

St Albans Community Association



ANNUAL REPORT April 2020-March 2021



Registered Charity Number: 1122405
Company Number: 06354930





Our Vision

Our vision is for a community in which all are valued and respected, where every resident has access to the information, support and quality services they need.



Our Mission

To be an asset to the local community by providing access to inclusive and supportive services.

Our Values

Honesty & integrity, dignity & respect, commitment to excellence and transparency & openness.



INTRODUCTION



St Albans Community Association

St Albans Community Association was founded back in 1983 by Pat Ryan and Beryl Chandler, who were committed to supporting the local community. Growing considerably since those early days, we now offer more services than ever before.

We pride ourselves on the warm, welcoming place with friendly, empathetic and passionate staff. We offer support to local people through our many services.

We're incredibly grateful to the people who enable us to provide this service, with funding coming from the Local Authority, individual grants, donations and service charges.

“ I owe a great deal to St Albans and it's a pleasure to be able to return. It's a wonderful thing in my life and I'm sure it's wonderful in everyone else's. The centre reopening means the world to me. ”

CHAIRS REPORT



Robert Evetts Chair

This time last year we were in 'lock down' and I doubt many of us would have thought

that now, a full year later we would only just be returning to some sort of normality.

In the early weeks of lock down, with all of our normal activities having been brought to a halt it was hard to see a way forward. Indeed, one option was for furlough everyone and simply shut down for the duration. However, given the situation of many of our clients that was not an option we could consider.

It became clear many of our clients needed re-assurance, food, and someone to talk to. We introduced a new shopping service to, adapted existing services and expanded out meals.

Having just become the owners of a very large building, it became clear that there was much to do and there was no better time to do it with the building empty, except for staff. We have invested in excess of £100,000 on the building, with more to do in the future. To date we have concentrated on making the building safe and weatherproof, compliant with health and safety and fire regs, re-decorating and re-equipping, re-furnishing and improving IT.

On almost every occasion that I visited St Albans, I was dodging staff and volunteers, most of whom carrying pots of paint and brushes.

All of this time and money will not have been wasted as I am confident we will emerge a better and stronger organisation, better able to support our local community. Despite having invested more money that I care to think about, we are still financially sound. This is mainly down to Tonia, having somehow managed to "nick" Jeremy Corbyns's money tree and the generosity and support of the various grant awarding organisations who obviously recognise that we are an organisation worthy of support and my sincerest thanks to them.

Our staff and volunteers have been wonderful, their attitude, flexibility and versatility has been outstanding and a very great thank you to all of you, and I include Tonia here, but I don't want to single her out in case it goes to her head, suffice to say she leads by example, well done Tonia.

I has been a strange year for the board, sometimes difficult to get a quorum, some surreal Zoom meetings "are you still there Vicar" or "Rob's gone again, we have lost Rob". Let's hope normal service will resume as soon as possible and once again thanks to you all.

Lets just look forward to a brighter, better future.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

Tonia Flannagan CEO



This has certainly been an exceptional year and one we will remember for a lifetime and I am sure each and every one of us have all learned things during

these challenging times. I would like to take this opportunity to voice my gratitude, to staff and volunteers for working so hard during this last year to support local people through such a challenging time.

When lockdown was first announced we very quickly consulted with our current clientele to find out what they would need; they told us food and someone to talk to.

They were frightened and some didn't really understand what was happening, I am not sure any of us really understood it at that moment in time. I certainly did not think it was going to continue into 2021.

A decision was made to maintain the out-meals service, provide a community response service for those that needed to self-isolate and maintain contact via telephone with all of our clients and carers to ensure we could reassure and support them as best we could. Risk assessments were carried out on the building and some staff were furloughed as we could not socially distance in offices, some were furloughed on a rotational basis and this meant staff had to work in other service areas. Staff embraced this and worked so well with each other that it gave an opportunity for people in different service areas to get to know each other better and give everyone a better understanding of their colleagues.

Demand for our out-meal provision increased, we went from providing 11 meals per day locally in Smethwick and parts of Oldbury to over 50 a day covering the whole of the borough. This was a challenge in itself and undoubtedly took some organising to ensure we had the staff and volunteers to get the food out piping hot in the numbers needed whilst maintaining the quality on which we pride ourselves. Some of our clients needed staff to go into their homes and get out cutlery and open their meals for them, not forgetting some of our clients are living with dementia and don't always remember to eat or think they have already eaten. This was challenging under the strict guidance we were working to, staff and volunteers alike embraced this and did well to meet the needs of those clients.

