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Company Values

Creative Sustainability is a values-led organisation, with Empowerment, Inclusion and Sustainability at the heart of everything we do. We provide residential, activities, workshops, volunteering and work opportunities for marginalised people and communities across Gloucestershire, facilitating safe, supportive environments in which people can 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:

- **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.

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 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:

- Co-produced, Inclusive Evaluation Methodology with the Countryside Community Research Institute;
- a Peer-to-Peer user-led Mentor Support Training programme with our Access Bike project, and
- a community-led place-based application, the first of its kind for the National Heritage Lottery, successfully implemented for the Cotswold Canals Connect project.

Over the last year we developed a strategy for Stroud District to support local volunteer action and make our communities more resilient, safe, and inclusive in the face of any emergency. 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.

In the last two 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 a 2-3 year secure funding stream for all current work. We are building our reserves 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. We forecast a year ahead to support planning and sustainability of projects and organisation, currently showing turnover of 500K+ for 2021.

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 common 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. In 2021 we will be working in partnership with Stroud District Council and Gloucestershire County Council to deliver our Area Hubs Strategy, a transformative project and model for community partnership working.

In 2021 we will be growing our team to absorb several new projects - the wonderful work we will be doing with our canal community, supporting the Gloucestershire Youth Climate Action Panel, on the Area Hubs Strategy and running our exciting 3rd Space hub with community kitchen, high spec IT suite, music, and creative spaces.

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.
- 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.
- 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

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, 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.

We were pleased to start working with GARAS (Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) and an inspiring group of young people this year. 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. This work will continue into 2021 and we are planning a diverse range of opportunities and activities tailored to the needs of this group.

The covid emergency created the need to turn our attention to the Bikes Key Worker Initiative. During lockdown a dedicated team safely repaired over 40 bikes that were then given out to key workers in need of independent transport. This was a rewarding project that utilized the skills and resources available at the time.

Access Bike is so embedded in the community, with new ideas and perspectives from all its contributors, while its key aims and values remain as strong as ever. This year has also seen many community engagement events,

run by the Access Bike community, including open days, stalls at farmer's markets, craft fairs & bike shows, a pub quiz's, online mechanics sessions and many other online support groups and initiatives.

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

Future projects that are currently in the planning stages at Access Bike include running a new round of mentor training, providing a pop-up bike repair service at the train station, and developing a 'graduate scheme' which will enable regular volunteers to take ownerships of different projects and initiatives, providing them with a transition between school and work and resulting in a worthwhile qualification to add to a CV. We also plan to arrange work experience trips to businesses within the bike industry, which could lead to an apprenticeship for a young volunteer, and we would like to provide even more enriching external activities like this in 2021.

Area Hubs Community Development

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 very 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.

Since then, Creative Sustainability has gained the support of Stroud District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, and community organisations to move forward with the strategy, employ a strategic plan leader to develop and deliver the strategy for Stroud District and share the learning for development across Gloucester.

Project outcome ambitions

- Reduce inequality of provisioning, to share and distribute resources such as food, medical supplies
- Take prompt immediate action where vulnerable people, including disabled people and people with mental health challenges, are being disproportionately impacted by emergency circumstances
- 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’
- Reduce transmission of the disease in communities and to the most vulnerable people
- 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 unconstituted 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 Area Hubs Strategy

- May 2021 Area Hubs Strategy Development Lead recruited: funded post for one year with a view to extend to a 3-year contract
- May 2021-May 2022 Develop the Strategic Plan as per;
 1. Strategy Document – Creative Sustainability developed 2020
 2. Stroud District Council's 2030 Master Plan; develop and integrate the self-assessment tool, leader will set targets, working across sectors to define and deliver the plan and explore potential for replication across Gloucestershire
- May 2022-23 Area Hubs Role extended: Funded post for further 2 years to embed and enhance the strategy in Stroud District and work with other Districts on their targets

Bike Drop

Project Summary

The covid crisis also gave rise to The Bike Drop, now a new Community Interest Company (CIC). 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, providing;

- 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.

In a year Bike Drop has now provided six young people with employment and training that was otherwise not available to them and delivered over 5000 items in and around the Stroud District.

