



McPhillips Community Fund

End of Grant Report - March 2026

“Empowering Communities, Improving Mental Health”



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
CONCLUSION	6
OUTCOMES.....	8
CASE STUDIES.	9
COMMUNITY RESOURCE – THE BUDDY SYSTEM	9
BRIGHTSTAR BOXING ACADEMY – EMPOWER PROGRAMME	11
HOME-START TELFORD & WREKIN – THE “SOMETHING MORE” COURSE	12
4 ALL FOUNDATION – WEEKLY MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMME.....	14
AMBER BEE CIC – MINDFULNESS AND MENTAL WELLBEING IN SCHOOLS	15
BEYOND THE GRANTS: ORGANISATIONAL IMPACT	17
AMPLIFYING STORIES AND ENGAGEMENT	17
SUPPORT BUSINESS CREDIBILITY (WITHOUT BEING PROCUREMENT -DRIVEN).....	17
INFLUENCING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE	17
ADVANCING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	17
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	18

“We didn’t want to just write a cheque; we wanted to create something structured and lasting that would make a real difference to people’s lives across Shropshire.”

Paul Inions, Managing Director, McPhillips



Introduction

Understanding Local Mental Health Needs

Mental health challenges continue to represent a significant and growing public health concern nationally and locally. This assessment draws on national datasets, public health reporting, and insight from the local voluntary and community sector. Evidence highlights the scale and urgency of need, including social isolation, rising demand for services, geographic inequality, and socio-economic pressures:

“One in four adults experience a mental health condition annually.”

- **Prevalence:** NHS Digital’s Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey shows that around one in four adults experience a mental health condition annually, with anxiety and depression most common.
- **Rising demand:** NHS England reports year-on-year increases in referrals and growing waiting times, indicating that demand continues to outstrip capacity.
- **Loneliness:** The Office for National Statistics identifies loneliness as a significant risk factor for poor mental health, especially among people living alone, on low incomes, or in rural communities.
- **Rural challenges:** Public Health England notes that rural/semi-rural areas face transport barriers, limited-service availability, and reliance on informal support networks.
- **Socio-economic pressures:** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and ONS link financial insecurity, unemployment, and cost-of-living pressures to increased stress and deteriorating mental wellbeing.

Local insight from voluntary and community organisations in Shropshire reinforces these national findings. Organisations report increasing demand for low-level, preventative mental health support, particularly from those who may not meet clinical thresholds or face barriers to statutory services.

The evidence supports the benefit of investment in early intervention, peer support, and community-led initiatives that strengthen resilience, reduce isolation, and improve long-term wellbeing. Research from the King’s Fund and Mind demonstrates that community-based approaches can improve outcomes while easing pressure on statutory services.

In response, the McPhillips Community Fund developed a flow-through grant programme to enable local organisations to deliver innovative mental health support tailored to their communities. Through this programme, a total of £20,000 was distributed to voluntary and community organisations addressing mental health challenges faced by people experiencing mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, or social isolation.

“Community-led initiatives can improve outcomes while easing pressure on statutory services.”

The grant scheme aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of people through one or more of the following:

- Counselling and therapeutic support.
- Peer support groups.

- Workshops and training focused on coping strategies.
- Physical activity initiatives designed to enhance mental and emotional well-being.
- Employment and skills development programs that boost confidence and reduce social isolation.

By funding trusted, community-based organisations, McPhillips ensured support reached those most in need, with approaches that are flexible, inclusive, and responsive to local contexts.

This end-of-grant report outlines how the funding was distributed, the activities supported, and the outcomes achieved, demonstrating the value of targeted investment across Shropshire.



"..... impact we have seen from mindfulness sessions reaching hundreds of schoolchildren to weekly wellbeing sessions giving isolated elderly residents a reason to leave the house shows what targeted, local funding can achieve when it is directed by people who truly understand the needs of our communities."

