

# COMMUNITY CONNECTOR / COMMUNITY RESILIENCE WEST WIGHT REPORT

November 2023 -  
October 2024



Written By  
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# BACKGROUND

I work as the West Wight Community Connector, dedicated to building stronger, more resilient communities. I assist individuals in overcoming loneliness, engaging in local activities, and accessing support services. My role involves connecting people to events, linking them with both formal and informal support, and helping them launch their own community initiatives—all aimed at strengthening our bonds.

Beyond individual support, I collaborate with local organisations to create impactful networks across the community. I meet people at the West Wight Sports and Community Centre, out in neighbourhoods, or even in people's homes. My assistance is open to all ages, helping everyone feel part of a vibrant, connected, and resilient community.

# FUNDING

The work I undertake as Community Connector role is made possible by Community Action Isle of Wight's Community Resilience Project funded via the National Lottery Community Fund, plus funding from the Living Well and Early Help Service and Totland Parish Council.



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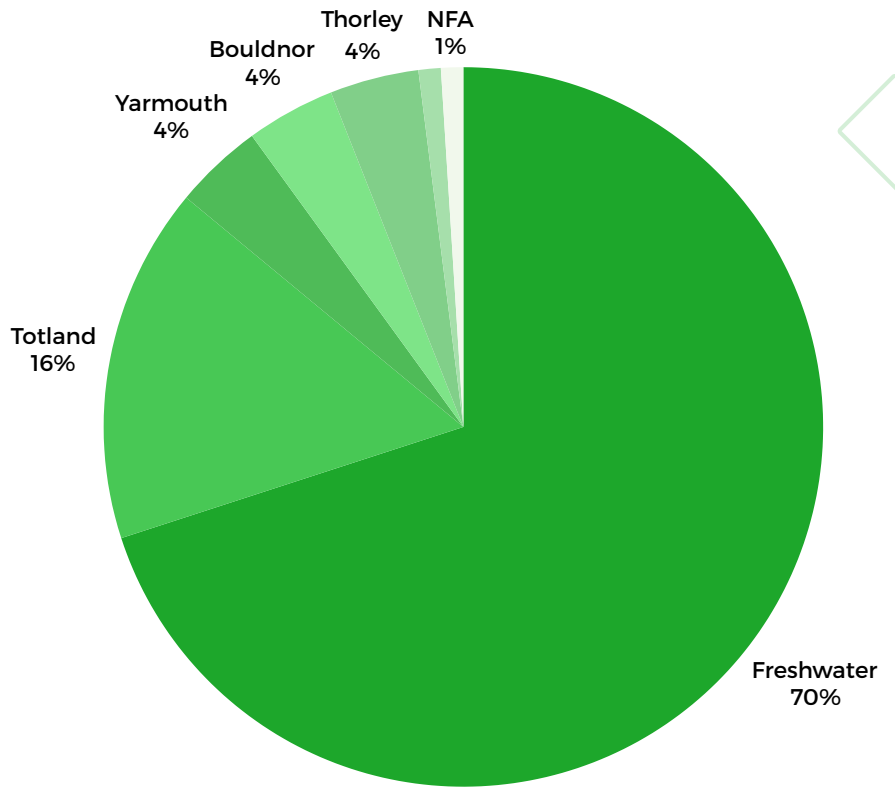


# ONE TO ONE STATISTICS

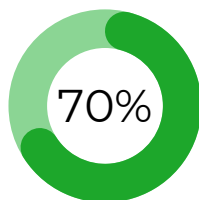
Between November 2023 and October 2024, I've worked alongside 140 individuals from our local community. This past year has brought new challenges, with rising living costs impacting more people than ever. I've seen a growing number of community members reaching out for help with benefit applications, reflecting the real, pressing need for support. Together, we're navigating these tough times and the associated mental health impact these issues bring and ensuring that everyone has access to the assistance they deserve.

