

HYPERTENSION HEROES

**Hypertension Heroes add
smoking cessation to their toolkit!**



Hypertension Heroes/smoking cessation (Phase 5)
Funded by Kent County Council LSSS
October 2025



Hypertension Heroes add smoking cessation to their tool kit!

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Summary

Hypertension Heroes is a community asset-based approach, directly empowering communities to address health inequalities around self-management of hypertension by increasing the knowledge and capacity of community champions.

Phase 5 of this project focused on the addition of smoking cessation information and advice, and was funded by the LSSS fund through Kent County Council in late December 2024.

Ongoing support, quality assurance and training were provided by EK360; however, community partners were responsible for managing the day-to-day running of the project, including the recruitment and coordination of volunteers and community spaces.

In addition to the work of the community partners, EK360 had a small team that went to specific venues where it was anticipated there may be a higher prevalence of smokers (football clubs and bingo halls). The geographical areas targeted were Ashford, Thanet, Swale, Folkestone and Gravesend, one existing community group was also supported to continue in the Maidstone area.

“

“The target was a challenge as many smokers may not wish to admit they smoke or be motivated to want to quit smoking, so we are very pleased with the results of EK360 and for achieving 85% of the target.”

”

*~ Tami Sonubi, Public Health Specialist,
Kent County Council*

Across 6 months (including mobilisation), **23** Hypertension Heroes were trained and supported from **10** community partners.

There were **1,230** interactions with members of the public across Kent.

23% of all readings were high or very high.

252 contacts were with smokers, all of whom were given relevant signposting and support around heart health and signposting to smoking cessation.

EK360

EK360 is a Community Interest Company (CIC). EK360 has over 10 years' experience of listening to and working alongside both the public and decision makers about health and social care to bring about positive changes. EK360 supports the delivery of the Hypertension Hero project.



Hypertension Heroes

Hypertension Heroes is a project that has developed iteratively over the last few years. It has been funded by a range of partners including Medway and Kent public health teams, KCHFT, The British Heart Foundation and OHID. Funding for this phase came from the LSSS grant within Kent County Council.



The model sees motivated citizens learn how to engage with their communities to support them to monitor their own blood pressure. It has been successfully delivered with community support across targeted areas of Kent and Medway and visited by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer. EK360 delivers the training, project management and quality assurance for the project.

Hypertension Heroes add smoking cessation to their tool kit!

In mid-December 2024, EK360 was commissioned by Kent County Council to deliver the Hypertension Heroes project with a new addition of finding and targeting smokers, to provide them with Very Brief Advice (VBA) and signpost them to the KCC smoking cessation service. Five areas were identified:

- 📍 Gravesend
- 📍 Swale
- 📍 Ashford
- 📍 Thanet
- 📍 Folkestone and Hythe

In addition to this, EK360 was to support an existing group in Maidstone.

The Hypertension Heroes programme with the addition of VBA/signposting was delivered through a variety of community engagement routes, training and supporting local community organisations and attending local football matches and bingo halls.



Data from the project was captured using a secure online webform, including levels of hypertension, smoking status and attendees' demographics.



Aims and targets

The aims:

1. For members of the public to be supported by a Hypertension Hero to learn how to take their own blood pressure, understand the readings and what action to take next;
2. For the Hero to have a conversation with a member of the public around healthy lifestyles; and
3. Where appropriate, receive smoking VBA if identified as a smoker.

We set an ambitious target of **1448** contacts in the 6-month period and crucially **222** contacts with smokers. The smokers were to receive Very Brief Advice in addition to support with managing their blood pressure.

Delivery mechanisms

The Hypertension Heroes training package was adjusted to fit the new model, with a new webform agreed to capture relevant data from the project.

All Hypertension Heroes received the Hypertension Hero training, as well as training around the new webform and the VBA training either in person or online by agreement.

With the new element of smoking cessation, it was agreed to try some new places to identify people, not just for hypertension support but also smoking cessation conversations. For that reason, the following environments were identified at the outset:

1. Community groups (target: 2 per area)
2. Football clubs (target: 1 per area)
3. Bingo halls (target: 2 in specific locations)

HEALTH CHECKS WHERE YOU LEAST EXPECT THEM





Review of engagement methods

Community groups

EK360 worked with 9 community groups who recruited volunteers and staff. EK360 provided Hypertension Hero training to each of the groups. Some were initially able to attend in person the VBA course, the rest did this online.

