

2023 - 2024

EVALUATION REPORT:

Bearwood Community Hub

Bearwood Community Hub CIC

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Headline Statistics	2
Local Context	3
About Bearwood Community Hub	7
Marketing and Outreach	13
Experiences of Bearwood Community Hub	15
Arts and Culture	26
Evaluators Recommendations	30

Headline statistics for January 2023 - March 2024

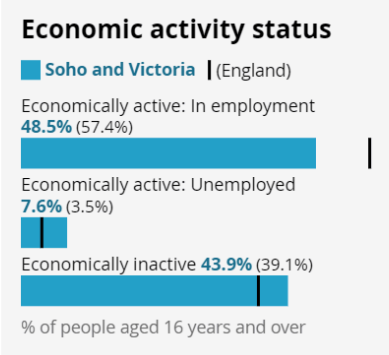
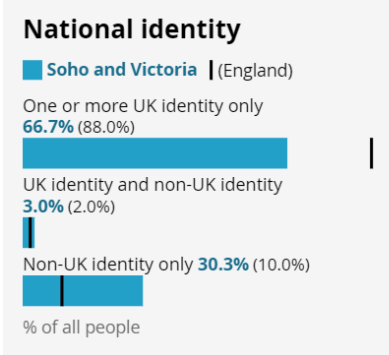
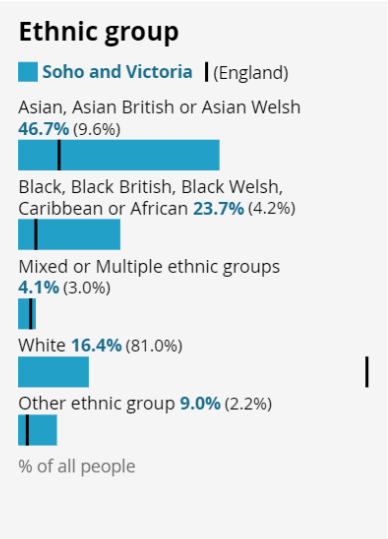
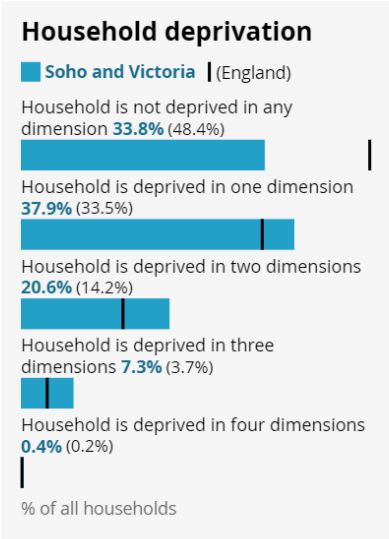
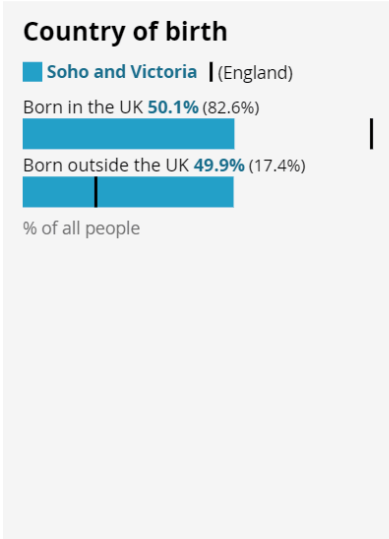
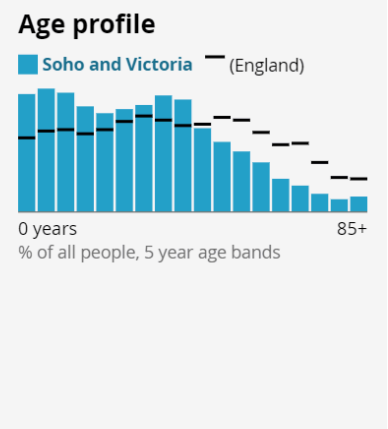
5399 visits to Bearwood Community Hub
22 unique programmed workshops and events in addition to weekly activities
41 volunteers
8200 website visits
20% more followers on Facebook, 16.6% on Instagram, 5.3% on Twitter
95% visitors would recommend BCH to friends or family 95% visitors agree that BCH makes them feel more connected to their local community 80% volunteers agreed that "BCH has positively impacted my mental health"

Local context

- Bearwood Community Hub is based within Bearwood which is in Smethwick, one of the six towns within the Local Authority of Sandwell in the West Midlands. Sandwell is a growing culturally diverse area with many changes in recent years. Population growth was higher in Sandwell than across the West Midlands with a growth of 11% from 2011 census to 2021. (Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021)
- Sandwell saw England's joint largest percentage-point rise (alongside Birmingham) in the proportion of people who were economically inactive because they were looking after their family or home (from 5.3% in 2011 to 7.6% in 2021). Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021
- Although Bearwood Community Hub activities are currently situated within the Bearwood area, many of their visitors, volunteers, staff, board and wider network people who engage with the Hub come from the surrounding areas which include the wards of Abbey, Smethwick, Soho and Victoria and St Paul's (Smethwick), Old Warley, Bristnall (Oldbury) as well as Quinton and North Edgbaston which are wards within the Birmingham Local Authority. The statistical data as presented from the most recent 2021 census shows that though they may be neighbouring, the population demographics can vary substantially (see data profiles on Soho and Victoria and Abbey wards below). The data profiles of Soho and Victoria and Abbey wards indicate the challenges and opportunities Bearwood Community Hub has on its doorstep. For example Soho and Victoria residents have higher levels of household deprivation and have a much larger proportion of younger population (especially children and under 35s) whereas those in Abbey ward are more likely to be born in the UK and be economically active. "The number of full-time employees in Smethwick town is lower than Sandwell [as a whole]. Abbey has the lowest unemployment (4.6%) with the highest in Soho and Victoria (6.2%). These figures are higher than Sandwell (4.5%). Abbey also has the highest percentage of retired residents, with 16.0% compared to 17.4% across Sandwell" (Source: Smethwick Town Profile 2023 p.4, <https://www.sandwelltrends.info/town-profiles/>, accessed 5 April 2024).

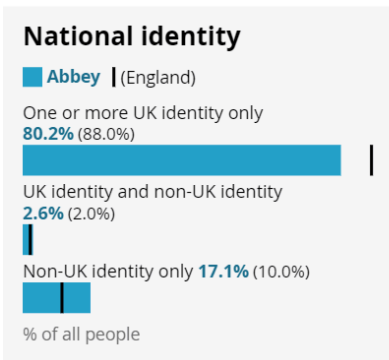
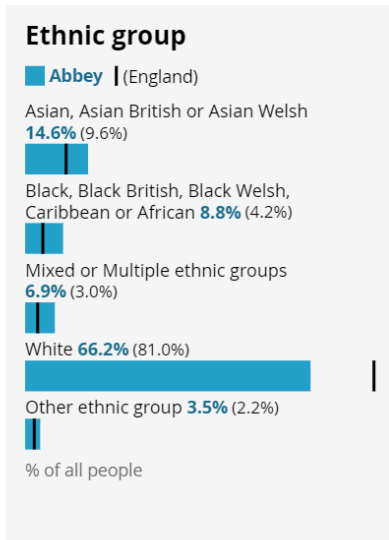
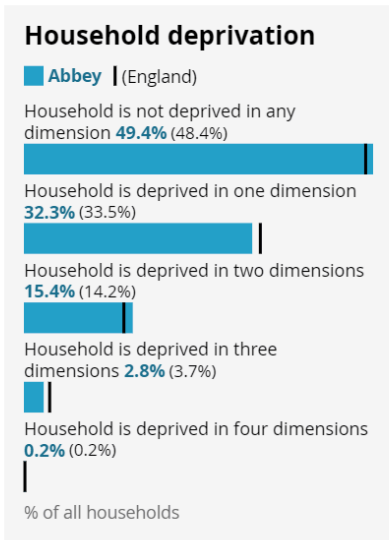
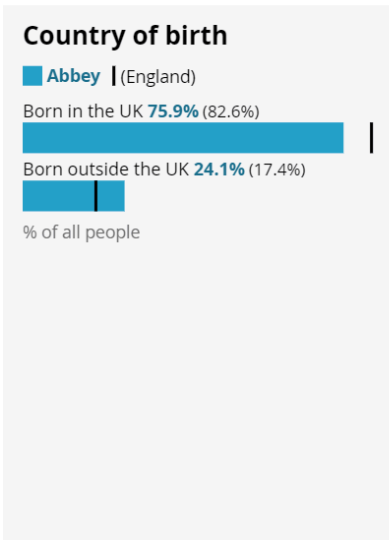
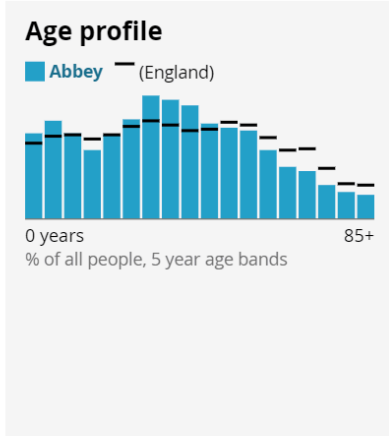
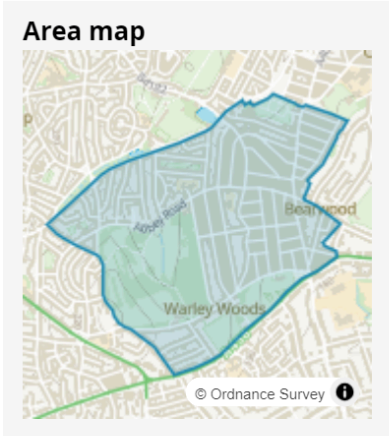
Therefore, having an in-depth understanding of the make-up and complex dynamics of local residents is crucial for Bearwood Community Hub to not only to root itself firmly within the community and ecology but also tailor its services, programming and support to meet the local need.

