

Company Values.....	2
Planning & Delivery.....	2
Strategic Development.....	3
Projects Overview.....	3
Access Bike.....	4
Project Summary.....	4
What's next for Access Bike.....	5
Bike Drop.....	5
Project Summary.....	5
What's next for the Bike Drop.....	6
Community Hubs Development Project.....	6
Project Summary.....	6
What's next for the Community Hubs Development Project.....	8
Community Rail Partnership.....	8
Project Summary.....	8
What's next for our community rail involvement.....	9
Cotswold Canal Connected.....	9
Project Summary.....	9
What's next for Cotswold Canals Connected.....	9
Creative Camping.....	10
Project summary.....	10
What's next for Creative Camping.....	11
Critical Friends.....	11
Project Summary.....	11
What's next for Critical Friends.....	12
Digital Inclusion.....	12
Project Summary:.....	12
What's Next for Digital Inclusion.....	12
GEM (Going the Extra Mile).....	13
Project Summary.....	13
What's next for GEM.....	13
Reconnect.....	14
Project Summary.....	14
What's next for RE-Connect.....	15
3rd Space.....	15
Project Summary.....	15
What's next for 3 rd Space.....	17

Company Values

Creative Sustainability is a values-led organisation, with Empowerment, Inclusion, Sustainability and Wellbeing at the heart of everything we do:

- **INCLUSION:** ensuring inclusion of people with disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those excluded from school and cared for young people.
- **SUSTAINABILITY:** encouraging personal responsibility for the natural environment, living and working more sustainably, developing knowledge and understanding of the issues.
- **YOUTH EMPOWERMENT:** speaking up for young people, facilitating them to become more enabled, empowered and have a confident voice in their local and global community.
- **WELLBEING:** inclusive and community-based activities to prevent feelings of loneliness and promote good mental and physical health.

We provide residential, activities, workshops, volunteering and work opportunities for marginalised people and communities across Gloucestershire, facilitating safe, supportive environments in which people develop confidence and independence, raise self-esteem and expectations, access peer to peer support, volunteering, and paid work opportunities, develop and maintain friendships and become active citizens. For many these are first steps towards improving mental and physical health and living happy and fulfilled lives.

Planning & Delivery

Our team embraces creative approaches, seeing opportunities for innovation rather than problems. We are willing to take risks to create change and are comfortable with doing things differently. Our planning, delivery and evaluation is informed by several principles or premises, including

- Co-production with people and communities for whom the work is focused on
- Asset-based and community-led community development – those who need it inform it and can access it
- Participants are equal stakeholders along with us and the funder, and have an equal say in what happens
- Place-based facilitation, not service provision
- Partnership working to achieve sustainability and sharing of best practice models
- Creative approaches, seeing opportunities for innovation rather than problems.
- Take risks to create change, being comfortable with doing things differently.

Creative Sustainability has a significant county-wide reputation for inclusive and creative approaches to engaging private, public and social sector groups with robust policies, procedures and expertise in place. Contracts with Local Authority, NHS clinical commissioning group and regional Social Investment networks, demonstrate the value and the trust invested in CS (Creative Sustainability) across a wide reach.

Our premises at Fromehall Mill, Cainscross, enjoy a canal and river-based location within easy walking distance from Stroud Town and easy cycling distance from Stonehouse and Ebley along the canal. We have meeting rooms, IT suite, community kitchen, garden, bike workshop and activities space, and good parking.

Creative Sustainability CIC is registered with the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (GSCB) and is a Gloucestershire County Council Accredited Provider of Children's Services. We comply with current national

legislation governing the provision of childcare services (including the Children Act of 1989, the Police Act of 1997 and the Protection of Children Act of 1999) and Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures.

Strategic Development

We are a thinking organisation, working with partners to review traditional models of planning, delivery and evaluation. Key research and development since 2020 –

- Co-produced, Inclusive Evaluation Methodology with the Countryside Community Research Institute.
- Peer-to-Peer user-led Mentor Support Training programme with young actionists and participants
- Community-led place-based application, the first of its kind for the National Heritage Lottery, successfully implemented for the Cotswold Canals Connect project's first full year.
- Area Hubs strategic development with Stroud District Council to support local volunteer action and make our communities more resilient, safe, and inclusive in the face of any emergency.

In the last three years of rapid growth our funding model moved away from majority short term grants to larger and long-term grants, Local Authority and health service with more secure funding stream for all current work. We have built reserves from consultancy work, with a policy to keep them to a minimum to cover core operational costs for just three months, because we only operate solvent projects, each with a discrete budget. This means we maximise outcomes for communities and can adapt to any situation arising.

In 2022 we will be building a business plan with support from The Cranfield Trust, to ensure timely planning an implementation of work for sustainability of projects and organisation, currently showing turnover of 500K+ for 2022.

