

Spring 2011 Communitynews

The magazine for Dorset Community Action

Includes a pull-out, practical guide for the voluntary sector - Surviving the cuts



Dorset's Big Society speaks

Around 150 representatives of Dorset's voluntary and community groups attended the Surviving the cuts conference organised by Dorset Community Action in February.

Angus Campbell, Leader of Dorset County Council, and David Jenkins, its Chief Executive, spoke about the need to save £31 million in the coming year, while NHS Dorset outlined plans for new health structures in the county.

As well as information about the anticipated impact of government spending cuts, the event offered practical help and resources to groups facing a reduction in funding.

A series of workshops tackled different ways of responding to the cuts, from influencing decision-makers and campaigning, to generating income, taking on public assets, and recruiting and managing volunteers.

Delegates were also reassured that despite facing cuts to its own budget, Dorset Community Action will continue to offer advice and support to the voluntary sector.

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Above: Delegates attend a workshop on influencing decision-makers at the Surviving the cuts conference

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Value for money



With 'shabby chic' taking over on the high street, thrift is the new fashion. But for many groups and organisations in the voluntary sector, the idea of make-do-and-mend is not a trend to follow but a hard necessity.

For us in the voluntary sector, spending little to get a lot is a hard-wired habit. Value for money has always been a preoccupation. Even so, at Dorset Community Action, we have recently

and governance advice, and talk to generalist staff who are committed to helping community and voluntary groups achieve their goals by providing support, inspiration and resources.

The leaner Dorset Community Action may well be seen as meaner too, as we start asking those who can afford it to pay for some of our services. Staff and trustees will be working out the details over the coming weeks, with the commitment to working as effectively as possible in those areas where we can make the biggest difference.

For us in the voluntary sector, spending little to get a lot is a hard-wired habit. Value for money has always been a preoccupation

had to make some very hard savings, having lost about a third of our income. This has of course meant changes, and by far the hardest of these is that seven people have been made redundant and a further two posts won't be replaced.

So we have had to say goodbye to Brian Evans-Johnson, Carole Bentley, Den Paice, Gemma Catterall, Gwyneth Brooks, Jackie Upton, Jane Colvin, Katy Pascoe and Peter Orchard. To do a good job for people and communities, you have to be creative, flexible and tirelessly committed, so for this I would like to say thank you and wish them all well for the future.

This inevitably means we no longer have specialists like a Village Halls Advisor or Play Development Worker, but you will still be able to get funding

We will also be looking for increased involvement from local communities to help us continue providing services and events such as the Dorchester One World Festival.

Further savings will be made by moving offices to somewhere more suitable for our smaller size.

Community News itself will also be changing, and this is the last issue in this current format. But we'll continue to bring vital news and information for the voluntary sector, and practical guidance for organisations which may be struggling to stay afloat in the current economic climate. Watch this space.

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Top volunteers wanted for award

Does a voluntary organisation you know of deserve an award for its work in the community? If so, now is the time to nominate groups for a prestigious royal award scheme.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service is the highest award that can be given to volunteer groups in Britain, for outstanding work done in their local communities. This can mean any social, economic or environmental service that has been running for three years or more, and is carried out by two or more volunteers.

One of the 103 groups awarded in 2010, was Bournemouth-based group, Caring Canines, whose volunteers take their dogs into hospitals, residential units, hospices and schools, for dog-assisted therapy. Amongst their activities is a literacy programme for children with low self-esteem and confidence (pictured) which uses dogs as 'book buddies'.

The group was thrilled to get the Queen's Award, says co-founder Sue Dennett: 'We'd always been appreciated locally, but this was the best achievement we could think of.'

Sue is happy to offer advice to anyone considering nominating a group. Nominations can be received until September, and in Dorset are assessed by the Queen's representative, the Lord-Lieutenant, and a panel of community representatives. For details, go to www.direct.gov.uk and search for Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

For details about Caring Canines, call Sue Dennett on 07812 477 349, or see www.caringk9s.webeden.co.uk

Above: A literacy scheme run by award-winning group, Caring Canines

Funding to support older people

A pot of money is still available to support the development of local activities which are important to older people in their communities.

