



Three decades of making a difference

Stories of communities
changing lives

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Introduction

Since The National Lottery was launched in 1994, we've given over £18.4 billion to communities. So 2024 is a milestone moment, a chance to reflect and celebrate. Here we share some of the ways this funding has made a difference, showing how communities have come together to create change.

Some differences are local or personal. A neglected woodland has become a thriving community space, hosting everything from outdoor gyms to history walks. Babies have grown up to become trustees of the organisations that helped to give them the best start in life. Despite harsh weather, schoolchildren in Shetland have learned climate-friendly ways to grow their own vegetables – even grapes and aubergines. From Belfast to Powys, charities have helped people turn their lives around, and seen them give back, supporting communities in their turn.

Others have a wide reach, whether that's involved designing and delivering new community mental health services, or a programme giving 128,000 young people opportunities to improve their local environment.

Some of the earliest grants are still making a difference. With capital investment, community groups have bought, built, and improved premises, turning them into local hubs for support and connection. Flagship projects have created UK landmarks, building community pride. Events of all sizes have fostered friendships and neighbourliness. And much smaller sums are still bringing people together – whether that's by building a community greenhouse, or starting a parent and baby class that's still running years later.

This report shares stories of communities supported by The National Lottery Community Fund and its predecessor organisations¹. You'll see how community-led funding has empowered people – helping them take action on what matters to them, build connections, and support each other to thrive.

¹ The report covers funding from The National Lottery Charities Board, The Millennium Commission, Community Fund, New Opportunities Fund, Big Lottery Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund.



A journey in 20 stories

1995

'Creating conditions for families to flourish' tells the story of one of the very first National Lottery grants, which changed how families were supported in and around Glasgow, with learning from this initial grant still shaping the work of one charity almost 30 years later.

1996

'A firm foundation' demonstrates the ripple effects of small grants, showing how, three decades on, a small grant to fix a waterlogged football pitch is still helping to encourage play and exercise, provide access to green space, and build connections.

1997

'A space for us' shows how a National Lottery grant to the West Norfolk Deaf Association to buy and refurbish a large Victorian building has enabled the group to grow into a busy social hub that offers hearing support to 5,000 people every year.

1999

'Space to slow down' follows the journey of a community-based boat project that takes people out on the heritage waterways of Leeds. Over 25 years, the project has given people opportunities to find common ground and make friends.

2006-2009

'Restoring green spaces' shows how National Lottery funding helped to revitalise two overlooked woodlands into much-loved community green spaces.

2006

'Helping everyone belong' illustrates how a National Lottery grant has enabled a support group in Omagh to bring different communities together and grow into a well-established multilingual advice service that is now funded by the local government.

2007

'Communities making a difference' tells the story of Scottish residents who used a National Lottery grant to protect a peat bog near East Kilbride, an important carbon sink that helps to remove greenhouse gases.

2011

'A safe place to learn and celebrate' explores how Jubilee Church in Grantham has grown into a bustling community hub, providing employment and English language and advice services, while building friendships and understanding.

2012

'Building resilience for the whole family' shows how community interventions can support the wellbeing of children and young people while ensuring their families are confident and resilient for years to come.

2013

'Helping good things happen' showcases the effects of a small grant that started a new community for locals in Warwickshire who wanted to grow their own food.

2014

'A community for every young person' highlights the extraordinary work of youth workers in Belfast who are helping to improve young people's lives, excluding no one and taking a long-term approach to building trust.

2015

'Setting families up for success' shows how community services have been supporting new parents to be active, build confidence and make friends, at a time when support and stimulation can have lifelong effects.

2016

'A place to feel welcome and useful' explains how a small grant helped an organisation to go from servicing and refurbishing bikes, to supporting wellbeing, launching new community ventures and promoting greener, healthier travel.

2016

'Where everyone can be themselves' showcases the value of inclusion and awareness training which addresses negative perceptions and attitudes.

2016

'Breathing space to build capacity' demonstrates how important it is to give groups room to grow and develop and invest in more effective delivery.

2016

'Exercise for everyone' explores the importance of giving everybody opportunities to exercise and spend time in nature.

2016

'Getting fitter together' shows how small grants can help to boost social connections while improving fitness.

2017

'Coming together to create change' tells the story of a resident-led action group from Nottingham which grew out of an informal network of local mums, to a key player that helps residents act as champions for their area.

2018

'A new model of community mental health support' shows how valuable it is to give time and opportunities for practitioners and decision makers to come together with charities and people who have experience of mental ill health.

2019

'Encouraging local growing' sheds light on how a small grant helped schools in Shetland to grow their own vegetables and extend the growing year into winter.

Oaks from acorns: growing great community ideas

Creating conditions for families to flourish: Stepping Stones for Families, Scotland

Using one of the very first National Lottery grants, Scottish charity Stepping Stones for Families took the opportunity to try something different. Its new ways of working inspired nurseries across Glasgow, and in rural South Ayrshire, to change how they supported families. Learning from this initial grant still shapes the charity's work almost 30 years later.

Back in 1995, [Stepping Stones for Families](#) had what Chief Executive Isobel Lawson now calls “a generic, jack-of-all-trades approach”. Staff at its Glasgow family centres offered informal childcare, advice and support. But there are so many things that can affect family life, from finances to health, and the charity noticed that families needed more than just support with childcare.

A £375,000 National Lottery grant was a chance to try something new – to test whether specialist staff could help families with specific issues affecting their lives.

Alongside childcare staff, the charity appointed health and family wellbeing workers to build parents' confidence and self-esteem. And – innovative in family centres at the time – someone to provide financial advice.

In this approach, help was specific, concrete, and hands-on. The [financial advisers](#) helped families to work out budgets, create savings plans, and check what help might be available with bills. They helped families to access grants from charitable trusts, for example for a new freezer that would save money on expensive daily shops. Advisers supported families to apply for children's disability benefits – often after a new diagnosis, when parents were still struggling to adjust.

The family workers supported children but also helped parents open up about the challenges and joys of parenting. They helped to tease out problems and then suggested solutions – whether that's help in managing stress, showing new ways to manage their children's behaviour, or learning to cook healthy meals. Family workers also looked ahead – for example, by encouraging parents to look for work when they were ready for the next step.

To find out whether this new approach worked, a researcher – paid for by the original grant – worked alongside staff and parents to compare the new and old ways of working. “That was a dream, because it's so hard to get research money for something that's a bit quirky,” Isobel remembers.

The results were clear. They found that what parents got the most out of was dedicated help for family wellbeing and money advice. They welcomed the friendly, holistic support, which responded to the needs of each family, without having to make appointments or wait to be seen. So financial and practical advice became a cornerstone of the charity's work from then on.

Seeing the potential of this idea, the next step was taking the service beyond the city. "I kept saying, 'We have a great approach. It really works,'" Isobel remembers, "and the challenge was thrown to me: 'Well, you know it works in an urban community. But how do you know that it works when people don't live up close in the same street?'"

So she approached more rural local authorities, working together to tailor the service for their area. She chose South Ayrshire: "Not completely rural – that would just be a step too far. [But] they have a significant rural part to them."

This time, rather than starting from scratch, the model drew on The National Lottery-funded research, and on local consultation. "We met with lone parents, young parents and teenage parents, a focus group of grandparents who were delivering kinship care, and a group of childminders." Eventually Stepping Stones was chosen to deliver the service through the Scottish Government's Social Inclusion Partnership funding.

The service opened in a local primary school, because the original research showed the value of being located in the community, giving parents a place where they could drop in and feel a sense of ownership. Once again, a specialist worker helped parents with finances, making a big difference for local families. Research suggests that, over a ten-year period, adding financial inclusion to its childcare support "realised circa £10 million, back into the rural community."



The approach was so successful that local authorities wanted to adopt it. Stepping Stones partnered with Glasgow Council nurseries, reaching a much wider group of parents. Supported by a further National Lottery grant, the charity's staff were placed in eight council nurseries across the city. Nurseries described the charity's workers as an integral part of the jigsaw in supporting families.

As well as successfully scaling its service from a small pilot to a large semi-rural community and across a city, the charity has made a big difference for families and school communities. In 2018, when its Family Wellbeing Service was working across eight nurseries in Glasgow and three in Ayrshire, 70% of parents said they felt less stressed and anxious as a result of the support they received. Two-thirds (67%) could provide more consistent parenting, while 61% of children had improved attendance at nursery.

“Stepping Stones was always by my side, be it for my toddler or my pregnancy and newborn baby. Stepping Stones has always come forward and asked upfront if I need any kind of help, be it newborn necessities or mental support or funding. The list is never ending. It made me feel like home.”

Schools recognised the difference, too. As [one Deputy Head explained](#), the impact on parents “feeds right through to the children” – as parents are happier, children are happier, and “start displaying more positive behaviours.”

As Isobel reflects, “threads from that original action research project are still being used today in our family support work.” It's a way of working that builds community, as well as supporting health for children and for the adults in the family.

A space for us: West Norfolk Deaf Association, King's Lynn

From its start as a small club, West Norfolk Deaf Association has grown into a busy social hub that offers essential hearing support and promotes accessibility across the region. Its community has grown up with the charity: “We have seen babies grow to become trustees and volunteers,” explains manager Anna Pugh.

