



Northamptonshire  
Community Foundation  
Giving back to our county

# Need in Northamptonshire

A VCFSE Needs Survey run by  
Northamptonshire Community Foundation



Registered charity no. 1094646

# What is the VCFSE Needs survey?

As a local independent funder, Northamptonshire Community Foundation looks to gather information on the needs of the local community and the **Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise sector (VCFSE)** in order to review our grant-making and work with donors and strategic partners.

Although only briefly detailed in this report, these survey results play a vital role in shaping our understanding of the needs of the VCFSE sector, providing essential data and insight into trends, changes, emerging issues and concerns.

We are very grateful to every organisation that took the time to complete this survey. All responses are anonymous.



# Feedback: emerging issues for organisations



01

## Funding Insecurity and Rising Costs

Organisations face increasing difficulty securing sustainable, especially unrestricted, funding amid growing competition. Rising costs (rent, utilities, wages, insurance, materials) are further threatening financial viability.

02

## Volunteer Shortages and Workforce Capacity

Volunteer numbers – especially younger people – have declined post-COVID, alongside an ageing volunteer base. Limited funding and insecure contracts also restrict staff recruitment and retention, leaving services overstretched.

## Increasing Demand and Complexity of Need

Demand is rising rapidly due to cost-of-living pressures, population growth and immigration, with increasingly complex needs. This is exceeding organisational capacity and placing pressure on staff, volunteers and resources.

03

## Capacity and Infrastructure Strain

Smaller organisations struggle with limited capacity to manage admin, legal and funding requirements, alongside service delivery. Ageing facilities, high venue costs and space constraints further limit sustainability and growth.

04

# Feedback: emerging issues for their communities



01

## Cost-of-Living Pressures and Worsening Poverty

Rising living costs are driving financial hardship, food and fuel poverty, and reduced access to essentials. This is increasing reliance on already overstretched community support.

02

## Increasing Isolation, Loneliness and Declining Community Cohesion

Social isolation is growing, particularly among older people, rural communities, migrants and those with limited mobility. Reduced community spaces and divisive narratives are weakening community connections.

## Rising Mental Health and Wellbeing Challenges

Mental health issues such as anxiety, low mood and trauma are increasing across all ages, often linked to financial strain and limited service access. Needs are becoming more complex while support systems struggle to keep up.

03

## Increased Pressure on Housing, Health and Statutory Services

Access to housing, healthcare, mental health and SEND services is becoming more difficult due to long waiting lists and gaps in provision. Community organisations are increasingly supporting complex needs without sufficient resources.

04

# Feedback: longer term concerns for organisations

01

## Sustainable / Long-Term Funding

This is by far the most common concern: organisations repeatedly report unstable income, difficulty finding suitable grants, rising costs, and heavy competition for limited funds. Many say short-term funding cycles prevent long-term planning, threaten core services, and put their organisation's very survival at risk.

## Volunteer and Staff Capacity

Groups frequently mention struggling to recruit and retain volunteers, trustees, and paid staff, particularly as demand grows. Burnout—especially in frontline or peer-led roles—is a major worry, with some organisations fearing closure if key individuals leave.

02

03

## Rising Costs and Inflationary Pressures

Increasing running costs - energy, labour, venue hire, materials, or building maintenance - are widely cited as threatening service levels and organisational sustainability. Many groups warn that rising costs force them to reduce activities, subsidise users more heavily, or dip into limited reserves.

## Growing Demand Outstripping Capacity

Many organisations report that community needs are rising faster than their ability to meet them. Without expansion of infrastructure, staffing, or financial resources, they fear being overwhelmed, unable to provide quality support, or forced to turn people away.

04

# Feedback: longer term concerns for their communities

01

## Cost of Living Pressures

This is the single most repeated concern: communities are expected to face ongoing or worsening financial strain due to high living costs, low incomes, and rising bills. Charities fear this will deepen poverty, reduce access to essentials, and increase reliance on overstretched local services.

## Mental Health Challenges and Social Isolation

Many charities anticipate increased mental health difficulties across all age groups—children, adults, older people, and vulnerable families—often linked to stress, poverty, and uncertainty. Social isolation is expected to grow, particularly in rural areas, ageing communities, and places with poor transport or reduced community activities.

