



Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove
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Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove – supporting older people across Arun District

Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove (AUKWSBH) is the leading older people’s charity in the region, one of the biggest third sector employers, and are proud to have been working in Arun District for over five decades!

Our organisation’s strategic plan sets out a framework of priorities and goals for AUKWSBH – our anchors are that we want older people to be informed, connected, healthy and independent. Since January 2024, we have achieved these goals by supporting 3,142 residents living across Arun District to access the AUKWSBH services and activities they want and need.

In Arun we work in a variety of different ways with the older person at the heart of our design, shaping our services and activities to ensure they are fit for purpose; working with anyone over 50 and our strap-line is that we want everyone to love later life. At the Laburnum Centre, we run a timetable of varied activities, plus a gym, [laburnumtimetable_april24.pdf \(ageuk.org.uk\)](#) and offer a Dementia Respite Service every Friday. In the last 9 months, 777 members have used the Laburnum Centre. There are 1,083 members in total, with 388 people also members of the gym, showing that the centre is more important than ever in keeping older people healthy, informed, connected and as independent as possible.



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Across the whole of Arun District, our Community Agent service [Age UK West Sussex Brighton & Hove | Community Agent Service - West Sussex Only](#), works to support people aged 50+ who may be feeling lonely or socially isolated. So far this year, we have supported 167 older people through this service, which is already a 95% increase on last year's total figure of 81 people. We have been able to increase our referrals through building strong referral pathways and by the work we do in the community through our Community Pop Ups, raising awareness of our services and widening our reach across Arun District to support more people feeling lonely or isolated.



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AUKWSBH also run community activities such floristry classes in Littlehampton, deliver Community Pop Ups in a variety of community venues that bring people together with their neighbours to meet, chat and enjoy a variety of activities, and in response to the need of older men struggling to find and navigate opportunities to socialise in the way they would like, we have recently set up groups called Silver Bullet which is a non-structured meet up that creates a space (usually in pubs) that allows the men to meet, talk on a surface level whilst playing cards or games, or may lead to a deeper, more meaningful conversation.

AUKWSBH also facilitate the Arun Older Person Network, which is a network of organisations, groups and charities working across the district with people aged 50+. The network allows the members to share important updates on their services and promote new initiatives, enables networking with others that can lead to collaborations and partnerships, and provides an opportunity for members to share vital intelligence of the key issues older people are facing right now. The Arun OPN has 200+ members.



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The challenges of the last 12 months

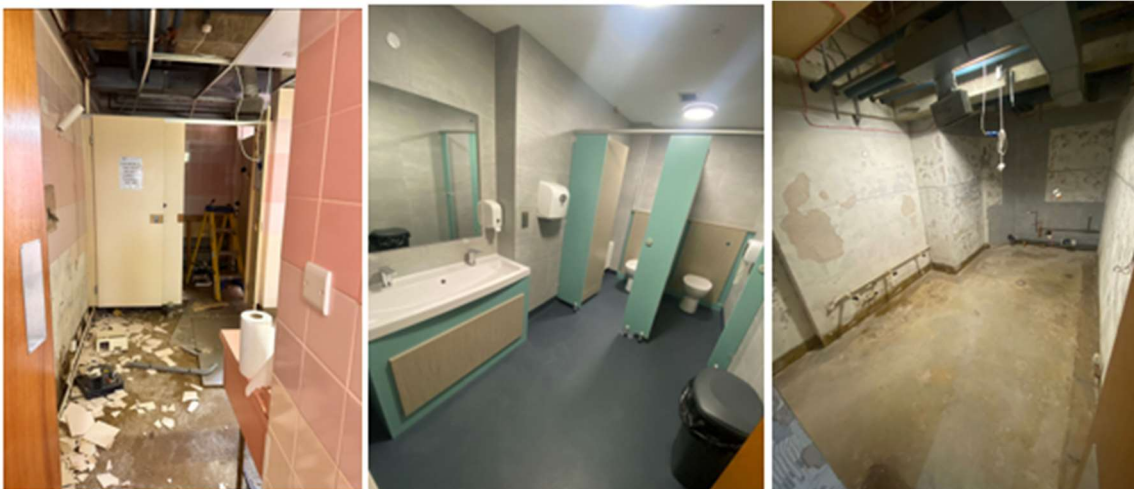
Our services continue to be vital to supporting Arun residents aged 50+ to love their later life and to stay healthy and independent for as long as possible and to keep them connected and informed, but as with every other third sector organisation, there have been major challenges for AUKWSBH over the last 12 months.