Paul Inions, Managing Director, McPhillips

Executive Summary

The McPhillips Community Fund flow-through grant programme received eligible applications amounted to £190,300 across 47 organisations and distributed £20,000 to six voluntary and community organisations delivering mental health and wellbeing activity across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. The programme was designed to address mental health challenges experienced by people with a focus on reducing social isolation, promoting resilience, and strengthening community-based support.

Funded projects delivered a range of preventative, non-clinical interventions, including peer support, physical activity, volunteering, mindfulness, and community engagement. While some projects worked with mixed or inclusive cohorts due to service design and accessibility, all addressed needs relevant to adult mental health and social isolation, including those affecting men, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

Across the programme, at least 1254 direct participants were engaged, with several projects exceeding their intended reach. Across the programme we have evidenced based outcomes that show:

- Increased confidence, independence, and social participation
- Reduced isolation, particularly among rural adults and older people
- Improved mental wellbeing (WEMWBS showed increases ranging from 7% to 50%)
- Development of coping strategies, routines, and resilience
- Progression into employment, volunteering, or training (Brightstar: 100% achieved at least one positive outcome)

Qualitative feedback from participants consistently highlighted increased confidence, reduced isolation, and the value of accessible, informal support. Volunteers and young people involved in delivery also reported skills development and increased confidence, contributing to wider sector capacity.

“Volunteers and young people involved reported skills development and increased confidence.”

The completed delivery and outcome reporting, and feedback indicates that the programme met its core objectives and responded effectively to identified local need. We acknowledge Designs in Mind CIC, which filed for voluntary liquidation on 10th December 2026 due to funding pressures, and whilst it did deliver the project was unable to submit an end of grant report, we thank them for their valued contribution to mental health support in Shropshire.

Conclusion

Small Grants, Big Impact

The McPhillips Community Fund flow-through grant programme delivered targeted investment aligned with identified local and national mental health need. Through £20,000 of funding, the programme enabled grassroots organisations to provide preventative, community-based mental health support addressing loneliness, confidence, and emotional wellbeing.

“.....when we invest in communities across Shropshire, we are investing in the communities where our own people live. That makes it personal, not just corporate”.

Paul Inions, Managing Director, McPhillips

Delivery evidence demonstrates strong engagement, efficient use of funding, and positive participant experience. Several projects exceeded their intended reach, and qualitative feedback provides credible evidence of reduced isolation and improved confidence.

“Activities have continued beyond the funding period, embedding wellbeing support within community structures.”

Importantly, many activities have continued beyond the funding period, embedding wellbeing support within community structures and strengthening local voluntary sector capacity.

The programme demonstrates that community-based, preventative mental health interventions can achieve measurable outcomes at relatively low cost, particularly when delivered by trusted local organisations. Demand for services exceeded expectations in several cases, indicating ongoing unmet need.

Small Steps, Meaningful Change

Across all five projects, a consistent theme emerges; small, supported steps leading to meaningful change. Whether through a conversation over coffee, a structured course, a boxing session, or a classroom activity, the funding enabled individuals to:

- reconnect with others
- build confidence
- develop coping strategies
- and begin to re-engage with everyday life

While the scale and approach of each project differed, the underlying impact was similar, helping people feel more able, more connected, and better equipped to manage their mental wellbeing.



Outcomes

Measurable Outcomes Against Grant Objectives

Grant Objective	Evidence of Delivery	Data and Feedback
Support innovative projects that empower men to improve their mental health	Projects used non-clinical, community-based approaches including peer buddying, sport-based activity, and group wellbeing sessions designed to reduce stigma and improve engagement.	Brightstar Boxing Academy reported 100% positive progression across mental health, qualifications, and employment pathways in at least one outcome.
Reduce social isolation and loneliness	Achieved through peer support, group activity, and ongoing community engagement. All projects prioritised regular contact, shared activity, and relationship-building, particularly for individuals living alone or in rural areas.	Community Resource exceeded its target by 135%, with participants reporting increased confidence to attend activities independently. 4 All Foundation participants described the programme as a “lifeline.”
Promote long-term wellbeing and resilience	Evidenced through both qualitative feedback and measured wellbeing improvements. Projects encouraged continued participation through peer networks, volunteering, and ongoing community activity.	WhatsApp groups, choirs, clubs, and community sessions continue beyond the funding period, with some activity planned for at least 12 months.
Strengthen the capacity of the voluntary and community sector	Funding supported volunteer involvement, youth leadership, and organisational delivery capacity.	Volunteers reported increased confidence, skills development, and satisfaction from supporting others.

