



# SUFFOLK PROHELP

## YEAR 1 REPORT

NOVEMBER 2019  
- OCTOBER 2020



# ABOUT

Suffolk ProHelp is a countywide network of businesses providing professional and strategic support free of charge to voluntary and community groups. This shared time, passion and commitment helps create thriving, resilient and sustainable communities.

Our strong and growing network of professionals include accountants, architects, solicitors, engineers, strategists, valuers, digital, marketing and HR experts and more.

We provide direct specific and time limited support to voluntary and community groups and social enterprises.

Alongside this we run regular webinars and seminars to share our expertise on key topics more widely.





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## **INTRODUCTION**

It's undoubtedly been a year like no other with the onset of Covid 19 and how it has effected all organisations and our daily life. Suffolk ProHelp has continued to offer probono support to the VCSE sector and stepped up our online offering to support organisations with advice where they most need it..

This report aims to demonstrate how we performed, the difference we made and what we learned during this challenging time.

## SUMMARY

- Suffolk ProHelp continued to operate fully during this extraordinary period of Covid 19 and lockdown.
- Requests for our organisational support were lower than anticipated especially during the lockdown period when organisations were not applying to us as much.
- We adapted our approach by offering an emergency support process whereby organisations in need of immediate help did not have to complete an application form as usual.
- We changed our quarterly learning lunches into online webinars and ran them more frequently on pertinent issues to the sector coming out of Community Action Suffolk's regular survey of the sector during this time.
- We updated and made our website more accessible.
- We recruited new professional members to Suffolk ProHelp
- We conducted a business impact survey
- We promoted ourselves widely, through SALC, Suffolk libraries, social media, CAS newsletters

## A GOOD NEWS STORY

"St Edmundsbury Sailing and Canoeing Association (SESCA) has benefitted from attending some of your team's events during the course of the last year.

Whilst we appreciate that many of your members will have found the last few months a challenge, we thought you might appreciate a 'good news' story.

SESCA is a Community Amateur Sport Club that was founded 40 years ago. We were fortunate enough to be able to re-open with the first wave of sports activities on the 13th May, and have progressively increased our on-water activities at each stage that the Government and the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) have indicated beneficial changes could be made. We are able to offer paddlesports as well as dinghy sailing, and this has been very attractive to new and existing members.

What has been most noticeable is that we have experienced a major growth in membership over the last 4 months in the order of 30%, well ahead of our normal profile and our budget plans prior to COVID. And this has been achieved without any advertising or promotional events.