In 1997, [West Norfolk Deaf Association](#) (WNDA) used National Lottery funding to buy and refurbish a large Victorian building in King's Lynn. Today, the centre supports over 5,000 people every year, from newly diagnosed Deaf babies and their families, to older people who use hearing aids.

The project started with a group of people who used British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language. They'd been to school together, they lived locally – but they wanted their own space, place where they could come together regularly, communicate with each other, and get the support that they needed. They also wanted to offer advice and mentoring for families, since more than 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents.

There have been Deaf clubs in the UK since the 19th century, but when the association started, there was nothing close to home. “There was a Deaf club in Norwich, which is 40, 50 miles away,” Anna remembers, and others in Cambridge and Nottingham. “Norfolk is a very rural county. If you're not a driver, you're in King's Lynn, and your nearest Deaf club is Norwich on a Saturday morning, you don't stand much chance of getting there and back.”

So the group applied to The National Lottery for support to buy “this enormous, red brick Victorian building”, to be “somewhere we can call our own.” Making the application was an important learning curve: it meant building relationships with supporters and local stakeholders, before seeking funding.

“What's happened over the years is that the organisation has grown into the space,” explains Anna. It still hosts regular Deaf clubs, but demand has changed with time and developing technology. [Cochlear implants](#), which can improve sound perception in those with severe to profound hearing loss, were introduced in the UK in 1989. As implants became more widely used, Deaf children were more likely to stay in mainstream schooling.

“The whole community has changed,” Anna explains. “You can be the only Deaf kid in school. You can be the only Deaf adult in your workplace, the only Deaf adult that uses BSL in your care home. So what we do here has even more relevance now.” For many, the centre and its social groups are the only place people can share their Deaf identity and language.



West Norfolk Deaf Association

Growing into the building, and beyond

The building is an important asset, giving the charity a very visible identity, and building awareness of the support it offers. It's big, imposing, and well located in the centre of King's Lynn, with good public transport links and local parking. "It's allowed us to have a louder voice, and enabled everybody to have that voice. I think that's been significant over the years."

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Improving the building over time, the organisation has created a series of meeting rooms and advocacy spaces. It has a specially equipped playroom, an enclosed safe garden, and an accessible lift. Room hire is an important source of income: the smaller rooms are popular with support groups, while the playroom is used by local children's services. The group offers hearing support at the centre, at a second site in nearby Downham Market, and in the community. Its services include hearing tests, specialist audiology assessments and referrals, and fitting and maintaining hearing aids.

The centre is a busy social hub, hosting young people's groups, exercise classes, craft clubs and coffee mornings. "We have a weekly group downstairs right now, drinking coffee and doing raffles and chatting." WNDA runs groups in other locations, too, recognising that people need support close to where they live. And it has its own [award-winning charity bookshop](#).

Having support and social events on the same site makes it easier to promote the work they do. The bookshop houses drop-in hearing support, offering help with hearing aids, general support, and advice. That means "people see what the charity does and who the charity supports while they're picking up a book."

Similarly, those with acquired hearing loss "tend to be older people. So they come with their grandchildren, they come with their carers. And that spreads the word." Anna recently met one little girl who came in with her grandfather, who was getting his hearing aids serviced. Noticing the child's difficulties with language, staff suggested she see Anna, who is a trained audiologist and hearing therapist. "She's going to have some auditory training. And it's that kind of networking – you never know what's going to come through."

Chatting to people is a good way to spot changing needs. People coming to the centre told the staff that they found it difficult to access ear wax removal services. Using National Lottery funding, the organisation repurposed and equipped a room to step into the gap, offering this service both regular clients and the wider public.

Promoting Deaf awareness

Promoting awareness of Deafness and Deaf issues in the wider community is another important strand of work. “It’s a very hidden condition,” Anna says. “The impact of hearing loss in general is very underestimated and under-recognised. A child’s learning or an adult’s communication, their relationships, their work life, their aspirations, their careers – all those things can be enormously impacted by how they’re hearing and how they’re not hearing.”

The centre has become “a fierce social advocate for inclusion and accessibility.” It works with statutory services, including the Norfolk Constabulary and local hospital trust, and advocates for those affected by a lack of communication and interpreter support from care providers and other services.

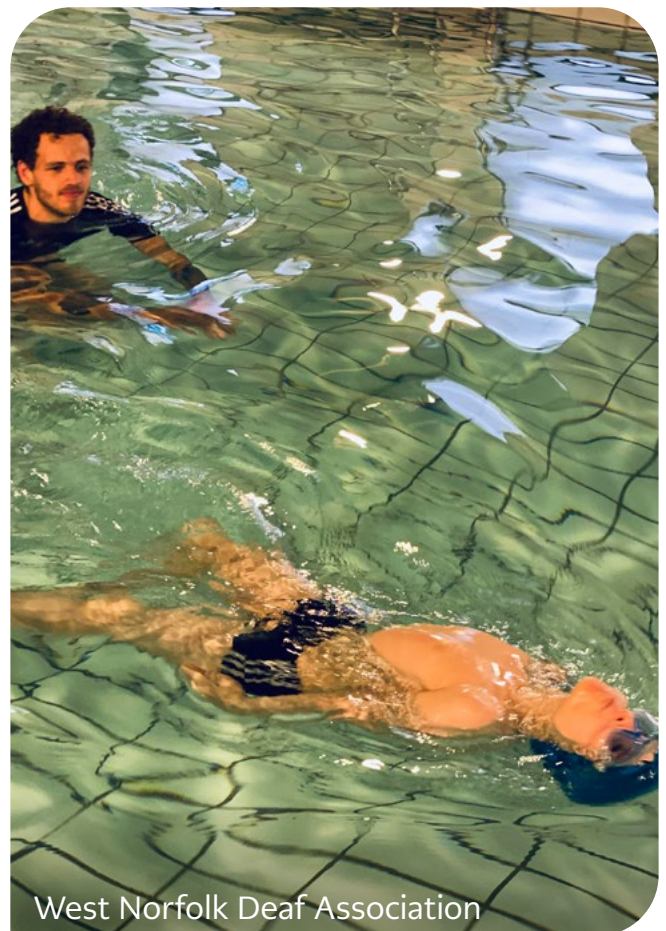
Demand for BSL is rising, with more people coming to the centre to learn. The association has now started to offer BSL workshops for teachers and other professionals, in addition to free short courses for family members and carers of Deaf children.

Growing up

Over almost three decades, the group has watched its members grow up. One is [Deaflympian swimmer Oliver Kenny](#), who grew up in a village near King’s Lynn, regularly attending the centre.

He now leads the UK’s first Deaf swimming school, funded by the association. This makes him an important role model for the next generation. “One little one said, ‘When I grow up, I’m going to be an Olympian, just like Oli,’” Anna remembers.

“I’ve got a million stories like that. And it is because we’ve got this space. That first tranche of National Lottery money allowed us to put our feet on the ground. We’ve grown everything from that.”



West Norfolk Deaf Association

“That first tranche of National Lottery money allowed us to put our feet on the ground. We’ve grown everything from that.”

Coming together to create change: Evolve Nottingham

Grassroots movements are the powerhouses of our communities. When Evolve Nottingham asked local mothers what mattered to them, it was the start of a strong network that helps people act as champions for their area.

Based in the north of the city, [Evolve Nottingham](#) works in an area of high deprivation. In 2017, we awarded £10,000 to set up and develop a resident-led neighbourhood action group.

“At the time, I was a neighbourhood policing sergeant,” explains Gary Bulmer, Evolve’s Operational Director, while CEO Karen Swan was working in council housing management in the city. Evolve started from their work with young people in the area. “We learned very quickly that issues at home have an impact on that young person’s behaviour, and obviously their future.” As they spent time with more family members, “we saw that there was an opportunity to give mums in particular a bit more of a say and to try and help.”

To raise interest and get people together, they started with Zumba classes and arts and crafts. They used the activities to build up a group, where the mums could share experiences and support each other to find solutions. “These women bonded and encouraged others to take part,” helping people to make changes and accept support. Word of mouth was important: where the group had helped, people would recommend it to their friends. And seeing people they knew made it easier to trust a service.

As their confidence increased, the mothers’ group grew more ambitious about improving the place they lived in. One mum joined Evolve full time, running a youth programme and mentoring young people to help them stay in school. Another is employed as a local work coach.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Evolve helped to coordinate local emergency response, becoming a food distribution hub, linked with a foodbank and the FareShare food distribution network. Over lockdown, they gave out more than 200 tonnes of food.

“We had an army of volunteers – funnily enough, the vast majority were the mums from this group.” Their local connections meant they knew who was vulnerable or alone, making sure that help reached those who needed it. They made 1,440 visits in six months: being a friendly face on the doorstep, sharing lockdown activities, and sometimes reporting to local social care if people needed more help – like the time a volunteer found a resident trapped in her shed with a dislocated hip.



It all built on the solid community foundation of that first grant Evolve received in 2017. “That small piece of funding lasted for a few months, but we continue to be blessed by it years later. It enabled us to plan how we wanted to grow and what was needed,” Gary explains. “The people that it supported are now with us and have developed along with us.”

