

**412**

Groups supported with advice and guidance

**£300k**

Raised through strategic funding support

**£1.2m**

Raised by groups who we supported to be 'funding ready'

**497**

DBS checks completed

# Volunteering

**33,461**

Visitors to Spark a Change platform

**716**

New volunteers signed up

**99**

New groups registered

**354**

New volunteering opportunities

# Training & events

**60**

In-person and online events

**1,722**

Total number of attendees

# Collaboration

**200**

People attended VCFSE  
Assembly events

**60**

Groups engaged in  
Somerset Mental Health

**52**

Groups engaged with  
Somerset Dementia

**50**

Organisations participated in Reflect,  
Recover, Renew task and finish groups

**15**

Digital Cafés

**38**

Volunteer Digital  
Champions

# Reach & influence

**1,825**

Newsletter subscribers

**22,596**

Website users

**93,731**

Page views

**2,400**

Facebook followers

**2,890**

X followers

**565**

LinkedIn followers

**725**

Instagram

# Supporting organisations to develop & grow

We help the sector develop and grow by providing information, advice, training and networking opportunities. This year we have:

- Supported 412 groups with advice and guidance
- Helped organisations to be in a strong position to look for funding to support their work, resulting in more than £1.2m raised for local groups
- Supported new organisations to establish strong foundations
- Supported existing organisations to adapt, strengthen their governance, increase efficiency, navigate difficult situations and provide the best support to their staff and volunteers
- Connected organisations together, supporting collaboration – 60 events, with 1722 attendees





# Rockin' Daddy's Emporium

Rockin' Daddy's Emporium in Crewkerne are a community radio station and community hub. The radio station evolved during Covid when Joey Daniels (the founder) started to stream music to help his own mental health. This year, we supported them to register as a Community Interest Company and provided guidance on how to find funding.

*"Spark have been friendly as well as knowledgeable and have guided us through. There are people in the town who won't go to official places for help. People suffering with alcoholism, drugs or isolation. These are people who are living on the edges of society, but because of my background, they are comfortable talking to us and we can signpost them or get them help if they need it."*

Joey Daniels, Founder and DJ



# Taunton Mencap

Taunton Mencap organise events, activities and trips for adults with learning disabilities so that they can participate fully in life, socialise and be part of events involving the local community.

*"After reaching out to Spark Somerset for help with our safeguarding policy.....we received a grant of close to £5,000 - a hugely significant amount for a charity of this size. The highly professional yet friendly and approachable manner in which Spark Somerset helped with our enquiry would mean there was no hesitation in me recommending their services to anyone in the sector."*

Dave Unwin, Development Officer





### VCFSE training & networking events

We ran 60 training and networking events for the VCFSE, attended by 1722 people. They included funding workshops, thematic events and peer support forums aimed at Trustees, Communication Leads and Volunteer Coordinators.

- "A really enjoyable session with great learning tips"
- "Fantastic session - so much information squeezed into one hour"
- "Very useful series and this speaker was very engaging, thank you"
- "I really enjoyed the session and the presenter/trainer was a joy to listen to"



### Minehead Development Trust

Minehead Development Trust came to us looking for core funding to sustain their charity and project funding for the continuation of their community projects, including the Minehead Bay Festival.

*"Thanks to support and advice from Spark, we have been able to secure 3 years of core and project costs to ensure the sustainability of our charity and staff, while also being able to recruit an additional member of staff to help scale our operations up."*

Zara Aitken, Project Coordinator

# Volunteering: sparking positive change



We help people to volunteer - to spark a positive change within themselves, for those they support, and their local communities. This year we have:

- Signed up 716 new volunteers
- Supported VCFSE organisations– 99 new groups registered on Spark a Change, 94 organisations received 121 support
- Promoted 354 new volunteering opportunities

*"We needed to recruit a lot of volunteers quickly and by using the Spark volunteer pool we were able to target people expressing an interest in what we were offering. This allowed us to let people know about the opportunity who may have a genuine interest in it and it led to us recruiting enough volunteers to launch a new project."*

SWAN Advocacy

**This year we have hosted 6 in person and 4 virtual Volunteer Coordinator Forums**

*"Since joining Haynes Motor Museum in February 2024 Spark have been invaluable in helping me settle in to understand volunteering in Somerset as well as providing opportunities for networking, training and help with recruitment. All the team are really helpful, accessible and the website looks great and is easy to use."*

Haynes Motor Museum



Meet Jake and Adam, volunteers from Bridgwater United Community Sports Trust

Use this QR code to watch the video.



