



# Community Hot-Spots

Report 2023 -24



Norfolk  
Community  
Foundation

# Community Hot-Spots

“ For the past two winters, our Community Hot-Spot programme has provided local communities with a warm and welcoming space during the cold months. We have empowered charitable groups to transform their spaces into vital community hubs, offering not just warmth, but also connection and support at a hyper-local level.

Once again, Hot-Spots have helped people forge new friendships and discover help on their doorsteps, significantly enhancing the well-being of individuals across Norfolk.

We hope the following insights and stories inspire you, just as they have inspired us.

**Laura Wigby**

Director of Community Investment/Programmes

**110+**

Hot-Spots in Norfolk  
in 2023-24



# Community Hot-Spots in focus

Norfolk faces unique challenges such as rural isolation, older and colder housing, and an ageing population. This creates pockets of 'hidden' deprivation. We believe that communities are best placed to understand their individual needs, so we empowered local groups to take action and find the right solutions for their community.

Over 110 Community Hot-Spots were launched in 2023/4, giving support to thousands of people all over Norfolk. Hot-Spots fostered a sense of community, reduced isolation, and provided critical resources to improve the quality of life for diverse groups within the community. In rural or coastal areas, where other facilities may be limited or costly, these warm spaces fill a crucial gap.

This report highlights the importance of Community Hot-Spots as vital hubs for social support, particularly for vulnerable populations such as older adults, those facing economic hardship, and people struggling with their mental health. It will examine the

# 2,225

people attended a Hot-Spot each week

# £20      71

per head cost for 4 months of support

groups returned for funding this year

# £200,000+

awarded in grants to Norfolk organisations

key themes that emerged from the 2023/4 Hot-Spots, and explore the opportunities and challenges revealed through these innovative hubs.

We would like to thank Norfolk County Council, the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Breckland Council, Equitix and all those who donated for helping to support Community Hot-Spots in 2023/4.



**Norfolk**  
County Council

Borough Council of  
King's Lynn &  
West Norfolk



  
Breckland  
COUNCIL

**equitix**



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# Our Insights

## Building connections

For many, especially those living alone or with limited social networks, these hubs provide a vital opportunity to connect with others, share experiences, and form new friendships.

While older individuals were the primary group to experience relief from isolation through Hot-Spots in the first year, our 2023-24 data shows that an increasing number of people from diverse ages and backgrounds are now also benefitting.

Families have found the spaces valuable for socialising as children could play with others and parents could expand their social circles locally. Additionally, the spaces opened channels for peer support for migrant communities, people with mental health issues, those who are neurodiverse, and those facing other personal challenges, such as bereavement.

### Insight:

- Loneliness was identified as the main reason for visiting by almost 70% of Hot-Spots.

### Feeling a part of something...

“Two elderly women who live alone attended our free lunch. We provided transport for them both as they do not drive - this provided companionship for them and a warm lunch.”

“We were also pleased to welcome two dads and their children at our free lunch, they were responsible for childcare and welcomed the support and companionship. One has a partner with limited mobility so could not attend, so he took home a packed hot lunch for her.”

**Carleton Rode Jubilee Hall and  
Social Club – South Norfolk**



# Promoting wellbeing

At the point of reaching out for help, adults can wait up to a distressing 6 weeks to receive mental health support – and sometimes longer.

Some attendees express that the regularity and routine provided by the warm spaces are essential for their mental well-being. Having a set time and place to go each week helps structure their lives, which is particularly important for those dealing with mental health challenges or recovering from bereavement.

For some individuals, attending the Hot-Spots gave them a renewed sense of purpose. Whether through volunteering, participating in activities, or simply having a reason to leave the house, groups told us that their visitors reported feeling more motivated and engaged in local life.

## Breaking down barriers...

“We had a person who started attending in mid-January to make use of the warm space, as they were currently sofa surfing and needed somewhere to go during the day. They had recently experienced a relationship breakdown and had a history of drug abuse. Being somewhere safe and warm was crucial for their health and ongoing recovery. Since attending the warm hub, they have made new friends, utilised our one-to-one counselling service while waiting for their GP referral, and particularly enjoy getting involved in our arts and crafts activities and bingo sessions. We have also signposted them to domestic abuse organisations and drug and alcohol support services.”

## First Focus - Fakenham

### Insight:

- In 2023/4, our local health system spent more than £15mil on talking therapies for anxiety and depression in the region. Hot-Spots provided social connection all winter for just £20 per head.



## Finding support

The first year of Hot-Spots demonstrated that the friendly, open atmosphere broke down barriers, helping to reduce the stigma often associated with asking for support.

This year, around 20% of Hot-Spots offered targeted advice and services to visitors. Hot-Spots became safe and trusted spaces to find guidance, access critical resources, and gain a sense of stability during challenging times.

Some Hot-Spots were able to link in with other services, connecting people with (among others) Community Connectors to help reduce isolation, Shelter to help with housing, and the Citizen's Advice Bureau to help with budgeting, bills and benefits. Others had their own in-house services to offer support.

Some were also able to support more basic needs, offering free or low-cost meals, access to essentials like food parcels, and a warm place to stay, which helped individuals save on heating and food expenses. Some also offered showers and washing facilities for those in extreme hardship, such as rough sleepers.



