Hastings Voluntary Action Macmillan Cancer Support Champions Project

Grow & Glow

Two-Year Stakeholder Report
September 2024 to September 2026



Cancer Support Champions Project
Stakeholder Report

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Cancer Support Champions Project
Stakeholder Report

Introduction

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

With a particular focus on underserved areas of Hastings, this work engages people who are at risk of late diagnosis, and those who are living with and beyond cancer. It is an asset based community development project, meaning that we focus on what's strong, rather than what's wrong and our champions are at the centre of the design of the work. They directly influence the training workshops and design peer support activities, and their lived experience has fed directly into national policy in the development of the National Cancer Plan.

Our volunteer cancer champions are supported to have conversations, listen and respond, signpost to support, and hold spaces where people can share their own experiences. This often identifies barriers to uptake, which we can feed back into the system.

Beyond that, many have developed their own activities in local supermarkets, at social clubs, in church, out in our local green spaces, at sporting events, festivals, music venues and more. We are delighted and humbled to share the reach that this work is having, and the impacts on both the champions themselves and the people who are accessing support and services as a result
.
This second year sees the consolidation of much of this work, with stronger links forged between the members of the Hastings and Rother Cancer Support Network, and the statutory sector, and the acknowledgement from our external evaluators that the evidence suggests we are strengthening the local cancer support ecosystem.

Whilst this is hugely encouraging, there is more to do. Cancer care in the UK is not fair. It should not depend on our postcode, or any characteristics we may have. In partnership with Macmillan, we are proud to be sparking a revolution and addressing this inequity head-on.

Executive Summary

The Macmillan Cancer Support Champions Project is funded by Macmillan to end of December 2027. This report covers the first two years, September 2024–September 2026.

Community Development Worker, Yasmine Kamel and Project Manager, Jane Dodson form the project team, supported by Steve Manwaring, CEO of Hastings Voluntary Action, and our Macmillan Engagement Lead, Kate Regan.

Cancer Support Champions Project
Stakeholder Report

A cancer champion is a volunteer, who is able to have conversations in communities and signpost people to support. Cancer champions do not have to have lived experience of cancer, or have cared for someone with cancer, but we have found this is usually the case for our champions.

Through a programme of training and workshops, including Cancer Awareness, Making Every Contact Count (MECC), Mental Health First Aid, Listening and Responding, Loneliness Matters and Motivational Interviewing, champions have reported feeling more confident in their conversations, and have used the training to support people in their communities, whilst also finding it is helping with processing of their own experiences, with family and friends.

Monthly peer support drop-ins are an opportunity to discuss these conversations, barriers to accessing support and any issues and trends that are being raised. There is often a creative, shoulder to shoulder type of activity that goes alongside these monthly sessions. For example, Kintsugi, the art of visibly mending ceramics using gold dust mixed with resin, was suggested by the champions, and the resulting workshop was a very powerful representation of finding beauty in imperfection. Particularly resonant with those who have had surgery, or felt a little broken by their experiences.

During the first year, champions came together to inform policy through a consultation workshop on the National Cancer Plan, and six of them told their story at a very well received launch event. Two champions set up their own independent services, a monthly cancer conversations session in a local supermarket, and a church based craft and sewing group.
During the second year, we have seen a consolidation of the model, with more engagement from medical and health professionals, and champions coming forward who work in GP surgeries, employment programmes, and in the creative sector, all of whom are finding a welcome, creative and safe space to discuss support.

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A highlight of this second year has been Cancer Connections, a conference that brought together the voluntary and statutory support services, alongside a communal RiverPaint, holistic and complementary health services and storytelling to address health inequity in Hastings. Impacts have been widespread, including developing a partnership with Diversity Resources International, who are working to increase global majority voices in cancer research, and creating resources for those with learning disabilities alongside our target groups in disadvantaged areas. Service providers have built trust, and relationships.

From a communications and engagement perspective, another highlight was staging a takeover of the HVA socials for World Cancer Day, showcasing our champions' stories in their own words.

The Hastings and Rother Cancer Support Network has continued to meet quarterly, with its aims of improving cancer care pathways, sharing good practice, and building trusting relationships on which collaboration can be built. The network felt comfortable and prepared enough to submit an early expression of interest to resource it's ongoing activities.

The project is now working with more than twenty champions and participants have attended over 200 events, including 100 organised by the project. Written communications have increased, with social media posts, newsletter articles, blogs and event invitations.

The title of our first stakeholder report was ‘Pain to Power’, a direct quote from one our champions, Hazel Newton, who expressed that the project was helping her turn her pain into power. This report is entitled ‘Grow and Glow’, another direct quote from a champion, Nadine Searle, who chose that phrase to describe what we do within the project, we support our champions to 'grow and glow', who go on to support others to do the same. The impacts are becoming clear now, both on our inspirational champions and on those they support.