As a community group, Evolve has continued to grow, with its resident-led approach at the heart of everything it does. That means the team can see and address issues that are hidden from statutory services. While Gary continued as neighbourhood policing sergeant, he found the group “almost made my day job easier... people would feel able to come and speak to us when they wouldn’t necessarily go and speak to the police,” or to housing services. “So we were able to feed into social services about what people were worried about,” helping to influence local decision-making.

Evolve’s services now include a menopause café, employment advice, support sessions in special educational needs, men’s groups, a community café, and free courses in beauty, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and IT skills. They’re all set up in response to demand: “All [participants] have a say, and they’ve all got things that they are concerned about.”

In the last 12 months, more than 2,000 residents have accessed its services. “Many have gone on to access other things that we do, and then gone on to get jobs.” Some have turned their lives around: Gary remembers one man who had been unemployed, had stress and anxiety, and hadn’t left his local area for more than 30 years.

“So we got him involved here with us, volunteering, helping us.” He helped with food distribution, gradually building his confidence and doing more – then started work as a social prescriber, helping other people. “He’d come full circle. This is after 30 years of multiple efforts to try and get him to do all the things and to move on.” He now works with people experiencing drug and alcohol addiction, and still helps with sessions at Evolve Nottingham.

Evolve itself has become quite a key player in the area. The original project funding “allowed us to create the evidence that we needed for other bids and for other project work, which just sort of built and built,” Gary says now. “I suppose it’s like when you kick that stone down a snowy mountain, eventually you end up with a great big snowball. For people that were involved in this, they very much felt like they’d got a bit of a voice, and things changed as a result of that.”

“That small piece of funding lasted for a few months, but we continue to be blessed by it years later.”

Supporting community ideas across the UK

A landmark that brings people together

Did you know that National Lottery funding was instrumental in the development of the [Eden Project](#), a visitor attraction that transformed a former clay mine into a destination, housing a huge variety of plant life in uniquely designed domed biomes? When it opened in 2001, it was hailed as a triumph, welcoming 1.8 million visitors in its first year and [contributing more than £1.7 billion](#) to the local economy since.



The Eden Project welcomed **1.8m visitors** in its first year

Energy generation in community hands

In Aberdeenshire, we supported one of the first wholly community-owned and operated wind turbines of its kind on the Scottish mainland, generating energy and profit which goes to improve the local area. The [Udny Community Turbine](#) generated £120,000 after one year of operation, and over its 20-year lifespan, this is expected to rise to £5 million – around £2,000 for every inhabitant. Residents have now set up a trust to invest some of the profits to build an accessible community centre and a café with play space for babies and toddlers.



The Udny Community Turbine generated **£120,000** after one year of operation

Community-led solutions for saving money

In Wales, [Foothold Cymru](#) helps income go further. Listening to what people want and designing the response together, the result is practical, on-the-ground support that enables people to save money, make connections and build support networks. For example, by using its tool, toy, and children's clothing exchanges, doing their own home improvements, and sharing money-saving tips, [families have saved an average of £426 per year each](#). And it's stopped an estimated 3.3 tonnes of useable tools and 3.5 tonnes of clothes and toys from being sent to landfill.



Foothold Cymru has stopped **3.5 tonnes** of clothes and toys from being sent to landfill

A little goes a long way: the value of small grants

A firm foundation: Deerhurst Parish Playing Fields Association, Gloucestershire

A small grant can have far-reaching ripple effects. It can make a difference to a local asset – insulating a village hall, installing a playground, levelling an uneven walkway. The right infrastructure can help things “just happen,” whether that’s a meeting place for an allotment or a reliably dry playing field.

In 1996, Deerhurst Parish Playing Fields Association in Gloucestershire had a waterlogged football pitch. The drainage dated back to the 19th century, and in wet seasons, “it was just a mud bath.” A National Lottery grant of £9,000 paid for new piping, draining the surface water into ditches and feeding the local pond. It was an immediate success: the village football team were able to play a season without a single cancelled fixture.

So far, so good. But the newly reliable playing field brought other benefits. Village children now play in the space. Local team Tewkesbury Town FC started using the pitch, particularly for youth games. And it’s become a space to hold village fetes, vintage vehicle shows, and parking for other events: “We wouldn’t have been able to do that if we hadn’t had decent drainage.”

Nearly three decades on, that small grant is still helping to encourage play and exercise, provide access to green space, and build connections.

A place to feel welcome and useful: Bike to the Future, Powys

A small grant can act as seed money, helping an organisation develop its ideas. In Powys, rural Wales, community workshop Bike to the Future discovered that it could support wellbeing as well as promoting greener, healthier travel.

As well as servicing and refurbishing bikes, [Bike to the Future](#) trains people in bicycle maintenance, offering a place to socialise while developing skills and confidence. “We can talk through it with them – what they should do, what tools it requires,” [explains a volunteer](#). “Instead of us doing it all for them, they can learn with us.”

Bike to the Future’s first National Lottery grant of £4,000 funded startup costs, including a new website, workshop tools, and insurance to get the project off the ground. “We wanted to promote cycling, of course, and recycling of old bikes,” explains project manager Tom Chandler. “But we wanted to support people to gain skills which could then be transferable.”

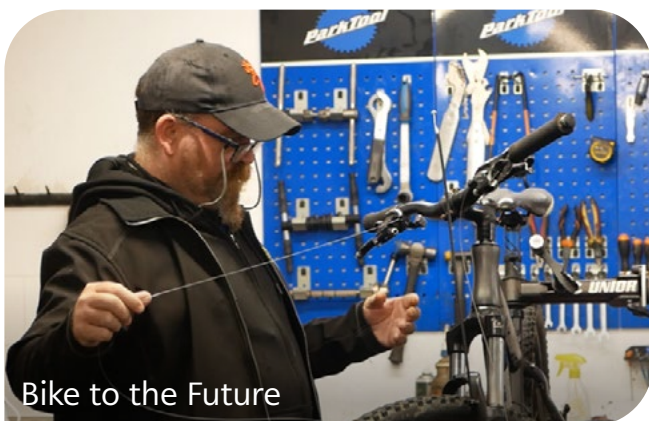
Time in the workshop has many benefits. Tom remembers one participant, who came more for the social side than to learn about bikes. “He had plenty of skills already, but he was retired. He was lonely, you know, he was quite depressed.”

So Bike to the Future developed a series of “Tinker and Talk” workshops: weekly sessions where small groups could work together while getting to know one another.

It’s a regular social environment where people can enjoy themselves and feel they’re doing something worthwhile. And it builds “what we now call wellbeing, although this term was not in general use when we started,” Tom says.

He’s found that people who volunteered in the workshop “have all gone on either to further work or, in some cases, volunteering... But they’ve all moved on.” And they come back to say hello and share what they’re now up to. “People who have been quite low and then they pick themselves up.”

The sense of “doing useful, positive things” changes how people see themselves. “If I wasn’t doing this, I would probably sit at home,” a volunteer says, “because I haven’t got a television, and I would drink. Which is not a good place for anybody to be.” The workshop has “given me structure and something to look forward to during the week. And hopefully I’m bringing enjoyment to people in the community, by fixing their bikes and giving them something to do.”



“I’m bringing enjoyment to people in the community, by fixing their bikes and giving them something to do.”

Over time, the project has grown. “Without realising,” explains Tom, “we were setting up an organisation which had the potential to be relatively commercial”: through selling bikes, and charging for maintenance, they’ve become more self-supporting. At the same time, it’s developing new services – like the [Bike Library](#), where families can borrow the right size of bikes for their growing children.

There are important environmental benefits too. By refurbishing, lending, and reusing bikes, the group reduces waste and saves money, with fewer bikes going to landfill. With a single electric cargo bike, the team collected 11 tonnes of waste in just 18 months – and one of the volunteers has used this experience to open his own business.

By offering a friendly place to mend bikes and learn new skills, the workshop has built connections, launched new community ventures, and found ways to save carbon.

Helping good things happen: Dunchurch Allotment Association, Warwickshire

Sometimes, it only takes a modest gardening project to bring together people who wouldn't necessarily know one another. In Warwickshire, a local allotment association did that. A small grant was a start of a new community for locals who wanted to grow their own food.

“Where you’ve got a group of people working together on something, it develops a sense of community...”

For [Dunchurch Allotment Association](#), a new polytunnel helped to change the whole mood of the place. In 2013, the Association used a small National Lottery grant to build a shared greenhouse space. The idea was to extend the allotment’s growing seasons, providing a sheltered space for plants. But it also encouraged people to work together.

Association members helped put up the polytunnel, building the foundations together. People began exchanging ideas, sharing produce, and experimenting, growing things they’d never tried before. They now collect and redistribute their surplus fruit and veg, and sell plants at the village fete to raise money for local community groups.

It’s created a stronger, more active allotment community. “Where you’ve got a group of people working together on something, it develops a sense of community, which wouldn’t happen if you were just individual allotment holders doing their own thing.” People have come together for seed sowing events, tree planting, building and mending sessions. Other allotment groups have come to Dunchurch for advice on grant applications or creating codes of conduct for using their own shared spaces.