Areas served:

**FRESHWATER**  
**YARMOUTH**  
**TOTLAND**  
**SHALFLEET**



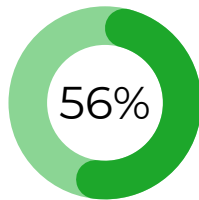
## Areas



**Freshwater**

**Freshwater** leads in referrals, accounting for **70%** of all introductions—unsurprising given its larger population and areas of deprivation in West Wight. Referrals from Bouldnor and Thorley have also increased over the past year.

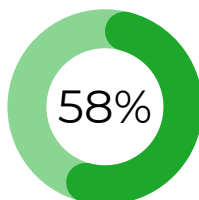
## Age Range



**55-84**

I've worked with clients aged 22 to 94, plus families with young children. Over the past year, **56%** of one-to-one sessions were with clients aged **55-84**, showing high demand for support among older adults consistent with local demographics.

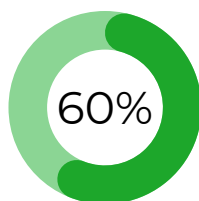
## Need



**Finance**

This year, there has been a rise in individuals seeking support for financial issues, with **58%** identifying this as a key area of need. Isolation and mental health concerns continue to be significant factors driving people to seek support.

## Gender



**Female**

For the first time in five years, the gender balance of the people approaching for support has shifted from previously being evenly split. This year, **60%** of all cases have been **women**, with more females seeking advice and support.



*"I can't express how much of a relief this extra income is, and it came through so quickly! I honestly don't know how we would have managed without it. Thank you so much for your help!"*

JD, West Wight client

## INCOME MAXIMISATION

This year, I have supported 140 individuals, helping 30 successfully apply for additional benefit income. My work has included guiding residents through challenging transitions, such as moving from legacy benefits to Universal Credit, and assisting those affected by health issues in securing vital support through Personal Independence Payment or Attendance Allowance.

### TOTAL INCOME GENERATION

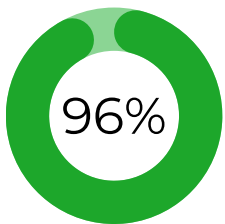
**£187,678**

Average £6200 per client.

## SUPPORT

In late 2023, Glanvilles Damant solicitors made their return to the Our Place Tuesday sessions, bringing vital legal support to the community. Early in 2024, we also began partnering with Community Action's Community Law Centre, expanding the help available to residents facing financial and legal challenges. With the rising cost of living taking its toll, both organisations have seen a growing number of local residents seeking advice and assistance to navigate these difficult times.

### Success rate



The support I've provided to local residents in applying for benefits has resulted in a strong success rate of 96%. This is largely due to my open and transparent approach, where I clearly explain the application process, set realistic expectations, and carefully assess eligibility criteria to ensure the best possible outcomes.

### Context:

**The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has been moving most families from tax credits and housing benefit to Universal Credit within 2024.**



## CASES



## EDWARD'S STORY

Since 2015, I have worked with Edward, who has long-standing addiction issues and severe anxiety that kept him confined to his home. Over the past year, his confidence has grown significantly—he's entered a relationship, attended drop-in sessions, and stayed for extended periods without needing to leave due to anxiety. His proudest achievement was visiting an elderly relative, navigating public transport, including the ferry, London Underground, and multiple train connections.

"I never thought I'd get to see my aunt again, and I probably wouldn't if you hadn't helped me," he said. While Edward continues to face addiction challenges, our long-term work has strengthened his resilience and supported him in accessing detox this year.