The programme highlighted several important considerations:

- Short delivery periods: In some cases, the funding timeframe restricted the ability to evidence longer-term mental health outcomes.
- Demand exceeded capacity: Multiple projects exceeded participation targets, indicating unmet demand for low-level, preventative mental health support.

Key learning includes:

- Community-led, informal support can successfully engage individuals who may not access statutory services.
- Physical activity, peer support, and volunteering are effective entry points for improving mental wellbeing.
- Modest, targeted grants can deliver meaningful outcomes when aligned with local knowledge and trusted organisations.

“Whether through a conversation over coffee or a boxing session, the funding enabled individuals to reconnect, build confidence, and develop coping strategies.”

These findings will inform future programme design, including clearer outcome frameworks and longer delivery periods where feasible.

“Brightstar Boxing Academy reported 100% positive progression across mental health, qualifications, and employment pathways.”

“4 All Foundation participants described the programme as a ‘lifeline.’”

Case Studies.

Stories of Change in Action

Community Resource – The Buddy System

From Isolation to Independence

For many people referred to the Buddy System, leaving the house had become a significant barrier. Anxiety, low confidence, bereavement, or long-term isolation had gradually reduced their connection to everyday life and their communities.



With support from the McPhillips Fund, Community Resource worked with 51 individuals across Shropshire, pairing 31 of them with trained volunteer buddies. Each partnership was built around the individual, what they felt comfortable with, what they had lost confidence in, and what they hoped to regain.

The first steps were often small. A short walk. A coffee in a local café. Sitting alongside someone at a community group. Over time, these moments built into something more consistent—routine, familiarity, and a growing sense of confidence.

Activities reflected people's interests: walks at Attingham Park, swimming sessions, craft groups, choir practice, and visits to libraries or local history groups. Importantly, support was designed not to create dependency, but to help individuals feel able to continue independently.

One participant described how the support helped her begin using public transport again and re-engage with activities she had previously avoided:

Another reflected on the longer-term impact:

"It built up my confidence and self-esteem... I can now attend groups and go out independently."

The project also revealed the ongoing challenge of demand. With more referrals than available volunteers, some individuals had to wait for support. In response, Community Resource introduced social afternoons, creating a space where people could begin reconnecting while waiting to be matched.



"I can actually leave the house by myself now... I feel more motivated to be healthier."

The legacy of the project is seen in what happens after the support ends. Many participants now attend groups independently, maintain routines, and continue engaging with their communities—often for the first time in years.

Brightstar Boxing Academy – Empower Programme

Building Confidence Through Physical Activity

At Brightstar Boxing Academy, the starting point for many participants was not sport, it was disconnection. Many were unemployed, lacked routine, and experienced low confidence or poor mental health.

The Empower Programme brought together 26 participants, the majority of whom were men, offering structured weekly sessions that combined physical activity with personal development and qualifications.

“Over time, participants began to build routine, confidence, and a sense of belonging within the group.”

For some, simply attending was the first challenge. Staff quickly recognised that a full-day programme was not realistic for everyone, particularly for those who had been out of work for long periods. In response, sessions were adapted, shortened and extended over a longer timeframe, to better meet participants where they were.

This flexibility was key to maintaining engagement. Over time, participants began to build routine, confidence, and a sense of belonging within the group. The outcomes were varied but consistent, every participant achieved at least one positive outcome, whether that was improved mental health, gaining a qualification, or moving towards employment. One participant described the significance of the programme:

‘..the course really boosted my confidence and encouraged me to live a more active lifestyle’

Beth joined the programme with low confidence and anxiety following disrupted education during the pandemic. Through tailored support and mentoring, she gradually rebuilt her confidence and developed routines that helped her move forward. She has since secured employment in a care role and begun exploring her own small business ideas.