Staff worked and continue to work bank holidays and this included Christmas day, boxing day and new year's day to ensure we could keep our clients engaged. On Christmas day we even delivered gifts to our clients that have no family or friends to visit them. Staff were on board and encouraged other staff to also use the time to have a good clear out, sort out the store cupboards, throw away years of rubbish we had all collected and hoarded over a long period of time. The external walls and fencing were painted, internal furniture was painted, and I began the quest to find money to replace the lost income from our Lunch Club, Day Care, Pre-School Service and room hire.

Prior to the lockdown we had worked hard to build up the Day Care Opportunities, so it was self-sustainable and not dependent on funding which was a real achievement and now it had all end abruptly. A number of staff had worked hard to make this service a success and a place for people to want to come, meet other people and give respite to Carers.

This left us feeling concerned for those who used to attend and their carers. This is why we felt we had to offer the outreach service, we now know this was such a life changing service to many of our clients.

Amid all this, we were going through the legal protocols to buy the building. The building that we had occupied for over 36 years. Thanks to Power to Change, The Evesons Charitable Trust, The Bernard Sunley Foundation and The Garfield Weston Foundation we were able to purchase the building from Holy Trinity PCC meaning that St Albans could finally secure their future and no longer had to find the £25k per annum rent.

The purchase was finalised in May 2020 and I would like to take this opportunity to thank those funders for making the purchase possible which will enable us to concentrate on delivering our services and supporting local people. If it were not for those funders, we simply would not have been able to buy the building.

Also, in May 2020 we were informed that a partnership bid to National Lottery Community Fund, led by Sandwell Community and Participation Services was successful. This is a 3-year programme providing a range of digital community support. Whilst we were elated, both partners were concerned about the delivery model which was underpinned by staff going into homes of older people to provide them with a tablet and support them to get digitally connected. Due to the restrictions, we had to rethink very quickly what we could do. I would like to thank SCIPS, Jan McMilan, the Manager and her hard-working team for the support and flexibility they gave us to allow us to deliver this programme in a very different albeit effective way.

The Charity has also seen improvements in IT and new efficiencies created out of necessity. We have heavily invested in a new system for our lunch club and outmeals service called 'The Graze'. This system allows us to track all clients coming into the centre, monitor what people are eating and all information to be kept on a shared system to improve communication. We are doing this in phases, as eventually we want to have all our client records on one system.

As you will read from other staff members in this report, we have spent over £200k having the much-needed building works done and purchasing new furniture and equipment, the centre makes me feel so proud for all that has

been achieved especially during a Pandemic that placed an enormous strain on services, individuals, partners and funders.

This year's finances look healthy on the surface as we were very lucky to receive support from funders and I would like to express my gratitude in particular to Power to Change, Julia Hans Rausing Trust and The National Lottery Community Fund whose funding gave us the necessary breathing space to plan how we diversify and maintain our services to meet people's needs without the fear of redundancies and compromising our service provision. The difficulty will arise this financial year as the COVID funding is no longer available and to come out of lockdown we will have to make substantial reductions in numbers of clients and phase them in over a long period of time resulting in a significant loss in income but no change to running costs and salary costs. This will have a significant impact on the finances of the charity. This in mind, we are anticipating a large deficit for next year and the year after which will come out of the charity's reserves.

While we are a Community Centre, St Albans is also a community itself. I would like to thank all those individuals who contribute toward its success; our staff, volunteers, our board and our many partners and those who fund us, the people who use our services and my family for the continued support I personally receive.

We are a critical piece of local infrastructure that continues to provide vital services to some of the most vulnerable people in the borough. This requires the coordinated effort of many people who remain determined to see us succeed and with their continued efforts and dedication long may we continue.

Older People Services

639

Home Visits to
the Elderly &
Vulnerable

4448

Welfare Calls made to
Elderly and Vulnerable

8521

Meals
Delivered

175

Food Parcels
Delivered

Junipers Preschool

93

Families Received
Welfare Phone Calls
Every 2 Weeks

87

Children received
online learning
experiences

27

Children received our
school readiness
information and
activities

20

Children received
our Covid capsule
booklets

Advice

£449,973.90

Achieved in Benefit Gains

218

Clients
Assisted

OLDER PEOPLE SERVICES



Elderberries Club

This year we adapted the Lunch club into an outmeals only service, delivering hot meals and fresh puddings straight to the doors of people unable to access hot food. We put all the relevant Government guidelines and COVID procedures into place to maintain everyone's health and wellbeing.

