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PRESS RELEASE

The future is bright for Somerset Village Agents!

Community Council for Somerset (CCS) is delighted to announce that it has been awarded £499,933 of funding from The Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund to contribute towards its Somerset Village Agent Project until March 2018. This not only allows for the current work to continue but also to extend the Somerset Village Agents' roles to just over half of Somerset.

Somerset Village Agents support the communities they live in, working at the very heart of those communities being the eyes and ears on the ground. Working with individuals and groups and responding to community need, they were really put to the test when the Somerset Levels and Moors flooded along with flash flooding across the county.

Somerset Village Agent Manager Jinny Uppington said: "We are thrilled to have won this money alongside funding from The Tudor Trust and Taunton Deane Borough Council amongst others. This will enable us to carry on our good work and build on our successes to date."

Somerset Village Agents supported over 470 people during the Somerset floods and the support still continues today: emotional, physical and practical.

Here are a few of the stories of how Village Agents have helped local families during the Somerset flooding:

Mr and Mrs A

Mr and Mrs A's house burned down on Christmas Eve 2013. The fire services were unable to get to them due to the water levels. They are an elderly couple, the husband has terminal lung cancer and the wife has the use of only one hand. They don't have children or any family. They needed help from the Village Agent with practical things like paperwork and dealing with insurance company, signposting to support agencies, volunteers, emotional support and guidance. The Village Agent got them involved with a local lunch club to enable them to meet other elderly neighbours, and signposted to them advocacy support which meant their insurance claim was dealt with more efficiently. The Village Agents also ran regular coffee mornings which meant that they were consistently kept in touch.

Mr and Mrs B

Mr and Mrs B moved into a flood affected area four weeks before the floods and did not know anyone locally. They found they had a house under water and were moved to temporary accommodation. They have needed support in relation to grants, signposting to support agencies, information on local services, emotional support, and guidance.

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Mr and Mrs C

Mr and Mrs C have lived in their home for over 40 years, bringing up their four children there. They are now retired, with grandchildren. Their house was one of the last to be flooded, but the water has ruined their lovely cottage, which is part cob. They are still not back, as the cob is complicated to repair. They are not due to return home until at least June 2015. They are both affected by this very depressing situation. They have attended the Village Agent coffee mornings regularly and this has helped them through the worst. "Before the floods, we didn't have a Village Agent. Now, Kate's a focal point in the Village, she's always approachable. She's a great source of information."

Without the help and support of the Somerset Village Agents what situations would these people be in now, who would they turn to?

The issues that were faced by the Somerset Village Agents and residents varied from financial advice, relocating families, pets, post to arranging medical appointments and most importantly emotional support to those who lost so very much.

Over a year on does not mean that everything is sorted. There are still people suffering from the after affects in many different ways. This includes 20 families still not returned to their homes. CCS surveyed the work carried out by the Village Agents in the flooded communities and 90% of respondents knew that if they called the Village Agents they would get the right support they needed. Nearly 60% would not have known where to go for help if there had not been a Village Agent available to them.

The Village Agents become an intrinsic part of the community's flood recovery and at a recent event when the community were asked to name a good thing that came out of the flooding people responded by saying having a Village Agent by their side.

For information on the Somerset Village Agents visit: www.somersettrcc.org.uk/sva

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Notes to editors:

The Somerset Village Agent project is a project of CCS and now covers 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.

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.