

TITLE SLIDE

Welcome, introduce myself.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION SLIDE

Voluntary Action Epping Forest or VAEF as you may know us was established in 1993 and has always been based in Homefield House just across the car park from the District Council. We are the umbrella organisation for the District which basically means we provide advice, information and development support services to voluntary and community groups and volunteers in Epping Forest.

We also operate a number of services that directly meet identified need within the community.

CORE SERVICES SLIDE

Our practical support includes funding advice which can be running searches for different funds available, for example, if you are looking for funding towards a minibus who should you apply to, or assisting with funding applications to funders including the Big Lottery, Essex Community Foundation and the District Council. Last year groups supported by VAEF with funding advice drew in nearly £120,000.

Other practical support ranges from providing advice on developing and operating a charitable organisation to producing monthly newsletters and weekly e-mail bulletins. VAEF membership groups benefit from the regular information, but it is also forwarded to all EFDC Councillors, appropriate Officers and other local stakeholders such as the West Essex Clinical Commissioning group, parish and town councils.

VAEF holds regular Voluntary Sector Forums for local groups and stakeholders. Recent events have included sessions on Funding and Good Practice in Volunteering. Our next event is a speed dating event for local Councillors and local Voluntary and Community Groups. Before your thoughts go into overtime, I can perhaps just set your minds at rest by sharing that the event is a networking event based on the speed dating idea of spending two minutes explaining to other participants what your role in the community is. We are hoping for a good turn out and feel this will be a great opportunity for local councillors to find out what's available in the community which they can then to pass on to their ward residents should the need occur. It would be great if any of you are available on 19th November to come along. We are also hoping for a good turn out from VAEF's membership groups which range from scout groups, older peoples support, community development, children's services to environmental groups.

Over the years I have heard many people from all walks of life say that the country would stop without the assistance of volunteers, and we do not need to look very far around us to know that this is certainly true. Or we could look at some of the national issues currently happening all over the world to know that this is true. Just last week all Council for Voluntary Services and Volunteer Centres in Essex, were contacted by Essex County Council to enquire if we had started to consider what support the voluntary sector could offer to the refugees soon to be entering our country. All around there does seem to be a big requirement for more and more volunteers at this time, particularly in the health and social care field as many statutory bodies have huge budget deficits so therefore look to volunteers to enhance their services in the community. Although I think we have to be careful not to expect volunteers to pick up the work of paid workers, perhaps in personal care for example, volunteers can certainly assist in many roles in the intervention and prevention area which I will expand on later.

Voluntary Action operates the Volunteer Centre Epping Forest which is funded from our core EFDC annual grant. The Centre provides a brokerage service to volunteers and voluntary groups. Individual volunteers are matched with local charities to accommodate their skills, experience and interests. Currently we have 165 opportunities available which range from the more traditional such as administration or driving to the more quirky such as tractor driving or Picasso painting for children. The Centre also offers advice on good practice in volunteering, such as ensuring your budget allows volunteers to be compensated for their travel. Volunteering is extremely beneficial to individuals providing an opportunity to gain new skills and confidence which can quite often move people along the pathway into paid employment. In addition there is a significant financial contribution to the District as if for example 100 volunteers recruited via our Centre work on average three hours per week, for 44 weeks a year using the national minimum wage of £6.70 per hour, this equates to over £88,000 worth of work given back to the Epping Forest community per year. But I would add that these are very conservative figures as many volunteer roles, such as Treasurers, Counsellors, Fundraisers and Legal Advisors would merit more than the minimum wage per hour so these figures show the minimum reward to the community.

At VAEF we recognise the value that everybody is able to make to society and it is for this reason we provide a supported volunteering learning disability project. This service as the name suggested is focussed on supporting people with a learning disability into volunteering. We find that people with a learning disability usually enjoy volunteering and benefit more from volunteering in group sessions so currently we have a number of these on offer such as environmental work at the Royal Gunpowder Mills, an allotment project at Parsonage Court Sheltered Housing, a Singing Group which provides entertainment at various establishments in the District and a Talk and Sort mailing and packing service currently packing Christmas boxes for Samaritans Purse.