**“All the team are really helpful”**



**Clare (pictured centre) is an Open Mental Health Champion and Volunteer Ambassador for Spark Somerset**

Clare shares how her own mental health journey has inspired her to volunteer. "I have many volunteer roles now, the majority focus on mental health, from supporting others through peer work, to signposting, to using my lived experience within the Open Mental Health alliance to help evaluate and design services.

*"I'd recommend volunteering to others because it's an opportunity to try out different roles, learn new skills and get to know yourself better without any pressure. It's enabled me to find out what I enjoy, and where I want to take my future."*



**Mulberry came to us for help with arranging a volunteering activity for employees**

The objective? To deliver an opportunity that would allow the team to connect, give back to their community and make a lasting contribution to the local environment. Dion, their Team Leader said:

*"To facilitate the organisation of the volunteering day, we reached out to Spark Somerset, and were connected with the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (QLPS). This provided us with an invaluable volunteering opportunity that we wouldn't have otherwise been aware of. It streamlined the process and enabled us to make a meaningful impact on our community and environment."*

# Strategic leadership & partnerships

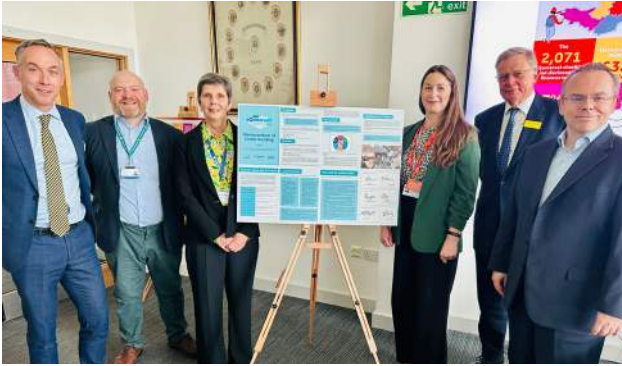
We support communication and collaboration within the VCFSE and other sectors. We act as an independent advocate and strengthen the voice of the sector to help shape design and policy. This year we have:

- Organised 2 Assembly events, attended by 200 people
- Represented the VCFSE sector on key decision-making forums
- Engaged with 50 organisations as part of 'Reflect, Recover, Renew' to explore practical ways to support the VCFSE to recover post-Covid

*"The collaborative and partnership opportunities provided by Spark Somerset are invaluable, particularly amidst rising demand for voluntary sector services and more challenging commissioning prospects. The network insights and sharing of expertise contributes to the creation of a stronger and more sustainable foundation for VCFSE services."*

Angela Kerr, Chief Executive Officer, Citizens Advice Somerset





## Historic agreement signed showing our commitment to working together to support health and wellbeing

We brought together 60 leaders from the voluntary sector, NHS and Somerset Council, to sign a Memorandum of Understanding outlining a shared vision and commitment to work more closely together. The signing of the agreement formally recognises the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector as an equal and strategic partner and the important role it plays in providing key services and activities.



We facilitated monthly Somerset Mental Health Network events (formerly the Somerset Mental Health Hub) to provide networking, learning and partnership opportunities for all VCSE organisations with an interest in mental health.

This included a conference attended by 60 members and thematic sessions on topics such as dementia, nature and wellbeing, children and young people's mental health, LGBTQ+ and bereavement.





