

ALDERMINSTER WINTER WARM HUB

Objective

Alderminster Village Hall Management Committee wanted to set up a new weekly community café during winter to help residents affected by the rise in heating and living costs.

Summary

The event was funded by a £500 Winter Warm Hub grant, without which it would not have run. Although the event organiser thought the main benefit would be helping with the cost-of-living crisis, it transpired over time that people's main reason for attending the hub was to enjoy social interaction with others.

People also enjoyed the free refreshments (coffee/tea and cake) and were happy to chat and meet new people, rather than engage in a wide range of activities. One person started a social history group, which created a lot of interest in family histories, and residents also enjoyed a visit from the British Motor Museum.

There was an average attendance of 15 with support from a weekly rota of four volunteers. More women attended than men, and the age range tended to be 65+. Regular attendees confirmed that the event helped to improve their wellbeing and reduced rural isolation.

The organisers also visited Shipston Winter Warm Hub before setting up their own hub and found their suggestions and practical tips very helpful.

Learning

- The event organisers were pleased with the level of community engagement, and that many people continued to come on a regular basis.
- *“Even if only a few people come, it’s worth doing”* – they would advise other potential hubs to *“go ahead and do it!”*

Outcome

As the hub had only been planned to run for winter and the organisers had other commitments, the event only ran twice more after the end of March. However, they are looking to run a similar event again in the Autumn, although they feel they may want to “rebrand” it with more of an emphasis on being a social get-together.

ATHERSTONE WINTER WARM HUB – NORTH WARKS 50+ LUNCH CLUB

Objective

The Lunch Club has been running twice weekly at St Benedict's Community Hall, Atherstone, for several years, but the organisers wanted to provide more cost-of-living support to local residents and continue to provide them with a social meeting place. They were particularly keen to expand their community support via slow cooking courses, to help people save on energy bills and cook healthy affordable meals.

Summary

The new Winter Warm Hub was funded by small grants allocated by WRCC totalling £500 and by the nominal subscription of £1 per session paid by attendees and other funds raised by the organisers, e.g., from ThinkActive for seated exercise classes run by Atherstone Leisure Centre. An average of 26 people plus five volunteers attended each lunch session over the winter period.

The largest group demographic was 65+, and mostly women although more men were starting to attend. Despite the name of the event, the lunch is open to all and some younger people with other vulnerabilities attend, if people are unable to afford to pay £1, they were still welcomed. Soup and sandwiches were provided to all, along with seated exercise classes, which attendees found helpful both physically and mentally. Bingo was also popular at the three-hour events.

Regular attendees looked forward to coming to the Winter Warm Hub (some came twice weekly) and said it was an important part of their week. *"I've made a lot of friends,"* said one, *"I live on my own and it keeps me active – there's lots of things to do!"* Volunteers also found it helpful to be able to check in with vulnerable people on an informal basis.

Attendees engaged positively with a visit from the British Motor Museum volunteers as well as with the energy advice and carbon monoxide alarms provided by WRCC. They are also looking forward to the upcoming slow cooking courses (4 sessions each) in June and July.

Learning

- The organisers are keen to promote the event more widely to attract more local people, and are also interested in sharing learning and experiences with other Warm Hubs – they have already met up with Shipston Warm Hub.
- They commented on how important it was to listen to the community: *"Variety is important ...measure your work by how involved those attending want to be."*

Outcome

Atherstone Warm Hub - North Warwickshire 50+ Lunch Club officially launched on 19th May 2023. The Warm Hub organisers are also keen to secure additional funding for the event in the longer term.

BAGINTON WINTER WARM HUB

Objective

The Village Hall Management Committee wanted to create a new event to encourage residents to meet up and socialise one morning per week during winter. The need for social interaction was felt to be more important to residents than cost of living support, although this was also a consideration.

Summary

The village community hub started running on a weekly basis from the beginning of

November 2022, funded by small grants of £500 from Warwickshire County Council (WCC) and a grant from Warwick District Council (WDC). Without Winter Warm Hub funding, this event would not have been set up in the first place.

