

# Special Thanks

Our heartfelt thanks to Luminary Motion Ltd for collaborating with us in creating a fantastic marketing video to promote ActivLives.



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A huge thank you to Suffolk Sound for always supporting us and helping promote ActivLives.



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**ActivLives**  
Changes Lives ●●●

**Annual Report**  
**2023/2024**

**Together We Thrive:  
Celebrating Members, Volunteers  
and Partners Journey**

### Mission

To support and empower people to improve their health & wellbeing, create & connect people with their community and provide learning and volunteering opportunities.

### What do we provide...

We help people to create stronger, healthier & resilient communities & enable people to live full & active lives.



## About Us

We are a local independent charity working with individuals and communities, of all ages, but with a particular focus on 55 plus who live-in hardpressed areas in Ipswich and across Suffolk. We offer a wide range of services and programmes that help people connect, be active, take notice, learn and give through our ActivHubs, ActivSport, ActivGardens and ActivSingers programmes. Our sessions provide preventative services to support everyone keep **ACTIVE, HEALTHY and CONNECTED.**

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### Our Registered Office

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Charity Registration Number: 1147615  
Company Registration Number: 7672809

## Core Values

We deliver the mission as a team, underpinning our work with a set of agreed core values. These define ActivLives and are as follows:

### Honest & Open

Creating trust through taking responsibility, acting ethically and encouraging open debate

### Community Focused

Supporting and empowering people to make positive changes to their own lives and the lives of others in the community

### Professional & Accountable

Delivering quality, effective, safe and reliable services to our members, partners, the community and stakeholders

### Respect and Value

Developing a committed and caring organisation that supports the development of volunteers, staff and members, promotes team working and working with partners and key stakeholders

### Innovative

Developing services that help reduce health inequalities, enable people to improve their health & wellbeing, and that are accessible and beneficial

## From Our Chair of Trustees



Well, it's been another busy year at ActivLives. The Board of Trustees and I are delighted to see how our services, activities and projects are reaching and having such an impact on so many lives across Ipswich, Sudbury and East Suffolk. Our services support local NHS 'Living Well' health strategies and delivery plans, particularly under the Stay Well and Age Well programmes, including mental health, people living with Dementia, Carers, increasing physical activity, Falls Prevention, Hypertension and reducing health inequalities.

New projects and courses have been delivered at the ActivGardens sites and it is great to see how the Men's Breakfast Hub and the new Kurling Group in Felixstowe have both grown over the year. Other new projects such as BreatheFit are now underway supporting people living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), respiratory health conditions, heart / lung disease, asthma and long Covid.

There have been a number of changes in the way that some of our services have been funded and I commend the staff involved, as I know this hasn't been easy. However, you have continued to deliver a very much needed service in Suffolk with a smile, passion, empathy and care to enable our members to stay independent and mobile.

Each year we thank all of our members for continuing to access ActivLives services and projects and for your feedback, which helps us to ensure we deliver quality services that are needed and community led.

As always, a big thank you to our hard-working staff and loyal volunteers for ensuring that our sessions are beneficial, engaging, fun and safe and keep you all coming back for more...

The Board of Trustees meet every month to ensure that ActivLives is meeting our Strategic aims and objectives, that services continue to develop; we are engaging and supporting the people we need to reach; that we have the resources and skills we need to deliver our services and most importantly the funding we need to develop and grow in the future.

We have continued to look at our staffing structures, recruitment processes and the Trustee Board to ensure we have the right skills mix, knowledge and experience required to take the organisation forward and grow our services. The key areas include income generation, Funding/Fundraising, Marketing and Communications and Operation Management.

We have also been reviewing our five Strategic aims for 2024 – 2026. These can be found in our new ActivLives Strategy document. Improving the population's health and preventing illness and disease is key to reducing health inequalities and is at the heart of the [NHS Long Term Plan](#). ActivLives will continue to develop services that improve people's health and well-being; reduce loneliness and social isolation and provide opportunities for people to learn skills and volunteer. We will continue to focus on our financial sustainability, our workforce, our presence and building positive partnerships and support in the community.

I want to finish by saying thank you again to all the staff, volunteers, members, our funders and supporters and everyone who helps make ActivLives what it is today. Let's celebrate everything that we have achieved over the last year, we should all be very proud.

Many Thanks  
**Rachel Scott**  
Chair of Trustees

## Chief Executive Officer's Report



This year's Annual Report and AGM celebrates our amazing staff, new staff who have joined us and our dedicated, loyal and committed team of volunteers who help keep our services, sites and projects up and running. They support many people in our community who are marginalised because of their age, culture, faith, religion, nationality, physical and/or mental health, disability or personal circumstances.

This year has been a year of 'change'. We have heard a lot about 'change' over the last few months and I did have the pleasure of meeting our new Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer at Gainsborough Leisure Centre, 3 years ago when he visited our Walking Football Group. Members and I talked to him about the plight of charities, the NHS, the barriers that prevent people from participating in physical activity and of course funding. For ActivLives, and other charities, 'change' happens every year and that's why we are expert in adapting to new ways of working, while continuing to deliver our much-needed projects and services across Suffolk.

We have five Strategic Aims:

- Creating & connecting communities
- Improving health & well-being
- Providing opportunities for learning, volunteering & developing skills
- Creating strong financial sustainability
- Strengthening the way we work at ActivLives

In this Annual Report 2023 – 2024 you will see how we are meeting our strategic aims, through the amazing projects and services that we deliver each week; the impact that our activities have on our members lives, their carers and families through their comments, feedback and stories and how we are reaching and supporting more and more people in Ipswich and across East Suffolk with new activities, as well as developing and growing our existing services.

My CEO report is an opportunity for me to welcome new members of staff to ActivLives, highlight new services, sometimes say goodbye, but most of all thanking everyone for making this organisation, what it is today.

This year ActivGardens welcomed Phoebe Hyett as Project Officer for the new 'Grow Your Future' Courses funded by the Henry Smith Charity. Former volunteer Jane Bearham, took on the role of Project Co-ordinator at our project in Sudbury Belle Vue Park in 2023 and is doing an amazing job leading the team of volunteers. A big thank you to Babergh District Council for supporting the project and to Jane and the team of hardy volunteers who attend each week to tend to the plants and borders and make the park look lovely for local people and visitors. We also welcomed Jack Cook in July 2023, for one year with ActivGardens, funded by New to Nature - Groundwork UK.

Ian Hirst, Operations Officer works hard every year to ensure staff, volunteers and visitors are able to work in a safe environment and that the gardens are accessible to all abilities. He also keeps a watchful eye on our lovely bees, supports our bee-keeping team of volunteers and encourages people to learn about bees, insects and nature in general. A thank you goes out to our amazing bee mentor Barrie Powell or 'Barrie the Bee' as he is known, who has supported our bee project for many years sharing his knowledge and passion of bees with many volunteers, some of whom have gone on to start beekeeping with their own bee hives. There is nothing about bees that Barrie doesn't know.

Other members of the team Samatha Grainger – Cowles and John Bettison continue to develop their projects 'Gardening in Mind' and ActivSheds and not forgetting Susannah Robirosa, ActivGardens Development Manager who has been developing and growing ActivGardens for over 15 years. Susannah secures the funding each year to keep the three gardens running and manages all the projects. A huge thank you to Susannah for her dedication, passion and expertise in horticulture and developing the gardens over all these years and to all the ActivGardens staff and volunteers who work in all weathers to run the courses, maintain the gardens, not forgetting nurturing our lovely plants at the nursery at Charity Walled Garden.

This year we joined up with Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust to deliver the ActivCommunity project and welcomed Moira Hoogendyk – ActivCommunity Support Officer to the team. This project supports older adults with severe mental health needs and helps them access and participate in a range of community activities, to improve their well-being and reduce loneliness and social isolation.

Frazier Seager – ActivAgeing Project Officer joined us to develop our ActivSport programme for older adults; kick-started two New Age Kurling Groups in Ipswich and Felixstowe and developed two new BreatheFit programmes in Stowmarket and Leiston. Mike McCarthy – ActivSport Development Officer has been working with younger adults with an intellectual disability and/or physical disability to improve access to inclusive sport, such as inclusive boccia, badminton and bespoke sessions. These activities also provide opportunities for people to take part in tournaments and competitions, working in partnership with Special Olympics Suffolk.

Our seated exercise and dance programme Keep on Moving funded by Suffolk County Council – Public Mental Health Fund enabled us to widen our reach in Saxmundham and Felixstowe with Marcus Hayward, a new Freelance Instructor and Laura Lopez, Step-by-Step Co-ordinator, developing the two new sessions. We also welcomed Claire Kynaston, Freelance Instructor to facilitate our two ActivSteps sessions in Ipswich, after Judy Rainer retired.

The Step-by-Step team, Jemma, Laura, Del and Frazier have been working closely with three Councils, Ipswich Borough Council, East Suffolk and Mid-Suffolk and Babergh District Councils to introduce a new falls prevention Strength and Balance Programme in Suffolk. This has impacted on our service, but we continue work with the Councils to develop their Strength & Balance programme and seek other sources of funding to support our Better Balance on-going sessions. I would like to thank the staff for their perseverance and patience through this time, it hasn't been easy, and for the support of our members who value their sessions and see the benefits of participating in this exercise.

Our new ICare Connect carers project, funded by Suffolk Community Foundation's – Suffolk Carers Fund started in 2023, with Alison Pearson – ActivLives Engagement Officer leading the project alongside the Men's Breakfast Hub and ActivFriends. All these projects support carers and cared for and another thank you goes to all the volunteers who help Alison deliver these activities.

We held a very interesting workshop with the support of Dr Andrew Brinkley from the School of Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Sciences at the University of Essex on 'Increasing Participation in Physical Activity for Older Adults'. 23 members, volunteers and carers attended the session and the buzz in the room was fantastic. A report was produced called 'Understanding the enablers and challenges to physical activity participation for older adults living in Suffolk', which has fed into local strategies. We hope to hold more workshops like this in the future and develop an ActivPartnership Group involving members and volunteers.

In July 2023, the High Sheriff, Mark Pendlington visited ActivLives and met and talked to our volunteers and members at Chantry Walled Garden, All Hallows Better Balance session, Elderflower Carers Hub, ActivSheds and the People's Community Garden. Mark was very impressed with all our activities and said he would help promote ActivLives during his term as High Sheriff.

Funding is always a challenge and is obviously our top priority every year, to enable us to continue delivering our services and developing new ones. We generate income, we apply for grants and we rely on donations from our members, their families, the general public, local business and our supporters.

