



Hastings Voluntary Action Macmillan Cancer Support Champions Project

Stakeholder Report Phase 1 -
September 2024 to July 2025

Cancer Support Champions Project Stakeholder Report



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Introduction

Hastings Voluntary Action is working with Macmillan Cancer Support to help people to access local services and break down barriers.

The Macmillan Cancer Support Champions Project is one of eleven such projects across the country and is funded for three years by Macmillan. Community development worker Yasmine Kamel and project manager Jane Dodson are delivering the work, Monday – Thursday (at 0.8 FTE) each, hosted by Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA).

The key aim is to increase uptake of cancer services, particularly in underserved areas of Hastings, such as Broomgrove and Hollington. The project will work with both those who have received a cancer diagnosis and those who may be at risk of cancer, and who are less likely to access support or screenings. The project uses the power of conversation to support people into services and uses an asset-based community development approach.

Macmillan approached HVA to consider this project, building on the success of existing asset-based projects such as Making it Happen and the Men's Health and Wellbeing work (Mr Hastings and St Leonards).

The volunteer cancer champions are supported to have conversations about cancer, general health and wellbeing and signpost people to support. They are also supported by receiving training around cancer awareness, making every contact count, motivational interviewing and mental health first aid. In addition, a programme of support 'drop-ins' is being co-designed with the champions, including a range of activities and topics such as nutrition, creative writing and woodland walks.

This report covers the first phase of the project, up to and including the project launch, and is divided into sections that link to the overall project plan.

Engagement and Outreach

Raising awareness of the project in the relevant communities

One of the first events the team attended was an Active Hastings Age-Friendly activity day at Broomgrove Community Centre, offering a creative, conversational space at a Macmillan Cancer Champions stall. We took along a joint branded HVA/Macmillan banner, colouring books, jigsaws, and offered nail painting to encourage conversations, which worked well.

The team attended the social supermarket at Broomgrove, a discounted groceries scheme, and spoke to some of the volunteers about the project. People responded positively to the idea of the project, and the Macmillan/HVA brand engendered a trust that enabled people to share their stories.

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In the town centre, a Unity in the Community event organised by Hastings Voluntary Action and St Michael's Hospice, was held where the team made teas & coffees and handed out postcards. We have created some jointly branded HVA/Macmillan banners, which are useful at events to raise awareness of the partnership. The idea is to become known in the wider community.



Age-friendly network event at Central Hall



Tesco Extra stall in Hollington

Above, an age-friendly Christmas gathering organised by HVA at Central Hall, in Castle Ward. We have found that the early champions coming forward, are often involved in the other HVA projects, such the ageing well network, and the food network, or the men's health project, Mr Hastings and St Leonards. Sometimes they are nominated in by friends or colleagues via social media.

We attended the Links Project Refugee Week celebration day at Central Hall which had about 100 attendees. We had a table and offered nail painting, had conversations about the project with some of the attendees including representatives from the Lotus Flower Charity, East Sussex County Council and Arts on Prescription and gave them some of our signposting cards.

We also held an information day at the Tesco Extra, in Hollington, one of our target areas, where we spoke to 35 people, and raised awareness in a very prominent spot near the entrance. We were introduced to the community worker by one of our champions.

We attended the Wellbeing at Work Awards conference, where we held a stall and passed out cards – it was attended by over 80 people from businesses across Hastings.

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Hastings and Rother Cancer Support Network (H&RCSN)

Hastings Voluntary Action is a founder member of this network, along with Macmillan and the Sara Lee Trust. The aim is to bring together organisations and teams from across Hastings and Rother that are supporting people living with and affected by cancer to:

- Improve joint working, integration and shared learning
- Improve pathways to care and support activities
- Increase awareness and ease of access in areas of high need
- Reduce inequalities in support, care and access



We have co-produced an A5 leaflet listing local services, a Padlet of support services which is on the HVA website, and a card with a QRcode that links to this, that champions can hand out as they are having conversations in their community.

We host one of the four quarterly meetings of this network at HVA per year, it now meets quarterly and is gradually expanding to include more members.

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As the focus for the third meeting was on men's health, Teresa Flower presented on Mr Hastings & St Leonards, the Rye Cancer Café, and PCaSO (a prostate cancer charity) also presented.

HVA now host an on-line presence for the Network. This includes the information above with any resources produced, such as the leaflet below.

Network members include: Sara Lee Trust, HVA, We Only Live Once (WOLO) Foundation, Macmillan Cancer Support, Sussex Cancer Fund, Hastings & Bexhill PCN Cancer Care Coordinators, NHS Integrated Care Board, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust.