02

03

## Housing Instability and Insecurity

A large number of responses reference unaffordable housing, overcrowding, homelessness risk, and unstable tenancies as long-term threats. Without improvements, charities believe poor housing conditions will continue to harm physical health, mental wellbeing, and the ability of families to move toward stability.

## Reduced Access to Public Services

Charities repeatedly highlight concerns about shrinking or overstretched public services—including longer NHS waiting times, limited CAMHS access, reduced school support, and failing public transport. They worry that declining service access will push more people into crisis and increase inequality across communities.

04

# Feedback: Training and Development



**83%**

of respondents  
noted that they use  
AI in some way

**54%**

would be interested  
in training and  
development in  
digital skills and AI

**44%**

Have an  
environmental policy  
and/or strategy in  
place

**44%**

would be interested  
in training and  
development in  
volunteers

**40%**

would be interested  
in training and  
development in  
leadership and  
governance

**37%**

would be interested  
in training and  
development in  
greening their  
organisation

## Leadership & Governance Development

Strong demand for practical, clear governance and leadership training, especially for new boards, to build confidence, improve decision-making and strengthen organisational effectiveness.

## Volunteer Engagement & Flexible Learning

Time-poor volunteers need flexible, bite-sized training. CPD-accredited opportunities and non-financial incentives can support motivation and retention.

## Digital Skills, Social Media & Everyday Tech

Widespread digital skills gaps across staff and volunteers. Organisations want short, accessible training that builds confidence in everyday tools and improves online reach.

## Specialist Training Needs

Demand for focused training in inclusion (e.g. cultural awareness, LGBTQIA+), sustainability, and fundraising—particularly bid writing and more advanced development.

## Access, Cost & Delivery Opportunities

Free or low-cost, accessible training is essential. Some organisations could deliver training themselves with support, and there is strong appetite for shared learning across the sector.

# How are we supporting the VCFSE sector?

Northamptonshire Community Foundation is committed to IVAR's Open and Trusting Grant-making initiative. We are open and transparent about our grant making, and we regularly reflect on our processes to make them simpler and more accessible, particularly for grassroots organisations.

We share knowledge and provide support by hosting monthly Learn and Share sessions. Each session has a theme, exploring areas that impact VCFSE organisations such as finding alternative sources of funding, how to utilise social media to promote your services, and the importance of measuring social impact.

We invest in researching and understanding the priority needs of Northamptonshire residents, and share this information with the local community through the creation of reports including our Hidden Needs Report.

Our commitment to and championing of local VCFSE organisations and the community-led services they provide to make Northamptonshire a better place.

We have formed a partnership with the Northamptonshire VCSE Assembly and the Northamptonshire Lord Lieutenant, to launch a new campaign supporting and promoting volunteer recruitment across the county's charitable and professional sector.



# How can you help?



## Become a Friend of the Foundation

Donate monthly or annually and become a Friend of the Foundation. We pool all of our Friends' donations together and our Friends decide how and where to direct these funds.



## Join our Corporate Giving Network

The Corporate Giving Network enables Northamptonshire-based businesses to give back to their community, through place-based philanthropy. Members form a giving circle of like-minded businesses whose donations will be combined to create funding for local groups providing life-changing services to those in need.



## Consider leaving a legacy

By making Northamptonshire Community Foundation a beneficiary of your Will or part of your estate plan, you are making a valuable contribution to a better future for our communities. We can work with you or your Professional Advisor, to ensure that your wishes are met and that your generosity will last for generations to come.



## Set up a named fund

Setting up a fund is an excellent option if you have a strong interest in supporting a particular cause and/or would like to be more actively engaged in your charitable giving. Whether you are an individual, family, business, or charitable trust, we will work with you to set up a fund that best suits your charitable goals.



## Support our Poverty Hurts appeal

Right now in Northamptonshire, thousands of people are facing impossible choices: heating or eating, rent or food, debt or dignity. Through our Poverty Hurts fundraising appeal we're tackling poverty across the county. Donate now.



## Hold a fundraising event or charity day

We will support you every step of the way, as you raise essential funds for your local community foundation.



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# More than a Funder: Championing Local Philanthropy and Charities

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