Each year we need to raise over £400,000 and so again, I must thank Susannah Robirosa, Cynthia Glinos and Alison Pearson for their hard work and dedication in helping me to raise the amazing sum of over £300,000 towards the 2023 - 2024 budget.

This involves, writing funding applications and letters, looking at ways to generate income, linking with the Corporate and Business Sector, local Borough, District and County Councils and Councillors and working closely with our health and social care colleagues to try and secure local, regional and national funding for ActivLives.

A big thank you goes out to our funders, supporters, members and their families who generously donate and invest in ActivLives, and help us support over 1500 people each year, these include, an anonymous person who donated £500; the Mariners Pub, Trimley St Mary who raised £265 at a quiz night; ASDA Foundation - £300; our lovely Trustee Clare Lucas at a Ducks in a Row event raised £700; Kesgrave High School - £500; Northwood Investors - £500; ShareGift - £1,000; the Murphy-Neumann Charity - £1,500; in memory of Audrey Faiers - £328.82 and £1,043 from our generous volunteers, parents and members.

Through Clare's event, we also, very kindly, received a free photo shoot from professional photographer John Ferguson, who took some amazing photos at our indoor Bowls Group at Gainsborough Leisure Centre and our volunteers at Chantry Walled Garden. John currently has an exhibition, 'An Eye for Life' at Christchurch Mansion until April 2025.

We are currently Charity of the Year with the Mason's Lodge of Perfect Friendship, nominated by Halstead Ottery, who has been an instructor with us for 15 years and also Ipswich Wanderers Football Club who held events, quiz nights, raffles etc and raised funds for us. Thank you for picking us as Charity of the Year.

In March 2024 we had to say goodbye to Ben Willmott, our Marketing and Communications Officer who moved to Norfolk, but we have now been joined by Jomel Gutierrez, who works with Cynthia Glinos and volunteer Jean White in the main office and is doing an amazing job to promote the organisation and refresh the ActivLives brand. Welcome, also Stella Houlihan, Office Administration, who joined us in April 2023 to help input all our attendance and registration data.

So, we have experienced 'change' and 'challenge times', but I have an amazing team of caring, passionate, enthusiastic and experienced staff and a wonderful team of dedicated and loyal volunteers across the organisation, who work exceptionally hard to keep our services running. So, a big thank you to all the staff, our freelance staff, volunteers and Trustees for your dedication and commitment to ActivLives and also our members for your support, generosity and feedback.

We look forward to another interesting and 'active' year at ActivLives.

**Julie Stokes**  
**Chief Executive Officer**



**Charity of the Year by Mason's Lodge of Perfect Friendship & Ipswich Wanderers Football Club**

**Launched ICare Connect Carers Project, funded by Suffolk Community Foundation's – Suffolk Carers Fund in 2023**

**around 60  
ActivLives volunteers**

**5 major projects over 3 main sites in parks, gardens, allotments and workshops implemented by ActivGardens**

**745 ActivHub sessions (Step by Step, Keep on Moving & Grooving) throughout the year**

**4 inclusive tournaments (2 badminton and 2 boccia tournaments) by ActivSport**

**44 lunch club sessions  
20 ActivSinging sessions  
39 ActivFriends sessions  
36 Men's Breakfast Hub sessions**



**1,921 total clients served**

**1,209 women benefited from our programmes**

**712 men supported by our programmes**

**£6,636.82 funds raised by supporters, funders, members & their families**

**£300,000 grant funding raised towards 23/24 budget**

**221 people benefited from ActivGardens services**



## Special Hubs

Alison Pearson  
Engagement Officer  
& Specialist Hub  
Facilitator



## Men's Breakfast Hub



Dr David Norman, Militaria collector and researcher with the group

Everybody looks forward to Wednesday mornings with enthusiasm. The group have enabled the meetings to have purpose, the opportunity to meet other like-minded people and make new friendships. Many attend other ActivLives activities and also meet up away from the group. It's definitely a friendly, relaxing place to be on a Wednesday morning.



Some of the collector items during a session with Dr David Norman

Having been isolated for many years, I have relearned how to mix with people, and have really enjoyed the social interaction and the exchange of information. The long term results and improvements since attending, have pleasantly surprised me.

-Member, Men's Breakfast Hub

## What members say

The group has helped me to forget about problems at home for a couple of hours a week, and it has given me more confidence in talking to new people that I have met at the group.

-Member, Men's Breakfast Hub



Men's Breakfast Hub members during one of our morning sessions

I was at a low ebb due to losing my wife. This group has given me the extra activity I needed, bringing me out of myself, and learning about new things. I love all the banter and conversations.

-Member, Men's Breakfast Hub

Before joining this group I was feeling a bit down, this has improved and has given me purpose on a Wednesday. My confidence has improved so I feel much more able to put across my point of view.

-Member, Men's Breakfast Hub

Sharing ideas and outlooks, in a safe environment, has been beneficial to me. The participation of Alison, who guides the group, makes her a real star and her evident concern for the welfare of the group is refreshing and a real pleasure.

-Member, Men's Breakfast Hub

This group has been great for me, I needed to meet people after retirement, to enjoy conversations, banter and enjoy new interests. This group is exactly what was missing in my life.

-Member, Men's Breakfast Hub



One of our Christmas chef volunteers, Bob, before the meal

## ICare Connect, a New Carers Project

## ActivFriends

ActivLives as a charity has been working with carers for many years within our existing membership. We understand from previous experience, that for many carers, caring for a family member, friend or partner, takes up a large part of their lives and some lose touch with friends and family as a result. Caring for someone at home can be life changing and becoming a carer for a loved one brings all sorts of challenges, it can have an impact on your physical and mental health and you may have to make sacrifices in your social life and leisure time.

However, there are many stages to being a carer, and our ActivLives ICare Connect Project has been working with carers locally.

ICare Connect project is a one-to-one, support service, designed to assist people with coping with their caring role and moving forward in a step-by-step way. We can assist with worrisome, everyday issues in a practical way. Support is available by phone, online or in person.

Since the project started early in 2023, 18 carers have participated in the project and have benefitted from the support of the project.

This project has been developed through learned experience and listening to carers who look after family, friends or neighbours. We have strong relationships with many health and social care practitioners and ties to community and voluntary groups and wish to develop further relationships within this community.

If this project is of interest to your charity or group, please contact Alison Pearson on 01473 345350, prior to any referral, as she is the lead for the project.

Caring for an older family member can be isolating, as is living on your own, without local family support. ActivFriends Social Hub is here to help you with that.

The project is funded by Ipswich Borough Council and we have had a very busy year in 2023 – 2024. Sadly, we have some members who have passed, however we continue to support their partners and families. Communication is one of the most important parts of the hub and a listening ear is always ready, so chats and discussion happen at every session also lots of laughter as well. We have a great variety of different activities involving singing, movement to music, indoor bowls, hand eye co-ordination games, reminiscence and so much more.

Without all our fabulous seven volunteers we couldn't provide the fantastic support, entertainment and delicious two course meals that we do, they help to make the magic happen on a Friday.



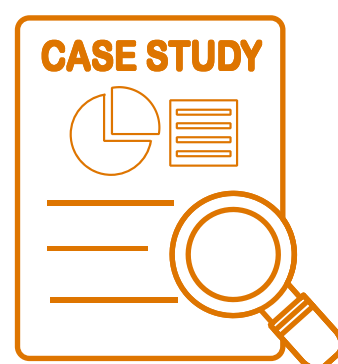
ActivFriends members celebrating Easter

A HUGE AND MASSIVE thank you to all my hard-working volunteers...Pat, Bob, Sandra, Barbara, Barbs, Melissa, and Jackie. And also, Gloria, who was with us for many years before retiring.

We know how important this hub is and what a difference it makes to our members and volunteers who come along each week. They all tell us they really look forward to coming on a Friday.

So, what are you waiting for, if you, or anyone you know, would benefit from coming along, get in touch now and call Alison Pearson on 01473 345350, we have spaces for new members and would love to hear from you.

### ICare Connect Project



G and S have been married for over 60 years and she is the sole carer for her husband, from the moment he wakes up, until he goes to sleep at night and also during the night if needed. He needs 24-hour care as he had a diagnosis of dementia which has impacted on their daily lives. All his personal care, all household tasks, shopping and every aspect of their lives was her sole responsibility. She had just started to attend our ActivFriends project on a Friday, with her husband.

After conversation it was apparent that there was a need for additional help and support, so I introduced her to our ICare Connect project. We met up and discussed what help and support was needed and I signposted her to other projects, which enabled respite for her, 2 days a week. I also encouraged her to talk to family and friends and talk to other carer support charities.

Alison was just there when needed, I was so relieved to talk to someone who understood what my day to day life was like. It felt like a whole mountain of pressure had been lifted from my shoulders, all the things that were getting me down were resolved, knowing that Alison was there if needed made my whole life change. Also, finding out that I was not the only one caring for a loved one with dementia was an absolute lightbulb moment. I cannot thank Alison and ActivLives enough for all the help they have given me.



Volunteers Jackie, Melissa, Sandra, Bob and our fantastic cook Pat



Christmas crafting at ActivFriends



Christmas Party with Dave, Pauline, their daughter, and Mayor Lynne Mortimer



Dance East with lovely Lynette at ActivFriends

## St Mary at Stoke Lunch Club



Volunteers serving meals at the Lunch Club

The Lunch Club will celebrate its 16th anniversary this November. It started in 2008 as part of the Town & Bridge Project, in partnership with St Mary at Stoke Church. Over the years it has grown in size, from 8 people attending each week to over 30. The Lunch Club is run by a dedicated and loyal band of volunteers and our paid cook Tina. Over the year we have delivered 44 Lunch Club sessions, we have 32 people on the register who attend regularly and 946 attendances. The Lunch Club has been supported this year with funding from Ipswich Borough Council Resilience Fund and Suffolk Community Foundation – Brooks Grant Making Fund.



We have had the pleasure of supporting many members and volunteers over the years, who have all brought something different to the Lunch Club, to make it what it is today. The current team of volunteers are led by Linda and Anita, including front of house, Tina's Angel's who help prepare the fantastic two course meal that is served each week and all the volunteers who help wash up. A big thank you goes to you and everyone who has been involved with the Lunch Club.

This year Anita, who has given well over 5,000 volunteering hours, since the Lunch Club started, is hanging up her apron in December 2024. Without Anita there wouldn't be a Lunch Club today, as the criteria was that there had to be a Church representative involved in the development and Anita, who was quite sceptical at the beginning, finally gave in and here we are today.

