

# Hertfordshire Independent Living Service

Annual Impact Report  
**2020-2021**

**Supporting our clients through the pandemic**



Hertfordshire  
**Independent Living Service**  
Supporting your independence



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**“Meals on Wheels has been the only constant thing throughout the pandemic. I can’t sing their praises enough!”**

**16,452**

...people received  
HILS support to remain  
happy, healthy, and  
independent at home

**1,309,794**

...unique interventions  
delivered to help  
people in need



# Our Impact in Brief

We would like to thank all our team members and partner organisations for their hard work, dedication, and support over the past year. Without you, 16,767 older and vulnerable people would not have received the 1.3 million HILS interventions that helped to keep them safe and well in their homes at an exceptionally difficult time.



- HILS delivered 535,161 hot meals to 3,937 clients; 831 clients also received 87,169 Tea and Breakfast Packs. Team members also provided 608,123 extra support services such as medication prompts and cutting up meals
- HILS provided 830 hot meals to 25 people coming out of hospital and provided homelessness support to 100 people by delivering 3,935 hot meals



- 1,384 emergency food and grocery packs delivered to 1,384 people in crisis or shielding as a result of COVID-19
- 1,262 Home from Hospital Bags delivered to people coming out of hospital



- 315 people were given 1,646 nutrition and wellbeing support interventions and 304 home visits; the team also distributed 15,580 Nutrition Boost packs for people at risk of malnutrition
- 185 care home staff received nutrition awareness training to support their residents
- 11 clients were referred to A1 Opticians for their home eye care service
- 270 clients received 946 Active Ageing sessions, 73 of these were delivered via video call
- Clients received 473 wellbeing packs with nutrition and physical activity advice



- 32 clients living with moderate dementia received 796 wellbeing telephone calls, and 18 of these were supported to attend 5 face-to-face activity sessions
- 77 lunch club members received 8,332 hot meals



- Hertswise supported 3,362 people living with dementia and their carers
- Team members provided 6,169 interventions including home visits, group meetings, and one-to-one support
- Clients received 2,500 wellbeing packs



- HILS teams provided 2,451 pop-in visits and installed 152 key safes
- 176 people were supported to feel safer in their homes



- Our community advocates delivered 1,447 interventions to help 54 people to make good decisions about their health and care



- 54 volunteers helped HILS to deliver lifeline support to older and vulnerable people
- 42 individual donors gave HILS £3,623 via our online platform





## Foreword from Chair



**John Turk**  
Chair of HILS Board

This has been a difficult and tragic year for many people, and our thoughts are with everyone who has suffered loss and hardship as a result of COVID-19. At Hertfordshire Independent Living Service (HILS) we are very proud to have been able to support thousands of vulnerable people when they have needed it most. As Chair of the HILS Board, I have seen first hand the incredible impact that the HILS leadership and team members have had, and have been hugely impressed by the resilience they have shown. It has never been more important for us to talk about the needs of our clients, and the value of local community-based services that can help older and vulnerable people stay independent, safe, and well in their homes. We are determined to continue growing our services and reaching new people who need help. On behalf of the HILS Board, we would like to thank our clients, our teams, and our partners for their continued support and encouragement.



## Introduction



**Sarah Wren**  
HILS Chief Executive

The pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges and immense sadness for many of our clients, colleagues, and their loved ones. From personal loss, to being isolated from friends and family, to the uncertainty that comes with rapid and unexpected change, we have all faced significant struggles and had to adapt to a new 'normal' that no one could have anticipated. But throughout these turbulent times, we have also witnessed incredible examples of compassion, determination, and selflessness that have been truly inspirational. We are grateful to people such as Captain Tom Moore, our thousands of colleagues working in the NHS and care, and everyone who reached out to their neighbours or volunteered with organisations such as HILS to help those who needed it. It has been a great privilege to work alongside them and our HILS teams to continue supporting people. For many older people in Hertfordshire, our meals on wheels deliveries have been the only constant in their lives, and our Community Team members have been the only friendly faces that they have seen on a regular basis. Even when we were forced to suspend some of our other services, teams continued to call their clients and send them gifts to let them know that they were valued and cared for. Team members were re-deployed, took on new responsibilities, created new services, and went above-and-beyond to keep the most vulnerable people in our communities safe and well. It is thanks to them and to our fantastic partners at Hertfordshire County Council, Social Business Trust, and many more, that we were able to overcome all the hurdles that the last year had to throw at us and reach more people than ever before.

## HILS' COVID-response...

**March  
23rd: UK  
National  
Lockdown  
declared**

### April-June

- Referrals for meals services grow by 18% and for emergency food bags by 400%
- Non-meals services temporarily suspended and staff re-deployed to ensure lifeline meals services are available, non-meals teams maintain contact with their clients via telephone throughout the suspension period
- Meals services are adapted to new PPE and social distancing requirements, emergency communication systems are set up to keep staff safe and informed
- HILS sends out over 12,500 wellbeing packs to help clients stay safe, well, and connected throughout lockdown and launches an 'At Home with HILS' section on the HILS website

### July-October

- New emergency food parcel service launched to help clinically extremely vulnerable people who are required to shield
- Major programme of service re-design started, to get non-meals services running again and to find new ways to support people under COVID-19 restrictions