On the first week alone, we provided over 70 fresh, homemade meals to mostly shielding members of the community.

SMBC provided us with 5 taxi drivers to support our delivery efforts and they assisted us for the first 4 weeks on a voluntary basis. When the taxi drivers left us, our staff and volunteers delivered the dinners, ensuring the clients wellbeing, giving their families a piece of mind especially in cases where they were unable to

visit family personally. With good teamwork and a supportive group of volunteers we have worked continually, including over the Christmas period and Bank holidays, to ensure that no one was left without a meal or a food parcel.

This year we have sadly lost nine of our dear clients although we know in the current climate, this number could have been much higher, we will still miss them dearly.

The Lunch Club has moved with the times and has had new technology installed – the Graze system. Everything is now available at the touch of a button.

We have had volunteers from all over the community offering their services free of charge. We would like to say a big thank you to you all.

“ I love St Albans meals, I find them very tasty, they are wonderfully presented and I enjoy them very much. I am very thankful to St Albans for looking after me so well. I miss attending the centre and I can't wait for it to re-open and see every-
one ”

8521 meals
delivered

Day Opportunities

Following the pandemic and instruction to close the Day Care Service, at St Albans it was all hands on deck to ensure we keep contact with our clients to ensure they are safe and to reassure them that if they need anything to call us.

We made regular phone calls to all of our clients and this gave the opportunity to be on hand to support them further if they needed it. From the telephone calls we were aware that many of our clients were becoming isolated and feeling totally alone. As a response to this we were able to provide an Outreach Service and extend that service to the wider community.

Following extensive guidance and risk assessments, we commenced the service in October 2020. The service has 3 strands, an activities programme, a sitting service to give much needed respite to carers and a befriending service.

The Outreach Programme has been able to reach out to people who have not been able to leave their homes due to health problems or they have no family.



“ Outreach has linked me up with another person who is now my friend. We go out shopping and for a cuppa. ”

Our friendly staff plan their time around the needs of the individual, providing a very bespoke service to ensure we maximise the time spent with each person.

This service has proven to be successful to the degree that since the start of the service in October 2020 we have made a total of 639 home visits. We are anticipating continuing this service when the Day Care service is re-opened with funding provided by Awards for All.



COMMUNITY OFFER



The Community Offer project began in April 2020 and is available across Sandwell. St Albans is responsible for covering Smethwick with partners such as Murray Hall, Agewell, Crossroads and CIS responsible for the other towns.

The project was envisioned as a light touch support and signposting programme for anyone aged 18+ to gain information, advice and support as required. Referrals are made to the SPA (Single Point of Access) and then sent to the service based on the area in which they live.

At the beginning of the project, because there were many people who received letters from the government advising them to shield and not leave the house, the Community Navigators shopped for elderly people that could not use the internet to get shopping delivered. We collected food parcels and delivered them to people that were isolating having tested positive for COVID-19.. We also provided people with food vouchers to assist them when they couldn't afford to buy food due to furlough, loss of jobs, bills increasing etc.

During the first year, 489 people were referred into us. We have helped people to find suitable housing, apply for benefits and grants, get new boilers,

speak to bereavement counsellors, access packages of care and suitable aids and adaptations and much more.

We completed 135 home visits, conducted 682 information and advice sessions and 154 community support visits. Social isolation support was given 430 times, we referred 87 people for VCS, and 24 people to other services such as talking therapies.

In July 2020 we began to focus on offering volunteer opportunities at St Albans and the Dorothy Parkes Centre. To date we have 74 potential volunteers that have registered for the opportunities we have available. Of the 74 enquiries, 36 are cleared and placed to volunteer roles. These roles have included: delivering outmeals, grounds maintenance, working with young children in pre school and the Go Play Plotters forest school. Youth Club to support young people aged 11 -18, Community Allotment and a Bereavement Pilot Project.

Although the Community Offer service is supposed to be for a maximum of 12 weeks, some of the referrals we have received are complex and require ongoing support. We do not discharge anyone from the service until they no longer need of our support.

