

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

**Creative Sustainability aims to create inclusive, resilient communities that can support mental, emotional and physical health and wellbeing for everyone.**

***Community – people with Common Unity - experiential, geographical, social, cultural, systemic.***

**February 2023**  
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**creative**  
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## Organisational Overview

2022 has been another year of change and review for CS and the beginning of another crisis for people and communities that we serve. However, we adapted, survived and thrived, improving our practice throughout, maintain our income levels and make wonderful things happen for people and communities.

Our income and turnover has remained steady despite two significant public sector income streams coming to an end, with an increase in sources of earned income and charitable trust support. Some programmes increased their income with both Digital Inclusion and 3<sup>rd</sup> Space budgets growing significantly. We began a contract with DWP for the first time and continue to work closely with both tiers of local government on health and wellbeing and climate action programmes. We achieved a nice chunk of unrestricted income for core funding from our consultancy work, and also from a generous grant from 30 Percy specifically for more strategic planning and development. We changed our accountants to Albert Goodman Associates and continue to be very satisfied with their high level of engagement and professionalism.

In early 2022 we were delighted to launch Re-Connect and The Bike Drop independently, where both these projects had a very healthy start – both financially and with fabulous staff to keep leading them in their new forms – and we wholly congratulate both new CICs on their continued success and commitment to their communities. We parted ways with the Cotswold Canals Connected and are extremely proud to have researched, developed and written the brilliant Activity and Action Plan, which won the £10m NLHF grant. We had four members of staff still working on the CCC project at the end of 2021 and all were re-engaged on other projects.

Our staffing levels have also been steady, despite these big changes. In Jan 2022 we bid farewell to Hannah to set up Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership- with whom we continue to work closely - to Coryn and Louise to evolve the CS project ReConnect as an independent organisation, and to Emlyn when he left to spend more time on his music career with Orbury Common. We were delighted to welcome three excellent community leaders - James as manager of Access Bike, Jemma as manager of our youth strands and Nick to the Digital Inclusion team- and R, ex-participant, to the Access team. We currently have 5 full time and 8 part time employees, 7 youth mentors, and a great many people who come and join in to support people who need it.

We continue to pay staff well compared to other similar sized community organisations and roles, with a number of pay rises through the year to align salaries with each other better as well as new and emerging responsibilities. We were unable to review salaries again specifically against inflation in the latter part of 2022, but this remains an issue to be addressed in 2023. Some funders have recognized the importance of supporting the sector and we have identified two core funding opportunities that could help address this issue for us.

Because of the seismic shifts that took place early in the year we prioritized a full organisational review with all staff, to include a re-write of our aims, values, mission and culture, and a complete review of our governance. We concluded that a CIC was still the best vehicle to support our charitable purposes, widely accepted by charitable trusts and foundations, allowing trading whilst clearly defining asset-lock and not-for-profit purpose, and giving staff the opportunity to become board members. (There are however still misconceptions about CICs in the VCS community which we should continue to address as this arises). We have detailed work plans against our risk register for six organisational areas, to include full policy and procedure overhaul and adoption, detailed Programme Plans for all strands of work in development, and a new Organisational Strategy Framework and draft Business Plan. These documents are a shared achievement and responsibility, will always be evolving and adapting to the people involved, the times we live in and the opportunities arising.

We have made relatively considerable investment into equipment and our spaces in the last year, with big improvements to facilities for staff and participants. Staff have quiet office space and meeting rooms, improved IT and printing facilities, with much better online systems being implemented fully including Sharepoint for

information management, Futrli forecasting tool, and Upshot for our evaluation management in progress. Our extensive activities and camping kit storage has improved for much easier access, and the trailer had the equivalent of an MOT. The fully equipped community kitchen now has a level 5 hygiene rating, and IT suite and video/audio room have great hardware and software for everyone to use. The bike workshop is in a great state of organisation with direct access to the outdoor social space - a lovely riverside setting for everyone.