### October-March

- New processes developed that enable all HILS services to begin doing face-to-face sessions again in people's homes
- Active Ageing launches virtual pathway to provide people with digital devices and support via video call
- Nutrition Awareness Service launches online learning platform for care home staff
- Kingfisher Club trials re-opening to smaller groups of people living with dementia and their carers, sessions fully re-launch in March
- HILS initiates a major refurbishment project at our Jubilee community centre, which has seen significant wear and tear due to COVID-19 response activities in preparation for re-opening
- Hertswise re-starts community group sessions outdoors



# Our Meals Services

Stepping-up to fight food insecurity and social isolation

## Anna's Story

87-year old Anna lives alone and was used to going out regularly to the town centre for a cup of coffee with friends and to go shopping. When the UK went into lockdown she began feeling very isolated. Living alone without Wi-Fi, or any family members close by, and listening to the terrifying reports on the news, Anna felt trapped and unable to reach out. 'You feel like a prisoner, like a caged lion', says Anna. 'I wander around the flat and think what am I doing? Why have I come in here? It's really really, really difficult, and you can't always be rational about these things. People say, "well you can phone us if you need to..."'. But I feel if I phone them I may be burdening them and the last thing I want to do is burden anybody.' Fortunately for Anna, she was still receiving visits from HILS team members when they delivered her meals on wheels. They noticed that she was struggling and appeared to be losing weight, so they referred her to our Nutrition and Wellbeing service. Anna began receiving regular calls and support to manage her nutrition and anxiety. She was also put in contact with a colleague at the University of Hertfordshire and established a friendly correspondence, which helped her to feel less alone. 'I find people who hardly know me have been so kind', says Anna. 'All you have to do is to listen to people and say, "yes, I understand, and yes, you are still valued". That's what I say to people when they phone - you are still valued, don't despair.' Anna recently completed HILS' Active Ageing programme to improve her strength and mobility. As part of this, she learned how to use a tablet to make video calls and has since received her own device, organised through a partner organisation, to help her stay connected with loved ones. She has since set herself a new challenge to learn how to use Google.



**HILS supported 3,937 older and vulnerable people like Anna by providing hot lunchtime meals and daily welfare checks. We also provided teatime and breakfast meals to 831 of our meals on wheels clients.**



**Sadly, the majority of lunch clubs have remained closed throughout the pandemic, however HILS still delivered 8,332 hot meals to lunch clubs, supporting 77 lunch club members. Our meals teams also supported 100 people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic by providing them with 3,935 hot meals.**



## Diane's Story

Diane is one of HILS' 158 Community Team members, who deliver meals on wheels to clients in Hertfordshire 365 days per year. Around 18 months ago, she spotted an advert for the role in her local Tesco and thought it would be rewarding. When the pandemic first arrived in the UK, the meals service delivery changed dramatically. Team members had to practice 'distanced deliveries' and wear PPE to protect themselves and their clients. Diane says, 'When it first started, everyone was concerned. The first time I was asked to deliver to a client with confirmed COVID, I was absolutely petrified.' Life outside of work was also challenging, as panic-buying and new restrictions on businesses changed the way everyone lived day to day. 'I couldn't sleep or eat during that time,' Diane remembers. 'I live on my own and had to do my own shopping; when I went one day and couldn't get any toilet paper, I just broke down.' As time went on, PPE provisions increased and everyone got used to the new processes. 'I think the delivery team have all done an amazing job. We all acted as if nothing scary was happening when we were with the clients. We put them all at ease with our professional attitude and positivity.' For many clients this was a lifeline, especially for those who live alone. Diane says, 'I'm still being thanked by clients that no matter rain or shine, I am nearly always there at the same time each day. I'm thanked for making them laugh and not rushing them. That simple thank you from our clients is all the reward I need.'



**Diane and her colleagues delivered 535,161 meals, and 87,169 Tea and Breakfast packs in the last year. They also provided 608,123 extra support services - such as reminding people to take their medication, and plating up or cutting up meals for those that need it.**



## Emergency food and groceries

During the pandemic, HILS expanded its emergency food and grocery provision to include people who were shielding and unable to get their shopping done online or with help from friends or family. 'I think these deliveries had a very positive impact on the clients who were shielding or having financial difficulties, our support was hugely important', says John, who delivered these packs. 'I myself had to shield for six months, so I know that it can be tough.' His Team Leader, Nicola, agrees. 'I remember one client who had to shield because he was recovering from cancer. He didn't have any family to help, so having the food delivered to him was a great weight off his mind. It also meant that he had someone to check on him - a couple of times we had to call for medical help as he was feeling unwell. We continued delivering boxes to him every week, I think this support was very important for him.'