Engagement and Outreach

Over the first two years, we have taken part in over 200 events, including 100 organised by the team and champions. Recorded attendance across virtual and in-person sessions exceeds 1,000, including training, awareness-raising, conferences, the launch event, supermarket drop-ins, sewing groups and festivals.

These have ranged from Westminster briefings, consultation workshops, art therapy sessions, a visit to an alpaca farm, asset based community development training and Cancer Support Network meetings.





Pictures from the River Painting session at Cancer Connections

Written communications have increased, from the World Cancer Day HVA social media takeover, press articles about the launch and Cancer Connections, event invitations, stakeholder reports and impact logs.

Audio and visual pieces include a podcast, radio interviews, videos of champion presentations, the Paul Huggett band playing in various venues across the town and sharing their stories, clinical props to aid understanding and self-checking, clinical presentations around screening (with an interactive inflatable bowel!), research trials and lifestyle medicine, sketchnotes and a poster, taken to the Macmillan Professionals Conference.



Isabelle Endréo, cancer champion and nutrition specialist, with her Rainbow Kitchen Magic demonstration at Cancer Connections



Dr Lisa Samson learning about the work of Diversity Resource International with Mudasir Amin at Cancer Connections



Speaker and cancer champion, Nadine Searle at Cancer Connections



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.

Training and Workshops

The training programme is constantly evolving, and is co-designed with our champions. There is a core offer of **Cancer Awareness, Mental Health First Aid**, and **Making Every Contact Count (Level 2),** including **Listening and Responding,** that has been tailored to the Cancer Champions programme, including resources and local signposting leaflets. This is delivered by One You East Sussex.

The **Cancer Awareness Train the Trainer** course has enabled six professionals locally in Hastings to be able to deliver this, responding to local need, and being informed by local lived experience.

Loneliness Matters, developed in partnership with Sussex Community Development Association and bringing together a range of research on the impacts of loneliness and isolation on individuals. This was in direct response to our champions describing their feelings of loneliness after receiving a cancer diagnosis.

Motivational Interviewing, in partnership with the University of Brighton, based on a wide body of evidence and research, and using a ukulele and song to lighten a serious topic, but including boundaries and self-support strategies for our champions.

Mental Health First Aid, jointly commissioned with Mr Hastings & St Leonards, an asset-based community development men's health and wellbeing project also hosted by HVA. Delivered by Soundcastle, this course was condensed into one day to meet the needs of our champions and the men taking part, and used song and music alongside more traditional teaching.

Nutrition and wellbeing, designed by cancer champion and founder of the Rainbow Kitchen Magic, Isabelle Endréo, includes using flavour, colour and joy to express how immersive cooking and preparing food can be, with discussions around emotional relationships to food, impacts of losing taste, and unpacking motivations around dietary behaviours and nutrition, in the context of communities we are aiming to reach.

Learning and Personal Development Workshops, developed in partnership with Barclays Bank. Three workshops around avoiding fraud and scams, CV writing, and Interview skills were delivered to some of our cancer champions and members of the public. The modules were specifically designed to provide an opportunity for adult learners to increase their confidence and motivation – and gain new skills in relation to employability and financial capability.

Creative Writing, in conjunction with Writing Well, that explored emotions related to waiting rooms, when anticipating a consultation, scan or results. Powerful anaphoric poetry was produced, along with introductions to journalling, and morning pages. A follow up workshop using collage to explore emotions was held.

Kintsugi, designed and delivered by Sussex Kintsugi, in response to a discussion at the support drop-ins around feelings confronting changes that cancer treatment, such as surgery, can have on people living with and beyond cancer. Feelings of being 'broken' and finding beauty in imperfection resonated powerfully with participants, who each put together a ceramic bowl that had been cracked, using gold dust mixed with resin.

Wildlife Walks, a bluebell meditation delivered in conjunction with **Calmer Self** founder and cancer champion Nadine Searle in a local wood, offered an opportunity to reflect and be mindful in the moment. Two wildlife walks have also been delivered in partnership with the **Sussex Wildlife Trust**, focussing on trees, birds, insects, dragonflies, and butterflies in a local park. Both these activities are informed by the growing mountain of evidence linking wellbeing to being outside and in green spaces.

Seeing and Sketching, designed and delivered by Joanna Mackinnon. This guided workshop focused on easy, step-by-step drawing exercises designed to encourage seeing and the enjoyment of mark-making. Attendees took part in sequential sketching exercises designed to develop hand-to-eye coordination, as well as encourage looking and seeing. This was open to attendees with or without previous drawing experience, with the added wellbeing benefits of enjoying a 'state of flow' in a supportive group setting.