In 2011 Anita wrote, 'We hear a lot about the Big Society at present, and certainly we at St Mary at Stoke Lunch Club play a very big part in this. The volunteers set up the hall each week, welcome members and take the money, cook the meals, wash up (courtesy of a team of helpers from the church) and do all the linen. The organisation provides the professional back up, the booking of the activity leaders, the support we as volunteers need, funding which the CEO tirelessly chases, and training as seen necessary to benefit all the members. The Lunch Club provides a focus once a week for many of our older people in the area most of whom are single or widowed. A healthy lunch with company, exercise, which has helped many in their daily life and the ability to meet and make new friends, is all on offer.'

The passion and dedication of local champions, volunteers and supporters are what make these activities flourish and grow. We hopefully won't be saying goodbye to Anita, she assures us she will continue to attend the Better Balance session and lunch in the New Year.

**Thank you again Anita from everyone at the Lunch Club and ActivLives.**

## ActivSinging

The ActivSinging groups have had a challenging year, to say the least. Unfortunately, Gina Cristallino stood down as Music Facilitator after many years of leading the two groups. Gina's last performance with the groups was at last year's AGM. We would like to thank Gina for her dedication and passion in developing the groups over the years and wish her well, with all her new ventures. We were, however, very lucky to find Ed Dewson who stepped in as Music Facilitator, with both groups for a few months, until he had to leave in May 2024.

Unfortunately, we had to close the ActivSinging – Ipswich group, but was able to keep the Woodbridge group open with the support of the ActivLives CEO and Gina covering a few sessions.

"I like being in a singing group, singing different styles of songs."

"Meeting new people in a friendly atmosphere"

"It's lovely meeting everyone each time. We have been singing for a while and actually make a pleasant sound!"

The call went out again for a Music Facilitator and in August 2024 we are very pleased to say that Evie Capon joined us to lead ActivSinging – Woodbridge, so definitely watch this space. New songs and arrangements are being developed, and we look forward to carrying on and welcoming new members to the group in the future.

We currently have 38 people registered who attend regularly, have delivered 20 sessions (two a month) with 402 attendances.



"Meeting like-minded people"

"I really enjoy it. I can't sing very well, but it's supposed to be good for my breathing."



ActivSingers in Ipswich and Woodbridge



Elderflower Hub for Carers and Cared for

The Elderflower Hub is funded through a partnership with Suffolk Family Carers.

It's been another busy year for the Elderflower group. This year they decided to get a little bit more adventurous and try out a selection of new activities! The group is encouraged to input ideas into a weekly activity programme and volunteers Mary and Carol then try and theme the light lunch to go with the agreed activity.

Members, of course, enjoyed celebrating the King's Coronation, with music from the wonderful Alan Mann. Nick Knowes, the Ipswich Speedway Commentator, visited the group, and even if you don't like sports in any form, he captivated members with his detailed stories of how he started and made us giggle with his funny match stories.

The group also got arty and decided to try their hand at a different art form and explored the French form of Decoupage.

Other activities included celebrating St Patrick's Day and St George's Day at the request of our very patriotic member Eric, who sadly passed in April 2024, they played pin the tail on the dragon, sang songs and read out poetry. Music played a big part in the group's activities including sea shanties and everything nautical (including the cakes) with the Rum Old Boys, a 1950's morning with Phil Jackson, a 1940's morning, the fun Hoy Bingo with a twist and visits from singers including Bob Whiting and Adie Fisk and Andy Ottley (as Elvis).

"I love coming here, we are like a little family."

"We have made a lovely friendship and love any excuse to get together for a cuppa."



They celebrated Suffolk Day on the 21st June making their own Suffolk Shortbread and Suffolk Rusks and tried very hard to decipher the Suffolk dialect. A pamper day was enjoyed by members with Liz Ford, a local qualified masseuse offering head and shoulder massages, whilst Gina tried her hand at nail manicures. Members also tried Silk painting, carving Halloween pumpkins, making Christmas cards and enjoyed a social meal out together at the Mermaid.

The group kicked off the new year sessions with a trophy presentation to the Elderflower Bowls team and Peter who holds the highest score. They celebrated Burns night and all things Scottish (in the daytime) with their own version of the Highland Games. They also had the pleasure of being visited by a professional Bagpipe player Martin Coombes - he went above and beyond, reciting poetry and re-enacting the addressing of the haggis, it really was a wonderful performance. The group got creative making our Spring flower baskets and decorated the Cress Pavilion with our handmade Decoupage hanging eggs.

They also took part in the national odd sock day (awareness for Down's Syndrome), raised money for the Alzheimer's Society, and raised over £100 for Macmillan Cancer Support with a cuppa and cake morning.

Unfortunately, Elderflower closed its doors in June 2024, but new projects for Carers and cared for are in the pipeline and some members joined ActivFriends. A big thank you to Gina Cristallino, Elderflower Facilitator for developing the hub over the years and to volunteers Mary and Carol for all the lovely light lunches they served. You will be missed.

## ActivSport

The ActivSport programme continued throughout the year, with a variety of inclusive sports and physical activities including boccia, bowls (indoor & out), new age kurling, badminton, table tennis, short tennis, ping pong, beginners yoga, health walk and walking football.

In addition to the weekly programme of activities, we also hosted a number of inclusive sports events in Ipswich and Stowmarket and we initiated a new kurling session in Felixstowe.

Mike McCarthy, ActivSport Development Officer and the team continue to work in partnership with Special Olympics Suffolk and a wide range of community organisations and charities in Suffolk, to enable younger adults with neurodivergent conditions and disabilities, to access and participate in inclusive sport. Funded by Suffolk Community Foundations Suffolk Sport Fund, the Postcode Places Trust and Sport England's Together Fund. With the support of Paralympian Evie Edwards, we have introduced Boccia across the county. This has enabled people to develop their skills, build their confidence and support their fellow players at weekly sessions, bespoke group sessions and at tournaments and competitions in Suffolk and across the country.

In April an Inclusive Badminton Tournament was held at Gainsborough Sports Centre in Ipswich with 26 athletes competing in both singles and doubles events. The standard of play was excellent throughout the day, with some extremely close matches deciding the final medal placings across the various divisions. We also ran a three-hour Boccia Leaders Course, accredited by Boccia England, with 18 participants to raise awareness about Boccia, the rules, supporting people to participate and making the game fun.

In May 2023, ActivLives, in partnership with Special Olympics Suffolk supported 6 athletes to compete in the Para-Badminton Tournament at Gillingham, Kent. The tournament was organised by Kent Badminton and included players around the country with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities. Suffolk players brought home five gold medals, three silver and three bronze. Other tournaments attended during the year included Special Olympics events in Plymouth, Derby and Wimbledon.



Some of our participants in our ActivYoga session

Mike McCarthy  
ActivSport  
Development Officer



Players competing at the Inclusive Badminton Tournament

“As a volunteer I thoroughly enjoy the day seeing the athletes experience competition and rising to the high level of badminton being played.”  
-Volunteer, Inclusive Badminton Tournament

“I like the tournament because I enjoy it. The tournament made me happy.”  
-Athlete, Inclusive Badminton Tournament



Members playing Ping Pong at the Gainsborough Sports Centre



Mike with players participating at the Boccia Festival in September at the Gainsborough Sports Centre

In July the first Boccia Tournament took place at Mid-Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket. The event was a tremendous success with 47 competitors, playing 129 ends over 44 matches. There were over 90 people attending the event during the course of the day. Weekly Boccia sessions are held at the Leisure Centre, led by Evie Edwards and Mike McCarthy.

In September a Boccia Festival was held at Gainsborough Sports Centre to celebrate National Boccia Day 2023. 42 people took part from across the region and enjoyed a fantastic day of Boccia action. In December it was the turn of inclusive Badminton and a tournament was held with 27 competitors from groups in Suffolk and Wimbledon and finally in March 2024 another Boccia Tournament was held in Ipswich.

A big thank you goes out to all of the volunteers who help at these events, supporting the players, the families who attend as well and make the day very special. We are also grateful to our supporting partners Special Olympics Suffolk, Special Olympics GB, Suffolk Community Foundation Sports Fund, Ipswich Borough Council, Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre - Everyone Active and the Postcode Places Trust.

These weekly sessions and events mean a lot to the athletes, as well as, the families and Support Workers.

“It is a safe and fun environment for every single player. They learn about being part of a team as well as an individual player. The players are on an even keel with each other, even if some of the players are better than others at badminton and they all help each other. They do not feel different from each other and so can be relaxed around each other which is brilliant. We are very lucky to have a team of fantastic players and we are very lucky to have Mike to teach and guide us.”  
-Parent, Inclusive Badminton Tournament

“The more I think about it the more impressive the whole event was. Well done to everyone involved who worked so hard to make it a success.”  
-Manager, Leading Lives Stowmarket

“It has been so lovely to feel fully part of something like this, rather than feeling as though we are just being tolerated – thank you!”  
-Mum of Boccia athlete who has physical and intellectual disabilities

“Brilliant to have people of all ages and abilities come together. Great atmosphere and friendly competition.”  
-Boccia athlete



ActivSport members enjoying the short tennis game

Who we have we worked with this year – Special Olympics Suffolk, Special Olympics GB, Boccia England, Avenues East, Leading Lives, Foxhall Day Centre (Lavender Trust), Indigo Opportunities, Kesgrave Bowls Club, Monday Club – Stowmarket, Ipswich Borough Council, Everyone Active – Stowmarket, Suffolk Sight, Papworth Trust, ‘We can’ Stowmarket and Felixstowe Carers.

“Fantastic atmosphere, great games – very inspiring. I love Boccia.”  
-Boccia athlete

## ActivAgeing



Frazier with players at the Felixstowe New Age Kurling session



Players enjoying the New Age Kurling session

**Frazier made the session interesting and competitive, which made us use our brains as well as our general fitness.**  
-Participant, Felixstowe New Age Kurling

**Frazier Seager**  
ActivAgeing  
Development Officer



Frazier Seager, ActivAgeing Development Officer joined ActivLives in 2023 funded by the Rope Trust to support the development of ActivSport sessions for older adults and the Engaged Communities Response and Recovery Fund to engage more people in the inclusive sport of New Age Kurling in Ipswich and Felixstowe. Taster sessions were held at Inspire Suffolk and at Felixstowe Leisure Centre - Places Leisure.

In April 2023 the Felixstowe New Age Kurling taster session attracted 7 people, who thoroughly enjoyed the session.

Since the taster session, this activity has continued to grow and by the end of March 2024 there was a total of 18 people registered, taking part in weekly sessions held at Felixstowe Leisure Centre – Places Leisure. During 2023-24 we have held 37 sessions with a total of 358 attendances with attendance levels ranging between 10 – 16 people each week.