Soho and Victoria



Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

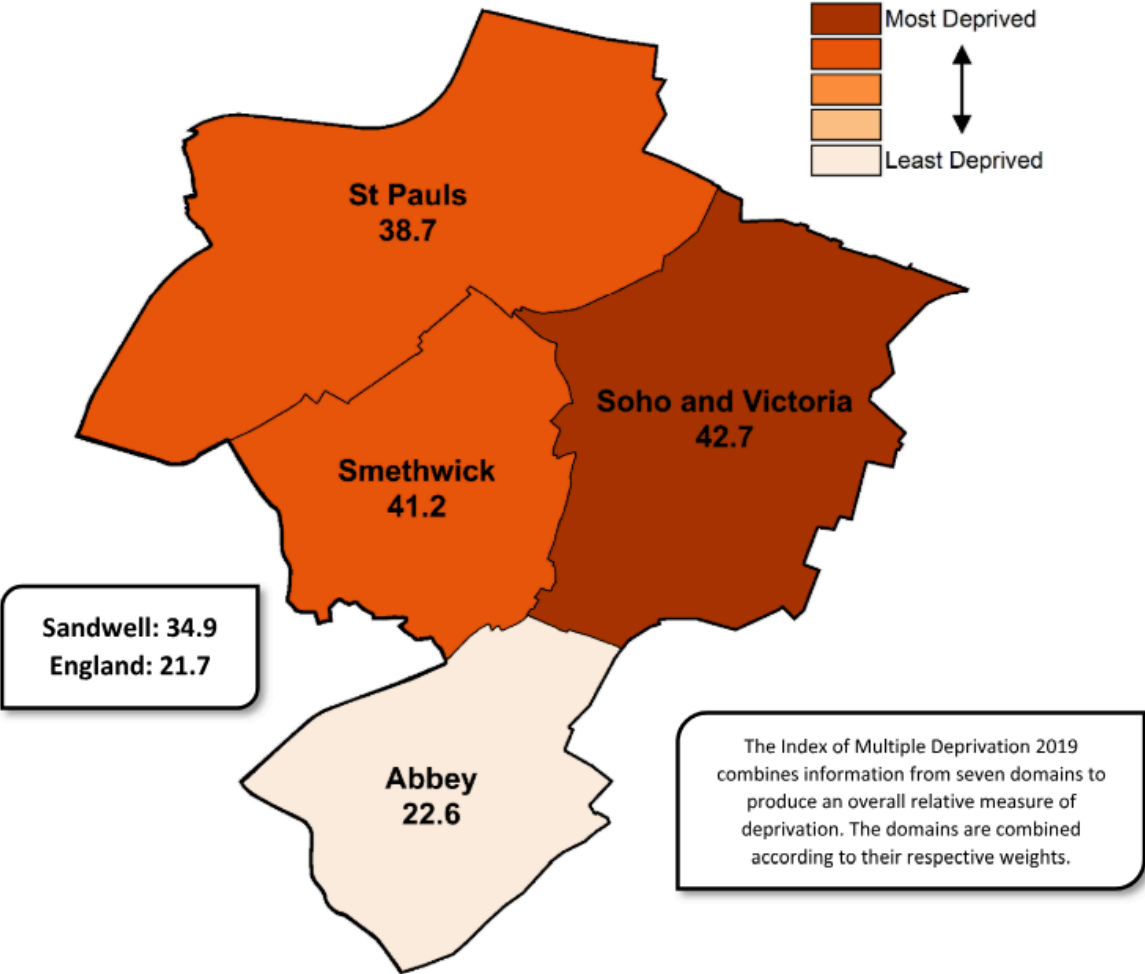
Abbey



Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

IMD map of Smethwick Town (Source: Smethwick Town Profile 2023 p.7, <https://www.sandwelltrends.info/town-profiles/>, accessed 5 April 2024). All maps produced by Sandwell Public Health Research & Intelligence Team © Crown Copyright and Database Rights 2023, Ordnance Survey Licence no. AC0000824500

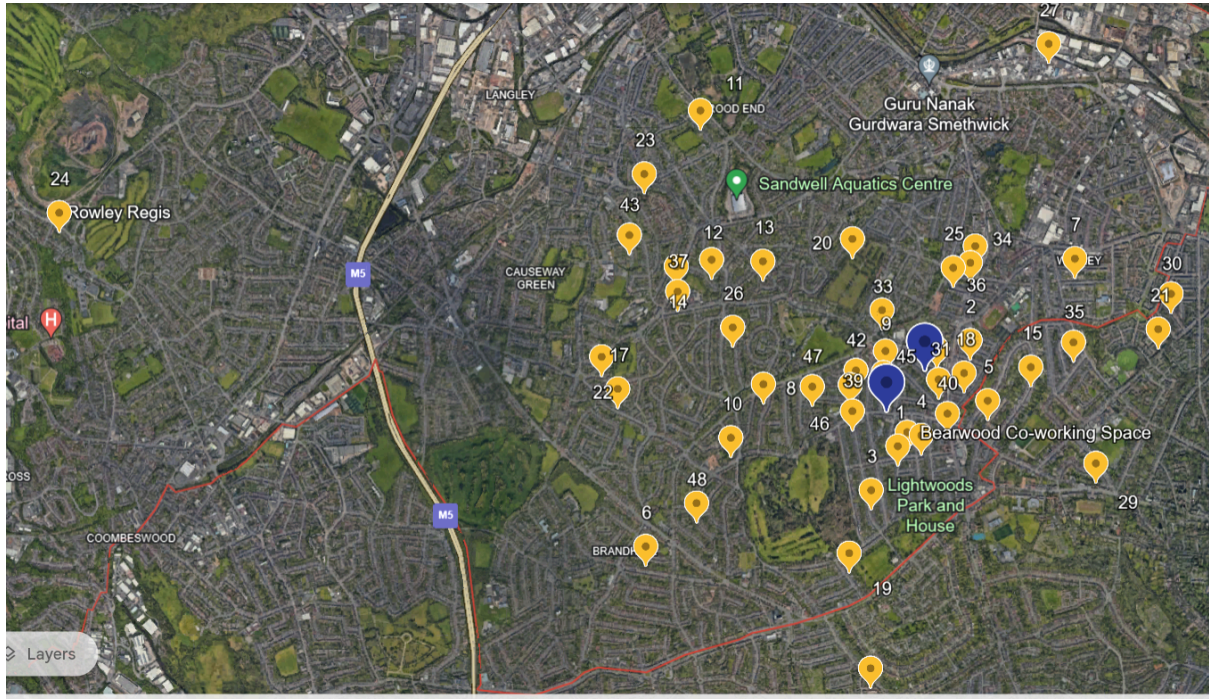
Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Score, 2019



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019

About Bearwood Community Hub

Founded in 2019, Bearwood Community Hub CIC is a not-for-profit, community-led social enterprise. It currently has 6 members of staff (3 FTE) and 7 board members.