Access to transport to get to activities and services remains an issue for Arun's 50+ population, as does the cost of activities, which is often prohibitive to many. We have not increased our membership or activity costs at the Laburnum Centre for the last two years to keep them affordable for members and we use grants to cover the costs of Community Pop Ups to make them available to all.

At The Laburnum Centre, operating costs have continued to rise as per last year; every cost associated with running the centre has spiralled higher than ever before and is an ongoing challenge. The building work to refurbish the Laburnum Centre lavatories and to create a changing room in the downstairs store-room is now complete. There were considerable delays in starting the project due to finding a builder (we had two separate ones pull out just before they were due to commence the work), which had the knock on effect of labour costs and materials have massively exceeded the original budget set for the work.

The building work was completed across a 6 week period with minimum disruption to the centre due to the fact that the building team worked very long days and at weekends. There was an impact on member attendance as some classes and activities needed to be cancelled if they couldn't be moved and having half the loos out of action was also a factor.

Catering costs have continued to be a challenge as last year and it is still challenging to try and break even on catering, but we have changed our processes, undertake more stocktakes and closely monitor all expenditure. We have also changed suppliers, using Tesco or Sainsbury's where there are savings to be made.



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Future projects

Over the last year we have successfully grown our programme of Community Pop Ups, with the highlight in Arundel in July this year, which saw 44 guests join us for a free Cake & Connect Pop Up in a marquee at the Arundel Lido, where the attendees enjoyed lunch and entertainment, as well as a plant project supported by the Arundel Green Team.



Community

We will continue to grow our successful Community Pop Up programme across the coming year, whether that is a Cake & Connect event, Popping up in Arun libraries or Popping Up to raise awareness of our services at different groups across the district, for example the Arun Community Agent will be supporting the WSCC Positive Ageing Month free events at Arun libraries in October 2024.

Community Pop Ups are a fantastic way for AUKWSBH to engage with larger numbers of people in their own communities, providing an opportunity for attendees to make stronger connections to where they live and to get to make new friends, and the 'pop up' nature of these events allows us to flex capacity, adapting each event to suit and enabling us to extend our reach across the district.

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We are looking to expand the Silver Bullet groups into other parts of Arun, particularly in wards with a higher ratio of men aged 50+ living there and we are trialling a weekly Walk & Talk group which we know has a higher appeal to men.

Laburnum Centre

A marketing programme for the Laburnum Centre and Gym is under development to increase membership, along with some taster sessions planned to trial new classes and activities. Regular events are held both within the centre and at external venues for members to enjoy, such as regular discos and parties, and the Laburnum choir provide a growing series of much loved musical events in the afternoon. Where capacity and funding allow, we will seek to provide more opportunities for activities to take place in the evenings and at weekends.

The membership programme for the whole organisation is being updated and will launch next year, and booking processes are also being updated for hirers, which will lead to more spaces at the Laburnum Centre being let out and generating income towards the running cost of the centre.

The programme of building work for the Laburnum Centre will continue into next year, for which we will need to fundraise and apply for grants and look at ways to further generate income. The upcoming work will include the refurbishment of the café/reception space.



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Partnership & Collaboration

We will continue using mapping and gapping data to explore opportunities to work collaboratively with other organisations to reach more older people, especially those from minority groups, who would benefit from our services and activities and continue building strong referral pathways into other organisations that support people aged 50+

AUKWSBH will continue to facilitate the Arun Older Person Network so that we can continue to hear and share the intelligence gathered from those organisations working across Arun District supporting the 50+ population.

New 5 Year Strategy

In April next year, AUKWSBH will launch our new 5 Year Strategy. This has been a detailed ongoing project throughout 2024, working with an external consultant (who co-designed our previous 5 year strategy) involving staff and volunteers, then a large stakeholder event in September, which will be followed by focus groups to seek the views and input of people who currently use our services, and in particular for those who don't currently use them but may wish to use them in the future.