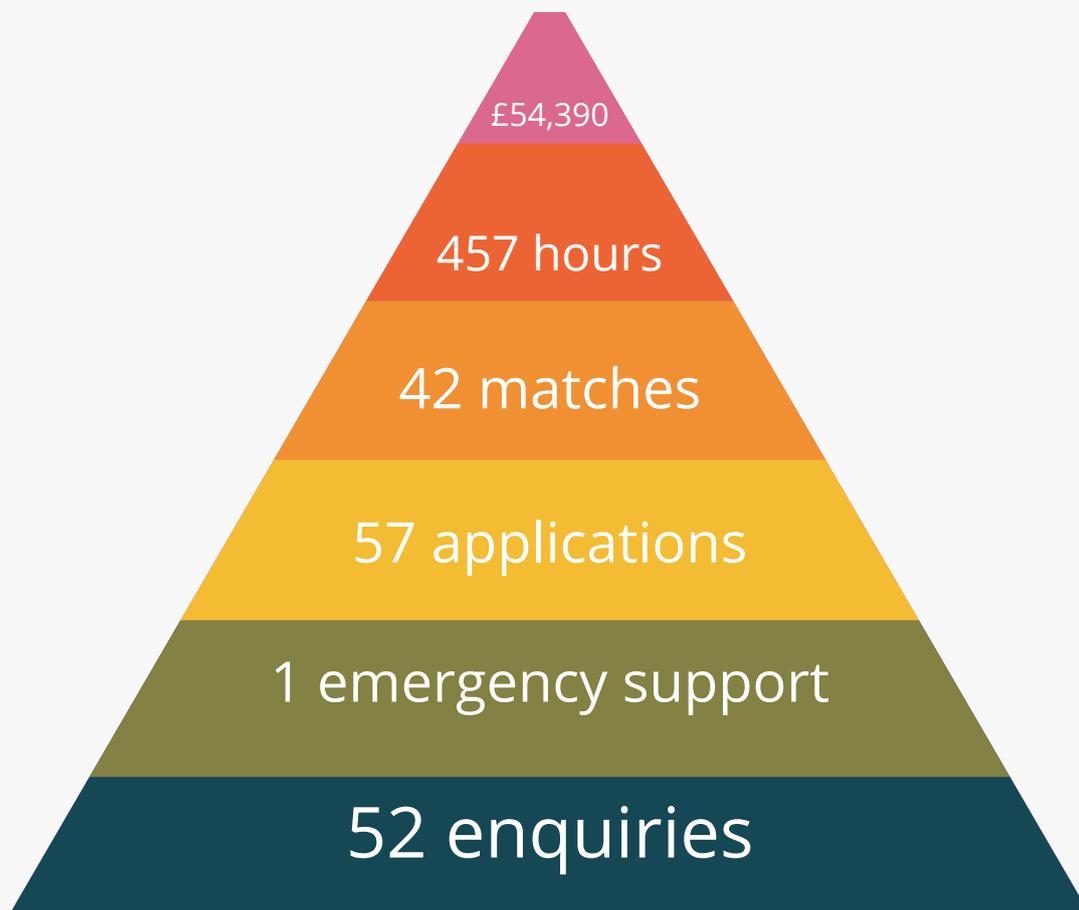
Consequently we have been able to invest further in the development of the Club and put it on an even stronger footing as we come to the end of this sailing season and in preparation for next year."

# OUTPUTS

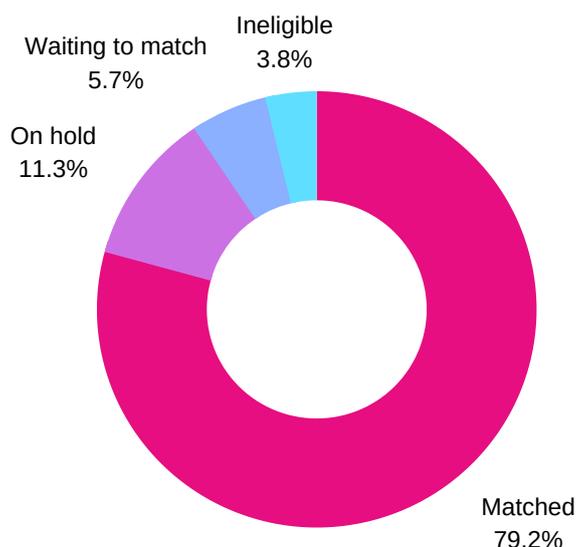
NOVEMBER 2019 - OCTOBER 2020

Our aims for this funding were:

- To match a minimum of **50 organisations** per year to professional bodies for free support and increase this by 10 per year during the lifecycle of the project
- To provide **£100k worth of professional support** to the voluntary sector, rising each year to £200k per year by year three.
- Hold quarterly learning lunches, where at least 12 organisations would attend each event
- To increase membership from **34 to 50 professional businesses** over the 3 years, thus widening the support available to the voluntary sector.



