

Acorn Fund 2025–26 Impact Report

Strengthening Communities, Reducing Isolation,
Changing Lives



Executive Summary

Thanks to the generosity of Shropshire Investors in Community members, the Acorn Fund 2025–26 turned donor support into direct, practical help for communities across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

Together, donors enabled £18,000 to be awarded to 19 trusted grassroots organisations, reaching people affected by loneliness, isolation, poor wellbeing and social exclusion.

Grants of £500 to £1,500 helped local groups respond quickly and effectively to need, providing safe spaces, social connection, practical support and opportunities for people to rebuild confidence.

Monitoring returns received to date show that donor funding has supported at least 6,688 beneficiaries through community cafés, befriending, youth clubs, exercise sessions, autism support, creative workshops, fishing, technology clubs and cancer support.

The impact of this giving has lasted beyond the grant period, with many projects continuing through volunteers, peer-led support, partnerships and additional funding.

At approximately £2.69 per beneficiary reached, the Fund shows how pooled donor investment can deliver significant value, strengthen local organisations and create lasting community impact.



Introduction

The Acorn Fund 2025–26 was made possible through the generous support of Shropshire Investors in Community members and provides accessible, small-scale grants to local groups responding directly to community need.

The Fund is rooted in the belief that local organisations are often best placed to identify challenges and deliver responsive support. By investing in grassroots activity, it helps create opportunities for connection, participation and improved wellbeing.



This funding round focused on projects supporting people facing barriers to inclusion, including older residents, children and young people with SEND, autistic women and girls, unpaid carers, people experiencing poor mental health, those recovering from addiction, cancer patients, refugees and people facing financial hardship.

Funded projects shared a common purpose: reducing isolation, improving wellbeing and helping people feel more connected to their communities. This report highlights the impact achieved, shares individual stories of change and demonstrates the social value generated through investment in grassroots community organisations.

Janice reflected:

"I honestly thought I was going to be stuck with that pain forever. Getting my balance back has given me my life back."

Today she attends regularly and actively encourages new participants to join.

Impact in Numbers

£18,000

Grant Pot

£25,971 Requested

6688

People Supported

19

Projects Funded
26 Applications received

AGES

10% under 18

17% 18 – 25

36% 25 – 50

37% 50 plus

47% v 53%

Male v Female

£2.69

Per Person Supported

Lasting impact

Many activities continue beyond the grant period through volunteers, peer-led support, partnerships and additional funding.

Why it matters

Pooled donor giving strengthens trusted local organisations and helps people feel more connected, confident and supported.

"I had noticed I am more comfortable with my autism and I have gained confidence from the other women within group."

Priority Groups Supported

The grants supported a diverse range of individuals and families experiencing significant barriers to wellbeing, inclusion and community participation and included people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction, individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, women fleeing domestic abuse, and those with a history of or vulnerability to criminal activity.

A large proportion of participants were living with disabilities, long-term health conditions, learning disabilities, autism, ADHD, visual impairments, Down Syndrome, cancer diagnoses, chronic pain, or mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression.

Funding also reached socially isolated older people, pensioners, carers, young adult carers, unemployed residents, people on low incomes, and those living in areas of deprivation.

Social isolation and loneliness emerged as common themes, with grants improving wellbeing for some of the county's most vulnerable residents.

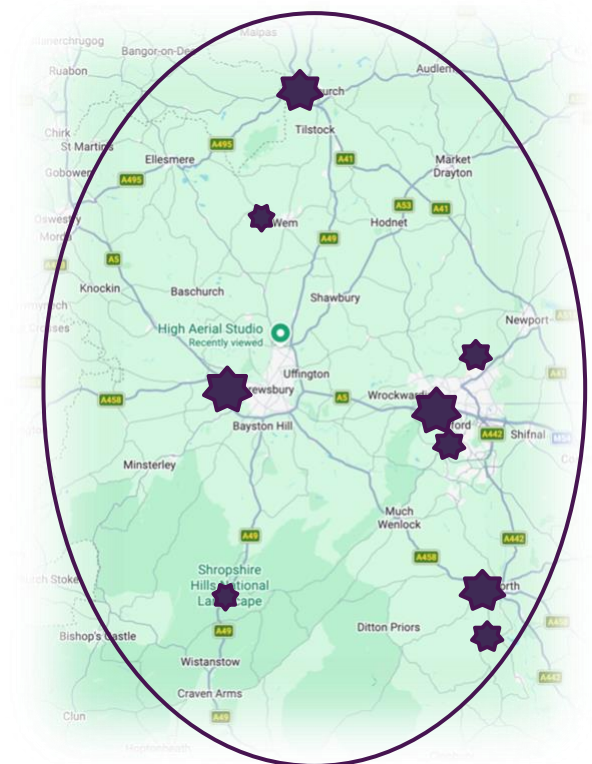
Nathan a young man with Down Syndrome and learning disabilities, family reported that the programme had *"done him the world of good"* and acted as a springboard for wider community participation.

Areas Reached

Grants were distributed across a wide area of Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, reaching residents in both urban centres and rural communities. Beneficiaries were located throughout Telford, with particularly strong representation from South Telford and communities such as Woodside.

Funding reached communities across Shropshire, including Shrewsbury, Whitchurch and its surrounding villages, Bridgnorth and neighbouring rural areas, Highley, Chetteton and Wem.