Joanna will be running a 6-week course with similar exercises to the ones she delivered for the Hastings Cancer Champions and stated that it was wonderful to be able to deliver the workshop to a small, intimate group prior to her delivering the 6-week-long course to boost her confidence, seeing as it had been a few years since she last delivered the workshop.

Social Activities

A range of social opportunities are also offered and co-designed by our champions, a way of rewarding and recognising their work.

From festive wreath-making, to sketching workshops, to bluebell meditations, to a kintsugi workshop, and a visit to an alpaca farm (complete with therapy goats!), musical evenings and guided nature walks, we try to include something for everyone.



Some of our champions and Ben from Barclays co-designing the learning and personal development workshops



Su, Hazel, Maz, David, Hannah, and Maxine at the Mental Health First Aid Training





Some of the participants at the Kintsugi workshop delivered by Sussex Kintsugi



James from Sussex Wildlife Trust leading a guided walk in Summerfields Wood



Clare, Isabelle, Jo, and Hazel at the Seeing and Sketching workshop



James from Sussex Wildlife Trust leading a guided walk in Alexandra Park



Yasmine and some of our champions having an afternoon tea at Fisherwood Farm



The Paul Huggett Band performing at the Carlise for the Cancer Champions benefit gig



Sabi and Emma at the Christmas wreath-making workshop



Stella with the therapy goats at Fisherwood Farm



Hazel and Kim and the Christmas wreath-making workshop



Hazel with the Alpacas at Fisherwood Farm



Nadine, Simon, Ray, Hazel, and Clare at one of the Cancer Champions benefit gigs



Paul with the Alpacas at Fisherwood Farm

Events

Shaping the National Cancer Plan

A consultation workshop was held on 1 April 2025 with twelve attendees, bringing together lived experience and service-provider perspectives for a local response to the call for evidence informing the National Cancer Plan. The workshop report records the discussion and submission.

Link to the report: Shaping the National Cancer Plan Report - Hastings Voluntary Action

Key recommendations included:
For prevention and awareness, we suggested rather than focussing on three key risk factors, that the government focus on the wider determinants of health, and use positive references to refer to possible preventative measures, using a trauma informed approach.

The existing list of risk factors did not include acknowledge factors such as stress, poverty, poor housing, health literacy and other variants that may influence individual engagement with these risk factors.

For early diagnosis we discussed the emotions that come into play around seeking help at an early stage, such as fear, stress, and shame and felt the focus should be on normalising preventative processes such as screening.

Health professionals should adopt a whole person approach, be welcoming and supportive when people present with an early potential symptom, and understand levels of additional stress when patients have a family history or genetic predisposition to develop cancer.

GP receptionists and other staff should have up to date guidance on what situations require a phone call, and which need a face to face appointment.

The four most impactful actions suggested for people living with and beyond cancer were: to increase numbers of cancer care coordinators, and other staff who support patients, increase support to Hospice services, and other charities, provide more integrative, comprehensive and personalised support after an individual recieves a diagnosis, and exploring the mental health and practical needs of patients.

Increasing treatment capacity, including workforce, improved communication with patients and updating guidance were key priorities submitted to improve access to services.

Improving access to clinical trials, research into early diagnosis and more research into innovative treatments were seen as important, and also genomic testing.
For full details please see the full report.

Project Launch



In June 2025, we held our project launch event, which was co-designed by our first cohort of champions, five of whom told their stories to a packed Durbar Hall at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery. A fundraising live haircut by one of our champions, Kim Kelly, and a bustling marketplace of support services, a pledge wall, networking, bath salts with essential oils, a fabulous feast created by Isabelle, and a final live music set by legendary local jazz singer and pianist, Liane Carroll.

'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 working towards a common goal'
Emma Morris, Learning Disabilities and Autism Liaison and Health Facilitation, NHS and HVA Macmillan Cancer Champion.

Cancer Connections



Mary Carter (HVA Chair), The Mayor of Hastings, Cllr Paula Warne, Emma Banfield and Wen Chiu of the Sussex and Surrey bowel screening team, and Jane Dodson stand inside the inflatable bowel

A large-scale event held in June 2026 to bring together statutory and voluntary support services, encourage them to connect with each other and open to local residents. A giant inflatable bowel provided a talking point, screening information and visual impacts, and there were a range of presentations, from clinical research trials to lifestyle medicine, from the Cancer Care Map to the Sara Lee Trust. Champions again shared their stories, highlighting specific impacts of the cancer experience, including impacts on families, in the workplace, and on particular client groups champions are working with. Resources were shared that can help with each of these impacts.