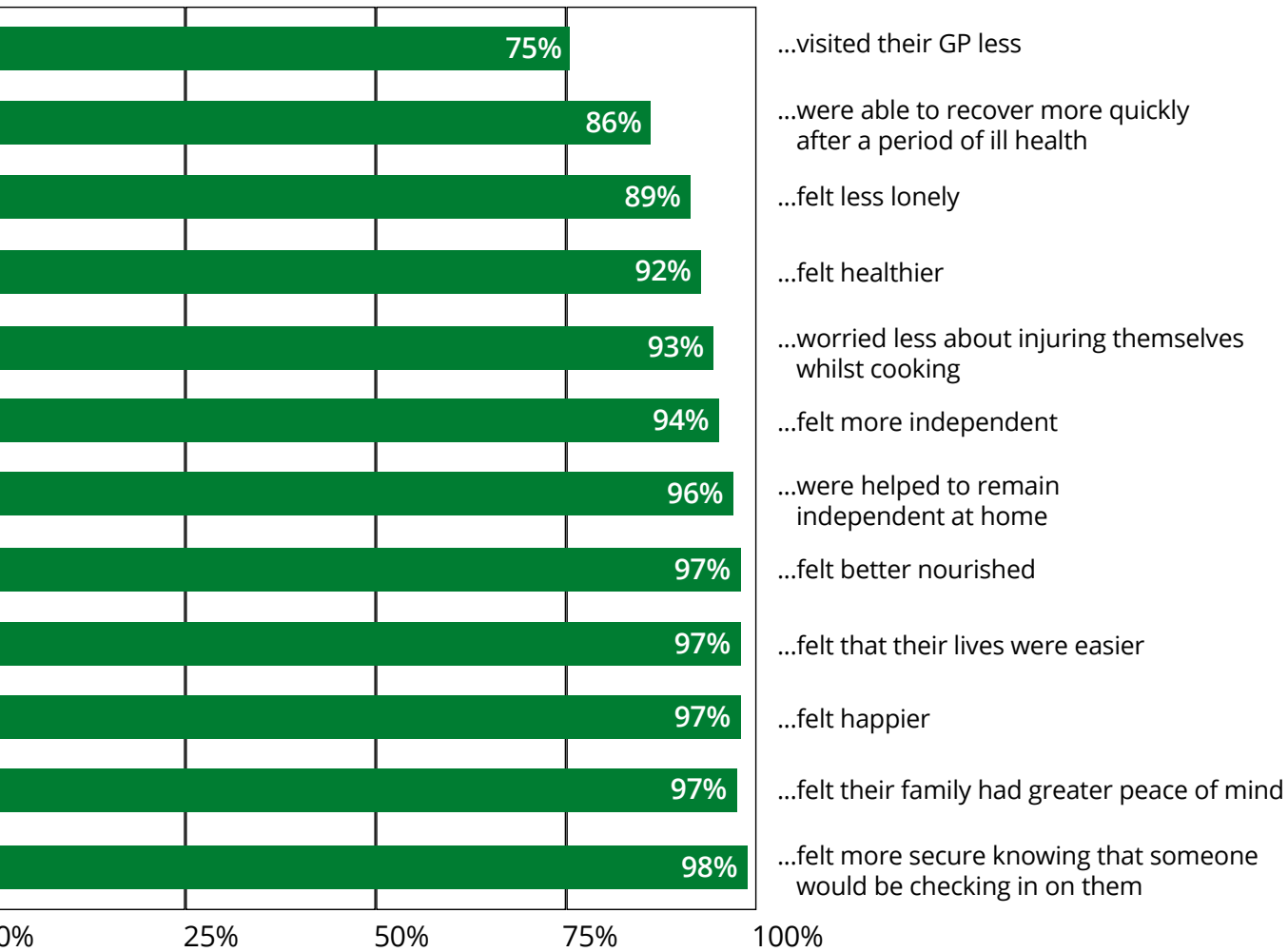
**John and the team delivered 1,384 emergency food bags to 1,384 people in crisis or shielding. They also gave out 1,262 Home from Hospital Bags for people leaving hospital so they didn't go home to empty cupboards.**



# Annual Client Survey

Every year, we distribute surveys to all our meals clients, and this year 500 of them responded. This is what they told us:

## Clients told us that as a result of HILS services and support...

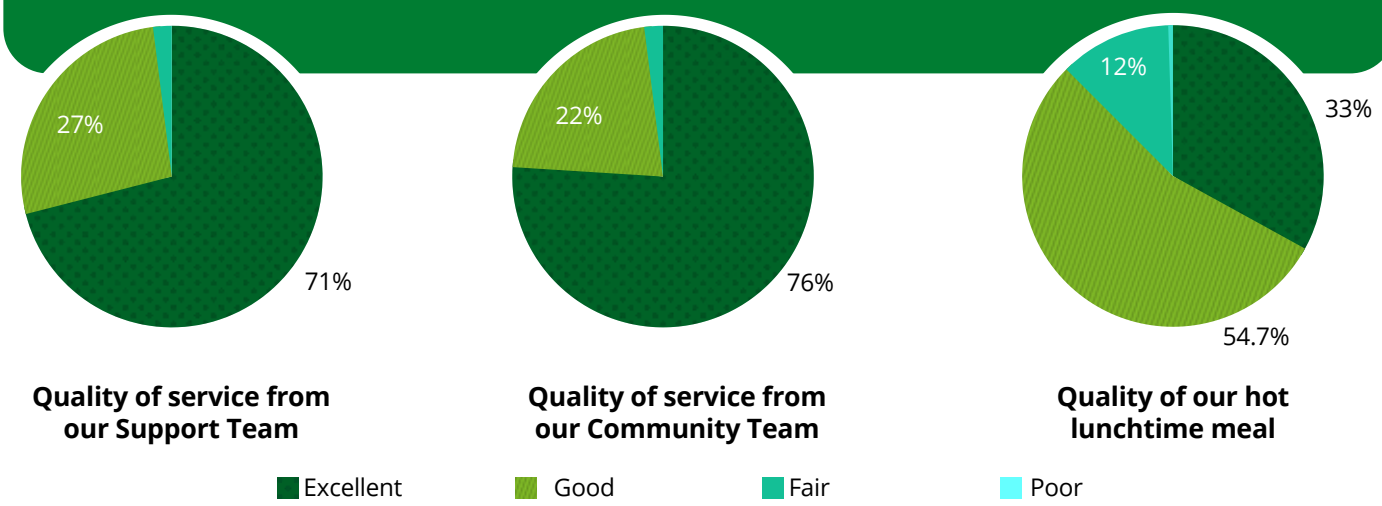


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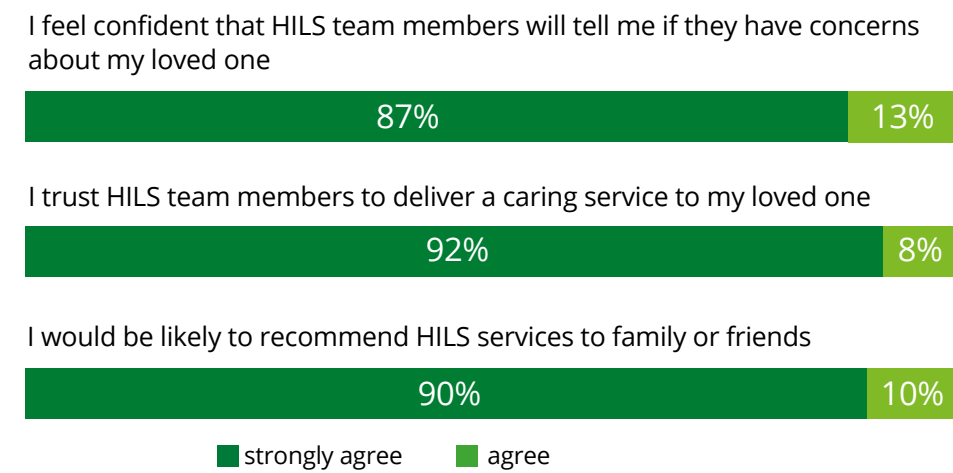
...of respondents said they found it reassuring that HILS teams continued to visit them during the pandemic

*'To see their smiling eyes above the mask and their usual 'I'll see you tomorrow' is a kind of support in itself and makes me feel how lucky I am'*  
2021 Meals Survey respondent

## We asked meals clients what they thought of the quality of our services, and this is what respondents told us:



## HILS asked friends and family members how our services affected them and their loved ones; this is what respondents told us:



Survey respondents were able to select: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree in response to each statement. However, no respondents selected somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

*'My mother has received an excellent service since we started having them delivered. The people who drop the meals off are first class. Couldn't ask for more, thank you!'*  
2021 Family and Friends Survey respondent

*'I live 110 miles away and never worry that mum won't have a meal. The people on the phone are excellent!'*  
2021 Family and Friends Survey respondent





# Health and Wellbeing Services

## Nutrition and Wellbeing Service

### Derek's Story

Derek was introduced to the Nutrition and Wellbeing service by his Active Ageing instructor, who had noticed he was struggling with his weight. On her first visit to Derek, Nutrition Team member, Simone, realised that Derek's poor mobility was being made worse by two painful leg ulcers and being severely overweight. Derek was also unable to control his diabetes and was experiencing frequent falls as a result of hypoglycaemic episodes (low blood sugar), some of which led to spells in hospital. Over time, Simone learnt that Derek had begun to struggle with his mental health after the recent loss of his wife. During lockdown, Derek had been unable to see his friends and family, and was feeling extremely isolated. This had led him to develop disordered eating patterns and to begin drinking excessive amounts of alcohol - both of which were making his health conditions much worse. Derek and Simone started working on techniques to improve his wellbeing, lose weight, and reduce his alcohol consumption. Within nine months, Derek had lost quite a bit of weight, but he was still feeling low. Simone began visiting Derek more regularly to help keep him motivated. Today, Derek has stopped drinking alcohol and is continuing to make healthy food choices. He has also lost over a stone in weight and his leg ulcers have completely healed. His hypoglycaemic episodes are less frequent, and he has had fewer hospital admissions since starting the Nutrition and Wellbeing service. His mood has improved, and he is delighted with his weight loss.



**The Nutrition and Wellbeing Team has supported 315 people like Derek, providing 304 home visits and 1,646 other interventions (such as onward referrals and wellbeing calls). They also gave out 15,580 free Nutrition Boost snack packs to people at risk of malnutrition.**

**HILS also works with A1 Opticians to promote their home eye care service and to make sure that our clients can receive support when they need it. Despite closing for several months during the pandemic, A1 was still able to help 11 HILS clients after we referred them to their service.**



## Nutrition Awareness Service

### Rebekah's Story

Having completed a nutrition placement with HILS in 2019, university graduate Rebekah was delighted when she officially joined the Nutrition Awareness Team (NAT) in 2020, which provides nutrition training and accreditations to care homes. Starting a new job can be daunting enough, but especially during a global pandemic! But Rebekah and the team rose to the challenge, transferring all of the training sessions they usually held in care homes onto an online platform and using video calls to teach. 'We adapted quickly to ensure we could continue to support our local care homes during this extremely difficult time', says Rebekah. 'In a matter of weeks, we completely redeveloped the way we deliver training, support, and accreditation. I am so proud of what we achieved.' Since then, hundreds of care home staff have received the online training, which has been so well received that the team plan to maintain a hybrid model even after restrictions ease.



One of the first care homes to trial the online training was Alban Manor Nursing Home who attended a webinar about food fortification and spotting the signs of malnutrition. After this session, Alban Manor Nursing Home decided to change the way they identify and tackle malnutrition among their residents, and their teams loved the training! When it then came to training kitchen staff and chefs at Allington Court Care Home in IDDSI (International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative) and texture modified foods, the NAT team got creative and asked the staff to prepare food for the virtual session in advance so they could do live 'tests' to measure the food's texture. For example, by seeing whether the food would fall off a spoon and timing how long it took. This interactive session was very engaging for the staff who then went on to change the way they prepare and serve meals after the training. This has been essential for residents to ensure their food is safe and to help prevent choking.



