



Cancer Connections Event Report

Hastings Voluntary Action Macmillan Cancer Support Champions designed this event, held on Wednesday 10 June 2026, 10.30am–4.30pm, at the Hastings Centre on the Ridge.

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Executive Summary

Cancer Connections brought together local residents, voluntary organisations, healthcare professionals and support services to raise awareness of cancer support available in Hastings. The event was designed to create a safe and welcoming space for conversations about cancer, screening, wellbeing and practical support, while strengthening local connections between services and the community.

The day showcased the role of Cancer Support Champions, highlighted local pathways into support, and encouraged people affected by cancer, carers, professionals and employers to better understand the resources available locally.

Purpose and Aims

The purpose of Cancer Connections was to improve awareness and uptake of local cancer services, encourage proactive engagement with screening programmes, and demystify the experience of seeking support. The event aimed to:

- Bring voluntary, community, primary care and secondary care partners together in one accessible space.
- Help residents understand what cancer support is available locally and how to access it.
- Support open, informed conversations about cancer, wellbeing and mental health.
- Reduce barriers to screening by giving people opportunities to ask questions in a safe environment.
- Celebrate and promote the contribution of Cancer Support Champions within the community.

Event Overview

The event included specialist speakers, information stalls, opportunities for networking, complementary wellbeing activities, creative elements, refreshments and lunch. It was open to members of the community as well as healthcare professionals, social prescribers, cancer care coordinators, advice services, employers and other organisations that support people affected by cancer.

Participants were able to hear directly from people with lived and professional experience, learn about local cancer support services, explore screening information, and connect with organisations offering practical, emotional and wellbeing support.

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Key Features of the Day

- **Information marketplace:** Local organisations shared details of services, referral routes, wellbeing support and community resources.
- **Specialist input:** Speakers contributed knowledge on topics including nutrition, lifestyle medicine, clinical research and cancer care.
- **Cancer Support Champions:** Champions shared their role in reaching into communities, starting conversations and helping people find appropriate support. Each focussed on a different area of their own cancer experience too, from changing career, to supporting family, to managing side effects and discussed having support to 'Grow and Glow' through the project.
- **Screening awareness:** The event helped attendees understand screening services and discuss concerns or uncertainties. A giant inflatable bowel provided a talking point and interaction opportunities.
- **Wellbeing and creativity:** Complementary therapies, storytelling, art and holistic activities helped create an accessible and supportive atmosphere.
- **Employer resources:** Information was available to support employers in helping people affected by cancer remain in work where possible.
- **RiverPaint:** arts therapist, Cinzia Ciaramicoli, led a storytelling workshop where she told the story of The Little River, then invited participants to paint a river together, on a long canvas.

Outcomes and Impact

Cancer Connections strengthened relationships between community groups, health partners and local residents. It created opportunities for people to ask questions, discover services and make direct connections with organisations that can offer ongoing support. The event also raised the profile of the Cancer Support Champions project and demonstrated the value of community-led conversations in addressing barriers to early help, screening and wellbeing support.

The Little River activity was very much enjoyed, and the resulting art work will be displayed in the reception area of host organisation, Hastings Voluntary Action, with some interpretation to prompt further conversations.

Cinzia will be conducting a training session with up to 20 champions, community leaders and facilitators to enable them to carry out similar workshops, with members of displaced communities, children and young people, people with learning disabilities and those who have suffered trauma. This will be opened up to both champions, and the wider Hastings community.

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Accessible Cancer Conversations for People with Learning Disabilities

Following Cancer Connections, GP practices connected with the work and requested sessions with local learning disability care providers who expressed interest in informal cancer awareness and screening conversations for the people they support. This demonstrated a direct post-event impact: the event opened new routes into communities where accessible, confidence-building conversations about cancer screening, body awareness, self-checks and what to expect at screening appointments are particularly important.

Cancer champion Emma Morris, Learning Disabilities and Autism Liaison and Health Facilitation, East Sussex, identified that visual and tactile resources would make these discussions more accessible for people with learning disabilities, particularly where abstract concepts are difficult to imagine or discuss. In response, the project agreed to use some of the Macmillan project budget to purchase breast and testicular examination models to support Cancer Champions and partners in future conversations.

This follow-up shows the event's wider impact beyond the day itself: it stimulated new partnership working, created practical opportunities to reduce barriers to screening, and led directly to investment in inclusive engagement resources that can support more meaningful cancer awareness conversations with people with learning disabilities.

