

**Cheshire and
Merseyside**

Cancer Alliance

Community Partnerships

**Impact Report
2023-2025**



Community Partnerships – the journey to date

In Spring 2022, Cheshire and Merseyside Cancer Alliance (CMCA) launched a Community Engagement initiative to improve early diagnosis of cancer and reduce inequalities in cancer outcomes across targeted areas. The initiative focused on distributing small grants to grassroots groups and organisations to develop socially and culturally sensitive approaches to raise awareness of cancer and encourage proactive health-seeking behaviour.

The initiative promoted a shift from traditional NHS interventionist approaches and instead focused on empowering communities to take ownership of cancer messaging and their own health. It involved partnerships with three Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) organisations in Cheshire and Merseyside (C&M), recognising the invaluable role they play in connecting and supporting the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector, and their expertise and skills in working with communities. For CMCA, it marked the beginning of a strong partnership with the voluntary sector and enabled access into communities that were showing the lowest levels of engagement with healthcare and the NHS.



An independent evaluation undertaken twelve months after project implementation recommended enhancing capacity within the CVS organisations to facilitate a region-wide rollout, and to strengthen management and sustainability. In the summer of 2023, the initiative evolved into 'Community Partnerships.' Building on the foundations established in earlier work, the Community Partnerships initiative has continued to raise awareness of cancer, facilitating direct engagement with vulnerable groups and communities who face barriers and challenges in accessing healthcare. By supporting people to recognise signs and symptoms of cancer, to access screening programmes, and in promoting healthier lifestyles, the initiative aims to support earlier diagnosis of cancer within these communities.

This engagement is led by eight Social Action Leads, employed by the CVS organisations across Cheshire & Merseyside's nine 'Places' – with Halton and St Helens sharing one CVS. The Social Action Leads provide capacity within the CVSs to coordinate grants and projects, and are instrumental in supporting grassroots organisations and groups, offering guidance and resource to enable the delivery of co-designed, community initiatives to raise awareness of cancer and encourage early detection. Each Social Action Lead brings their own skills and perspectives, helping shape solutions that fit their communities' needs. Alongside the Social Action Leads and the infrastructure provided by the CVS organisations, a CMCA project lead provides leadership and project management, ensuring coordination at a regional level.

Contract management is now provided by one of the eight CVS partners. This collaborative approach ensures that the programme is well-coordinated and able to respond to the varied and evolving needs of the populations it serves.

The Social Action Leads hold a small budget, an ‘enablement pot’, to fund projects, although much of their work does not rely on funding. They maintain a strong local presence through attending events, sharing resources, delivering cancer awareness sessions, and engaging directly with communities. A key part of their role is building trust and developing meaningful relationships, especially with underserved groups, which requires dedicated time and commitment to encourage greater engagement and support the best possible outcomes.