**Our Nutrition Awareness Service has provided training to 185 care home staff, and received fantastic feedback on their training resources.**

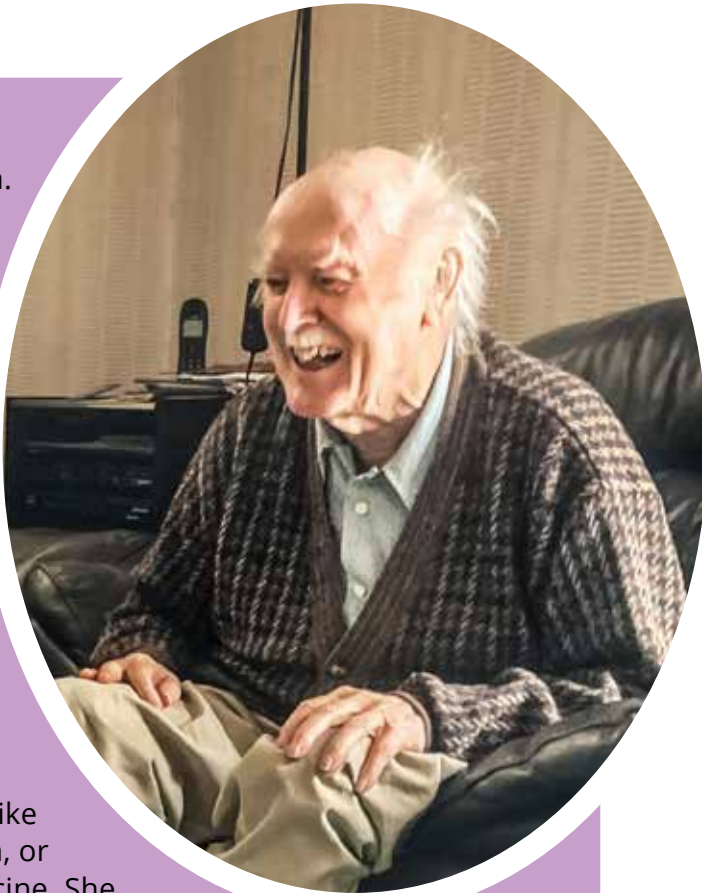




# Health and Wellbeing Services

## HILS Active Ageing Service

### Michael's Story



91-year-old Michael lives alone with mild dementia. Thanks to his meals on wheels, Michael was able to look after himself independently throughout the first lockdown, but he was losing confidence in his physical mobility and had fallen several times. Without any local relatives, he relied on a neighbour for support and was feeling isolated when he joined the Active Ageing programme in October. With help from his instructor, Charlotte, Michael began receiving chair-based exercise sessions over video call as part of a trial aiming to broaden access to the programme. The exercises helped Michael to improve his strength and confidence walking, while the regular video calls established a routine. 'These exercises kept me alive', says Michael. 'My mobility makes life worth living.' Charlotte also helped Michael with simple but important things, like writing down the dates of the November lockdown, or calling to remind Michael of his second COVID vaccine. She also set him up on the Compassionate Neighbours scheme to make sure he had regular contact from people nearby. In June, Michael received a HILS Mental Health Wellbeing Pack and was such a fan of the colouring book that he ran out of ink in his colouring pens. So the team sent out some new pens and a colouring book to keep him going.

Before starting with Active Ageing, Michael had never used a tablet before and wasn't sure if he would get on with this unfamiliar new technology. But by the end of his programme, he decided to purchase his own tablet so he could video call his sister-in-law, Sue, who he hadn't seen since March. Today, Michael is still living independently at home and goes down to the shops every day for his exercise. He also calls Sue regularly on his new tablet.

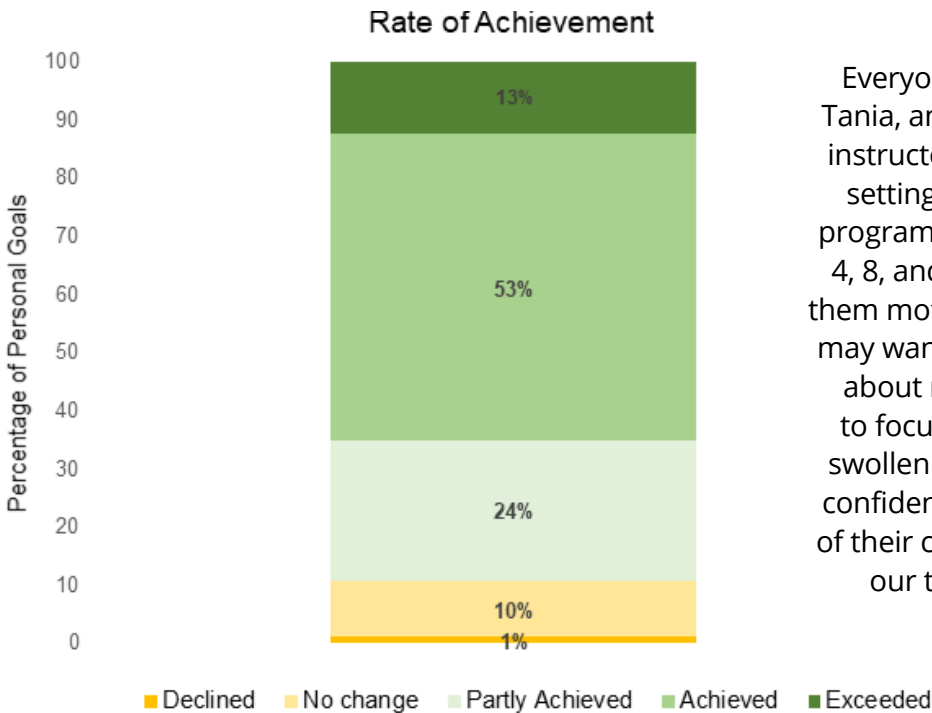


**Charlotte and the rest of the Active Ageing team delivered 946 sessions to 270 people like Michael, 73 of these sessions were delivered via video call. They also sent out 363 resource packs to keep people active.**