In terms of progressive policy and achievements in 2022 we set our paternity rights to the same level as statutory maternity for the first six weeks. We are developing a right to protest policy for issues that align with our culture and values. We are proposing additional days leave to allow train travel to European destinations to the board where this supports our NUS Green Impact framework ambitions for Gold standard. We are certified Inclusive Employer and Disability Confident, and are part of the You're Welcome Community in Gloucestershire. We are co-author of the Countryside Community Research Institute's GEM Evaluation Report, with our Co-produced Inclusive Evaluation development a key feature of the report.

## Strategic Framework Development

We went right back to the bones in 2022 to create our new strategic framework together as a whole team. Over many sessions we worked both with and without a facilitator to review our culture, our values, mission and objectives. Our strategy will be informed by our programme aims and objectives, and our principles of best practice that come from our day to day practice. In this way our organisation stays true to culture and values, where what we do is community-led and not directed by the board – rather they are servant-leaders and support, facilitate and guide our work. In 2023 we will publish our strategic framework using what we have developed in 2022 - and incorporating our theory of change - with the key areas as follows:

### Values

We are a values-led organisation with three core values:

**Inclusion:** ensuring inclusion of marginalised people, supporting their autonomy, raising expectations and access to opportunities for work, leisure, belonging and health.

**Sustainability:** developing knowledge and understanding of social, climate and natural environment issues, strengthening resilience of people and our local communities.

**Empowerment:** advocate for people, facilitating them to become more enabled, empowered and have a confident voice in their local and global community.

### Mission – two strands of work

We have two strands of work which are entirely connected and symbiotic. During our team sessions we decided to keep these separately defined, as this would help us talk about what CS does more easily and identify areas for development or stasis. The two areas are System Change and Place-Based Best Practice:

**System change** Aiming to address and challenge marginalisation at individual, community, and societal level through amplifying grassroots voices, influencing and facilitating change to systems of public funding and service contracts in order to create better outcomes for people and communities. Our objectives are to

- Actively seek collaboration and partnership working to address issues at individual, community and societal level, and find solutions that meet existing and emerging needs for people and communities
- Bridge the cultural, trust and understanding gaps between the community sector and public bodies, and major funders, more effective partnerships, transactions and collaborations
- Establish better procedure and practice for those partnerships, where existing systems unfairly burden the community sector with financial, capacity, individual health and legal risks
- Explore opportunities for strategic thinking and co-production within the community sector, where this will create lasting partnerships, more community wealth, and stronger, more resilient communities

## Place-Based Best Practice

Aiming to respond to the needs of all young people, modelling best practice in our place-based hub, and multiple opportunities to access resources, connections, support, advocacy and representation, towards better mental, emotional and physical health and wellbeing and life chances. Our objectives are to

- Focus on younger people, with residentials, activities, workshops, learning, volunteering and work opportunities, that improve long-term mental health and wellbeing for young people
- Offer a physical location to develop and maintain friendships, connect with support and expertise, access resources, and access peer support, be active citizens
- Respond to people's specific needs and asks within a safe, supportive environment in which people develop confidence and independence, raise self-esteem and expectations
- Actively seek collaboration and partnership working with groups, organisations and influencers from across Gloucestershire, to improve, consolidate and share best practice for all young people in the county.

## Planning & Delivery

Our board of directors support our participants, practitioners, volunteers, mentors and staff with resources, governance and capacity they need, and check our planning and delivery against 7 principles:

- Co-production with people and communities achieves the outcomes we all want
- Asset-based and community-led community development is the easiest and best practice
- Participants are equal stakeholders along in planning, delivery and evaluation
- Safe, supportive facilitation and not service provision, is sustainable, empowering and inclusive
- Collaboration and sharing of best practice models achieves more, faster, and more sustainably
- Creative approaches - seeing opportunities for innovation rather than problems – is better for everyone
- Taking risks to create change - being comfortable with doing things differently – is essential

## Organisational Culture

We can achieve all this because our organisational culture supports our team to be

- Inclusive: valuing inclusion equality and co-production to build our community and our team
- Democratic: recognising self-agency *and* need for formal communication and decision-making processes
- Supportive: supporting people to develop autonomy through empathy and kindness
- Sustainability allies: it is entwined into all we do
- Change makers: seizing opportunities to challenge existing practices to bring about change
- Creative: a thinking, learning, responsive organisation on a journey of innovation, exploration and risk taking

## Programmes Overview

We have now defined programmes as ongoing large pieces of work that are the foundations of our work. Projects operate on a year to year basis and within a programme. This definition helps us with planning, finance and management where there are Programme Managers with responsibility for their plan.