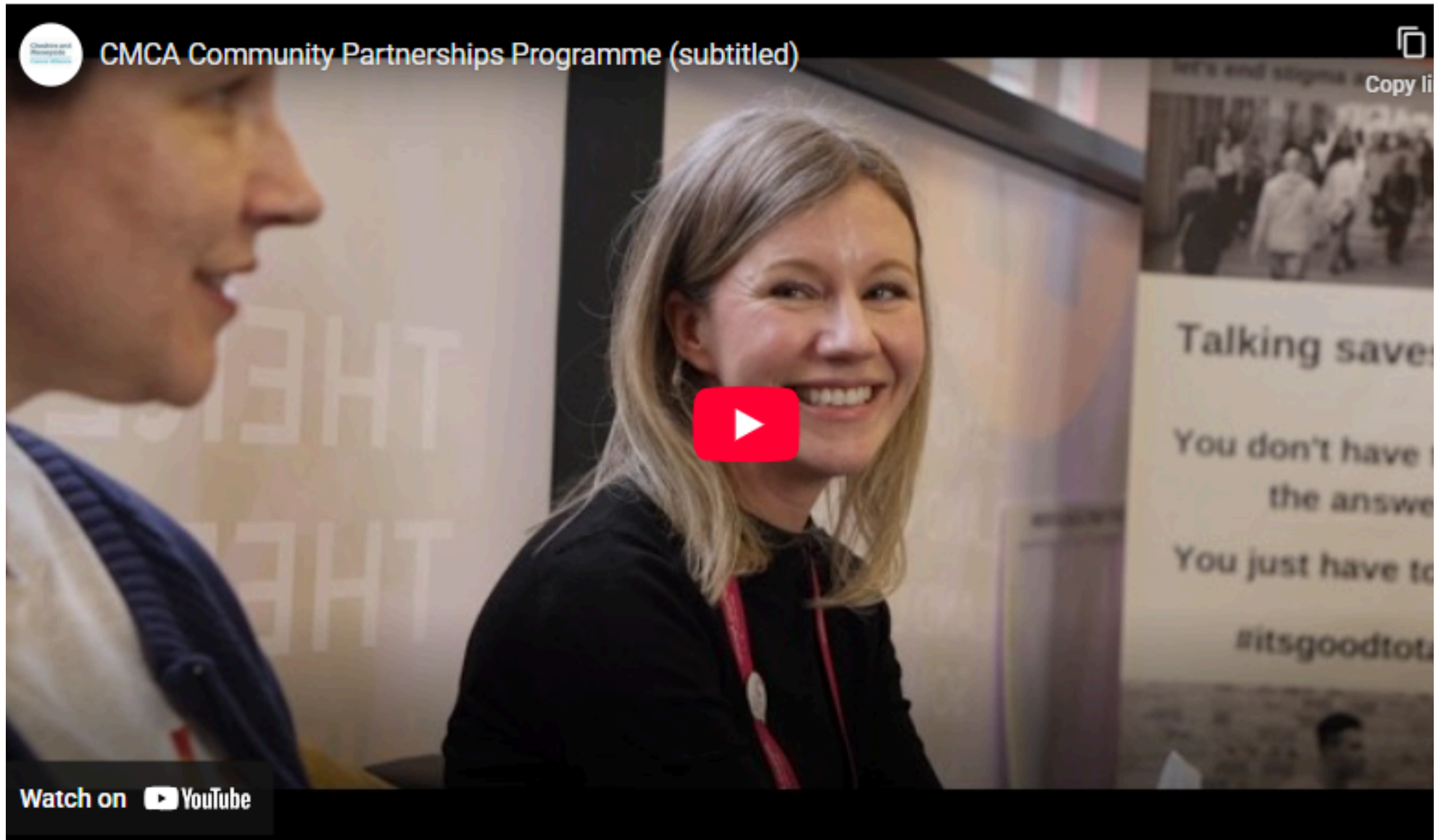
As the initiative has matured, the Social Action Leads have collaborated with a range of CMCA teams to support capacity building and drive progress against shared priorities. Examples include facilitating community engagement for lung cancer screening programme roll-out and working with the health inequalities and patient engagement team to film patient stories and share insight. A recent campaign to raise awareness of screening was also supported by Social Action Lead insight and capacity, and their ability to convene local stakeholders to be involved in the campaign. This all contributes to the initiative’s influence beyond individual projects and promotes partnership and collaboration across teams. Since the initiative’s inception, and in conjunction with other initiatives across the region, early diagnosis rates in Cheshire and Merseyside have improved from significantly below the England average in 2019, to slightly higher than the England average in 2024.

The case studies and project snapshots included in the following pages offer a glimpse into the variety of interventions delivered through the initiative. They are intended to illustrate how the initiative enables community-led action and is a catalyst for broader improvements in health and wellbeing. A key component of the initiative involves identifying the challenges and barriers faced by individuals, addressing misconceptions, and understanding what prevents engagement with healthcare. With the Social Action Leads as trusted messengers, this valuable insight and intelligence is fed back into the wider system, driving transformation and laying the foundations for sustainable, long-term change.

