

## Cheering Volunteering Newsletter – June 2021



**Volunteers Week takes place 1-7 June every year. It's a chance to recognise the fantastic contribution volunteers make to our local communities.**

**Volunteers' Week 2021 is a time to say thank you. It goes without saying that volunteers have played a key role in the pandemic response. During an exceptionally difficult year, people from all walks of life around Central Bedfordshire have taken the time to volunteer and make a huge difference to their communities, just as they do every year.**

**This is a time for us to come together and thank all volunteers for their invaluable contribution. Here are just a few of the many amazing volunteer groups that have offered significant help to our local communities.**

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## Men in Sheds

Dunstable Men in Sheds, based at Meadway Allotments in Dunstable, has re-opened following the lifting of some COVID-19 restrictions on 17 May and can't wait to get going on completing unfinished projects for local communities, and starting the Shed Refurbishment Project which has been part funded via the Community Assets Grant Scheme.

First on the agenda is finishing a number of community projects that were delayed by the last lockdown, including five collapsible tepees for Dunstable Town Council, two reading breakouts for Beecroft School and a playground tuckshop for Watling Lower School.

During the last few months, the Men have been hard at work getting ready to re-open, and to start the delayed refurbishment of the building and reorganisation of the workshop area. These activities have included transferring tools, equipment and sale items into a temporary storage unit in Houghton Regis. To make efficient use of the available storage area, the men have installed racking with four shelf levels.

A new concrete work area at the rear of the Shed has been done free of charge, as a 'Community Project' by the construction company Ringway Jacobs ( see below)

The Men have also designed an external steel-clad Timber Store to free up floor space and create a safer and flexible operational environment in the workshop.

The Dunstable Men in Sheds Trustees and members say: "Please come along and make new friends! Put your practical skills to good use; or try something new, learn new skills, and support our local communities."



## Ringway Jacobs volunteers...

Ringway Jacobs give each of their staff two volunteering days to use each year and look to find opportunities with local charities where we can utilize these days to give something back to the community we work in. One of these opportunities was with Dunstable Men in Sheds. A local charity which is part of a large UK network of over 600 sheds in various communities.

### What was needed?

You can see the shed in the below picture, the charity gained permission to lay a concrete hard standing in the grassed area at the rear of the building, which will be used as an outside working area. Ringway Jacobs were able to provide the expertise, labor and machinery, but asked for help from their supply chain for the materials. Dean Chandler from North Herts Surfacing responded almost immediately and so the project was planned in and delivered on 21/05/21. The three Leads for the charity that were there on the day were really happy with the team and the work they did on the day. They are now able to carry on with the next stages of their development project.

### The Day in Pictures



The Dunstable Men in Sheds is located on the allotments in Meadway, entrance is close to the speed camera. Postcode LU6 3JU.

New Members are always welcome to come over and meet fellow 'Shedders' for an introductory chat and a cuppa. Find out more here: <https://dunstablemeninsheds.org.uk>

'Team Paintbrush' Refurbishing the children's play area structures at Studham Primary School. L to R: Roger: Martin, Mike: Nigel: Richard W: Bernhard: Tony K.

### A note from Martin Young Trustee & Chairman:

*"On behalf of the Trustees and the Shed members, I thank Russell Montague (Ringway Jacobs), and Dean Chandler (North Herts Surfacing) for being the catalysts in starting our Shed Refurbishment Project. The project is aimed at creating a facility that shall provide a safely controlled social and recreational environment in which existing and future members can participate in both their own hobbies, and the community projects we undertake. It all started about 18 months ago when I saw three RJ workmen dropping a kerb in front of house in West Street. Little did I realise, that what I asked the lads would result in a job well done. It has been a real pleasure to have been given such generous help from Ringway Jacobs, especially Francis, Joe, Mike and Robert whose good humour made the day very enjoyable. Professionals to the man!"*





## Central Bedfordshire Community Champions

In August 2020 Central Bedfordshire Council brought together a network of Community Champions to help the Public Health Communications campaign with the amplification of vital public health messages amongst family, friends, and social networks across Central Bedfordshire.

In the first hour of the webform going live, 40 local residents had registered to be a Community Champion. By February 2021 we had engaged 223 of our residents, community and faith groups and local businesses and our own staff as Community Champions and estimate the Champions have a potential 'reach' of a further 26,000 contacts.

We hold regular Drop-in sessions, with regular updates by colleagues from Central Bedfordshire Council, Public Health, the Clinical Commissioning Group and GP's which attract an average attendance of 25 Champions per session, they are an important platform and opportunity for the Champions to raise issues, ask questions and provide feedback on what is and isn't working and where more information is required, the feedback helps to inform future messaging.

Since establishing the network in August 2020, 78 newsletter emails have been sent, and the average number of shared views per email is 285.

The Community Champions have played a fundamental and crucial role in the response to the pandemic and have been amazing at dedicating their time to support their local communities.