And it’s led to connections beyond Dunchurch’s gardeners. The allotment now hosts a scarecrow festival: “Families from the village can come and view the scarecrows, and we put on a buffet.” For a Wildlife Wander event, they placed wildlife drawings around the site, creating a trail for children and families to find the pictures and learn about birds and animals.

“The greenhouse has really just been part of that,” the secretary reflects. “It didn’t facilitate that directly, but it’s been part of a developing story.” Having a welcoming place encourages people to come together: it’s now a space for fresh ideas and collaborations.

Breathing space to build capacity: East European Resource Centre, London

Charities work hard to make a difference in the world. That's their main focus – but it can help to step back and plan, to invest in more effective delivery. Dedicated funding gave the East European Resource Centre room to grow and develop.

In London, the [East European Resource Centre](#) (EERC) supports residents to gain essential work and life skills. As well as supporting this work, National Lottery funding has helped the centre make improvements to the way in which the organisation and its services are run. In 2016, its National Lottery grant included £15,000 to invest in new software, staff training and leadership development.

For the centre, the real key big thing was the chance to improve data collection and monitoring – which helps the organisation assess demand, see what's working, and record the difference it's making. The extra money meant EERC could invest in customised software: tailoring a business platform for the needs of an advice and casework organisation, and training people to use it in-house. The centre is still using it.

“[The grant] gave us breathing space, to get into capacity, competencies we needed to develop,” explains CEO Barbara Drozdowicz. It gave them a training budget for staff working on advice and casework, and time to research different kinds of delivery: “what people want and really engaging users, which we did through user forums.” It led to “improved service, which on its own I would say is worth its weight in gold.”

The organisation has grown from 4 to 31 staff. And having that extra time to plan has meant career development for individual employees, too. Barbara points to one colleague who has “gone through all the stages,” from answering phones as a volunteer to becoming “a really effective and efficient programme manager,” learning on the job with additional training. That is “partially because we did have that money from the Lottery, that we could sustain roles... we had the breathing space to be able to guide people towards leadership.”



East European Resource Centre

Support for a strong start in life

A community for every young person: St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre, Belfast

Everyone should have someone to turn to. Children and young people need trusted adults, who can offer practical support and advice to help with the challenges in their lives. In Belfast, youth workers at St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre are there for every child, excluding no one.

It can be hard to accept help from people you don't know, or who don't understand you. So building trust is often a vital part of support. Based in the Lower Falls, Belfast, [St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre](#) shows how that trust works in action, as it helps young people to develop social and life skills.

As St Peter's youth worker Stephen Hughes explains, "It's a very complex area: it's where the Northern Ireland conflict began." He points to paramilitary organisations still active in the community, legacies of poverty and clerical sexual abuse, and the local interface wall or "peace wall", a barrier built with the aim of reducing violence between Protestant and Catholic communities.

"When I came here, they couldn't recruit a youth worker," Stephen remembers. "They couldn't recruit a manager for the building and to put together a programme of activities that would have helped support the young people. We had a huge car crime problem, huge drug problem.

"And my first night was probably the weirdest night." When he arrived, he found "27 kids waiting on me: 'We're going to burn your car,' 'We're going to wreck your building'. And I went, 'What's going on, lads? What's the problem?' Most of them were intoxicated. 'We're all barred' – excluded from the building. 'Right,' I said, 'absolutely not.' Open the door, turn the key. 'I said, 'We'll talk when you get in. We will not be excluding anyone.' And that changed everything."

St Peter's has stuck to that decision. "We don't do exclusion. And that's a good thing and a bad thing. But we don't put any kid out, any young person, regardless of what baggage they're carrying, what their life experiences are, what conditions they live in. We believe that all behaviour is communication. And that every young person is entitled to access services."

"We believe that all behaviour is communication. And that every young person is entitled to access services."



St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre

Building different values

The charity works to create a sense of family: of people who will be there for you. “When you join the youth centre, you get that [youth] worker allocated to you. And they take that journey with you. You become part of a family.”

That starts with immediate practical help. “Poverty is rife in the area, so we feed them. Granted, it’s toast and cereal, we go through buckets of Nutella. But we sit down for a meal together.” The centre offers a mix of activities, making sure there’s fun as well as learning. “But the whole core of what we’re about is the connectivity, the attachment that the children and young people often miss in their lives. They have someone to talk to, who will listen and communicate with them.”

It’s tailored for different age groups. For the youngest, from the age of seven, it offers fun-based learning. “It’s very much about relationships, about manners and wee personal characteristics that children normally have growing up.” Because many of the children have challenging backgrounds, “where violence is normal and drugs are normal and crime is normal,” this work is about “trying to rebuild a different set of values and morals and lifestyles in the children, at a very early age.”

Work with preteens brings the challenges that naturally come with transition into adolescence. But there’s also a lot of preventative work, recognising local risk. “We have the biggest child sexual exploitation problems in the country and the biggest child criminal exploitation.”

Throughout, they focus on “young people’s positive attributes and skills and talents.” And they offer a sense of continuity. “I work with three groups of young people, and I stay with those three groups the whole way through their life at the centre.”

Clarity is important, too. “We have defined communication systems, defined working arrangements. Everything that we do is developmental: it’s framed within the young person connecting with the home, the school and the youth centre in the middle. And all of that is framed in safeguarding human rights.”

Developing the right mindset

From very early on, they focused on mental health. “The drug situation was, and still is, out of control. Violence came to the fore very early on – nobody talked about anything. The response was always fists, sticks, knives. It always went to violence.”

One of the “peace walls”, set up to separate Catholic and Protestant communities, is right beside St Peter’s building. “We had no relationship with the people on the other side of the wall. It was nightly violence and attacking each other. It was fear, mistrust, prejudice, and all of those things combined.” So Stephen started a programme of resilience training, which has “evolved and evolved over the years. It’s now being rolled out to about 300 youth workers across Northern Ireland.”

It’s meant finding and training staff with the right mindset. “We do build a particular type of youth worker, with a particular knowledge – a very different attitude and skill set. And we invest in them.” There’s a lot of training: Stephen and his staff had just spent a day meeting with other similar projects, “renewing our philosophy, talking about our methodology, checking ourselves. I think you need to check yourself regularly. So we do that four or five times a year.”

A good relationship with The National Lottery Community Fund has helped, bringing encouragement as well as grants. “I think I got enthused, that they could see the vision,” Stephen says now. After several small grants, St Peter’s was awarded £510,000 in 2018. “That initial relationship with The National Lottery [Community Fund] staff – it was caring and empathetic, and there was a wee bit of teaching in it for me as well.” Conversations about evidence influenced his thinking on how to record and demonstrate the work.

But they needed to shift attitudes among young people too, and in the wider community. “I think the first five years, the community and the young people really struggled with some of this. Their behaviours were very functional, very protective – they didn’t trust very well. So it took five, six years to start embedding it, getting the staff into that way of thinking.”

Stephen remembers how hard it was to get young people to buy into the process. It’s still a community with high rates of violence. When he organised his first residential, “they didn’t want to go because they thought that I was taking them to be shot. So I couldn’t get anyone to go. Nobody. And it was an activity residential that was near enough free.” He had thought the activities would be “a carrot dangling in front of them. But no, they were absolutely terrified.”

After five or six years of steady work, outcomes improved. “How that’s impacted the community has been significant. People that were haters before, people that sent their paramilitary gangs round the doors to threaten us, to damage our cars, to threaten our staff. They have backed off now. Because they can see the benefit to the young people and they can see the benefit to the community.”

Making the change

How do you address such real fears? “It’s a wee bit about technique,” Stephen says. “Sometimes you have to go and rap a door – ‘Where are you? Why are you not turning up? We’re committed to this. We’re going to achieve it together. We’re going to get you places.’”

Consistency is essential. “When they do give up – and they do give up easily – you’ve got to go back and try and re-motivate and reignite that. Sometimes they make mistakes, and you’ve got to go back again and say, ‘Come on. All right. It’s a mistake. You know it’s a mistake. Dust yourself down. Get yourself back on your feet. And let’s do it again, and get back at it again.’ That’s a technique that has worked really well for us.”

They brought the same persistence and commitment to work with young people already involved in criminal activity. They used a traffic light system to measure how heavily a young person was involved with gangs. “The initial intention was to grab the greens – get them away, to provide them with diversionary activities, provide them with a wee bit of developmental work to make them think about risk and consequences.” With the amber group, work was more intensive, while they aimed to “isolate” the reds.

This was the hardest group to work with: “I have to say we had no success with the seven who we banded red.” But they’re still trying, ten years later: “They’re in their mid 20s, and we’re still continuing to engage with them, still trying to get them sober, trying to move them away from crime, trying to get them into understanding what a good partner looks like in a relationship. Simple things like getting them a licence and getting them driving... as ways of getting them onto developmental pathways.”

“It was more about you understanding the vision. And that support has been continual now for ten years.”

Building relationships

Those lasting relationships can lead to extraordinary change. Stephen remembers stopping at a garage in 2014, and seeing “this crowd coming towards me with cudgels.” It was terrifying – “So I had a whole rant that night, and the three at the front with the cudgels, I went, ‘You, you, and you, into my car now!’” He talked to them: “Say, ‘just to come to the club, you’re going to get involved because you’re going to end up in jail.’”