The following groups were all successful in recruiting Heroes and delivering sessions both in their own settings and through outreach:

1. Gravesend – **Youth Ngage**
2. Gravesend – **Rethink Sahayak**
3. Swale – **Sheppey Matters**
4. Swale – **Sheerness Salvation Army**
5. Ashford – **The Beehive**
6. Folkestone – **Sunflower House**
7. Folkestone – **Hythe Town Dementia Forum**
8. Thanet – **The Gap**
9. Maidstone – **Fusion Healthy Living Centre**





IN GRAVESEND...



HYPERTENSION HEROES IN ACTION AT YOUTH NGAGE AND RETHINK SAHAYAK

“

I am now more serious about looking after my health.”

”

IN ASHFORD...



HYPERTENSION HEROES IN ACTION AT THE BEEHIVE AND SUNFLOWER HOUSE





“

“I am truly truly grateful being shown on how to monitor my own blood pressure; after seeing I have high blood pressure, I will be making a GP appointment with my results. I do smoke, however after hearing that vaping is safer, I will do everything in my power to stop.”

”

IN SWALE...



HYPERTENSION HEROES IN ACTION AT SALVATION ARMY AND SHEPPEY MATTERS

“

**“Not everyone has chance to get places,
so having it here is useful.”**

”

IN MAIDSTONE...



HYPERTENSION HEROES IN ACTION AT FUSION HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE



Two groups in Gravesend, who have been with the Hypertension Heroes project since the beginning, were most successful at reaching members of the public and finding smokers through their outreach.

Two groups that were new to the project in Swale also delivered high numbers once they were able to get started a little behind the Gravesend groups.

The variety of outreach opportunities (including melas, book launches, police events etc) through the community groups and their commitment to making the project work within a very short timeframe is to be commended.

Reflections from Hypertension Heroes in community groups

- 🗣️ *"Helping people quit smoking was a really valuable part of the project. I talked to people about smoking and listened to what they had to say. I didn't pressure anyone, but if someone seemed ready or interested in quitting, I referred them for more support. Some people were really motivated, while others found it tough, but I think even small steps made a difference. Overall, I think the project was a good experience – it felt meaningful to be part of something that helps people get healthier."*
- 🗣️ *"The experiences are different sometimes. Some of the smokers said that they tried a few times to quit, but they ended up going back to smoking, especially those living alone, while some tried to vape and felt the satisfaction isn't comparable to cigarettes, so they go back to cigarettes."*
- 🗣️ *"In my opinion, I would suggest there should be more awareness in GP surgeries, job centres, hospitals and schools (primary, college and universities). Also, surveys can help to facilitate talks to schools, colleges and universities to curb high rate in teens and young adults."*
- 🗣️ *"It's been such a wonderful and rewarding experience being a Hypertension Hero volunteer. I have been able to connect with the community more and help others take charge of their health by teaching them how to take their blood pressure. It has been truly inspiring."*
- 🗣️ *"For me, it meant helping people who didn't know they had high blood pressure and pointing them in the right direction. People with low blood pressure thought this was good. We are able to tell them low blood pressure is just as concerning as high blood pressure and signpost them to get help."*
- 🗣️ *"I like being a Hypertension Hero volunteer because I feel that people are a little worried on how to use the machine and don't always understand the readings. If we can show members of the community how to use the blood pressure machine and understand the readings, that is a plus for me."*
- 🗣️ *"For me, being a Hypertension Hero volunteer means I am able to help people within the community and highlight the importance of having regular blood pressure checks as part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle."*



- “The smoke-free aspect has been quite interesting. We have met people who are willing to stop, and they readily agree to send the SMS to the number provided, while some said they were not interested in quitting. Some said they had given it a shot before but fell through and [were now] willing to give it another shot.”
- “If we can have the VBA on smoking pamphlets or leaflets, it will go a long way, we can easily hand them out to people who couldn’t make up their mind at the time we met with them.”

Reflections from football clubs

EK360 partnered with 6 local football clubs, one in each of the targeted areas. EK360 supplied trained experienced Hypertension Heroes at matches at the following clubs:

1. Punjab United FC (Gravesend)
2. Sheppey United FC (Swale)
3. Margate United FC (Thanet)
4. Hythe Town FC (Folkestone and Hythe)
5. Ashford United FC (Ashford)
6. Ashford Internazionale Walking Football Club

Due to the time of year (near the end of the season), sessions were limited to the end of April).



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“It’s a great idea coming here [as] you keep hearing about people dropping down in the stands with their hearts.”

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“Middle-aged men at the club need checks.”