We actively choose to work in direct partnership with local people and organisations, maximising potential by sharing resources, networks, skills, and ideas and collaborating on shared challenges. We love to share what we know, our resources and discoveries with other organisations and make that part of our planning process. In 2019 we became a partner in the Cotswold Canals Connected project, and in 2020 we set up a new Community Interest Company in partnership with the Grace Network, the Bike Drop. In 2021 we have built a wide public and community sector collaboration to deliver our Area Hubs Strategy, a transformative project and model for community partnership working, particularly to support community resilience to sudden and complex shock.

In 2022 we will be growing our youth projects, having recruited a youth projects manager to support development of the Gloucestershire Youth Climate Action Group and the 3rd Space community hub, and to get Access Bike back to the glory days before covid.

Projects Overview

- ACCESS BIKE -an open door, youth led bike workshop for young people, reconditioning bikes and providing targeted personal development courses for disadvantaged people referred by local agencies.
- AREA HUBS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT – cross-sector development for the Stroud District, grass roots and organisational capacity building for emergency response and day to day resilience.
- BIKE DROP – youth-led enterprise supporting zero carbon delivery, skills development and fair wage jobs for young people, supporting local businesses to enhance and increase their offer for local people.

- YOUTH CLIMATE ACTION GROUP – taking action to make a positive impact for a low carbon and resilient Gloucestershire that reduces inequities and centers the needs of people and the environment.
- COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP - facilitates improved connectivity, empowerment and economic opportunity for local people through sustainable transport, destination marketing and station activities.
- COTSWOLD CANALS CONNECTED - a major regional multi-partnership and development project for which we will manage delivery of the Activity Plan to ensure maximum benefit for people and communities.
- CREATIVE CAMPING - supports disabled and non-disabled teenagers to spend the weekend together at wilderness camps encouraging self-agency, positive risk taking, cooperation, friendship, inclusion.
- CRITICAL FRIENDS - Not for Profit Management Consultancy to extend, enhance and all projects with learning, funding and networking opportunities.
- DIGITAL Inclusion – empowering people with barriers to digital connectivity, to become more connected and less isolated, through Digital Champions peer support in their own homes.
- GOING THE EXTRA MILE (GEM) - supports individuals who have barriers to work or education and moves these people closer towards education, training, volunteering or work, including self-employment
- RECONNECT - brings people living with stroke, dementia, aphasia and other long-term health conditions together, through peer befriending, regular group sessions and activities in nature.
- 3rd SPACE – a vibrant, inclusive, safe, supported space for young people to explore their potential, volunteering and earning a living, develop and maintain friendships and become active citizens.

Access Bike

Project Summary

Access Bike Project is an open-door, youth-led workshop, where young people come together to build, repair and up-cycle old bikes. We aim to

- Provide a safe, supportive, and healthy environment for young and disadvantaged people
- Help the environment by encouraging recycling, re-using, and bike-riding as green transport
- Enable young and vulnerable people to develop new skills, perspectives, opportunities, friendships, and a sense of purpose within a community
- Break down barriers to cycling and campaign for better cycle infrastructure

On a busy day Access Bike will host 25+ participants, all sharing skills and creating something new out of recycled materials, selling affordable bikes to the wider community, improving the space itself, playing games, building or fixing their own bike, or helping to recondition or repurpose some of the 260+ bikes that are donated each year. Young people can join the earn-a-bike scheme and build a bike to keep, and giving their time to help in return, giving back to the community, making friends, and having fun in the process. Access Bike is a place where young people receive a lot of respect and trust from their peers, older participants, and workshop leaders, getting a sense of belonging and ownership. Participants appreciate the opportunity to pursue a healthy and social activity over more negative alternatives, which can often include spending too much time indoors, on mobile phones, anti-social behaviour, or drug and alcohol abuse.

In 2020 and 2021 Access Bike re-focused on peer-mentoring for vulnerable young adults. 1:1 support focused on the mentees' personal development, their specific needs and aims, both in the workshop and out on bikes

rides. Many mentees' independence, attitudes and confidence have improved drastically since participating in mentoring, inside and out of the workshop. Two previous mentees have returned as regular volunteers, and the newly developed training programme for new mentors has provided paid positions for 6 excellent mentors, enabling Access Bike to provide dedicated peer-support for up to 14 mentees per week. One older volunteer led weekly bike maintenance training sessions for marginalised adults through the GEM project, giving them more confidence and self-esteem towards overcoming multiple and complex barriers to work.

Our work with GARAS (Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) and an inspiring group of young people, continued to be wonderful. Our sessions have provided a safe place for them to come together, to form close friendships and mutual support, to get out of the city and enjoy green spaces on foot and cycling.