Bearwood Community Hub has had an eventful year after dispersing their services following their move from their former location at St Mary's Church hall in October 2023. Their busy year consisted of providing the following services:

Mondays	Tuesdays	Wednesdays	Thursdays	Fridays
<p>Bakery and Bakery Legacy Project (Ongoing) Now the Community Hub's Women's group; the bakery involved refugee, asylum seeking, and sanctuary seeking women coming together to bake bread. The participants are currently designing and leading the next stage of their activities: Bearwood International Cookery School and a possible befriending project.</p> <p>Wellbeing Service (Tues - Fri, 9am - 1:30pm) Free 1 to 1 'Listening ear' sessions - provided by a qualified counsellor, life coach and mentor.</p> <p>Borough of Sanctuary (Ongoing) BCH is co-lead of Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary along with Brushstrokes Community Project. This is a formal partnership between the community sector and the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC). BCH successfully managed to get sanctuary status for the Borough.. Now BCH is focusing on funding to enable the capacity needed to implement the co-designed strategy.</p> <p>Co-Working (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm) A community business aiming to enable a more inclusive local economy and generate income. All the profit is reinvested into activities in the hub. It is mainly accessed by home workers, self employed, people that work part time in an office, and people who want to start a business. It is a useful way for people to network; those looking for opportunities in employment, sharing skills/knowledge, or to fight the isolation of working alone.</p> <p>Support Work (Throughout the week as needed) signposting and providing information, advice and guidance, and referrals to other organisations. Also providing particular items of clothing or household goods that people need. The BCH support ethos is about holistic support and self-advocacy.</p> <p>Volunteering Opportunities (Various, throughout the week) Volunteering roles include opportunities to cook in the kitchen for the community lunch, chat with our visitors, be involved in the bakery, litter pick locally, offer academic writing support, volunteer for Duke of Edinburgh awards, college placements or work experience and help manage donations.</p>				
<p>Stay and Play (10am - 11:30am) Weekly free drop-in at Bear Bookshop for messy play, crafts, fun activities and storytime for parents, carers, babies and tots.</p>	<p>Trash Talk (5 - 6pm) Weekly litter pick of the high street. Supported by 'Litter Watch' and was for people to litter pick, improve their local area and have a conversation.</p>	<p>Wednesday Warm Welcome (11:30am - 5pm) Weekly at Bearwood Baptist Church. Friendly and welcoming space for people to come in for a hot drink, hot meal, a chat with other members of the community, access other services - i.e. information, advice and guidance from the Sandwell Consortium Cost of Living team. Attendees can also attend an ESOL class, take part in arts, crafts, sewing, and access the free shop which contains household goods and clothes, mainly. There is also an after school stay and play.</p>		
		<p>Wellbeing Walk (Wednesdays, 12:30pm - 1pm)</p>		

		Weekly walk run by volunteers; promoting more active lives and offering people a chance to meet other members of the community and chat.		
--	--	--	--	--

2023 timeline:

	Key milestones	Unique partnership projects	BCH regular activities on top of weekly programme
January			Volunteers and Coworkers Social
February			
March			
April	Planned and delivered Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Partnership Conference 1		HAF Easter Playscheme
May			
June 2023		'Shakespeare in Sandwell' project	
July		5 x Work experience placements for young people from Shireland Collegiate Academy.	HAF Summer Playscheme
August			HAF Summer Playscheme
September	<p>Closure of the Bearwood Community Bakery, planning begins for the next phase of work..</p> <p>Planned and delivered Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary partnership conference 2 Sandwell awarded Borough of Sanctuary Status</p>	<p>Hosted four local artists to display their work for Birmingham Open Studios.</p> <p>Partnership with Beverley House residential mental health, enabling patients to re-enter community settings.</p> <p>Sandwell Consortium Cost of Living team started regular surgeries at Wednesday Warm Welcome.</p> <p>Grief Kind Space (development & training) (Starting Mondays 10am - 12 noon from 13 May 2024) A drop in coffee morning space for people experiencing grief to find support and community, with the help of trained volunteers in partnership with the Dorothy Parkes Centre and Sue Ryder.</p>	Youth Panel project begins, with the first meeting in January 2024
October	Enhanced Maddison's capacity to extend the Listening Ear project to Staff and Volunteers	<p>Sanctuary in Smethwick Film' project starts - promotion and sharing of voices from people who have migrated to Sandwell.</p> <p>Start advocacy with Corks Social Club for Bearwood Community Hub to be considered as purchasers in any future sale of the club.</p>	After school drama workshop Flying Seagulls Circus Show hosted

November	West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner Community Thank You Awarded	Director starts the School for Social Entrepreneurs Community Business Trading Up Programme Work Experience placements for young people undertaking Duke of Edinburgh Award.	After school breakdancing workshop
December			Christmas Lunch Flying Seagulls Circus Show hosted 1st Volunteer Monthly Coffee Morning Volunteers and Coworkers Thank You Christmas Party
Jan 24			
Feb 24	Smethwick Community Volunteer Awards: 3 x nominations	Venue partner for Black Country Touring for their Smethwick Puppetry Festival Bearwood Bites features the work of BCH on their channel. Sandwell Language Network funded ESOL class for the first time.	Bearwood Business Brunch hosted by Board member Andrea Walters at BCH.
March 24		Grief Kind Space Training for Volunteers, partnership with Sue Ryder. Informed by Corks Social Club of intention to sell their building, with preference that it is purchased by BCH to continue community use. New partnership developments: DORCAS End FGM advocacy charity Black Country Women's Aid	

Given how much BCH have successfully energised their local community, maintaining long-term relationships with other organisations, funders, and supporters has been essential. This includes:

<p>Agewell UK Bear Bookshop Bearwood Action for Refugees Bearwood Baptist Church Bearwood Bites Bearwood Corks Social Club Bearwood School Bearwood Yoga Black Country Mental Health Black Country Touring Black Country Women's Aid Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Brushstrokes Community Project Citizens Advice DORCAS Dorothy Parkes Centre Go Play Sandwell Healthwatch Sandwell Mothership Projects New Beginnings Community</p>	<p>Powered by CAN Public Health Sandwell Sandwell Consortium Sandwell Churches Link Sandwell Language Network Sandwell MBC Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations Shireland Collegiate Academy Smethwick Clothes Project Smethwick Food Bank Sue Ryder The Federation of Abbey Infant and Junior Schools The National Lottery Community Fund The Space The Wesleyan The West Midlands Combined Authority. University of Birmingham</p>
---	---

Methodology

This report covers the Hub's activities between January 2023 and March 2024.

When reporting on BCH's 2023, this report

1. Utilises quantitative and qualitative insights drawn from a bespoke survey that was sent to staff, board, visitors, and volunteers. The questions behind these surveys were made in consultation with BCH staff and aims to establish a baseline for future comparative data, and is informed by the organisation's latest theory of change.
2. Incorporates enhanced qualitative feedback from staff and volunteers.
3. At times, combined feedback from visitors and volunteers is used. This is because some volunteers access some services from BCH (like a visitor would). However, where appropriate, we have also separated insights from these two groups as well.

When looking at the volunteer questionnaire, 15 completed surveys were returned out of a possible 41 volunteers. This sample size represents 37% of BCH's volunteers. In this round of evaluation, 14 were active volunteers. This sample size reflects a range of volunteers who have engaged with BCH for a varied length of time. Three have volunteered less than a year; three have volunteered for a year; three have volunteered between 1-2 years; two have volunteered between 2-3 years; three have volunteered for more than three years.

When looking at the visitors' questionnaire, 39 completed surveys were returned.

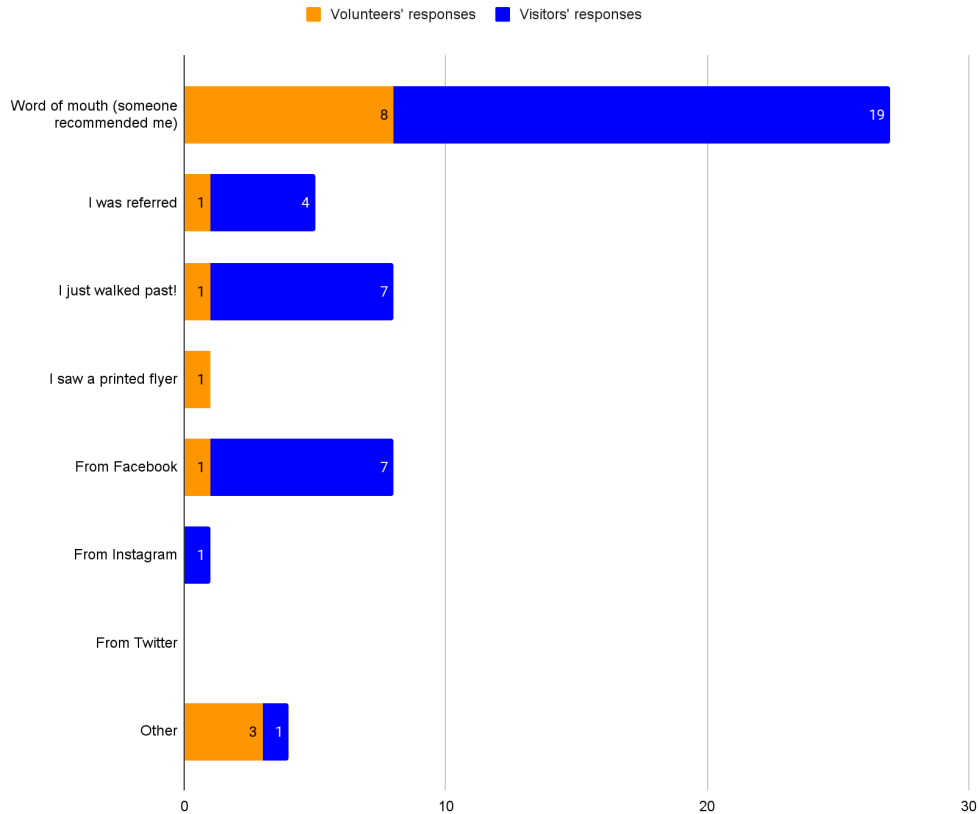
Marketing and Outreach

In terms of its digital architecture, BCH has a website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and a regular email newsletter. There is a limited budget, as such BCH relies on a freelancing member of staff who supports creating assets for distributing on social media only. Any print material is designed and distributed by the core team.