It is important to highlight that this report seeks to capture the human impact and the qualitative outcomes achieved through the Community Partnerships initiative, and the difference it has made to people’s lives. A comprehensive evaluation was undertaken following the first year of the initiative which evidences value for money and provides robust quantitative data to complement the qualitative insights within this report. If you would like a copy of the evaluation, please contact: ccf-tr.cmccomunitypartnerships@nhs.net



Community Partnerships in their own words



Community Partnerships in numbers

1 CVS Contract Holder



OVER
48,000

interactions within local communities



14

diverse communities engaged

8 CVS Partners



£300k

annual budget covering salaries and enablement pot

8 Social Action Leads covering



9 Places in C&M



78% of projects & interactions took place in areas ranked **LOWEST** in the index of multiple deprivation



Delivered over

projects with grassroots groups and organisations

200



Community Partnerships in quotes

“ I smoked ciggies for years, from when I was about 13. I stopped about five years ago. I worry about lung cancer and think I might get it one day. I didn't know about the lung health check, but I think I might go to it if I was called. It might make me worry less. ”

“ I started my Social Action Lead role this year after 27 years in a large corporate organisation. I have been blown away by the fantastic work my colleagues are doing and the difference they are making to real people. I'm already working with some fantastic local groups and communities in driving cancer awareness, knowing that the work we're doing is making a difference and saving lives ”

“ It was good we were able to make stuff together. It gave us a chance to talk about things like cancer. We would never bring something like this up in our conversations. ”

“ I absolutely love working as a Social Action Lead. The role offers great opportunities to promote awareness on the importance of screening and early detection. We collaborate with community groups and organisations that already have strong, trusted connections with local people. When people can speak openly and honestly about cancer, they are better able to address and dispel myths, fears, and barriers and make informed choices. ”

“ The team behind this work is exceptional. They bring together the right people, connecting with what really matters to individuals, all while turning bold, initially unconventional ideas into reality with remarkable skill and humility, often unaware of how extraordinary their talents really are. ”

“ The positive response from participants and staff highlights the importance of continuing these efforts to support health awareness and positive change within the community. By promoting healthier habits, we can support long-term wellbeing and encourage proactive cancer prevention approaches. ”

“ This partnership is a testament to the power of transformational cross sector working in the co-design and co-production of shared outcomes. The strength of the partnership has meant potential challenges of delivering a strategic initiative within a hyper local grass roots led delivery model have been navigated, securing the ambition of the initiative and leaving a lasting community led legacy. ”

“ ...it's an excellent initiative that we really enjoy delivering. ”

“ I pledge to go for my screening and encourage clients to go for theirs. ”

“ It was much less scary than I thought. I'll make sure I go to my screening appointments in future. ”

Case study: Improving cancer awareness for people with learning disabilities in Cheshire

Live! Cheshire developed the **Our Best Chance** project to improve cancer awareness and health habits among people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), addressing healthcare barriers faced by this group. The project was designed to improve fitness and lifestyle habits, challenge poor dietary habits, and provide easy-read, accessible cancer information on prevention, signs and symptoms, screening programmes, and self-checking.

The project ran weekly over three months and was delivered via a range of activities including fitness training, cancer information sessions, and craft classes - all with a focus on **cancer conversations**.

Participants highlighted barriers and challenges they faced in engaging with healthcare services, including a lack of information and advice on, for example, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, attending screening appointments, and checking for signs and symptoms.

Through Our Best Chance participants learned about the importance of fitness and **maintaining healthy habits** and were involved in easy-read presentations and discussions on how to self-check. Live! Cheshire also hosted cervical screening information sessions and encouraged participants to book appointments with female GPs or nurses, to increase comfort and accessibility.

Our Best Chance created:

- A safe environment for sensitive health discussions.
- Increased confidence in recognising cancer signs and symptoms.
- Healthier eating and improved fitness routines.
- Greater awareness of screening programmes.
- Strong peer support networks.

The project demonstrated that targeted, accessible health education for people with LDD can address significant **health inequalities** and empower participants to take proactive steps for their own health and wellbeing.