The Community Initiatives Fund, available through the Dorset Partnership for Older People Programme (POPP), has so far approved more than 260 projects for funding. Each group

supported has had to demonstrate how they will be sustainable beyond the funded period.

Approved projects have included coffee mornings, good neighbour schemes, tea dances, table tennis clubs, memory cafés, stroke clubs, computer schemes, Tai Chi classes and village lunch clubs. The programme has also in the past

funded larger projects such as a scheme which helped older people to identify their housing needs.

Groups can apply for grants of up to £2,000 from the Community Initiatives Fund. To discuss your idea or find out how to apply, contact Sue Warr at the POPP office on 01305 224841 or email sue.warr@dorsetcc.gov.uk



continued from page 1:

The conference began with Angus Campbell and David Jenkins outlining the national context, explaining that Dorset's grant from the government is being reduced by 26%, which equates to £18 million. Added to this are pressures on the budget including rising costs, an ageing population, and inflation. As a result, the County Council has to identify £55 million savings over the next three years, and £31 million in 2011/12.

There were assurances that the council will minimise the impact on frontline services by reducing its own costs, for example through less reporting to government. The council, said Angus Campbell, wants to 'secure, promote and protect the voluntary and community sector' and the Chief Executive's office has safeguarded its £600,000 investment in support for voluntary and community action. 'We are keen to hear what people

from the voluntary and community sector organisations have to say about how we best support them,' he added.

There were questions from the floor, both for the County Council speakers and an NHS Dorset representative. Some delegates were keen to know about the impact of spending cuts on their own groups. Mark Powell, of Diverse Abilities Plus, asked whether the council had informed those organisations likely to be affected. He was told that the council is in the process of working through the detail of the budget, and its effect on every service and post. In some cases, delegates were disappointed that the speakers were unable to provide definitive answers.

Representatives of Dorset's District Councils were also on hand to answer individual delegates' questions (pictured).

'For us, the conference was a great success'. says Georgina Morgan, Chief

Executive of Dorset Community Action. 'It's important the voluntary sector finds out as much as it can about what's happening, and the workshops will help us prepare for the difficult times to come. As one delegate put it, it was also useful to be able to meet people from the voluntary sector and its statutory partners, and discuss the enormous challenges the cuts will present us with.'

The council is encouraging the voluntary and community sector to take part in its survey on support for the sector at www.dorsetforyou.com/390511. This consultation ends on 29 April 2011.

The Surviving the Cuts conference was filmed by community media company Transition Vision. To see the video go to www.transitionvision.tv/play/Community/Dorset_Surviving_the_Cuts

Above: Delegates at the Surviving the Cuts conference in conversation with representatives of district councils

Surviving the cuts

A practical guide for the voluntary sector in Dorset

Conference helps groups to look ahead

At the Dorset Community Action conference *Surviving the Cuts*, a series of workshops looked at practical ways to help voluntary and community groups stay afloat during these difficult times. In this pull-out guide, we set out ideas put forward by experts and delegates during some of the workshops.



Recruiting and managing volunteers

Marie Waterman from the Volunteer Centre Dorset stressed in her workshop that it is vital from the start to think about why you need volunteers, what exactly they would do, and whether you are ready to recruit them. Volunteering is a two-way process and is about meeting their requirements as well as yours.

