

Community Exchanges are regular community-led events that bring people together, provide services and information and reduce social isolation.

Introduction

Crosthwaite Exchange started in 2006 as a response to the closure of the village shop and Post Office. Bolton Exchange opened for the same reason in 2008. (See *Crosthwaite Case Study, and Bolton Video Interview*).

Since then a number of other Exchanges have opened, with support from ACT and funding from NHS Cumbria. In most cases they have been established to bring the community together rather than in response to a specific event such as a shop closure.

Many communities already have coffee mornings, village hall pub nights and other events to bring people together, which fulfil some of the same purposes as an exchange. We have defined a community exchange as a project which:

- Brings the community together, particularly people who might not otherwise meet
- Reduces isolation for residents who may feel “cut-off” from the community
- Provides services (i.e. opportunity to shop, socialise, access health care or learn about public services)

What happens at an Exchange?

The project needs to suit the community and can be anything that brings people together, reduces isolation and provides service. It’s important that it’s based on local need and that there has been some assessment of this before it starts. Many hold a regular coffee morning or afternoon. As well as selling refreshments they also provide; stalls to buy food or other goods, children’s activities, and information on services.

It may be possible to borrow toys from the local toddler group and providing children’s activities helps to attract a wide age range. Exchanges can be run at evenings or weekends to attract those who work during the day.

How are they run?

They are run by volunteers. Some are run as a sub-group of an existing community hall or another community organisation. Some are organisations set up specifically to run the exchange. A large team of volunteers lessens the workload for all and can be coordinated by a smaller committee.

The start-up costs for an exchange need not be high and can often be covered by small grants. Most exchanges break even and many make a profit which can be donated back to the community hall or to other local groups.

Regular events which

- Bring people together
- Provide basic services as well as a chance to socialise

Relatively easy to sustain

- A big team of volunteers can spread the load
- Should be financially sustainable once set-up costs are covered

Benefits

- Improves community cohesion, can bring different ages together
- Can give people information about services they might not otherwise know about

Range of services

- A huge range of services and stalls can be provided
- Choose what suits your community

Range of activities and services

The following have all been provided at Exchanges in Cumbria;

Community led

- Simple lunches (i.e. soup and a roll)
- Theatre trips
- Chiropodist and manicurist (in separate room)
- Complementary therapies
- Book stall or book / DVD exchange
- Jigsaw library
- Fish van with ordering service
- Produce from local gardens
- Plant stall
- Home baking stall
- Traidcraft© and dried goods stall
- Children's crafts and toys (particularly during school holidays)
- Stationery stall
- Internet access
- Visits from local school
- Occasional performances from choirs and musicians
- Themed Exchanges with decorations and food to celebrate Valentines, St George's Day etc.
- Local art group displays
- Noticeboard for people to advertise events, items for sale etc.
- Consultation for Community Led Plans
- Craft Stalls

Outside agencies

- Fire safety information
- Recycling roadshows
- Energy efficiency information
- Community Nurses (testing blood pressure and providing dietary information)
- District Council Handyman service
- Signposts
- Library van visits
- Community Police Officer

What are the benefits?

Exchanges bring people together and improve community cohesion, for some people it's their only regular social contact and, through Exchanges, people have made new friends. They help to welcome new residents to the community too. For some Exchanges the involvement of young families through children's activities has been a particular benefit, bringing young and old together. Exchange volunteers have increased their confidence and self-esteem through involvement.

In addition, the Exchange can be a central point for information and news. They also provide an opportunity to bring in agencies who can share information about their services.

More information

The following guidance is available from ACT, to help you develop an Exchange:

Case Studies: Crosthwaite Exchange Case Study and video; Bolton Exchange video; 'The Vic' at Culgaith video.

Guidance Sheets: Project Planning; Establishing a Group; Governance; Budget Planning; Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluation; Running a Café; and Linking to Services.

Workbooks & Quick Guides: Getting Going; Developing your Budget; Sustainable Finance; Robust Business Planning; Working with Volunteers; and Marketing

For support to set up an Exchange please contact ACT and speak to your local Development Officer

For funding advice to cover start-up costs contact Cumbria CVS Tel: 01768 800350
www.thirdsectorcumbria.org.uk



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For more information please contact us at Action with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01768 840827 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

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