Initial Impact Data and Stakeholder Feedback

Initial feedback from the event shows that Cancer Connections created meaningful opportunities for learning, collaboration and improved confidence in signposting. Stakeholders highlighted the value of hearing directly from Cancer Support Champions, connecting with other professionals, and identifying ways to strengthen local cancer support pathways.

"It was such a useful event. We usually only engage with people at an early stage, to hear the champions and other stories about what happens next has been invaluable."

Surrey and Sussex bowel screening team

"Congratulations on what was clearly a very successful day. My team members enjoyed it thoroughly and learnt a lot about other services provided."

Dan Redsull, CEO, Sara Lee Trust

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“It was so good to see the healthy lunch provided [falafel boxes from a street food truck with fresh herbs, pomegranate seeds, spices and flatbreads] and excellent to connect with all the professionals here.”

Dr Anna Cowley, consultant haematologist and lifestyle medicine practitioner

“I have been so moved to meet participants who were part of clinical trials that we were running at the Conquest, ten years ago.”

Jo-Anne Taylor, Head of Research, East Sussex Healthcare Trust

“Could we please get a picture of our inflatable bowel with the Mayor and other stakeholders for our wider outreach?”

Kerry Fay, Clinical Manager, Sussex Bowel Screening Programme

“Today has been amazing, truly. I will be much more confident in my signposting and will be keeping in touch with the project.”

Care Coordinator, local GP surgery

“I would like to collaborate with the project and work with these groups to ensure we increase access to services.”

Oncologist scar specialist and therapist

“Thank you for the excellent opportunity — it was good to present our research into making cancer resources more accessible and enable making clinical research more inclusive through the event.”

Aabha, Community Impact Lead, and Musadir Amin Shiek, Diversity Resource International

Taken together, the feedback demonstrates impact across several areas: increased confidence among professionals, stronger awareness of local cancer support services, renewed commitment to improving pathways, opportunities for future collaboration, and greater visibility for inclusive approaches to cancer information and clinical research.

Learning and Reflections

The event highlighted the importance of holding cancer conversations in familiar, community-based settings. Bringing services together in one place made it easier for people to explore support without needing to navigate multiple systems independently.

Feedback and informal conversations from the day should be used to identify common questions, barriers and gaps in awareness, particularly around screening, referral routes and support after diagnosis.

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The Little River story, written by the facilitator's friend, Giovanna Conforto, who has cancer, was very moving, and the painting of the river was popular, providing an immersive activity that resulted in a striking canvas, five metres in length, in greens, purples and blues, for display.

The professionals who came from GP surgeries found it particularly useful, and one care coordinator came along to the July Champions drop-in. She was delighted with the information and support she gained, the Padlet, and all the resources and training available to support her in her work with cancer patients.

The June Hastings and Rother Cancer Support Network meeting was held as part of Cancer Connections, helping to reinforce its role as a forum for partnership working and service improvement. There was a definite buzz around the meeting being surrounded by services, and one member noted that the Network has now become a respected organisation, having met regularly now for almost two years.

Next Steps

We will use learning from the event to shape future Cancer Support Champions activity and community engagement going forward. We will follow up with partners who offered future collaboration, including work to improve access to services and make cancer resources and clinical research more inclusive.

The feedback was shared with New Philanthropy Capital, external evaluators of the Macmillan Champions work, who have concluded that “the Hastings Cancer Connections event is a strong example of how bringing services, champions, professionals, and creative activity into one space can build confidence, relationships, and future collaboration”

What the evidence suggests (so far):

The evidence suggests that Hastings is strengthening the local cancer support ecosystem. Professionals reported increased confidence in signposting, stronger understanding of what happens after screening or diagnosis, and interest in future collaboration. The event also appears to have created emotional resonance: people described being moved by Champion stories and energised by the possibility of creating better connections across services.

Conclusion

Cancer Connections was a valuable opportunity to bring people and services together around a shared aim: improving awareness, confidence and access to cancer support in Hastings. The event demonstrated the strength of partnership working and the importance of trusted community conversations in helping people affected by cancer find the right support at the right time.



A Photo Montage of the Day

The inflatable bowel was a talking point all day – despite arriving late and being rather louder than anyone expected, it provided a focal point and some memorable quotes!