**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.

**Gloucestershire Youth Climate Group:** facilitating youth action and voice for a low carbon and resilient Gloucestershire, that reduces inequities and centers on the needs of people and the environment.

**Community Hubs Strategic Development:** building community resilience now, and preparing for future shocks, with a strategic approach to community building across Stroud District.

**Creative Camping:** \* supports disabled and non-disabled teenagers and young adults to spend the weekend together at wilderness camps encouraging self-agency, positive risk taking, cooperation, friendship, inclusion.

**Critical Friends:** consultancy work that supports community and public sector thinking, development and practice where it fits with and supports our culture, core values, missions and objectives for people and communities

**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

**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.

\*In 2023 we will be incorporating Creative Camping project activities into the programmes where they sit, variously through the year.

\*\*Workability will be established as a programme and replacing the 5 year success of our involvement in GEM.

## Development Areas for 2023

- **Open Information** - publishing policy documents and programme plans, modelling transparency and openness; publishing papers and principles that underpin our working practices, including CPIE, Community Engagement, Working with Young People and Community Hubs Strategic research.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation** - embedding Upshot in our daily practice to monitor and evaluate our work, combined with Co-Produced Inclusive Evaluation methodology (CPIE), ensuring all stakeholders equally benefit; creating a theory of Change that directly links with our evaluation framework, ensuring activities, outcomes and values are completely aligned
- **Diversity and Inclusion** – developing diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation, looking at mentor training, internships and other courses of action for staffing; exploring options for diversification of the board including mentoring, paid internships and active recruitment
- **Programme Plans** – continuing to work on seven programme plans to ensure ongoing sharing of resources, methodology and information that enhances whole organisation best practice – 3<sup>rd</sup> Space, Access Bike, Digital Inclusion, Community Hubs Strategy, Workability, Youth Climate Action, Critical Friends.
- **Strategic Plan** – continuing to develop a strategic plan from ground up, where the programme plans inform strategy and business planning is, in turn, influenced.
- **Governance** – continue to improve the CS governance structures, policies and frameworks so that CS continues to be a great place to work, to fund and collaborate with.

## Programmes and Projects Report

### Access Bike

#### Programme Summary

The Access Bike Project is a community bike workshop and youth space, aiming to:

- Provide a safe, supportive environment for young people, including marginalised and vulnerable young people
- Promoting recycling, re-using, and cycling as a sustainable transport option
- 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 across Gloucestershire

On a busy day there might be 25 participants, sharing skills, creating something new out of parts, selling affordable bikes to the community, improving the space, building a bike for themselves or someone else. Young people can earn-a-bike to keep by volunteering, giving back to the community, and at the same time making friends and having fun. 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, or drug and alcohol abuse.

James Beecher started as Project Manager in late April 2022, and hit the ground cycling with the support of regular mechanic Cai and mentor Rowan. The workshop had suffered from a long period of neglect with no lead staff member and low funding. Since then Access Bike has extended opening hours again to 16 hours a week, added a quiet session and women only session. Highlights include

- 8 workshop based activities for the Holiday Activities and Food programme
- Collaboration with Atlas Games at 5 Archway School based sessions for children
- £3K crowdfunded for young refugees and asylum seekers for their summer camp and bike kite
- Archway School raising £680 for sessions and bikes for 10 students
- 12 Thomas Keble students taking part in an employability skills course
- Afternoon sessions with 6 disabled students at the Apperley Centre
- Evening session for 12 young people from the Woodcraft Folk
- Friday workshops specifically for young refugees and asylum seekers to build a bike and gain confidence riding. It has been wonderful to provide these young people with bikes, and to hear their whoops of joy while riding along the canal together
- Linking with Youth Support Team to support 5+ young people in 2023
- Network Rail Grant to include cycle hub feasibility in Stroud Railway Station



Around running the workshop James has supported community cycling with the establishment of a monthly 'Market Ride', screened MOTHERLOAD with the Cargo Bikes of Stroud Group, presented at the 'Cycling Summit' forum, set up a cycling-themed window display for the Stroud Town Council, met with Stroud District Council officers, neighbourhood wardens, and youth workers, NHS social prescribers, DWP staff, and members of the local and national cycling community. He has launched a [monthly newsletter](#) and trained for the C-Card scheme. The workshop is considerably tidier and more user-friendly and he has recruited 3 part-timers.

