

## Aldeburgh, Leiston, Saxmundham and Villages Community Partnership

### Update on 'Art in a Bag' Project at July 2021

#### Background

The 'Art in a Bag' Project emerged from the Community Partnership 'task and finish' group in relation to the priority to 'address social isolation and loneliness – particularly in relation to family carers, older people and men over 40'. In September 2020, community groups across the whole Community Partnership area were asked for ideas and an art project was selected on the basis that it would reach the greatest number of people in the context of the pandemic lockdown.

A small project group was formed to coordinate the project and 'The Art Station' (a non-profit arts organisation) in Saxmundham was contacted to find an artist with experience of similar projects to develop ideas. Helen Rousseau, a community artist, worked with the project group and volunteers to identify art activities which would be accessible to older people completing them on their own at home but which would be interesting and different and relevant to the experience of lockdown. Helen produced full instructions for the activities and The Art Station sourced all the materials and prepared the bags and worked with two primary schools on activities to be included. The project group and project coordinator identified individuals/groups who would like to be involved and distributed the bags. Some bags went as a set to a group to allocate – for example a Parish Council – while others involved a phone call to an individual and a doorstep visit to explain the contents and have a chat.

#### What we did

Since December 2020 A total of 140 bags have been produced and by July 2021 approximately 120 have been distributed across the whole Community Partnership area to older people and family carers who have been socially isolated since the start of the pandemic.

The bags contained several activities including:

- A letter exchange with children from two primary schools
- Making a pot and growing a bulb as a gift
- Cut up poetry
- Making a folding book
- A picture from poetry

#### Evaluation to date

The positive aspect of the project have been enabling social contact with so many people and making new links between community organisations. The feedback from participants has been very positive about the quality of the contents of the bag and many have enjoyed doing something different. From our point of view, each bag delivered was an opportunity

to talk to someone and check how they were and if there were concerns, these could be followed up.

The main challenge of this project has been that when we started in Autumn of 2020 we did not know that the pandemic restrictions would continue for nearly one year. This has had several effects including ongoing restrictions on going inside people's homes to give support and being unable to do some of the activities we had thought of which involved passing materials back and forwards between people. It also affected how the project was publicised as there was a long period when the free local papers were not being published and people were not in places to look at noticeboards. However, the Parish Councils and other organisations such as the Leiston Patient Participation Group helped by using their newsletters.

#### Next steps

There will be a display about the project in the afternoon of Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> September at the Art Station. People who took part will be invited and we are currently asking people if they would be willing to display what they have made.

One of the hoped-for outcomes of the project was that we could make connections which could lead to some new groups which meet in person. At this point there are concerns about running groups for people who are more vulnerable to the virus and therefore it is something to be reviewed in the next couple of months.