Cheshire West Voluntary Action are now working with the Council and community organisations like Live! to use Our Best Chance as a **best practice model** to deliver a range of health and wellbeing projects to promote prevention and early cancer detection.

“ I feel much more confident about checking myself now and I loved the fitness sessions. I will keep those up and try to eat more healthy food. ”



Case study: Increasing cervical screening in Knowsley

Soul Sisters is a women's community group based in one of the most deprived areas of Kirkby. The group was established to create a **safe space** for women from disadvantaged backgrounds to prioritise their own health and wellbeing needs. Using familiar but unconventional practices such as ice-baths, journaling, and breath work, they created a trusted space for open conversations on health and cancer. The group's unique approach of combining holistic health practices with frank discussions helped to break down **misinformation and barriers** which were impacting engagement with health services.

Initial discussions with the group highlighted a lack of participation in screening programmes, most notably for cervical screening. It became apparent that there was a widespread belief amongst members that **cervical screening occurred during childbirth**. This resulted in missed appointments and impacted opportunities for early diagnosis and intervention.

The funding enabled the development of a project emphasising the **importance of screening** and encouraging participation. It addressed misconceptions about cervical screening and through the group's established culture of openness, changed perceptions and habits. Members began to view screening as an act of **self-care**.

The results of this project were immediate and long-lasting. Post project feedback indicated that all members of the group subsequently engaged in screening programmes.

For one member, her **cancer was detected earlier** than would have been possible otherwise. Additionally, it also prompted changes in maternity services, ensuring new mothers are now explicitly informed that cervical screening is not carried out during childbirth.

The **legacy** of the project remains as the group continues to meet independently, and a similar model for younger girls, 'Teen Soul Sisters' has since been launched, aiming to instil positive health practices and knowledge from an even earlier age.

The impact of this initiative extends beyond cancer care, contributing to **broader improvements in health and wellbeing** in Kirkby, demonstrating the power of community-led action. Its success also played a significant role in CMCA receiving the **HSJ Award** for Community Care Initiative of the Year at the 2024 HSJ Patient Safety Awards.

“
To my proper shock she said they don't do any of those [cervical screening] checks after giving birth. I assumed they checked everything.”



Case study: Empowering students as Cancer Awareness Ambassadors in Sefton

In an innovative partnership with **Hugh Baird Further Education College**, the **'Crisp Cuts, Bold Beauty, Chat Cancer'** initiative was developed to bring vital cancer awareness into everyday community conversations.

The project focuses on equipping hairdressing and beauty students with the confidence and knowledge to act as **Cancer Awareness Ambassadors** in their salons and communities. Recognising that hair and beauty salons are trusted, conversational spaces where clients often feel comfortable sharing personal stories, the project uses this unique dynamic to encourage earlier conversations about wellbeing and cancer.

Workshops held at the college explored key topics including the **power of conversation**, empathetic listening, and understanding the cancer screening programmes. Students were encouraged to use an **Ask, Assist, Act** model - asking open questions about health concerns, assisting by listening empathetically, and acting by signposting individuals to appropriate healthcare support.

The sessions also addressed **common barriers** to screening, such as fear, lack of information, and low prioritisation of self-care. By discussing these issues in a peer-led, supportive setting, students began to see how **small, informed conversations** could have a **huge impact**.

Building on this success of the work with Hugh Baird college, the project is about to launch in a second further education college. The team are also collaborating with a **Primary Care Network**, who have done similar work with hairdressers, to expand the reach of the initiative. Together, they are developing a **Cancer Awareness Toolkit**, providing practical resources, conversation guides, and activity templates to help other colleges and workplaces replicate the model and empower more young people to become health advocates in their own communities.

Through this partnership, the project demonstrates how community-led education can transform awareness, break down barriers, and ultimately contribute to **earlier cancer diagnosis and better outcomes**.