The Mayor of Hastings, Cllr Paula Warne, with Mary Carter, Chair of HVA, Emma Banfield and Wen Chiu of the Sussex and Surrey bowel screening team, and Jane Dodson stand inside the inflatable bowel. This photo will be used for ongoing promotion.



Lesson learnt: for the bowel to stay inflated, the motor makes a whirring sound – so best to only inflate for a short period, and not whilst storytelling and other speakers are under way.

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Painting The Little River

Facilitated by Cinzia Ciaramicoli

Cinzia has agreed to train up to 20 community members and professionals in this art therapy technique, which will continue to benefit the people of Hastings.



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Speaker and champion, Nadine Searle



Robin Pritchard, Cancer Care Map



Mardi Gras Umbrellas by Cancer Champions. Creativity and local tradition came together during a workshop to decorate umbrellas, as part of the annual Mardi Gras celebrations in Hastings. Fat Tuesday has become an established live music festival, with the Preservation Sunday umbrella parade forming a key part of the weekend.

The umbrellas were displayed on the stand created for the tree of hope, part of the Baton of Hope anti-suicide project initiated by the Men's Health and Wellbeing project at HVA.

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Isabelle Endreo, Cancer Champion and nutrition specialist, with her Rainbow Kitchen Magic demonstration. Isabelle switched careers from teaching to creating delicious food workshops after receiving a cancer diagnosis.



Hastings & Rother Cancer Support Network, holding their June meeting at the event. The network has now been meeting quarterly for the last two years and has become an established forum to share good practice and improve cancer pathways.

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Jacy Kilvert, (HVA Men's Health and Wellbeing project) and colleague Su Barnicoat, hosting a wellbeing table creating bath salts using essential oils, that participants could take away.



Dr Lisa Samson, local GP



Specialising in cervical screening, presenting and learning about the work of Diversity Resource International with Mudasir Amin

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Clare Marten White, Cancer Champion



Emma Morris, Cancer Champion working with People with learning disabilities, who is now using educational aids at GP surgeries and care facilities to encourage self-checking and raise awareness



Aabha & Mudasar - Diversity Resource International

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Dawn Jobling, Sara Lee Trust, Complementary Therapist lead, who connected with a local dance practitioner and shared her personal story on the stage.

Stall Holders

- Active Hastings: <http://www.activehastings.org.uk>
- Cancer Care Map: <https://www.cancercaremap.org/>
- Care for the Carers: <https://www.cftc.org.uk/>
- Diversity Resource International: <https://driorg.com/>
- Healthwatch East Sussex: <https://www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk/>
- Hastings Voluntary Action: <https://hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk/>
- Horizon Centre: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/get-help/macmillan-services/macmillan-horizon-centre>
- Macmillan Counselling: <https://www.cancercaremap.org/oncology-counselling-sessions/>
- Macmillan Hastings Information and Advice Hub: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/eastsussex/our-services/macmillan-information-advice-hub-56b3d01a-32de-ef11-95f6-000d3aacb6e1/>
- One You East Sussex: <https://oneyoueastsussex.org.uk/>
- Sara Lee Trust: <https://www.saraleetrust.org/>

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Meet Some of Our Speakers

Clare Marten-White - Cancer Champion:

Alongside reshaping my working life after cancer diagnosis and treatment, I volunteer for Macmillan Cancer Champions and local cancer support groups, 1066 Pink Ladies, and Nurture & Nourish retreats. I share lived experience with those also going through treatment, signpost to support organisations and activities, and participate in fundraising.

Key messages:

A cancer diagnosis and treatment can have a huge impact on our ability to work and support ourselves financially in the way we did before treatment. Changing career can be the only way forward. Navigating that additional layer of uncertainty and fear requires energy and confidence at a time when both of these have been hugely impacted. Finding meaningful and flexible work can be a really important part of the healing process.

Signposting - some examples that are finance/ work related:

- Macmillan financial helpline
- Local job centre and work coaches
- Level Up - Sussex Community Development Association
- Local job fairs
- Connect to Work - Careers East Sussex
- The Confidence Box
- Brave Starts (national CIC)
- The Mortgage Charter

Emma Morris - Cancer Champion:

As a Cancer Champion with Hastings Voluntary Action, I am passionate about helping ensure that every person's experience of cancer care is individual, accessible, and shaped around what matters to them. I believe cancer information, support, and services should be inclusive and available to everyone. I am equally passionate about recognising the impact cancer has on the people around the person, their family members, friends, and carers.

