

# Case study: Active and In Touch Frome

August 2021

Active and In Touch (A&IT) aims to support health and wellbeing by combating loneliness and isolation. It offers befriending services and support to anyone who feels isolated or lonely in Frome (Somerset) and the surrounding villages. This is done through matched befriending sessions between members and volunteers; weekly meetings that offer a caring small group environment for adults of all ages; and a range of events throughout the year.

A&IT received £7,070 through the Coronavirus Community Support Fund (CCSF). The CCSF is a funding programme supported by a grant of £200 million from Government, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, to help organisations in England respond to the COVID-19 crisis and increase community support to people affected by the pandemic.

## How was the CCSF grant used?

Feelings of loneliness and isolation were exacerbated by the pandemic, which increased demand for A&IT's services. On average, A&IT received 5-10 referrals each month and more people started accessing a new 'Shop for Me' scheme, which offered food delivery to those isolated or shielding. The number of members rose from 104 to 280. The CCSF grant was primarily used to increase staff hours, enabling A&IT to process referrals, continue to deliver its support and offer more of it.

Referrals mainly came from Health Connectors as well as the local food bank and the Town Council. A&IT also saw an increase in self-referrals, particularly from young mothers, men in their 40s and 50s, and people struggling with mental wellbeing.

A&IT also used the grant for marketing activities, such as leaflets in shops and supermarkets, to inform the community about their offer and to reach new people.



***Without the grant, there is no way we could have grown to the size we are now and keep the staff's health as it is...It's enabled us to do what we already do, but do much more of it."***

**– Service Director**

To continue their support during the pandemic, A&IT replaced volunteer visits to members' homes and their one-to-one support with a phone service. The weekly social groups moved to the local park when restrictions permitted, and A&IT used the grant for venue hire when indoor groups could resume safely.

The additional staff hours also helped recruit, train, coordinate and support more volunteers. During the grant period, the number of volunteers significantly increased from 70 to 230, and the grant helped cover associated costs, for example, DBS checks. By increasing volunteer hours, A&IT offered more one-to-one contact to those who were isolated or shielding, as well as consistently delivering food, picking up prescriptions and taking members to medical appointments as part of the 'Shop for Me' scheme.

## Quick facts:

Grant period: **July 2020-January 2021**

**10,000 one-to-one phone calls and 6,000 visits** since the start of the pandemic

**280 people supported**

**150 additional volunteer hours per week**

## Three key messages:

- ① People who were shielding or who did not have families or other networks to draw on may not have had support without A&IT's one-to-one befriending support, meaning they would have been lonelier and more isolated.
- ② Shifting to a phone service will remain in place alongside existing support. It provides more variety for members and volunteers, depending on preferences and needs.
- ③ A&IT remained an important player in local social prescribing efforts, potentially reducing pressures on the NHS by meeting members' needs.

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## What difference did the CCSF grant make?

### For people and communities

A&IT is the only charity locally with a focus on combating loneliness and isolation. As these issues became more pressing for many people during the pandemic, A&IT saw a rapid rise in demand and the number of members more than doubled. Between March 2020 to January 2021, staff and volunteers made 10,000 one-to-one phone calls and 6,000 visits. The CCSF grant helped A&IT respond to this demand during the six-month grant period.

The one-to-one support ensured members had regular and reliable social contact. For those without support networks, just having someone to talk to and who cared about them was valuable. Delivering shopping and taking people to doctors' appointments also helped meet members' immediate, basic needs. Around 40 members were in a support bubble with A&IT volunteers during lockdown periods.



***I would have found it very hard to not have someone to meet and talk to. Some people have no one, no family or deep friendships. And the volunteers help. My life has been emotionally enhanced by this.*** – Member

With increased capacity, A&IT also supported people struggling with more complex mental health issues than they normally would. With other services closing in the area, such as day centres, these members were offered contact they likely would not have otherwise had during the pandemic.

Organisations partnering with A&IT described the charity as the “obvious organisation that drives support for those who are lonely and isolated”. Their increased capacity meant they could continue to be one of the key players in the community’s social prescribing efforts and “continue to be the eyes and ears for GPs”. For example, if a volunteer noticed concerning changes, such as worsened dementia or excessive weight loss, this was fed back to Health Connectors who arranged appropriate support.

### Key legacy from the experience:

The CCSF grant provided A&IT with the stability to take the risk of growth and have since merged with Frome Community Drivers and employed a Community Fundraiser. A&IT will also retain the volunteer coordinator roles, which was a new way of working that helped better manage resources.

### Want to know more?

**Website:** <https://www.activeandintouch.org/>

**Twitter:** [https://twitter.com/activein\\_touch](https://twitter.com/activein_touch)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/activeandintouchfrome/>

**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/activeandintouch/>

### For volunteers

For existing volunteers or those who came forward because they had more time to help (due to being on furlough, or not at college or university), volunteering gave them the opportunity to offer their skills, ‘give something back’, make a difference, and create lasting friendships. Those who were themselves struggling and feeling lonely benefitted from the support of staff. Their relationship with members also gave them “a sense of purpose and kept them going”, improving their mental health. Some young mothers, who felt isolated because they could not go to their toddler groups or meet others, began their relationship with A&IT as members and then became volunteers – for example they were ‘matched’ with other young mothers facing similar experiences, creating a virtuous cycle of support.



***It is pleasing to know that we are able to help people who just need help, whether with the shopping or getting them to their vaccinations. Just that feeling that you're making a difference.***  
– Volunteer

### For the organisation and its staff

Without the grant, A&IT would have delivered significantly fewer services. Using the grant, the small team of two staff began working full-time and 15 existing volunteers became ‘assistant coordinators’ who coordinated and looked after volunteers. This freed up staff time for other responsibilities such as recruitment, training, and processing referrals. A&IT intends to keep this model of working, plus the phone service for remote support.

By continuing and expanding services, A&IT gained more visibility and learned more about the needs in the community. The CCSF grant gave A&IT stability and therefore “the wiggle room for the unexpected and to be creative”, which included merging with Frome Community Drivers who deliver prescriptions and food and take people to medical appointments.



***[The CCSF grant] has been brilliant. We've been able to increase our workload, our hours, reach more people, keep on top of the volunteers we are coordinating – there are a lot of them now. It also gave us a chance to see what more is needed out there.*** – Staff