

Wellbeing

Hi, I am Kate! One of the Community Projects Officers with Frome Town Council. My role is to deliver a Wellbeing work program in the town working with local people and organisations to provide opportunities for local people to get involved.

We started a few years ago by asking people; What do you care about? What would you like to change? Since then Frome has built on the 'can do attitude' Rosie described earlier and applied it to Wellbeing.

For us Wellbeing is far reaching and includes physical, financial, educational, health and employment opportunities. It is about creating the conditions in which local people can thrive.

Frome has a population of about 27k people, unemployment is low, there is a thriving arts scene and a growing number of small businesses. However there are also three areas in the town which rank within the top 40% most deprived in the country one of those sitting in the top 20%. Literacy and numeracy levels are low, the number of adults with higher level training and education is low, there are many people living with long term health conditions and others who are reporting isolation.

I could tell you much more about the facts and figures....I love numbers....but I won't bore you with endless slides of tables! But these are the things that are impacting on the Wellbeing of people in Frome. As a country we have been used to many services and opportunities being provided by the government and locally by the county (Somerset County Council). That is changing and as austerity bites there are less and less things provided and many of the first things to be cut are those that help people in the early stages of difficulty. The result is that people are reaching 'crisis' before they get help.

One of the six community panels initiated by the Town Council looked at Wellbeing and this has resulted in an ongoing Wellbeing forum. Its members include representatives from over 20 local organisations, councillors, practitioners from Health, Schools, and Social services alongside interested members of the public.

In the initial 4 meetings the group identified that there is in fact lots taking place in the town and that the opportunities offered to local people in their leisure time make a real difference to their Wellbeing... from Yoga, Thai Chi,

Shiatsu and other holistic therapies, to parent and toddler groups, 'stich and bitch', groups for widows and widowers, basic IT and literacy groups for adults, play rangers in the parks, a busy Youth Club, a drop in café for young people, lunch clubs for elderly residents, and not to mention the numerous sports and arts clubs for all ages.

The list goes on and on!

Many of these are run by volunteers and under local community organisations. Where a gap emerges organisations and local people are quick to respond. Fair Frome, which runs the local food bank and community dining events across the town is a perfect example of this.

However, the Wellbeing panel identified that it is actually quite hard for residents to find out what's going on and that all too often the different groups do not know what each other are doing! There are numerous websites that hold partial bits of information and rely on labour intensive updating....mostly done by volunteers. They suggested that more notice boards and better use of the local free papers could be a start in making information more readily available. There is a danger that in a fast moving world of digital media we forget that not everyone is face book savvy and indeed, as my children tell me, that facebook is now old-fashioned anyway!

The panel also suggested we look to widen the reach of the Mendip Health Connections Service, a pioneering project which began life in Frome 3 years ago, funded in the main by the Clinical Commissioning Group. Local people are trained as Community Connectors to share information and signpost local people to groups and clubs as part of a wider model of social prescribing initiated and advocated by Frome Medical Practice.

The results of this project are starting to see a reduction in the number of people going to their GP for conditions which they can positively affect themselves, more people participating in low level exercise and leisure activity such as walking, new support groups coming together where patients with specific conditions support each other on a regular basis and an all round service which aims to reduce waiting times and see more people in the town actively seeking to address their own health needs but also those of their friends and neighbours.

The panel also recognised that many people do not know others living in the same street. A pilot study (Community Connections) was undertaken in three

areas of the town. It identified, amongst other things that where there are community assets such as parks and open spaces there are opportunities for local people to get to know each other, have fun, get outside and build a stronger sense of community. In turn this leads to neighbours looking out for each other and amongst other things reducing isolation and creating safer places for people to live and enjoy their leisure time.

A pack – how to organise your street party – now sits on Frome Town Councils website and we continue to grow the number of local events initiated and held by local people year on year; for example the Queens 90th birthday Celebrations and The Big Lunch.

We have found that egg and spoon races, easter egg hunts and food are great ice breakers!

We also host a celebration of volunteers each year to recognise the enormous energy and enthusiasm of local people that drives so many of the projects across the town.

There are also a number of annual events which celebrate our parks; Mayhem in the Meadow, A Willow Day, River Festival and Showfield Spectacular which encourage people from further afield to come together.

The new Frome Town Hall will become a central place for local people to not only access information but also services themselves.

We continue to work with all of our partners, including Mendip District Council who have a remit for Health and Wellbeing; towards a town where all local people take pride in their streets, their parks, their clubs, groups and organisations. Where communities work together to look after their children and the elderly alike. Where young people are inspired to learn, to take part and to give back. To create a happy, friendly and resilient town ready willing and able to cope with the challenges which lie ahead.