The story of 'The Little River' was performed by arts therapist and actress Cinzia Ciaramicoli, who then facilitated a five meter long communal fabric painting, of the river, with around 25 participants, using greens, purples and blue acrylics and immersed in the process. The resulting artwork will be displayed in the reception of HVA with interpretation, to facilitate further conversations. Cinzia is also providing a train the trainer to enable local professionals and champions to deliver similar workshops, using her trusted techniques and colour pallettes.

Diversity Resources International shared their recent community research report and recommendations into making cancer awareness materials, and cancer care, more inclusive and accessible. This has since led to a collaboration to share cultural responsiveness training, support culturally adapted early detection materials and commitment to work with three bilingual safety advocates in Hastings.

The presentation about people with learning disabilities has led to a direct approach to one of our champions to offer awareness-raising sessions in care homes and in GP surgeries. The educational aids have been purchased by the programme and will be held for any champions who need to borrow them. A 'Know Your Body' easy-read guide to cancer awareness and screening was co-produced by Emma Morris and Yasmine Kamel as another aid for these conversations. An Easy-Read Guide to Cancer Signs and Symptoms - Hastings Voluntary Action

This is currently being trialled and evaluated and if successful, a wider dissemination and larger print run can be considered to be made available to health professionals.

Co-everything Hastings: Asset-Based Community Development, Jeder Institute Training
A two-day extravaganza of tools and methodologies from the world-class Jeder Institute, bringing together community organisations across Hastings and the surrounding districts, creating a network of practitioners who can apply these approaches. The follow-up session included how people are using the ABCD principles in their work.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmjtpWEnHE4

Communities Creating Change

A showcase of community-led action in Hastings, held in September '26, including the HVA Macmillan Cancer Champions programme. Contributions from our champions included an acoustic music set, a meditation to release creativity, a river painting and a showcase of a bereavement pack designed with St Michael's Hospice, which used food and flavours to start conversations around memories of loved ones. The whole event built on the recent training from the Jeder Institute, on the asset based community development methodology, on which approach the Cancer Champions project is built. One of the key aims is to connect commissioners and public sector professionals with community practitioners and volunteers creating change.

Tools Created

We created the **easy-read role profile** as part of the early introduction to the project, and presented it as a menu of options, rather than a fixed and exhaustive list.

Initially designed as a way of measuring, discussing and breaking down the role profile, the **Bingo Card** also sparks conversations and support.

Postcards have created a perfect template for general information and contact details, but are also easy to adapt – we have created cards specifically for champions recruitment, workplace champions, and employers' resources postcard. A Pride postcard with signposting for LGBTQIA+ individuals has also been created and distributed at Hastings Pride.

Small cards, about the size of a credit or business card, were created with two QR codes to Padlets (one QR code links to cancer-specific services in Hastings and Rother and the other QR code links to more general support services) so that champions had something to give after a conversation, to signpost to resources, without fishing around in bags whilst the person is talking. It fits easily into a pocket or purse.

Link to Cancer support services Padlet: https://padlet.com/yasmine115/cancer-preventative-and-support-services-in-hastings-and-rot-4hckjg6vi3m8dc01

Link to other support services Padlet: https://padlet.com/yasmine115/local-support-ihowgyzsmh7b4y6c

The Padlet is designed as a digital resource, that can be opened on a phone or laptop, whilst a professional has a patient with them.

Podcast (link: HVA MacMillan Cancer Support Champions Project Podcast Jane and Yasmine 10th March 2026)

Blog (link: 5 Minutes With... Hastings Voluntary Action/Macmillan Cancer Champions Project - Cancer Care Map)

Local services leaflet (in conjunction with the Hastings & Rother Cancer Support Network)

Breast and testicular clinical self-examination models have been purchased for use in face-to-face sessions to demystify self-checking for a range of audiences.

For the Macmillan Professionals Conference, we produced a poster outlining the activities and achievements of the first 18 months of the project, working with designer and artist Mandy Johnson (link: Hastings Cancer Champions Poster - Hastings Voluntary Action) Sketchnotes (Link: Hastings Cancer Champions Year 1 Sketchnote - Hastings Voluntary Action).

Know Your Body booklet signs and symptoms for people who have learning disabilities or autism – Co-created by Emma Morris and Yasmine Kamel in response to the requests for Emma to produce workshops and sessions in care homes and other venues. An associated slide set, signs and symptoms for people who have learning disabilities or autism has also been produced. Link: An Easy-Read Guide to Cancer Signs and Symptoms - Hastings Voluntary Action

Champions – Recruitment and Impacts

Our champions represent a wide diversity of experience and have a huge range of skills, which they then build upon within the programme. We encourage everyone to use their own assets and work in their own communities to raise awareness of support and signpost to services.

