



Introduction

Through the Better Connections Project Inclusive Exeter has promoted community engagement, cross-cultural integration, and inclusivity. This report outlines the activities and events delivered, feedback received, challenges encountered, and steps forward. We are on target with regard to reaching new Drop-In beneficiaries; we have better connected individuals within their own communities and with Exeter's wider community; we have helped ethnically diverse communities not directly involved with the Project and others wanting to connect with diverse communities in Exeter.

Recruitment

We had an open recruitment process for our three key project roles and have successfully recruited staff with lived experience and in-depth understanding of their communities. All our staff are from a diverse background and have the appropriate skill set for their role.

Steering Group Committee

A Steering Group made up of representatives from the six participating communities, Inclusive Exeter Directors, staff and other stakeholders directs the Project. Meetings cover updates on events and activities and scrutiny of expenditure. Details of expenditure are sent out to Steering Group members for study in advance of the meetings so that members are kept well-informed and Inclusive Exeter upholds its commitment to transparency.

Community Events Overview

Over the past six months, Inclusive Exeter has organised five events delivered by the four community groups.

1. Easter /Vishu/ Eid Celebration (13th April 2024): Delivered by Exeter Kerala Community, Venue: America Hall, Attendance: 350
2. Eid Reunion and Community Picnic (30th June 2024) Delivered by: Afghan Community in Exeter, Venue: Exmouth Park, Attendance: 300
3. Annual Sports Day (30th June 2024) Delivered by: Exeter Kerala Community Venue: Ludwell Valley Park, Attendance: 150
4. NCIE Family Fun Day (21st July 2024) Delivered by: Nigerian Community in Exeter Venue: Wonford Community and Learning Centre and Wonford Playing Field Attendance: 450
5. Filipino Sports Fest (27 & 28 July 202) : Delivered by: Filipino Community Association Venue: ISCA Academy, The Ship and Pelican (Heavitree, Exeter) Attendance: 350

Some of these groups, in particular Exeter Kerala Community and the Filipino Community Association , have been delivering these events for a long time but only within their community; with the Better Connections Project, we tried to make these events open for all communities; however, we found it challenging to engage them into making their events more inclusive to all communities because they have established a culture that their events are for only their communities. On the other hand, we had a great experience with the events of the Afghan and Nigerian groups. Both groups are new. Both events were genuinely inclusive, and we had participants from diverse backgrounds regardless of people's race, faith, gender, religion, class and sexuality. Within the Inclusive Exeter Better Connections Project, we are aiming to work with these grassroots groups so that they can deliver their events for all communities to increase community cohesion. We find it more challenging to make established groups inclusive than new ones. However, this will be our target for the next few years.



Physical Activities Programme

We have been delivering four regular physical activity sessions, attracting people from all communities. Our physical activity programme has proven to be genuinely inclusive fostering community integration and reflecting true inclusivity and diversity. Our grassroots community groups with identity hosting regular activities for people from Exeter from all backgrounds is an excellent achievement of our work.

Sunday Badminton: Every Sunday, Time: 12 PM – 2 PM Venue: Wonford Sports Centre Facilitators: Members of the Devon Bengali Association. Each session was attended by people from various communities, including Bengali, Hongkongers, Keralan, Malaysian, Filipino and local white British people. We are currently hiring all four courts of the sports hall. The WhatsApp group has been regularly updated with photos, videos and updates about the group by the facilitators. The weekly video from the session on 28th April was uploaded to our Facebook page. There were some lovely comments from the regular attendees. One of them says:

“This initiative is a great opportunity to do some much-needed physical activity, socialise, and make new friends. You get to meet people from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds here. Everyone is welcoming and accommodating regardless of their ability on a badminton court. In addition, there is always a dedicated pitch for young kids to hone their badminton skills. When combined with the availability of an adjacent big supermarket, playing fields, walking/running trails and a car park with ample spaces nearby, every option is to make it a family day out with weekly activity and shopping ticked off in the same go. Hats off to its organisers, and keep up the good work!”

Volleyball: Every Tuesday, Time: 6 PM–7:30 PM Venue: Riverside Sports Centre Facilitators: Members of the Afghan community. The average attendance is around 12-15 per session, spread over two courts. These events are regularly attended by Afghans, Pakistanis, and refugees living at various Exeter hotels. Inclusive Exeter will pay for the volleyball venue hire for six months as the Afghan community has decided to use half of their Better Connections funding to pay for volleyball.

Women’s Only Yoga: Tuesdays: 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM, Thursdays: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM, Venue: The Mint Methodist Centre, Facilitators: Women of Iraqi and White British heritage. The yoga sessions took a break in August. Classes will resume from 5th September. New Timing: Starting on 25th July 2024, Thursday sessions start at 12:30 instead of 1 PM. These sessions have become an essential part of the social lives of our regular attendees from various ethnic backgrounds, including Bangladesh, India, Syria, Ukraine, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Hong Kong, and others. The WhatsApp group, our CRM platform and IE Facebook page are regularly updated with relevant information about the yoga sessions.