Their experiences, challenges, and needs are a vital part of the wider cancer journey. Alongside this role, I bring over 30 years' experience supporting people with learning disabilities and currently work as a Learning Disability and Autism Health Facilitator, advocating for equality, inclusion, and reducing health inequalities across mainstream healthcare services.

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Hazel Newton - Cancer Champion:

My name is Hazel Newton, and I live in Hastings. I first found out about the Macmillan Cancer Support Champions Project over a year ago after looking online for some voluntary work in my local community. As I have had cancer and been a carer to members of my family, I thought maybe I could help in some way to talk and support people in my local community.

I applied to become a champion and was accepted; I found the training and workshops extremely helpful, which allowed me to go into the community with confidence to talk to people who are in the same position that I have been in. Becoming a champion has also helped me with the groups that I am involved with. I have also started a craft / sewing group which is very successful.

Isabelle Endréo - Cancer Champion:

I was honoured to be involved in the launch of the HVA Macmillan Cancer Champions project last year. I prepared the food for the event and spoke about my own experience of cancer, including how I found support and why that support matters so much in coping with the emotional and physical impact of diagnosis and treatment. I also shared how I came to change important things in my life and career and about my work delivering wellbeing-focused food workshops with the Sara Lee Trust for people affected by cancer. I became a Cancer Champion almost by chance, but the role has become something very meaningful to me. It has given me the opportunity to spend time with others, share creative activities that can support wellbeing, and reflect together on how best to help people living with cancer, as well as their carers and loved ones.

Through this role, I have come to understand even more clearly the importance of listening carefully and helping people find the support available to them. This has helped me bring it into conversations in a more thoughtful and systematic way. Sometimes, people or friends of someone newly diagnosed come to me for advice about food, and that often opens the door to a wider conversation about the support that is there for them.

<https://www.rainbowkitchenmagic.com/>

Nadine Searle - Cancer Champion:

I think every possible emotion has come up for me during my treatment and I have been very grateful for the opportunity to become part of the wonderful community that has been created by becoming an HVA Macmillan Cancer Support Champion where I have had training, been supported and had many opportunities to grow and glow. More importantly we have been encouraged to open up conversations about cancer which is very helpful for me, I think it helps me process whether I am sharing my story or listening to others, but I also know how much it helps others to talk.

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Since my breast cancer diagnosis, and the experience that I have learnt so much from, I am passionate about helping ease the fear and anxiety that comes with every stage of a diagnosis from the testing, through the treatment and even the anxiety. I was lucky that I had my trusted Calmer Self Method to lean into and I want to give that 'Toolbox' to others.

www.calmerself.co.uk

Aabha, Diversity Resource International

Aabha is the Community Development and Impact Lead at Diversity Research International C.I.C. She has worked with DRI since 2023, earlier as a project and services coordinator. Aabha leads DRI's evaluation and impact work, ensuring that projects deliver measurable change for communities and stakeholders. Aabha currently leads on the Sussex Friendship Bench project that is a community mental health initiative originally from Zimbabwe brought to Sussex by DRI.

Cinzia Ciaramicoli, actress, theatre director and fine artist

Cinzia has always used theatre as a tool to reach communities by performing in unconventional spaces and by using her pedagogical skills to engage with underprivileged people around the world.

Cinzia has lived and worked in eight different countries and now she resides in England. In every country she lived, Cinzia created theatre projects for the communities, together with her group of independent artists, working as a collective, named The Itinerants. The Itinerants' latest project Kuunganisha is reaching communities in rural areas of Tanzania and developing an eco-sustainable International Arts Village in the Dodoma region.

Cinzia is also a fine artist using mixed media to share her thoughts and disappointments. She trained in Australia as an Art Therapist to heal people through painting along her journey. The "RiverPaint" is one of the art therapy events that Cinzia developed through the years by stimulating the arts within communities and she travels with a 42 metre canvas connecting people through strokes of paint.

Dr Anna Cowley is a Consultant Haematologist and Clinical Research Lead at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust. She studied medicine at University College London, with a prior degree in biochemistry and experience in the pharmaceutical industry. She has a strong interest in clinical trials and improving patient access to novel therapies; she is currently leading efforts to establish a clinical trial addressing fatigue in patients with myeloproliferative neoplasms. Dr Cowley is also a certified Lifestyle Medicine Physician and a member of Plant-Based Health Professionals UK. Following her personal experience of Long Covid, she developed a particular interest in holistic approaches and integrates evidence-based lifestyle medicine principles with traditional care to support patient wellbeing.