Overall, the grants achieved broad geographic coverage, supporting individuals and groups throughout Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin while ensuring access for residents in both densely populated urban areas and more isolated rural communities.



Key Outcomes



Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing

Fishing sessions delivered by A Better Tomorrow Charity provided calm, reflective experiences that supported recovery and mental health. Participants described feeling more relaxed, connected and confident.

Women attending Aurum Autism Support groups reported feeling accepted, understood and less pressured to mask their autism. Many developed coping strategies and gained confidence to advocate for themselves in wider society.

Cancer patients attending Bridgnorth Cancer Support Group found creative activities provided valuable distraction from pain, treatment and anxiety whilst creating a strong peer support network. Projects delivered significant improvements in emotional wellbeing. Participants reported:

- Reduced anxiety.
- Improved confidence.
- Increased self-esteem.
- Improved emotional wellbeing
- Greater sense of belonging
- Improved resilience

For many beneficiaries, funded activities provided safe, welcoming spaces where they felt understood, accepted and supported.

Reducing Loneliness and Isolation

A recurring theme across every funded project was the creation of safe, welcoming environments where people could connect with others.

From telephone befriending and community cafés to fishing groups and dance workshops, beneficiaries consistently reported feeling less isolated and more connected to their communities.

Omega's Chatterbox service provided weekly companionship calls to some of the county's most isolated residents, while projects such as Chetton Active Friends and Empowering Women to Health enabled people to establish meaningful friendships and support networks. Participants consistently reported:

- Increased social contact.
- New friendships.
- Improved confidence.
- Greater participation in community life.
- Enhanced sense of belonging.

Many groups established peer support networks that continue beyond the funded activity period.



"I was able to switch my busy mind off for a while."

Improving Physical Health

Several projects focused specifically on improving physical wellbeing.

Purposeful Active Living delivered strength and balance sessions helping older adults improve mobility, reduce falls risk and regain independence.

Empowering Women to Health delivered regular yoga and Tai Chi sessions, with participants reporting improvements in balance, flexibility, strength and overall physical health.

Chetton Active Friends combined exercise with social interaction, helping participants remain active, independent and engaged within their community. Activities included:

- Strength and balance sessions.
- Yoga and Tai Chi.
- Inclusive dance.
- Outdoor fishing activities.
- Community gardening.
- Active social groups.

Participants reported improvements in mobility, strength, balance, flexibility and overall wellbeing.



Building Confidence and Independence

Many projects provided opportunities for personal growth and skill development.

BizEd's Tech Club connected young people with industry professionals and digital learning opportunities, helping participants explore future careers while reducing social isolation.

PODS Youth Club enabled young people with SEND to build friendships, develop life skills and gain confidence, with several participants progressing into volunteer roles.

Projects enabled beneficiaries to:

- Develop new digital, creative and communication skills.
- Volunteer within their communities.
- Build social confidence.
- Access employment opportunities.
- Travel independently.
- Take on leadership roles.

Many participants progressed from beneficiaries to active contributors within their communities.

"It's a safe space to listen and be heard. People just get me."

Legacy and Sustainability

One of the strongest indicators of success across the programme has been the sustainability of activities beyond the grant period. From continued weekly Strength and Balance sessions, fishing activities, weekly Tech Club sessions to ongoing community café provision with a planned expansion.

New support groups for autistic women and girls have been formed and people facing loneliness have established WhatsApp networks to support ongoing peer connections.

The projects have not only addressed immediate needs but have created long-term community assets and stronger support networks with volunteers progressing into leadership and mentoring roles.

Conclusion

The Acorn Fund has demonstrated the profound impact that small, targeted grants can have within local communities.

Through an investment of £18,000, community organisations have supported at least 6,688 people, reducing loneliness, improving wellbeing and creating stronger, more connected communities across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

Participants have gained confidence, friendships, skills and opportunities that will continue to benefit them long after the grant period has ended. Whether through a phone call, a dance class, a fishing trip, a community café or a shared creative activity, these projects have shown that meaningful human connection remains one of the most powerful tools in tackling loneliness and improving wellbeing.

"I wasn't feeling great today and nearly didn't come. I feel so much better for it."

Acknowledgements

We want to thank all funded organisations, volunteers and participants whose dedication and commitment have made these achievements possible, and demonstrates the continuing importance of investing in grassroots community organisations and the powerful role they play in improving lives and strengthening local communities.

A massive thank you to our SIIC members without their sponsorship this fund would not have been possible, may your ongoing support continue.

Appendix 1

Funded Projects

The Acorn Fund supported a diverse range of organisations and activities:

Organisation	Grant Award
Shropshire European Organisation CIC	£1,500
Sight Loss	£1,500
Aurum Autism Support	£1,000
Chetton & District Parish Hall	£1,000
Crowsmill Craft Centre CIC	£1,000
Glyns Garden	£1,000
Omega – Ending Isolation, Ending Loneliness	£1,000
Purposeful Active Living	£1,000
Shrewsbury Food Hub	£1,000
Shropshire Inclusive Dance	£1,000
Wem SEN Hub	£1,000
Wem Town Hall	£1,000
Bridgnorth Cancer Support Group	£900
PODS Charity	£800
Shrewsbury Men in Sheds	£800
A Better Tomorrow Charity	£750
Telford and Wrekin CVS	£750
BizEd Projects CIC	£500
Empowering Women to Health	£500