Access Bike is so embedded in the community, with innovative ideas and perspectives from all its contributors, while its key aims, and values remain as strong as ever. However, with funding difficult in the wake of covid and we had to limit the opening days to one or two a week in 2021. Access Bike is a priority project for 2022 with depression and loneliness a growing challenge for young people, and youth crime and county lines drug cartels in the area on the increase.

What young people say:

- 'This has really improved my confidence, it's the happiest I've felt in ages!'
- 'I've made loads of friends here'
- 'The atmosphere is great here, it's always such a laugh. Nice people, good tunes, great bikes, what's not to love!?'
- 'It's a lot more chilled and open than school and other places, that's really helped me feel comfortable and make new mates'
- 'It's great to be out with others, rather than at home on my computer or phone'
- 'Climate change is such a massive issue but it's really easy to feel disengaged from it at a local level, but Access Bike kind of brings it into reality, I'm here with the community, we're fixing bikes, it's just a really good thing to do.'
- 'I think every town should have a project like this!'

What's next for Access Bike

We are recruiting in the new year and along with another training programme planned for young peer mentors, the project will soon get back to crazy busy days of 2019, supporting disabled young people, young people excluded from education, those at risk of offending and young refugees. We continue to work with our partners Grace Network on developing the Bike Drop as a potential work stream for Access Bikers and exploring the opportunities for a pop-up bike repair service at the train station.

Bike Drop

Project Summary

This local bike delivery service started out with a team of dedicated young people who wanted to get active and be part of the solution supporting local businesses and their community, helping vulnerable and shielding people to get supplies during lockdown. The benefits of a reliable, eco delivery service were immediately clear

to local businesses and the project evolved into a business. We set the CIC up in partnership with The Grace Network, with a 50/50 share to support and up-skill a dynamic young team and the local community through a sustainable transport and delivery service:

- employment and training opportunities for young people in a positive, healthy working environment
- reduce carbon emission within the Stroud District and promote cycling as a mode of transport
- support local businesses and contribute to the development of a more resilient local economy.

What's next for the Bike Drop

The Access Bike project will continue to be represented on the board of directors with our new youth projects manager and Access Bike project lead taking over the roles from our senior managers in 2022. We will continue to involve more young people through developing the Access Bike Graduate Scheme. With our partners we are building a new network of bike servicing spaces to ensure everyone can have a working bike at a fair price, with a five-year dream to remove vans off our local roads and replace them with a new bike network. The project is 12 months into a 5-year mission to change our economy and travel network.

Community Hubs Development Project

Project Summary

This strategy was developed in response to the challenges faced by the Voluntary Community Social Enterprise sector (VCSE) to meet their existing and emergent responsibilities and duty of care for people and communities, due to the sudden impacts of Covid-19 in March 2020. Meeting the different new and increased needs of many vulnerable people all at once was an overwhelming task and, whilst the instant response of hyper-local community groups was impressive, local government was well behind the curve.

By mid-April 2020 it was abundantly clear that there was a need to share capacity and resources across the hyper-local community groups, VCSE sector and district council. Whilst this took place to a degree there was and still is no system to maintain the links and improvements made on the fly. The principles and desired outcomes for a practical plan for resilience in the face of emergency and sudden shock to communities was explored with stakeholders and Creative Sustainability led on developing a strategy.

Consultations with our local VCSE group took place through June 2020 with people working for or associated with Pagan Hill Community Centre, Stroud Town Council, Stonehouse Town Council, GL11, Grace Network, Creative Sustainability, Climate Action Network, Stroud Coronavirus Community Response and Rodborough Community Mutual Aid Network. This research also drew on additional sources including We Were Built for This, Locality; "Outbreak management plan for Gloucestershire," Gloucestershire County Council; Mapping the impact of Covid-19 in Gloucestershire, Barnwood Trust, and New Local Government Network.

Project implementation

Through 2020 and in to 2021 we worked with:

- Stroud District Council to establish a collaborative approach that would enable and consolidate emergency response work between local public and VCS sector groups, and

- Gloucestershire County Council to understand a wider application of the strategy and to explore how the model might fit different districts considering hugely different geographical and social contexts.

We established the need for a community embedded role that would work across sectors and model exemplar cross-sector working to:

- develop a practical workplan with milestones, aims and objectives, work in close collaboration with all stakeholders to evaluate, test, and review the feasibility of aims and objectives,
- support stakeholders to evaluate current, desired, and future role in the network and capacity development targets,
- develop budgets for the strategic development of groups and orgs accordingly.

In May 2021, with support from Stroud District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, and several community and voluntary sector organisations, Creative Sustainability recruited a Project Lead to develop the strategy further and test its feasibility for rolling out across Gloucestershire.

