



Better Connections End of Second Year Report, 4 March 2026

Introduction

The Directors and staff of Inclusive Exeter CIC are pleased to present this second-year report for the Better Connections Project. We continue working with grassroots groups across Exeter to support ethnically diverse communities, promote integration, and strengthen social cohesion, helping to make the city more welcoming for all.

We are aware of the rise in far-right activity in the city, which has caused distress among the ethnically diverse communities we serve, as well as white British residents. We remain committed to bringing people from different backgrounds together to foster understanding and build positive relationships. Alongside delivering this Project, we created spaces for individuals to share their experiences. At an extraordinary Steering Group meeting, people spoke movingly about racist abuse they had faced. This led to 'Action Against Racist Abuse' at Exeter's Historic Guildhall, where community members addressed City and County Councillors, Devon and Cornwall Police, Community Builders and others, including a National Lottery representative. As a result, we are developing confidence-building training and are now listed as a Third Party Reporting Centre on the Devon and Cornwall Police website.

We continue to operate two days a week at Southernhay United Reformed Church, a city-centre venue where we deliver our Drop-In Support Service, Women's Yoga, English Conversation Group and other activities under one roof. The space also provides a welcoming meeting point for staff, volunteers and visitors.

In our second year, we have maintained strong partnerships and built new connections. We are working more closely with Wellbeing Exeter, hosting a Local Connector role to support socially isolated individuals and strengthen our Drop-In Service. We have supported diverse communities, including Connected Romanians from Exeter, Devon; Exeter Hindu Cultural Centre; Al Shola Women and Children's Group; Devon Turkish Community-Exeter; and the Women's ADHD Social Group-Exeter, to raise funds for their activities, and assisted the Afghan Community Exeter with their application to become a CIC. We have secured a Devon Community Foundation grant to provide food vouchers for families in need through the Department for Work and Pensions' 'Food, Fuel and More' scheme.

We have also broadened engagement through collaborative projects with Studio 36, creative workshops at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, a Health Research Café, sessions with the Association of South Asian Midwives, and an event enabling ethnically diverse residents to meet Exeter's MP.

Steering Group Committee

Our Project Steering Group, made up of representatives from the six participating communities, Inclusive Exeter Directors, staff, and other stakeholders, directs the Project. Meetings cover updates on events and activities, and scrutiny of expenditure. Details of expenditure are sent out to Steering Group members for study in advance of the meetings so that members are kept well-informed, and Inclusive Exeter upholds its commitment to transparency. In addition to Steering Group meetings, we have a much-used WhatsApp Group, keeping everyone as up-to-date as possible on the day-to-day running of the Project.



Community Events Overview

In its second year, Inclusive Exeter deepened its community partnerships by delivering eleven events in collaboration with six community groups. With approximately 2900 attendees, these initiatives strengthened cross-cultural understanding, promoted inclusion and reinforced a shared sense of belonging across the city.

Events & Attendance:

- Easter/Vishu/Eid Celebration (03 May 2025) - Exeter Kerala Community | Clyst St Mary Hall | 228 attendees
- Family Activity Day (21 June 2025) - Exeter Kerala Community | Ludwell Valley Park | 150 attendees
- Annual Picnic (06 August 2025) - Afghan Community Exeter | The Maer Ground, Exmouth | 150 attendees
- NCIE Family Fun Day (16 August 2025) - Nigerian Community in Exeter | Wonford Community Centre & Playing Field | 450 attendees
- Filipino Sports Fest (23-24 August 2025) - Filipino Community Association | ISCA Academy & Exeter University Sports Park | 300 attendees
- Family Fun Day (13 September 2025) - Filipino Community Association | The Maer Park, Exmouth | 90 attendees
- All Souls' Day (26 October 2025) - Community St Thomas | St Thomas the Apostle Church | 400 attendees
- NCIE Christmas Event (21 December 2025) - Nigerian Community in Exeter | Clyst St Mary Hall | 250 attendees
- Festura (11 January 2025) - Exeter Kerala Community | Corn Exchange | 310 attendees
- DBA Victory Day Celebration (18 January 2026) - Devon Bengali Association | St James School | 370 attendees
- The United Smash Cup (14-15 February 2026) - Devon Bengali Association | Wonford Sports Centre & Isca Academy | 200 attendees.

For insights into the experiences of organisers and participants' feedback and reflections, [Click here.](#)

Take a glimpse into last year's events [Click here to view.](#)

Highlights from the United Smash Cup 2026, including event photographs and participant feedback, can be viewed [here.](#)

Physical Activities Programme



During Year 2, our physical activity programme continued to grow in reach and impact, providing consistent, welcoming spaces for people from diverse backgrounds to connect, build confidence and improve their wellbeing through sport and movement.