You can recruit volunteers in a number of ways including:

- Contacting your local Volunteer Centre (details below)
- Displaying posters and leaflets at community centres, libraries, waiting rooms and social clubs
- Contacting faith communities, Rotary, Inner Wheel and Lions organisations
- Approaching schools and colleges where students may need placements and experience
- Running media campaigns
- Contacting REACH, which recruits retired executives

Once you have volunteers in place, you need to motivate them and help them feel valued, for example by:

- Giving them clear task descriptions, and ensuring they know what is expected of them
- Offering support, training and opportunities for development
- Having a named person to work alongside them initially
- Giving them a volunteer handbook which should include volunteer policies and a role description
- Recognising their skills, giving responsibility, and acknowledging their ideas and input
- Thanking them, and organising events to celebrate and publicise their achievements

For more information and details of outreach services across Dorset, see www.volunteeringdorset.org.uk, call the Volunteer Centre on 01305 269214, or email info@volunteeringdorset.org.uk



Influencing decision makers in Dorset

The relationship of voluntary organisations with local authorities and public bodies is changing. Structures like Strategic Partnerships, are being reviewed or scrapped, and the cuts mean less support for those representing the voluntary sector. Meanwhile, the government intends to give more power to communities through the Localism Bill. This workshop, led by Isabel Livingstone of the South West Forum, explored some of these changes.

It is still unclear whether there will be funding to support representatives on decision-making forums such as the Dorset Strategic Partnership and the developing Health and Wellbeing Board. There was a strong feeling at the workshop, however, that organisations should come together to have influence collectively as well as individually.

Some of the ways organisations currently influence Dorset County Council, the NHS and other public bodies:

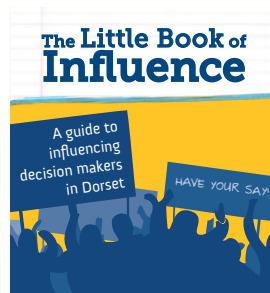
- Shout and campaign
- Go to meetings with the council and health bodies

Actions they could take to have more influence:

- Do research and inform themselves
- Get involved in local area partnerships which can be an opportunity to hear about things off the record
- Commit to joining or forming a voluntary sector group to influence GP commissioning
- Talk to whoever is working out the detail of cuts now, before plans are set in concrete, and influence early

Actions that voluntary and community organisations could take together to have more influence:

- Commit to developing an action plan to influence GP commissioning, and attend all meetings
- Work with the council to set budgets, and get involved in the detail of implementing the cuts
- Be aware of the barrier of competing priorities, and be fair to those who are more vulnerable or less vocal
- Drive the agenda rather than just sit round the table



Dorset Community Action's new publication, the Little Book of Influence, is full of further advice, and local and national contacts. Download it at www.dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk/news/little_book_influence

Your voices.....



'We should all strive towards participatory budgeting because there's obviously a finite resource and this would enable people to help make decisions about priorities.'

Sue Warr, Dorset Partnership for Older People



'It was positive to hear today that the County Council supports social enterprise, but I feel services could fail or go to the private sector without a proper strategy for promoting and supporting them, and the timescale is pressing.'

John Merritt, Social Enterprise Network



'My main concern is the expectation from statutory bodies that their cuts can be picked up by volunteers for free. Volunteers already do an awful lot with not a lot, and investment is needed to support them, especially if you're asking them to do even more in the future.'

Katy Pascoe, Island Community Action



'I would urge the County Council to use their reserves to set up a transition fund to sustain voluntary and community sector organisations through this difficult period and keep them afloat.'

Caroline Buxton, Purbeck Citizens Advice Bureau



Generating income for your organisation

With presentations from two prominent community organisations based in the South West, this workshop looked at strategies, capabilities and finance for generating income.

The Lyme Regis Development Trust works with the community to provide services and resources including a children's centre, affordable housing, a business centre and community consultation. Marcus Dixon believes 'social enterprise is an increasingly attractive way of delivering public and community services and innovation, particularly in the low carbon, environment and the developing sectors.'

Income-generating options for social enterprises include:

- Taking on physical assets
- Taking on contractual assets – delivering or supporting services
- Entering into joint ventures
- Having trading subsidiaries
- Developing projects

To make things happen for your organisation you need:

- Finance – obtained through loans, grants or equity
- Skills and expertise on your staff
- A good plan, and the opportunity to develop it
- An enterprise culture

Wessex Community Assets (WCA) offers support and advice on community investment and reducing reliance on grants. Tim Crabtree explained how it has supported community asset development for the Lyme Regis Development Trust, for example, through negotiating investment from the Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset, securing a grant and providing a loan.