[Register here to become a Champion.](#)



## Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (YHWCB)

YHWCB consists of a group of young people who are passionate about the health, wellbeing and resilience of the children and young people in their local community. They meet regularly in Central Bedfordshire to develop ideas and projects that can benefit young people of all ages. Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire consists of 20-25 young volunteers ranging from 14- 19 years old, who meet regularly once a month. Currently on zoom but hoping to meet face to face soon! They aim to be a voice, not an echo, and have made a difference to health and social care services by amplifying the voices of young people.



They have still remained very active during the pandemic working on projects such as the pen pal scheme. The volunteers exchanged letters with residents of care homes, providing a much-needed connection for both young and older people in the local community. This was a well thought out project and proved to be a positive experience for all involved. Volunteers and residents both benefitted from the interaction and the scheme has recently been expanded to include more isolated residents in the local community.

Other projects include The Ready Trial, A Randomised controlled trial of Energetic Activity for Depression in Young people. Several Young Healthwatch volunteers are involved in a randomised controlled trial (RCT), supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), to determine whether exercise is an effective treatment for young people with depression or low mood. The aim of the study is to find out if physical activity is an effective treatment approach for young people with depression and if the intensity level makes a difference.

Projects coming up include 'Don't Stop the Beat' where the young volunteers will be trained by British Heart Foundation (BHF) in life saving CPR training. They will then go on and train other young people in Central Bedfordshire in this vital skill. This will enable young people to be educated in delivering first aid, which will allow them to feel more confident in life threatening situations and build resilience levels as they mature into young adults as they venture off to new beginnings. It could potentially save someone's life.



If you are aged between 13-25 and if you are interested in learning more about Young Healthwatch then please get in touch with Eleanor Ryles, [eleanor.ryles@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk](mailto:eleanor.ryles@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk), 07935 504441 (call, text or what's app).



## The Heart of Marston

Katrina Widdicks decided to have a fundraising year for the village school where she lives in Marston Moretaine, she called it The Heart of Marston.

Katrina set about raising an amazing £7,500 to provide a therapy space at Marston VC lower school, this included training 2 staff. Katrina achieved this by organising different events including a non-uniform fundraiser, sponsored events, an online concert, and a raffle. She also received a grant from the Ward Councillor Grant Scheme and The Forest of Marston Vale Community Fund. Katrina carried on during the pandemic and with the support of the school, made up 450 individual care packages for families with young children within the village over a 6-month period. Katrina made playdough and other creative materials herself to keep the costs down so she could provide more packages.



The Heart of Marston has continued to support children's mental and emotional health. She's raised another £5,700 for the school towards the cost of an outside classroom and another £2,000 was raised to create a therapy garden at the Forest End site of the school. Other projects achieved this year included funding for a large fish tank and fish, and Katrina is now in the process of raising money for musical instruments to use in music therapy at both sites.

You can also keep up to date on fundraising activities by following The Heart of Marston on [Facebook](#).

Katrina also received the Central Bedfordshire Council Cheering Volunteering, Captain Sir Tom Moore Award for Outstanding Contribution in 2020.



## Potton Food Garden & The Veg Box Donation Scheme

Potton Food Garden is an extension to the great work of Potton residents caring for each other during lockdown. A piece of land has been secured and work has begun to produce an organic no dig community allotment. The idea is to cultivate nutritious food to share among members and with Potton residents. The food garden will help people learn about the no dig system whilst also enjoying the health and wellbeing benefits of growing with and for others. We also wish to encourage groups to come and grow together including new mums, retired residents, people living with dementia/loneliness/mental stress, and visiting school parties. We also welcome anyone completely new to gardening and just wants to learn how to grow produce and doesn't know where to start. We are currently looking for new gardeners to join us at the garden and if you would like to do so please make contact:



Sharon Mey or Tracey Wye - [pottonfoodgarden@gmail.com](mailto:pottonfoodgarden@gmail.com) or find out more at [www.facebook.com/pottonfoodgarden](http://www.facebook.com/pottonfoodgarden)

The veg box donation scheme opened in June 2020 to provide fresh produce to families living in Biggleswade and Potton who cannot always access food due to lack of resources. Collections are made at a local allotment and a church carpark, with donations from allotment, home and community growers, farmers, shops, local residents, schools, and vegetable distributors. With increasing donations, the group have been able to increase the deliveries, with around 11-12 households supported each week across the two towns.



There are currently five committed volunteers helping with the deliveries in Pottton and four in Biggleswade, on a rota basis, but this scheme is looking for more help. If you are interested please visit the website at [www.vbds.org.uk](http://www.vbds.org.uk) for more information, or contact Sharon Mey at [hello@vbds.org.uk](mailto:hello@vbds.org.uk).



## Rural Revolution

This group consists of 30 volunteers and is an environmental community group focussing on cleaning up, preserving, and promoting our beautiful Central Bedfordshire countryside.

The group also grow and distribute free wildlife friendly plants to local community encouraging a cleaner, greener way of living.