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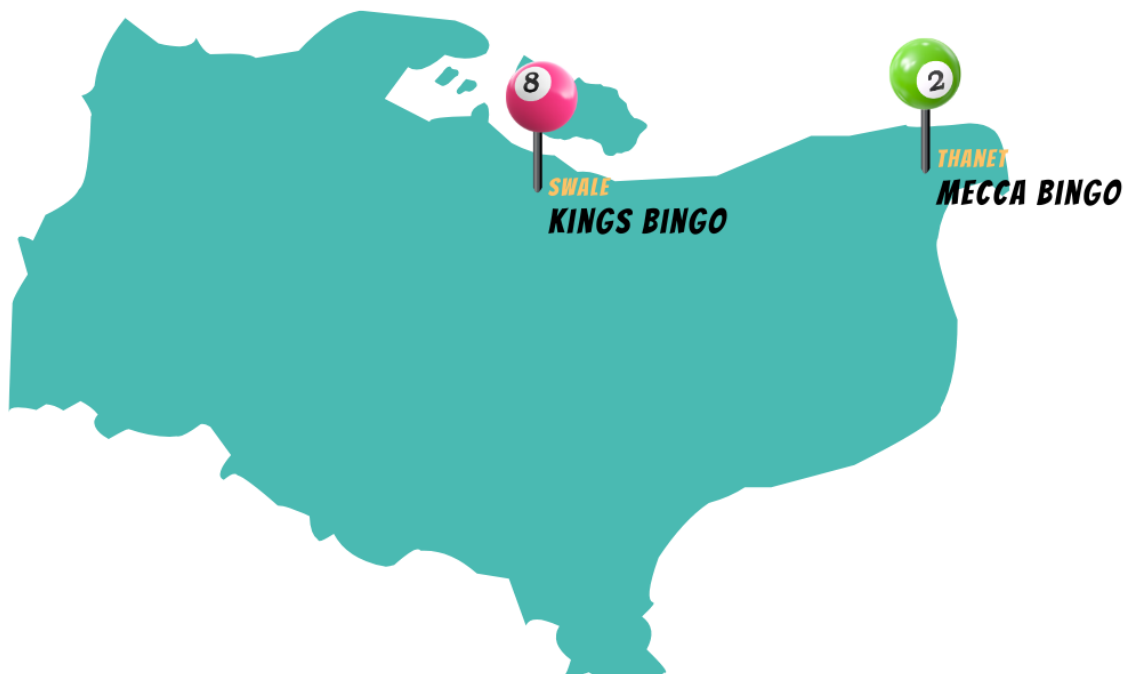
**“People always find a reason not to have it done.
Great to have at football clubs.
Lot of people don’t realise that their pressure is high.”**

”

Bingo halls

EK360 partnered with two large bingo halls that remain within the target areas, one in Swale and one in Thanet. After many calls, emails and visits, the Thanet Mecca Bingo was not successful, however Kings Bingo in Sheerness was very welcoming and meant we were able to provide several visits and identify smokers.

The results show a high percentage of smokers at these venues.



“

“There should be more of this, especially at the bingo.”

”



Impact of the Hypertension Heroes

Reaching smokers

We reached over **1,200** contacts within the timeframe and exceeded the target of smoker contacts. We set the target of **222**. We went on to have **252** contacts, of these **200+** smokers were signposted.

Of the **252** smoker contacts, in total we found **101** smokers who wanted to quit.

**THROUGH THE INTERVENTION OF A
HYPERTENSION HERO, 46% THEN WENT
ON TO TEXT QUIT IMMEDIATELY!**

In Gravesend and Swale, the numbers of smokers found exceeded the target set. The community groups in both areas were very targeted in their approach, the two in Gravesend have been actively hosting Hypertension Heroes since the first phase of the project.

We found the highest proportion of smokers in the bingo hall. The football clubs and community groups had differing levels of success at identifying smokers.

Lower numbers in Thanet were partly due to one of the community groups failing in their attempts to get the project up and running, even with additional support.

- 💬 *"Thanks for the advice on smoking. I will keep on thinking of giving it up down the line and with the numbers given to me, I am sure I will use it. Fantastic service from a wonderful gentleman."*
- 💬 *"This is really good, an opportunity to get checked. I smoke and drink, so I know I'm at risk."*
- 💬 *"There are lots of people that don't know what to do. Really need the information."*



Increasing hypertension awareness and self-management

In terms of numbers of people with hypertension, 282 people found that they had high or very high blood pressure and 29 people found that they had low blood pressure.