Exploring equity finance in more detail, key points included the following:

- Loans (or debt finance) require interest payments and the repayment of the amount borrowed
- Equity is investment in exchange for a stake in the organisation, in the form of shares
- Equity finance can be useful in the early stages of growth or when developing a new product or service. Investors are effectively sharing the risk and are likely to defer any expectation of a financial return for some time

To find out more about the Lyme Regis Development Trust go to www.lrdt.co.uk

For details of Wessex Community Assets see its website at www.wessexca.co.uk or email tim.crabtree@phonecoop.coop



Taking on public assets

This workshop, led by Peter Jones of the the Development Trusts Association, looked at the opportunities, risks and issues to consider for those interested in taking on public assets.

Peter Jones explained that the work to promote the transfer of assets to the community sector has been gathering momentum: 'The new political climate and economic reality is driving public bodies to dispose of assets at an unprecedented rate, while simultaneously having large expectations of community and voluntary organisations to take over assets and run services.'

The benefits of asset transfer include:

- Using an asset base to build sustainable income streams
- Having a reduced reliance on grant funding
- Increasing community empowerment and confidence
- Gaining control of spending potential and decision-making

Potential barriers to asset transfer include:

- Difficulty in raising the capital
- The lack of a viable, sustainable business plan
- A lack of appropriate skills and confidence
- Resistance to change in an organisation
- Concerns over liability and maintaining the asset

Issues to think about when considering asset transfer:

- Does it fit with your organisation's strategic objectives?
- Do you have the capacity to engage with a long-term development project?
- Do you have a sound financial strategy?
- Which should come first – the community need or the availability of an asset?
- Could you work in partnership with your local authority?
- Who will take on ultimate responsibility for the asset?

A key message was that anyone considering taking on public assets should not do so lightly, and should carry out long-term planning. Taking on public assets may not help you survive these current cuts, but could help to make you sustainable in the longer term, and less susceptible to changes in the political and economic climate.

Information and support for organisations undertaking asset transfers can be found on the Asset Transfer Unit website www.atu.org.uk. The Development Trusts Association's publication *To Have and To Hold* can be downloaded from www.dta.org.uk/resources/publications. To register buildings in which you have an interest, go to www.theplacestation.org.uk

.....your say

'We need to move from getting an overview of where the cuts are, to detail. In our case we need to know which of the services in Swanage that we've fought for over the years, we may now lose.'

Trevor Ayling, Swanage Area Senior Forum



'Dorset Community Action gets information out to the voluntary sector, listens to their needs, and is an effective advocate at local and national levels. I'm concerned that the cuts to DCA's funding could have a damaging effect on their ability to do these things, at a time when the Big Society agenda is expecting more of us all.'

Nigel Engert, Sherborne Area Partnership



'We all need to focus on working together, and to look at joint working arrangements. It's vital that representatives of all those involved, from both statutory and voluntary sector, attend planning meetings.'

Peter Atkins, East Dorset Mental Health Carers Forum



'I work on a housing association project which supports volunteer mentors. Events like this help you link up with others and share good practice.'

Claire McNally, Futures at Knightstone





Taking local action



Since helping save the Swanage Day Centre from closure, Melvin and Jerry Norris have used their experience to guide others threatened by the cuts. They were one of three local groups at this workshop to talk about practical and effective ways of taking action at a local level.