Also, Rye Memorial Hospital, PCaSO Prostate Cancer Charity, Macmillan lead cancer nurses at Conquest, 1066 Pink Ladies, Macmillan Counselling Services, St Michael's Hospice, Age UK East Sussex, Care for the Carers, Horizon Cancer Centre, Brighton.

The project team brought H&RCSN members together with cancer champions, and others with lived experience, and facilitated a response to the national consultation, 'Shaping the National Cancer Plan'. This report was cascaded to senior professionals at the Integrated Care Board.

Becoming known to leaders in local authorities, health sector bodies and Shared Prosperity Fund projects

The project manager attended UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Panel held at Broomgrove, coordinated and chaired by Hastings Borough Council, and presented the project. HVA hosted a follow up workshop to discuss proposals for healthcare priorities for North East Hastings in February.

The team have held several meetings with Anna Merla, Public Health Consultant who has conducted research into barriers to healthcare in Broomgrove. Connected to Ben Brown, Helen Cheney, Mark Hannigan, Rebecca Moscrop, and colleagues to collaborate.

Connected to colleagues at Hastings Borough Council including Active Hastings & Regeneration managers, and the team present regularly to the Active Hastings Partnership meeting, updating on our work.

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Jane has been co-opted onto the Screening Inequalities Section 7a steering group, which has over 60 members, from across Sussex and Surrey healthcare professionals. This meets quarterly and exchanges good practice.

The team have met lead Macmillan nurses at the Conquest, and connected with Graham Evans, Head of Public Health Intelligence, at ESCC.

The project team attended a 'Bridging the Gap' study day created with Surrey and Sussex Cancer Alliance, referred in by Becky Trussler, Macmillan Primary Care Nurse

Facilitator, Integrated Care Board. This was immensely useful, and we are looking to recruit champions within GP surgeries, as part of our next steps.

Jane attends monthly webinars for Cancer Care Coordinators, which are excellent for information sharing and becoming further known within that community.

Work with local businesses

Connected with the chair of the Business Improvement District in Hastings Town Centre, Hastings Direct, and the local Chamber of Commerce. One of our champions (Dee Flower) presented the work to a Chamber breakfast, held at Hastings United Football Club, resulting in the club offering to dedicate a match to the project next season.



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A strong relationship has been built with a hairdressing salon in Queen's Road that has supported our launch event with one of our community anchor champions, Kim at HVA, who raised over £700 for Macmillan by having her hair cut and donating it to the Little Princess Trust.

Jane attended the Wellbeing at Work Conference and awards ceremony. Signposted employers to the Macmillan employers' toolkit with advice on how to support employees who present with cancer.

The team have met with Let's Do Business, HR lead, to share information about the project and our aspiration to recruit champions with the workplace.

The team have also created two new postcards, one for employers and one for potential workplace champions.

Recruitment of Champions

We have designed a postcard that summarises the champion's role, with contact details of the team to express an interest. We also announced the project through HVA socials.

A light touch application form, with an emphasis on existing skills and what brings candidates joy in their everyday lives is in use. Our preferred method of completing these is in person, having a conversation with the prospective champion, which we find brings out much more information, using open, appreciative inquiry style questions.

We have developed an induction questionnaire, that measures the champions knowledge and awareness of cancer, available support services, and confidence to have conversations, pre embarking on the training. This can be checked back in on to create a data set measuring confidence to have conversations at intervals, and post training.

The skills and knowledge and interests that they mention then feeds directly into the design of activities for regular 'drop-ins', where again, we find offering 'shoulder to shoulder' creative activities, nail-painting and crafting helps to create a safe, environment where people can talk about cancer and its effects easily and confidentially.

These discussions often lead to ideas to progress the projects, for example connecting us with their contacts, and spreading the word at events they are attending, and through social media.

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An 'easy-read' role profile, has been produced, to be inclusive when people express an interest in the role.

We developed some short, introductory social media pieces, introducing the project, and the project team, put a note in the HVA bulletin that goes out to the membership and wider stakeholders across the town, with a circulation of approximately 2000 people.

The project was also featured in the Hastings Borough Council bulletin, that goes out to all residents with a My Hastings account.

First champions cohort

The first twelve champions have been recruited, and are trialling the training, and helping us co-design the programme, with the support drop-ins. Their backgrounds range from social prescribing, former pharmacy technicians, a former hairdresser, a former project manager, community hub managers, business marketing, counselling, teaching and working with children and young families.