What's next for the Bike Drop

We are updating the existing business plan in partnership with the Grace Network, in summary to

- Consolidate and grow customers, improving systems and forecasting
- Explore workstreams for recycling and partnership with waste contractors
- Explore potential for out of town depot for first-last mile delivery

In 2021 we will be seeking investment and/or funding to support full-time development and management, to grow our fleet of cargo bikes and involve more young people through the Access Bike Graduate Scheme.

Community Rail Partnership

Project Summary

Our Community Rail projects improve connectivity, provide economic opportunity, and empower local people through sustainable transport, destination management and station activities. Based on the success of our pilot activities delivered in 2019 Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership CIC was constituted in April 2020 with Creative Sustainability as key delivery partner. Activities planned include:

- 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
- Taste for Travel - promoting travel behavioural change for leisure through mapped trails and bookable visitor experiences in agri-tourism and heritage, increasing health, wellbeing and economic development
- Access Public Transport - engaging four youth groups throughout lockdown on the sustainable transport agenda with an opportunity to debate and influence the transport agenda for our local place
- Canal Rail Trail - promoting travel behavioural change with local walking and cycling opportunities, improving health and wellbeing through experiences that encourage greater connections and ownership of local place

What's next for our community rail involvement

- Extending our Let's Talk Travel Project to fund a 2-year part time post to improve employment opportunities through facilitated personal travel planning
- Launch of community rail education programme in partnership with Severnside, Worcestershire and Wiltshire Community Rail Partnerships
- Mapping and marketing trails and experiences designed specifically to support community recovery, improved health and wellbeing, and local economic development according to current restriction scenarios

Cotswold Canal Connected

Project Summary

The successful outcome of the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) bid for the Cotswold Canal Connected (CCC) project represents an exciting opportunity for Creative Sustainability to bring the values of inclusion, empowerment and sustainability to many more people and communities living and working in the canal corridor through all aspects of the project for 3-4 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 for key areas of community development:

- Community Enterprise Development
- Informal and Formal Learning
- Pathways to Participation
- Interpretation
- Working with Nature
- Volunteering

In terms of actual delivery Creative Sustainability is leading on the first four plans and will be leading on best practice in community-led, inclusive and sustainable partnership working.

What's next for Cotswold Canals Connected

Because of the scope of responsibility for coordination and the depth of knowledge and understanding of the Activity Plan that exists in the team, Creative Sustainability will lead on a review process for delivery in 2021, that will take in to account the impact of the last year on our canal communities and plan for 2021 and beyond. There is a clear need for reprioritisation of outcomes and consideration of different approaches to activities.

Rationale

- 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 a very 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 huge 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.

Creative Camping

Project summary

Creative Camping is residential wild camps and online activities for disabled and non-disabled young people. The project supports disabled and non-disabled teenagers and young adults to spend time together in nature and online, encouraging self-agency, positive risk taking, cooperation, friendship, and inclusion. Normally, Creative Camping provides weekend residentials at wild camping locations in partnership with Active Impact CIC and a number of other providers to deliver activities for Gloucestershire County Council as part of the Of Course We Can programme of inclusive activities and residentials for disabled and non-disabled young people.

All but one of our residential weekends were cancelled in the summer of 2020. Just before the announcement of the first lockdown in early spring we went with 15 young people to Devon, courtesy of the Landmark Trust, visiting Tintagel Castle and the beach and spending time around the old manor farm. Evenings were 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.

Since then, we have been able to continue our work in a different capacity: online over zoom 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. Since the beginning of May 2020, we have run over 100 online zoom sessions and 6 outdoor, socially-distanced meet-ups including 3 day camps, a trip to Westonbirt Arboretum, cycling trip and bonfire. Our online activities cater to our young people's varied interests, and the activities that we have run include drama, art, karaoke, cooking, yoga, cabaret, story-telling, tai chi and dance, with time to catch-up, share news and hang out.

What's next for Creative Camping

Feedback for the zoom sessions has been overwhelmingly positive and we continue to offer three online activities a week, for the foreseeable future while government COVID restrictions remain. To complement online sessions, we will continue with provide outdoor activities per month. We will expand our group, without losing the intimate setting that has developed over the past nine months, welcoming new young people through the Of Course We Can programme of activities for disabled and non-disabled young people in Spring and Summer 2021. Overcoming digital inclusion barriers are key to more young people joining the online camping community who are unable to access the online activities due to lack of IT skills or a device. We are evaluating the extent of these barriers and creating personal plans to overcome issues for individuals as part of our wider digital inclusion programme across all projects. The pandemic is far from over for those who are clinically vulnerable, and we hope that we can continue to support our community for as long as is needed.