The Friends of Swanage Day Centre ran a successful campaign to protect and develop the centre, which provides support for older people and their carers. Jerry (pictured above) and her husband Melvin advised others to:

- Make sure you have the facts and do plenty of research
- Take your facts to the streets with petitions, leaflets and banners, and get facts into the local press
- Use case studies and personal documented evidence
- Get the support of local and influential bodies such as churches, doctors' surgeries, and town and district councils
- Use the experience and advice available from Dorset Community Action to strengthen your group
- Involve as many people as possible, for example when demonstrating at council meetings

Save our Lollipop People is 'a local campaign with ambitions to go national' explains its leading campaigner, Helen Toft. The campaign was started to highlight the protest in Dorset against cuts to the School Crossing Patrol Service. The ultimate aim is a change in the law to protect the service in the future. Among the methods she has used so far are:

- Creating a blog using the free service www.blogger.com, which was easy to set up, and generated a lot of interest
- Setting up a petition and sending it to all the 65 Dorset schools with crossing patrols
- Creating a logo using the lollipop sign
- Setting up a dedicated Facebook group
- Running a media campaign
- Emailing all the County Councillors directly
- Leading a march through Dorchester (see picture below) and presenting the petition to County Hall
- Putting a film of the march on YouTube

The Ad Lib campaign was the third group to share their experience. Mike Chaney, who is very active in this campaign against council plans to close more than half Dorset's libraries, acknowledged that they have received much media support. One of the campaign's main thrusts was getting nearly 14,000 people to sign a petition in just one week, and Mike advised others that a petition can be very effective, especially if you get over 1,000 signatures, which means that your issue has to be discussed in a full County Council meeting.

The Friends of Swanage Day Centre can be contacted via melvin.norris@btconnect.com

Helen Toft of the Save our Lollipop People can be contacted at save_lollipop_people@yahoo.com and the blog is at <http://save-lollipop-people.blogspot.com>

Mike Chaney of Ad Lib is at chaneatley@tiscali.co.uk.

To find out more about Adlib's proposals to save Dorset's libraries go to www.dorsetlibraries.org.uk/adlib

Below: Helen Toft leads a march through Dorchester in January to protest against proposals to cut the School Crossing Patrol Services





One World Festival goes on

The third One World Festival is set to take place in Dorchester on Sunday 10 July, and once again, the organisers are looking for performers, community groups, businesses, sports teams and volunteers to get involved.

Last year's event attracted 3,000 visitors who came to celebrate Dorset's cultural diversity through dance, sport, food and other activities. Thirty organisations took part, from local groups like the Bridport Bagladies, which supports South African townships, to sports teams from Bangladeshi restaurants and the Ghurkha army base in Blandford.

The event will once again be hosted by Dorset's Speak Easy group, with the support of Dorset Community Action. The original idea for the festival came from Khaliq Miah, the Bangladeshi founder of Speak Easy. The group helps to provide English language lessons for those who do not speak English as a first language.

The main sponsor of the 2011 event is the Dorchester Business Improvement District (BID) which stepped in when reduced staffing levels at Dorset Community Action threatened the future of the festival. The Dorchester BID brings together local businesses to invest in improvements to Dorchester's town centre, and it's director of projects, Phil Gordon, explains why he wanted to help save the festival: 'There's a real community benefit in bringing people from different parts of the community closer together - and this can only be a good thing for Dorchester too.'

Anyone wishing to take part in the 2011 Dorset One World Festival should complete a booking form, available at www.dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk. If you would like to support the event as a volunteer, contact Kris Hallett on 01305 216409 or email kris.hallett@dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk.

Above: Egyptian dance troupe Raqs Sharqi Dorset at the 2010 festival

Community housing schemes take off in Dorset

Two projects in Dorset are set to provide affordable housing for future generations of local people.

In Buckland Newton, work has begun on site to build 10 new, energy efficient homes. The project has been developed by the Buckland Newton Community Property Trust (BNCPT), and funded by an assortment of grants and loans from central and local government, as well as the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tudor Trust. BNCPT was formed by villagers, to provide affordable homes for local families. In around 25 years, when the loans have been paid off, any income from the scheme will be used to benefit the village.

In Symondsburry parish, a Community Land Trust is being developed, which hopes to buy a piece of land near the village. One option being considered is for the land to be leased to a housing association, which will build and manage homes for those with close links to the village. These would be available to rent and buy as shared ownership properties. The Symene Community Land Trust, which would own the freehold, is accountable to the local community, and would ensure the homes remain affordable for future generations.