Normal (Between 90/60 and 139/89)	861
High (Between 140/90 and 179/119)	276
Low (89/59 or below)	29
Very high (180/120 or higher)	6
not recorded fully	58
Total contacts	1230

Table 1 – Blood pressure readings from all contacts

	Folkestone Romney Marsh	Gravesham	Thanet	Ashford	Swale
Contacts per area and numbers of smokers					
Community groups contacts	132 contacts of which 15 smokers (11%)	295 contacts of which 76 smokers (26%)	100 contacts of which 2 smokers (2%)	56 contacts of which 4 smokers (7%)	214 contacts of which 26 smokers (12%)
EK360 engagement	49 contacts of which 26 smokers (53%)	0	35 contacts of which 22 smokers (63%)	89 contacts of which 20 smokers (22%)	7 contacts of which 5 smokers (71%)
Charity shops	0	0	0	0	0
Football clubs	20 contacts of which 3 smokers (15%)	12 contacts of which 1 smoker (8%)	44 contacts of which 4 smokers (9%)	42 contacts of which 2 smokers (5%)	34 contacts of which 5 smokers (15%)
Bingo Halls	0	0	0	0	60 contacts of which 28 smokers (47%)
TOTAL per area	201	307	179	187	315
Total smokers per area	44	77	28	26	64
Prevalence of smokers found per area, those who wanted to quit and those who went on to text QUIT.					
Number of smokers who wanted to quit per area	26 (59%)	27 (35%)	14 (50%)	9 (35%)	23 (36%)
Total number wanting to quit	99 people from target areas and 2 from Maidstone = 101 (40%)				
Number of smokers referred to stop smoking services	37	60	25	22	44
Number of smokers who text quit and percentage	12 46% of those wanting to quit sent a TEXT msg	11 41% of those wanting to quit sent a TEXT msg	10 71% of those wanting to quit sent a TEXT msg	7 78% of those wanting to quit sent a TEXT msg	6 26% of those wanting to quit sent a TEXT msg
46% of those wanting to quit went on to send a text message to QUIT.					



Reflections on the service from recipients

While engaging in community settings, our Hypertension Heroes had the opportunity to capture additional comments from members of the public.

The most common strands of feedback were:

1. **Gratitude, support and appreciation** for the Hypertension Heroes, with a helpful and personable service provided.

💬 *"It was really easy to do and was reassuring!"*

💬 *"Great work being done here. Very helpful – thank you for your time and patience. Well done, it's really beneficial!"*

💬 *"It's really important to have this service in the community for people who don't know their blood pressure. It's a silent killer. A wonderful service."*

2. **Increased awareness of the importance of blood pressure checks** and an understanding of how to monitor it effectively at home.

💬 *"I feel like I have more understanding of how to take my blood pressure and that makes me happy, thank you for the time and knowledge you have given me today."*

💬 *"This has made me more aware of the need to look after myself."*

3. **Accessibility, convenience and the ease** of blood pressure checks in familiar settings, especially if they have difficulty accessing their GP.

💬 *"[Hypertension Heroes] is a very good idea. Why not check your blood pressure if it's here? Not everyone has chance to get places, so having it here is useful."*

💬 *"Trying to get a doctor's appointment is like trying to ask God to open the earth. Impossible! This service is magic."*

💬 *"People won't go out of their way to look after health, so this is a very important service."*



Thank you

We are very grateful to have been given this opportunity to continue with the Hypertension Heroes project and give it this new enhancement of smoking cessation.

We are hugely grateful to the community groups who worked with us, supporting volunteers and members of the public.

We would also like to thank the football clubs that allowed us to visit and Kings Bingo, who all made us very welcome.

Improvements that could be made to the support received by EK360:

- a) Much more flexibility is needed in terms of VBA being delivered in communities;
- b) Community groups had requested smoking cessation leaflets, EK360 passed this on early, yet they only arrived on the last day of the project; and
- c) We went into the project knowing that it was going to have short-term funding. That said, we want to raise the issue that this project, including the community organisations and settings, would benefit from sustainable funding.

The future for Hypertension heroes

Community groups continue to embrace this community asset-based approach and would like to continue if the opportunity is there.

Feedback from Kent Public Health team

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“We enjoyed working with EK360. There was great communication between both organisations and expectations were clearly stated and met. Where there were problems, this was communicated early on, and solutions were quickly found.”

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“EK360 performed well with the challenges they faced, including setting up new partnerships within short time scales. Their engagements skills and communication were excellent, it is hard to see how they could have done better.”

”

~ Tami Sonubi, Public Health Specialist, Kent County Council

engage
reflect
improve

EK360 supports the delivery of Hypertension Heroes

EK360 is the trading name for Engaging Kent CIC

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