## APPLICATIONS

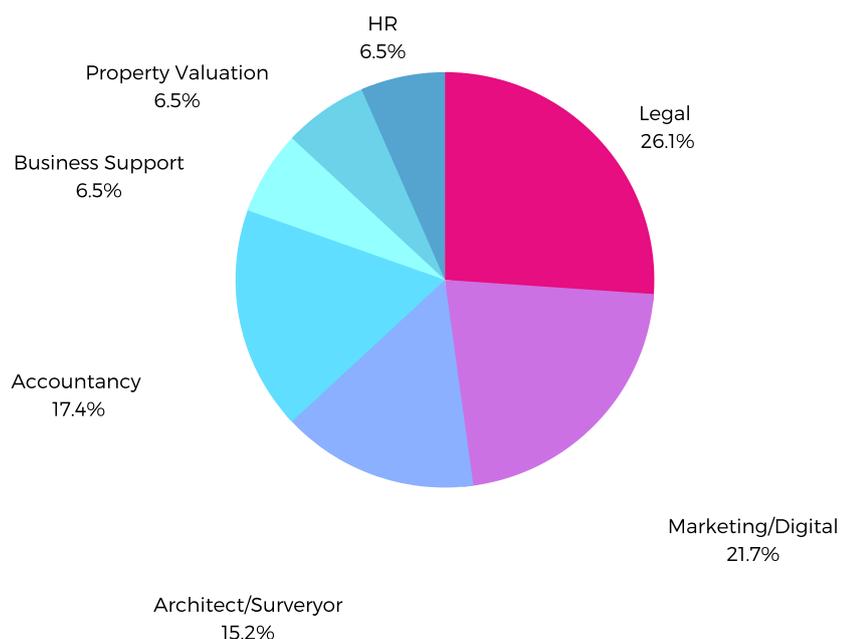


We received 52 enquiries for support and 57 applications (some people apply directly without an initial enquiry). We were able to support 42 of those applications, While 2 were ineligible (they had funds to pay for support) 6 were put on hold as they were not ready to receive support or their situation changed, at the time of writing 3 are currently waiting to be matched with a professional firm.

Almost a quarter of our support was legal advice the majority of which was on leases. Marketing and digital support increased this year and being 21% of our help given. This is partly because we have four new digital and marketing firms on board. Accountancy expertise was provided to around 17% of our organisations a significant amount around tax and VAT. Architectural support including quantity surveying, conditions surveys, engineering surveys accounted for around 15% of the support we gave. While business support, property valuation and HR support had similar smaller numbers, around 6%.

Some requests received support from multiple professionals. For example, the Art Station in Saxmundham had support from architects, surveyors, construction design management and accountancy support.

## TYPES OF REQUEST



Of the requests, many were small scale, so while we did have a target of distributing £100k worth of support this does depend on the nature of requests. This year we distributed £54,390 worth of advice and expertise in kind. One issue we do face is accurate reporting from the professionals themselves. We have put several measures in place to ascertain accurate figures but sometimes there is a delay or non-reporting.

This report provides accurate numbers regarding organisational requests but our audit to professional firms of hours they have committed and billable equivalent is done quarterly so reports up to the end of September (quarter 2)

We did increase our professional members widening the pool of expertise. This came about as a result of member recommendations, outreach and some firms approaching us during Covid. We now have 44 member firms well on the way to reaching our target of 50 firms.

Our targets were ambitious; possibly too ambitious for the amount of demand although Covid 19 certainly did have an impact on requests.

# OUTCOMES

- We did support the sector well this year in adverse circumstances
- We recruited new ProHelp professional members
- We updated our website and streamlined our application process to include an initial enquiry stage to check we could support in principle before organisations completed the application form
- We introduced an emergency support system
- We lined up a series of online webinars to address burning issues VCSE organisations faced during the crisis
- We contributed to the first virtual online fundraising conference delivered by Community Action Suffolk
- We conducted a business impact survey

# LEARNING LUNCHES

As part of our offer we run quarterly Learning Lunches where Suffolk ProHelp professionals share their expertise in lunchtime seminars. We ran two such events before lockdown when our events went online.



## LEARNING LUNCH: BIRKETTS

In February 2020, just before Covid came to the forefront we ran a successful Learning Lunch hosted and delivered by Birketts solicitors on leases. This is one of the main requests we get at Suffolk ProHelp and wanted to provide a 'top tips' session for voluntary organisations.