For further information on how a Community Land Trust could work in your community, contact Alison Ward of the Somerset, Devon and Dorset Community Land Trust Project. Email alison.ward@wessexca.co.uk or call 07827 941030.

Correction: The last edition of Community News reported that the Buckland Newton scheme had been developed with the support of the Somerset, Devon and Dorset Community Land Trust Project. This is not the case, although the project is very supportive of the scheme. Apologies to the BNCPT.



Playtime for Dorset's children

It's not just swings and roundabouts at the new Jarvis Field play area in Stalbridge. Some of the more innovative features at the site include a 'mud bath' (pictured right), with a boardwalk and logs, and slides which whizz you through tunnels to the bottom of a grassy hillock.

The play area was funded through the national Playbuilder programme, following a government grant of over £1 million for Dorset. Jarvis Field was the 51st and final play area to be funded by the scheme, which has now ended.

Plans for the Jarvis Field play area were developed by Stalbridge Town Council, with local parents and children. Dorset Community Action (DCA) supported the project with various aspects from community consultation and selection of equipment to funding.

Through its Our Space 2 programme, which has also now ended, DCA helped with many other play areas, from Colehill in East Dorset, to Thornford in West Dorset (pictured above). Brian Evans-Johnson, who ran the scheme, says, 'Dorset used to be behind other

countries in its provision of play spaces but can now, rightly, claim to be leading the field.'

Above: Swings at the Thornford play area. Below: The 'mud bath' at Jarvis Field play area, Stalbridge



Does your parish have a plan?

Having a parish plan involves setting out a vision for your neighbourhood, can help bring in funding and resources, and encourages local people to take action.

In Dorset, parish plans have recently been produced in Osmington and Abbotsbury, bringing the total of completed plans to 96.

A further 23 communities, including Wareham St Martin and Winterborne Stickland, are in the process of producing plans, and there are 12 groups about to start them.

In each case the idea is to identify local issues and what can be done to improve the neighbourhood and the lives of the residents.

For advice on forming a parish planning group, getting started and obtaining funding, contact Simon Thompson of Dorset Community Action on 01305 216412 or email simon.thompson@dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk

To see existing parish plans go to www.dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk/parishplans

How to green your community building

Village halls and other community buildings can be very expensive to heat, especially when so many rural buildings rely on oil, with its spiralling prices. Dorset's sustainability organisation, da21, recently organised a training day to help reduce energy use and costs in village halls across the county.

At the training course, experts from the Energy Saving Trust provided guidance to those running community buildings, on how to carry out an energy audit. Participants learnt about monitoring energy use, heating and lighting systems, efficient heating controls and improved insulation. They were also given advice about using renewable energy technologies such as solar panels, which can generate money as well as electricity.

The course was run as part of da21's GreenAssist project, with the support of Dorset Community Action. Sustainability officer Susan Anders explains how the project can help community groups: 'Many groups want to do something to limit their environmental impact but are not sure how to go about it. GreenAssist can help them to understand more about sustainability issues, and then

look at the possible changes they could make, from small ones like using recycled paper or locally sourced food for catering, to more complex efforts like insulating buildings or installing renewable energy systems. We can also signpost them to other advice, including ideas on where to go for funding and resources, and help get projects off the ground.'

One exciting new resource that will be available from the end of April is a thermal imaging service, which is being offered by the Dorset Energy Advice Centre. Community groups will be given training in the use of a thermal imaging camera plus the loan of the camera for a week. This will enable them to detect areas of heat loss in a community building, helping them identify the most effective energy saving measures.

da21 is an independent charity which encourages sustainable living in Dorset. It now works closely with Dorset Community Action, and develops joint projects. For more details, go to www.sustainabledorset.org.uk. To find out how da21 can support your group, call 01305 213721 or email susan@da21.org.uk or paul@da21.org.uk.

In brief

Free Transition Town training is to be held in Wimborne on the weekend of 3 and 4 June.