Free hot drinks and hot snacks such as bacon and sausage sandwiches were served, and the event rapidly became popular with the local community. By the end of March 2023, there was an average of 28 attendees each week including seven volunteers.

The group demographic was at the older range of 65+, with many of those who attended living alone and valuing the opportunity to meet new people. Two regular attendees who lived on their own met for the first time at the Winter Warm Hub, even though they only lived 500m from each other - showing that living near other people in a similar situation does not necessarily prevent social isolation.

Residents enjoyed the informal social aspect of the weekly community café style event, which soon became an important part of many people's weekly routine. All those who provided feedback confirmed that the event has significantly helped their health and wellbeing.

The hub was also visited by local Parish Councillors and members of Warwick District Council (WDC).

Learning

- The event organiser was surprised by how quickly the hub became an important meeting place for villagers, and how willing people were to engage with the hub.
- Volunteers commented: *"You can make new friendships whatever your age!"* and *"We get as much out of the Warm Hub as do the attendees."*

Outcome

Baginton Warm Hub is due to be officially launched on 6th June 2023. The Village Hall Management Committee is also keen to secure additional funding to support the event in the longer term.

LIGHTHORNE HEATH WINTER WARM HUB

Objective

Lighthorne Heath Village Hall Association was already running a weekly coffee morning at the hall and wanted to run another event to help more local residents affected by the cost of living. Ultimately, though, the event organiser felt that people's main reason for attending was to enjoy social interaction in a welcoming community space.

Summary

The new Winter Warm Hub was funded by small grants allocated by WRCC totalling £500, and by some funds raised from Lighthorne Heath's existing coffee morning. Several people attended both weekly events, but new people also came to the Thursday Winter Warm Hub, including a young family. By the end of March 2023, average attendance was 13 with increased numbers attending the slow cooking sessions (see below).

The largest group demographic was 65+, and almost entirely consisted of women, except for a young father and the person leading the slow cooking sessions. Many of those attending lived alone and relied on their two weekly coffee mornings, plus the occasional community outing (using WRCC's Back&4th minibus service) to connect with each other.

The housing development at Lighthorne Heath currently has limited facilities, and many people have limited social interaction with other groups, so the Winter Warm Hub was seen as a way to start reaching out to more residents. This was the main reason for Trustgreen's community champion promoting the Warm Hub concept to the Village Hall Association. The event would not have been set up without Winter Warm Hub funding.

People felt the free weekly events helped with social skills. They also appreciated receiving energy saving advice, further helped by receiving slow cookers provided by the project (see below).

The hub was visited by Act on Energy, Healthwatch Warwickshire, Family Information Services, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service, and the British Motor Museum.

Trustgreen's Community Champion commented: *"It's been a privilege to work in partnership with WRCC and witness the community come together to establish a warm and welcoming permanent hub."*

Learning

- The attendees are keen for more people to attend and are open to trying more new things such as arts and crafts and gardening activities.
- The slow cooking course (four sessions in March with ingredients also provided free of charge) was enjoyed by residents, a quarter of whom had never used a slow cooker. One commented that *"the demonstrations gave me confidence"* and another said that they *"liked new cooking ideas, with less meal prep and more time to do other things."* The next slow cooking course will follow a similar structure but will be aimed at attracting new people and will be held in the evenings/at weekends.

Outcome

Lighthorne Heath Warm Hub officially launched on 16th May 2023. The Village Hall Association has received a £1,000 cost of living grant from WCC and is also using some funds from the other weekly coffee morning to subsidise the event.

NEWTON REGIS WINTER WARM HUB

Objective

The Village Hall wanted to run a weekly "Heat and Eat" themed hub during winter, with the main objective being to create a new social meeting place for residents.

Summary

Winter Warm Hub funding of £500 was needed to set up the event, and the hall also contributed to the costs. People enjoyed free hot drinks and biscuits/cake, plus soup and a roll. For a nominal charge, they could also enjoy a hot bake with salad and a hot pudding such as sponge or apple crumble.

