

Cancer Smart Project

Final Evaluation Report

Key findings from an independent evaluation
2025

Executive Summary





The Cancer Smart Project

Cancer Smart was developed and delivered by Social Enterprise Kent (SEK) between September 2024 and September 2025, commissioned by the Kent and Medway Cancer Alliance. The project aimed to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of the most common cancers and increase uptake of cancer screening programmes – particularly across communities experiencing health inequalities in Kent.

The programme took information and support into trusted community spaces, working through established relationships and engaging people who were less likely to access traditional NHS pathways.

Cancer Smart delivered 109 community engagement events, reaching 3,018 people. Events included ‘pop-up’ stalls and in-depth ‘information sessions’ delivered in a range of settings. The events were often aimed at specific ‘target groups’ who experience health inequalities – including coastal communities, minoritised ethnic groups, LGBTQI+ people, manual and construction workers, and young people (including young care leavers). Alongside this, 57 ‘Cancer Smart Champions’ were trained to share knowledge within their own communities, and a suite of films and digital learning resources were created to extend the project’s reach and impact beyond the commissioned year-long timeframe.

The evaluation

SEK commissioned an independent evaluation to understand Cancer Smart’s impact, process learning and generate recommendations for future delivery. The evaluation took a theory-based approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to assess outcomes against the project’s theory of change.

Qualitative data was collected through participant observation at four Cancer Smart events, interviews with stakeholders, partners and Champions and a workshop with the SEK delivery team. This data was analysed alongside 188 survey responses, collected by the SEK team from event participants and Champions. The evaluation also drew on analysis undertaken by the Cancer Alliance, which provides early evidence that the programme has already contributed to improvements in screening engagement across target postcode areas. This is a significant finding given the programme’s short timeframe.

Key findings

Impact:

- Cancer Smart met and, in many cases, exceeded its project’s KPIs, demonstrating the value of trusted, community-based prevention approaches.

- **Awareness and knowledge:** Survey data showed significant increases in participants’ awareness of cancer symptoms and screening options, with 98% overall reporting increased awareness of at least one cancer type.
- **Behavioural change:** Participants reported greater confidence in checking symptoms, talking about cancer and encouraging others to get screened. They also reported greater likelihood to take part in screening programmes going forward. These impacts aligned with the NHS ambition to normalise early help-seeking and reduce barriers created by fear, stigma or cultural taboos. These ‘ripple effects’ amplified the programme’s impact beyond those directly engaged, which was a helpful mechanism in addressing inequalities at community level.
- **Community reach:** The programme successfully engaged groups often underrepresented in screening uptake, building trust through existing community networks and leaders.
- **System-level impact:** Early analysis by the Cancer Alliance indicated that Cancer Smart activity contributed to increased local screening rates – providing evidence of a short-term shift in hard clinical outcomes resulting from the community-led approach. This aligned to NHS England’s Neighbourhood

Health Model priorities, which emphasised proactive, localised approaches to early identification and closing gaps in uptake.

Learning:

Cancer Smart was most effective where SEK worked through trusted community partners and used existing community assets, along with high-quality, human conversations led by trusted facilitators. The ability of the SEK team to ‘meet people where they are’ – through accessible language, empathy, cultural sensitivity and physically ‘going to’ communities – proved essential in opening up conversations and promoting learning about cancer. In this way, the project bridged a gap, by taking ‘formal’ information (so accurate, high-quality, up-to-date materials) into ‘informal’ community settings. Working through community partners and networks amplified reach and credibility, while the Cancer Smart Champions model created ripple effects across communities to sustain outcomes in the longer term.

Challenges included managing demand beyond the project’s remit, the short-term nature of the funding cycle, clarity of and opportunity to broaden the scope of the Champions model and the limitations and challenges of collecting demographic data at informal events.

Conclusions

Cancer Smart has delivered meaningful impact within a short delivery window, and has demonstrated the power of community-led approaches to public health. The programme’s approach aligned with national Neighbourhood Health Model priorities by strengthening community assets, addressing barriers faced by underserved groups and supporting proactive outreach and early identification.

Cancer Smart achieved and surpassed a number of its KPIs, generated excellent feedback from participants, and contributed to measurable improvements in cancer awareness and intention to take part in screening programmes.

The project’s success lay in SEK’s trusted presence, local partnerships and high-quality and accessible delivery of information, which together created conditions for meaningful dialogue about cancer. The evidence from this evaluation reinforces Cancer Smart’s theory of change – that community-led, relational approaches can make a tangible difference in early cancer diagnosis and prevention.