Project outcome ambitions

- Reduce inequality of provisioning, to share and distribute resources such as food, medical supplies
- Develop a plan to ensure the needs of vulnerable people, including disabled people and people with mental health challenges are prioritized in emergency planning and response.
- Ensure best practice safeguarding for everyone, particularly for the most vulnerable in our communities
- Reduce responsibility for volunteers in supporting the most vulnerable people in their local area
- Support the triage and referral processes for and by the NHS, Local Authority, and professional services and ensure complex situations are transferred to professional help promptly
- Support everyone, specifically people who have become vulnerable through isolation, anxiety and economic circumstances and who are currently considered 'unseen'
- Maintain the essential role of community based mutual support networks to ensure ongoing community resilience and cohesion in the event of any emergency
- Ensure that in the medium-term the district is well prepared to ensure that vulnerable people, including disabled people and people with mental health challenges, retain their rights and autonomy
- Build back cohesive communities that work together to find understanding, tolerance and compassion
- Achieve long-term change in how communities, services – including statutory - and individuals interact

Core Premises

- All types of organisations and groups are part of a resilient emergency response and must include hyper local volunteer networks, community groups, VCS and public sector at every level of governance
- A place-based model responds to the specific needs of a community, draws on local knowledge, facilitates and supports hyper localization of mutual support
- Mutual aid groups are essential and succeed if they respond intuitively and independently according to hyper local need and merge the role volunteer and beneficiary

- Small and Un constituted local groups and organisations have an essential local connector role and can succeed if they can focus on resourcing their community and not on having to increase capacity to manage new and high-level responsibilities
- All types of organisations and groups can succeed if key functions are understood and assigned appropriately according to existing capacity, resources and expertise before an emergency arises
- A resilient emergency response depends on connectivity and clear, embedded communication pathways, fair and efficient use of resources, appropriate distribution of responsibilities, cross-sector collaboration, equitable benefit from existing skills, knowledge and confidences, best practice, safeguarding and systematic inclusion

What's next for the Community Hubs Development Project

- June-September 2021: Review of situation and context across Stroud district, one year on from original research
- July 2021: Community Hubs Steering Group created. Members represent three tiers of local government, three community groups, a funding organisation, and the NHS
- August 2021 - June 2022: Develop the Strategic Plan as per:
 - Strategy Document – Creative Sustainability (2020)
 - Theory of Change – Steering Group, Community Hubs (December 2021)
 - Prioritisation exercise - Steering Group (January 2022). The four priorities identified in January 2022 for the next 5 months are:
 1. Map coverage of district
 2. Develop tool to help community groups assess their resource needs and capacity
 3. Produce a costed plan, using case studies from existing hubs
 4. Establish peer network of Community Hubs to share, learn, connect and reflect

Community Rail Partnership

Project Summary

As a key partner in GCRP we have access to opportunities, funding, station infrastructure and GCRP projects that improve connectivity, provide economic opportunity, and empower local people through sustainable transport, destination management and station activities. We are currently supporting local partners with

- Let's Talk Travel – developing skills, careers and employability through community engagement and resource development, supporting accessibility to train and wider sustainable travel, building confidence and supporting vulnerable groups to access life opportunities and work
- Getaway – planning city to countryside trips for black and brown communities living in Gloucester, working with community leaders to promote and support the opportunities for children and young people. Our strong links with community groups makes an impressive range of activities available to the project.
- Station galleries – we have adopted Stroud Station and created platform exhibition space in Stroud, Stonehouse and Gloucester, for truly democratic and accessible access to art. We regularly put on new exhibitions of art and photography, either created through our community projects or with partners.

What's next for our community rail involvement

We are still using our little station room for meetings and a workspace and have been offered a bigger space on platform 2, that will work well as hub for the Bike Drop ambitions for a potential active transport and sustainable tourism project in 2022.

Cotswold Canal Connected

Project Summary

Creative Sustainability has ensured that the values of inclusion, empowerment and sustainability have underpinned the incredible plans for people and communities living and working in the canal corridor, and commitment to realise the ambitions of the Activity Plan we wrote in 2018 – 2020 for the next 3 years. Creative Sustainability is a proud partner in the project and particularly due to the lead role in the bid development and submission, successfully implementing a community-led place-based application, the first of its kind for the National Heritage Lottery and heralded as a new best practice model by them. We have responsibility for coordinating the Activity Plan for Cotswold Canals Connected, with delivery of Community Enterprise Development, Informal and Formal Learning, Pathways to Participation, Interpretation plans held by us under five roles.

In June 20 we took the plans through a robust review to enhance and develop the urgent covid recovery agenda, prioritising the outcomes for health and well-being recovery. Despite hold-ups on recruitment for the 5 roles under our auspice we delivered a massive programme through Spring and Summer with a full report available on our websites.