Time banking is another offshoot of Volunteer Centre Epping Forest. The project enables people to make a difference in their community and can best be described as an exchange of hours amongst either individuals or organisations. So for example I may be great with IT and technology so can assist my elderly neighbour with helping her to skype her grandchildren in Australia and in return my neighbour or somebody else in the Time bank scheme may be able to help me to cook some cakes for my children's school summer fete. We think Time banking is a great project with lots of potential for the future and is really a modern name for the old fashioned idea of everybody helping their neighbours or each other where they can. With the help of Chris Overend we are also in the process of trying to promote Time banking within EFDC, thus encouraging members of staff to sign up to the Time banking website. We would also be delighted to have you as Councillors as members, although I suspect you are all giving quite a few voluntary hours as it is.

I have so far highlighted some of the services that VAEF's core grant covers, although I should add that our learning disability project and Time banking are funded by Essex County Council and are direct services.

In addition VAEF's core grant and other support given by the District Council enables us to look at needs and gaps in the District and pursue other funding to develop appropriate direct services for members of the community.

DIRECT SERVICES SLIDE

As you may already know Epping Forest has a larger than average older population which is why many of our projects are focused on assisting this generation. We also find that because parts of our

district are rural with poor transport that many of our older generation are isolated and sometimes lonely.

VAEF's Befriending project offers weekly activity clubs in North Weald, Loughton and Buckhurst Hill and a one to one visiting service for those unable to access the clubs. On a weekly basis at the clubs between 45 and 60 service users benefit although sometimes the clubs are at full capacity of either 20 or 25 as some people are attending more than one club. This project is funded by the Big Lottery, but is supported by the District Council as they provide the project the use of Leonard Davis House and Jubilee Court for two of the clubs. Clients of this service additionally benefit from the use of the VAEF minibus which was kindly fundraised for by the previous Chairman of EFDC as part of his Chairman's Charity year. Quite often we find that the clubs are the only time the client gets out in the week to have fun and mix with other people their own age. Loneliness can affect us all at times, but if it is continual it can lead to both mental and physical illnesses.

The Handyman project funded by EFDC provides a service to older or disabled tenants of EFDC and last year assisted over three hundred residents. The Handyman was able to support clients to live independently and safely in their own homes by undertaking a wide range of tasks, including replacing light bulbs and tubes, assembling flat pack furniture, replacing and fixing toilet seats and fitting and testing smoke alarms and batteries to name a few. Many of the tasks completed have a falls prevention benefit along with other more obvious benefits.

Overall the project is providing excellent value for money as it has also worked in partnership with the EFDC Safer Communities' team to assist with the installation of CCTV and other security equipment helping to overcome anti social behaviour in the local community which often effects older people to a higher degree.

VAEF's Home safety project funded by the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group has assisted with preventing falls in the home by fitting handrails, stair rails and generally providing equipment in the home to prevent slips and trips. In practical terms, fitting one hand rail in somebody's home could prevent that person having a fall and needing a hip replacement which will cost the NHS from £12,000 upwards. This service also receives an element of funding from EFDC's Safer Communities Partnership which allows us to support vulnerable people such as older people who require extra security in their home after a burglary or victims of domestic abuse again requiring extra door or window locks for example, or in some more extreme cases fire proof letter boxes.

Older and disabled residents in the District benefitted from receiving a total of 3,260 gardening hours from VAEF's paid gardeners and volunteers. Apart from the obvious delight of having their garden tidied, residents said they felt much safer in their home as an unkempt garden can often indicate a property is occupied by a vulnerable person, thus enticing burglary.

Our most recently launched service is a home visiting advice and information project which as the name suggests supports vulnerable people of all ages with benefits forms in their own homes. So far the Coordinator has been very busy assisting clients with attendance allowances, disability living allowance and personal independent payments. We receive referrals from CARE at EFDC and also EFDC Housing so have also supported individuals with council tax and housing benefits.

PARNERSHIP WORKING SLIDE

VAEF plays a crucial role in a number of local strategic partnerships, including the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Partnership. A place at these Boards enables VAEF to bring forward the views of the voluntary sector on relevant issues and also promote

topical matters emerging from the Partnerships. A particularly strong relationship is held with the Community Safety Partnership in that VAEF is funded to cover some security work in the District on their behalf but also provides administration to the CSP.