DIGI-COMM



Funding was secured from Reaching Communities in May 2020 to for a joint Digi-Comm project between St Albans and SCIPS. The aim of the project was to engage with the community to build their access, skills, and confidence in engaging in the digital agenda, thus improving their quality of life.

Due to the major disruption to the whole sector during the pandemic we were unable to deliver the project in the way we had originally planned. However, both organisations have continued to deliver services throughout lockdown and have been responding to an emerging and urgent need around digital access. We needed to be creative in how we were able to support our communities around digital access and build their confidence quickly and safely.

In May 2020 we developed a Zoom guide and piloted it with members of the community. We held regular zoom quizzes to enable people to practice the technology in a safe environment. We worked with Sandwell Council to facilitate a virtual task and finish group with residents around the new Ombudsman code of practice. We held 3 training/practice sessions with 8 residents to use Skype and held 3 virtual consultation meetings. We used the experience to produce a good practice guide for local au-

thority staff in planning and managing a virtual task and finish group.

In October we started to deliver training around the tablet loan scheme. All 30 tablets were allocated by December. We held 3 face to face sessions which were attended by 10 residents. Due to changes in national guidance we had to provide telephone support to 20 residents around basic use of the tablet. In addition to the basic training, we have provided sessions, via telephone or zoom, and individual support in using, setting up and trouble shooting the tablets.

We have support several community groups to hold meetings virtually, providing them with their first opportunity to meet together since lockdown. We have also supported a number of individuals to engage in council consultations and meetings digitally on Teams, Skype and Zoom. In February we started to work with a cohort of 5 Tenants and Resident Associations to support them with individual funding bids to the Council to purchase their own tablets. The funding totalling £9,543 was approved in March to purchase 24 tablets which will increase the capacity of these groups to access this technology permanently.





We have noticed a positive change in his behaviour since he has returned, and you have been working with him which makes me happy and makes mornings so much easier.



Preschool

St Albans preschool continues to care for and educate children aged 2 – 4 years that live in the local community. We cater for up to 40 children per session and have around 60 families on roll.

Here at St Albans, we continue to have a highly skilled staff team, including an Early Years Teacher and a long-standing Deputy Manager. We are able to offer extensive support for many children who have English as an additional language. Within the team we have practitioners who can communicate in Mirpuri, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, French, Latvian and Romanian as well as using some simple signing and visual prompts to communicate with our children and families.



Home Learning and welfare calls

During the covid-19 pandemic, we needed to temporarily close our preschool doors to the children. To maintain relationships with the children and families, we had to find a new way to

continually provide a service, supporting the parents during lockdown, helping the children continue to progress and ensuring the safeguarding and welfare of all our families. This involved creating a bigger online presence through our online learning journey's that encouraged parents to engage and provide them with a variety of fun and stimulating activities that they could be doing with their children. A small number of families did not have access to the internet so they were provided with a paper-based home learning pack, containing information for parents on how they could support their children to become 'school ready'.

Weekly welfare calls to our families were also provided and for some families, this was a welcome break from the isolation that lockdown created. Parents were sharing their struggles and seeking advice and encouragement on how to tackle several difficulties such as with toileting, routines, and frustrations over working from home. This prompted us as a Preschool team to carry out some door-stop visits so that the children were provided with familiar faces and was able to continue the relationships they had developed with their key workers. One of the biggest difficulties for most of our families was the prospect of returning to normal after restrictions had been lifted. This is where we sent out a

'covid capsule' book so we could gain more of an understanding of what our children and families had been experiencing and their worries and fears of returning to Preschool, allowing us to address those individually and collectively with the children and parents. This part of our practice has been recognised by Sandwell Early Years Team and written in a book authored by Cathy Nutbrown which is due to be published the end of this year. The Covid-19 risk assessment meant that we needed to re-organise our preschool routine and ensure that we had two groups of children that arrived at a staggered start and finish time. This new routine had a big impact on both the children and staff and allowed us more opportunities to spend more quality time with the children, helped the children build more purposeful relationships with each other and allowed for those children who were a bit quieter and more reserved to develop their confidence and self-esteem by being in a smaller group. The routine of the preschool day was able to run more smoothly. Parent's meetings have been held via telephone calls and virtual zoom meetings as well as welcome meetings for all our new starters, which has seen more parents taking up these opportunities. A virtual tour was also created to send to parents who were interested in registering their child.



