

'A Year of Listening' An Exciting New Community Engagement Project On Cancer Services in Medway & Swale

Tuesday 27 September, 2022

A 'Year of Listening' is an exciting new 12-month Kent wide community engagement project which will engage with local communities and residents to understand the barriers and challenges local people are experiencing in accessing cancer treatment and support services in Medway and Swale.

The project, funded by Macmillan, begins in September 2022 and will be delivered in Medway and Swale by Medway Voluntary Action (MVA), a local charity in Chatham. The initiative was born in the light of Medway and Swale underperforming in many cancer system indicators, which have only worsened in the wake of the pandemic.

Annmarie Frenchum, Macmillan Engagement Lead – Kent, Medway & Essex, said *"A year of listening' is all about dedicating time to listen and gather feedback from the Medway and Swale community about the cancer services they have received so that, moving forward, we can help to shape and improve them. We are delighted to be partnering with MVA who will help us to have these conversations so we can identify the barriers many people in our local communities face when accessing cancer treatment. By working with partners such as MVA and listening to cancer patients and those affected by cancer, we aim to help deliver inclusive services for everyone in the future."*

The programme will engage with and support Medway and Swale residents to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities within the existing system (in relation to accessing treatment and services), and their views will be shared with key decisionmakers who have committed to taking action based on these insights.

Annmarie adds: *"It is so important to listen to what local people have to say based on their experiences of cancer services. They will have the opportunity to address the barriers they currently face and speaking openly to create change, becoming the 'decision makers' in Medway and Swale. We hope that the project will help support community resilience, creating a clear insight into possible solutions, all lead directly by the community".*

The 'listening' will happen in a variety of ways and anyone living in Medway or Swale whose lives have been impacted by cancer can take part.

Clare Saunders, Programmes Manager at MVA, said *"We are committed to supporting engagement activities that the whole community can get involved in, so we are working closely with our voluntary and community sector peers to deliver local 'listening' events across Medway and Swale. These events will offer a diverse range of ways to be heard; whether that's through filming people telling their stories, drawing pictures, joining online chats or simply writing your views on a piece of paper – it's important to us that everyone's voices are heard; and the funding from Macmillan enabling us to deliver this entire year of listening is a great way for local people to have their say in shaping the future of cancer support services in Medway and Swale so that they meet all our needs."*

If you are a resident, community group or organisation in Medway or Swale and have been impacted by Cancer, then MVA would love to hear from you. Contact a member of their team on 01634 812 850 or contact@mva.org.uk.

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