One champion, based in the NHS works with people with learning disabilities and autism. The majority of the champions have lived experience of cancer themselves, or of caring for a loved one with cancer.

There is a rich range of knowledge, skills and experiences and they have given some very positive feedback so far, as well as connecting us with their valuable networks.

Current champions: Sabi Mahabir, Nadine Searle, Kirsty Treadwell, Jackie Guant, Dee Flower, Mikaela Berridge, Jonathon Dolding, Hazel Newton, Kim Kelly, Isabelle Endreo, Emma Morris, Clare Marten-White. Shreyans Iyer and Clive Hancocks are also collaborating with the project, using community music, and raising awareness of Prostate Cancer respectively.

Training & Workshops

The training programme is being co-designed with the champions themselves, and Macmillan. There is a 'core' offer of cancer awareness, and Making Every Contact Count, supplemented by other topics as suggested by participants, or linking in with other projects.

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Cancer Awareness

The project team have undergone Macmillan Train the Trainer in Cancer Awareness, with Julian Backhouse, the Macmillan Champions implementation lead, and reviewed this module with Kim, HVA champion with lived experience, who suggested we make some small amendments to the pathways slides to be more inclusive.

The first session was delivered, with Kate Regan, Macmillan Engagement & Quality lead and our first three champions, in February 2025. Participants Jonathan, Sabi and Nadine provided feedback on the process, and the content of the materials.

During the session, which was held at the White Rock Hotel, one participant bumped into an acquaintance during the tea break, and spoke to them about the project, and why he was taking part. It was a powerful example of putting the skills into practice.

A second workshop was delivered by Matt Jarvis, of the Macmillan Horizon Centre in Brighton, who came to Hastings to facilitate a Cancer Explained session, and hosted by HVA.

Delivered 12th February & 10th March '25, follow up scheduled 24th Sept '25



Making Every Contact Count Level 2

The team are liaising with One You East Sussex to deliver (MECC) training, quarterly, specifically tailored to the cancer community and using the mini directory of local services we co-created with the Hastings and Rother Cancer Support Network.

Delivered: January 2025, May 2025, July 2025 (delivered) Sept 2025 (scheduled)

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Loneliness Matters Workshop

This was developed in response to one of our cancer champions, who described the sense of loneliness and isolation he felt on receiving his cancer diagnosis as a young man.

Co-designed with Gillian Reynolds who brought the learnings from the East Sussex Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation project. This was delivered in January 2025 with some excellent feedback from participants, who reported a more extensive knowledge of the impacts of loneliness, after attending, and were given tools to spot the signs and support those who present with these.



A follow up workshop explored how the participants are using the learning in their conversations and how the champions are applying the techniques.

Delivered: 22nd January 2025. Follow up 'refresher' delivered: 22nd May 2025

Motivational Interviewing

Through Yasmine's connection at Brighton University, Jamie Cooper, delivered a Motivational Interviewing module, where he used music (specifically a Ukelele!) to put everyone at ease, and is also interested in potentially linking the project to some wider research, via the theory of change model developed by NPC.

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Delivery Date: 30th April 2025.

Bluebell Walk

A bluebell walk/meditation was held by one of our champions, at Church in the Wood, Holington, one of our target areas, which was very well attended.



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Creative Writing

We are working with Writing Well, the duo behind 'Words from the Waiting Room', a creative writing project, that aims to capture the emotions that people feel when in an oncology waiting room where they may be given life-changing news, to design a walking and writing workshop over the summer.

The work was initially a collaboration with the Sussex Cancer Fund and the University of Brighton. A workshop design drop-in was held in July 2025, and the delivery date will be confirmed shortly, in September/October.



Mental Health First Aid

Developed with Soundcastle for the Baton of Hope project (brought to Hastings by the Mr Hastings & St Leonards project) and the HVA Cancer Champions.



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Nutrition Drop-in

Champions had mentioned the loss of a sense of taste and lack of energy that can impact on their nutrition, creating meals with family, or the challenges of being alone and summoning strength to cook from scratch.

So, we linked with Isabelle Endreo, founder of [Rainbow Kitchen Magic](#) in Bexhill, who provides food workshops with the Sara Lee Trust (and is known to the HVA projects Mr Hastings and St Leonards, and Hastings Food Network) and explored links and possible activities linked to their work with qualified dietician and nutritionist Nathalie Sansonetti at New Leaf Nutrition, who has worked with many clients who have undergone cancer treatment. A drop in on the topic was held in February.