**The Somerset VCFSE Dementia Partnership, facilitated by Spark Somerset, has over 50 organisations signed up to receive information, and around 30 organisations actively participating in strategic discussions. This year the Partnership worked in collaboration with the NHS to:**

- **Run 13 county-wide 'roadshows'**
- **Provide dementia training to over 300 people**
- **Deliver the Carers Education Programme and create Information Packs designed for those caring for someone with a dementia diagnosis**



**Somerset Youth Work Alliance** is a collaboration of VCFSE youth work providers. This project secured a 3 year grant from the National Lottery in May 2023 to grow the infrastructure and profile of youth work locally. This year the Alliance have:

- Attracted 21 VCSFE organisations to be part of the network, with an aspiration to grow
- Developed a training pathway in order to make youth work a valued career choice
- Held a celebration event for colleagues receiving their Youth Work certificates

*"Spark have been instrumental in supporting both the Somerset Youth Work Alliance, and ourselves as a youth and community organisation in West Somerset. I often term them as the glue that puts local organisations safely together. They have provided us with such support, capacity, connections and opportunities which has helped us to achieve more for the Alliance, ourselves, and other small groups we work with across the area."*

Paul Matcham, CEO Minehead Eye CIC





**Spark iT** works in partnership with VCFSE organisations to support individuals to build their confidence and learn digital skills.

We were also delighted to win a national award-winning first place in the Digital Inclusion category at the Internet Service Provider Association Awards!

This year, we have:

- Supported 15 Digital Cafés in community spaces, working with 38 volunteer Digital Champions, to provide 2,000 client interactions
- Delivered training to a range of groups, fostered local partnerships and hosted digital drop ins
- Worked in partnership with Donate IT to redistribute a range of devices and help combat digital poverty

*"The Digital Café has become a beacon of inclusivity... The positive outcomes in terms of enhanced digital literacy, improved mental health, access to ordering online prescriptions and the ability to obtain GP consultations via video call highlight the vital role your organisation plays in shaping a healthier and more connected West Somerset."*

Mark Shields, Locality Manager, Village Agents

**"The Digital Café has become a beacon of inclusivity"**



# Open Mental Health community engagement

Working in partnership with Diversity Voice and Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership, the aim of the project was to improve the mental health of communities who don't traditionally engage with mental health services. Initial communities of focus were based on data and local knowledge: neurodivergent communities; veterans; adults with learning disabilities; D/deaf Community; low income communities.

*"Today we felt like humans. You treated us with love, care and respect. We felt like we were important."*

Attendee, Consultation Event for People Seeking Asylum



# Information, communication & campaigns

With such a vast and diverse VCFSE sector in Somerset, we are always looking at ways to increase our reach and improve our communication. We need to keep the sector informed of relevant issues – but also have a key role in championing the Somerset VCFSE, the brilliant work that it does and the collective positive impact it is having on our communities.

This year we have:

- Sent our regular newsletter to 1,825 subscribers
- Published 10 'general' newsletters and 10 targeted newsletters on key topics
- Aimed at local fundraisers, we sent out 7 'Funding Five' bulletins to 232 subscribers
- Proactively engaged with more than 6,500 followers across our socials (Facebook, X, LinkedIn, Instagram)

During Volunteers' Week, we showcased inspiring stories from volunteers across the county. Examples include Lara, a Move More Together volunteer.

*"I volunteer to give back and help people but then find*

*that in doing so, I meet inspiring and interesting people. My volunteering gives me a feeling of self-worth and appreciation for life."*

And Renate, who in a short video, explains how volunteering at Paddington Farm in Glastonbury enabled her to improve her gardening skills and spend time with others.

Use this QR code to watch the video.



**“Volunteering gives me a feeling of self-worth and appreciation for life”**

**We've created a Somerset VCFSE YouTube playlist**

so that videos from a range of organisations can be featured in one place. It's an idea that emerged from the Reflect, Recover, Renew task and finish groups as we wanted to have a place to celebrate the scope and variety of amazing work that is taking place.

Use this QR code to watch the video.



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**For Trustees' Week**, we shared the voices of local board members who talked about their personal experiences of trusteeship and why they would recommend it to others.

*"This journey has not only allowed me to form wonderful new friendships but has also kept me mentally and physically engaged, instilling a profound sense of purpose in my life."*

Mandy, who explains what it's like to be a trustee of a children's mental health charity, The Space, in a short film.

Use this QR code to watch the video.



# Thank you

A big thank you once again to everyone we have worked with across Somerset this year - volunteers, colleagues, partners, funders, supporters, friends, groups, organisations and communities. We couldn't do it without you.

We look forward to working with you in the year ahead.

#BetterTogether

# Contact

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