### What young people say:

"I come to Access Bike to spend time with friends, and have a laugh. Now whenever my friends need their bikes fixed, I can do it for them – and I can even earn a bit of money doing this. Coming to Access Bike has helped me develop my skills and motivation."

"It's good experience for a job when I'm older – I'd like to work in a bike workshop, and I'd like to be able to say I've been working in a community bike workshop. I like the social aspect – it's a good reason to bring lots of people together and it's a good way to make friends. My confidence with bike mechanics has increased – especially with the more complicated things, I've had a lot of help with and it's made it so that I can take bikes apart and put them back together which is great! And it's not like school with a teacher just bossing you around and telling you what to do. I come every week now, and it's the first activity that I've chosen to come to myself instead of my parents suggesting something. It's really cool and I recommend it to all my friends"



“I feel like I have much greater confidence in fixing bikes. Beforehand I was scared to take something off my bike in case I couldn’t put it back together. Now I feel a lot more relaxed about it – especially the complicated stuff – because there are people around you to help you. There’s a perfect balance between being allowed to try things out and learn, and getting support when you need it.”

“I think it’s a great way to make new friends, we’ve made a couple of new friends in a short time. You can have a laugh, it’s a great place to come once or twice a week, fixing bikes and socialising. It’s good to have a real life place to meet up after Covid, I didn’t get on with Scouts when it moved online.”

### What’s next for Access Bike

A re-launch event! Marking James’ 1<sup>st</sup> year as Project Manager (tentatively Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May), with a refresh of the indoor space – lick of paint all round, bespoke cabinets and workbenches and mural work both inside and out.

If feasible the plans for a station cycle hub will include refurbishment of a disused room on the southern platform, enabling pop-up bike maintenance / servicing sessions and the potential for hire of e-bikes, cargo bikes or family bikes as a source of income for Access Bike. Ongoing collaboration with the The Grace Network and The Bike Drop to promote cycling and joining forces to create routes to employment for young people, and contributing to Stroud’s cycling communities as cycling hub based in Fromehall Mill and the Station Rooms.

## Community Hubs Strategic Development

### Programme Summary

In it’s second year, the programme has made a significant contribution to the community development in some parts of the District. The programme has

- Explored how to build community resilience, using learning from the pandemic response, including a wide national body of research and previous CS community engagement research, in the form of action research for a two-year period at least.
- Worked with multiple and cross-sector stakeholders to research, review and action the strategy, form clear aims and objectives, draw out the critical path and onboard key stakeholders.
- Begun to create a systemic way of understanding existing and growing capacity, and map information that would show coverage and gaps across the district.
- Supported development of a network of community groups and hubs that can be supported to work together to solve problems and share resources – the CS website is hosting all materials, with a series of logos and icons having been designed to signal different areas.
- Understand strategies, processes and resources that support capacity building and problem solving.

In September 2022, with the Cost of Living crisis looming, CS and Stroud District Council (SDC) began to use the learning and networks so far established to collaborate on a Warm Spaces initiative. This would support groups to respond to the growing need for support in their communities. CS’s role was initially thinly spread but we realized the potential to review and stretch our learning with this real case study for another emergency response. We

- launched a fiscal host or funding platform, to enable grassroots groups to access funding quickly and for any associated individual to claim expenses, transparently. The platform is a difficult concept for our culture and requires a different way of thinking about grants and giving, and has yet to pick up pace.
- logged dozens of warm spaces on a map that is on both SDC and GCC warm spaces page and used by the public to find their nearest place. We opted for a simple mapping tool to get the spaces out there quickly but there seems to be scope for a more complex and dynamic tool in the future.
- created signposting materials to ensure groups have the right information to share with their communities about debt, keeping warm and their health and wellbeing.
- produced a set of resources to support community groups follow best practice in safeguarding, health and

safety, data protection and inclusion, where these materials were previously too many and not always of good quality. There is still too much information on the community hubs website and a need to scrutinize and distill information on behalf of small groups and organisations which want guidance.