## LEARNING LUNCH: CONATUS

Kevin Ward of Conatus ran a Learning Lunch for us in November 2019 on strategic planning. This well received workshop helped organisations understand the need for and value of strategic planning and how to keep it simple and current. Proving prescient in the year to follow

The enhanced connection with the business community through Suffolk ProHelp has benefitted Community Action Suffolk in numerous ways. Most recently CAS has appointed a new Chair: Kevin Ward of Conatus who was introduced through Suffolk ProHelp

# EXPERTISE ONLINE

## WEBINARS

When Covid struck we quickly responded by running regular online webinars. Pioneering their use at Community Action Suffolk and leading the way for online virtual conferences and volunteer festivals to follow. We ran a number of events over the year.

**FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE**  
 • THREE FREE ONLINE SEMINARS WITH EXPERTS MHA LARKING GOWEN •



SUFFOLK PROHELP HOSTS THREE ESSENTIAL SEMINARS

- THURSDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 11.00 - 12.00  
HOW TO COME BACK FROM LOCKDOWN - PRACTICAL STEPS •
- THURSDAY 15 OCTOBER 11.00 - 12.00  
RISK MANAGEMENT - KEEPING IT CURRENT •
- THURSDAY 5 NOVEMBER 11.00 - 12.00  
RESILIENCE - BUILDING BACK RESERVES •

COMMUNITY ACTION SUFFOLK  mha LARKING GOWEN

COMMUNITYACTIONSUFFOLK.ORG.UK/TRAINING

# 194

## ORGANISATIONS ATTENDED OUR LEARNING LUNCHES AND WEBINARS

COMMUNITY ACTION SUFFOLK   
 Strengthening the voluntary and community sector

**FREE WEBINAR**  
 TUESDAY 12 MAY  
 2.00PM

**THROUGH FURLOUGH  
 AND BEYOND – AN  
 EMPLOYER'S GUIDE**

WITH LUCY PAKES  
 ASHTONS HR CONSULTING



COMMUNITY ACTION SUFFOLK   
 Strengthening the voluntary and community sector

**FREE WEBINAR**  
 MONDAY 18 MAY  
 11AM

**COVID 19 - MAKING  
 STRATEGY WORK**

WITH ELIZABETH PEARCE,  
 EPEARCE LTD & CHAIR OF  
 SUFFOLK INSTITUTE OF  
 DIRECTORS



COMMUNITY ACTION SUFFOLK   
 Strengthening the voluntary and community sector

**FREE WEBINAR**  
 THURSDAY 30  
 APRIL  
 11.00 AM

**MICROSOFT TEAMS &  
 LIVE EVENTS**

WITH LORNA ROSE TRAINING



COMMUNITY ACTION SUFFOLK   
 Strengthening the voluntary and community sector

**FREE WEBINAR**  
 MONDAY 13 JULY  
 11.00 AM

**WHAT VIRTUAL  
 PLATFORM IS RIGHT FOR  
 YOUR ORGANSATION?**

WITH LORNA ROSE TRAINING

SUFFOLK AND NEIGHBOURHOODS **CONNECTING BUSINESSES + COMMUNITIES**



COMMUNITY ACTION SUFFOLK   
 Strengthening the voluntary and community sector

**FREE WEBINAR**  
 TUESDAY 23 JUNE  
 2PM

**BRANDING:  
 HOW TO RAISE  
 AWARENESS IN YOUR  
 CAUSE**

**BrandUp**

SUFFOLK PROHELP



mha LARKING GOWEN

**RESILIENCE:  
 BUSINESS  
 CONTINUITY FOR  
 CHARITIES**

VIDEO RESOURCES



# IMPACT: CASE STUDIES

## STRADBROKE COMMUNITY CENTRE

Built in 1965, Stradbroke Community Centre recently completed a major refurbishment. At the heart of the community it is hired by social groups, sports organisations, private individuals and charitable organisations for fundraising and social activities. The Centre also runs a monthly cinema with high definition wide screen surround sound system. As well as running successful community suppers to bring people together. On an average week approximately 500 - 600 people use the Centre. They are constantly being asked to host various events but frequently have to decline due to lack of space or availability.