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Dr Lisa Samson is a salaried GP working at the Hill Surgery who has a specialist interest in public health and health inequalities.

Geoff Brown, Centre Manager of the Macmillan Horizon Centre since it opened in 2016. Over 30 years of experience of working with volunteers and developing volunteer delivered support services in the UK and internationally.

Jas Gray, GP Link Worker at Active Hastings, is working with those with long-term health conditions, to get them moving and exercising more by linking them up with physical activity and exercise sessions suitable for them based on their medical history. I try to break down barriers for people being more active, along with supporting local instructors in upskilling them so they are comfortable in working with various different medical conditions and concerns.

She also runs a local exercise referral scheme 20/20 Health, which runs a cancer prehab/rehab session once a week, at Bexhill Leisure Pool, where we hire a private gym space to create personalised exercise sessions.

Jo-Anne Taylor, Head of Research at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (ESHT), has a career in cancer care spanning nearly three decades. She began her profession in haematology and oncology nursing in 1996 at United Lincolnshire Hospital Trust and has remained dedicated to delivering high-quality, innovative treatments alongside compassionate, patient-centred care.

Her extensive experience includes working as a haematology cancer specialist nurse, a Lead Sister for three chemotherapy units, and on a bone marrow transplant unit, as well as establishing a haematology research service in 1997—laying the foundation for a career deeply rooted in research. Jo-Anne is passionate about making complex research medical information clear and accessible, helping patients and their families feel informed, reassured, and involved in their care. She is responsible for ensuring there is a wide variety of clinical trials for our patient population to be involved in and manages teams to deliver the clinical trials which support clinical teams to improve cancer services and advance research that leads to better outcomes. Committed to ensuring every person's voice is heard throughout their cancer journey, ensuring our community has access to research, supporting ESHT colleagues to embed research into practice and making research everybody's business. Jo-Anne is proud to lead research services in East Sussex, helping patients access the latest treatments close to home and improving the lives of people affected by cancer.

Learning Disability and Autism Health Facilitation and Liaison Team

The team supports people with learning disabilities and autistic people to access healthcare more equitably. We work to reduce health inequalities by raising awareness, promoting reasonable adjustments, and supporting individuals, families, and professionals to better understand and meet people's needs. A key focus is improving access to screening, early diagnosis, and ongoing care, ensuring services are inclusive, accessible, and person-centred.

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We can help with:

- Accessing screening and appointments
- Understanding health information
- Identifying and reducing barriers to care
- Supporting professionals to meet individual needs

If you or someone you support is experiencing barriers to accessing health services, please contact the LDA team for advice, guidance, and support:

Email: emma.morris50@nhs.net

Phone: 07825899467

Robin Pritchard, Cancer Care Map

Robin is co-director of Cancer Care Map, a UK wide online directory of over 6,000 cancer support services, developed by The Richard Dimbleby Cancer Fund. All information is verified and kept regularly checked and updated. The database also feeds into the Macmillan Cancer Support website and other healthcare platforms. Robin has lived in Hastings for 4 years and is a member of the Hastings and Rother Cancer Support Network.

Samuel Pourasghar, Carer Support Worker at Care for the Carers

Sam has been working with Care for the Carers since 2023. He has a responsibility to his local area of Hastings and Rother, but his role also enables him to directly help unpaid Carers across the whole of East Sussex. He is a Carer himself, and feels that his previous work history within Adult Social Care and respite services for Adults with Learning Disabilities helps him to be more practically supportive of his fellow Carers.

Jane Dodson MSc FRSA

Jane manages the HVA Macmillan Cancer Champions programme and has worked in community development both overseas and in the UK. She was drawn to the programme when cancer affected members of her own family and has a particular interest in systems change, impact measurement and influencing policy.

Yasmine Kamel MRSPH

Yasmine is the Community Development Worker on the HVA Macmillan Cancer Champions programme and has worked and volunteered for various charities over the last 7 years. She has a background in Public Health, and is currently completing her Master's in Health Promotion.

Resources

[Plant-Based Diet Factsheets](#) | [Plant Based Health Professionals UK](#)

[More evidence sticking to life...-In a Nutshell: The Plant-Based Health Professionals UK Podcast – Apple Podcasts](#)

Recent report published by Diversity Resource International (DRI): <https://driorg.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/cancer-final-report-version-3.pdf>