- developed a network of coordinators to share resources and offer training for emerging groups in Stroud district. This is primarily run by SDC at this time, taking responsibility for warm spaces work ongoing.

## What's next for the Community Hubs Strategic Development

We had thought it possible to have an Activity Plan and costed Action plan by the end of the second year of the project - that would be used to further the aims of the strategy, raise considerable funding from public and charitable sector, and structure a 4-5 year development programme. Sadly strategic development lead ME is moving to take up a role in community building in early 2023 so there will be a hiatus of a few months. We have been working with a Locality consultant to support her to download, review learning and hand over the baton. Locality have expressed great interest in working with CS ongoing to use this project as a formative case study for their agenda on community capacity and wealth building.

We have confirmed further funding for the programme from UKSPF for two years but this is considerably less than we had expected. We are looking in to how this has come about and to adjust the outcomes and outputs accordingly. However, the project has grant funding to take forward. We are also expecting more support from SDC through their healthy communities strategy and seeking support from other sources including Hotspots.

## Gloucestershire Youth Climate Group

### Programme Summary

Gloucestershire Youth Climate Group (GYCG) is for 16-25 year old youth voice leaders who want to get involved with Climate Action. Our 'Core Panel' of 20 representatives meet monthly to steer the direction of the group, consult with Gloucestershire County Council and form project teams to undertake community climate action projects. 139 young people attended our workshops and events, and nearly 3,000 young people responded to a Climate survey in 2022/23. The group is

- Action led and organised. We take action and we do what we say we will. We continually improve through listening, learning and innovation.
- Collaborative. Bringing together networks of community stakeholders working in youth and climate domains to promote the GYCG and signpost opportunities to young people.
- Providing opportunities for young people. Facilitating insight and participation in community and public sector climate issues work, with opportunities to get involved in action, work and activism.
- Underpinned by youth ownership. We are led by youth voice – amplifying youth as expert voices on climate change issues - and providing a platform to influence climate policy and climate justice for young people.

### Programme Highlights

- Interclimate Network Survey for Gloucestershire – Partnership with [Interclimate Network](#) (ICN), [Planet Cheltenham](#) and [Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust](#) on designing a survey completed by 2,800 young people.
- What Can I Do? Event and Zine – Collaboration with other youth orgs [The RYSE](#) and [Strike a Light](#) for a series of workshops and an event for all young activists and community organisers in Gloucestershire – there was representation from Climate, LGBTQ+, Disability and Racial Justice movements. Artwork, photographs and materials from the activities was put together into a zine publication, with artwork displayed at Gloucester, Stroud and Stonehouse Railway Station Platforms.
- Consultation with young people on Gloucestershire County Council's (GCC) Climate Action Plan – the core panel reviewed the plan over a number of sessions, and then consulted with a wider group of young people at events. The panel worked with community artists to present the feedback in a creative way. This, alongside the ICN network survey research became a part of the new edition of the GCC Climate Action Plan. Representatives from the core panel presented their edition to GCC Environmental Scrutiny Committee.

- Climate Action Workshops – Panel members devised and delivered a workshop to young people as part of the Green Books project with The Roses Theatre and Gloucestershire Libraries. They did a youth planting party, with 1,600 trees planted as part of the GCC Million Trees Challenge, and took part in teambuilding/confidence sessions, including a two day climate camp.