By the end of March, average attendance at the hub was 30, with six volunteers running the event – there were more women than men, mainly from the 65+ age range. The organisers felt that residents' wellbeing was improved, and that the event did help support them with the cost of living even though the greatest benefit was from social interaction.

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service visited and arranged a number of home visits for vulnerable people as a result. Citizens Advice also visited the Winter Warm Hub and were approached for help and advice by several attendees. And residents appreciated the energy information packs and carbon monoxide alarms provided by WRCC.

Learning

- *“Planning and organisation is very important,”* commented the organisers. *“Each volunteer needs to know their role and feel appreciated to ensure their continued support.”*
- The volunteers all found the experience very rewarding – *“seeing the community of all ages come together was heartwarming.”*

Outcome

As the hub had only been planned to run for winter and there were insufficient volunteers to continue with the event after the end of March, the organisers chose not to continue. However, they may want to start a similar event up again next Winter.

RUGBY WARM HUB - BENN PARTNERSHIP CENTRE

Objective

The Benn Partnership Centre wanted to help support local residents with the cost of living and ran a free cooking course to build people’s confidence and prepare meals on a budget.

Summary

The Winter Warm Hub cooking club ran over two months although people did not have to attend every session (unlike the shorter WRCC slow cooking course). There were seven sessions delivered in total (with free ingredients provided) including slow cooking, microwave cooking, hob cooking, and a final “bring and share” session.

There were an average of ten people attending sessions, predominantly women, and in most sessions people were encouraged to cook their own food at individual cooking stations. They could then either eat their meal there or take it home afterwards. This did not apply to the slow cooking session – instead, the chef gave a demonstration and attendees were able to take a cooker home with them to practice with the recipe provided.

Another session also focused on making sweet treats, including three types of fruit crumble, easy to make biscuits etc, and the chef created seven puddings which attendees were able to help make at a large communal table, as well as enjoy eating during the session.

The event organiser felt that the Winter Warm Hub significantly helped those attending as it not only helped them to learn to cook on a budget, but also helped people to socially interact with others in a safe, welcoming space. *“The recipe is just a starting point ... we want people to enjoy cooking, to be confident enough to try things out, and cook for themselves and their families,”* they explained.

Learning

- The event organiser is keen to run more tailored cooking courses and “one off” sessions, e.g., for young families, teenagers, men etc.

- Apart from this hub, the majority of Winter Warm Hubs and other warm spaces in Rugby (there were nearly 60 in total according to Rugby Borough Council) appeared to struggle to attract a number of attendees during the winter.
- The cooking course is only one of the events run at the Benn Partnership Centre, with others including the Work Club, computer drop In, and wellbeing groups. The Centre Manager, Trustees and WRCC are keen to develop a Warm Hub community centre model where a range of events are already running, and where additional support can be provided via the Warm Hubs project.

Outcome

The Rugby Warm Hub - Benn Partnership Centre is due to officially launch in June 2023.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

1. WRCC provided all these Winter Warm Hubs with energy information packs including energy saving and home safety advice, signposting to other support services and contact details, plus guidance on signing up to the Priority Service Registration and carbon monoxide safety information from Cadent. Free carbon monoxide alarms were also provided.
2. During the project, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) visited several hubs, and a member of the Gaydon crew confirmed that out of 30 direct referrals for home visits, over 90% had resulted from attending a community "Warm Hub" or warm space. However, from a recent discussion with WFRS, it appears that some of these were not WRCC Winter Warm Hubs and therefore it is more difficult to provide a useful case study regarding this.
3. From limited experience this winter and recent discussions with WFRS, it does seem that greater engagement and more positive outcomes can be achieved by Fire and Rescue teams visiting existing hubs in the community, rather than running hubs at fire stations (for a range of reasons).
4. WRCC plans to arrange a further meeting with WFRS to see if a more co-ordinated approach to visiting WRCC's network of endorsed Warm Hubs can be agreed.