What's next for Cotswold Canals Connected

Creative Sustainability will recruit all five roles as soon as possible, and continue to lead delivery for people and communities, based on our principles and premises of planning, delivery and evaluation that are held in such high regard by NLHF:

- The investment by NLHF and partners into the canal corridor has a vital, strategic role to play in local recovery, with our established partnership work able to focus on benefits for people being more important than ever and could gain us significant national attention.
- Supporting a creative, thoughtful and community-led response to how the impact of Covid has changed our local place, and the role heritage has to play in recovery for our communities, is fitting with our specific community-led Spirit of Place and an incredibly positive local story to be told.
- Reprioritisation - identifying priority areas of specific need and then dialing up and dialing down specific activities - is an opportunity for this project to have a significant impact on those people and communities who have been most affected by Covid, and be part of the reset for Stroud District - supporting our stretched public and Voluntary Community Social services
- A two-step review – 1. Outcomes 2. Activities - is a realistic, logical and high impact way of doing a review for a complex and large project. We may even model a way forward for other large-scale project leaders that need and desire to turn their project in to a recovery project.
- We will demonstrate our project partnership's commitment to the communities we serve and make a clear statement about the power of nature and heritage to do good.

A copy of the Activity Plan Summary is available on the Cotswold Canals Connected website and a brief description of our partnership role here [Creative Sustainability | Cotswold Canals Connected](#)

Creative Camping

Project summary

All about social inclusion of the most vulnerable young people in our communities - disabled young people and young refugees – through spending time in nature with peers. In Gloucestershire there is no integration for young refugees, and minimal inclusion of disabled young people in mainstream activities - they are among the most marginalised people in our community and least able to access nature to improve mental health and wellbeing, and physical health, and participate in outdoor social activities.

For this reason, we started running wild camping weekends in 2010, known by campers as 'Creative Camping', for disabled and disadvantaged young people. We found that spending two or three days under canvas in a wild place created huge positive changes for individuals in terms of happiness, positive self-regard, feeling part of a community, confidence to make friends, trying new things and growing independence.

Camps include equal numbers of non-disabled/disadvantaged young people as equal participants -not volunteers- and so also impact hugely on the understanding these young people have about their disabled and refugee peers. The issues are better experienced than talked about, shared and witnessed, with efforts and successes becoming the story of healing. Evenings are spent singing in front of a fire, star gazing and performing in the camp cabaret. Camps are run co-operatively, and everyone joins in cooking, collecting firewood, map reading and entertaining each other. The camps are supported by veteran campers but mainly run by a team of young people who have been camping with us for years. The training and confidence building for these young leaders cuts across all our youth projects and we now have an extraordinary competent and confident young team.

Disabled teenagers we work with, their families and support agencies report social exclusion, exclusion from mainstream activities, limited opportunities for self-agency and none for independent participation in interests or purposeful activities. They are more isolated since covid, with limited relationships beyond family or carers. With poor self-esteem the expectations by others and of self are low. Sadly, there is significantly higher risk of long-term depression, suicide and compounding physical health issues than for their non-disabled peers. Young (18+) refugees and asylum seekers we work with, and Gloucestershire Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS) tell us about the complex stressful circumstances and severe trauma these young people have survived, now here with no community or family support. They are isolated from peers including people with shared experience and very rarely access social, cultural or nature-based opportunities. With significantly reduced economic, social and cultural life-chances they are vulnerable to negative relationships around criminal activity, particularly drugs. With higher incidence of abuse against them and sexual predation than their non-refugee peers their physical and mental health and well-being is extremely fragile.

In 2020 and 2021 we converted the weekend experience to 'day camps' for disabled young people, maintaining the same spirits of adventure, but sad to lose the deep stuff that happens over a period of days together - where young people learn about positive risk taking, emerge as leaders, learn to cooperate and find ways to include everyone in a team activity, where expectations of self and for others are radically shifted -

'The day camps were a great substitute for 'proper camping' and a chance to keep the friendships going while normal camps can't take place. For a young man with very few peer friendships this was so important.' (Carer)
'There has been so little going on, we have found it pretty tough. We were so happy to have the Orchard Day camps – I needed some time away from home and it makes him so happy to spend time there.' (Parent)

We did have one three-night camp for young refugees, supported by our county association for refugees and asylum seekers, which was such a powerful experience for all of us after a year of imposed limitations, and reminded us of the importance of our work, and lit a rocket under our drive for societal change for these young people too. They told us -

'This is the first sunset I've seen since coming to England'.

'I found myself daydreaming of home before it became unsafe, for the first time. Normally I have nightmares. It's so peaceful, I slept really well.'; 'I can see home all around (Syria) ... (he pointed around the orchard as he spoke) these fruit trees, crops, homes where my family, friends, aunties lived. the smell of cooking, goats here, chickens over there, camels and cows here'; 'It made me remember to live'.