For some, the programme became a stepping stone into employment. Others continued attending sessions, volunteering, or even supporting delivery as coaches. The impact of the programme was not only in outcomes, but in creating a space where individuals felt accepted, motivated, and able to move forward at their own pace.



Home-Start Telford & Wrekin – The “Something More” Course

Finding Strength and Resilience

For the women attending the “Something More” course, daily life often involved managing multiple pressures, parenting, relationships, financial stress, and their own mental health. Many arrived feeling anxious, isolated, and lacking confidence.

The 11-week course created a structured but supportive space where 12 women could focus on themselves, often for the first time in a long while. Practical barriers were addressed from the outset, with a crèche provided to enable full participation.

Sessions were intentionally gradual. Early weeks focused on building trust and comfort within the group, before moving into deeper reflection, communication skills, and self-esteem.



The impact of the course was measurable. Using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, participants recorded improvements ranging from 7% to 50%, reflecting increased wellbeing over the duration of the programme.

However, the most meaningful changes were often described in participants’ own words:

I can now speak my mind....I wouldn't before”

“I have learnt that I am strong and there is always a way out”

Participants spoke about feeling more in control, more confident in setting boundaries, and better able to manage challenges in their lives. The benefits extended beyond the individuals. As confidence and communication improved, so too did family relationships. Children attending the crèche experienced early socialisation, with some separating from their parents for the first time.

The course did not remove the challenges participants faced, but it equipped them with tools, confidence, and resilience to manage them differently.



4 All
FOUNDATION



4 All Foundation – Weekly Mental Health Programme

Ongoing Community Support

The weekly sessions delivered by 4 All Foundation quickly became a regular point of stability for many participants. The programme engaged 142 adults in Telford, many of whom were experiencing a combination of mental health challenges, unemployment, and social isolation.

For some, attending the sessions was the first step towards reconnecting with others. For others, it was part of a wider journey of managing long-term health conditions and rebuilding routine.



As the programme developed, it became clear that participants' needs were often more complex than initially anticipated. Many required additional support beyond the sessions themselves, including access to counselling, financial advice, and local services.

Rather than limiting delivery, the organisation adapted, building partnerships with external agencies and expanding the support available. This created a more holistic model, ensuring individuals could access the help they needed.



“Participants reported increased confidence, improved wellbeing, and a stronger sense of connection to their community”

Many began to develop routines, coping strategies, and clearer pathways towards employment or training.

Importantly, the programme has not ended with the funding period. Due to continued demand and the relationships established, the sessions are continuing, providing an ongoing source of support within the community. The project has evolved from a funded activity into a sustained local resource.



Hub on the Hill Wellbeing Club

Amber Bee CIC – Mindfulness and Mental Wellbeing in Schools

Preventing Mental Health Challenges Early



Amber Bee CIC's project took a preventative approach, working with over 1,000 children in Telford, including 441 direct participants aged 9–11, at a key stage in their development.

Delivered through schools, the programme combined structured lessons, interactive workbooks, and resources for teachers and parents. The aim was to normalise conversations around mental health and provide children with practical tools to manage their emotions.



The results were clear and consistent, 100% knew who to speak to if they needed support.

“100% of children understood the importance of mental wellbeing”

The majority demonstrated improved understanding of resilience, coping strategies, and online safety. Teachers observed that the sessions were particularly valuable during periods of transition, such as preparing for SATs or moving to secondary school. One headteacher noted:

“It was wonderful... children have something to refer to during their transition

The programme also extended beyond the classroom. Parent packs encouraged conversations at home, while teachers were equipped with resources to continue delivery beyond the funded period.

Unlike other projects, the impact here is less immediate and more long-term, building resilience, awareness, and coping strategies that children can carry forward into adolescence.



**“Every pound of this fund is going exactly where it is
needed most...”**

Val Hard, Company Secretary, McPhillips

Beyond the Grants: Organisational Impact

Creating Impact from the Inside Out.