Young People have told us that being a part of the group has helped them to:

- Develop more confidence in themselves and their abilities
- Learn and share climate information and knowledge
- Work in teams to plan and deliver workshops, events presentations and reports
- Made new friends, relationships and connections
- Gained skills and experience to add to their CVs

*“Previous groups I’ve been involved with said they listened but no action was taken, and it seemed like a tick box exercise. I was skeptical about whether this will happen again, but feel very positive towards the way the GYCG is managed and run. It’s much more guided by young people”.*

*“Feeling connection makes things feel less bleak”*

### What’s next for Gloucestershire Youth Climate Group?

We are waiting to tender for a 30 month contract to run the programme. With delays since September 2022 the grant period we are currently in has been extended to March 2023. If successful the future for the programme is very exciting. Initial cautious plans have been made for -

- Summer of Action: Programme of variety of Climate Action Activities for young people in the county including green event with Gloucestershire Libraries, Biodiversity and Climate Art Workshops and a Mock UN Climate Change Conference with [University of Gloucestershire](#) International Relations Course
- Focus on supporting Youth Mental Health and Ecoanxiety: Young people have told us they want support to feel empowered and resilient when undertaking Climate Action. We want to build further on our work in this area by offering more workshops, nature based activities, peer support opportunities and will be collaborating with [Healthwatch Gloucestershire](#)
- Begin consultation with young people on latest version of GCC's Climate Action Plan
- Youth Voice and Sustainability Social Media Training and Campaign: Led by a project team from GYCG Core Panel Members to promote individual action and community projects
- Further building stakeholder relationships and establishing district groups: supporting grassroots community organisations who work with young people to develop district group opportunities. Build on our network of 62 stakeholder organisations to promote climate action activities to young people in Gloucestershire.

[Interclimate Network Survey](#)   [GCC Climate Strategy Youth Creative Feedback](#)   [What Can I Do? Event Video](#)



## Creative Camping

### Project Summary

Creative Camping is 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 around the 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 have a 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. 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.

After a hiatus during covid restricted times, we were finally able to bring Creative Camping back in full for 2022 - enabling deeper connections over a period of days together, all pitching in and looking after each other. We camped with 39 young people over a total of 10 days, working with three different groups.



The first group was referred to us from GARAS - 14 young men between 16 and 18 years old - with myriad languages, nationalities and life-experiences. New friendships were found on walks in the woods and stories were shared while cooking on the fire. Late nights around the fire playing music, and speaking our stories. Many expressed their love of being in the countryside, saying it brought back the feeling of 'home' and 'feeling safe'. A 17 year-old Kurdish man had worked as a shepherd before he was forced to leave his home in Iran. He said, "It makes me so happy to be out where there is forest and fields and I see so many sheep." Our second camp included 15 disabled and non-disabled young adults between 16 and 30, for the first time we were joined by participants from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space youth cohort – a busy and exciting camp with walks and games in the lovely environment of Thistledown. The third camp was with the Gloucestershire Youth Climate Panel at Biblins on the River Wye, and was the first opportunity for youth activists to come together overnight, develop themselves as a team and have some well-earned fun.

- 39 young people between the ages of 16 and 30 from marginalized backgrounds, camping under canvas
- 18 round-the-campfire renditions of 'Don't Worry, Be Happy and 25 of 'Hey Jude'
- 14 refugees and asylum seekers brought together and friendships made

Zoom sessions initiated by Creative Camping during covid restrictions have been continued through the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space programme. Although the need for these sessions is considerably lower now that our young participants are generally well-met by in-person activities, we find it is still an important social opportunity for those who live further away and would otherwise not easily access our youth activities. See the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space section for more details.

## What's next for Creative Camping

In 2023 we are offering a wider range of residential opportunities for more young people, including theatre and music and climate action. We also need to re-develop our mainstream cohort and 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. Our first two residential are planned for February and March 2023, in a Landmark Trust house in Devon, as part of their 50 for free scheme.

## Critical Friends

### Project Summary

In late 2020 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. Critical Friends explicitly adopts the UN Sustainable Development Goals as the ethical basis of all work undertaken, and only if this fits with our core values and mission.

### Main commissions in 21/22

- University of Exeter on their Environment and Climate Emergency carbon management plan, in association with Bureau Veritas Sustainability Services, specifically supporting the youth climate panel group in 2021.
- GCRP – to establish principles and premises for best practice community engagement for planners where this can also build community resilience and create opportunities for community building and local people.
- Countryside Community Research Institute to complete and publish the report for CPIE best practice evaluation, a collaborative project on behalf of the GEM project since 2018, with CS as owner the principles and methodology for co-produced inclusive evaluation.