In March 2024 a New Age Kurling Competition was held at Gainsborough Sports Centre. This was open to Kurling groups across Suffolk, to come together for a day of activity and fun. On the day, 38 participants took part in the competition, with group stages, semi-final and final games taking place, followed by the awarding ceremony with bronze, silver and gold medals being presented to the winners.



A player trying out the New Age Kurling game

**The game is new to me, and it's just the right amount of exercise.**  
-Participant, Felixstowe New Age Kurling

**“**  
**‘A big thank you to Mike McCarthy who offered his guidance and support to me as a new member of staff at ActivLives. I had never hosted an event like this before, so I was really pleased with the attendance and positive feedback.**  
**I would also like to give a special thanks to all competitors who took part in the day's events and especially to the wonderful volunteers who helped with the organisation and kept score of the games. Your help was greatly appreciated. Thank you!**  
**—Frazier**

The new Felixstowe Kurling Group continue to meet on Mondays at Felixstowe Leisure Centre, which was supported by the Felixstowe Peninsula Partnership fund. In addition to Kurling on a Monday, the Saturday Kurling and Boccia group meet at Walton Community Hall and are still going strong with 14 regular attendees, have held 39 sessions with 427 attendances.

ActivSport provides a wide range of weekly inclusive sports for younger and older adults in Ipswich and East Suffolk including boccia, bowls (indoor & out), new age kurling, badminton, table tennis, short tennis, ping pong, beginners yoga, health walk and walking football. 13 activities are delivered each week, 241 people are registered with ActivSport, 107 are female, 134 are men, 168 are aged 50 plus; 91 state they have a disability, 27 have mental health needs and 6 have a life limiting illness.

Shortly after Frazier began working at ActivLives, he was contacted by Carol, who was seeking an instructor for a group in Stowmarket, which supported people living with a diagnosed respiratory conditions/breathlessness. By reaching out to ActivLives, Carol was acting as a ‘champion’ to a small group of people living with COPD, who she had met and kept contact with.

An initial ‘taster’ session was held on Thursday 6th July 2023. With Carol’s help spreading the word, a total of 10 people attended the taster session. Following the taster session, weekly sessions began and a new service called ‘BreatheFit’ was developed. Carol very kindly shared her story at last years AGM, and a big thank you goes out to Carol and the members of the group for making this a truly community led activity and your on-going support for ActivLives.

**“**  
**The sessions are very good and helpful. Frazier is an excellent instructor.**  
**– Participant, BreatheFit**



Health Walk participants at the Christchurch Park in Ipswich



ActivLawn bowls members at one of their sessions

In December 2023 ActivLives was awarded a small grant of £495 from Stowmarket Town Council, which was used to cover the costs of hiring the venue for Stowmarket BreatheFit. Carol and other members also participated in a local COPD research project led by Healthwatch Suffolk. By March 2024, Stowmarket BreatheFit has reached a total of 28 individuals living with COPD/breathlessness, 18 of which are registered with ActivLives and regularly attend the weekly sessions.

In the time-period of this report, 32 weekly sessions were delivered, totalling 360 attendances. The weekly attendance levels range between 11-18 members per session.



BreatheFit session at the Waterloo Centre in Leiston

Following the success of Stowmarket BreatheFit, Frazier was contacted by two more individuals, also looking to start a local COPD support group, this time in the Leiston area.

Another ActivLives community led activity, started with the help of 'champions' Tim and Lesley, who spread the word and identified other interested people in the area. A 'taster' session was held on Wednesday 6th September at the Waterloo Centre, Livewell Hub and a total of 7 people attended, which was a strong core group to build on.

Leiston BreatheFit was established and a thank you goes to the Waterloo Centre/Livewell Hub, who have very kindly hosted the weekly sessions, helped promote them locally and supported members each week at the facility.

With continued efforts from Tim and Lesley, the word continued to spread throughout the local community of Leiston, leading to Healthwatch Suffolk reaching out to Leiston 'BreatheFit' members to participate in a local COPD-research project.

By the end of March 2024, a total of 25 weekly BreatheFit sessions were held with a total of 217 attendances, 13 registered members and a range of attendance between 9 – 11 people at each session.



Frazier conducting the BreatheFit session with the members

**I have found Frazier to be such a very caring and understanding professional leader. He takes time with every one of us in the class, he listens and then gives us advice and shows us exercise and explains how it benefits our health, muscles and joints, breathing, and the day-to-day management of our lung problems. I am sure it is the care and patience I have received from Frazier that keeps me going, and I thank him for that so very much.**  
- Participant, BreatheFit

**Class is really good- need another one on another day at Leiston.**  
-Participant, BreatheFit

**Well worth it, keep session going please.**  
-Participant, BreatheFit



**What ActivSport members, partners and volunteers say**

**I love volunteering for ActivLives. I have met so many wonderful people who I would not have met had I not taken up the opportunity to volunteer at the Inclusive Badminton sessions. I really enjoy watching the camaraderie and development of our players every week. I have also helped at several tournaments which are great events for players and their families/carers. I learn so much from volunteering and it brings up opportunities I had not envisioned, such as, attending a badminton coaching course in Milton Keynes and attending an away tournament in Gillingham. I am very grateful to Mike and the volunteers, as well as all the players and their carers, for being so welcoming and supportive.**  
-Volunteer, ActivSport

**The games were so competitive and the communication was great.**  
-Support Worker, Boccia tournament

**The friendly atmosphere and sportsmanship was beautiful, and everyone that participated in arranging and running the tournament should be highly commended.**  
-Athlete, Boccia tournament



**“Really fun event and fantastic tournament to be part of.”**  
-Athlete, Boccia tournament

**“What a great day, brilliantly organised. Well done to all involved.”**  
-Athlete’s parent, Boccia tournament

**“Thank you for the seamless organisation. As ever I come away humbled from everything I saw.”**  
-Volunteer, Badminton tournament

**“Our Ipswich team is a brilliant group of different ages and abilities and Mike does a fantastic job with every single one of them.”**  
-Athlete, Boccia tournament

**I enjoyed my day. Thank you to everyone who organised the Boccia tournament. Always great fun to take part.**  
-Support Worker



**“As a volunteer and family member, I thought the tournament was a great success. It was good to see so many players taking part with enthusiasm. It’s good to have longer time than usual weekly sessions, and play matches with people watching, the standard of play and competitive spirit go up. It is good for players’ mental and physical health and well-being - the exercise and the connection, the physical and mental activity, with other people...”**  
-Parent/Volunteer, Badminton tournament

Mike, Frazier and ActivLives are very grateful to all the volunteers that help at sessions, tournaments and competitions, without their support, commitment and enthusiasm, we wouldn't be able to deliver our activities and support nearly 2,000 people each year to keep active.

ActivSport and ActivAgeing are continuing to develop activities that improve physical fitness, particularly in terms of strength, endurance, balance, co-ordination and flexibility; enable people to widen their social network and their links to the wider community, reducing loneliness and social isolation and developing a feeling of connectedness; improving mental health and feelings of well-being, increased self-esteem and self-confidence and the opportunity to develop an existing skill or develop new ones.

**ActivSport in Action**



## Step by Step Programme



**Jemma Tilley**  
Step by Step  
Development  
Coordinator



**Del Keeble**  
Step by Step  
Coordinator



**Laura Lopez**  
Step by Step  
Coordinator



**Participants enjoying the sessions at the Better Balance Ipswich with Del**

### The Step by Step Programme

The programme currently delivers 21 weekly Better Balance/OTAGO sessions held in accessible venues such as Church/Village Halls, Sheltered Housing Schemes, Social Clubs, Community Hubs etc. We were able to secure funding to support our on-going sessions and thank Suffolk Community Foundation – Pargiter Trust who supported our East Suffolk sessions and Ipswich Borough Council – Ipswich East health & wellbeing funding that supported sessions in IP3/IP4.

These sessions help people improve their strength, balance and co-ordination, provide an opportunity for people to meet and make new friends, build people's confidence, reduce falls and fractures and enable people to live independently for longer, in their own homes. The sessions are fun and include seated and standing OTAGO exercise, which is the evidence-based exercise programme to reduce and prevent falls and fractures.

Our ActivSteps sessions also include seated dance and SOSA dance routines to music. We were very sorry to say goodbye to Judy Rainer, freelance instructor who retired from leading the ActivSteps sessions at Castle Hill Community Centre and the California Club, but we are very pleased to welcome Claire Kynaston who now leads the groups and has introduced Salsa into the programme.



**One of the Better Balance Sessions that helped participants increase their confidence & improve strength**

## In Numbers

### IPSWICH

**10 sessions** - delivered per week  
**272 sessions** throughout the year  
**235 people** registered  
**4,529 attendances**  
**100 people** average attendance per week

### ACROSS EAST SUFFOLK

**10 sessions** - delivered per week  
**415 sessions** throughout the year  
**471 people** registered  
**7,044 attendances**  
**166 people** average attendance per week

## What members say

**“ The instructor makes the sessions challenging and good fun. Everyone is very supportive and friendly. I am doing more exercise than before. I realise the importance of keeping active and keeping mobile. -Member, Step by Step programme ”**

**“ I feel more confident as now I have improved mental focus when changing body positions, walking on uneven surfaces and going up steps e.g. previously unsteady and had falls when stepping backwards. -Member, Step by Step programme ”**

**“ Some things we do are very challenging e.g. standing on tip toes and balancing on one foot for a minute, but that's because of my problems. Most of the exercises are just right. We are always encouraged to do what we can manage, and the instructor is very aware of individual capabilities. There is a challenge, which is good and ensures that we improve our balance. If it wasn't for the class, I wouldn't be exercising and trying to improve the balance and mobility. -Member, Step by Step programme ”**

**“ The class is friendly in a positive environment where I feel comfortable, even going in the wrong direction doing an exercise (literally). We are on a mission possible to do our best to avoid trips, slips and falls. As a class we are keen and always endeavour to improve our skills to promote awareness of balance. -Member, Step by Step programme ”**



## Keep on Moving



Laura leading the session at Felixstowe



Jemma instructing members during the exercise session

Keep on Moving was established to extend the falls prevention pathway for those people who have lost confidence in their mobility and prevented them from participating in an OTAGO session, but who wanted to increase their physical activity levels. These sessions have been funded by the Suffolk County Council – Public Health & Communities – Physical Health fund and the Felixstowe Peninsular Community Partnership (Felixstowe session).