We stayed connected with all our young disabled and refugee friends with tri-weekly online social sessions from May 2020 to September 2021, face to face activities in nature and our workshop spaces. Since September are running online zoom sessions once a week from 3rd Space, and with a limited number of socially- distanced day camps and trips. This has been a vital source of social interaction for our young people whose hours at college and other activities were massively reduced. We wanted to keep our creative camping aims (to develop and strengthen links and friendships between disabled and non-disabled young people; raise expectations of self and others; raise self-esteem and confidence) and so developed a diverse programme of activities to reflect what we do on the camps - drama, art, karaoke, cooking, yoga, cabaret, storytelling, tai chi and dance, with time to catch-up, share news and hang out.

What's next for Creative Camping

In 2022 we will bring the camps back to life, with mental health issues for these groups at an all-time low, and inter-youth violence on the rise.

This will also be an opportunity for us to develop our existing team of young peer mentors - the camps are brilliant for developing leadership confidence and skills in a young team, that will benefit all our youth projects going forward. Youth mentors support individuals 1:1 to have a safe, supported and meaningful experience in our Access Bike project and 3rd Space where youth community comes together all year round.

Critical Friends

Project Summary

In late 2019-20 we launched our not-for-profit management consultancy Critical Friends. The business model offers Creative Sustainability the benefits of our directors' decades of multi-sector experience, through providing professional service targeted at the third, educational and public sectors and investing any surplus (typically 10-15% of the fee) back into our social and environmental projects and further developing our competences and capabilities in the process.

Our first project in 2020/21 was with University of Exeter on their Environment and Climate Emergency carbon management plan, in association with Bureau Veritas Sustainability Services. Funds raised have supported development of the youth climate panel group in 2021.

Critical Friends explicitly adopts the UN Sustainable Development Goals as the ethical basis of the work, and these will be adopted in the planning and evaluation framework for all Creative Sustainability work in 2021.

What's next for Critical Friends

We are developing our teaching and learning materials to share our expertise and best practice models in several areas including in Community Consultation work, working with GCRP, and Co-produced Inclusive Evaluation Methodology, working with GEM and a new developing partnership for Welcome Circles.

Digital Inclusion

Project Summary:

We work with people in their own homes to connect with the outside world using IT equipment and communication devices which helps grow their independence and confidence and make more connections with the outside world. We train Digital Champions using the Digital Unite learning platform. They can then teach people who need support to gain skills and knowledge to access services they need from their homes.

The people we work with are often housebound and for some this is due to communication disability and the feeling of being at risk without speech – what they miss most is the ability to communicate with friends and family, and we can work with them in ways that overcome speech barriers. In addition, the vulnerability of those who are housebound without internet access or digital skills has been thrown into stark relief by the pandemic.

Citizens Online says that 59% of people aged 75+ with a long-term health condition or disability, are not internet users, and are precisely those who would benefit most from access to services such as online prescription, doctor appointments or food shopping services. The internet also provides much needed social communication for those with mobility barriers. We support people to have more confidence to use communication apps, social media sites and get better connected with friends, family and community. Starting with the reason to overcome the barriers is highly motivating and often sparks wider interests.

Our Toolkit of paper-based Digital Inclusion Workbooks, Glossary and Assessment booklets give our participants a physical product to be able to hold and read, reflect on, and check back with, when learning. We also created a simple evaluation tool to be able to report on how well we are succeeding with our project aims and goals.

What's Next for Digital Inclusion

We will be working on a trial with the NHS CCG (Clinical Commission Group) to provide technology training support to enable Cardiac patients to access online Occupational Health and exercise sessions. We are also planning to provide Digital Inclusion support to Community Hubs across Stroud District, to support recruitment and training of Digital Champions in every community.

We are planning our Creative Caring project, for those who are in a caring role for a loved one, to be run in the same spirit as Creative Camping @home. Sessions will bring people together online for creative wellbeing – a

safe, supportive peer group, connecting carers with each other to share experiences and information, whilst enjoying mindful creative activities, including art, yoga and journaling.

GEM (Going the Extra Mile)

Project Summary

Creative Sustainability continues to host a Navigator Developer for the Gloucestershire County Council led GEM project. This project supports individuals who have barriers to work or education and moves these people closer towards education, training, volunteering or work, including self-employment. The Navigator Developer works on a one-to-one basis helping people work through a personalised action plan and to move into education, training, volunteering, or work. People are supported to access the help they need to make life more manageable, helping them to overcome low confidence and self-esteem, alcohol and substance abuse, financial issues and mental or physical ill health.

The pattern of work and expectations of outcomes were dramatically affected by the impact of the COVID virus, with a significant reduction in available jobs for those furthest from work. More vulnerable people we work with were nervous about the risks this virus represented to them and all struggled with their mental health, with prolonged periods of isolation and feelings of hopelessness about their future.