## ISOBEL'S STORY

I began working with Isobel in mid-2023, shortly after she experienced a domestic abuse incident. Since then, I've supported her in rebuilding her confidence and establishing a positive co-parenting relationship with her ex-partner for the benefit of her children. Isobel is highly motivated and determined to improve her quality of life. Over the past year, we've focused on increasing her household income, enhancing her skills, and boosting her confidence as a parent. Her dedication has led her to start volunteering with

schoolchildren, and she more recently recently secured a role in a nursery, where she is excelling. Together, we also arranged for her children to participate in holiday activities, helping them build water confidence. Reflecting on her progress, Isobel shared, "Seriously, I have nothing but good things to say about you, Adam. I know you keep telling me that I've made this happen, but I wouldn't be here without you."



\*Stock images have been used and names changed to protect the anonymity of the local residents I have worked alongside.



## TINA'S STORY

Tina and I have been working together since 2018. Over the past year, she has faced challenges, including family illness and adjusting to one of her children moving away. Throughout these changes, I've supported her in maintaining her volunteer commitments, which have been an important part of her well-being.

For the first time in a decade, Tina feels ready to take the next step and look for employment. Reflecting on her progress, she shared: "It really helps to know that you are always there and I can just call you, or

stop you when I see you at the centre. You have helped me to get through so much and if you'd told me when we first met that I'd now be looking for work, I would never have believed you. So much has changed since then".

It's been rewarding to see Tina's confidence grow as she prepares for this new chapter.

## BELINDA'S STORY

Belinda faced immense challenges during the pandemic, coping with the loss of a loved one and the isolation that came from being unable to attend her regular community groups. However, since restrictions eased, she has made remarkable strides in rebuilding her confidence and re-engaging with her community.

Over the past year, we've worked together to support her resilience, including successfully applying for a disabled Blue Badge. With her mobility scooter, she has

regained independence and enjoys getting around her local area. Belinda's dedication to giving back shines through her volunteering with the local Timebank. Most recently, she and a friend launched a creative "Drop and Swap" table at a community group, allowing members to exchange unwanted items and give them new life.



\*Stock images have been used and names changed to protect the anonymity of the local residents I have worked alongside.

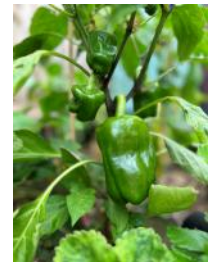
# PROJECTS



## COMMUNITY GROWING PROJECT

Joy Wiltshire continues to lead a flourishing community gardening project at Colwell Baptist Church, where local residents come together weekly to nurture vegetables around the church hall. It's all part of a vibrant community cafe, providing a place to gather, connect, and grow! Once a month, the group shares a meal—now featuring some of the fresh produce they've cultivated. Recently, Jo Ridley from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust visited to explore

further ways to enhance the space, aiming to create more wildlife corridors that link to already established wild areas, enriching the community and supporting local ecosystems.



## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

On May 16th, in celebration of Mental Health Awareness Week 2024, we hosted a free, lively Dance Fit session at West Wight Sports and Community Centre. With over 30 participants



joining in, the event was a fun, energetic way to emphasise the powerful role of movement and connection in building good mental health and personal resilience. Together, we danced, connected, and took steps toward a healthier, happier community.

A short video showcasing the session can be found on Facebook here: <https://bit.ly/mhaw-ww2024>

In 2025 at West Wight Sports and Community Centre we are planning to mark more important national and international health days and weeks to highlight the importance of and the connection between good mental and physical health

# PROJECTS



## YOUTH NON-CONTACT BOXING

Over the past 12 months, with initial training support through Julian Wadsworth at the Community Resilience Project and with funding support from Get Active, Get Involved (Hampshire Playing Fields Fund), we successfully launched a youth non-contact boxing program. Delivered in six-week blocks, this initiative has provided a valuable space for young people to build

confidence, develop skills, and stay active.