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 and ongoing project is with University of Exeter on their Environment and Climate Emergency carbon management plan, in association with Bureau Veritas Sustainability Services.

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 a number of areas including in Community Spaces Development and Co-produced Inclusive Evaluation Methodology and will be marketing these for both independent use and training in 2021. We are working towards consultancy for community-led project development with a particular interest in major NLHF bids.

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 long 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 began to work with GEM and the Countryside Community Research Institute to roll out our co-produced, inclusive evaluation methodology across the GEM partnership, having developed and proven the benefits of this approach. Work with the partnership came to a halt in March 2020 but continues internally.

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 2021 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

Re-Connect 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 offer support by sharing their own experiences, and they tell us it makes a difference to their own lives too.

The project demonstrates 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 work closely with county-wide networks, running training alongside our Befrienders in partnership with Stroke Association and the Stroke Education team at Oxstalls; communication and aphasia training, dementia training and first aid for staff, volunteers, participants, and carers.

As a result of our work 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 LTC and are therefore more resilient, joining on

line forums, support groups, becoming a Befriender. They report increased confidence to self-initiate and make life choices, more positive feelings about social inclusion, less depressed and lonely and altogether happier.

During the pandemic of 2020-21 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, resuming groups briefly during the summer in a covid safe environment. We ran some walking groups instead of meeting inside, which were very popular. We implemented and ran a pen pal letter writing scheme and a telephone befriending service. In total 23 people are in the pen pal scheme, 70 people in the groups, and to date there have been 581 phone calls made.

What's next for RE-Connect

We will develop more county-wide groups in 2021 and have just started a Digital Inclusion Project, teaching and supporting people to access online technology with the aim of enabling them to become more independent and feel less isolated. We are working with our reference groups to develop a theory of change for ReConnect, underpinned by our organisational principles of co-produced inclusive evaluation methodology.

3rd Space

Project Summary

3rd Space will be 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 different 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

We recognised the need to specifically target the 18-25 age group who's immediate and future prospects have been significantly impacted by the impact of Covid19. For young people age 18 to 25, 3rd Space offers a rare chance to explore and try things outside of a target driven education system. Funding from 30 Percy, Stroud District Council, The Rank Foundation and Cooperative Foundation has paid for a state of the art IT suite, a community kitchen and staff to run the project for the next three years.

We have set in motion a varied programme for current participants in other Creative Sustainability projects - weekly art sessions “Art with Angeline” run by a GEM participant, aimed to empower creativity and ease social anxiety; a showcase for young musicians and an ‘open mic’ session for the community to tune in to and enjoy new music and support up-and-coming artists; sessions for young refugees and asylum-seekers in affiliation with Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS), offering a space to share and discuss language, heritage, music, create art-work while sharing food and stories.

We have also been getting people outdoors, taking young people from GARAS on kayaking trips along the Stroudwater canal, having camp-fires and offering regular support-walks with individuals from the GEM project who are suffering from mental health and isolation, supporting Creative Camping with walks, bonfires and explores, and ReConnect’s walking group. 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.

What’s next for 3rd Space

We are clear that there are benefits of online activities, particularly for disabled and clinically vulnerable people, already excluded from in-person events. 3rd Space is excited by the prospect of enabling more people to come to our sessions through better online engagement. It is a solution that extends beyond our COVID-response, and we aim to achieve in the future a hybrid online programme that suits the needs of everyone.

In the 3rd Space ‘physical space’ our multi-station kitchen will support marginalised people to come together to cook and eat and our state-of-the-art IT suite will support creative visual and audio projects. We are creating a community garden where anyone and everyone can get involved, spend time outdoors together. 3rd Space for has been on hold due to the uncertainty brought about by COVID and the impossibility of live collaboration but we will continue to connect creatives and community through live music, art and story-telling.

Internships

As an essential pathway for young people our commitment to providing internships will grow in 2021. In 2020 we hosted a 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. We will be creating 6 more internships through the Department of Work and Pensions Kickstart programme in 2021 and another Rank Foundation internship to give more young people meaningful, safe, and supported paid work in our growing organisation. With a range of training and mentor support, interns will 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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