### Tania's Story



'COVID came as a blow as I had only recently joined the Active Ageing team, I started with my first clients in January so I hadn't completed the programme with any of them when lockdown came. I was worried that they would lose momentum. We began doing wellbeing phone calls which was great as we still managed to speak with them. A lot of our clients were anxious and lonely due to family not being able to visit. I think it also kept the instructors sane as it was a relief knowing they were okay. I also started doing meal deliveries for people experiencing homelessness, before going on to organise our volunteers to do these meal deliveries. This went on for about three months, and kept me busy alongside wellbeing calls to my Active Ageing clients. We also made resource packs which we sent to them by post, the feedback was very positive - I think a lot of our clients were bored during the pandemic so these packages really lifted their spirits. Because we couldn't see our clients, the Active Ageing team created a virtual pathway - providing clients with tablets and teaching them how to video call. I feel really proud to be part of a team that is really making a difference. We did everything we could to try and find ways to help our clients and they are always at the forefront of what we do. I am proud that I was able to be at the end of the phone for people when they most needed it, to listen, to reassure and to help where possible.'







**“I can now move more freely around my home and can do small domestic jobs I hadn’t done for a year, such as making tea and sandwiches”**

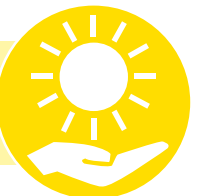
# Thanking our volunteers

## Helping us through the crisis

As a social enterprise committed to the relief of unemployment, HILS prioritises paid employment. HILS primarily hosts volunteers as part of training programmes (such as work placements for students), and skills development to support people back into full time work (for example, if they have experienced barriers such as mental health or substance misuse issues, or have learning disabilities). However, when the first lockdown was announced, demand on our lifeline meals and crisis intervention services increased by over 400% in just a few weeks, putting significant pressure on our frontline operations. Thankfully, over 200 members of the public reached out to offer their support. Throughout the pandemic, volunteers helped us to deliver meals and emergency food parcels, they put together 22,200 PPE kits for frontline team members, and collated wellbeing resources into over 10,500 activity packs which were sent out to clients.

To manage the high volume of volunteers, get them trained, checked, and in the right place at the right time, HILS set up an emergency volunteer management system. This was led by our Senior Community Dietitian, Simone, who has been involved with volunteering for 20 years as a scout leader, and with her scuba diving club. ‘I LOVE working with volunteers’, says Simone. ‘It’s one of the most rewarding experiences. Many of our volunteers said they would rethink their own job roles and look to work with older adults in the future. We were fortunate to have so many people come forward during the pandemic. Their help was invaluable and they supported a great number of people, who we may not have reached without them.’

**Over the past year, HILS received regular help from 54 fantastic volunteers and received £3,623 in donations from 42 individual donors**



*‘I am so proud of the way I, and my colleagues, rose to the challenges of the past year. Firstly, I was re-deployed to London Independent Living Service to lead their team while their Team Leader was shielding. It was something I will never forget - being in the middle of the pandemic when London had very high cases of COVID and at the beginning when there was no PPE. The team down there were amazing, they went above and beyond to get their meals out to their clients each day. I was also proud of myself because it was completely out of my comfort zone. Secondly, we massively expanded our emergency food pack service - I was setting up suppliers, getting boxes packed and delivered, and sorting out staffing... all new things that I had to learn. The team was very new and had also been re-deployed from across HILS, but they were so dedicated.*

*And while there were many hurdles along the way - when the food didn’t turn up, when our order of boxes was going to take two months to arrive because of a shortage of cardboard, when the referrals suddenly doubled overnight - we just remembered that the most important thing was for clients to receive food. And we achieved that.’*

**- Nicola, HILS Nutrition and Wellbeing Visitor**



# Community Services

## Fun clubs and friendships at the Jubilee Centre

The Kingfisher dementia fun club closed temporarily at the start of the first lockdown. Team members were re-deployed to pack PPE and deliver meals on wheels, but they continued to support the club members and their carers with regular telephone calls, activity packs, and garden visits. In September, they began trialling smaller group sessions with strict social distancing and a rigorous cleaning regime. 'The clients were a little wary at first to be back and socialising', says Kingfisher Club Activity Coordinator, Jill, 'But after a while they began chatting together like they did before.' Sadly, the club closed again during the second lockdown in December. Undaunted, Jill and her colleague Jess donned their Christmas hats and visited every client to drop a gift outside the door and check they were okay. A few months later, the club was able to re-open and is now running four days per week. 'It is so lovely having our clients back and seeing them enjoy themselves. We have had a few clients that struggled with lockdown, especially with the loneliness and isolation. It's lovely to be able to welcome them back and create a safe place for them to enjoy and to be themselves.' Since re-opening, the Kingfisher Club has been sharing the space with the Jubilee Centre's drop-in restaurant, to the satisfaction of regular attendees, Maureen and Geoff, who both live alone and missed being able to socialise. 'The isolation during lockdown was very hard to cope with and I missed seeing my family terribly.' Says Maureen. 'I really missed coming to the restaurant every day,' agrees Geoff. HILS team members regularly called restaurant clients during lockdown to make sure they were okay, but this couldn't replace seeing their friends over a hot lunch. 'I am feeling normal again now', says Maureen. 'But lockdown has left a scar. I'm happy my clubs are opening again, but some never will which is very sad.'