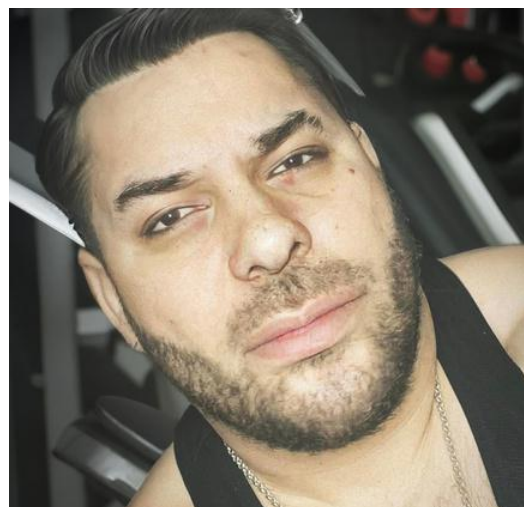
While engagement has not yet reached our initial goals, over 20 young people have participated so far, with many returning for multiple six-week sessions—an encouraging sign of the program's impact. To strengthen our offering, we've invested in additional instructors, significantly increasing our capacity to run future courses.

We're now reviewing our approach, including the possibility of transitioning to a drop-in model and, ideally, offering sessions free of charge. Achieving this will require sufficient staff and volunteer support, as ensuring health and safety remains our top priority for such a hands-on activity. The progress we've made so far sets a strong foundation for growth and broader community engagement. Participants have said: "I've only ever played football, boxing is now a new sport that I really like and has helped me let out frustrations through it"; "I've got way more confident in my ability to defend myself so I feel more confident day-to-day"; "I'm not the smallest [lightest] person here, it's helped me physically, I feel fitter and stronger and love coming to something new".

## FITNESS FOR ALL

In September 2024, in collaboration with Clare Griffin, the manager of West Wight Sports and Community Centre, we launched a pilot "Fitness for All" scheme. With no current funding, we began with a small-scale initiative, offering a six-month discounted membership to residents who have been working with me and expressed a desire to improve their fitness, but whose

financial situation currently prevents them from affording full membership. I will be working closely with these residents to provide ongoing support and help them integrate future membership costs into their budgets, should they wish to continue. So far, three individuals have signed up for the programme.





## SCHOOL HOLIDAY FUNDED ACTIVITIES

Over the past 12 months, we have continued to provide funded places for summer holiday activities, ensuring that families facing financial challenges have access to enriching experiences for their children. This initiative has made a significant difference, particularly for those who

might otherwise struggle to afford such opportunities.

From February Half Term to October Half Term this year alone, we have funded 81 activity sessions for local children, creating invaluable opportunities for them to engage in a wide range of activities. These included intensive swimming lessons, with 58 week-long sessions booked, allowing children to improve their swimming skills and gain confidence in the water.

One parent shared their gratitude, saying, "My son has struggled to get to grips with weekly swimming sessions at school, but this intensive week-long course has really made a difference. I just want him to be safer in the water, especially living by the sea, and I'm now much more confident that he is well on his way to achieving that."

In addition to swimming, other young people were able to participate in exciting and diverse sessions such as climbing, kayaking, snorkelling, soft archery, Rookie Lifesaving, and pickleball, providing them with both physical activity and life skills that will stay with them for years to come.

We have been fortunate to secure funding from both the Daisy Rich Trust and a generous private donor, which has enabled us to cover the costs of these activities over the past two years. However, this funding has now been fully used. We are actively exploring new funding streams to ensure that we can continue offering these vital opportunities for local children, helping them build skills, confidence, and memories that last a lifetime.



# PROJECTS



## YOUTH SURVEY

We are currently running a youth survey open to all residents, seeking feedback on the activities they currently participate in during their free time, as well as discovering what additional options they would like to have access to in the local area. We recognise that many local services tend to cater more to the older demographic due to the area's demographic makeup. Additionally, we are aware that secondary school students often face the challenge of travelling at least 12 miles to school, which impacts the amount of time they have available after school for activities.

Through this consultation with the island's youth, we aim to develop activities that meet their needs and preferences, arranging them at convenient times that work with their busy lives. By involving young people in this process, we want them to feel a sense of ownership over the activities available in their community and to play an active role in shaping what is offered.