When assessing visitors' and volunteers' survey responses to "How did you find out about BCH?"

- 1) Word of mouth was the main marketing source for appealing to visitors and volunteers. The lack of mentions for Instagram and Twitter speaks to the organic appeal that the Hub has within its local community.
- 2) "I just walked past!" and "From Facebook" garnered the same total number. While the former reflects the importance of having a physical presence in the area, the latter reflects how BCH appeals to a demographic aged 35 years and above on Facebook. If there were to be any dedicated paid ads budget towards marketing, it would be best to use Facebook.
- 3) When looking closely at those who selected "Other"
 - Volunteers' responses: one was unclear, one wrote the BCH email newsletter, one wrote Citizens Advice.
 - The sole visitor who selected this did not go into further detail.

How did you find out about BCH?



To help focus BCH’s marketing and programming strategy (especially to avoid duplication, and to build ties in the community), volunteers and visitors were asked “Where else in the local area offers similar support and/or activities like Bearwood Community Hub?” They responded by listing places and organisations that BCH have already been in contact with. This highlights how much the team are deeply embedded in the area:

Partners named by Hub volunteers and visitors, that the Hub work closely with	Partners names by Hub volunteers and visitors, that the Hub have/had irregular contact with
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Brushstrokes ● Dorothy Parkes Centre ● The Parakeet ● These churches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bearwood Church ○ St Hilda’s Church ○ St Mary’s Church ● Thimblemill Library ● Warley Woods Community Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Abrahamic Foundation of Sandwell ● Bearwood Christian Café ● Brandhall Community Hub ● Cape Hill and Bearwood Children’s Centre ● Iley’s Community Association ● St Germain’s Church

One person touched on the Hub’s unique selling point, that “Lots of other organisations offer aspects of what the Hub does, but I think it's the only place that offers such a varied package.” Another stated “Nowhere [else] for free - we would have to go to Birmingham.”

Understanding how people experience Bearwood Community Hub

Understanding motivations behind people's engagement with BCH

Visitors' Top three motivations for attending events/visiting BCH

1. "To entertain my kids"
2. "To support my wellbeing"
3. "To enjoy the atmosphere"

Volunteers' Top three motivations for attending events/visiting BCH

1. "Volunteer"
2. "For professional/academic reasons"
3. "To learn something", "To do something out of the ordinary", "To support my wellbeing"

When cross referencing the visitors' and volunteers' responses to which activities they have the most experience of with the data of what their main motivations for attending BCH events were, the data shows:

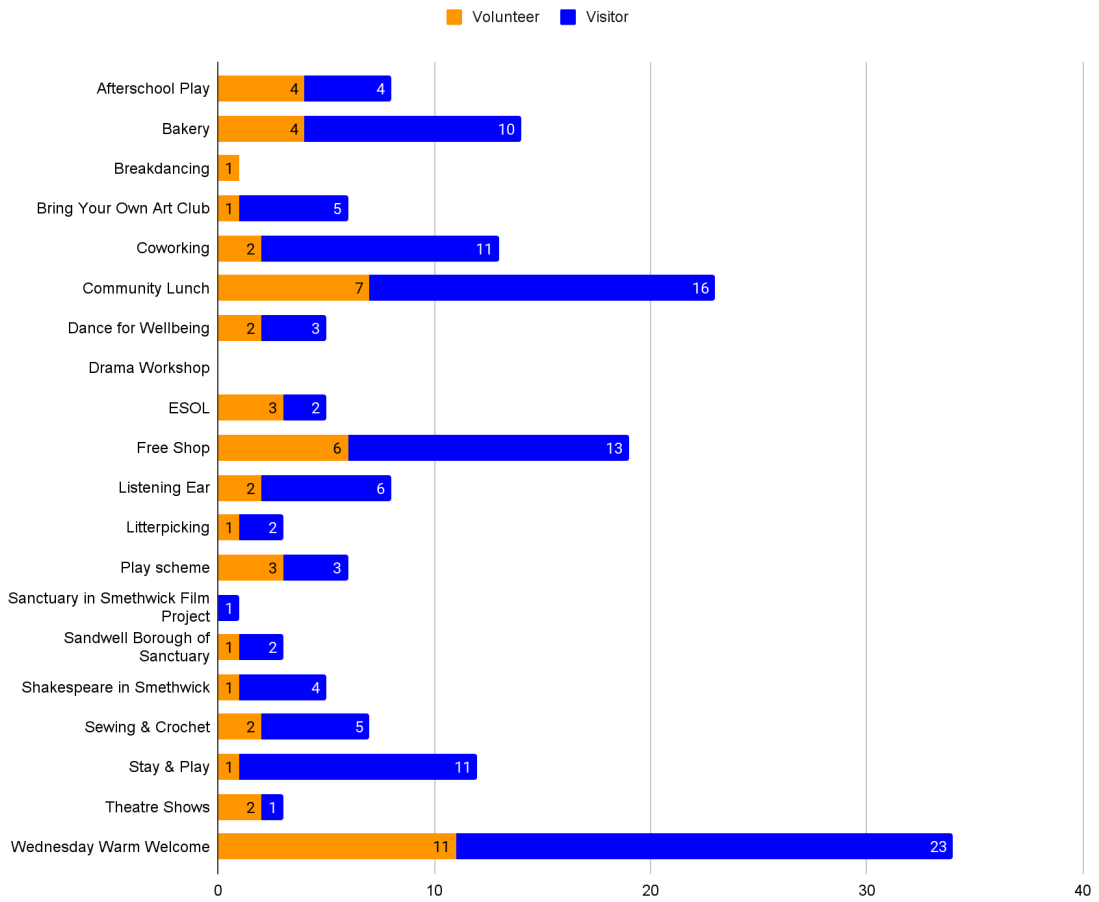
1. Wednesday Warm Welcome is the most popular activity that BCH offers. This unsurprisingly has the knock on effect of ensuring that the Community Lunch and Free Shop are well attended for both visitors and volunteers. One staff member remarked that Wednesday activities tend to receive more volunteers than for other activities (e.g. at the coworking space) as volunteers enjoy having direct interactions with members of the public compared to volunteering to support on light-touch administrative tasks (such as marketing support and outside of Wednesdays which have the most activity during the week).
2. After the Wednesday activities, the Bakery was the second most remarked activity for visitors. It is now the Community Hub's Women's group. For one visitor it was great for "encouraging team working in the kitchen delivering the lunches and through the Bearwood Bakery" and for another visitor, they want to "Bring back the bakery! (Although cost of living might make unit costs and margins a challenge)."
3. In joint positions after the Bakery and Wednesday activities are
 - a. The Co-Working space which is integral for BCH to generate income. It appeals more as a space for visitors compared to volunteers. This may seem at odds to the few volunteers who volunteer for professional reasons and haven't volunteered at the Co-Working space instead.
 - b. Stay and Play - it aligns with how for a high proportion of visitors, their main motivation for attending events at BCH is "To entertain my kids." The family friendly programming succeeds in keeping parents engaged.

When exploring the reasons behind visitor motivations for attending BCH events, those who selected "Other", three selected multiple options. However