**In the last year, Jill and her colleagues made 796 wellbeing telephone calls to their 32 fun club regulars, and delivered 5 dementia fun club sessions to support 18 clients who were able to attend sessions in person.**



**HILS teams also provided 2,451 pop-in visits to check that people were okay, and installed 152 keysafes. This helped 176 people feel safer at home and feel reassured that emergency services, friends, and family members could reach them if they need help.**

## Hertswise: Albert and Connor's story

Connor began working with the Hertswise community dementia support team in February 2020, just before face-to-face group sessions moved to Zoom. 'For the first few months everything was digital, it was quite hard to adjust when we began to go out into the community again', remembers Connor. 'I was also telephoning clients each week to make sure they were okay.' Albert and his daughter Sandra, who cares for him, were just two of the people that Connor and his colleagues supported. 'Hertswise was brilliant during the pandemic, from the telephone calls to the activity packs,' says Sandra. 'Connor managed to secure Dad a tablet from Age UK, this meant he could join the Zoom groups.' Now that the groups are meeting in person again, Albert feels confident enough to attend because he knows Connor is there to help. 'Connor makes sure Albert is comfortable at the group and contacts me to let me know how he is doing at the sessions. Thank you for all the hard work!'



**Hertswise has supported 3,362 people like Albert and Sandra by providing 6,169 interventions, including group meetings, home visits, and one-to-one support sessions.**



## Advocacy: Mr Brent's story

Mr. Brent was moved to a care home in Hertfordshire from his house in London in 2018 when he became the victim of financial abuse. Despite being 94 years old and only partially sighted, Mr. Brent was determined to go back to living independently in his home town. With the help of our Community Advocate, Elizabeth, the local Adult Care Services agreed to arrange supported living facilities to enable him to return home and live more independently. They also put in place extra support so that Mr Brent could take more control of his finances. In August 2020 Mr Brent was finally able to return to London and be near his family. 'It's a great feeling to know that you can help someone to achieve what's important to them', says Elizabeth. 'Everyone deserves the right to choose where and how they live. If people need extra support to get to where they want to be safely, it's a privilege to support them and a joy when they reach their goal.'



**Our team has helped 54 people like Mr Brent, providing 1,447 interventions to help them make good choices about their health and care.**





# Support Services

While our frontline team members focused on delivering much needed food and wellbeing support to older and vulnerable people in the community, colleagues working behind the scenes in Communications, Finance, Human Resources, IT, Facilities, and Equipment teams went above and beyond to keep the wheels rolling and team members safe.

## Keeping everyone informed

The initial months of the pandemic were characterised by uncertainty and escalating government restrictions on social interactions and working practices. It became vitally important to define clear communication channels to keep our team members, clients, and partners informed. In March, HILS set up a centralised Coronavirus Helpdesk to respond to internal and external queries. The Helpdesk was staffed by members of the Business Development and Improvement Team, the Communications and Marketing Team, and Human Resources. At the peak of the crisis, the Helpdesk could receive up to 30 calls in one day and was manned from 8am-6pm, seven days a week. In addition to calls, the Helpdesk responded to emails sent to a dedicated COVID-19 account, and called hundreds of clients to verify their meal delivery arrangements were appropriate and safe for them.

The Communications and Marketing Team also began exploring new media to help get important messages out to staff quickly and effectively. In addition to producing a weekly bulletin with the latest government guidelines and procedures, the team began using WhatsApp and text messaging to make sure everyone was kept up-to-date. In addition, they sent out, produced three hours worth of videos, including training for using PPE, hand hygiene, and delivering meals safely, which have been viewed 3,433 times. In addition, they sent out nearly 8,000 letters to clients to make sure they were kept informed about changes to their services. We also used our website and social media to communicate important wellbeing and safety messages accessed by 106,293 people via our website and 185,612 views on Twitter. Since launching in May 2020, our 'At Home with HILS' section on our website has been accessed by around 80 new visitors every month.

## Keeping people safe

The biggest change brought about by the pandemic was adapting our working practices to ensure team members and clients remained safe. At the beginning, sourcing PPE and adequate food supplies was a significant challenge - it was all-hands-on-deck to ensure we had enough essential grocery items for our emergency food packs. Our Support Services teams and volunteers sourced 72,000 face masks, 5,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, and 6,000 disposable aprons. Volunteers packed these into hygienic pouches which were distributed across all HILS sites, and to our partner service in London. Office spaces were also adapted to reduce occupancy, and work stations set up two metres apart, or with perspex screens. In January, HILS staff were able to access COVID vaccines. The Helpdesk called every team member to ensure that they had the information needed to receive both vaccinations. To date, 87% of staff have had at least one vaccine. The Finance and Human Resources teams also supported 44 staff who were furloughed and processed over 3,000 invoices.