## What's next for Critical Friends

We are developing principles for commissioning youth work, for best practice inclusion for disabled young people, and exploring the potential for more Welcome Circles work in the community, where this will benefit hyper-local groups in existing community settings. We are considering charging for time to give advice to small local groups about constituting and fundraising and offering fiscal hosting.

## Digital Inclusion

### Project Summary

We continue to 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. Digital Champions can then teach people who need support to gain skills and knowledge to access services they need from their homes.

For example, our Digital Champions shows a housebound person how to access shopping and doctor's appointment online, by teaching them how to use a tablet, accessing the internet safely and securely and being confident to enter personal details such as address and bank details.

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 online 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.



### Digi-Hubs

This year we have been working with a network of organisations across the Gloucestershire to develop a series of digi-hubs. We were successful in becoming a Stroud District main partner, for the network, along with GL11 in the south of Stroud District. We are identifying locations based on the outcomes of the Digital Divide report from Citizens Online last year. Other partners include lead organisation Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF) and Gloucestershire Community Building Collective (GCBC), with more partners coming on board in 2023.

We have set up a hub at Top of Town Community Hub with 4 laptops and a printer, trained a Digital Champion to provide a drop-in at an Independent Living Hub in Minchinhampton, and are developing a hub in the new Shop on the Common in Amberley, which is due to open around Easter. Digi Hubs across Stroud are mapped at <https://maphub.net/CommunityHubsStroud/digital-inclusion>

### Creative Caring

A beautiful project that supports the wellbeing of Carers, it is a weekly schedule of online evening sessions to promote wellbeing, peer connection and teach creative skills. The project supported 20 carers, who were thrilled with the chance to increase their confidence and motivation in a safe, supportive peer group, connecting carers with each other to share experiences and information, whilst enjoying mindful creative activities.

### What's Next for Digital Inclusion

Digital Sustainability - We have been looking at ways of measuring and assessing the digital footprint of our digi hub activity, website and office usage, with a potential aim of providing a wider service of helping Community organisations and charities to become more sustainable in this area. We will continue to work in partnership with our Countywide community organisations network, to promote best practice and share knowledge, supporting joint funding bids in areas around Digital support and sustainability.

## **GEM (Going the Extra Mile)**

### **Project Summary**

GEM supports individuals with barriers to work or education and moves them closer towards education, training, volunteering, work and self-employment. Our GEM Navigator Developer (ND) works one-to-one 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.

Following COVID, we saw a dramatic decline in participants mental health, with prolonged periods of isolation and feelings of hopelessness about their future. For many participants the focus has been on physical and mental welfare. Whilst there was an increase in available jobs these were still unobtainable for our participants, with unrealistic expectations from prospective employers. We have continued many of GEM's on-line health and wellbeing and learning activities, but face-to-face within CSCIC, including creative workshops, wellbeing sessions - yoga, mindful photography, calligraphy - and practical sessions such as bike workshops and drop-in IT support.

Our ND worked with 18+ 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 just over a third returning to employment. Referrals to GEM ceased in September 2022 in anticipation of the end of the programme altogether, hence lower number of participants.

We worked closely with Gloucester Services this year with positive results. Two of our GEM participants attended their "Bridging the Gap" course and successfully gained employment at the Southbound site. Our ND then supported those participants to gain support from Access to Work for in-work job coaches and transport costs.

The rollout of our Co-Produced Inclusive Evaluation (CPIE) methodology was successful. Workshops and follow-up sessions were run by CSCIC in partnership with GEM to educate all NDs across Gloucestershire. NDs from partner organisations took the opportunity to participate in a series of sessions for their participants around creative evaluation for mental wellbeing.

We were awarded Gloucestershire Inclusive Employer status by the GEM legacy project "Inclusivity Works" and are also registered as a disability confident employer. We feel that our work as an inclusive employer is vital and are proud to employ previous GEM participants within the organisation.