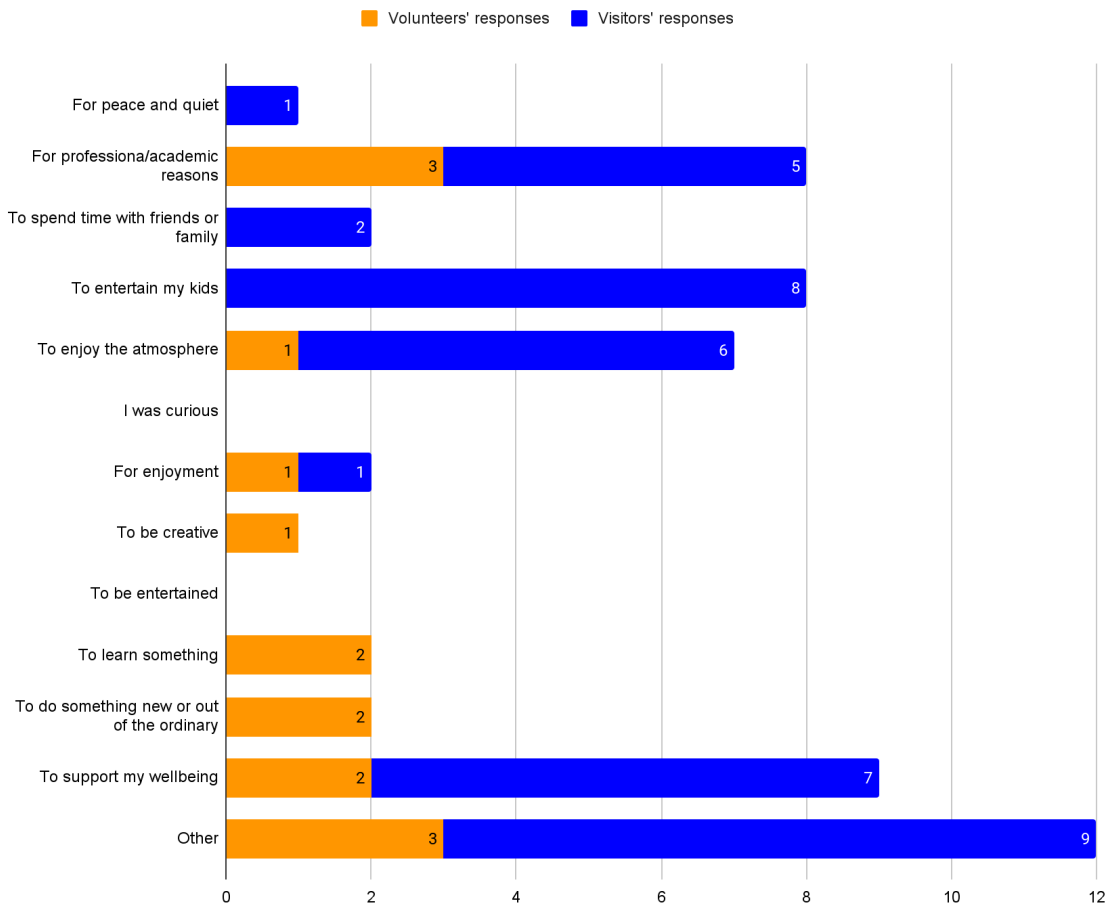
- Three volunteers voiced the desire to simply volunteer
- One visitor stated wanting to "Get to know my community"
- Two touched on answers that reflect the impact of the cost of living crisis, namely that BCH helps them "Get out of the house because it's cold" and "I was looking for something to eat and for clothes."

- Two visitors touched on “For a different working environment” and “For meetings”

In 2023, which of these BCH activities you have experience of?



What was your main motivation for attending events/visiting BCH?



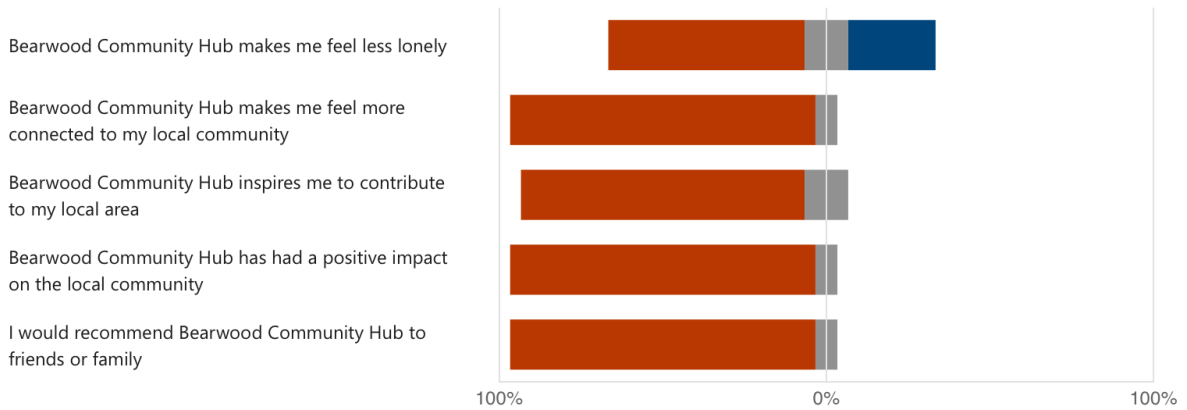
Understanding how BCH impacts social wellbeing

BCH scores overwhelmingly high with regards to gauging how they make those they engage with feel more connected to others and with tackling isolation as echoed by one staff member who said, “[BCH] has helped alleviate isolation and enabled the community to come together and meet people you wouldn’t usually have the opportunity to meet.” The organisation particularly scores better with visitors more so than volunteers. This may be because of how high-needs and vulnerable some of the visitors are and how this impacts their wellbeing. Although BCH has adapted to the increased demand for support through the extension of the Wellbeing Service, throughout the evaluation period, the evaluators noted the recurring concerns over sustaining optimism given the high costs of living. This was something that was picked upon through discussions with staff, visitors, and volunteers. It altogether underlines how crucial BCH is to the area in providing essential supplementary services.

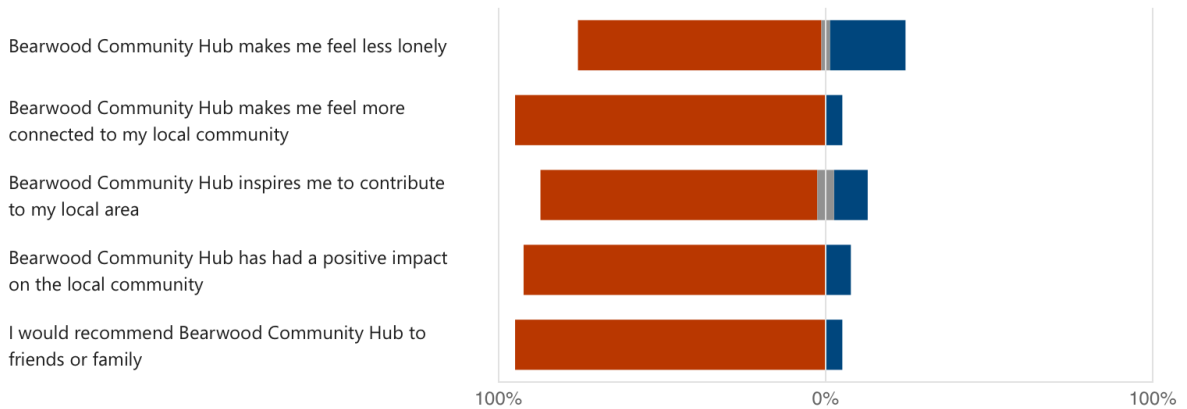
Volunteers

www.bearwood.cc
hello@bearwood.cc

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Doesn't apply



Visitors



“Mental health support for volunteers is a brilliant idea, we often spend time listening to others so it's great to know we can take time for ourselves too.” - Volunteer feedback about Maddison’s offer

Given the high-needs and vulnerability of some of their visitors, BCH had for some time wanted to offer more wellbeing support to its staff and volunteers. When one of the volunteers died suddenly in September 2024, efforts to achieve better wellbeing support were galvanised to help with the bereavement, and the Staff & Volunteers Listening Ear Pilot was funded and developed. Along the way, there were numerous short term, relatively small funding pots which enabled much needed work. One of these shorter-term funding pots includes a third grant from SCVO Vision 2030, granted in October 2023.

During 2023, the demand for wellbeing support increased due to a high proportion of BCH visitors struggling with the effects of the Cost of Living Crisis, including food and housing insecurity. As a result, the Listening Ear project was extended and rebranded to be the Community Wellbeing Service. This service incorporates the Listening Ear one-to-one therapy but has developed into

offering varied services including: psycho-education sessions, support for parents, self-defence classes and upcoming peer support groups.

BCH is now reviewing budgets and considering how to effectively provide a full time service, and incorporate wellbeing support to Staff and Volunteers into its longer term offer. This would also ensure stability for both our Wellbeing Practitioner and for clients needing ongoing support.

The team ended 2023 with the news that BCH was successful in gaining funding from SMBC to deliver mental health improvements in the local Black community, as part of the Better Mental Health Strategy.

During this year the Listening Ear project has been extended in a number of ways, most significantly in branding to be the Community Wellbeing Service. This service incorporates the Listening Ear one-to-one therapy but recognises the breadth of the offer that has been developed, such as psycho-education sessions, support for parents, self-defence classes and upcoming peer support groups.

The service has gone from numerous short term, relatively small funding pots that have enabled much work, but also created insecurity both for our Wellbeing Practitioner and for the clients needing ongoing support. In January 2024 BCH was successful in gaining funding from SMBC to deliver mental health improvements in the local Black community, as part of the Better Mental Health Strategy.

One of the shorter-term pots was a third grant from SCVO Vision 2030, granted in October 2023. BCH had for some time wanted to offer more wellbeing support to its staff and volunteers. When one of the volunteers died suddenly in September 2023, efforts to achieve better support were galvanised and the Staff & Volunteers Listening Ear Pilot was funded and developed .

The demand for the Wellbeing service has increased during the year, and a high proportion of clients are struggling with the effects of the Cost of Living Crisis, including food insecurity and housing insecurity. BCH is now reviewing budgets and considering how to effectively provide a full time service, and incorporate wellbeing support to Staff and Volunteers into its longer term offer.

When comparing responses to the question: “How has Bearwood Community Hub had a positive impact on the local community?”