“ I pledge to go for my screening and to encourage my clients to go for theirs. ”



Project snapshots

Halton & St Helens: The Social Action Lead collaborated with CMCA's Campaigns team on a campaign designed to increase residents' **awareness of screening programmes and help them feel more comfortable talking about cancer.** Drawing on their trusted networks and local connections, the Social Action Lead convened stakeholders to help shape the campaign's planning, and also featured in the campaign itself, which can be viewed here: [Two Minutes of Chat and an Early Screening](#)

Warrington: The Social Action Lead worked with an independent production company – [Ludovico](#) - to develop 'Chat Cancer' podcasts to raise awareness of screening programmes. These were co-produced with community advocates and people with lived experience and can be accessed here: [The Chat Cancer Podcast](#)

Cheshire East: [Her-Place Charitable Trust](#) delivered women's health pop-ups to raise awareness of breast cancer signs and symptoms, and the importance of self-checking, screening, and maintaining healthy lifestyles. The events helped women to **overcome anxieties and prioritise their own health.** One participant, who had avoided screening for years, attended screening within a week of an event, commenting afterwards **"It was much less scary than I thought. I'll make sure I go to my screening appointments in future"**

Liverpool: [North West Cancer Research](#) spent time engaging with the with the Irish traveller community to build trusted relationships in a community who are often distrustful of healthcare. By engaging with individuals on a one-to-one basis, they were able to have in-depth conversations around **cancer signs and symptoms, screening** and their **relationship with healthcare.** This led to a women's wellbeing event which enabled conversations that would not have happened on the traveller site, and demos on how to check their breasts, what to look out for, and information on screening options.

Wirral: The Social Action Lead is applying their community engagement expertise to support the roll out of the lung cancer screening programme. Through delivering roadshows alongside specialist nurses, they are **raising awareness, building local connections, gathering patient feedback, addressing concerns, and encouraging attendance at lung cancer screening.** This work demonstrates how the expertise of Social Action Leads can strengthen wider programmes and drive better health outcomes.

What's next? The journey continues...

The work delivered so far has created strong foundations on which we can now build for even greater impact. The 10-Year Health Plan for England sets clear ambitions to prioritise prevention and to address health inequalities. The Community Partnerships model demonstrates how these ambitions can be realised through a strong partnership between health and the voluntary sector, underpinned by the knowledge, energy, and passion of communities.

A vital part of the 'what next' is leaving a legacy. By enabling genuine community ownership and empowerment, the initiative is encouraging people to prioritise their own health and wellbeing in ways that are culturally relevant and locally driven. This drives lasting change and sparks a 'ripple effect' where messaging spreads beyond those who directly engage, influencing families, friends, and wider networks. Sustainability and scale are central to this legacy, with opportunities to expand some projects across Place and the wider region, ensuring the impact continues to grow.

The principles of the Community Partnerships model – raising awareness, prevention, and addressing barriers to access - are equally relevant for other long-term conditions or topics. Longer-term, this approach could be adapted and extended beyond cancer, contributing to a broader vision of prevention and health improvement that addresses multiple conditions and drives better outcomes across populations.

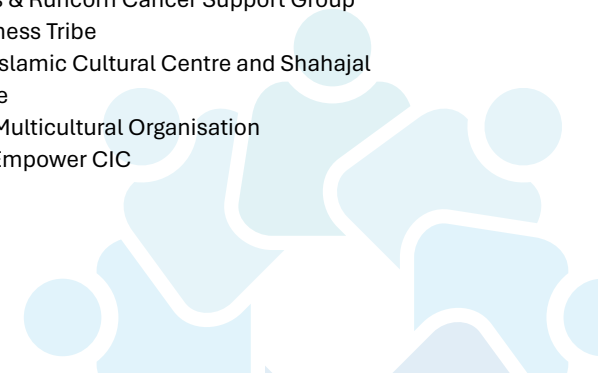
The ambition now is to embed learning, sustain momentum, and ensure long-term sustainability. The initiative is demonstrating how collective action can endure beyond individual projects, creating lasting benefits for people and places. It is laying the foundations for a future where health, the voluntary sector, and communities are more connected, more responsive, and rooted in what matters most to people.