The session in Saxmundham and the two Felixstowe sessions have proved very popular including fun seated/dance routines, some standing exercise to improve strength and balance, information about exercising at home and falls prevention, helping people improve their flexibility and mobility, and building their confidence and social network.

### FELIXSTOWE

**45 sessions** delivered  
**69 people** registered  
**765 attendances**  
**17 people** average attendance per week



ActivLives is a community led Charity and is often contacted by local champions who want to establish a bespoke physical activity group for people with a specific health condition or older adults who just want to keep moving. Residents of Priory Park in Ipswich reached out for a taster session of seated/dance exercise and a monthly session was organised, this has now developed into two sessions a month and the group has progressed to standing exercise, as well as seated. 37 residents are currently registered with the session. We also visit other community groups on a regular basis including, the Bangladeshi Support Centre's Carers Group, Ipswich OddFellows, Britannia Ladies Group – Ipswich, WI groups across the county and local McCarthy Stone Schemes.

**"I feel more confident and mobile and my balance has improved."**  
 -Member, Keep on Moving

## Members Story and what they say

**Mrs S (76) lives in the Felixstowe area and has been attending the Keep on Moving sessions at the Old Felixstowe Community Centre on a Wednesday morning for the last 8 months.**

**Before attending the sessions, Mrs S had completed the 6-week community physiotherapy course at the Felixstowe Community Hospital, as well as undertaking regular swimming. Having experienced a hip injury a number of years ago together with arthritic pain, Mrs S has been in some discomfort and her mobility is affected.**

**Mrs S wanted to improve her confidence and mobility and says "The sessions have definitely helped with my mobility, my body feels much looser, I am more positive and its good speaking to people in similar situations. I now feel more motivated, when I come to a session it always works its magic! I feel better, it takes you out of yourself".**

**"My goal was to challenge my mobility, flexibility and balance. I am certainly much more flexible and bendy. I have continued with exercise by following the booklets we were given, especially first thing in the morning, 15 minutes on average. I enjoy feeling better all round and our weekly meetings are so much to look forward to."**  
 -Member, Keep on Moving programme



Standing exercise with participants in Rushmere



Marcus doing one of our exercise sessions with the members

**"Before attending I was not very mobile, and my balance was poor. I wanted to get stronger. I have noticed some difference, and I have continued with exercise with walking when weather permits. What I enjoy most about the sessions is the encouragement to keep moving."**  
 -Member, Keep on Moving programme

## Keep on Grooving



Keep on Grooving members having fun with exercise and lively music

Keep on Grooving, funded by the Connect for Health - Community Chest Fund – East Suffolk Council, was a new approach by ActivLives to encourage people 50 plus to keep active and to socialise with others through dance and music. The inclusive sessions were aimed at people who liked to dance, but had poor mobility, physical disability or respiratory/long-term health conditions, people living with Dementia, carers and people with mental health needs.

As this was a new project, it was very much co-produced with the members in its design, content and structure. We were very lucky to find a local volunteer who helped set up, serve refreshments, make exceptional cakes and welcomed participants.

The sessions were 2 hours long and were held monthly at Woodbridge Community Hall, which is an ideal and accessible venue. The sessions were led by facilitator Gina Cristallino and comprised of fun seated dance routines, so everyone could take part in the activity and then Salsa Instructor – Claire Kynaston led the group in simple Salsa moves. We then had a social 15 - 20-minute break for refreshments, cake and an opportunity to socialise, ending with another Salsa routine (seated/standing) or a line dance routine, occasionally led by a member.

This structure was agreed with members, volunteers and staff and seemed to work really well.

Dancing seated/standing is an enjoyable and fun way to stay fit, particularly for older adults. It has a wide range of physical and mental health benefits including:

- Improved condition of your heart and lungs
- Increased muscular strength, endurance and motor fitness
- increased aerobic fitness
- Improved muscle tone and strength
- Stronger bones and reduced risk of osteoporosis
- Better coordination, agility and flexibility
- Improved balance and spatial awareness
- Increased physical confidence
- Improved mental functioning
- Improved general and psychological well-being
- Greater self-confidence and self-esteem
- Reducing social isolation and loneliness

Members were asked about their long-term health conditions - 6 had heart conditions; 1 had COPD; 7 with osteoarthritis; 3 living with Dementia and 2 with dizziness. Other members reported no health conditions. However, there was a wide range of abilities within the group.

## Members Story and what they say

R aged 52 has a number of physical health conditions including Rheumatoid Arthritis, mild high blood pressure, had a brain haemorrhage 12 years ago, which has left R with mental health needs, mobility and balance issues. For a while R has used two walking aids, her goal was to walk with 1 walking aid and not to wobble. R has now progressed to a walker with a seat, so she can sit down when required and it has helped with her confidence and independence.

It was amazing to watch R at the Keep on Grooving session, she put her walking aids to one side and participated in the Salsa session with no problems. Having a partner also helped to give her that stability, but she seemed to forget about her disability and just danced. It was lovely to see her enjoy herself, be free of her walking aids for the session.  
R attended every session.

“The line dancing was very good, especially for people who may feel uncomfortable partnering with strangers (although not strangers for long). More gentleman is needed.”

-Member, Keep on Grooving programme



Keep on Grooving members at Woodbridge

## WOODBIDGE

13 sessions delivered  
43 people registered  
191 attendances  
15 people average attendance per week



Standing dancing with instructor Claire



Pauline, volunteer, at one of the Keep on Grooving sessions with the cakes and refreshments for the members

“Everyone gets on and you have the choice of joining in or just watching.”  
-Member, Keep on Grooving programme

“I’m happy with the way it is organised. A really nice afternoon.”  
-Member, Keep on Grooving programme

## ActivGardens

Susannah Robirosa  
ActivGardens  
Development Manager



Ian Hirst  
ActivGardens  
Operations Officer



Phoebe Hyett  
ActivGardens  
Grow Your Future  
Project Officer



**Grow Your Future enables learners to build skills and confidence**

**The pleasure is in looking after this public space and working as a team who are focussed on maintaining and improving the gardens. I practise my gardening skills and feel part of the community.**

-Grow Your Community – Sudbury  
female volunteer, aged 71



**ActivBlooms bring older people together**

## Impact – the difference we make: who benefits from our work and how

In 2023-24 ActivGardens delivered services to a grand total of 221 people who benefitted from more than 11,000 hours of volunteering, learning, work experience and activities.

The People's Community Garden, which started in 2008 with funding for 1 year, celebrated 15 years!

We ran five major projects over three main sites in parks, gardens, allotments and workshops.

Almost two thirds of participants (61%) were not in paid employment.

26% reported a mental health condition, 19% a physical disability and 18% a learning disability.

Well over half our participants (127 people) were male – a major achievement in the context of public health concerns over men who have low engagement rates in activities.

80 local people have come together to support our projects by contributing their time, energy and skills as volunteers. A quarter of volunteers were retired.

62 people learned skills and built confidence in our horticulture-based learning programmes. Almost a fifth (18 people) stayed on as regular volunteers.

Four moved on into accredited learning, two people moved into employment and one person started a social enterprise.

50 people improved their well-being by taking part in our gardening project to help people living with mental ill health, with more than a third (36%) staying on as volunteers.

46 people took part in regular beekeeping – learning an important craft while maintaining seven hives and harvesting 46 jars of honey – one each!

20 young people – 18 of whom had complex issues, learning disabilities and/or mental health issues, took part in weekly work experience, developing employability skills and personal competencies.

90 primary-aged children got their hands in the soil and learnt about gardening, growing and nature conservation and had a go at making a bird box or insect motel.

25 people learnt the basics of woodworking, with imaginative projects ranging from a dog kennel to a map of the UK key holder to a carved bat!

13 ActivSheds volunteers built new areas of the garden, took commissions and made quality items for sale.

We hosted volunteer taster days for refugees and asylum seekers accommodated in hotels in Ipswich, and for Ukrainian refugees in Ipswich and surrounding areas.

75 people from four local businesses contributed an astounding 300 hours of volunteering – equivalent to 40 days' full-time work.

We increased sales turnover at Chantry Walled Garden by 14% to £8,643 with the help of a great new range of plants and our dedicated staff and volunteer sales team.

We employed two more volunteers – meaning half our staff team of eight people is a former service user.

Together we have maintained and developed 15 allotment plots, a walled garden, a woodland apiary, a Men's Shed/ActivShed, a community hub, and a town park for the benefit of people, plants and nature.

ActivGardens respond to social needs in urban Ipswich and rural Suffolk, working in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the UK with marginalised individuals and groups. We bring people together in an active and healthy way to help them create positive change both for themselves and the communities in which they live.

ActivGardens are community gardening projects based in Ipswich and Sudbury. We have two gardens in Ipswich – the People's Community Garden, which is a community garden on an allotment site, and Chantry Walled Garden in Chantry Park. In Sudbury we are based at Belle Vue Park. We also work in partnership to help other groups and organisations to develop their own gardens, as well as reaching out to schools, colleges, care homes and hospitals.

We provide a diverse range of activities and opportunities throughout the week, including volunteering, work experience, and learning and mental health programmes in - gardening and horticulture, flower arranging, beekeeping and nature conservation, woodworking and construction.

These programmes are aimed at people facing a range of challenges in their lives, including mental health conditions, illness, disability, unemployment, social isolation and lack of confidence.

By participating, people are able to improve physical and mental health and well-being, make friends and develop support networks, learn skills and gain confidence and motivation – moving on into further volunteering, learning or training and employment.

As a result, people are encouraged and motivated, they feel included in society and gain an enhanced sense of hope and purpose, which means they are able to raise their aspirations look forward to a more positive future.



**Gardening in Mind helps people feel relaxed and engaged**

## The year – an overview

This year has been a year of consolidation, diversification and growth – in which we have run two sets of courses side by side, engaged with new client groups and built new partnerships with various organisations – bringing the benefits of gardening and nature to ever more people in need of our help.

In April, we secured three-year funding - for the first time - from the Henry Smith Charity to run employment and training programmes as part of its 'Improving Lives' strand. Phoebe Hyett joined as Project Officer, beginning a series of nine 12-week courses, Grow Your Future, at both gardens in Ipswich. Three courses ran in the 2023-24, delivering to 30 people. They learnt practical skills in horticulture, nature conservation and woodworking, customer service and other skills relevant to a similar work environment, alongside competencies and personal attributes such as showing initiative and taking responsibility, communicating well with others, problem-solving, and supporting/ leading others. In the first two cohorts, 80% achieved their personal project goals and a total of 55% moved on into further learning or training, volunteering, work experience or employment.