While the primary focus of the McPhillips Community Fund is community impact, the programme has also generated significant value within the organisation itself. From strengthening culture and employee engagement to shaping corporate social responsibility, the fund is influencing how McPhillips operates, communicates, and defines its role within the communities it serves.

“The fund's impact is visible both inside and outside the organisation.”

Amplifying Stories and Engagement

The project had 41 separate pieces of news coverage regionally, reaching an audience of more than 1.2million people, illustrating significant awareness raising in our local communities of issues around mental health and social isolation and the organisations tackling these challenges, impact beyond those directly benefiting from project delivery. The McPhillips Community Fund has generated a rich bank of compelling stories, with every grant recipient becoming the focus of individual news stories that have been widely covered across regional media. These stories have also been shared with external stakeholders through the McPhillips newsletter and via internal staff channels, ensuring the fund's impact is visible both inside and outside the organisation. Engaging employees more actively in the grant process was always part of the long-term vision for the fund, and this has now been realised with staff involvement forming part of the 2026 fund programme.

Support Business Credibility (Without being Procurement -Driven)

Strengthening External Positioning We reference the McPhillips Community Fund as part of tender processes where it is relevant to the procurement in question. But we'd like to be clear that the development of the fund was not driven by procurement requirements, it reflects a genuine desire to give back to the communities in which the company operates, and the fund exists entirely on that basis.

“The fund exists entirely on the basis of a genuine desire to give back.”

Influencing Organisational Culture

From Initiative to Embedded Practice the McPhillips Community Fund has had a tangible impact on organisational culture. Since the fund's launch, McPhillips has created a dedicated social value co-ordinator role and established a new social value working group a clear demonstration that community investment has moved from aspiration to embedded practice within the business. Led initially by Val Hardy, company secretary, the fund has fostered genuine pride across the organisation. With staff now actively involved in the 2026 grant programme, the fund is playing an increasingly central role in shaping the company's culture and identity.

“Community investment has moved from aspiration to embedded practice.”

Advancing Corporate Social Responsibility

A Pioneering Approach to CSR As the first company in Shropshire to establish a dedicated community grant fund in partnership with a community foundation, McPhillips has taken a pioneering approach to corporate social responsibility that goes beyond traditional charitable giving. The fund has helped to define and communicate a clear CSR identity for the organisation, both internally and externally. The continued investment into a second round of grants in 2026 demonstrates that CSR awareness and commitment has been embedded at a senior level within the organisation."

“The fund has helped to define and communicate a clear CSR identity.”

Acknowledgements

Thank You to McPhillips and Our Community Champions

We would like to begin by expressing our sincere gratitude to Paul Inions and the team at McPhillips, whose foresight and commitment to funding positive change have strengthened the delivery of services to our most vulnerable communities.

Our thanks also go to BeBold Media, engaged by McPhillips, for their outstanding PR and marketing support, which greatly enhanced the promotion and reporting of this grant and provided much need publicity to our voluntary and community sector organisations.

We are profoundly grateful to the grant panel, who undertake the challenging task of making difficult decisions about how to allocate funds where the need is greatest. Your care, dedication, and fairness are central to the meaningful impact of this fund.

To the organisations and their beneficiaries who have shared their stories and provided feedback, thank you for allowing us to witness firsthand the difference these grants make. Your openness brings the work we do to life and reminds us why this support matters so deeply.

We also wish to acknowledge Designs in Mind CIC, a valued local social enterprise that provided creative, peer-led mental health support across Shropshire. Due to reductions in government funding and ongoing financial pressures, the organisation's board made the difficult decision in early 2026 to cease trading, despite their efforts to continue operations. We are grateful for the impact they made and the difference they brought to the community.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to the Shropshire Community Foundation Board and our ambassadors, many of whom generously give their time and expertise to support people and communities across Shropshire. Your dedication, energy, and commitment underpin everything we do.



"... we've been so impressed that we are continuing with a new round of grants in 2026 giving us more opportunities to support local organisations and individuals."

Val Hard, Company Secretary, McPhillips