Step by step, St Peter’s saw them change their lives. Stephen singles out one of those boys, who moved from youth programmes into volunteering, then to qualifications through Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN NI). “I employed him as an apprentice, using National Lottery money. Put him through university as an apprentice. Last year, he became the youngest senior youth worker in Northern Ireland, and is now managing Holy Trinity Youth Centre with a £500,000 grant from The National Lottery. The young lad’s name is [Conor Largey](#), and he’s a better youth worker than I am. He is superb.” All three young men are now professionally qualified youth workers, with full time jobs.

It’s been a long process – which is why it’s so important that funders like us are there for the long term, too. For Stephen, National Lottery funding went beyond the individual grants: “It was more about you understanding the vision. And that support has been continual now for ten years. This relational funding continues to be critical for us, supporting exceptional people as they work to make a difference in our communities.”

Building resilience for the whole family: CYCA, Carmarthenshire

For Connecting Youth, Children and Adults, working with children in crisis means looking at everything going on in their lives. Throughout Carmarthenshire in Wales, the charity supports the wellbeing of children and young people while ensuring their families are confident and resilient for years to come. Its mentoring model has helped to shape the work of local GPs and schools, to give children the best possible environment to flourish.

Connecting Youth, Children and Adults

(CYCA) is a lifeline for families in crisis – especially those at risk of slipping through the net, who aren't accessing social services but still need support. Awarded a £251,000 National Lottery grant in 2014, the charity helps with both immediate problems and long-term resilience, empowering families to grow and improve by themselves.

Mentors are the backbone of this work, with one assigned to each family – someone who'll be there for them, providing consistent, ongoing support in a way that works for them. While not every family is ready for counselling, according to Chief Executive Tracy Pike, the charity has found success in mentoring, "bringing a trusted adult into [young people's] lives and addressing the emotional distress."

Getting to know the young person's strengths is an important starting point. Mentors work with them to find out their likes and dislikes, suggesting activities they might enjoy, something they can connect with. The aim is to build confidence and self-esteem – whether that's through walks on the beach, art or music, mindfulness, or working out at the local boxing club. "The Lottery has enabled us to really branch out, diversify, and look at every conceivable mechanism of engaging with children."

Many of the young people haven't learned the social skills they need to navigate challenges around school, work or friendships. But taking part in something they love can be a real boost of confidence, with huge ripple effects in other areas of life.

After struggles with his mental health, one boy started boxing. "It helped me improve physically and mentally. You know, I wouldn't be the person I am today, without that." Focusing on what they want to do makes the young person more motivated to engage with the support, as Tracy notes that it's rare for young people to skip sessions like this.

"The Lottery has enabled us to really branch out, diversify, and look at every conceivable mechanism of engaging with children."

And it goes beyond the individual, recognising that the wider family environment plays an important role in children's lives. "To ensure the child becomes more resilient, we always make sure we work with parents as well," explains Tracy. So the team offers parenting advice, help with stress or anger management, and practical support with issues such as housing, debt, or substance abuse.

All staff are trained in trauma, and encouraged to see mental health problems in context. In some cases, they've found that recognising what a child might need or be missing has addressed their symptoms without need for a medical intervention. "Our motto is normalise, not pathologise."

It takes time to bring about real change in people's lives. While statutory services might provide six to eight weeks of counselling, the charity has worked with families for over a year: "as long as we felt they needed, until we felt the family had stabilised."

Building on this experience, the charity also works with families before they reach crisis point. Its training helps families manage their emotions and emotional distress, building up confidence. By working in groups, parents can form new friendships as they learn and see that they're not alone in how they feel and what they're going through. Those support networks mean fewer families have needed one-to-one help. Some parents go on to volunteer as mentor, with training to help them pass on their new skills. "It's so nice to be able to give back to the charity that has continuously supported me for years," one mother said.

It's helped to transform the landscape of family support in the region. The trauma-informed model is now used in [18 local primary schools](#), with further funding from the Waterloo Foundation. It's an approach that offers training for school staff to work with families, along with support for parents and carers and "superhero" resilience training for children.

"Many families have benefited massively," one school explained. "It has helped us understand some deeper issues that the family are maybe facing or have in the past, so that we are able to support them moving forward."

Inspired by CYCA's example, the local authority now appoints children and family mentors within its own departments, as well as consulting the team for complex cases.

The charity also leads on a [social prescribing project with Llanelli GP surgeries](#), helping children to handle emotions such as anger and depression, while offering specialist support for the whole family.

And it means GP practices now offer help within four weeks – as one GP explained, "the only other alternative for us is Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) with an 18-month waiting list where we know that most will be ineligible."

To get an idea of the impact for families, CYCA measures emotional wellbeing before and after people use its services, using [HACT's social value scale](#). "On average, there's a social value improvement of £10,000 per child. In some families, that's £25,000." It reflects how the charity sets children and families up for the future – not just solving problems here and now, but preparing them to deal with challenges and opportunities in the years ahead.

Setting families up for success: YDance, Glasgow

Being a parent can be hard, and new parents may worry that they're not doing it right. Community services can help, offering support to build confidence and make friends. In Scotland, YDance helps young mums play and socialise with their babies, at a time when support and stimulation can have lifelong effects.

In 2015, we funded [YDance](#) to expand its work with young mums. Its [award-nominated](#) Me and You project was built on the Scottish Government-funded Free to Dance campaign, which encouraged teenage girls to improve their health through dance. Inspired by the work with young mothers, a very successful part of that campaign, YDance wanted to make this more widely available for young mums.

Young parents can find themselves alone, without the vital support of friends or family, explains YDance's Alison Mussett. "They've lost friendships when they've had babies, and often they don't feel they can go out to nurseries or playgroups, because they don't feel confident enough."

Me and You provided an opportunity for young mums to socialise and be active, while meeting other parents in the same situation. The first block offered parents a chance to take free dance classes, with a creche provided. The second focused on using dance and play to build attachment and bonding between parents and their children. And there was time to sit down and be social after each class, with children playing while their parents chatted.

When the project was evaluated, parents preferred the more active first part. So YDance adapted its approach, developing a single type of session where new mums can dance and be active with other parents but also play and bond with their child. "So they are still making friends, they're still getting fit and they're still dancing, because that's all part of the class. But they're doing it with their baby the whole time."

Space to experiment meant YDance could fine-tune the project. "Without the National Lottery funding, we would never have had the chance to do that, to take that step, and to see which one worked." The successful evaluation "gave us that bit of evidence to be able to go to other funders," a proof of concept that has led to more grants, from different sources.

You and Me has continued in this new format, working in partnership with organisations who support young parents. From its start in Glasgow, the project has run in Edinburgh and Fife too.

It boosts parents' self-esteem along with their fitness. As one explained, "Sometimes I find it hard being a mummy. Coming here my girl and I have shared some special moments." That makes it easier to try other activities, to go to playgroups or socialise in other ways.

For Alison, "you can see a direct line from the dance sessions to the effect on young parents. They're gaining confidence. Quite often they start volunteering. They just become happier. They make friends, they have a nice time. They've got a better relationship with their children. You can see it happening."

Improving the environment

Communities making a difference: Friends of Langlands Moss, East Kilbride

Improving green space can be a way to mitigate climate change, as well as offering wellbeing benefits. In Scotland, Friends of Langlands Moss protected a peat bog - and helped reduce greenhouse gases.

In 2007, [Friends of Langlands Moss](#) used funding from The National Lottery and Scottish National Heritage to renew drainage dams for a peat bog near East Kilbride. The Langlands Moss bog, an important carbon sink that helps to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, was at risk of drying out after damage to its older dams. The work improved water levels, so that mosses and other bog plants could grow in the new standing pools, absorbing more carbon dioxide.

For the group, the success of the project led to further funding and work on the bog. The founding members have retired, “but a younger, enthusiastic group of people are carrying on the work we started.” The group has helped to raise awareness of how peatlands can protect the environment from climate change, working with many local schools and youth groups: “our work has been widely recognised in Scotland and used as a prototype for other groups.”

And it’s doubled or tripled the amount of carbon Langlands Moss is storing: it’s now approximately 90 metric tonnes annually. More damming, rewilding, and tree planting will help to increase this, as well as improving access for visitors – a truly lasting difference for the group, the local community, and the environment.

Encouraging local growing: Transition Turriemfield, Shetland

We know that fresh fruit and vegetables are good for you, and that locally-grown food is better for the planet. In Shetland, Transition Turriemfield finds ways to grow healthy food – even in fierce weather.

With dark winters and gale-force winds, Shetland’s climate can be challenging for growing fresh produce. But new methods are helping to change that. With a grant of almost £6,000 in 2019, [Transition Turriemfield](#) worked with schools to build knowledge and confidence in local growing for children, teachers, and parents.

Many schools already had “polycrubs” – a locally produced polytunnel/greenhouse hybrid. “Crub” is a Shetland word for a sheltered growing area, traditionally built from drystone walls. Like these older shelters, the new polycrubs are designed to withstand harsh weather. But they were often underused, since most crops would be ready for harvest in the school holidays.