**Grow Your Future has been a lifeline to me. From feeling mentally stuck to the point it has been disabling - not leaving my house, limited interaction with people, high anxiety leaving me incapable of trying anything new and unfamiliar- I have come to look forward to Tuesdays, to the point it has impacted my life massively. Being outdoors, no matter the weather has aided my progress in improving my mental and physical health. I have regained some of my social confidence. I have learned loads and see the potential for so much in my future both in providing a basis for setting up a business and generating areas of enjoyment arising from flowers, plants, fruit and vegetables. I've met wonderful people and made new friends.**

-Grow Your Future female participant, aged 51



**Our courses help develop co-operation and team work**

Meanwhile, Babergh District Council Public Realm was so impressed with our volunteer project in Belle Vue Park in Sudbury – Grow Your Community – Sudbury & Great Cornard - it committed to fund the main costs of sustaining it. This enabled us not only to continue the volunteer programme, led by freelance worker Jane Bearham, but to open a new weekly training and volunteer session for disadvantaged adults, with Phoebe at the helm. Twenty-two people took part in Grow Your Future – Sudbury & Great Cornard - with referrals from Job Centre Plus, Social Prescribing and other support organisations, including a group of adults with learning and physical disabilities from the Bridge Project.

Our mental health programme Gardening In Mind, led by Samantha Grainger Cowles, and now in its second year, continued with three more courses. This programme has formed part of ambitious programme by Norfolk and Suffolk Mental Health Trust to transform mental health services in Suffolk by funding community-embedded interventions, such as therapeutic gardening. Fifty people living with mental ill health registered with the project this year. Those who completed the course said they had improved their wellbeing, learnt new skills and built their confidence, while enjoying making new contacts and friends as part of a community project. The average Wellbeing Score of a sample 26 participants – based on a set of six questions supplied by the Suffolk's Public Mental Health Programme - increased by 4.1 points from 21.7 to 25.7 of a total score of 30 points – with nine people reporting an above average improvement of up to 12 points. On completion of the course, 18 people continued as volunteers.

**This project has helped me turn up when I'm not very organised and given me a sense of routine. There's always something to learn and I enjoy co-operating with other people. Here, I'm able to switch off from outside pressures and I have made new friends. It has given me a sense of achievement. I have become calmer and I'm doing more activities – like singing.**

-Gardening In Mind female participant, aged 73

In January, we employed John Bettinson as ActivSheds Project Officer, at the head of a 13-strong volunteer team, who have made quality items for sale, restored garden furniture and kept ActivGardens in a good state of repair. John and his key volunteers have enabled 25 vulnerable adults – including family carers, people with serious long-term illness/life-limiting illness, older people living with dementia and effects of stroke; young people with disabilities, mental health issues, socially isolated, and people on probation - to learn basic woodworking techniques as part of a friendly, supportive group.

For the first time, we secured two sets of funding to support discreet client groups, enabling us to forge new partnerships with relevant support organisations and agencies:

Our work experience project for refugees and asylum seekers aimed to provide participants with positive activities and opportunities across our services to help them integrate into the local community. However, the closure of the hotels meant we are changing our focus to work with settled refugees.

Meanwhile, our developing partnership with Suffolk Probation will assist offenders in their rehabilitative journey back into the community.



**A care home resident is proud of her flower-arranging display**

In July, we were able to employ a former course participant and volunteer Jack Cook, as a community gardener, assisting Ian, as part of Groundwork UK's New to Nature programme – which encouraged disadvantaged young people into the environment sector by funding a year's salary at a relevant organisation. Jack developed his skills while greatly contributing to the smooth running of ActivGardens.



**ActivSheds show off their works at a plant sale**



**Creative woodworking skills come to the fore in our workshop**

A floristry and flower-arranging enterprise piloted by ActivLives staff member Gina Cristallino, who participated in Grow Your Future, led to us securing funding to set up a new strand – ActivBlooms - growing our own cut flowers and restarting our work with older people in residential care homes, as well as with other groups including women's refuge and transgender groups.



**'New to Nature' enabled us to employ a young person**



**Sowing seeds for the future is at the heart of what we do**



Beekeeping enables people to set close to nature



Celebrating 15 years of community gardening

None of this could happen without our beautiful and inspiring gardens, lovingly tended by our armies of amazing volunteers, with Operations Officer Ian Hirst at the helm. During the year he has developed his skills and passion for beekeeping, under the mentorship of the amazing 'Barrie the Bee' (Barrie Powell), introducing a huge range of people, families, school children and guides to the amazing world of bees, and igniting a passion for nature and its stewardship in people of all ages and abilities.

In summer, more than 100 ActivLives members from across our services and hubs had a chance to admire and celebrate our work at a garden party, enjoyed by all.

### Successes: Sudbury park volunteers scoop group award

Volunteers Maxine Hinshelwood and Julia Price attended the Hive Community Awards on Saturday 3rd June to pick up an award recognising the team's dedicated and hard work in Belle Vue Park. From one volunteer when the project started back in 2016, the Thursday morning session is attended by up to 12 people each week who work productively together to keep the park's borders looking beautiful – weeding, watering, picking up litter, pruning overgrown shrubs, and planting new plants.



Sudbury volunteers celebrate their hard work



Time to relax and admire the flower beds in Belle Vue Park!

I really like the social aspect of it, meeting and speaking to people is a big deal for me. At my worst I wasn't leaving the house. I like the physical aspect too - it helps with my sleep patterns. Getting stuck in and feeling you've achieved something is really good. It's a relaxed environment, there's no pressure. For people with mental health issues, pressure is a thing. In the garden, if you make mistakes and things don't come up, you try again. That's why I like gardening in general. I like it here because it's a big space - you can take yourself off and do your own thing if you want. If you're lonely, you can have a chat and a laugh in a group. I'm now sharing an allotment with Terry and learning a lot off him. I've got paid gardening work - I've carried over the skills and confidence I gained here.

- People's Community Garden male volunteer, aged 28



Chantry Walled Garden volunteers are proud of what they achieve



A dedicated participant in Belle Vue Park



Community Garden volunteers prepare for the season ahead

## In Pictures

## What partners and volunteers say

ActivGardens have been a fantastic experience for the service users I support, who are all from a low secure forensic unit. They have been welcomed and supported with a friendly face from all involved, with no bias shown and have learnt many gardening skills. The service users have been given opportunities that they have not had before and have been encouraged to take the lead in these new-found skills and opportunities. As a member of the Occupational Therapy team that supports my service users, I can say with certainty that the team at ActivGardens have been amazing and we are hoping to work with them again in the future.

-Occupational Therapist Assistant Practitioner, Foxhall House Low Secure Unit for offending men or men at risk of offending, over the age of 18, who have a mental illness and who require a low secure setting

The structure of a course helps. I still need to build my personal confidence, but my moods are better and I don't overthink too much. It's helped me to not let my internal fear stop me doing things.

-Gardening In Mind male participant aged 23

I was recently widowed and needed to start rebuilding my life. The park gives me the chance to get outdoors and I like working with plants and my work mates in the team - they are a great bunch. We are always learning from each other. It is helping me to get back to meeting people and start living again. I feel part of the community as a result. The ActivLives team are great and the team leader is a gem.

-Grow Your Community male participant, aged 76

I'm more confident – talking to people, more relaxed, enjoying things more. And I've gained gardening skills and learned the importance of conservation. I'm finding it easier to socialise with different people. It's given me confidence to create a therapeutic garden at home. The biggest challenges have been actually getting here and committing to a course. It's helping me to have more self-belief in my abilities, both physical and mental.

-Gardening In Mind female participant, aged 64

# A Year in Action



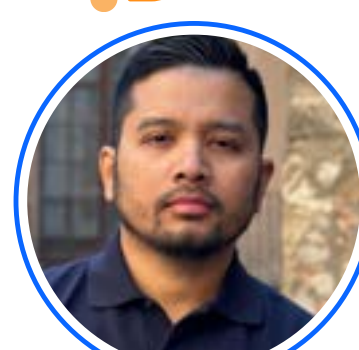
# Meet the Team



**Julie Stokes**  
ActivLives CEO



**Cynthia Glinos**  
ActivLives Finance & Office  
Manager



**Jomel Gutierrez**  
Marketing & Communications  
Officer



**Mike McCarthy**  
ActivSport Development  
Officer



**Frazier Seager**  
ActivAgeing Development  
Officer



**Del Keeble**  
Step by Step Co-ordinator



**Jemma Tilley**  
Step by Step Development  
Co-ordinator



**Laura Lopez**  
Step by Step Co-ordinator



**Alison Pearson**  
ActivLives Community  
Engagement Officer



**Moira Hoogendyk**  
ActivCommunity Support  
Worker



**Susannah Robirosa**  
ActivGardens Fundraising  
& Development Manager



**Ian Hirst**  
ActivGardens  
Operations Officer



**Sam Grainger-Cowles**  
ActivGardens Gardening in  
Mind Project Officer



**Phoebe Hyett**  
ActivGardens Grow Your  
Future Project Officer



**John Bettinson**  
ActivSheds Project Officer

# Meet the Trustees

**Rachael Scott**  
Chair



**Mark Ledger**  
Treasurer



**Louise Kenlock**  
Trustee



**Daniel Billson**  
Vice Chair



**Kerry Overton**  
Trustee



**Clare Lucas**  
Trustee



## Your Support Matters



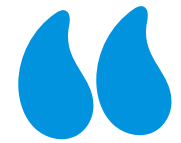
The past year has been an incredible journey with ActivLives because of the support, fundraising and collaboration that we received and built with our supporters, partners, volunteers and funders. We also received some fantastic feedback and comments from various organisations for the services and programmes we offered through the year to different communities in Ipswich and around Suffolk. Our supporters, partners, volunteers and funders play a significant role in successfully implementing our different programmes and initiatives. We thank all of them for their support and enabling us to implement programmes and projects that impact on individuals, groups and different communities.



ActivLives AGM 2023 at the Kesgrave Community and Conference Centre

ActivLives, as an independent charity, relies on grants, trusts, donations, fundraising activities, sponsorship & commissions to enable us to provide & develop our services across Ipswich & Suffolk. We also implement our programmes with the hard work and support of our volunteers. Our high impact programmes continue to benefit the people and communities we serve because of the individuals, groups and organisations that donated and raised funds for us, provided assistance and help and connected us to different people and institutions that gave us the support we need.

To enable us to continue to make a difference through our ActivSport, ActivGardens and ActivHubs programmes, we need your support, make a donation, sponsor an event or activity or volunteer a few hours a week. To donate, visit our website: <https://activlives.org.uk/donations/> and to get more information on how to support us, please contact us at 01473 345350.