With early indications that Cancer Smart has contributed to improved screening rates across Kent and Medway, there is a strong case for continued and targeted investment in future phases of the work.

Recommendations

The evaluation identified opportunities to build on the project’s success by:

- Sustaining and targeting the Cancer Smart model in specific primary care networks (PCNs) and geographical areas to deepen understanding of impact.
- Strengthening the Cancer Smart Champion network, working more strategically with those keen to co-design and deliver future activities.
- Enhancing data collection by capturing participant demographics and outcomes more systematically, and considering an economic evaluation to quantify the cost savings associated with earlier cancer diagnosis.
- Deepening and broadening partnerships between community organisations and statutory organisations to further this community-led approach to increasing awareness about cancer and screening programmes.
- Continue to prioritise accessibility, inclusion and quality of engagement to facilitate impactful conversations about cancer.
- Using evaluation findings to raise awareness of the value of community-led approaches in tackling health inequalities.
- Exploring digital and media opportunities to expand reach and accessibility of Cancer Smart resources.

- Strengthening strategic alignment to secure long-term sustainability.
- Applying community insights to improve NHS screening programmes – ensuring they are accessible, culturally sensitive and responsive to diverse needs.

Together, these steps will help build on the programme’s achievements and support sustained, community-led approaches to tackling inequalities in cancer outcomes.

A Cancer Smart pop-up stall (left) and information session (right)



Quotes illustrating the impact of Cancer Smart

“I have the test at home (bowel screening) but haven't sent it away yet - but I will after the information provided. The team was very supportive with information on bowel cancer and the test and I'll do my test after talking to them.”

Pop-up event participant

“The Cancer Smart events have massive impacts – and we are seeing the results through increased screening rates and people attending GPs with early signs and symptoms.”