The recent village wide survey done as part of our Neighbourhood Plan identified many activities for young and old that they would like to provide for. The Centre wishes to extend its facilities to meet known and forecast demand and in the first instance needed professional help to determine what may be technically feasible given the constraints of the existing building and site location. Affect Community architects, who have recently become a social enterprise themselves, were able to take up the request and advise on what may be achievable and at what likely cost, drawing up plans and running a feasibility study and community consultation process.



## THE ATTIC COMMUNITY PROJECT

Suffolk Pro Help Suffolk ProHelp was contacted by Beaconsfield Residents to explore the viability of using The Attic building as a community building. The project aims to build community identity and address the social needs in the area around anti social behaviour and social isolation. We were able to support this project through provision of a structural survey conducted by MLM and a condition survey conducted by Whitworth architects who provided detailed reports including estimated costings which will be useful for any future grant applications. Shelley Goddard, leading this project said : "It is unlikely that we would of been able to raise funds so quickly for the cost of the surveyor to meet Suffolk County Councils requirements without pro help support. It has made the Attic project more viable, so that we can see how much work needs doing to the building and that now we can set up a CIO (Charitable incorporated Organisation). We did not want to set this up without the surveyors reports in case it was likely that the repairs on the building would cost a unrealistic amount of money."



# IMPACT: CASE STUDIES

## LEISTON COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Leiston CLT formed in 2019 following a Neighbourhood Plan and a scoping report commissioned by the Town Council and its partners. These reports recognised that Leiston would benefit significantly from town centre redevelopment and reinforced the need for a mix of uses (residential, retail and community) that could serve to draw more people into the town centre, therefore helping to revitalise it.

Leiston CLT's aims are ambitious. They aim to: create a sustainable and economically vibrant town centre; one that is well planned and designed to meet the current and future needs of Leiston and its people. The specific objectives of the CLT include:

- The provision of affordable homes.
- The creation of a vibrant social, civic and commercial centre for Leiston.
- Using high quality planning to link the town centre to the rest of the town.
- Improving road safety in the town.

Making Leiston an attractive destination with positive impact on the local economy

Leiston CLT recognises that its success will depend on building strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with the public and private sectors, and maintaining strong support from the community which will have a large input into the whole scheme.

Suffolk ProHelp was able to contribute to this ambitious programme by providing legal support through solicitors Marshall Hatchick.



# IMPACT: CASE STUDIES

## SUMMERHILL CHILDHOOD CIC

This is a new CIC set up alongside A.S.Neill's world famous Summerhill School, to share their knowledge and practice of education and childrearing through freedom, democracy, community and wellbeing.

For nearly 100 years, Summerhill School, founded by A.S.Neill in 1921, has championed education of the whole child through democracy and self-regulation. A.S.Neill's ideas about childhood and learning have influenced generations of educators and many of Summerhill's innovations have shifted global understanding around education. Summerhill's values continue to provide solid foundations upon which inclusive and mutually respectful communities can be built.

Both A.S.Neill's writings and his philosophy's continued influence on global educational practice as well as the school's enduring success has led to Summerhill being one of the most inspirational schools and communities for the past 100 years. As a result, the local, national and international demand to visit and experience Summerhill from teachers, schools, educationalists, researchers and students, has been exceeding the school's hosting capacity without infringing on the community itself.

Suffolk ProHelp were able to provide accountancy and business support and advice through MHA Larking Gowen and Intellectual Property Law advice through Birketts solicitors



# CHALLENGES

The key challenge has undoubtedly been how best to respond to Covid 19 providing timely and effective support to the voluntary sector

The impact of Covid 19 hit the sector hard. Those that had robust reserves and strong IT weathered the impact well. While others struggled to keep afloat.