Our Board members, along with our Community Support Manager, Angela, saw first-hand how the £4,950 we supported ActivLives with has helped them set up their Grow Well, Eat Well project. Not only has the project taught people in and around Ipswich valuable skills like how to grow their own produce, but everything grown has been sold in the charity's top-up shop, supporting local people.

-East of England Co-op



Things we love to see! This looks like a fantastic day. Thank you for giving people the chance to play our wonderful sport locally.

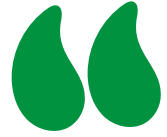
-Boccia England



Our hard working volunteers who support the Inclusive Badminton Tournament in Ipswich



<https://activlives.org.uk/donations/>



We love to get involved with other community groups here at Avocet Court and are grateful for all the help ActivLives has given us in the past. We hope the relationship will continue to grow and benefit us all.

-Avocet Court Ipswich



**VOLUNTEER WITH US**



Lunch club volunteers provide the best service and care to our club's members



Volunteers doing great work in the garden



Halstead Ottley and Brian Morphew from the Freemasons Lodge of Perfect Friendship presented CEO Julie Stokes with a cheque



Julie Stokes receives the cheque from the Ipswich Wanderers



## Finance Review April 2023 - March 2024

This year has seen significant increase in the weekly activities being put on with increased attendances supporting a 30% increase in generated income. Grant income also increased by nearly 20% attributable to Henry Smith Charity which started in this year and funding for Public Health type projects.

We are showing a deficit of £33k which is similar to last year and means our available reserves have reduced to £156k but that still represents a healthy reserve.

### Funders for 2023-24

We are continuously grateful to our funders in supporting the valuable work we do. The organisations that helped provide this key funding in the current year were:

- Ipswich Borough Council
- Suffolk County Council
- East Suffolk Council
- Mid Suffolk District Council
- Babergh District Council
- Stowmarket Town Council
- NHS Suffolk and North East Essex ICB
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Norfolk & Suffolk Foundation Trust
- Suffolk Community Foundation – Maurken Fund
- Suffolk Giving Fun
- Equity in Mind
- England Co-op Lunch Club Fund
- Healthy Heart Fund
- Brooks Grantmaking Fund
- Suffolk Carers Fund
- Private Fund JA
- Suffolk Sports Fund
- Suffolk Cancer Screening Awareness Fund
- Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner's Fund
- Pargiter Trust Fund
- Langlands Grantmaking Fund
- Suffolk Family Carers
- Mrs L D Rope Third Charitable Trust

- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Henry Smith Charity
- New to Nature Groundwork
- Postcode Places Trust
- Sport England
- Heart Research UK
- Ipswich Dementia Action Alliance
- Boccia England
- Special Olympics Suffolk
- Mediterranean Shipping Company

In addition to this there has been hard work from all the staff within the organisation, looking after the gardens and promoting the cause of ActivLives, for which all the Trustees are very appreciative.

For further information, please see the Annual Accounts.

### Trustee/Treasurer

Mark Ledger

### Bankers

National Westminster Bank, Tavern Street, Ipswich

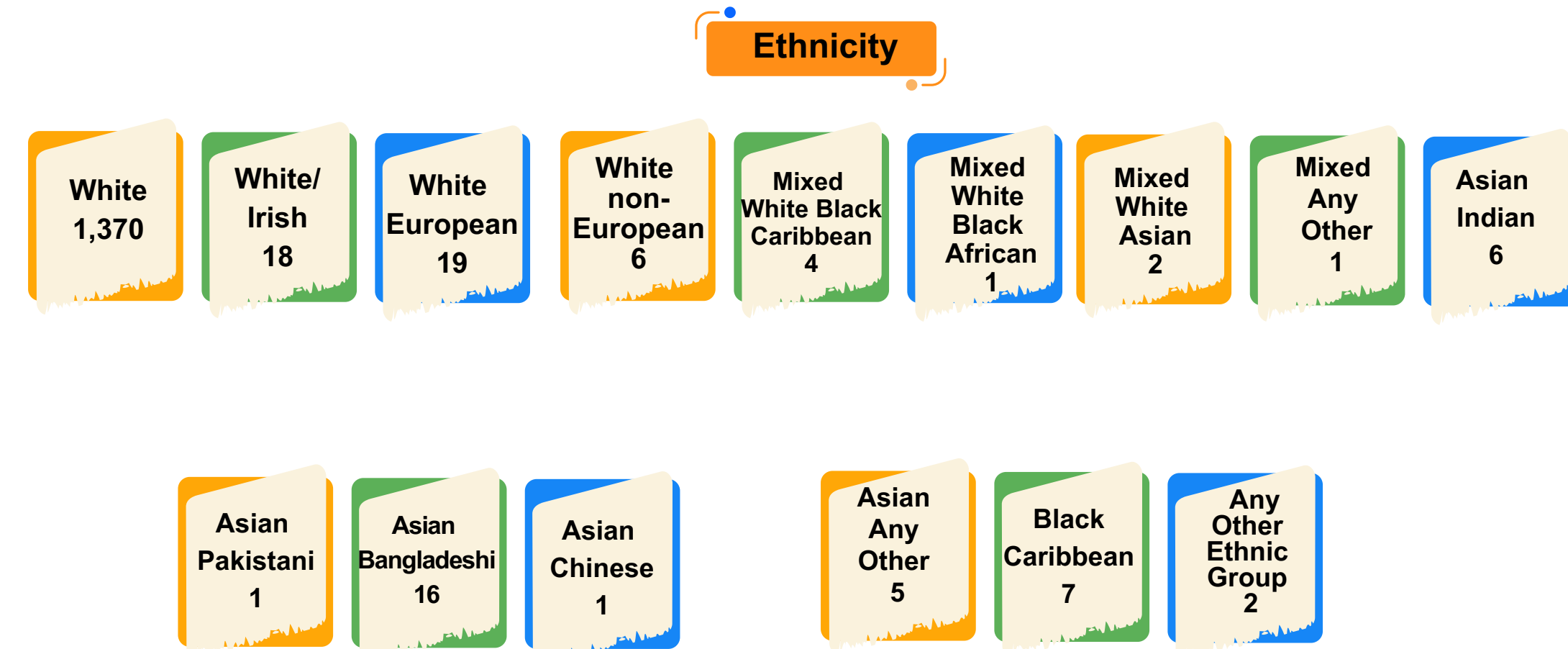
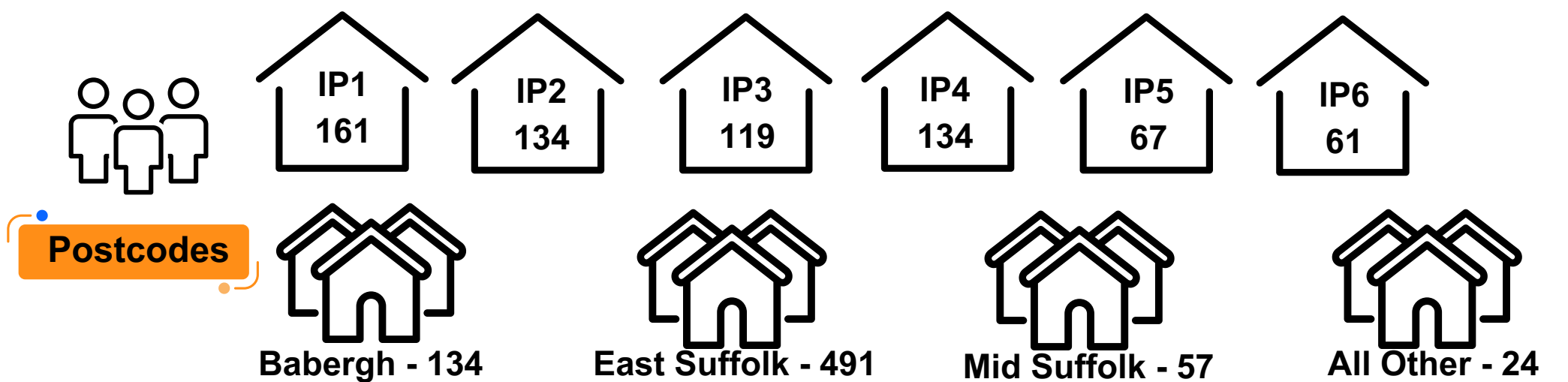
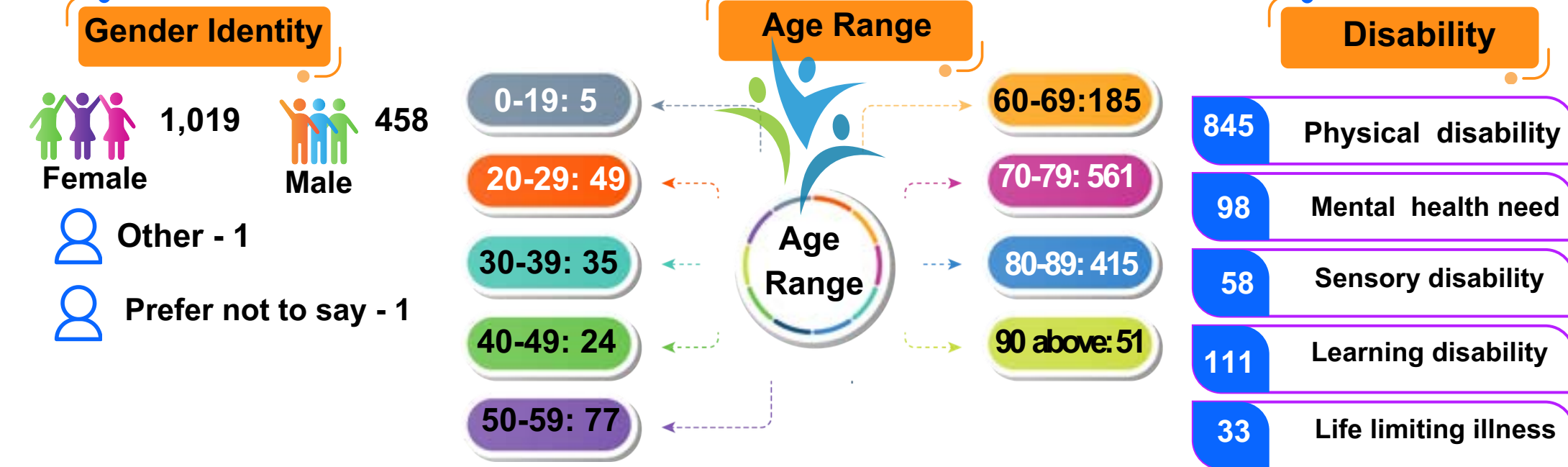
### Accounts Examined by:

Beatons Group

## Participation and Monitoring Data



Our data collection enables us to monitor overall participation levels, client profiles and ensure that we are responding to the requirements of our funders and commissioners and the needs of the people we serve here in Suffolk. Our data includes our wide range of services : Step by Step Programme, Keep on Moving, ActivSinging Groups, ActivSport, Elderflower Hub and ActivFriends Hub. ActivGardens data is separate.