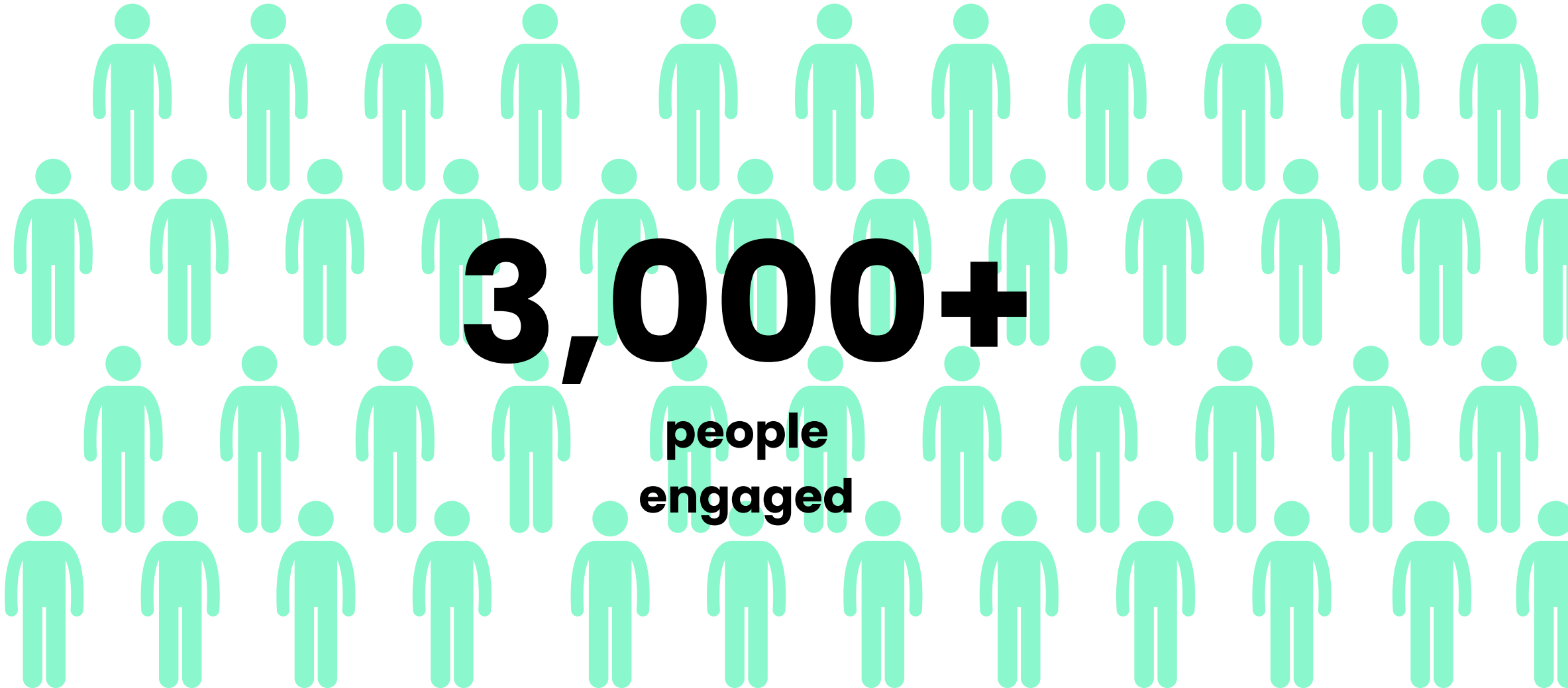
Strategic stakeholder interviewee

A screenshot of one of the Cancer Smart films



All films will be available to view on the [Social Enterprise Kent YouTube channel](#).

Diagram: Cancer Smart project activities and reach – key headlines



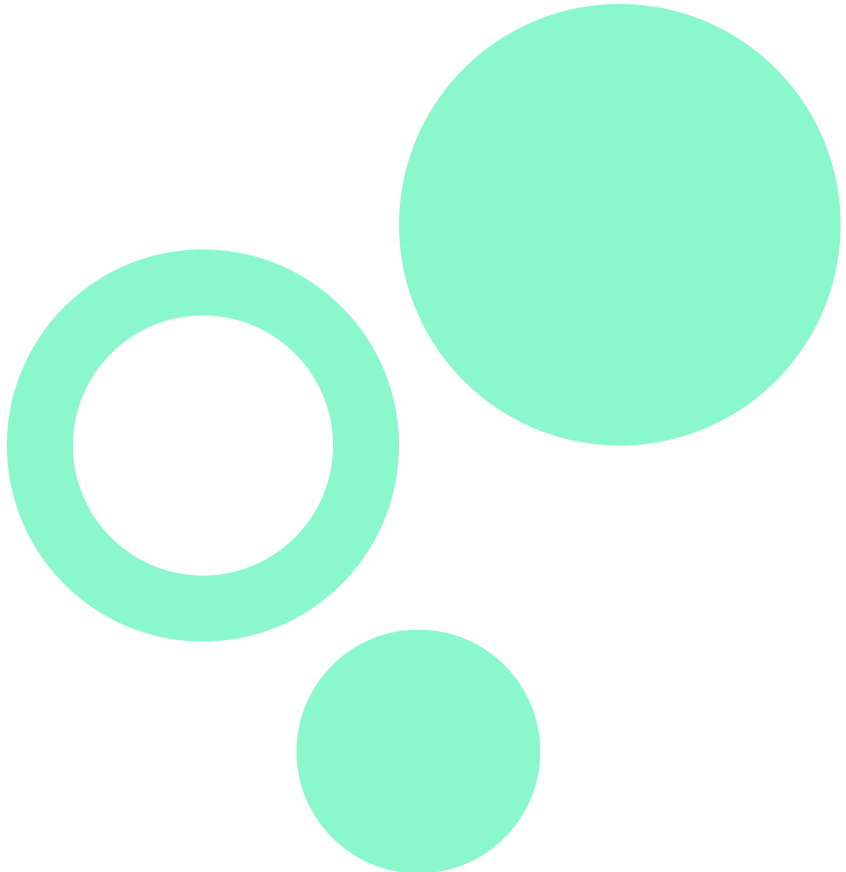
57 Cancer Smart
Champions trained



**Films & digital
learning resources**

Diagram: Cancer Smart project performance against KPIs

Metric	Total target	Actual	% achieved
KPI 1: 3,000 people engaged	3,000	3,018	101%
KPI 2: 75 community events delivered	75	69	92%
KPI 3: 75 youth events delivered	75	27*	36%
KPI 4: 5 workplace events delivered	5	6	120%
KPI 5: 4 Be Skin Smart events delivered	4	7	175%
KPI 6: 20 Community Champions trained	20	57	285%
KPI 7: 90% of these people will report increased awareness of signs and symptoms	90%	98%	



*SEK were able to secure several large youth events with high footfall, in place of some classroom based sessions, and so reached 1,145 young people (the equivalent of approximately 40 typical-sized class groups).

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