Lived Experience Group

Across the next year, AUKWSBH plan to introduce a Lived Experience Group to give a voice to Arun residents aged 50+, building on the work started with focus groups created for the strategy consultation.



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AUKWSBH Case Study

Demonstrating our person-centred approach for clients

The Arun Community Agent received a referral for a 77 year old Arun resident whose husband had passed away some months before which had left her feeling very lonely and isolated, so she had reached out for some support.

Initial Consultation

During the first telephone conversation the Community Agent discovered the client was teary, incredibly low, struggling with extreme feelings of anxiety and had completely lost her confidence. In her words 'she felt she had lost her purpose in life', admitting she had closed herself off from society and didn't feel able to talk to people.

The Community Agent decided to take a slow approach with this client; they had several long chats to give the client the time to talk about her feelings and anxieties and how this had impacted her new life without her husband. The client's aim was to be able to join some local groups and form a new social life for herself, but she had no idea where to start and wasn't sure she had the confidence to do it by herself. The Community Agent discussed some coping strategies and some ideas of small steps the client could make to start to help her to break down some of the barriers preventing her from accessing the outside world.

Face to Face meeting

The first plan was for the Community Agent and the client to meet in person in a neutral place of the client's choice, but on the day the client felt unable to go ahead, but after a short call with the Community Agent, the client did push herself to go out and they met up in the coffee shop as planned. The client was so pleased she had made the decision to meet up with the Community Agent. During this meeting they discussed further options to for the client to try. The Community Agent also suggested that the client may benefit from some bereavement support and so shared the details a local group with the client, which she was open to trying.

Bereavement support group

The Community Agent supported the client to attend the bereavement support group, which was hugely successful for the client who felt comfortable there due to the mutual understanding and support the group session gave her. The client added her contact details to the other members WhatsApp group, where she enjoyed the chat and support outside of the weekly group meeting where the client is now a regular attendee.

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Drop-in Social Group

The next suggested step from the Community Agent was for the client to try attending a local drop-in social group that provides a host of activities from Monday -Friday. The Community Agent was giving a talk at the group about AUKWSBH services and her role so she was able to take the client along with her and provide the support and encouragement the client needed to go along. Once again, the client almost backed out as she had a panic attack whilst getting ready, but again a reassuring call with the Community Agent gave her the encouragement she needed to meet outside the group venue, they then entered together. Although the client did well during the morning, she felt it wasn't the group for her and she didn't want to go back.

AUKWSBH Cake & Connect Community Pop Up

The Community Agent had arranged a free AUKWSBH Cake & Connect community pop up event in the same village where the client lives at an Arts & Crafts group and invited the client to attend. She accepted and felt confident enough to get herself a taxi and come into the session unaided. She arrived feeling quite anxious but was made to feel very welcome by the volunteers and the group. The client started to relax when the Community Agent sat with her; they started to do some crafts together which the client really enjoyed and when the Community Agent left her, she began to relax and started to talk to other attendees.



The client making her flower arrangement at the AUKWSBH Community Pop Up

During the event a florist came along with some materials and held a tutorial for all the attendees to take part in, making their own floral display, which they were able to take home. The client made a floral display using her husband's favourite flowers and colours, which she said she was looking forward to

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placing it in the corner of her lounge where she had made a special shrine for him and she felt her husband would be so proud of her. The client found the arts and crafts very relaxing and liked the social aspect of the group too, so she joined the group on the day of the pop-up event and is now a regular attendee which she looks forward to each week.

Referral to The Royal Voluntary Service - Good Neighbours scheme

The Community Agent felt the client had reached a point where she would benefit from some ongoing support to enable her to continue gaining confidence and making further social connections, so a referral was made on behalf of the client to The Royal Voluntary Service Good Neighbours scheme; the client is waiting to be matched to a volunteer and will take up this service as soon as the match is made.

Independent steps

The client has felt empowered by her new confidence and drive, and so has booked her first solo holiday! The client is incredibly nervous but also excited for the trip.

The support the client received from the AUKWSBH's Community Agent during a very difficult period of her life has given her back the confidence she had lost and the realisation that there is life still left to live after suffering such a huge loss. The client is now most definitely looking forward to living it!