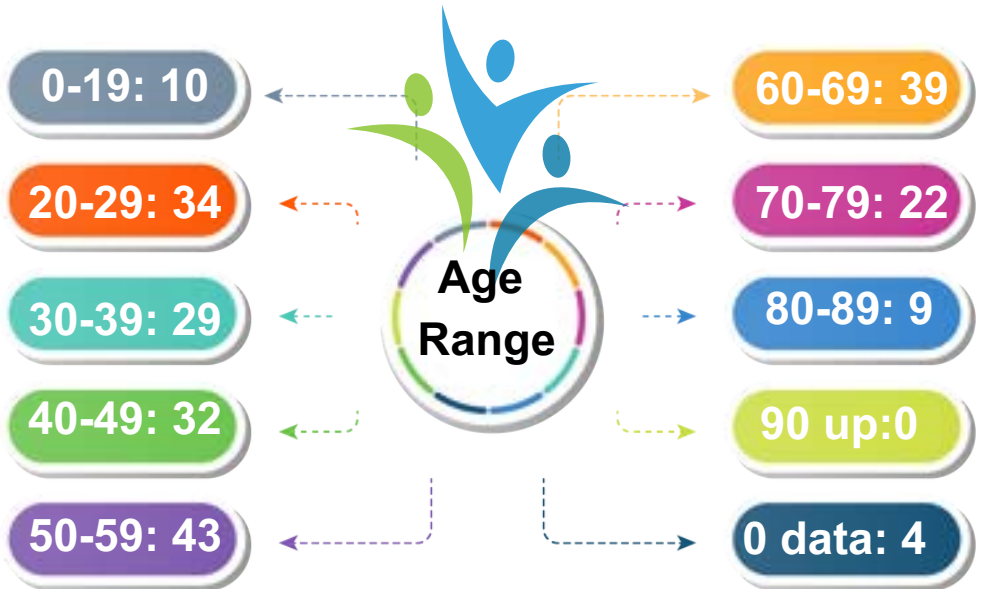


# ActivGardens Participation and Monitoring Data

Total: 222

## Gender Identity

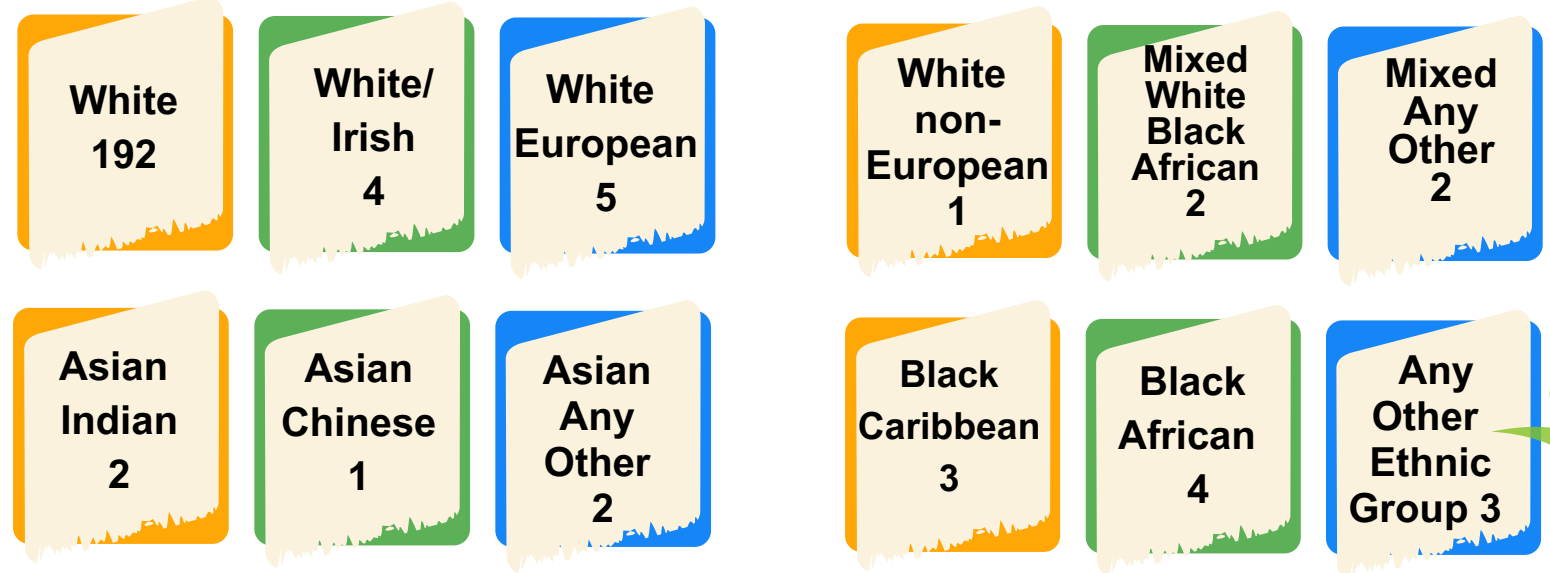
94  
127  
Prefer not to say - 1



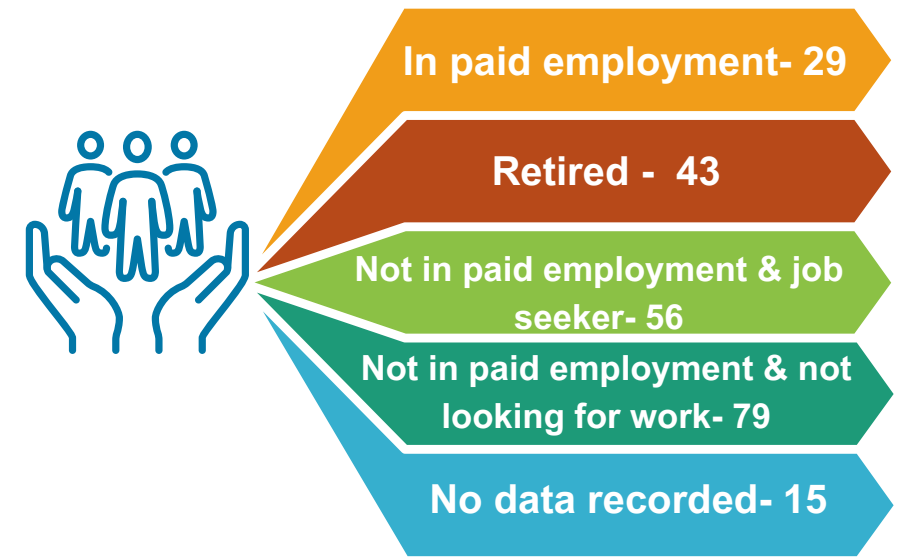
## Disability

Physical disability - 34  
Learning disability - 37  
Mental health need - 57  
Life Limiting Illness - 0  
Sensory disability - 9  
No data recorded - 86

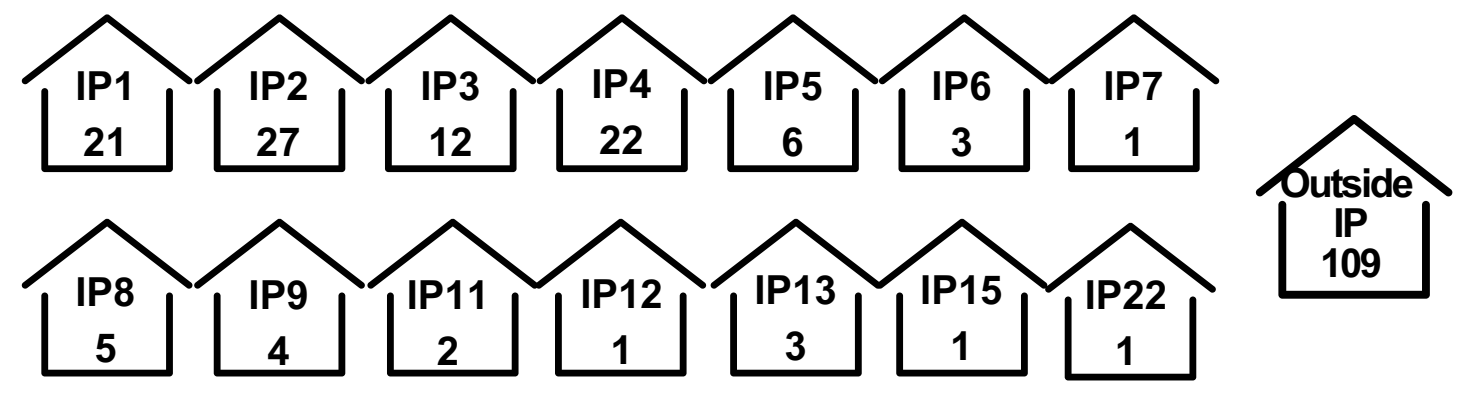
## Ethnicity



## Employment



## Postcode



# Looking Forward



Along with our Annual Report 2023-24, we are launching the ActivLives Strategy 2024 – 26, which highlights the four main areas that we will be focusing on, over the next two years, to ensure that ActivLives continues to deliver our preventative and inclusive services and that we can be sustainable now and in the future.

The four areas we will be developing are:

- Creating a positive working environment that will attract and grow a flexible, inspired and highly motivated team of people with the enthusiasm, knowledge and experience to deliver our vision.
- Ensuring ActivLives is well governed, and our resources are deployed to deliver maximum value to the communities we serve, and we are transparent and accountable to our funders and customers.
- Amplifying the voice of ActivLives and enhancing the brand across Ipswich and Suffolk, to raise awareness about our services with funders, commissioners, supporters, future members, staff and volunteers.
- Reducing our reliance on restricted funding by developing and implementing our Marketing and Communications and Funding and Fundraising Strategies and investing in resources and people who will help us achieve this.

We have created an ambitious Strategy, but it will help us to focus and strengthen our organisation. We know there are going to be challenges along the way, but there will also be exciting opportunities for us to grow our services, widen our reach and support more people in Ipswich and across Suffolk.

We look forward to developing existing partnerships, building new relationships with funders, supporters, donors and growing ActivLives services.

So, here is to another busy and positive year ahead for ActivLives.