Volunteers’ responses can be grouped as forging friendships and connections and for providing tangible support. Here are some highlighted comments

- “I have volunteered in many places. Bearwood Community Hub is for sure one of the best. The warm welcome is something that keeps you coming back. Everyone is welcomed with open arms. Hence, so many people from different walks of life attend.”
- “By engaging with the people and giving them support emotionally, physically and spiritually. They welcome everybody or anybody to the hub.”

- “[Providing] opportunities for all kind[s] of people to access excellent support of all kinds.”
- “Space and time for people to meet, new friendships, trying something new, essential needs like food and clothes, a way to find out more about the area, services etc especially for people who are new”
- “By bringing the community together and connecting us through common interests and uniting us and solving problems.”
- “Bringing many diverse people together. Counteracting loneliness, supporting wellbeing.”

The visitors’ responses resonate with the above but go slightly further. They can be grouped as (1) bringing together a range of different people; (2) providing essential services; (3) supporting people without worrying about money. Here are some highlighted comments

- "Provides a safe local play space without having to worry about cost"
- “It helps connect people who might not normally meet”
- “It offers an opportunity for people to come together, make friends and connections, learn new skills, or get support.”
- “There's so much you can do like the sewing, art club, meet people, you can get free stuff which is so helpful to people in this community. Just somewhere to come when it's cold is nice.”
- “So many ways, from supporting people in desperate situations to creating a real sense of community and place for all.”
- “This building is used for different things. And you get different groups coming in here like refugees.”
- “Creating a place for people to come seek support, bringing people who work at home together and connecting small local businesses.”

“When we first came to the UK, I came to work in Bearwood. However, I faced a combined challenge of an exploitative employer, rising living costs for me and my family, and had no recourse to public funds. We were recommended to go to Bearwood Community Hub.

I went to a Warm Wednesday with my kids and the team were so nice. I kept going every Wednesday with my children, and eventually volunteered. There is always that relief that there's someone at the Hub, and you're always welcomed with open arms. It made me feel less alone, I met so many people there from my own country and other countries. I can see that it gave people that sense of belonging, knowing that this place is open to all irrespective of where they're from, especially for migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. I see how they care for them, especially for those who are trying to learn English. And they don't discriminate, everyone is treated as equal and as humans. The respect is there for everybody and no one looks down on you.

What I loved about Bearwood Community Hub was that they always listened. I was signposted to Citizens Advice for further help and they got me a therapist. The team also made provisions for us - from finding clothes, food vouchers, finding school uniforms, sending links to new jobs, groceries, and accommodation. They even helped us with transportation to get[ting] into our new house. I'm just thankful I got support - they're my family for life. They've been there and still there.

The Hub has been a huge blessing. The Bearwood community should feel privileged to have the Hub there.”

- Trevor (a visitor, name has been changed)

BOROUGH OF SANCTUARY

In September 2023, Sandwell was awarded Borough of Sanctuary status by the City of Sanctuary initiative. This award was the culmination of two and a half years of partnership development, growing the network of local people wanting to support the Sanctuary initiative, and developing a Borough of Sanctuary strategy. The partnership is between the community and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and has been led by community organisations Brushstrokes Community Project and Bearwood Community Hub CIC.

Whilst the status is positive and recognises the commitments made by both the community (individuals and organisations) and the Council, much work is now to be done to implement the action plan. With regards to the latter, BCH is leading on the following initiatives:

- Management of the Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Account (via freelancer, budget from core organisational budget) to:
 - increase awareness of the initiative
 - share positive stories of sanctuary seeker contributions across Sandwell
 - promote the work of network partners
 - support local and national refugee rights campaigns
 - counteract the negative narrative about refugees and asylum seekers in media and society on the whole
- Management of Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary emails and campaigns
- Coordination (when capacity allows) of meetings and events.

There remains great capacity pressure on both community-led organisations and so work is ongoing to access the support needed to enable strong leadership of the Borough of Sanctuary initiative locally and bring people together to make change.

“Knowing that I am making a difference in people's lives, and giving them a space to be themselves when they don't have anywhere else to turn to, motivates me to continue the work I do at BCH.”

- Anonymous staff member

Volunteers' Experiences

“People are very friendly and we work as a team. We are one people, one village.”

- Anonymous Volunteer

“I feel like I belong in this community and have my place to help others”

- Anonymous Volunteer

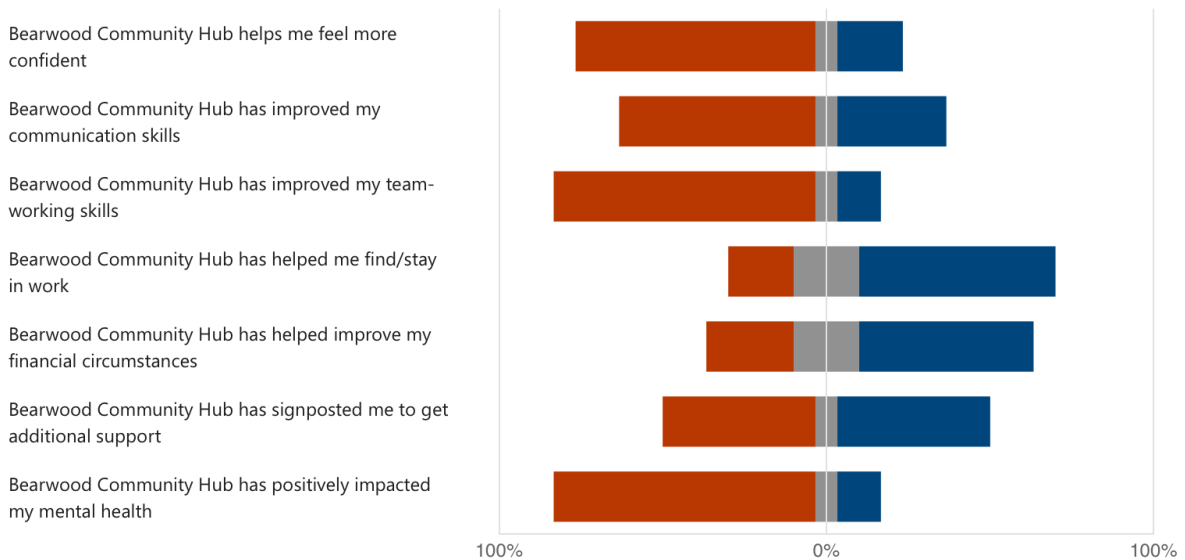
“Thoroughly enjoyable, [Bearwood Community Hub] makes me feel valued and encouraged to develop my skills”

- Anonymous Volunteer

93% of volunteers had overwhelmingly positive comments to make about BCH, with one person even calling it their “second home”. This is reflected in the statistics where volunteers reflected on BCH’s impact on them personally:

- 80% volunteers agreed that “BCH has improved my team-working skills”
- 80% volunteers agreed that “BCH has positively impacted my mental health”
- 73% volunteers agreed that “BCH helps me feel more confident”
- 60% volunteers agreed that “BCH has improved my communication skills”

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Doesn't apply



However, the survey respondents were split on to what extent they use volunteering as a means to access additional support and an opportunity to improve their career and financial wellbeing. This is because

- There were an equal number of respondents who both “agree” and ticked “doesn’t apply” with the statement “BCH has signposted me to additional support”
- The majority ticked “doesn’t apply” with the statement that “BCH has helped me find/stay at work.” This alludes to volunteers who may already be employed or are currently not in a position to seek work due to their current circumstances.
- The majority ticked “doesn’t apply” with the statement that “BCH has helped improve my financial circumstances”

Of the three who disagreed with the view that BCH helped them find/stay at work, two said their motivation for engaging with BCH was to volunteer, and the other said it was to learn something.

When looking into the responses of the respondent who was no longer volunteering, they wrote that they “prioritised a community project that was more genuinely diverse. Warm Wednesdays lacked

systems for meaningful communication, discussion, and equity in decision making. This mitigated against real equality in the project.” The BCH team are conscious of the need to improve what they offer volunteers and have since instigated frequent wellbeing check-ins and Volunteer Coffee Mornings (a social for volunteers). They are currently working on a 12 month training plan, led by the skills and knowledge that volunteers have said they are interested in learning.

After losing my job during COVID, it was really hard to get a new job whilst being in a bubble as my child is disabled. No job was flexible enough but I did not want to not do nothing. I looked around for things to volunteer at and that’s how I came across Bearwood Community Hub (when it was at St Mary’s). I went into a coffee morning and saw how it grew from people making things to eat to sharing. It’s such a mix of people - from young, old, those who are on the street.

I now volunteer regularly. On Mondays, I help out with Stay and Play to help parents new to the area and can recommend them to the Free Shop or the free community lunch on Wednesdays (where I also volunteer at). I also help with settling new volunteers in the kitchen after they get their initial training. Some of the volunteers we have, started from being a bit timid when needing Bearwood Community Hub, to now - they offer their ideas and feel worthwhile here. They’ve slowly built their confidence up and want[ing] to contribute.