The survey will remain open until the end of January, providing ample opportunity for young people and their families to participate, especially over the Christmas break. We are also working to engage with local schools one last time and will be present at Freshwater Parish Council's annual consultation in January to gather additional opinions in person.

So far, young people have expressed interest in a variety of activities, including aerial tricks (silks and hoops), animation, art club, badminton, basketball, cooking, cricket, dance, gymnastics, hockey, indoor football, judo, nature walks, pickleball, rock climbing, rollerblading/skating, running, tennis, and trampolining.

Indoor football, dance, and pickleball sessions have already started, and we are currently evaluating the effectiveness of these sessions, considering timing, age groups, and other factors to ensure they best serve the needs of the participants. We will continue working with the community and our partner organizations to expand and enrich the range of youth activities available locally, fostering a more vibrant and inclusive offering for young people.

The Youth Survey will remain open until 31st January 2025  
and can be found here:

<https://forms.gle/HThq2SVDFJWjfEGeA>



# SOW AND GROW

Thanks to support from Tesco's 'Stronger Starts' scheme, West Wight Sports and Community Centre launched the Sow and Grow group earlier this year, giving young people the chance to learn how to grow and nurture produce in small spaces. Using a dedicated area beside the centre, children participate in fortnightly sessions led by Brian and Michelle. This exciting initiative is a

collaboration with the 'Wilder Communities' project from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, bringing hands-on learning and a deeper connection to nature.



## Community Pantry

Freshwater Parish Hall  
Victoria Road, Freshwater PO40 9HZ  
Fridays 3:30pm - 4:30pm

The Island's mobile community pantry comes to Freshwater on Fridays.

Become a member of the pantry and then pay just £5 each session to collect £15 worth of food for your household.

For more information contact: [abbie@lweh.org.uk](mailto:abbie@lweh.org.uk) or call 01903 716020.



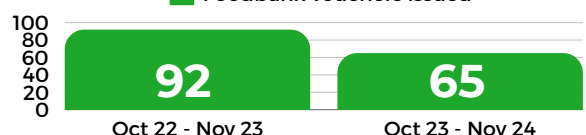
Living Well and Early Help Team  
ASPIRE

## FOODBANK & MOBILE PANTRY

I remain a Foodbank voucher holder, but over the past 12 months, I've issued fewer vouchers—65 compared to 95 in the previous year. One significant change is that I'm no longer based at the Foodbank during its operating hours, which means a portion of the vouchers were previously issued on-site as people visited in person. The mobile Community Pantry has continued to serve the area, but it has faced challenges with vehicle

reliability and staff availability due to leave and illness, making it harder for the service to establish a stable presence. Recently, the pantry's operating hours have been reduced from two hours to one. Additionally, in December, the pantry will change its venue, day, and time, moving from an after-school slot to a mid-morning, weekday schedule. This change may affect access, particularly for families who previously relied on the pantry right before the weekend, which can be a challenging time. I will work closely with the Living Well and Early Help Team running the pantry to ensure the community is well-informed about these changes and to encourage maximum use of the service.

Foodbank vouchers issued

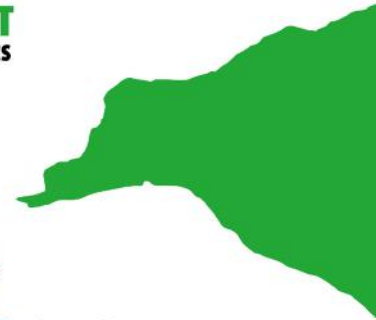


# WHAT'S ON WEST WIGHT

I regularly update the What's On West Wight guide, a comprehensive resource showcasing a wide range of regular activities available locally for all age groups. Whether you're looking for social groups, fitness classes, family-friendly events, or support services, this guide is designed to connect residents with opportunities to engage and thrive within the community.

