

Somerset Village Agents

PRESS RELEASE



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NEW ONLINE SUPPORT PORTAL FOR PEOPLE IN SEDGEMOOR

A new website has been developed by the Community Council for Somerset (CCS) and Assist as part of their Somerset Village Agent project. The website is a Portal to help individuals seek advice, guidance and support for a range of issues, from fuel poverty to asking for support on a community project, such as finding funding for transport to isolated rural areas.

The Somerset Village Agent project now covers over half of the county. The project uses paid, part time, highly trained individuals living in the parish 'clusters' they support. They help to bridge the gap between isolated, excluded, vulnerable and lonely individuals and statutory and/or voluntary organisations which offer specific solutions to identified needs.

Lucille Simms, Village Agent for the Sedgemoor area, is spearheading the Sedgemoor trial, which CCS hopes to roll out through the rest of the Village Agent network in 2017. The Village Agent Portal website uses technology from a Somerset-based organisation - Assist. Their Assist Portal system allows businesses, public services and charities to quickly create their own advice, support, learning or mentoring websites.

She said: "This is an amazing tool, that hopefully the people of Sedgemoor will find invaluable – you can book confidential online 'live chat' sessions, have discussions in a secure group environment with people experiencing the same issues as yourself, and generally use it as a gateway for advice to access services in your local area."

Lucille added: "CCS is a forward thinking organisation the portal is a vital addition and will provide a new layer to the Village Agent service. Not only does it allow another method of contact, it also bridges the gap between communities, support services and outside agencies. We often hear the term 'joined up thinking' and its merit - the portal is the means to achieve this."

Village Agents work with all ages dealing with a wide variety of issues. Village Agents also have the role of helping to shape services by feeding back to the appropriate body information about gaps in service e.g. transport provision.

The Portal opens up a whole new way that people can communicate with their Village Agent, ensuring they obtain the real support they need at a very local level.

Sedgemoor residents can access the portal at this web address:
<https://villageagents.theassistportal.com/>

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Tel: 01823 331222 Email: info@somersetccc.org.uk Website: www.somersetccc.org.uk

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Editors notes:

The Somerset Village Agent project is a project of CCS and now covers half of the county. The Village Agent project continues to grow from strength to strength. The team has better geographical coverage, reaching even more people and providing support in ways appropriate to local people. The project uses paid, part time, highly trained individuals living in the parish 'clusters' they support. They help to bridge the gap between isolated, excluded, vulnerable and lonely individuals and statutory and/or voluntary organisations which offer specific solutions to identified needs.

Village Agents offer a signposting and referral service with a difference.

Village Agents work with all ages dealing with a wide variety of issues, although a considerable number of their clients are elderly and involves social care issues. Helping to solve these problems may, ultimately, help the elderly to remain living independently for longer. Village Agents also have the role of helping to shape services by feeding back to the appropriate body information about gaps in service e.g. transport provision. They can also motivate and support a community to respond to a local need by working together to address issues e.g. by helping them to set up a coffee morning for a group of lonely people or start a volunteer car scheme.

CCS supports people who live and work in Somerset communities. We do this through a range of diverse projects which bring together people who care about local community life in Somerset. We focus our energy on helping you and your community.

See [our work](#) to see what projects are running across Somerset.

About the Assist Portal

The Assist Portal is a hosted software system which allows organisations to create their own online advice, support, learning or mentoring platform based around how their customers or service users want to communicate.

Organisations can choose the communication options they want to offer to customers from: webchat, private 1-2-1 discussion threads, adviser-led group discussions (public or private), information libraries and social media. The platform can be used to offer purely digital support or customers can build a blend of online, phone and face-to-face support through the appointment booking service.

Users can self-refer through web form sign up or organisations can set-up users themselves and keep the portal private. This means the Assist Portal has almost limitless applications for supporting different types of stakeholders groups. It has a massive range of applications from confidential advice services to internal HR Support and Learning & Development activities.

The portal can be deployed in minutes using customer's own branding and they stay in complete control over the communication and content options. Different administration levels are available allowing advisers to manage content or you can appoint a system administrator.

For further information visit: www.theassistportal.com