As discussed earlier, the role description is a starting point, more of a menu of elements that our champions can choose to do. We have broken this down even further into the bingo card mentioned above, which breaks down individual tasks so that champions can tick these off, and they act as a prompt during support drop-in sessions. However, we are constantly updating the cards, to include things we absolutely did not imagine would be happening in the early days of the project. The latest iteration of the Bingo Card is a double-sized sheet which includes the standard pre-filled squares which champions can tick off on one side, as well as blank squares on the other side for champions to add additional things they have done which are not listed as activities.

From public speaking, to producing podcasts, to cooking demonstrations, to craft and sewing groups, supermarket conversations, social media posts, storytelling and advocating for people with learning disabilities, our champions are finding new and imaginative ways to engage.

As part of the Jack in the Green festival, champions tied bunches of greenery and ribbon to decorate the streets for the parade, and for Mardi Gras, Hastings Fat Tuesday, we decorated umbrellas for the Preservation Sunday Umbrella Parade. Champions have asked for sashes to be visible in crowds and at events.

We have created a special post-card for Hastings Pride this year, which lists a few LGBTQIA+ cancer and additional support services. This was distributed throughout the day.

We have champions in both areas of Hastings that statistically are under-served, Hollington and Broomgrove, and our connections with Public Health and the local creative community have brought us together with an arts therapist, whose RiverPaint technique has been shared during a workshop, to train facilitators, who will in turn continue to engage with marginalised communities.

One of our latest recruits has held an exhibition of paintings, detailing her experience of breast cancer, which she has now turned into a beautiful book.

Following on from Cancer Connections, we have made further in-roads with GP surgery staff, some of whom are now attending drop-ins and valuing the links to the resources, and benefitting from hearing lived experience that can directly feed into their work supporting cancer patients. For example, Ella, who has taken on a new role contacting cancer patients at her surgery, will bring up the Padlet whilst she is on a call with the patient, for easier signposting, and has been added to the mailing list for the newsletter.

Beth, a professional working with Reed, and Connect to Work, a scheme to support people living with a range of complex barriers and long-term health conditions, including cancer, into securing and retaining employment. Beth has become a champion and is working with us to explore how she can apply the role in her work, and how we can be further informed by her experiences of two different cancers. Yasmine connected her with Stephanie Collins, Macmillan Information and Support Manager for Eastbourne District General Hospital and Conquest Hospital and a partnership memorandum is now in place to refer people directly into the service, where they will be seen by someone with lived experience of cancer.

This work responds directly to our champions reporting that a re-evaluation that often takes place when a person has had a diagnosis; they often reconsider career choices and options.

We are very much enjoying the gigs that Paul has played across venues in the town, speaking openly about his experience of prostate cancer using both the gigs and his social media, and role as a local DJ to raise awareness. Sharing personal stories and practical tips, such as driving routes to hospitals, and demystifying the treatments, whilst bringing joy and dancing to other champions, and fundraising.

The initial cohort that we brought into the project are going from strength to strength. Whilst one or two will inevitably be less engaged than others, and some may need to step back, from time to time, others are consistently carrying out sessions, sharing on socials, setting up new groups and reaching more deeply into communities.

Hastings and Rother Cancer Support Network

Hastings Voluntary Action, Macmillan Horizon Centre and the Sara Lee Trust founded this network which first began meeting in September 2024. The aim of the network is to bring together organisations and teams from across Hastings and Rother that are supporting people living with cancer to:

The network's published overview confirms its establishment in September 2024, quarterly meetings and aims to improve joint working, care pathways and access to support.