Delicious lunch at our launch event with Isabelle and Yasmine

The wide ranging conversation that took place with our champions, was very moving, and took on board the communities we are aiming to reach, emotional relationships to food, planning meals, equipment and facilities that people may have available, and unpacking the motivations around diet/behaviours and nutrition, that apply in general and when someone is living with cancer.

A nutrition workshop, possibly in the newly refurbished community kitchen in Broomgrove, in conjunction with the social supermarket, is being developed.

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External Communications

Website and social media

A project web page has been set up with a description of the project, the champions role description and the directory, and some social media posts introducing the project have been posted on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram.

A holding Facebook and Instagram account has been set up for the champions project, to enable us to amplify what the champions and HVA and Macmillan are posting. These will be developed further if the champions think it would be useful.

LinkedIn is a useful source of information sharing and links with the other champions projects, and other professionals working in this space, including the South East community network run by Macmillan.

The HVA social media channels, training programmes, e-bulletins, and trusted sources have been invaluable in spreading the word about the project, and the volunteer coordinator can promote the champions' opportunity alongside her other work.

A presentation to the HVA team in January and to the HVA board in March to ensure that the messaging is on track internally, so we can all accurately present the project externally.

A project Facebook page and profile have been set up to help monitor social media, and the project manager is using her own LinkedIn profile to help amplify messages and key reflections. There were more than 33,000 views of written communications between September 2024 to July 2025.

The project launch was featured on Sussex World, and a printed article appeared in the Hastings Observer, the Macmillan South East Cancer Network newsletter, Hastings Borough Council e-bulletin to residents, and an interview with one of the champions was held on BBC Sussex Radio.

Project Launch

The project launch happened on Tuesday 10th June at the Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, Durbar Hall.

A launch ideas meeting was held in Spring 2025, and joint ideas document shared with the Macmillan Champions Communications Lead, Emma Byford, and Matt, HVA communications manager.

A pledge wall, a focus on the next recruitment campaign for champions, and a focus on making Hastings a town where anyone needing cancer support knows how and where to access it gradually took shape.

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The March drop-in for champions focussed on ideas for the launch, including an outdoor meditation, champions sharing stories, and a marketplace for those offering services.

One of the cancer champions approached local jazz pianist and singer Liane Carroll, who agreed to play alongside an afternoon tea as part of the event, which was wonderful.

The day exemplified the atmosphere and environment of the project, with the champions storytelling being particularly powerful, along with the marketplace of support services that was held on the upper gallery floor.

The presentations from the champions were recorded, and shared with the evaluators, and were very well received on the day.



Feedback on the launch

‘What a brilliant event on Tuesday, it was fantastic to be part of it. There was such a strong sense of purpose in the room, it was genuinely inspiring to see such a diverse group of individuals, all working towards a common goal. I’m really looking forward to being part of and seeing how the project shapes and evolves over the coming years.’

Emma Morris, Learning Disabilities and Autism Liaison and Health Facilitation, NHS

‘Congratulations on your event! It was brilliant, so heartfelt and a great way to showcase local services, but also local talents and skills.’

Rebecca Trussler, Macmillan Primary Care Nurse Facilitator

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'I just wanted to extend my thanks and congratulations to all involved. It was a lovely and memorable event. Please also pass on my thanks to your lovely champions, sitting and chatting with them as the afternoon went on was both enjoyable and humbling. I'm sure the planning and preparation was a mighty task, but the result was very special, and the venue, food and entertainment worked so well too.'

Julian Backhouse, Macmillan Cancer Champions Implementation Lead



World Cancer Day and Shaping the National Cancer Plan

Jane attended a Macmillan event, an interview with Wes Streeting, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and Nick Robinson, BBC journalist, at Westminster for World Cancer Day, 4th February. The opportunity led to the chance to feed into the call for evidence, feeding into the National Cancer Plan.



https://youtu.be/pZ6_AhVuVbY

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The event led to the project manager creating a Shaping the National Cancer Plan workshop and report, bringing together voices of lived experience, with Primary Care Network, pulling together a consultation response.

<https://hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk/sites/default/files/project/Shaping%20the%20National%20Cancer%20Plan%20%20Hastings%20and%20Rother%20Cancer%20Support%20Network%20Consultation%20Workshop%20Report%20.pdf>

Impact Measurement and Evaluation

External evaluation partners New Philanthropy Capital have co-designed an interview structure and a platform to capture Most Significant Change stories and speak to wider stakeholders about the project's impact. There are clearly defined checkpoints for data collection. One of these was in late February to feed into the first report, and site visits/interviews are taking place over the summer of 2025, with a view to a second report in September 2025.