Sunday Badminton

Every Sunday | 12 PM – 2 PM | Venue: Wonford Sports Centre | Facilitators: Devon Bengali Association

Badminton sessions ran regularly throughout Year 2 and were consistently very well attended. Most sessions attracted around 25 to 30 participants, with some particularly busy sessions reaching up to 36 people, clearly showing high demand and enthusiasm for the activity. The sessions also gained wider local attention, with the facilitator being interviewed on BBC local radio about the weekly badminton sessions. [Click to hear.](#)

Volleyball

Every Tuesday | 6 PM – 7:30 PM | Venue: Riverside Sports Centre | Facilitators: Afghan Community

Volleyball regularly attracts between 12 and 16 participants. As only one court is available, a maximum of 12 players can take part at any one time. However, sessions are consistently oversubscribed, with a waiting list in place, highlighting strong demand for the activity.

Women's Only Yoga

Tuesdays & Thursdays | 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM | Venue: Southernhay URC Hall Room | Facilitators: Women of Iraqi and Bangladeshi heritage

Women's yoga sessions, running on both Tuesdays and Thursdays, showed consistent weekly attendance across the year. Most sessions attracted between 15 and 25 participants, with several peaks of over 30 people, especially during the autumn months. Participation stayed strong into the winter, suggesting good commitment from attendees. Offering yoga on two different weekdays helped make the sessions more accessible and allowed a wider range of women to take part.

Martial Arts

Every Saturday | 4:15 PM – 5:45 PM | Venue: Wonford Sports Centre | Facilitators: Hong Kong Community

Martial arts sessions maintained strong and steady attendance throughout the year, usually bringing in between 12 and 18 participants per session. There were a few temporary dips around late summer and early winter, which is expected, but engagement picked up again strongly in January, showing good retention and continued interest.

Click for participant [testimonials](#) and [attendance figures](#).

Other Active Involvements

Alongside our regular sessions, we actively collaborate on wider community initiatives supporting physical and mental wellbeing, including 'This Girl Can', led by Exeter City Council and Live & Move, and 'City Sisters', delivered by Wellbeing Exeter. Our participants also engage in broader community sports and activity events. Following the success of our 2024 Badminton Tournament, we hosted 'The United Smash Cup 2026' on 14–15 February across two venues in Exeter. Players from nine different cultural backgrounds took part, alongside children's activities and a Zumba session, creating a welcoming and family-friendly event for all.



This is a computer-generated representation of the Drop-In Support Service session

Introduction

This report covers the second year of the Better Connections Drop-In Support Service (March 2025–January 2026). Data for the final month (February 2026) will be included in the next bi-annual report and in the final year-end report.

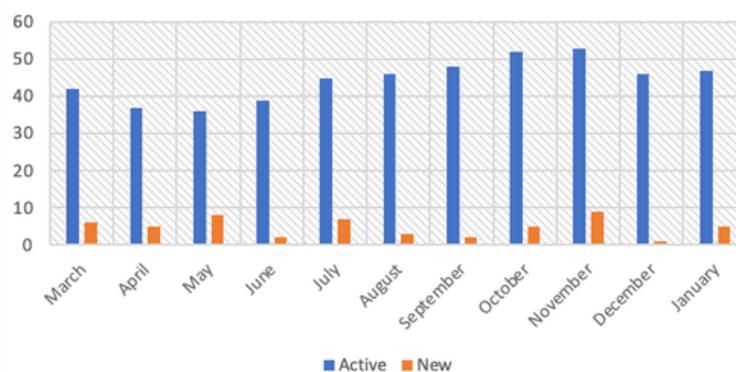
The Drop-In Service operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9.30am–1.30pm at Southernhay United Reformed Church, Exeter, with up to one hour allocated per beneficiary per caseworker.

The service is delivered by two paid caseworkers, supported by two ad hoc volunteer caseworkers as needed. All caseworkers hold valid DBS checks and complete mandatory training to ensure skills and policy knowledge remain up to date.

Achievements and statistics for the second year of the Project (March 2025 to January 2026)

- A total of 127 beneficiaries were seen since the start of the Better Connections Project
- Currently 46 active beneficiaries in total including new and previous – numbers fluctuate as beneficiaries not seen in 3 months are taken off the active beneficiaries list.
- 53 new beneficiaries accessed the service over the past 11 months, with a detailed monthly breakdown available [here](#).
- The service has had 80 Drop-In sessions over the past year and has enabled IE to help 468 individuals (including repeat visits).
- The number of dependents benefiting from the service amounts to a further 17 individuals.

