
Bearwood Community Hub



Bearwood Community Hub CIC

SCVO BOUNCE Programme (CAO) Funding Evaluation Report

May 2021

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About:

Grant awarded to:

Bearwood
Community
Hub CIC

Granted:

September 2018. Started
using September 2019,
still benefiting from it in
May 2021.

Amount Awarded:

£5,000

Additional benefits:

Clore Leadership Course
provision and increased
local network.

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Any changes?

The main area of our work that has changed is that whilst carrying out our engagement work we have been working with people to establish who would like to take part in the Architectural Engagement work. Both to give opinions on the designs and to lead workshops. With this in mind we had planned in detail a focused fortnight of activities designed to bring people together to co-create the final designs for the Hub. However, due to unexpected changes beyond our control, we may be functioning as a nomadic organisation in Bearwood.

Fortunately, through this work we have gained a greater understanding of what a community building in Bearwood needs to take into account. A space in Bearwood needs to be dementia friendly, accessible for people with disabilities, neurodiverse people, it needs to be interfaith, multigenerational. Although we will no longer be taking on a renovation of St Mary's we now know what our community expects of us as an organisation if we were to take on different space.

Who we are:

The Bearwood Community Hub CIC (BCH) is a community led organisation. Our emerging mission is: To enable every person in Bearwood and surrounding areas to connect, collaborate and create in ways that are right and beneficial for Bearwood people, and in ways that foster belonging within and leadership by the communities we are part of.

We are bringing together local people, local communities, local organisations, local research, local experience, and local leaders to determine what the mission should be and how we, as a geographic community with many self-identifying communities within it, can best work together to create positive change.

Where we want to be:

We want to be able to provide a *'single front door'* to bring people together to be the kick-starters. We want to be the incubator, accelerators, connectors, supporters, enablers, innovators, collaborators, activators and partners.

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Our Story so far:

Since September 2020 The Bearwood Community Hub CIC has had staff who work full time on projects and experiment with what works well and what doesn't. Prior to that, one Director was paid as a project manager to engage with the local community to co-create the Hub's vision.

We have learnt an incredible amount during this time frame, and it was the Bounce grant that kick started our activities and our real-time learning. For example, we have learnt that young families need to be able to access playgroups, for children to have the space to socialise and play. As soon as we were able, we opened up our community garden for this purpose and have received feedback that it's been a vital service for the parents and children attending.

Contrastingly, after learning about student isolation we set up a pilot to invite local university students to join interdisciplinary study groups and although we had 5 sign ups only one student joined us.

We have also been able to experiment on how to work with people offline during a pandemic, through delivering leaflets and litter picks (Bearwood Bonds). We have continued to strengthen and develop our partnerships with local organisations through the delivery of Online Art Workshops. As we are in a crucial developmental stage it is important for us to understand how our knowledge, resources and networks impact our community.

Projects that have benefited from Bounce Funding:

Whilst the funding has not necessarily been spent on direct project costs due to retrospective reallocation of funding following recent funding challenges, it was a launchpad from which we were able to launch, to start our projects, conversations and funding applications. Furthermore, the Clore Leadership Course has been critical in helping our organisational leadership to develop, including how to tell our story, how to create and lead a diverse team, and how to focus on our own leadership practice whilst still delivering.

We are focused on the **quality of connections** we make with people. This development of shared experience and sense of place takes time. Our engagement work has been rich and relational. We have prioritised workshops, discussion and conversation whilst still collecting data through forms and survey feedback. It has allowed us to surface different voices and (sometimes conflicting) opinions from across our community about what is required in the community and how we need to make it happen.

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Manifesto

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SCVO
connecting · enabling · transforming

Partnerships & projects delivered in partnership:

01

Online Art Workshops with Dorothy Parkes Centre (DPC):



The Hub had plans to develop an Arts Pilot, at around the same time the Dorothy Parkes Centre had some funding for art and music sessions. Both organisations believe that more can be achieved through building strong partnerships and therefore it made sense to set up the Online Art Workshops together. To share resources, skills and knowledge that benefit the wider community. We came together to develop a 5 week arts programme with the aim of reducing isolation, improving mental wellbeing and promoting different art forms.

35 participants, mostly women, children and 2 men. Facilitated by the 5 artists, Robert Bruce (Dorothy Parkes Centre), Sally Taylor (Bearwood Community Hub) and Renata (Bearwood Community Hub).