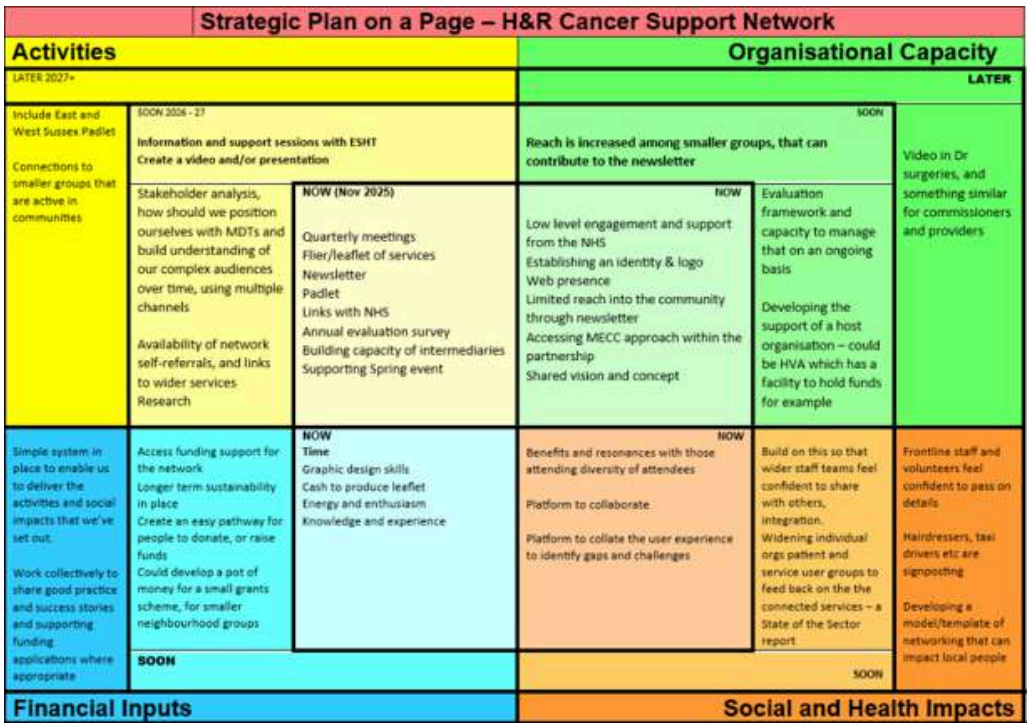
- Improve joint working, integration and shared learning
- Improve pathways to care and support activities
- Increase awareness and ease of access in areas of high need
- Reduce inequities in support, care, and access, particularly amongst those in underserved areas, men, and those from marginalised groups who are less likely to take up services.

The network has produced an A5 leaflet of local services, alongside a large print A4 version, and has contributed to a Padlet of services made available online. The HVA Macmillan Cancer Champions project now chairs the network, and the project manager facilitated a strategic planning session in December 2026.

https://hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk/projects/the-hastings-and-rother-cancer-support-network/

We have met quarterly, and gathered at events, which has helped to foster trusting and less formal relationships, and increased knowledge of each service to instil greater confidence in signposting.

It has also been noted in an NPC impact summary, as part of an external evaluation of the project, that the network is contributing to strengthening the local cancer support infrastructure and it is providing a united voice with which the organisations can feed back into the wider healthcare system.



Strategic Plan on a Page – H&R Cancer Support Network

Activities

LATER 2027+

Include East and West Sussex Padlet

Connections to smaller groups that are active in communities

SOON 2026 - 27

Information and support sessions with ESHT
Create a video and/or presentation

Stakeholder analysis, how should we position ourselves with MDTs and build understanding of our complex audiences over time, using multiple channels

Availability of network self-referrals, and links to wider services
Research

NOW (Nov 2025)

Quarterly meetings
Flier/leaflet of services
Newsletter
Padlet
Links with NHS
Annual evaluation survey
Building capacity of intermediaries
Supporting Spring event

Simple system in place to enable us to deliver the activities and social impacts that we've set out.

Work collectively to share good practice and success stories and supporting funding applications where appropriate

Access funding support for the network
Longer term sustainability in place
Create an easy pathway for people to donate, or raise funds
Could develop a pot of money for a small grants scheme, for smaller neighbourhood groups

SOON

NOW
Time
Graphic design skills
Cash to produce leaflet
Energy and enthusiasm
Knowledge and experience

Financial Inputs

Organisational Capacity

LATER

Video in Dr surgeries, and something similar for commissioners and providers

SOON

Reach is increased among smaller groups, that can contribute to the newsletter

NOW

Low level engagement and support from the NHS
Establishing an identity & logo
Web presence
Limited reach into the community through newsletter
Accessing MECC approach within the partnership
Shared vision and concept

Evaluation framework and capacity to manage that on an ongoing basis

Developing the support of a host organisation – could be HVA which has a facility to hold funds for example

NOW

Benefits and resonances with those attending diversity of attendees

Platform to collaborate

Platform to collate the user experience to identify gaps and challenges

Build on this so that wider staff teams feel confident to share with others, integration.
Widening individual orgs patient and service user groups to feed back on the the connected services – a State of the Sector report