Number of Active and New Beneficiaries



Impact and Key Issues Addressed :

- A2/B1 bookings (English language skills assessments for immigration applications)
- British passport applications
- Council Tax issues and CT Support applications
- Debt management (utilities/rents/bankruptcies)
- Devon Home Choice applications/appeals/reviews
- eVisa applications/UKVI accounts registrations/share codes
- Food delivery apps: registering/issues
- GP registrations
- Housing – Devon Home Choice
- Housing issues and repairs with Exeter City Council
- ILR/Naturalisation/British citizenship applications/enquiries
- Immigration appeals
- Job searches/applications/CV updates
- Legal Aid enquiries/referrals to solicitors
- NHS pensions nominations



- Pension Credit applications
- PIP applications/reviews/health assessments
- Private housing: search for homes
- School admissions with Devon County Council
- Provisional driving license applications
- Foreign passport applications
- Share codes for right to work
- Taxi license appeals
- Universal Credit: journals/commitments/health assessments/ free childcare scheme
- Utility bill enquiries
- Workplace discrimination
- PCN charges - parking fines/NHS prescription fines

Referral Sources

Referrals come from various organisations, and the Service works closely with other 3rd party organisations, including

- Citizens' Advice
- Employment Plus (Salvation Army)
- Exeter Foodbank
- RSD (Refugee Support Devon)
- USDAW (trade union)
- Wellbeing Exeter

Case Studies - Illustrating Impact

To further demonstrate the impact of the Drop-In Support Service, we have compiled five anonymised case studies. These highlight the range and complexity of issues addressed, the challenges faced by beneficiaries, and the practical outcomes achieved through caseworker support. For case studies [click here](#)

Comments

For people accessing the Drop-In Support Service, often we are a lifeline: those for whom English is a second language, who are not familiar with online application processes, with limited IT skills and in unfamiliar ground, we support them so that they have access to mainstream and essential services.

Examples are given in the case studies which demonstrate the challenges people face and the adverse effects of not being able to complete applications, keep to commitments or communicate effectively. People are adversely affected when essential commitments are not honoured whether due to communication issues or because of a lack of understanding of how processes work in the UK.

Some beneficiaries remain very vulnerable and susceptible to deprivation, harm and prejudice. We help ensure people are aware of their rights and help them access services that assist in various ways. Having our services under one roof enables our service users to access other activities that work to break down barriers of vulnerability, discrimination and isolation. One of our key objectives outside of the Drop-In, is to help people overcome social isolation through well-being activities that bring people together from various backgrounds. This is offered to all who access this service.

In order to offer a fair and accessible service, we offer 1 hour to each beneficiary per caseworker. Only in exceptional cases do we offer 2 consecutive hours where certain online processes can take longer than an hour to complete. Certain processes demand that the application be completed within a limited timeframe, e.g., Blue Badge applications must be completed within 14 days of starting an application.

We have supported people from various ethnicities including those from the following countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq (Kurdish), Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey (Kurdish). Given the nature of Exeter's diverse yet close knit communities, our caseworkers are trained to adhere to the strictest degree of confidentiality and impartiality when offering support. No personal information is shared without the express consent of our beneficiaries, except within our team of caseworkers with the aim of sharing the workload.

Targets for the third year of the Project:

- Prepare for publicity drive at the Respect Festival 2026 and volunteer fayre at Exeter Cathedral.
- Approach community representatives to promote the service among other communities.
- Strategic publicity with key services across the city



Digital Presence

Inclusive Exeter has expanded its digital reach across multiple platforms to better engage our community:

Website: Regularly updated with events, resources, and team profiles. (To View [Click Here](#))

Social Media: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#).

Looking to the Future: Challenges & Reflections

Inclusive Exeter was established to enhance social cohesion by connecting diverse communities, amplifying minoritised voices, and supporting individuals to live their best lives. In the two years of our Better Connections Project we believe we have done much to achieve those aims, whilst acknowledging that there is still much to do.

Our events and activities are planned and delivered by partner organisations and are open to everyone. It is clear, however, that some events and activities are much more successful than others in bringing diverse groups together. Events which involve a shared activity are proving to be much more inviting to people who come from cultures other than the one delivering the activity, as described earlier in this report.

Those events based on a religious festival, albeit the festival is also a secular festival, and those which are nationality-based, have proved to be of less interest to the wider community. They are, nevertheless, an important part of the Project, giving people within a community a sense of belonging. Much thought goes into the planning of these events and people look forward to them as celebrations of their heritage and an acknowledgement that people can be at home in more than one culture.

In the third year of the Project we will continue to deliver events and activities as described in our initial Project plan and will redouble our efforts to engage with a greater number of people, acting as an umbrella organisation for ethnically diverse community groups. We have begun to create a database of community members' contact details so that information about our activities can now be sent directly to individuals and thus reach more people than simply relying on community leaders, who themselves are time-poor, to disseminate information.

We look forward to working with an independent evaluator, who will assess the effect the Project has had on the people it has set out to support and empower, the extent to which our aims have been achieved and how our experiences during the lifetime of the Project and our consequent learning as an organisation will help Inclusive Exeter to develop and focus even more closely on the needs of people whose heritage lies elsewhere, but who call Exeter 'home'.



Thank you

Our sincere thanks to The National Lottery Community Fund and the Lottery Players - your support is enabling us to achieve good things and make our great little city an even better place to live for all of us!