With many participants, the focus of our work with them changed, as we worked to ensure that we supported their physical and mental welfare. Regular phone check-ins and additional support was arranged, and participants were supported to focus on new activities including learning new IT skills and becoming confident to use online platforms. GEM provided county-wide on-line health and wellbeing and learning activities and we continued to offer creative art workshops, wellbeing sessions such as yoga and walking, practical sessions (bike workshops and drop-in IT support) and delivery of essential items to people having to shield.

Our Navigator Developer worked with 30+ people with a range of significant barriers to employment including mental health, disability or chronic ill health, homelessness, low qualifications, substance abuse or alcohol abuse, over 50's, criminal records, and women returners. Of this cohort, many have made progress towards the goals they had identified in their action plans with a third returning to employment. Many improved coping mechanisms, learning self-reliance and problem solving.

We have been working with GEM and the Countryside Community Research Institute to roll out our co-produced, inclusive evaluation methodology, running training and development sessions with Navigator Developers from across the county.

What's next for GEM

The rise in unemployment means that the work of the GEM Project continues to be vital as those furthest from the labour market are now finding it even more difficult to secure employment. The GEM Project has funding until Autumn 2022 and is seeking further funding to allow the project to continue. Creative Sustainability will continue to host a Navigator Developer and further develop links across all our projects, supporting people to create their own programme of broad and varied activities both online and face to face.

Reconnect

Project Summary

RC empowers people with long term health conditions (LTCs) and carers across Gloucestershire to live fulfilling and socially connected lives through a peer befriending scheme. Befrienders are trained and supported to share their experiences of living with a long-term condition, to offer support and help build confidence. People living with a long-term condition, such as dementia, aphasia or stroke, support other people with a similar condition. This can be through one-to-one visits at home, care homes, in the community, in a group setting and in the stroke units at Cheltenham Hospital and the Vale Stroke Rehabilitation unit at Vale Community Hospital.

Our Befrienders understand the challenges faced by people living with a long-term condition and can offer support and help to build confidence by sharing their own experiences. Befrienders have also told us they feel they have gained a huge amount from volunteering with us and making a difference to their own and others' lives.

We believe that the best long-term support can be found within communities, and we encourage people to attend our local peer support groups. Our informal groups are a great place to share experiences, offer ideas, support each other, as well as rebuild confidences.

We run and attend training sessions throughout the year. These have included Dementia training delivered to CS team; Befriender training delivered to Volunteer Befrienders; Volunteer training (in partnership with Stroke Association); Stroke Education team at Oxstalls with befriender; Communication and aphasia training; First aid training to staff, volunteers, participants and carers.

As a result of our work on this scheme, communities involved have become more accepting and inclusive places for people with a LTC to live. People with LTCs reporting a positive change in their communities towards more inclusive attitudes. People are becoming more able to self-manage their LC and are therefore more resilient, joining online forums, support groups, becoming a befriender. They report increased confidence to self-initiate and make life choices, more positive feelings about social inclusion, less anxious, depressed and lonely and they are much happier.

During the pandemic of 2020-2022 we radically changed how we support people, reacting swiftly to local need. We suspended our 1-1 and hospital visiting and put our groups on hold- From March 2021 we started some of our groups and by Nov 2021 we had all our groups up and running, with the addition of an Aphasia Choir in Rodborough, Stroud. We resumed visiting patients on the acute stroke unit in Cheltenham Hospital and delivering Stroke Awareness training to clinicians from around the county. Our art group at the stroke rehab unit at the Vale Hospital restarted. This is run in partnership with Mindsong and is for people who find talking

difficult due to their brain injury. During the last year we have had 356 referrals. 152 face to face befriender visits happened and 259 befriending phone calls.

What's next for RE-Connect

Re connect will continue to deliver all its services and will be employing a new Volunteer engagement Officer to recruit new and support current volunteers.

3rd Space

Project Summary

3rd Space is a vibrant, inclusive, safe, supported space for young people to explore their potential in a range of ways, to develop confidence and independence, improve mental health, raise self-esteem and expectations, access peer to peer support, explore volunteering and ways of earning a living, develop and maintain friendships and become active citizens. The project aims to:

- give more young people a chance to participate in activities that promote and develop economic independence and diverse ways of earning a living, leading to better life chances, longer, healthier lives
- support people to rediscover their interests, to explore, and develop new interests alongside peers, leading to greater confidence to try new things, persevere and overcome barriers to participation
- provide positive role models and opportunities that facilitate purposeful, positive experiences that grow skills, model behaviour, and improve self-esteem, leading to better life choices
- harbour a welcoming and inclusive community alongside support and mentoring that sustains participation in social, work and leisure activities towards long term inclusion and participation
- facilitate people to support each other to overcome barriers to recovery, learning and training, and to take steps towards meaningful work and enterprise
- be highly adaptable to meet a range of interests and needs, open to community ideas and decision making, emergent leaders and proactive participation