We began our long-planned partnership with the DWP, recognizing the need to extend the GEM remit for our particularly vulnerable cohort, working closely with the Job Centre, and welcoming in 16-25s who are needing additional support to find work. We have regular visits from a Job Coach at Stroud Job Centre who uses 3<sup>rd</sup> Space as a safe and inclusive environment for their younger clients to meet with them in a more relaxed way. In turn, these young people are included in 3<sup>rd</sup> Space opportunities and activities that help to promote self-esteem encourages positive connections.

### **What's next for GEM and Workability**

This has been the last year that Creative Sustainability will host an ND for the Gloucestershire County Council led GEM project. The programme ended in December 2022 due to EU funding rules. We are supporting young people who are required to look for work through our 3<sup>rd</sup> Space programme, in partnership with DWP and SDC. This strand will become a new programme – Workability – to respond to the urgent needs of the 16-25 age group (30 for disabled young people) and we are hoping that funding will come from both health and work commissioning.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Space

### Project Overview

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 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 recognise the need to specifically target the 16-25 age group who's immediate and future prospects have been significantly impacted by the impact of Covid19. For young people age 16 to 25, 3rd Space offers a rare chance to explore and try things outside of a target driven education system. We plan a weekly programme 3 days a week to reach the current needs of young people to suit different interests and abilities. We have calm and mindful sessions, projects that are focused on fixing and mending, and plenty of time for raucous karaoke sessions and ping-pong tournaments, and 'anxiety-friendly options'. Sessions include

- upskilling such as gardening, bike maintenance, cooking and baking, IT skills, job searching, web safety, disability work advice, healthy relationships, shopping and budgeting.
- volunteering and training opportunities to become an activities leader or peer-to-peer mentor
- activities in nature such as whittling, long walks, fire-building and forestry, camps and residential
- online @Home programme to develop social and IT skills, particularly suited to those who cannot easily access our in-person activities due to a disability, transport barriers, or social anxiety
- day-trips that aim to meet the needs and interests of participants, offering new opportunities, friendships and experiences. These have included a walk at Westonbirt Arboretum, trips to visit other local community organisations, a trip to the theatre, and a beginner's canoeing class at Saul Junction.

### Mentoring

Our peer-to-peer mentoring programme kicked off this year, with our co-produced in-house training. This training is for young people who want to take on more responsibility and work with others who require more support. We have a growing group of trained peer mentors working with individuals who need the support they can offer.

### Internships

As an essential pathway for young people our commitment to providing paid internships, we have hosted 3 part time six month placements since 2021 and 3 full time year placements since 2020. We are hosting our 3<sup>rd</sup> Rank Foundation funded Time to Shine internship in 2023 – offering meaningful work to gain experience and skills for future work in the Voluntary Community Social sector. We have employed two further young people from our participant cohort, with more people leading on activities that suit their interests and skills. With a range of training and mentor support, interns and participants on pathways to leadership can 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 everyone bring to our projects.



## Welcome Group

In March, we began our monthly Welcome Group sessions. The aim of these sessions is to provide space for young disabled people to offer and receive support and friendship, in their community. Each person speaks about what is good and new for them, and has the chance to ask for and offer help to others. This session begins with the making and sharing of food together and ideas arising inspire sessions in the weeks. This is helping everyone build a sense of community interdependence, and guides our response to meet the needs are for some of our most vulnerable participants.

## IT Facility

We have been building our IT resource here at 3<sup>rd</sup> Space, bringing easy access iPads in for general use, a top-notch portable Bluetooth speaker, gaming kit and audio/visual software.



## What's next for 3rd Space

With incoming numbers growing and needs diversifying, we are always looking to expand what we have on offer here at 3<sup>rd</sup> Space. We look forward drawing upon the expertise of Building Circles, offering bespoke training for disabled adults. Our textiles sessions are expanding and we are planning a textiles enterprise in our community space. We are lining up more nature-based residential for different groups of young people, and a performing arts residential with drama creatives Pro Corda. We are hoping to achieve funding for a new nature-based learning and activities lead to increase our capacity for residential camps and trips.

We will continue to focus on collaborating with schools, colleges and other community groups and organisations, including RYSE and GYCG, to help us build a network of young people for participation, leadership and mentoring. It is critical to our vision for an inclusive youth space to include all young people there.