Rural revolution is about connecting people together in a community and connecting the community to the joys of the local countryside.

Rural Revolution believes in making changes through positive actions and regularly engages people in community litter picks to growing plants for locals and schools.



Upcoming projects include a monthly magazine, guided walks and outside yoga and wellbeing classes.

For further details please see is [www.rural-revolution.co.uk](http://www.rural-revolution.co.uk)



## Home-Start Central Bedfordshire

Provides **vital support services to families with young children** in Central Bedfordshire as well as Luton.

Since 1984 our charity has been helping local young children and their families struggling to cope with:

- Domestic violence and abuse
- Poverty, financial issues and unsafe environments
- Mental ill health
- Bereavement
- Hunger, poor nutrition, neglect
- ...and more



Our crucial support is often given through our volunteer home visiting service. In addition, we run regular support and prevention groups for women suffering from mental ill health and [domestic violence or abuse](#). We always aim to help families with young children get through hardship and back on their feet; providing support until they no longer need us. As a result, Home-Start benefits the entire community through our child and family support services. Find out more about our current projects in our [charity news blog](#).

There are many reasons why local parents choose us for volunteering in Bedfordshire:

- Volunteering is a rewarding experience – you'll be [directly helping children](#) and their families
- Our volunteers learn new skills, gain experience and qualifications – voluntary work is valuable for your CV, and for many can be a stepping stone toward a career in a relevant field
- Using your own past experiences you can directly help others and make a difference – we believe in the value of every volunteer's unique parenting experience



- Help give young children and babies the best possible start in life
- Enjoy being part of a team and making new friends – you will become a valued part of our volunteer team and charity
- Volunteering is an interesting and enjoyable way to spend just a few hours of your free time helping each week

Interested in volunteering here?

<https://www.home-startcentralbeds.org.uk/volunteering-in-bedfordshire/>



## Harlington Litter Pickers and Pie Club

The group was founded by Andrew Ashby and has grown from members of his family, to friends and local residents with the common goal of picking up litter in their local village of Harlington. Much to our delight the group name drew inspiration from the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society due to the likeness of people coming together with fun and community spirit at their heart.

Although based around local litter picking the group have key aspirations on how they can start to help spread the message and make a difference within the local community. Here are some of the initiatives they are working on:

**Adopt-a-street** -The group very much believe that it can often be the acts of one individual multiplied by many that can help to make the most difference. They have come up with their adopt-a-street campaign and they are encouraging local residents or groups to go on their website and adopt a street that they will keep clear of litter and plastic.

**Getting schools involved** - The litter pickers and pie club have also got local schools involved with poster painting competitions focusing on litter and how the issue can be addressed. The posters have been attached to local litter bins to help demonstrate the children' support.

**Inspiring others** -The group has already expanded from Harlington, to Toddington and Sundon and they are encouraging others to get on board. They hope that as the initiative grows, so will, the environmental quality of our local towns and villages.

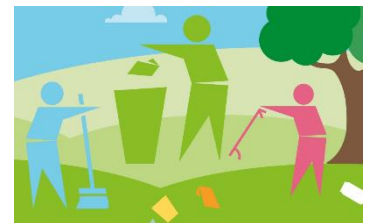


## Great British Spring Clean 2021

The Great British Spring Clean takes place between 28 May and 13 June this year. If you are interested in joining a litter pick we recommend contacting your local [Town or Parish Council](#) to discuss a litter picking event.

We will be asking for photos of litter picking events to celebrate another example of community action and volunteer effort.

For further information please contact [Community Engagement Team](#) or the Environmental Services team [Env.Services@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Env.Services@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)



## Communities First - Volunteering Opportunities

Please check out the social medial links below. Communities First are leading on the recruitment and support for volunteers at the vaccination centres and we have been asked this week to help promote their current recruitment campaign, volunteers are needed in Central Bedfordshire, Bedford , Luton and Herts.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/2181794172036437/photos/a.2233420323540488/2910875489128298>

And Twitter: <https://twitter.com/1stCommunities/status/1397905439216574465>

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## Volunteering Opportunities

**Community Voluntary Service** host and support volunteers and voluntary organisations in Central Bedfordshire. You can register, search and apply for volunteering opportunities, putting you directly in touch with the organisation. The Volunteer Centres can offer advice on the different volunteering opportunities that are currently available and may be of interest to you.

To find out more, and look into local volunteering opportunities, visit their websites: [Community and Voluntary Service](#)



Community  
Voluntary Service  
Strengthening local social action

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## Share your stories and photos

Every day we are hearing more and more stories of truly wonderful acts of kindness and goodwill gestures across our communities from individuals, groups or organisations. Tell us who your heroes are and share your stories with us so we can share with others - let's spread the positivity!

Contact the [Community Engagement Team](#) or share stories with us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#)



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## Coming soon.....

- Stories from the Great British Spring Clean
- Volunteering with Central Bedfordshire Council