## WHAT'S ON WEST WIGHT COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

COMMUNITY  
CONNECTOR  
WEST WIGHT



In addition to being available at West Wight Sports and Community Centre and local schools, physical copies can now also be picked up at Totland Post Office for added convenience. The guide has grown to 39 pages, filled with weekday activity listings to suit various interests and needs. At the back, you'll find a handy glossary of local organisations, offering contact details and information about the support and resources they provide.

This document is not only a calendar of events but also a valuable tool for residents seeking ways to stay active, meet new people, and access helpful services in West Wight.



COMMUNITY  
SESSIONS



## MONDAYS: TOTLAND

Attendance at Our Place Monday sessions at Christ Church in Totland experienced a dip during the spring and summer months. However, the arrival of autumn brought a welcome resurgence in numbers, including the addition of several new residents keen to connect with their community. Listening to their feedback, our dedicated volunteer, Jane, has introduced a weekly quiz, which has quickly become a highlight of the sessions, sparking lively engagement and plenty of fun. Every fortnight, I am also on-site to offer personalised support, practical assistance, and guidance on a wide range of topics, ensuring that residents feel heard, supported, and empowered.



## COMMUNITY SESSIONS



# TUESDAYS: FRESHWATER

Our Place Tuesday sessions at West Wight Sports and Community Centre continue to attract a vibrant and diverse mix of community members, with attendance consistently ranging between 30 and 40 residents each week. These sessions have become a key hub for connection, support, and practical assistance in the area. Recently, we expanded our offerings by introducing regular drop-in sessions hosted by Community Action’s Community Law Service, which provides crucial guidance on housing, benefits, and related issues. Alongside this, a variety of other organisations now offer monthly support, ensuring residents have access to an even broader range of resources and advice.

I am present at most sessions, available to provide direct support, answer questions, and assist community members with any challenges they may be facing. A particular highlight is our monthly community lunch, prepared by our dedicated volunteers. This free meal not only provides nourishment but also creates a warm and inviting space where residents can stay longer, enjoy good company, and strengthen their sense of belonging.



For more info visit [www.westwight.org.uk/our-place](http://www.westwight.org.uk/our-place)



**COMMUNITY  
SESSIONS**

**Our Place THURSDAYS**  
JOIN US FOR DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES  
EACH WEEK INCLUDING:

- THE GAMES LOUNGE
- Health & Wellbeing
- Remember when...**  
Reminiscence Sessions
- GET ACTIVE
- AND MORE!

ALL WELCOME 2PM-3.30PM THURSDAYS  
WEST WIGHT SPORTS AND COMMUNITY CENTRE  
01903 240 722. [HELP@WESTWIGHT.ORG.UK](mailto:HELP@WESTWIGHT.ORG.UK)  
[WESTWIGHT.ORG.UK/COMMUNITY/OUR-PLACE](http://WESTWIGHT.ORG.UK/COMMUNITY/OUR-PLACE)

OurPlaceWestWight

# THURSDAYS: FRESHWATER

Our Place Thursdays provide a supportive and engaging environment for older residents, offering a diverse range of activities designed to promote social connection, well-being, and personal enjoyment. Each six-week block is carefully planned and led by a dedicated team of volunteers, ensuring every session is enriching and accessible.

This year's activities have included a variety of stimulating experiences, from creative crafts and meaningful reminiscence sessions to a guest talk from the Shipwreck Museum, providing fascinating local history. We've also enjoyed outings, like the memorable trip to Briddlesford Farm, as well as both regular games and music sessions that encourage interaction and fun.

A highlight for many has been the gentle exercise routine at the beginning of each session, expertly led by Emily from West Wight Sports and Community Centre, helping participants improve mobility and maintain an active lifestyle in a relaxed and welcoming setting.

These sessions have a profound positive impact on older people in the community, fostering a sense of belonging, boosting mental and physical health, and providing opportunities for new friendships to blossom.