A Transition initiative is a community-led response to the pressures of climate change and fossil fuel depletion. The sessions, organised by da21, are designed for those already involved, or who want to develop their understanding and get started. The training will be delivered by the Transition Town Network. For details go to <http://dorsettransitiontraining.eventbrite.com> or contact da21 (details left).

The Dorset Play Partnership has produced a new Dorset Play Strategy 2011-2015 setting out its ambitions for improving play provision and services in Dorset. The draft strategy is available to view and comment on at <http://consultationtracker.dorsetforyou.com/playstrategy>

Villagers in Chetnole, West Dorset, now have a weekly post office outreach service, run from the village hall. And when they have taken advantage of services such as getting post weighed, paying in cash or drawing out pensions, they can stay for tea and coffee served by volunteers. The service was opened in January, with the help of Dorset Community Action, following the closure of the village shop a year earlier.



Above: The first customer is served at the opening of the Chetnole post office outreach service in January

Successful.

Insurance: from trustee indemnity to the horticultural show

Aon has been successfully creating insurance solutions for thousands of village halls around the country for over forty years. With the help of our extensive experience and unrivalled knowledge, our dedicated team will treat you like number one.

Whether you require cover for accidental damage and public liability, indemnity insurance for hirers, loss of revenue cover or insurance for special events, we will provide just the policy you need.

For more information call the Aon Village Hall Team on **0845 600 1682**

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Tales of the river bank

Voluntary and community groups across North Dorset are supported by a team of Community Resource Workers, whose roles include funding advice, help with applications, and information about training opportunities. Among the groups to benefit is the Gillingham Action for Nature Group (GANG), which recently opened up Withywood, an area of willow and alder woodland.

The site is by the River Stour, and the Chair of GANG, Bob Messer, explains that work included protecting the river bank from erosion (pictured). 'Volunteers of all ages also laid over half a kilometre of all-weather path, and built a footbridge and safety fence.' The group encourages awareness of local wildlife through walks and talks, and carries out practical conservation tasks in and around Gillingham, such as clearing

paths, planting trees, putting up bat and bird boxes and managing a butterfly and wildflower meadow.

Bisi Adekunle, Community Resource Worker with the Three Rivers Community Partnership in Gillingham, says that supporting local groups like GANG is vital: 'We provide the kind of everyday help which enables them to grow and flourish in their communities.'

North Dorset's team of Community Resource Workers is employed by Dorset Community Action to support the district's four community partnerships. For contact details see www.dorsetforyou.com. The Gillingham Action for Nature Group can be contacted through the Chair, Bob Messer, on 01747 821269.

Above: A volunteer with the Gillingham Action for Nature Group carries out river bank protection work on the Stour

At a glance

Free computer training courses are still going ahead in village halls across Dorset, set up by Dorset Community Action, with tuition from Dorset Adult Learning.



Broadmayne village hall (left) was one of the most recent venues, and further IT sessions will be held in West Moors

on 12 May and Briantspuddle on 24 May. For details or to book, call 0800 262648.

The DT11 Green Group is co-ordinating a week of activities for Green Week 2011, from Sunday 3 to Saturday 9 July. Events will include free guided walks, environmental arts activities and a Green Fair at the Blandford Corn Exchange on Friday 8. To take part, or for more details, contact the DT11 Forum Community Partnership on 01258 489998 or see www.dtlforum.org.uk

A job club in Gillingham now runs weekly for those seeking paid and voluntary work, training, or help with CV writing and forms. The service is at Gillingham Town Hall from 10am to 1pm on Fridays. Contact david.walsh25@btinternet.com or call 01747 825161

Crossways Young Peoples Group, which helped their village to acquire a skatepark, multi-use games area and seating shelter, was congratulated at the recent district council Community Awards Champion ceremony. Jonny Webb, the Chair (below), won the overall



Young Person Award. Meanwhile, Kris Hallett, of Dorset Community Action, has been invited to a

Buckingham Palace garden party in recognition of her work with the young people, and with other groups in West Dorset.