

Guide to Friendly Communities of Leicestershire

This guide aims to support communities around Leicestershire to coordinate local initiatives and to contribute to a welcoming, friendly, and inclusive environment.



What is a Friendly Community?

Friendly Communities of Leicestershire is a simple and easy way to help and support communities to be more resilient, and to help individuals to feel welcome, supported, safe and integrated wherever they live in Leicestershire.

It focuses on low-level support actions, from helping an elderly person to be part of their community, to welcoming other people into existing activities and community events like Dementia Friendly Action, Autism Friendly Awards, The Friendly Bench or cooking lessons for young parents or older residents.

Communities that are friendly, cohesive, and inclusive are more resilient and can better contribute to greater levels of wellbeing, helping people to feel less isolated or lonely. Key features of a Friendly Community are:

- Knowledge of the area/community where they live or work
- Understanding of the impact and importance of collaborating and working with others
- Empathy
- Inclusion
- Public life participation of local citizens/residents

Who can start a Friendly Community?

Anybody or any organisation that has an interest in, or provides amenities for their community – Parish Councils, schools, churches, local businesses and shops, local councillors, community groups, neighbours. All of them can support their community and the people who live and work in it.

How can you start a Friendly Community?

Anyone can start, but the more people that are interested, the stronger the support for a Friendly Community:

Three to four people can start a Friendly Community, helping to connect different individuals and groups to gain more inclusive and friendly environments. This could increase the sense of belonging and personal connections with their neighbours.

At the same time, these individuals may become Champions, or they could continue with their role, sharing experiences and supporting connections between different communities.

Who are Champions?

Champions are supporters with knowledge/experience about a local topic, a group activity, or the community at large and who want to lead the development of a Friendly Community. Parish councillors, Church or community group leaders or well-known activists are ideal candidates, but it is not a formal role and anyone anyone with interest and commitment can be a champion.

What do Champions do?

Champions help to motivate other members of the community and to lead and strengthen connections to promote an inclusive and Friendly Community.

Supporters and Champions could find out what activities and events are taking place in the area

Regular events or special occasions where the community comes together can include Christmas markets, local cinema experiences, summer fetes, Remembrance Day, Christmas lunches, Dementia Cafes, Scout groups, etc.

How can Champions connect communities with new and existing activities and events?

- Giving information to the community through local publications, talking to neighbours or contacting community radio-stations.
- Talking to local people at meeting places (local businesses, health centre, school, community centre, Scout groups, WI, library, etc.) to reach individuals and communities that may be more isolated.
- Working with parish, borough, district, and county councillors. Local councillors tend to be known in their areas and understand their communities.
- A key element of community networking is to share with wider audiences what you know, so different, and sometimes isolated individuals can engage in their communities.

- Champions can also work with [Local Area Coordinators](#) to reach individuals and groups that are more excluded.

How do you know you have made a difference?

- What has changed, how it has changed. Do people feel there is a greater sense of community?
- Are there new initiatives, services or maybe a growing interest to cooperate to ensure the most vulnerable are included?
- Reflect on the stories of people, examples of integration, successful changes that have resulted from new people participating in their communities.
- Has community life been promoted by local or social media, videos and feedback from people within the community, including those that were not able to engage or participate in their community's life before and now feel they can?



What are the advantages of a Friendly Community?

- Individual and community wellbeing is enhanced as more people know others and are connected with local services and amenities. In this way, everybody has a better opportunity to enjoy their community and can confidently access support and information if they need it.
- A more integrated community, resilient and responsive, where people are supported to remain independent for longer.
- A more cohesive community where people respect each other and the facilities that everyone in the community has a share in.
- It can help to develop other initiatives, as it generates more contacts and relationships, helping make people more included in their community and reducing negative perceptions.

The potential benefits of a Friendly Community are highlighted by successful examples of this approach;

[Dementia Cafes](#),

[The Friendly Bench](#) or

[GREAT GLEN COMMUNITY WILD](#)

[SPACE](#)

Information, advice, support and guidance about communities in Leicestershire:

www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/

Support with all aspects of community work - set up and development of groups, working together, volunteer recruitment and management etc. <https://valonline.org.uk/>

How to start a social enterprise and how to develop sustainable plans:

<https://case.coop/>

Funding opportunities

<https://valonline.org.uk/funding-and-income/>

[First Contact Plus](#) provides information about caring for others and support that may be available.

[Adult Learning Opportunities](#); why not to start an Adult Learning Course, there are many to choose from and they can be ideal to share, communicate and get in contact with other people.