SOON

Frontline staff and volunteers feel confident to pass on details

Hairdressers, taxi drivers etc are signposting

Developing a model/template of networking that can impact local people

Social and Health Impacts

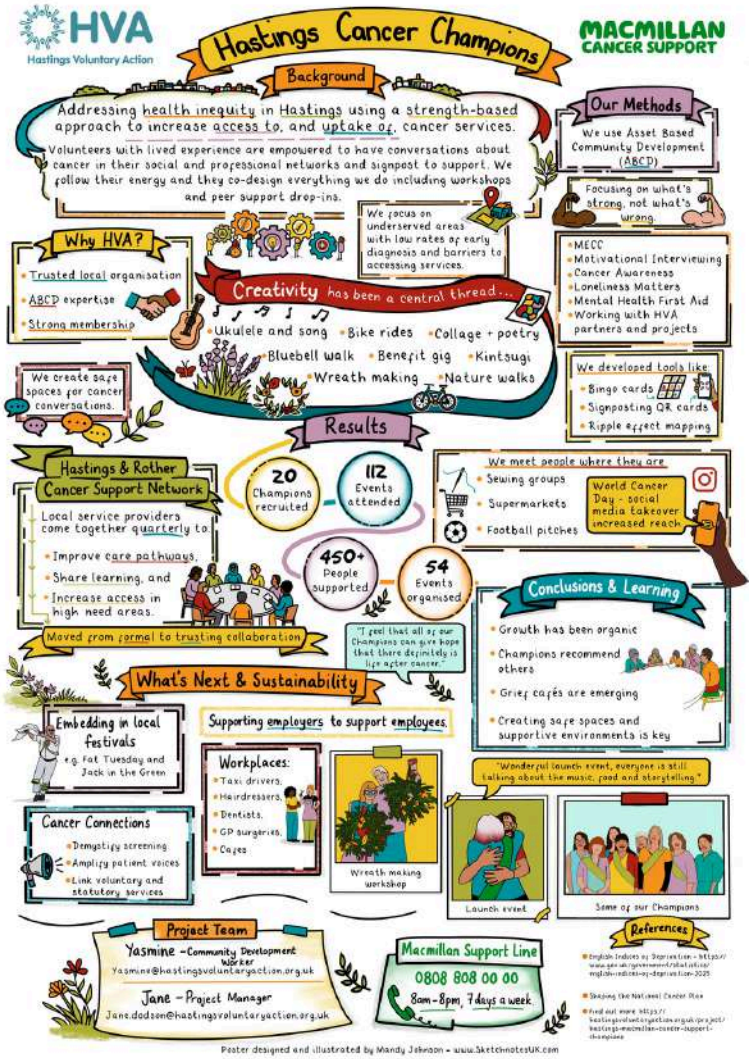
This preparation work proved useful, when an opportunity to submit an expression of interest for some funding arose and the network mobilised quickly to respond.

Cancer Champions Community of Practice & Macmillan Professionals Conference

The project is one of eleven Cancer Champions projects across the UK funded by Macmillan. A monthly online Community of Practice connects projects, providing space to share good practice and discuss challenges. The project manager has valued the opportunity to connect with others and the support it provides.

We met in person at the Macmillan Professionals Conference in April 2026, where we presented a poster describing the project's background, methods, work and results to date. This was around the midpoint of the original three-year funding period; funding has since been extended to 31 December 2027.

We have been able to use the poster since at events, and as an engagement tool.



Impact Measurement, Ripple Effect Mapping and Evaluation

Macmillan commissioned New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) to evaluate the programme, focusing particularly on five of the eleven participating sites. Hastings is identified in this report as one of those five 'deep dive' sites; site-specific findings should be read alongside the relevant evaluation reports.

From an initial theory of change, through to Most Significant Change Stories, interviews with key informants across the health system, impact logs and regular sense-checking sessions, NPC have been conducting some thorough work to establish lessons both on what's worked, and what could work better. They have also created some case studies for commissioners and funders of such work, to encourage best practice in evaluation.

They have also created some case studies for commissioners and funders of such work, to encourage best practice in evaluation.

We have been able to input into the design, timing, and data collection methodologies, and it's been a privilege to see how each of the projects has developed. The champion's model is exceeding initial expectations across each of the five deep dive sites, and some have been nominated for awards.

In addition to this external exercise, we have been collating our own thoughts and reflections and noting impacts at different levels: champions report benefits, increased confidence, and healing, while those they support feel less isolated, more connected, and experience improved wellbeing.

There is clear evidence of demand for spaces and environments where conversations can happen, with people who understand what going through cancer can mean, and the impacts this can have. In particular, champions talk about the 'cliff edge' coming out of physical and medical treatment cycles, and needing further emotional support to live well with and beyond cancer.

At the end of this second year, we can also see more engagement with the healthcare professionals in primary care and secondary care, both through the network and from attendance at events. One example of this is consultation on the development of a cervical screening poster, where our champions suggested language that was more friendly and inclusive, and less instructional, more persuasive.

Ripple effects, or unintended consequences, are being measured, for example an inclusive dance practitioner attended Cancer Connections, and as a result connected with the Sara Lee Trust, who offer complementary therapies. She has now delivered several sessions for the trust, and recruited four dance buddies, volunteers who help with the dance sessions.
As a direct result of Emma's presentation to Cancer Connections, she received direct requests to run sessions in care homes and surgeries that led to the development of a specific set of resources.