The small National Lottery grant helped schools extend the growing year into winter, planting more varied crops and increasing the harvest. Workshops for parents and teachers included help to develop a seasonal growing plan specific to each polycrub, with problem-solving and advice on planning, crop rotation, and soil improvement. It held pupil workshops in late summer, so that children could sow and plant winter crops before daylight hours became too short for growth.

All schools are now using their polycrubs more, with **some now getting** “two and sometimes three crops out of every tub in the polycrub.” One school explained, “We haven’t really been managing winter growing before, and the advice has given us the confidence and knowledge to give it a go.”

Schools are now growing more than 30 different crops, including more delicate varieties such as aubergines and grapes. Children have learned about reducing food miles and carbon footprints through climate-conscious food and growing choices – often for the first time.

The project went on to **create resources** to help everyone in Shetland grow their own food, whether you have a windowsill or a whole polycrub – helping to drive healthy, sustainable, and delicious change across the region.

Restoring green spaces: Fairy Dell, Middlesbrough and Bracknell Forest, Berkshire

From “scary” or overlooked to much-loved community woodland: the regeneration of Fairy Dell, Middlesbrough and Bracknell Forest in Berkshire shows how local green spaces can be revitalised.

Both woodlands were restored through Breathing Places, a £9.5 million programme that we ran from 2006 to 2009, in partnership with the BBC. It funded more than 1,000 groups across the UK, encouraging communities to create, maintain and use parks, forests and gardens.

The Chair of **Bracknell Forest Natural History Society** gives a vivid picture of why the woodland had become neglected, before the society used a small National Lottery grant to restore it in 2007. “The woodland had become very overgrown. It was dark. It was scary. There was a huge amount of dumped rubbish in it. It was really full of antisocial behaviour, and it was a scary place to go.”



In Middlesbrough, the Fairy Dell park was simply overlooked – even though it’s surrounded by housing estates. “The lower part of the park is actually a flood defence area” – which meant it was often waterlogged, explains the Chair of the [Friends of Fairy Dell](#). “It was mud.”

For both projects, providing easy routes into the woodlands was the essential first step. Fairy Dell started off by using National Lottery funding to put down boardwalks, so that everybody could safely cross the park. Bracknell Forest Natural History Society brought together a team of volunteers, with some help from the Council and other community groups. “We thinned out the holly, we thinned out the sapling trees. We made a wider, more accessible place.”

As well as new signs, the Bracknell team installed picnic benches, ran guided walks, and encouraged residents to get involved. And as they worked, they spoke to people, discussing the changes and hearing what people thought.

“They would say it was a massive improvement. It was no longer scary. It was possible to go and sit there without fear of what might be going on around you, antisocial behaviour-wise. And they could observe wildlife.” The small but visible changes were important quick wins, helping people to rethink the neighbourhood.

For Fairy Dell, the new footpaths led to “literally thousands of people” using the park, both for pleasure and as a shortcut to get to work and school, relying on a route that was only available because of the refurbishment.

“It makes a big difference,” the Fairy Dell Chair explains, pointing to the high level of deprivation and the poor health of local population. “The money that we got helped this little area of the borough pull itself out of the ground.”



Bracknell Forest Natural History Society

“The money that we got helped this little area of the borough pull itself out of the ground.”

And they've made the most of it, holding football, boxing, games, and dance events in the park and encouraging people to improve their fitness. They've had particular success with events for children, "because they tend to drag parents or other people along with them, we get everybody involved."

The health ambitions have leveraged further investment, with the local authority buying £38,000 of exercise equipment. It's set up at different locations, so people "go from place to place, walking in the park and doing all the exercises you normally have to do indoors in a gym." They're accessible for people with disabilities, too.

In the 17 years since the regeneration, Fairy Dell has welcomed a huge variety of activities. The team always intended to get the public involved – but hadn't expected to host events including displays of flying birds of prey, gymnastics, walks with primary school children, and dog groups.

"When we set out, [saying] 'let's clean this messy, raggedy park', never could we have thought we would do the sort of things that we've done," the Chair remembers. For one recent event, they worked with local police to manage traffic. "We closed roads, we expected a fair few people to be there, but in the end 3,000 came."

With so much going on, there's a real sense of community ownership. One local pub recently donated £500 from its charity collection. The group often receive suggestions from the public, while a busy email list lets people know what's coming up – and whether they can help. "Because we've learned, if you ask people for help, it's amazing how they join in."

For both the green spaces and the groups that restored them, change has snowballed since those first grants. Bracknell Forest have won further grants as well as awards for ecology and restoration. For Fairy Dell, The National Lottery funding was "almost seed funding to start other things going." In 2014, a [medieval walkway or "trod"](#) was discovered in the park, with Heritage Lottery funding to support an archaeological dig. "I'm still doing talks to people for that now – we take our primary schools around the park and do a history route."

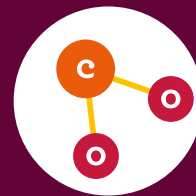
It's led to less formal support, too, as people feel more ownership of their spaces. For Fairy Dell, "Our litter pickers are now almost redundant because there are other groups who have kind of formed themselves – 'Let's meet on a Thursday morning, have a coffee, then we'll do some litter picking through the park as we walk back.'"

It's all adding up to a sense of shared responsibility – a recognition that these green spaces are "a resource that isn't going to stay there if somebody doesn't put some effort into it." And that the effort is more than worth it.

Different ways to improve the environment

Young people creating a brighter future

We know that many young people care strongly about environmental issues. To recognise and harness that passion, we ran [Our Bright Future](#), a £33 million National Lottery funded programme led by The Wildlife Trusts. Between 2016 to 2021, more than 128,000 young people took part: they planted trees, created and maintained allotments and community gardens, learned new skills – from beekeeping to farm maintenance, and cleared and protected wetlands and woodlands. Overall, young people worked on eight miles of coastline and 400 hectares of land – an area almost the size of 1,000 football fields. Their work saved an estimated 30,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions and diverted 1,343 tonnes of waste from landfill – roughly equivalent to the annual waste of over 3,000 households.



An estimated
30,000 tonnes
of CO₂ emissions saved

Energy efficient community venues

Talking about environmental improvements often brings to mind major new developments and expensive redesigns, but small upgrades to the quality, efficiency and sustainability of existing buildings can also make a difference. Between 2010 and 2012, we gave out 403 grants of up to £50,000 to allow communities in Northern Ireland to make efficiency improvements to village halls, community centres, and other facilities, making them more sustainable and affordable. For example, Community Recreational Arts in Coalisland received £44,919 to install a new heating system and porch to reduce heat loss in its theatres, while Cedar Foundation's new solar electric system generated over 12,000 kWh of electricity, reducing electricity costs by more than £3,000 per year.



Reducing electricity
costs by more than
£3,000
per year

1.5 million trees planted to mark the Millennium

The Millennium Commission was set up to celebrate the turn of the millennium, using funding raised through The National Lottery. One of the many ways in which it did that was by giving funding to the Woodland Trust to create 250 new woods across the UK. This resulted in 1.5 million trees being planted. For example, in Tramlines Wood, Devon, a meadowland was planted with scattered willows, with lots of open space to encourage a range of wild flowers to thrive. The area now connects a range of habitats along the river valley – and a new footbridge links it to the local playing fields, college and youth hostel, encouraging people to visit the site.



1.5m
trees being
planted



Evolve Nottingham

Welcoming everyone

Helping everyone belong: Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group, County Tyrone

“We shy away from being exclusive,” staff at [Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group](#) explain. In Northern Ireland, the charity offers multilingual advice with social events that bring different communities together. It’s about celebrating and building on everybody’s cultures and identities.

And it’s also helped change mindsets in other ways, offering new perspectives on old divisions. With almost 10% of the population now born or raised outside the UK, that new diversity “has helped to break down the idea that there were only two major cultural traditions in Northern Ireland.”

In 2006, a National Lottery grant of nearly £223,000 gave the group space to grow. Without that funding, “It would have been very difficult for us to survive, at least on the scale that we did.” By the end of the three-year grant, the value of the group’s work was clear: it now receives core funding through local government.



Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group

The organisation offers advice with interpretation support. For staff and volunteers, “part of our job description was to be at least bilingual, possibly trilingual if possible.” Advice covers health, education, and employment: as well as helping people find work, it’s helping more people access the health care they need in a timely manner, rather than waiting for their condition to decline.

The group offers regular free courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), along with wellbeing courses such as pilates and yoga, and practical skills such as food safety.

And it hosts regular social and cultural events, often focused on traditions and customs from outside the UK and Ireland. Bigger events include Chinese New Year, Christmas, and Halloween, while there are smaller celebrations for specific communities, such as Filipino Independence Day or marking 20 years of the Polish community in Northern Ireland.

Connecting with the wider community is a key part of the work, “at the heart of what we do. We send out the welcomes to the broader community to come and participate, take part, enjoy and meet people. We reckon about 30 to 40% of the people who come to our events would be from the local community.”

“The fact that they want to go obviously says that it’s working.” Feedback shows that people appreciate the chance to talk and share with people from different backgrounds.

Staff point to the way integration benefits the whole community. One remembers a Polish family who arrived in 2007, with an eight-year-old daughter. “None of them spoke English, so we started providing English classes.” The charity helped with that process of settling in: finding housing, employment, health access, and settling in to school.