Our immediate response was to instigate a way to request emergency support from Suffolk ProHelp without having to complete an application form. Despite promotion of this we had only one emergency request. We think this is because people were firefighting internally rather than looking for external sources of support.

We also ran a series of webinars to address key issues in the sector. Issues around getting online, furloughing, making strategy work and finance.

Our responses is still evolving as the situation unfolds but requests for organisational support now seems to be returning to its usual level and voluntary sector organisations are beginning to look more long term and to the future.

We continue to be informed by Community Action Suffolk regular state of the sector reports to identify emerging needs.

We were ambitious with our targets; probably too ambitious. Despite targeted marketing to the sector via Community Action Suffolk networks, through Suffolk Association for Local Councils, the health and through libraries our numbers of requests for support has remained fairly consistent. Indeed has been impacted a little by Covid. We anticipated supporting 50 organisations a year and rising over three years. We still believe this is achievable.

However, most of our requests are time-limited specific requests at a small scale due to both the nature of requests and the capacity of our professional members. This means our target of distributing £100k in kind rising to £200k by year 3 was overly ambitious.

This year we distributed £XXXXX worth of expertise to the sector. One of the issues around accurately reporting on this is that professionals involved in the network do not always return their quarterly audit of hours and billable equivalent. We can only report on what they tell us. We continually try to make this easier recently switching to an online return.



# LEARNING



In this challenging year we have learned some key issues:

- The expertise of Suffolk ProHelp is very much needed by the sector
- We need to stay agile and respond to the issues raised in uncertain and challenging times
- We have access to a range of valuable expertise
- We need to charge for our webinars (a nominal amount) to ensure commitment as, although take up was good, some people registered and did not attend.
- Our target of £100k per year worth of expertise was over-ambitious
- Many organisations want small scale targeted support.
- The number of organisations helped does not necessarily correlate to the amount of expertise in monetary terms when we quantify it
- The business impact survey demonstrates the value to firms of being involved with Suffolk ProHelp
- Suffolk ProHelp members have been involved and supported the wider work of Community Action Suffolk including conferences and trustee roles.

## Going forward

We will continue to:

- Promote and market our service developing a more coherent digital marketing strategy
- Roll out regular webinars, at least once a quarter but potentially more frequently in response to changing needs
- Recruit new Suffolk ProHelp members widening our field of expertise
- Provide expertise and support for CAS events such as fundraising and village hall conferences

## Summary

This has undoubtedly been a year like no other with rapidly changing demands and shifting environment. Suffolk ProHelp has risen to the challenge and continued to provide ongoing support to the sector both business to organisation support and a stream of webinars to address key issues. We were able to grow our professional membership and demonstrated our worth to the business sector of joining us.

# SUFFOLK PROHELP



Suffolk ProHelp is a countywide network of businesses who provide professional and strategic support free of charge to voluntary and community groups. This shared time, passion and commitment helps create thriving, resilient and sustainable communities.

## — Supporting communities

Suffolk ProHelp was established in June 2001 and was previously run by Business in the Community (BITC). It is now co-ordinated by Community Action Suffolk and funded through the National Lottery Community Fund. The Suffolk ProHelp business network includes solicitors, accountants, architects, surveyors, property consultants, marketing and public relations.

## — A wide range of expertise

"Businesses commit to undertake one-off projects which may include activities such as feasibility studies, structural surveys, marketing strategies, legal and accountancy advice and property valuations. The only difference is that the community client is not charged for the work undertaken. Clear eligibility criteria are applied to make sure that this valuable expertise is directed to voluntary and community sector organisations who are most in need and would most benefit.

## — Focused input



## THANK YOU

We are very grateful to our funders: The National Lottery Community Fund.



SUFFOLK  
PRO  
HELP

CONNECTING  
BUSINESSES +  
COMMUNITIES

Suffolk ProHelp is part of  
Community Action Suffolk  
Reg Charity 1150501  
Company No. 08316345

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