# OUR PLACE LEAFLET

To boost awareness and highlight the support offered through Our Place and its related sessions, I have completely redesigned a 4-page leaflet. This updated resource, packed with information about our activities and services, will be delivered directly to households across West Wight starting in January 2025. It's an exciting step forward in ensuring every resident knows about the opportunities and assistance available right on their doorstep!



# TRAINING - DEMENTIA AWARENESS

Earlier this year, I facilitated a connection between West Wight Sports and Community Centre and the Isle of Wight Dementia Awareness Partnership. As a result, 12 staff members participated in an informative session led by Kate Hall from Carers Isle of Wight.



This session provided staff and volunteers with essential knowledge about the different types of dementia, how dementia may manifest in everyday situations within the sports centre, and the best ways to respond with empathy and effectiveness. Becoming dementia aware offers many benefits, including fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals living with dementia. It enhances communication, reduces frustration for both staff and participants, and ensures that people with dementia feel respected and valued within the community.

# AGE FRIENDLY ISLAND

Over the past twelve months, I have been actively involved with the Age-Friendly Island initiative, led by the Isle of Wight Council. As part of a collaborative effort involving statutory and voluntary organisations, as well as community groups, I have worked alongside colleagues to explore ways to improve access to information, advice, and support for older people, no matter where they first seek assistance. This important work will continue throughout 2025, and my unique insights, drawn from my interactions with the local community in West Wight, are playing a key role in shaping how services and protocols evolve to better meet the needs of our population.

# MENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE

I am also regularly connecting with the Isle of Wight Mental Health Alliance (MHA), a partnership between the NHS, the voluntary sector, Isle of Wight Council, and other statutory bodies. The MHA brings together all aspects of mental wellbeing support to reduce stigma, promote collaboration, and build community



Presenting at a Mental Health Alliance Meeting, 2024

resilience. It focuses on preventing mental ill health, raising awareness of available support, and encouraging self-help. The MHA's goals are to:

- Improve emotional and mental resilience
- Support communities in offering non-medical, resilience-building approaches
- Reduce crises and the risk of suicide

I have found the alliance a useful tool to bring more organisations out to West Wight to support our local residents and to network with organisations that can support some of the one-to-one clients I work alongside.

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## SCHOOL LINKS

This year, I've worked with local primary schools to support families through early help plans. I've assisted families referred by schools with practical advice, benefit applications, Foodbank vouchers, and energy support in crises.

As part of the School Community Meetings for the Federation of Freshwater and Yarmouth, and Shalfleet schools, I help create ways for schools to engage meaningfully and foster young people's sense of responsibility in their community.

I also offer drop-in sessions once per half-term at each school for parents and carers to seek support in a familiar environment.

How this helps young people and their carers connect:

- Support network: Families gain access to services, strengthening community ties.
- Youth involvement: Encourages young people to take an active role in their community.
- Accessible help: Drop-in sessions provide an easy way for parents and carers to connect and access support.





**Freshwater Bay**

## NEXT STEPS

Exciting new initiatives and projects are on the horizon, designed to strengthen the local community, build resilience, and create more opportunities for connection, support, and friendship. In the year ahead, in addition to continuing the work already underway, I'll be focussing on the following developments:

- A social network and support group for immigrant workers
- A dedicated support group for carers
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's Wilder Communities initiatives
- Advancing the development of Freshwater Skate Park
- Expanding opportunities for young people through the West Wight Youth Project
- Supporting the Freshwater Parish Neighbourhood Plan to build a more resilient community
- Offering local cooking-on-a-budget sessions
- Providing Energy Advice sessions to help people reduce consumption and save money

These efforts will play a pivotal role in strengthening the community, fostering peer support, and providing vital resources for everyone in the area.

### QUESTIONS / FEEDBACK

For any questions or feedback on this report,  
please contact me via:

07498496719

[adam.tucker@westwight.org.uk](mailto:adam.tucker@westwight.org.uk)