Volunteering for BCH has given me the confidence to do things and say to services what needs changing, and encourage people to nip things in the bud before things get worse. I personally try to take as many workshops offered to me such as mental health, safeguarding, food hygiene, and the Red Cross workshop on pinpointing loneliness. I’m going to do a training on how to do a cookery class and I’m looking forward to that so I could bring something else to the Hub. None of that would be accessible without me being at the Hub.

I do wish we could do more but other places don’t have the same community feel like Bearwood Community Hub. I volunteer here because I want to make a difference, and be a part of making change happen.

- Deeanne

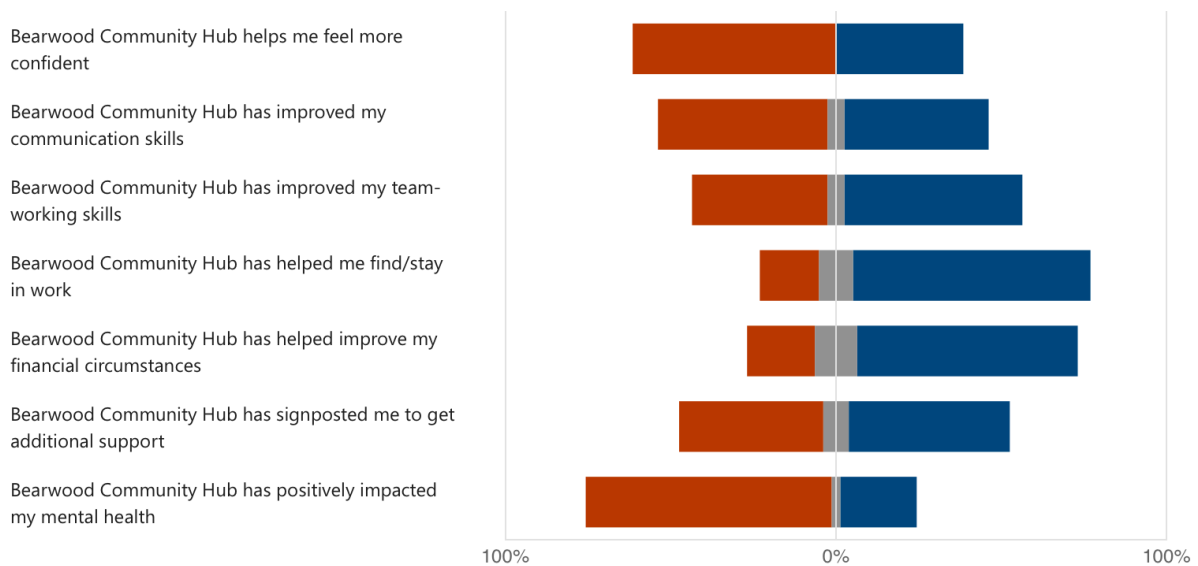
When asked to describe BCH in one word, “Welcoming”, “Friendly” and “Amazing” were in their top three.



With regards to gauging the personal impact BCH has had on visitors, there is stronger consensus that the Hub has impacted their wellbeing more than their ability to work in a team and their financial wellbeing.

- 74% agree that “BCH has positively impacted my mental health”
- 61% agree that “BCH help me feel more confident”
- 51% agree that “BCH has improved my communication skills”

■ Agree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Doesn't apply



There were more visitors who ticked “doesn’t apply” with the statements that BCH has helped them find/stay in work, improve their financial circumstances, and improved their team working skills. The latter could be because some of the visitors were new to BCH and had yet to be onboarded to what the organisation has to offer. For some visitors, they viewed financial wellbeing as literally being offered a job and money. This points to how there is more work to be done with the branding on how BCH supports the financial wellbeing of its community via:

- Supporting people facing food insecurity (with the Community Lunch);
- Helping boost employability (through CV support and providing training, especially for volunteers);
- Promoting a circular economy (through the Free Shop and the Co-Working Space).

Since moving into our new space at Bearwood Yoga, the coworking has developed well. The space is much more conducive to coworking, and feedback is often that it is cosy, welcoming and productive.

A number of regular coworkers have changed jobs during the past year, to jobs where they are expected to be present in offices more regularly or 100% of the time. This has served as a reminder that coworking must constantly be promoted, and the effectiveness of communications about coworking reviewed, so that we can increase the number of members and maintain it as a viable social business.

Coworking space was listed as a highlight for some of the visitors:

- “The community hub co-working space is an excellent place to bring people with different skills together to draw on one another/collaborate in unexpected ways, as well as its primary aim of providing a low cost working space for them.”
- “It’s lovely to feel part of a wider community with the Hub. I enjoy using the coworking space and sometimes visiting Warm Wednesdays.”
- “The friendliness and welcome are key reasons the co-working is so lovely.”

Although 15% of visitors said they would not change anything at all, 7% wished for more funding to support the BCH team, the rest gave suggestions which are grouped below:

- 1) 10% touched on the marketing. They wanted improved visibility of what BCH does, from more advertising and one person stated, "I don't really know where to look for what events."
- 2) Operational
 - a) Warm Wednesdays: they wished that the Hub was open more, that the space had better heating, more vegan options, and less standing in the queues.
 - b) Co-working space suggested improvements depend on the capacity of the team to facilitate a quiet booth for meetings in the current space, and have more coworking space socials. One person wrote, "I can do 9am meetings there. I'm not always sure if it's open early/ how it works going before others are in, which means I use it less than I might otherwise."
- 3) There were those who suggested activities such as cooking courses, programming with the Job Centre/ to help those searching for jobs; more activities and toys for children. Here is a quote from someone who focused on activities for young families and for men specifically:
"possibly do more day trips too, like Stratford upon Avon and Blackpool and Alton Towers. Those day trips would be really good for single mothers. We've never organised any trips here at all. And it would be nice for people who can't afford a holiday. Organised sports activities would be good for the men. It would be good to get more men's clothes and toiletries for the free shop too"

"Because it's open to everyone it's good unlike _____ which is family only, single people can't attend and puts people off. It's more people friendly here"

- Anonymous Visitor

"We have only used the Stay and Play on a Monday but the whole thing is brilliant."

- Anonymous Visitor

Arts and Culture

The mission of Bearwood Community Hub references the power of arts and culture to make a positive change to people. BCH's 2023 programming has included notable arts and culture activity delivered in partnership with freelance artists and arts organisations such as:

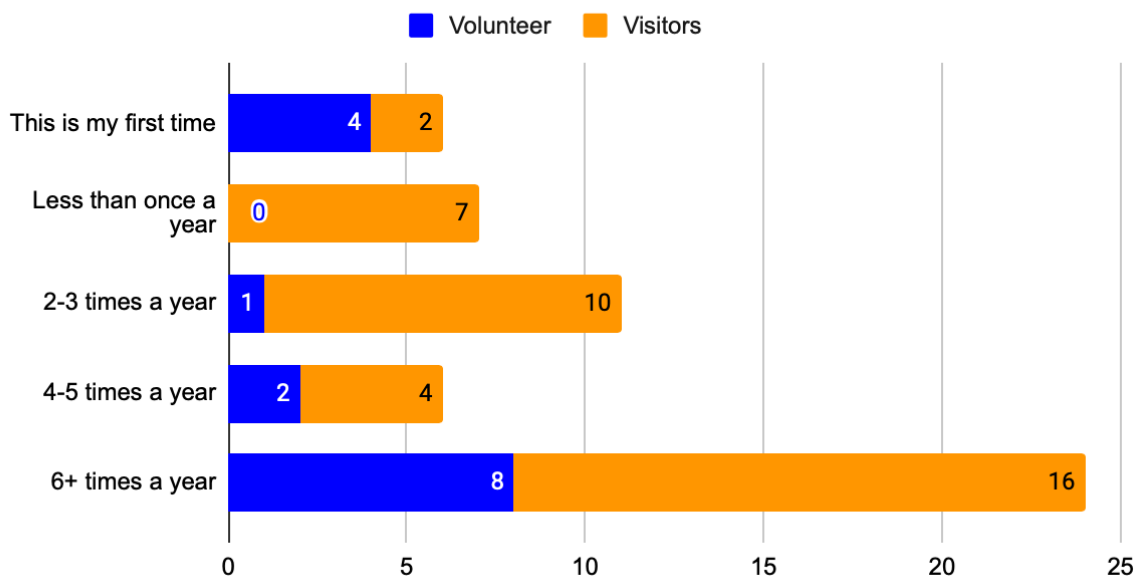
- 'Shakespeare in Sandwell': a visit of Shakespeare's First Folio with the Everything to Everybody Project (June 2023)
- Bring your own art club
- Smethwick Puppetry Festival with Black Country Touring Sanctuary in Smethwick film project

- Partnership with Make Good Arts CIC sewing and crafts activities at Warm Wednesdays