An initial ripple effect monitoring exercise has been held, and this will be revisited and updated. This builds on work done by the other asset-based community development projects at HVA, specifically Making it Happen and Mr Hastings and St Leonards.

We have developed a tool, a 'Bingo Card' that has boxes containing the activities that a champion may do, e.g. have a conversation with friend, or signpost to a service, or being kind to oneself after having a difficult conversation.

This will show progress, act as a prompt for champions to have support conversations with Jane and Yasmine and provide clarity on what actions count as part of the programme.

Macmillan Cancer Support Champion
Bingo Card



I have had a conversation around cancer with a friend Number:	I have had a conversation around cancer with a family member Number:	I have signposted someone to a cancer support service Number:
I have signposted someone to the MacMillan website Number:	I have signposted someone to the MacMillan service at the Community Info Hub Number:	I have attended a relevant training session to support my work as a Champion Number:
I have had a conversation with someone about some of the barriers they face to access screening Number:	I have had a conversation with someone about some of the barriers they face to access cancer support services Number:	I have spoken to either Jane or Yasmine for some support after having a difficult conversation with someone around cancer Number:

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We will revisit our champions' induction questionnaires later in the programme to measure progress, alongside our baseline data taken at application stage. We have also collected presentations made at the launch, and post event feedback, which has been universally positive, with champions reporting that the process is giving them confidence, empowering and enabling them. Some are finding that it is becoming part of the healing process, with the training helping them to make sense of some past experiences and look forward to the future with hope.

The total number of events organised by the project so far is **27**

We have been to **64** events so far.

Over **57** written communications have gone out

Attendees across all events have been **1,682**

Around **321** people have been signposted

Learning and reflections

Nine months into the project is good time to reflect on how things are working, and to think about the learnings we have gained so far.

Cancer can be an emotive and sometimes difficult topic to address, however, we as a team have found so much positivity, and joy in this work. The contributions have been hopeful, passionate, honest, and heartfelt. This emanates from within, our champions, and their experiences, and is also reflected in the reactions of others to the project, the wider stakeholders, potential collaborators, and colleagues.

Much of this early stage has been about creating an environment where champions feel able to speak freely, and creatively, and to help us to co-design this project with them at the absolute centre of things. It's tempting to over manage, or structure, or plan, however, the asset-based community development approach we have adopted centres the skills, knowledge and experiences of our champions, and their communities.

We have adopted a person-centred approach to the role of champion and have presented the role description as more of a menu of things that champions might choose to do. This is perfect for some; however, others appreciate more structure and clarity – so we have developed the bingo card to help with this. It provides a simple structure that acts as a reminder of tasks/conversations, a sense of achievement and accomplishment, and acts as a prompt for support conversations with the project team.

A series of support drop-ins are held, in between the training workshops, where we have creative activities, refreshments and sometimes a theme. These are working well, and providing a space/environment is proving enough for meaningful discussions to take place. The aims of these drop-ins were initially group and peer support, however they are also turning into explorations of topics to include in the programme, as with the nutrition and creative writing discussions.

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Sustainability

We aim for the cancer champions to deliver activities themselves, for example, Nadine has established Cancer Conversations in a local Asda, directly in one of our target areas. Another champion, Hazel has started a sewing and craft group at her local church. Emma, who is delivering training for GP surgery staff, is spreading the word through her work. Nearly all the communications about the project, on social media and elsewhere, are now coming from the champions themselves, and we are then amplifying their voices. Our further aim, as we expand our numbers of champions, in workplaces, in community centres and within primary care, is to ensure that they have all the tools and resources they need to continue their work and feel connected to each other to continue with the peer support sessions and guidance. Through our idea for a Cancer Convention, we aim to bring professionals together to form lasting relationships, continuing to implement the Six Shifts in our work.

Introducing the “Six Shifts”



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Conclusion

We are looking forward to our next steps, which include plans to create a Cancer Convention, recruiting more champions (our target is 35) and delivering more training. As we uncover barriers to uptake of support, we will report those back and try to influence system change.

Finally, we will continue to develop activities with our champions, ideas include a kintsugi workshop, a jazz evening, a community music and song writing session, and a tree walk.

Together, our vision is that no one needs to feel alone when they have a cancer diagnosis or are caring for someone with cancer, and that they know where to go for help and support. Let's realise that vision now. With heart, with strength, with ambition.

Thank you to all our champions, the members of the Hastings and Rother Cancer Support Network, and to our wider stakeholders, who have welcomed us into the space.

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