**HILS' Coronavirus Helpdesk has received over 600 calls since March 2020**

**Our Communications and Marketing team have sent out 15,183 text messages and 5,670 bulletins**

**We distributed 72,000 face masks and 5,000 bottles of hand sanitizer to staff**

**87% of HILS team members have had at least one vaccine**

## Changing the way we work

In addition to PPE, our Facilities and IT teams worked hard to make sure that staff were able to work from home wherever possible. This meant purchasing new equipment such as desks and laptops, and setting up new software such as Zoom to help staff work remotely. By negotiating terms with software providers, our teams were also able to save HILS £3,444 over the last year.

Between August and October, frontline teams also collaborated with HILS' Business Development and Improvement Team to adapt service provision so that suspended services could be brought back online. This included fundraising a total of £127,474 in COVID-19 relief grants to support service re-design and to enable us to respond to new needs among our clients. A major component of this re-design was setting up virtual pathways and support to get clients online. Working with a developer, the team were able to adjust our existing databases in line with these changes to our services. In addition to 170 developer-hours, HILS also purchased 81 digital devices which are still being used across the county to support people who cannot, or are reluctant to, receive support in person.

While these innovations were precipitated by COVID-19, many have turned out to be extremely positive for both staff and clients. We intend to continue learning from and developing them to improve our flexible working practices and service offer. HILS was honoured to receive a Hertfordshire Care Provider's Association 2020 Care Award for Outstanding Care and Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic in recognition of these achievements and our consistent service provision.

## Keeping up morale

The last year has been uniquely challenging for clients and team members, many of whom have been isolated and unable to see friends and family for a long time. To support our clients, our Communications and Marketing Team produced a series of wellbeing activity packs designed to help clients keep busy and to support their wellbeing. These included resources on nutrition, physical activity, puzzle books, and mental wellbeing packs with playing cards, colouring books, and sensory gifts for people with sight and hearing impairment. For Christmas, HILS worked with a variety of local groups to provide over 2,000 special gift bags and an extra 3,730 Christmas treats for clients and carers.

To support our colleagues, the Communications and Human Resources teams worked together to produce two staff support packs with information about mental health services, financial support, and other useful resources for people juggling caring and childcare responsibilities. These were distributed alongside copies of the Happy Newspaper, which only shares positive news stories. HILS is also grateful to Wilko who donated over 800 Easter eggs for our staff, and to Burton's Biscuits Company who provided endless supplies of treats to help keep everyone going.

**£127,474 raised to help re-design our services and improve our support offer during COVID**



**HILS sent out 540 support packs and 300 copies of The Happy Newspaper to staff to help keep their spirits up**



# Thanking our partners

HILS is indebted to our fantastic partners who helped us to support 16,452 people in need. Without you, we could not have achieved this incredible result.



We are extremely fortunate in Hertfordshire to receive the incredible support of the County Council. While many counties have cut funding for meals on wheels, Hertfordshire County Council recognises the value of community-based service provision and has been a phenomenal ally to its older and vulnerable residents.

We would like to thank Adult Care Service's Community Wellbeing Team for their role in Operation Sustain and support to expand our emergency food pack operation to people who were shielding. HILS has also benefitted from the expertise and advice of Public Health Hertfordshire, who helped us to keep our staff and clients safe whilst continuing to deliver vital services.



In late 2019, HILS was chosen by Burton's Biscuit Company as their charity of the year. Since then, they have been tireless in their support - providing us with biscuits to distribute to clients and team members

to help them feel cared for, and even raiding their office supplies to give us toilet rolls for our emergency grocery packs. We are delighted that they have decided to continue working with us in 2021, for what will hopefully be a less turbulent year!



One of the positive outcomes of the pandemic has been developing new partnerships. When we were struggling to source supplies for our emergency grocery bags, Wilko and Tesco both responded by providing us with much needed food and sanitary products. We would like to give special thanks to Wilko for donating hundreds of Easter eggs to our staff.



Volunteers from Burton's Biscuit Company at our 2020 Valentine's Day celebration at the Jubilee Centre

At the outbreak of the pandemic, Social Business Trust set up a Rainbow alliance of corporate volunteers to provide rapid support to social enterprises in their portfolio. This quick response was invaluable in enabling HILS to access much-needed PPE when there was a national shortage. We would particularly like to thank the Permira Foundation for their unwavering support and financial contributions.



We work with a variety of partners from across education, health, care, and voluntary, community, and social enterprise sectors. We would like to thank: Small Acts of Kindness, St Albans Older People's Trust, Home Instead, and St Albans City & District Council for their contributions to the Christmas and wellbeing packs that brought our clients so much joy; Age UK Hertfordshire, Sport England, Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust; and our colleagues in the Malnutrition Awareness and Prevention Network, Sustain, Meals on Wheels Alliance, and many more who have helped us to continue providing excellent care and support.







**Hertfordshire Independent Living Service is a charitable social enterprise delivering meals on wheels and other independence-promoting services to support older and vulnerable people to stay happy, healthy, and independent in their homes.**

## **Call to action**

Over the past year, the provision of community activities such as lunch clubs, social, and leisure groups has declined as a result of the pandemic. This means that many older and vulnerable people who relied on these opportunities to socialise and develop support networks are at greater risk of isolation and loneliness than ever before.

HILS is reaching out to groups to offer our support through the provision of hot food, access to our community and wellbeing services, and community centres.

**If you think that you, or your organisation, could work with HILS to help provide new community opportunities and lunch clubs for older and vulnerable people, email us at: [info@hertsindependentliving.org](mailto:info@hertsindependentliving.org)**

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**[www.hertsindependentliving.org](http://www.hertsindependentliving.org)**