Our sessions over the last year include:

- Weekly "Art with Angeline" sessions run by a former GEM participant, aimed to empower creativity and ease social anxiety
- A weekly gathering of 'Band,' bringing total beginners and advanced players together to contribute and bring our own sound, choice of songs and adding our own lyrics to song-writing workshops
- Gardening, landscaping and building in our community garden which was identified as a positive and safe way to gather as we emerged out of the second lockdown.
- Whittling, fine-art and glass-painting days held out in the garden with campfires and barbeques
- Baking and cooking sessions in collaboration with KitchenTalk
- Parties, reasons to celebrate, have fun and play games
- Art sessions and games held on Zoom both in person and virtually when Covid restrictions were in place

- Weekly @Home Sessions on Zoom with our Creative Camping cohort. Activities held are for young disabled adults who live remotely and/or not able to travel to 3rd Space. Popular activities include baking, karaoke, drama, storytelling and art.
- Peer-to-peer mentoring in connection with the Access Bike project which includes all 3rd Space activities as well as learning bike skills, going for rides and doing creative upcycling projects

Aside from activities held within 3rd Space, we have also been getting people outdoors as much as possible. When restrictions meant we could only meet outside, we offered regular support-walks with individuals from the GEM project who are suffering from mental health and isolation. In the summer, we took young refugees and asylum seekers (from GARAS) on a weekend camping trip. There was paddleboarding, hiking, cooking and sharing music around the campfire. We have been on kayaking trips along the Stroudwater canal and having campfires with disabled participants, refugees and asylum seekers as well as offering opportunities to volunteer with the Cotswold Canals Connected initiative.

We had our first Kickstarter join 3rd Space for six months. This young person led a team of other young people to create a new space outside. 'The Community Garden' was fundamental for building confidence to meet in groups safely and allowed us to start moving forward as a project and team.

The completion of our multi-station kitchen has widened the opportunities for collaboration and sharing of food and recipes and acts as a natural central point within 3rd Space. Young people are empowered to budget for and try out recipes to cook for each other in a spontaneous and relaxed environment.

We have supported Creative Camping with walks, musical activities, bonfires and explores. Also, co-developing Cotswold Canals Connected festival 'Noise on the Nal' which featured many up-and-coming young artists, giving them a new platform to perform and share their work.

Participants of the Access Bike Project are frequent users of 3rd Space with food, games and space for reflection and conversation for vulnerable young adults. Some of the young people who attend the workshop have been working in our big events such as the summer HAF (Holiday Activity and Food) days and our camps. These opportunities for ad-hoc work have helped young people to gain work experience and develop their employment skills. There are Kickstarter roles available in the new year which we hope might benefit some of the young Access Bike cohort.

3rd Space participants have access to an in-house GEM Navigator Developer. This enriches what we can offer for participants who are currently unemployed and need support to enter work. Likewise, for young people enrolled on to GEM, 3rd Space provides an array of activities and social situations that help to build confidence, allow people to be themselves and find community.

As an emerging youth project of 2021, 3rd Space has begun networking with other local community organisations and authorities. Some of our closer communications have been with the Job Centre and The Door Stroud, receiving referrals and looking at ways our provisions can complement each other. We are also

receiving referrals from local secondary schools who are currently finding lack of attendance and mental illness in students to be of high concern.

What's next for 3rd Space

A framework called 'Community Circles' has been shared with us to work specifically with disabled adults, beginning in the new year. These held sessions are about building friendships and trust through regular sessions where individuals are encouraged to voice what they need from others, and likewise what they would like to offer.

We will expand our peer-to-peer mentoring programme with a six-week training period and opportunities for young adults to be a part of the 3rd Space mentoring team. This work will enable more people with needs for on-to-one support to join in with our activities and it will extend and move between the Access Bike project and all other youth-related activities in CS.

New opportunities are on the horizon for young people coming to 3rd Space with the forming of Gloucester Youth Climate Group. This project is set to recruit for its leader in January 2022 and as plans and actions take place, 3rd Space aims to encourage marginalised voices to be heard at the foreground of these discussions.

With lockdowns now behind us, we look forward to our Creative Camps taking place in full swing over several trips in the summer, to include young disabled and displaced people in Gloucestershire.

Internships

As an essential pathway for young people our commitment to providing internships will grow in 2022, with sights on Access Bike as a great entry project for young people without qualifications. In 2021 we hosted a second Rank Foundation funded Time to Shine internship for a young adult to gain experience and skills for future work in the Voluntary Community Social sector, and two internships through the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) Kickstart programme. With a range of training and mentor support provided by our team, interns enhance their confidence and skills across many domains and raise their expectations for purposeful, enjoyable, and meaningful work. We embrace the voice of the next generation, and the energy and fresh perspectives young people bring to our projects.

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