### Insight:

- 20% of households in Norwich live in fuel poverty, meaning they would fall below the poverty line after paying fuel costs.



### It started with a Hot-Spot...

**Future Projects' Baseline Centre** in Norwich supported a wide range of people last winter, from families with very young children to older adults made vulnerable by the rising cost of living. Their Hot-Spot featured hot food and the opportunity to socialise, which brought many people through the door. One visitor revealed that he had lost his job of 20 years due to illness. He initially came to the Hot-Spot after having to turn his heating off at home, but soon found a wealth of support available to him. He spoke to staff about his financial worries, and they helped him apply for benefits he didn't know he was entitled to. His illness had led him to become isolated, but as the centre was nearby he could travel there easily and soon began to participate in their Men's Group – becoming an advocate for the centre and its activities. But it all started with the Hot-Spot.

# Opportunities

## Volunteering

Some organisations found new volunteers by offering a Hot-Spot over the winter. Some helped just with the Hot-Spot, but others moved on to volunteering in other activities associated with the group or other local organisations. Volunteering has many benefits, from helping individuals build valuable work and life skills to helping to reduce loneliness.

### Giving back, gaining skills...

**Helping Hands** in Breckland hired their local village hall to offer a Hot-Spot. The volunteer-run charity also runs a Nourishing Norfolk food hub called 'The Pantry', so they opened their Hot-Spot to align with its opening times. The Food Hub gained additional volunteers via the Hot-Spot space. The Hot-Spot became extremely popular, especially when Helping Hands began providing access to a laptop. One visitor who was unemployed used this laptop to gain a Level 1 Food Hygiene Certificate, and began volunteering at the Food Hub. After gaining this experience, she then moved on to permanent employment nearby.

Helping Hands - Broadland





# Building community

Community Hot-Spots were spaces where groups could connect with their community in a new way and try something different. Numerous Hot-Spots have told us that new clubs, activity groups and services have formed 'organically' as a result of offering the warm space and that new connections have been made.

## Giving back, gaining skills...

Through their Hot-Spot, **Hanseatic Union** in King's Lynn identified that there were many women who were socially isolated, relying on antidepressants, and struggling to cope while remaining at home. In response, they are now working to establish a support group for women over 50 who have English as an Additional Language (EAL). The aim of this group is to reduce older women's isolation by providing a space for them to connect, share experiences, and support each other.

Furthermore, they began to collaborate with other organisations, such as a DWP worker focused on over-50s, as she found her way to the Hot-Spot. Similarly, Hanseatic Union began to do outreach to a large BAME community in King's Lynn, expanding their reach and impact. This broader engagement was initiated after a church member from the BAME community sought advice at the Hot-Spot, revealing further needs within this group.



Hanseatic Union - West Norfolk

# New needs

## Hidden hardship

Hot-Spots offered people who are 'sofa surfing' or living in temporary accommodation the chance to 'get out' and socialise without the expectation of spending money. Some also supported those in greater need.

## Local respite

Many individuals visiting their local Hot-Spot reported it as the 'only time' they saw other people, or people other than their carers. This was especially true for those with physical or mental disabilities, including dementia.

### Winter lifeline...

**Great Yarmouth Pathway** offers a community café 4 days per week. Operating in the most deprived ward, they support anyone who is struggling. Seasonal employment in coastal towns creates additional need in the winter months. As well as local families and older people, a large number of people using their Hot-Spot were individuals of non-settled status living in temporary accommodation. With no access to cooking facilities, the café was a lifeline during winter months, providing warmth, company, a hot meal and even food parcels for those most in need. Volunteers from local agencies were on hand to help people with their mental health, benefits, debt money management advice and more.

### Warm welcome...

"I believe in the last year, that the compassion and friendship I have been shown is outstanding. Sarah [the older people worker] has always been there for me. She is caring and loving and has made it possible for me to take part in groups where everyone is so friendly. I've also been able to help practically and make friends, having met some lovely people at these activities, they are all so friendly. Being together and exploring these things about our life stories and different views means a lot to me. These groups are like a community and I've never come across people who are so loving towards each other."

– **Visitor whose husband had dementia, Gateway Vinyard, Broadland**

# Community Hot-Spots in 2024-25

Fuel bills this winter are still set to remain stubbornly high, with further rises forecast by Cornwall Insight. Loneliness and isolation are also not going to go away. Additionally, many older people who are 'just getting by' may be pushed into hardship through the loss of their winter fuel payments.

This means that Community Hot-Spots remain as relevant as ever as we approach winter 2024/5.

Our typical Surviving Winter Appeal

relies on those who can afford to do so donating their winter fuel payments so we can help those who need it most – an ask we simply can't make this year.

Instead, we are asking people to donate what they can, whether it's £20 to support just one person through the winter months, £125 to run a Hot-Spot for a week, or £2,000 to support a whole Hot-Spot all winter.

[norfolkfoundation.com/giving-and-philanthropy/surviving-winter/](https://norfolkfoundation.com/giving-and-philanthropy/surviving-winter/)



Wymondham Abbey - South Norfolk



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Together, Norfolk shines brighter