“Just last year, this eight-year-old girl who came here with no English, she’s qualified as a consultant surgeon in Belfast.” Another participant, a young man of Chinese heritage, has won two All-Ireland medals in Gaelic football. “That’s what really good integration is, what it means. Families who come to Omagh have received, but they’ve given back in greater and greater amounts.”

Exercise for everyone: Riding for the Disabled Association, Glasgow

Everybody should be able to have fun, to take part in exercise and spend time in nature. In Scotland, the [Glasgow Group of the Riding for the Disabled Association](#) helps to build a more inclusive community.

“Our participants are often excluded from mainstream activities,” staff explain, with “limited access to exercise, sports, and youth clubs.” In 2006, we funded the group to run a “tinies” class, for children under the age of eight. As well as helping with social integration, riding classes can improve balance, mobility, and physical strength. As one child said, “It’s physio but it’s fun.”

Having a dedicated class meant younger children could develop at their own pace. Classes are smaller and shorter, allowing “that wee bit more support and a slightly different coaching approach... just building it up week on week, but being conscious of their age and their concentration span and stamina.” It gives children the space to become “relaxed and confident and happy on the horse.”

Horse therapy is a chance to exercise and develop social skills, but can open doors to much more. Families are often “looking for an activity where their child can participate, but fully participate, even with disabilities. And because it’s working with horses, we can. The children that are using wheelchairs or walkers, when they’re hacking [riding] out on the nature trail that we’ve got beside the river here, they’re up high above everyone else, able to experience that kind of freedom in nature. They can adapt playground games - bingo, or ‘What’s the time Mr Wolf?’ - on horseback.”

Parents are sometimes surprised by the difference it makes for their child. One teacher commented on how a child “thanked the horse at the end of the lesson – and the parents are saying, ‘No, no, my child is nonverbal, they don’t speak.’” When they came down to watch, they found their child “telling the horse ‘walk on’, ‘woah’ and saying ‘thank you’ at the end. And they were really moved by that. I think it’s because the horses just do not judge people. If you’re kind to them, they’ll be kind to you.”

Some of the group’s current adult participants started out in the tinies class, with some going on to supported volunteering. The group is also establishing more community connections. Nine local schools regularly take part, while closer links with schools mean students can complete Duke of Edinburgh awards.

Then there’s the Tea with a Pony scheme, for those living with dementia. “They can come down, groom the horses, and have tea and cake and chat afterwards. That’s a more gentle activity, working with horses differently.” They also run litter picks, and the local nursery comes and sings Christmas carols at the stables. By making riding more inclusive, they’ve helped to make sure everyone feels like they are a part of the community.



The Glasgow Group of the Riding for the Disabled Association

Where everyone can be themselves: The OutHouse, Colchester

Everyone should feel safe to be themselves at work, school, and in their communities. In Colchester, [The OutHouse](#) offers local support for LGBT+ people, while working to make society more accepting and inclusive.

In the UK, LGBT+ people still face discrimination and prejudice. A [2018 survey](#) found that more than a third of British LGBT+ people weren't open at work, for fear of discrimination – rising to two in five for students at university. One in eight had experienced unequal treatment from healthcare staff. And [in 2021](#), 43% of LGBT+ pupils were bullied in the past year – twice the number of non-LGBT+ students.

In 2016, we awarded The OutHouse £347,000 to support its inclusion and awareness training. The Colchester-based charity offers courses to help build a more welcoming society, which in turn supports more people to be open at the workplace or in education. “While times are changing, some people still hide their sexuality and their gender identity in the workplace for fear of how others will treat them. This is largely because, as a society, we haven't been taught or shown this is a natural way of life,” staff explain.

The OutHouse training addresses negative perceptions and attitudes in a non-judgmental way. “If you are not fortunate enough to have a family member or a friend from the LGBT+ community, you can be oblivious. LGBT+ people being a common part of society hasn't been normalised to you. By not understanding our historical struggles and culture, things can be said which come across as hurtful, even if that wasn't the intention.”



The OutHouse helps people keep up with a changing society. “Young people are great, because they have grown up with gender and sexuality more widely spoken about. That is leap years ahead of when schools and councils were banned from portraying same-sex couples from the late 80s to the early 00s.” This means in many settings, from frontline to office staff, people feel unsure about what to say. “The OutHouse training offers answers with context, so people can support colleagues and students with a greater confidence.”

The OutHouse staff saw a big change over the COVID-19 pandemic, with many more people coming out during or after the lockdowns. “Especially with young people, they maybe weren’t feeling the peer pressure at school.”

Schools wanted to respond. “They wanted to do the right thing. There were many discussions about, how can you improve your school to create safe spaces?” Greater visibility, from LGBT+ youth clubs to rainbow flags, makes a difference: “Making it a normality. It’s about informing everyone that we exist.”

Similarly, The OutHouse has built a good relationship with the local hospital, helping to make it a more understanding space. “If someone has transitioned, it’s like they have to keep telling their story to different people. So it’s about making it easier” – whether that’s an informed and understanding receptionist, or pronoun badges that make interactions easier.

The charity has worked with local and district councils, universities, colleges and third sector organisations, from the Youth Enquiry Service to St Helena Hospice. Word of mouth was so strong that The OutHouse stopped advertising: participants were sharing information with colleagues, recommending the training to other organisations, and requesting repeat sessions for new staff.

It all helps people feel safer and more welcome in their home community. One staff member remembers that, as a young person, “I had to go to London to discover myself and see more visibility of LGBTQ+ people,” but that’s changed. Increasing understanding makes it easier for people to feel seen and connect on their own doorsteps.

“As times change, we react to what is happening in society. Our training is currently being redeveloped and will re-launch in 2025 to raise greater awareness on LGBT+ issues for older people, and to give greater insight into the trans+ community.”

A safe place to learn and celebrate: Jubilee Church, Grantham

From English language classes to cross-cultural friendships, Grantham’s Jubilee Church has built understanding and cohesion, even in times of division.

It takes time and effort to make a new home, to settle into a new place. For migrant communities, there may be the challenges of learning a new language, adapting to different ways of life – and sometimes facing hostility. Starting out with a café that offered drop-in support and English language classes, [Jubilee Church](#) has grown into a space where people develop their own ideas to improve the community they live in.

In 2011, when it received its first substantial grant of £100,000, the church found that people were struggling to access local services and didn't know where to go for support. And people wanted both to integrate with their new community, and to make sure their children stayed in touch with their own heritage.

With that first grant, Jubilee expanded its English teaching, setting up two more classrooms. It supported people with employability and understanding life in the UK, along with help to meet new people and get involved in volunteering.

Since then, the church has grown into a bustling community hub. It has run a music and media project for young people, created a hub for Ukrainian refugees, launched an English conversation club, and built a parent and toddler group. Some café sessions support people with mental health difficulties; the church runs cookery classes with budget tips, clothes swaps, games nights, and big shared meals. They work closely with the local council and the police, and Citizens Advice now runs advice sessions in the café, offering specialist support in a friendly space.

It hasn't been easy. Police have had to be called to the centre when it has been a target of abuse. And though things have improved, those challenges haven't all gone away. "We still get the windows spat on, and threatened. But we have learnt, just clean the windows. We've got CCTV now – we're known as safe place."

That's also true for its work with young people with learning disabilities: "If they feel intimidated on the street, they'll come in. It's a safe place."



“We couldn’t have done it without the Lottery, because they gave us five years’ funding.”

How did they build that reputation? For staff, it’s meant stepping away from assumptions about what people might need. “You have to learn to listen.” While Jubilee Church runs big events, “you have to break things down into really small groups if people want to talk honestly and openly. If you put them in a big room all together, there’s the loudest and the noisiest – but it’s actually listening to the quiet voices.”

Funding has covered training for staff and volunteers, including in befriending skills, which help with “picking up on the things that aren’t said.”

It means getting comfortable with risk too; letting the participants to steer the direction. It’s built real trust: people feel safe to bring in ideas. Success looks like “beneficiaries meeting outside of what we do, then actually coming and saying, ‘Can we do this in the café?’ They bring food in to share. They celebrate each other’s children’s birthday parties. There’s a learning of how people live.”

That culminates in Jubilee Church’s [Celebrate the Nations](#) night – “which is something else! They all come in their national dress, bring a dish and bring a song, they dance and sing, and we all eat each other’s food.” It all encourages understanding: the 250 people who join the celebration are “probably 60% migrant community, 40% local community.”

It doesn’t happen overnight. “We couldn’t have done it without the Lottery, because they gave us five years’ funding. Most of the time, people only give you a year – and you can’t get anything off the ground in a year. It doesn’t give us a chance to make mistakes and to learn.”

The scale of the funding, and that readiness to take risks, allowed the team to focus on what’s needed, not just what already works. From the start, funding came with an external evaluation – which helped the team feel accountable, and identify ways to improve. That’s become a key thing for the group, something they build into any big project: “We always ask for payment within the grant for an external evaluator, because it’s a fresh pair of eyes.”

Longer-term support means they can build up resources. This has given the church an opportunity to recruit staff rather than just relying on volunteers, in addition to paying for the facilities. “We can have projectors, teach English. We’ve got proper books, we’re not photocopying pages! We’re actually well-equipped now. And we couldn’t have done that without this journey.”