Strong partnership relationships have always been held with the various different organisations that have provided health services in the District. Over the years many of our direct services have been developed in partnership with health to support early intervention and prevention measures for members of the community. A great example of this is VAEF's falls prevention services which plays a big role in either keeping people out of hospital in the first instance or prevents them having another fall in the home further to discharge from hospital.

VAEF is currently working in partnership with the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, Epping Forest District Council, Essex County Council and a number of other key agencies on the Community Mobilisation Agenda. In the current economic climate community mobilisation is becoming increasingly important when looking at both voluntary and public landscapes. Briefly, Community Mobilisation is about providing support to local people to be empowered and equipped to do more for themselves. This can include being more informed about formal volunteering roles, increasing the number of people taking on volunteering roles, increasing the awareness of the diversity of volunteering and supporting people to have positive volunteering experiences or it can mean helping more volunteer led groups to develop in response to needs within the communities. It is about encouraging neighbourliness, skills sharing and community led solutions. I thought it would be helpful to share this with you as it highlights that VAEF and indeed the groups we are funded to support have a key role to play in strengthening and supporting communities. Our Volunteer Centre is experienced in working with volunteers and understands the importance of good volunteer management. Often VAEF and the local voluntary and community sector is the first to understand the needs of different communities whether that be geographic communities or communities of people who share a common interest or need.

Lastly on partnerships I would add that VAEF by the nature of the services it provides is constantly working in partnership with many different local charities and has just recruited Rachel Poulter from the Epping Forest CAB to our Board of Trustees as we feel there is synergy in what we do and we both wish to develop a stronger organisational working relationship.

FUTURE PLANS SLIDE

VAEF was recently fortunate to secure Big Lottery vouchers to enable us to work with an excellent consultant to develop the first draft of a new three year strategic plan. The plan is both focussed on the development of our current services and a number of new areas of work to explore. A priority for VAEF in the future is to engage with local businesses, how they can support VAEF and the local sector and this is definitely not just about money and in return what can we do for them. We will also be researching the area of remote volunteering; quite often volunteering can be delivered remotely, a telephone call every day or so does not even involve leaving the house, but can make all the difference to an elderly isolated person. Another priority area is to expand our learning disabilities volunteering project to enable VAEF to also assist people with other support needs such as a mental health issue into volunteering. We are looking to develop a Big Lottery Reaching Communities bid to cover this area of work but of course there are no guaranties. Our last area of work for development is communication, so we will be looking at improving monitoring, developing an impact assessment tool and revising our communications strategy. The overall aim is to attract more groups into membership of VAEF to enable us to continually assist with building the capacity of the local sector.

POTENTIAL PROJECTS SLIDE

Every organisation no doubt has a wish list and on VAEF's wish list is a Resource Building/Community Hub. This would definitely pay lots of dividends longer term as it has in not too distant area's in the County. Just the other side of West Essex for example there is now the thriving Uttlesford Community Hub which is home to the local CAB, West Essex Mind, the Stroke Association, to name a few. In fact this building used to be the old high Street police station. As said other charities and community services could be sited in the Hub to offer more of a one stop shop for visitors, relationships of groups in the building would strengthen and opportunities to work together and expand/develop services would occur. It may also help to sustain some of our services as we could possibly rent rooms to other sectors, provide a drop in café, offer training, etc.

Even the use of an unoccupied shop for short periods of time in the year would be beneficial to help us recruit more volunteers and promote local services.

So that's not to say we are not extremely grateful for the use of Homefield House and other support offered by the Council, but I just thought I would give you some food for thought!

We recognise that these are very challenging times indeed with budgets for all sectors being squeezed to the limit. We have all seen the horror stories of health budgets with huge million or is it billion pound deficits and clearly there is not one answer to solve this but certainly one of their answers is more prevention and use of the voluntary sector, which I might add here is not for free. At VAEF and for the charities we support it is no different, times are hard and there is great competition for any pot of funding available. We will definitely not be pulling down the hatches though as we see our role as even more vital in our District at this time and we want to expand our services rather than decrease in size which I hope you will agree is a positive outlook at this very difficult period for communities in this time.