Barriers Identified

We are coming across barriers to accessing services as we listen and respond to people's experiences.

We are told that screening processes are not clear, and that there are cultural barriers to taking up appointments. Where appointment letters are sent out, they sometimes arrive before the information about why this is important. There may not be clear instructions on where to attend, and lack of clarity that people can ask for a medical professional of a specific gender, or take somebody with them to appointments. Fear of the outcome, and feelings of guilt around smoking, for example, ahead of attending a lung screening, can be a significant barrier.

Anxiety around what is an intrusive procedure, for example around cervical screening, can be a barrier and there can be cultural norms around self checking, discussing changes to body parts, and sharing this with medical practitioners.

Younger people attempting to access screening appointment to which they are entitled, have struggled to get them or been dismissed as outside the age bracket.

At point of diagnosis, people report use of inaccessible, medical language, and information overload. In some cases, people are not expecting a definitive diagnosis, so may not have brought someone with them to support them. Often individuals have an emotional response to the word, cancer, and can then struggle understandably, to take anything further in.

In some cases, people have been told during a telephone call, and assumptions have wrongly been made that the individual has previously been informed of their condition face to face.

Complex cases have been communicated in medical terminology that can baffle people, discourage active questioning and cause distress.

The order in which communications are sent out can sometimes be wrong, again inadvertently causing avoidable distress.

Finally, having undergone treatment, people report reaching the cliff edge; it is unclear whether there are further opportunities to engage with the system and access support.

There are high levels of demand for the Macmillan counselling services, locally, for example. Support may be needed to navigate a new normal, which may include changing job or career, having much less income, deciding to pursue lifestyle changes that spark joy and feel more impactful. There is also demand for services for people who do not have English as their first language.

Overcoming Barriers and Good Practice

Clear communication, avoiding too much technical and medical terminology and explaining things clearly, can help. An example of a recent poster, to invite people to book a cervical screening, was shared with the champions, and they suggested more inclusive, inviting language, less parental and instructional in tone.

Ensuring that information is presented in the correct order, so an invitation to an appointment via text message, for example, arrives after the letter explaining the screening programme and context. Also, if scan results are expected by telephone, do not use that call to explain other results, from a blood test, for example, that could be inconclusive and not what the recipient of the call is expecting. It's helpful if health professionals speak slowly and clearly and invite questions, particularly when describing results using medical terminology.

Presenting what to expect, with some reassurance where appropriate, and demystifying processes. For example, letting people know in advance that the scanner will make a noise, or that they will need to hold their breath.

Providing information in manageable chunks and not overloading with terminology or support leaflets, but staggering these.

Social prescribers and GP surgeries signposting to support services post treatment, and increased awareness of what is available.

Following up with people who have missed opportunities for screening, or appointments, to find out what further support may be needed.

Conclusion: Continuing to Grow and Glow

Over its first two years, the Cancer Support Champions project has grown from an emerging idea into a community-led approach that connects lived experience, practical support and local services. The achievements described in this report reflect more than a programme of events and workshops: they show the value of creating spaces where people can talk openly, feel heard and find routes to support. By starting with what is strong in our communities, we are making room for people to shape both the support they receive and the support they offer others.

The numbers reflected here, more than twenty champions, participation in over 200 events and more than 500 people signposted to services—indicate the scale of activity. Alongside these figures, accounts of increased confidence, reduced isolation and new connections help us understand its human significance. Stronger links between community organisations and health services, together with resources shaped by lived experience, are creating opportunities for more accessible and joined-up support. These are encouraging signs of progress, rather than proof that inequalities in cancer outcomes have already been reduced.

The learning is equally important. People continue to describe barriers to getting information, accessing services and finding emotional support, particularly after treatment ends. Trusted conversations can help people navigate these challenges, but community action cannot remove every structural barrier on its own. Listening to these experiences and sharing them with those who design and deliver services remains central to the project's purpose.

Priorities emerging from this report are to sustain support for champions, deepen relationships in underserved communities, develop and evaluate accessible resources, and strengthen connections between voluntary and statutory services. Continuing to gather evidence of what changes for people, alongside planning for the project's longer-term legacy, will help make the case for sustaining the most valuable elements of this work.

We thank our champions, Macmillan, community members, partners, and funder for making this work possible. ‘Grow and Glow’ captures both the spirit of the past two years and our ambition for what comes next: people supported to use their experiences and strengths, communities better connected, and cancer support shaped with the people who need it. Together, we can build on this momentum and keep working towards support that is easier to find, more inclusive and responsive to people’s lives.

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