Thank you

None of this would have been possible without our dedicated CVS partners, Social Action Leads, and the many passionate grassroots community groups and organisations we have worked with. While we have made every effort to include all projects in the list below, the breadth of the work means that some initiatives may have been inadvertently omitted.

Active Wirral	Enjoy Football	Meet and Eat	The Alpha Omega Women Peace & Security Foundation
Aigburth Community Empowerment	Everton in the Community	Men in Sheds	The Atkinson Southport
Alchemic Kitchen	Everybody Health and Leisure	MHA Communities Cheshire East	The Bowersdale Resource Centre
Angel Dust CIC	Evolving Mindset	12 Million Minds	The Bridgend Centre Bollington
Anthony Davies Childhood Bereavement	Feeding Liverpool	Mind Mastery CIC	The Hope Centre
Apex Plan B	Finding Harmony	Motherwell Cheshire/ Her-Place	The Lighthouse Church
Apollo Sports Club	Fortuna Female Society	Mulan Culture	The Old School
Bee Friends Memory Café	Fresh Beginnings	Myeloma Support Group	The Vikings Foundation
Beeyou Support Hive	Hazelhurst Studios	New Directions	The Welcome Knutsford
Beyond Raw Materials	Healthwatch Liverpool	Northwest Cancer Research	Thrive to Survive
Birchwood Community Centre	Helping Hands CIC	Northwood Community Centre	Time Out Group Handforth
Birkenhead Sixth Form College	Her-Place	Older Persons Enabling Resource & Action (OPERA) Sefton	Tomorrow's Women
Black Health Agency for Equality	Homestart	Park Farm Community Centre	Torrington Drive Community Association
Blacon Beacon	Hope Central	People First Merseyside	Torus Foundation
Blooming Art	Hough Green Pensioners Club	Phoenix Social Group	Tower Hill Community Hub
Bollington Linking Lives	Hugh Baird College	Positive Life CIC	Treasure Your Wellbeing
Bootle Library	Involve North West	Pride Chester	Trinity Safespace
Breastmates	Just Bee You CIC	Queen of Greens	Trinity Wellness CIC
Bridgend Centre	Kindfulness Café	Rhythm Reaction	Vibe UK
Brighter Living Partnership	Knowsley Community College	St Leonards Community Centre	Volunteers at Macclesfield Hospital
Brook Acre Primary School	Laughter for Life	Sam's Diamonds	Warrington Citizens Advice
Café Laziz	Let's Farm	Sandbach Rugby Club	Warrington Disability Partnership
Catalyst Museum	Lifestyle Women's Group	Seafit/ Fisherman's Misson	Warrington Housing Association
CAT Community Radio CIC	Live! Cheshire	See Communications	Warrington Speak Up
Centre 63	Liverpool Homeless Football Club	Sefton Baby Baskets	West Lancs & Merseyside Myeloma Cancer Support Group
Cheshire East Council Rough Sleeping Team	Livewire CIC	Sefton Cancer Support Group	Widnes & Runcorn Cancer Support Group
Cheshire Silk Radio	Living Well Sefton	Serpentine Road Family Church	Wilderness Tribe
Citizen's Advice	Lord Rama Krishna Community Centre	Signing Solutions	Wirral Islamic Cultural Centre and Shahajal Mosque
Come Together Hub	Lucem House Community Cinema	South Cheshire CLASP	Wirral Multicultural Organisation
Cre8	Lucky's Café	Speak Up 4 All	Youth Empower CIC
Crossroads Community Hub	Ludovico	Spider Project CIC	
Crownway Community Centre	Macclesfield Eye Society	Sportivity	
Deaf and Sensory Network	Macintyre Friendship Group	Stemcell Scousers	
Digital Art Box CIC	Make it Happen Birkenhead	Stockbridge Tenants Forum	
Dramatic Recovery	Make LCR CIC	Talk Hub	
	Maximum Edge CIC		



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in partnership with



If you would like to get in touch, please contact:
ccf-tr.cmcacommunitypartnerships@nhs.net