Martial Arts: Every Saturday Time: 4 PM – 5:30 PM Venue: Wonford Sports Centre Facilitators: Members of the Hong Kong Community

There were no sessions in June due to issues with our insurance coverage, which required us to pause the Martial Arts sessions. Regular sessions resumed on July 13th. Attendance has been good since the beginning and includes children (accompanied by adults). Hongkongers attend these sessions mainly, though there are plans to include asylum seekers housed in one of the hotels.



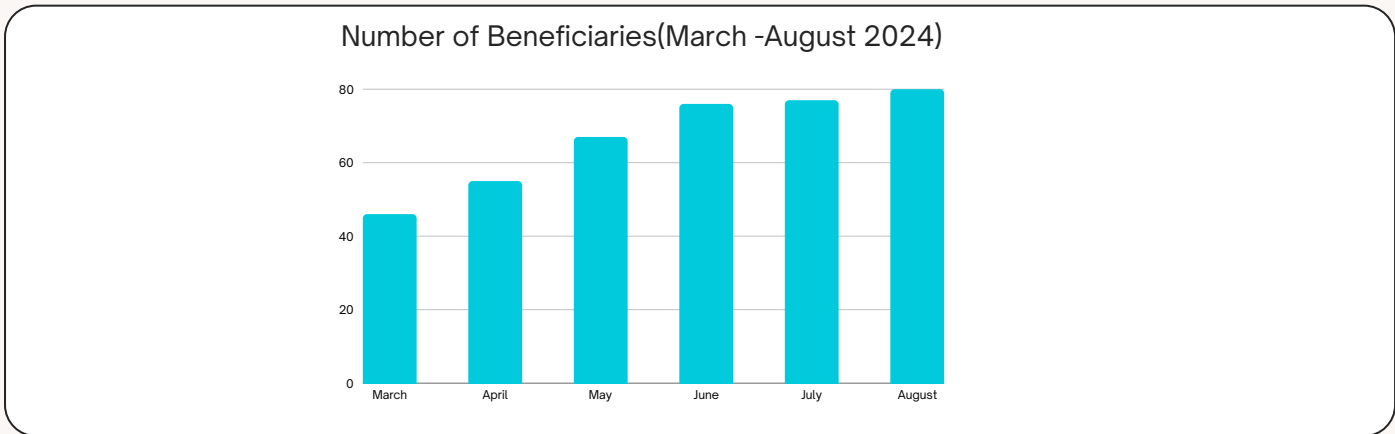
This is a computer-generated representation of the Drop-In Support Service session

Introduction:

The Better Connections project, launched on 4th March 2024, enabled the expansion of the Drop-In Support Service, which originally began in 2020 in response to COVID-19. The service operates at two locations: Wonford Community & Learning Centre(Tuesdays)and Mint Methodist Church Centre(Thursdays) 9.30 A.M -12.30 P.M , making it more accessible to the Exeter community.

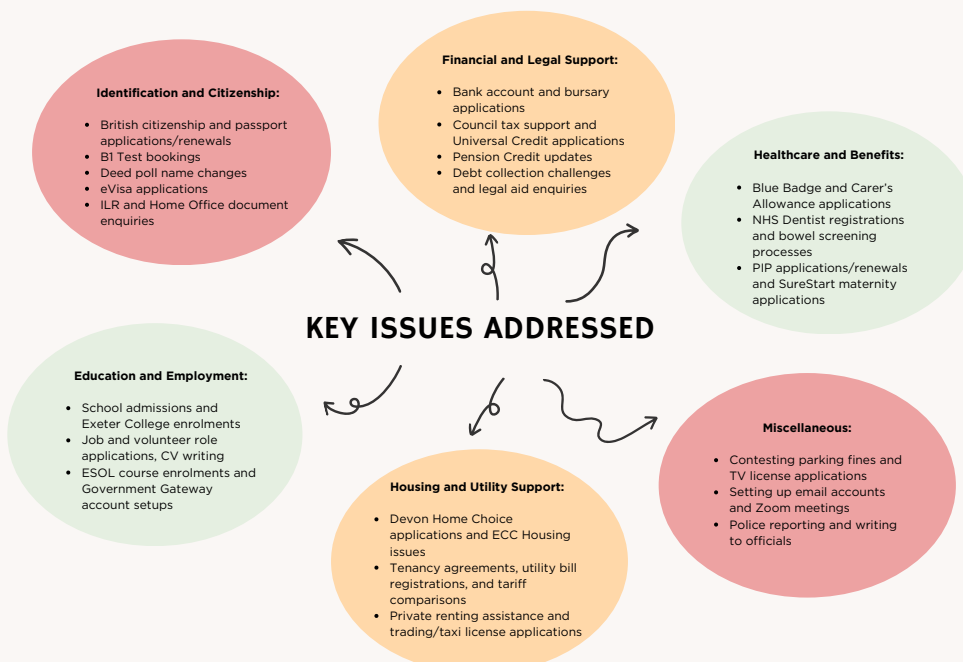
Beneficiary Growth:

The service started with 46 beneficiaries registered on our CRM platform in March 2024 and has since grown steadily:



Impact and Key Issues Addressed :

Through focused outreach and strong partnerships, our Drop-In Support Service has expanded its reach, effectively addressing the most pressing issues faced by our diverse community. We've successfully connected with diverse ethnic communities, including Afghan, Bangladeshi, Filipino, Indian, Nigerian, Kurdish, Malaysian, Moroccan, Syrian, among others.



Key Referrals Made:

We support beneficiaries with IT and language barriers by offering a transition service. We build trust and guide them through the process, staying with them until they're comfortable working with the referred organization independently. Referrals include:

- Immigration and legal support - Amicus Law
- Foodbank services - Exeter Foodbank
- CV/Job search assistance - Employment Plus
- Furniture provision - Turntable Furniture

Challenges:

- Difficulty recruiting and retaining skilled volunteer caseworkers
- Struggling to manage rising beneficiary numbers with limited caseworkers and resources.
- Handling complex cases is increasingly challenging, demanding more time and specialized knowledge.
- Facing limitations in expanding services due to inadequate funding, particularly for high-demand form-filling assistance.
- Overcoming IT and language barriers is challenging, requiring more personalized and time-intensive support.
- Struggling to maintain GDPR compliance due to the need for regular CRM updates and proper data management.

Future Outlook:



- Expand the service to reach 100 beneficiaries by the end of the project.
- Recruit and train additional caseworkers to meet growing demand.
- Considering offering form-filling services due to rising demand and service closures of similar service by other organisations
- Implement email encryption, conduct ongoing training, and regularly update our CRM to ensure GDPR compliance.
- Secure long-term funding to sustain the service.

Additional Comments:

The Drop-In service offers a supportive transition process for beneficiaries, ensuring they feel comfortable and confident when referred to other services. The team continues to publicize the service and expand its reach within Exeter.



Digital Presence

Inclusive Exeter has expanded its digital reach across multiple platforms to better engage our community:

Website: Regularly updated with events, resources, and team profiles.(To View [Click Here](#))

Social Media: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#)

Newsletter: Our quarterly newsletter, launched in July 2024 as the Summer Edition, provides seasonal updates on our activities and upcoming events.(To View [Click Here](#))

Partnership Organisation

Thanks to the Better Connections Project Inclusive Exeter is becoming an increasingly well-known organisation in the city. As such we have been approached by a number of individuals and organisations seeking help and we have been pleased to oblige. We have forged links with, assisted and contributed to:

- o Devon Maternity Voices
- o Sport England's Live & Move Learning Seminar
- o Executive of the Exeter Community Safety Partnership
- o Exeter City Council's Equality and Diversity peer assessment.
- o North Devon Sunrise and Plymouth Hope
- o Exeter University Medical School Cancer Research Team
- o Family Practitioner Community Bridging and Wellbeing Exeter Community Connectors
- o Devon Cricket Foundation
- o Exeter Turkish Community and Exeter Hindu Cultural Centre

Further Work, Challenges, and Response to Recent Disorder

One of the significant challenges we have been facing is very little cross-cultural community cohesion among our partner groups. Sometimes, when we work with community leaders, we find that information does not go to the community members for various reasons, eg all these leaders have day jobs and are busy with many commitments, so we are trying to reach out to the communities through the events and our one to one work with our Drop-In Service so that in future people can use our services directly. Some of the groups have internal challenges: gender inequality, class segregation, internal racism, and religious segregation. We plan to deliver a range of training to the community leaders and members so that they can better understand equality and diversity as well as contemporary society. One of the most significant issues some of our service users face is accessing local services, especially new migrant workers. Some people have lived in Exeter for a decade but do not understand local services or activities. We hope our planned community training programme will address some issues.

We also played a considerable part in tackling the current disorder, especially after a riot in Plymouth; our Exeter residents were nervous, so we organised a meeting with the Exeter City Council Community Safety team, Deputy Leader, Councillor with the Communities Portfolio and a Police Inspector with responsibility for Exeter City Centre with our community facilitators. The Police Inspector assured our communities and answered their questions. We have invited him and the councillors to our next steering group meeting to continue the dialogues about our community safety. There were already a lot of issues among new migrant workers who came on a work visa as care assistants, nurses, and restaurant workers among local workers. This disorder has influenced many of these issues, and some of our service users are facing a huge challenge in their workplace.

Appendix :

[Click Here](#) for Event Feedback and Physical Activity Photos