Making improvements

During this time whilst the Preschool was closed to the children, the preschool staff were deployed in other departments within the centre, helping deliver out meals and working alongside the community offer.

Staff also decorated throughout the centre which included painting, varnishing, tidying, and creating a large planter for our growing area.

The Preschool office has been redecorated and had new carpet and blinds fitted and some new furniture to help create a better storage solution for all the resources.

The Blossom Room has also been redecorated making it a much brighter room.

We have also had new flooring on the stairs and within the main hall.

The children have been learning all about growth and decay as well as exploring the wildlife that we are attracting to the garden such as butterflies, lady birds, worms, water snails and exploring the life cycles of tadpoles and frogs in our pond.

“ He has loved the activities that you have put on to tapestry. Thank you. He is so excited to be coming back and I know he cannot wait as he has missed you all. I feel very confident with how the preschool will be run in September. ”



CARING IN A CRISIS

£449,973.90

Achieved in benefit gains for the people assisted.

Attendance Allowance	£47,717.80
Carers Allowance	£17,312.00
Child Disability Living Allowance	£8,590.00
Employment and Support Allowance	£40,635.40
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Relief	£28,603.64
Personal Independent Payments	£146,848.16
Pension Credit	£34,190.70
Universal Credit	£126,439.30
Total	£449,973.90

Due to Covid 19 restrictions this year Caring in a Crisis has had to adapt and deliver it's services in different ways. Staff have worked from home for the large part of 2020/2021 which has presented challenges in dealing with clients. We have continued to see positive outcomes for many clients who were assisted during the latest the lock-down. Advice has been provided largely by telephone contact. Forms have been completed in a similar way. This is common with all advice providers across the country. We have represented cases at tribunal hearings which have also taken place virtually with the Judge, medical member and disability member by telephone. without a hearing.

Additionally, the DWP has improved access for vulnerable people to allow them to make Universal Credit claims by phone rather than the go through the default method of having to make a claim on-line.

All appeals are planning to be completely digital by the end of this year, starting with ESA, PIP and UC. This includes all digital bundles, as this makes a 3-week turnaround time into

a 10-minute job.

This year we have managed to achieve benefit gains of £449,973.90 for the people we have assisted. Issues dealt with from the individual benefit claims including representation, to assisting with housing issues, council tax arrears, dealing with debt collection agencies used by the council and Warm Home discounts.

Education	School Application	1
Housing	Housing Applications/Registration	5
	Moves Transfer	3
Debt	Arrears	6
	Utility Bills	4
Welfare Rights	Applying for Benefits	177
	Reconsideration	15
	Appeals	7
Social Care	Aides and Adaptations	2
		218

BUILDING PURCHASE AND RENOVATION

When the lockdown was announced everyone at St Albans was very sad, staff and clients alike.

We had managed to secure £245,000.00 in funding from Power the Change, Garfield Weston Foundation, Bernard Sunley Foundation and Evesons Charitable Trust and were in the process of purchasing the building that we had occupied for 36 years.



Whilst we continued to deliver crucial front-line services, we planned the much needed external work on the building and improvement plans to upgrade the building aesthetically internally. Scaffolding was erected, and the extensive work began. A large amount of brick work was re-pointed and 90% of the flat roofs around the building replaced. Staff painted external walls, shutters and fencing making the outside of the building look inviting. Internally, staff worked hard painting some of the furniture and walls.

Contractors carried out the main decoration of the building. We had a complete new main kitchen and safety flooring in our dining room. New



easy chairs for our older clients to relax in, and new tables and chairs to eat their meals on.

Wooden floors were stripped and varnished and blinds fitted, Old ceilings were replaced and lighting upgraded so all offices have LED energy and cost-effective lighting.

Computers were replaced and laptops purchased to support the changes in service delivery, we also upgraded our IT system to Office 365.

We have increased our CCTV cameras to ensure the safety of our staff and clients. and improved the access to the centre by adding additional ramps.

We have also been lucky to have funding to purchase a new Minibus named in honour of one of the founders of the Charity, Pat Ryan.



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Chief Executive Officer:
Tonia Flannagan

Directors:
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G Darby
B D Bright
R Bruce
D R Gould

Co-opted member: S Sohal

Special thanks for the continued support of our funders



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Providing a service for those in need



And a further thanks to those involved in the building purchase

The **Eveson**
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