Health and happiness

A new model of community mental health support: Living Well, UK

People with poor mental health don't always get the right help at the right time. Introduced in 2018, Living Well UK brings together practitioners and decision makers from the NHS, local authorities, and the voluntary sector with people who have experience of mental ill health. Together, they design and build community mental health systems that support people across all the challenges in their lives.

People can fall between services – too unwell for one, and not ill enough for another. Many face long waiting lists, or receive treatment that doesn't address the underlying reasons. And it can be difficult for professionals to implement new or more joined up approaches that give people a better experience.

To address these challenges, Living Well brings together practitioners, financial and strategic decision makers, and people with lived experience of mental ill health. Building on the success of [Lambeth Living Well](#), we supported [Innovation Unit](#) with £3.4 million of National Lottery funding to lead the development of Living Well in [Edinburgh](#), [Salford](#), and [Tameside and Glossop](#). Together they reimagined what an ideal community mental health system in their area could look like, with each local team having up to a year to work out how their vision could work in practice.

They considered where a community mental health service should be based, which professionals should be involved, how it would link with other clinical and non-clinical services in the area, how it should look and feel, how referrals would work, who would fund it, and what support should be provided.

To work through these questions, the three sites held 140 collaborative sessions with representatives from 50 organisations. Teams received ongoing support from experts, while hearing real-life stories that helped build [understanding of people's full life experiences](#) and how they affect mental health.



Living Well

“As soon as we started talking about stories, the way that we considered support really changed,” says Stacey Hemphill from Innovation Unit. Taking this wider view helped staff to look beyond diagnoses, to see the whole person in the context of their life. And it “really acted as a bit of a call to arms for a new vision for mental health ... a tool and a vehicle to unite people around.”

Each site found its own answers. Edinburgh, for example, already had a strong peer support model in place, while in Salford, the team could make the most of its expertise in working with adverse childhood experiences and trauma.

After a year of designing, it was time to start developing the new systems. In all three sites, the new system is run by a multi-disciplinary team – with mental health nurses, psychiatrists and psychologists working alongside employment coaches, occupational therapists, recovery workers, debt advisors, social workers, or housing specialists.

Peer mentors play a big role, especially at the start of someone’s journey. “I got matched up with someone who had the same condition as me,” explains one Living Well participant, which “made me feel at ease. Being with them made me see I could have this condition and still have a normal life.”

All three sites have now opened up their new community mental health systems. For example, the [Tameside and Glossop Mental Health Open Door](#) is the single point of contact for all non-urgent local mental health services. This team triages patients, who are usually directed to the new Neighbourhood Mental Health Team. Rather than having a fixed location, the team can meet people where they feel most comfortable – whether that’s a clinical setting, outdoors, or in a community venue.

Charities offer peer mentoring, the NHS provides therapies and support from mental health nurses and a consultant psychiatrist, and the council offers employment coaching. People are assigned a key worker to oversee their journey to ensure they get joined up access to the right support.

This model has cut waiting times. Between March 2019 and May 2022, [there were 1,830 referrals](#) and all but one were accepted. The median waiting time was just 14 days between the referral and initial conversation.

The impact on wellbeing is equally promising. Based on an initial sample of 385, more than half (58%) saw a “reliable and meaningful improvement in their recovery and quality of life.”

In Salford, Living Well acts as a front door to several broad pathways of support for psychological and social issues. Clinical and therapeutic interventions range from talking therapies like cognitive behavioural therapy and loss counselling, to crisis support and art therapy.

“A person-centred approach is something that we have talked about in mental health services for years, but this is the first time I’ve seen it in reality.”

Salford healthcare professional

To tackle underlying problems like loneliness or inactivity, about a third of participants (35%) have been [referred to VCS-led interventions in the community](#). Therapy to address trauma has been in great demand, with nearly a third (30%) receiving help. People are always welcomed to the service by a peer mentor, who guides them through support. Waiting times here are also down to 14 days.

There are early indications of success. The [evaluation](#) found that many Living Well Salford participants are now “recovering and staying well enough to live the life they want to lead,” with 55% making statistically significant progress.

Overall, three Living Well sites in England and Scotland supported 6,411 people in the first two years. The sites have received more than £10 million of new investment to continue their provision. And Innovation Unit is supporting new UK locations, like Derbyshire and York, to take up the model.

Space to slow down: Canal Connections, Leeds

Canal Connections, a community-based boat project, takes people out on the heritage waterways of Leeds. It’s a chance for people from different backgrounds to find common ground, make friends, and share skills – sometimes with lasting, life-changing results.

For Trevor Roberts, co-founder of [Canal Connections CIC](#), boats are a “useful communications tool”: it’s easier to talk on the water. In 1999, with a £4,000 grant, the former community safety officer hired a boat for a fortnight, and started bringing people together.

Some had troubled backgrounds. Trevor remembers one “very cocky, boastful lad, for want of a better word.” After multiple speeding offences, this young man was finally disqualified from driving. “That was his way of showing off, was the speed. So when I put him on the boat, the first thing he says is, ‘This is no good! I can only travel at three miles an hour!’ And yet that created the pace and the space to slow him down, physically and also mentally.”



Canal Connections

As Trevor sees it, working on boats allowed the young man to spend time with people who didn't judge him. Having space "to reflect and to communicate" won him over: he joined the project as a trainee. He stayed for a year, developing his communication and boating skills, with no further offences.

Three years later, Trevor remembers, the same young man "came and knocked on my door, with his wife and their newborn child. He was driving a company car. He was now a manager within an electrical retail company. So from [being] in danger of going to prison, he turned his life completely around."

What made the difference? "One that's stuck with me is always being there for him to come back to," Trevor reflects. Even after time had passed, they were still ready to welcome him. 25 years on, the charity is passionate about offering that stability: being a place you can rely on, which offers you practical routes to growth and development.

Peter, now the charity's project manager, came to the organisation when he was 13 years old, at the point of final exclusion from school. After time with the charity, he went on to volunteer locally and internationally, devising a National Boat Leadership course for younger people, and becoming a trustee on the National Community Boat Association board. "He'll acknowledge that that [first] intervention put him on a different path – he's put it all down to that environment of the waterways. It's a very calming one."

And it's a place to find common ground. Trevor found one Canal Connections boat in Lancashire, run by a group of older volunteers who needed a next generation to hand on to. So the charity took a group of young people out to Lancashire, ready to bring the boat back to Leeds.

The young people were from a Muslim background, while the older group were from a very white area. "So they had no experience of that faith, and never had a means to engage. But the young people hosted them, they cooked for them, but mainly they talked." And all sides benefited. While the initial plan was to train up a new generation, "it soon became evident that younger people had a lot to offer as well. A two-way education process."

It's something the charity has built on. When they bring in specialists for subjects like heritage or birdlife, they've found that sharing expertise becomes easier in the neutral space of the canal. Even if a subject is close to your heart, it can be hard to communicate it to a new group of people, especially those of a different generation or background. But spending time together enables you to find a common language.

With support of National Lottery funding, the project has been able to expand their offer and take more younger groups out on trips, away from their normal environment. To make this happen, Trevor's team worked with 570 local people, teaching them to crew and manage a boat. Six even qualified as skippers, who not only steer the boat but take responsibility for passenger safety.

Volunteer Graham, who had felt very isolated before joining the project, was struck by the impact trips had for a group of children with learning difficulties. Their teacher agreed, surprised to see the children interacting so easily with strangers. The experience prompted Graham to go back to college to study autism in children.

Looking back, he sees it as “the wake-up call I never knew I needed”: without Canal Connections and the input from the schoolchildren, “I would still be vegetating alone, blaming society for my lot in life.” For Graham, “getting involved with an organisation that cares for others... feels like having spring-cleaned your soul.”

“Getting involved with an organisation that cares for others... feels like having spring-cleaned your soul.”

Getting fitter together: Jhankar Beats, Glasgow

Social connections can be at the heart of happier lives. This is where our small grants often add value, creating places and spaces where people can come together and building a shared sense of belonging, plus positive connections and networks. In Glasgow, Jhankar Beats uses dance to support fitness and new friendships.

Dancing has always been a way to bring people together: having fun, being active, moving to a shared beat. In Glasgow, we’ve funded [Jhankar Beats](#) to run free or low-cost weekly Bollywood, Western, and Bhangra dance classes for a variety of age groups.

The classes can improve strength and flexibility, but they also build confidence. Many start nervously, but in the end feel comfortable to perform at the final event, which brings dancers together to show their talent and celebrate what they’ve learned.



Jhankar Beats

At first, the classes focused on those from minoritised communities, recognising that these groups had been less likely to take part in physical activities. But the programme was so popular that other residents wanted to take part. “So we decided, no, we actually need to welcome everyone.”

Along with feeling fitter, participants “start respecting each other... about their culture, their food, their tradition, because they start mixing with each other. So this is also our main aim, that through the dance session we connect people.”

More recently, Jhankar Beats has started a youth club and a club for older people, encouraging more connections. At first, people focus on the dancing – but then “they start talking with each other. They’re taking interest in where you are from...they are very good friends.” They’ve also noticed that young participants get more punctual, eager not to miss any of the dancing!

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