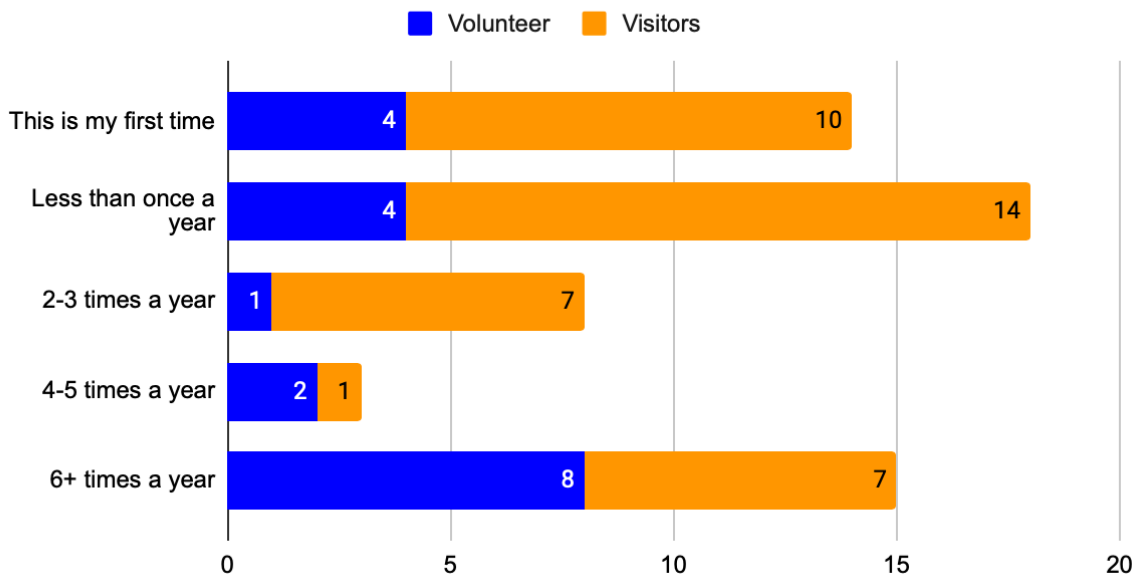
One of the Sandwell Consortium Cost of Living team has noted that “when the world is so tough there are sometimes very few ways that we can practically help people. That is why it’s important to do what you do. People need friendship and warmth and nice experiences, like the things you organise. It enhances life, even when life is really hard. It can help people to keep going.”

The ambition Bearwood Community Hub have to extend their arts and culture programming to be more consistent rather than project based has been hindered by the lack of sustainable source of funding for this activity. This is reflected in the data from the survey issued to visitors and volunteers. While 77% of BCH visitors generally engage in arts and cultural activities more than once a year, this drops to 38% when considering arts engagement at the Hub. This differs from the volunteers where 53% attend or participate in arts and cultural experiences more than six times a year, both inside and outside of the Hub.

How often do you attend or participate in arts and cultural experiences?



How often do you engage in arts and cultural experiences at BCH?



When asked what had been a particular highlight, Alison from Make Good Arts CIC said, “People’s kind of joy at being able to fix something especially when it’s something that’s really precious to them. So sharing that joy of people being able to bring something back to life that they thought was done for.” It was clear from observing the session that the visitors really enjoyed having a tangible output at the end which they had created themselves and got to take away as a physical representation of their hard work and development of their crafting skills.

With regards to volunteers’ responses which gave suggestions, four suggested performance arts (singing, dance, music, pantomimes); and five suggested improved culturally diverse offers, with a particular focus on “traditional” cooking and dance. Only two gave suggestions which differed from the majority, one suggested “makeup classes and home decoration classes” and another “story writing for adults, creating a zine or book, any kind of visual arts, textiles, upcycling.”

With regards to visitors who gave suggestions, although there is tension between accommodating for families versus focusing on adults only, there nonetheless remains a strong appetite for more arts programming:

- 23% of visitors wanted general activities that related to the performing arts (such as festivals and theatre). This figure includes the 10% of BCH visitors who wanted more musical activities - ranging from free concerts to activities with their children.
- 10% of visitors wanted more craft classes - one person suggested woodworking, others focused on textiles such as crochet and sewing.
- 8% of visitors wanted activities that related to food from different cultures - learning how to shop and cook from different cultures, and one saying “I’d like to see people come in with their ideas like the refugees.”

There were three visitors who would prefer events scheduled outside of the current offer, such as:

www.bearwood.cc
hello@bearwood.cc

- “More events in the evenings and weekends.”
- “I would rather events to be during school hours and not during holidays”
- “Quiet times and spaces would be great, difficult to do in the limited time and space, but would really help anxious and isolated people connect.”

There is the potential to revisit these scheduling suggestions when BCH has more capacity to realise their aims to have a “15 minute arts centre” (where all borough residents would be able to experience culture and all essential services within a 15 minute journey see www.15minutecity.com). Given the current limited resources, it is integral for the BCH team to continue signposting (to avoid duplication) and partnering with others as they have done so already.

The planned partnership with Black Country Touring could be beneficial in supporting Sandwell which is an area feature on the Priority Places and Levelling Up for Culture Places lists established by Arts Council England which have been historically under funded and have lower levels of formalised cultural engagement (see www.artscouncil.org.uk/your-area/priority-places-and-levelling-culture-places).

RECOMMENDATIONS

MARKETING

We recommend additional marketing capacity to support Bearwood Community Hub. This would raise awareness of other activities that BCH does outside of Warm Welcome. We do not advise jumping on trends and utilising another social media platform (such as creating a Tik Tok account) to appeal to different audiences. Instead, we advise the team to do the basics brilliantly. This includes

1. regularly updating the website;
2. framing the marketing of some of these activities as supporting financial wellbeing of the community;
3. perhaps allocating a budget for events photography.

REFRAMING WHAT IS OFFERED TO VOLUNTEERS

We recommend reframing and develop what is currently offered to volunteers

1. Firstly, looking into how to engage with the more active volunteers who would want to feed into what is currently programmed. The Volunteer Coffee Mornings are an opportunity to explore this further. Whether these Coffee Mornings are an opportunity to give team updates or become a steering group - either option addresses volunteers who want to engage more deeply with BCH. It touches on one of the volunteers' feedback where "Maybe looking at skills people have they can bring. So it's less about supporting people in need and more community sharing skills. So there doesn't become a them and us. Also there doesn't become a power imbalance of people with needs and people with power to meet those needs. What can anyone who walks through the door bring to the community, if they want to? Community empowerment."
2. Secondly, is there the opportunity to train volunteers in light touch administrative tasks that support BCH marketing? This can include data entry, support with the website, and/or training volunteers to take photographs of what BCH does. This would help volunteers who aren't available to support on Wednesdays and/or are looking to go into office roles, or look to improve their computer/digital skills.

DIVERSIFYING PROGRAMMING OFFERING

To ensure that there is greater sense of relevance and accessibility to the programme of activities on offer, we recommend including diverse voices representative of the social demographics of BCH volunteers and visitors. This includes:

1. Looking into cultural diverse offers for arts programming and food for the Warm Wednesdays, so it does not just sit with the core team.
2. Additional support for men's mental health. This was something that was remarked upon by volunteers and visitors especially at Warm Welcome. They highlighted the comparative lack of offers at the Free Shop especially. It would be good to gauge whether there needs to be a

www.bearwood.cc
hello@bearwood.cc

Bearwood Community Hub CIC
Evaluation Report 2023 -2024

more targeted approach with Listening Ear or if there is capacity to find partnerships to support in this endeavour.

3. While there is a hearty appetite for arts and cultural programming amongst visitors, there is a stronger desire for performance arts. It would be worthwhile to develop partnerships and opportunities with local organisations.
4. “And when the cultural sector works closely with community partners, the activity itself is richer and more relevant, resources go further, and greater civic and social benefits are delivered.” (ACE Let’s Create Strategy 2020-2030)

ESTABLISHING A PERMANENT VENUE FOR BEARWOOD COMMUNITY HUB

We also recommend establishing a dynamic company structure which builds in capacity for BCH to continue its development towards finding a permanent base. Comments from the board of trustees and staff members also support this. This would address issues such as brand identity and recognition within the community, sustainability of the organisation, designing the spaces which have the most utility for the needs of the organisation and meeting community need, e.g. private spaces, kitchen, large enough for activities such as the Free Shop, Warm Wednesdays and Stay and Play. A permanent venue would also invite the potential to revisit past programming and remodel it to be a sustainable enterprise such as the Bakery.

For this to happen, it is integral to structure staffing roles, especially for leadership, to dedicate to this aim and the actions which are required to fulfil it such as increasing the profile and awareness of the hub, networking with political influencers, local businesses, fundraising, and time for consultancy. For this to happen, there needs to be delegated responsibility of delivery, increased staffing to increase strategic capacity, support from the board with the skill sets, knowledge and networks required to attain a permanent base.

Bearwood Community Hub would like to thank...

- **SCVO**
- **National Lottery Reaching Community Fund**
- **Arts Council England**
- **The Wesleyan Foundation**