The Hub's role in the project was to recruit artists, support artists in developing their workshops, create social media posts, engage with participants, collect anonymous feedback from the workshops. Approximately 33 hours spent on this project (BCH).

"It made a huge difference. It was so lovely to do something together with people and chat and no one was made to feel they were doing it wrong. Everyone was very accepting"
-Anon Feedback

02



Bearwood Tapestry with We Are Bearwood (WAB):

The Bearwood Tapestry was set up to co-create a tangible creative legacy for and by Bearwood. On its completion it will be displayed where the Hub finds a home.

With over 100 participants across Bearwood, Smethwick and even West Bromwich have been taking part. Participants are mainly women from different backgrounds including a group of newly arrived women referred to us by Mothership Projects CIC Facilitated by a Lead Volunteer from We Are Bearwood, Textile Artist Maria Wigley, Renata Lasocki (Bearwood Community Hub) and Sarah-Ann Cromwell (volunteer creating a digital legacy).

Renata (Community Engagement Lead) is an accomplished stitcher/embroiderer and was able to support the project through running an introduction to embroidery, hosting online Sew & Chats, creating online assets and supporting volunteer to develop a digital legacy for the tapestry. 12 of hours have been spent on the project since March 2021.



(Participant's work in progress).

03



Borough Of Sanctuary Sandwell (BOSS):

Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell is a network of organisations and individuals who have committed to ensuring that Sandwell is a welcoming place for all who seek Sanctuary here. Initially set up by Bearwood Action for Refugees and Brushstrokes Community Project, the network was stalling because of a lack of capacity by the frontline founding organisations to convene. Bearwood Community Hub offered to provide the Secretarial capacity necessary to organise, support the Chair in agenda setting and take and share minutes.

There are about 50 named individuals and organisations now a part of the network. Numerous working groups have been set up and the network meets at least one per month.

Sally Taylor (Hub Director) is the secretary for BOSS Sandwell. Sally and Renata both attend meetings so they can remain informed of the needs of the newly arrived community and the potential for local organisations to provide a welcoming environment.

The Hub time input ensures that network members, whether or not they attend every meeting, are kept informed of the opportunities available to them to help further the network's cause, through the minutes and regular emails. The Hub's own extensive network has helped to grow membership, but also share actions and activities within the community, through social media and WhatsApp groups.

03

Borough Of Sanctuary Sandwell (BOSS):

“I endorse the work of the Bearwood Community Hub in the strongest of terms.

From my experience in local government and the community at large, it is precisely what we need to improve lives for our communities at a time when we are facing huge economic, social and health related challenges ahead.

The Hub’s staff and volunteers contribute to our communities and have done so for many years... Their inclusive ethos ensures no community is left behind and their work has played a central role in ensuring our newly arrived communities are included in everything going on locally. “

Feedback from Councillor Ahmad Bostan, Chair of BOSS



*"Good to make contact Thanks
for reaching out"
-Anon Feedback*

04

Bearwood Bonds supported by Warley Woods Community Trust (WWCT):

The Hub has been experimenting with ways of connecting with Bearwood locals who live on the same street. The priority being community-created and led activities, enabled by the Hub and/ or partners. The project is also focused on connecting with people offline. The pandemic forced the world to find new ways of working digitally. Unfortunately, this was at the expense of people that might not have access to digital devices or to unlimited data/ broadband, thus highlighting the digital poverty gap (Holmes and Burgess, 2021). As our projects list and ambitions grew we became aware of funding that had been granted to Warley Woods Community Trust to employ a sessional worker, but WWCT was unable to continue with their project because of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

We have visited 7 streets (Arden Road, Wheatley Road, Herbert Road, Ethel Street, Merivale Road, Lincoln Road, Sydney Road). We will be visiting 5 more by the end of June 2021. The streets were either nominated online by residents or we visited them because we haven't had engagement with those streets before. We have spoken to approximately 20 residents. Facilitated by Renata (BCH), Fionnuala (DPC), Sally (BCH), Julie (WWCT).

The Hub's role has been to strategise engagement work, creating leaflets, speaking to people door to door. Through speaking with residents we have been able to set up street litter picks in Arden Road, met community fitness and wellness instructors who wish to be more involved in our wellbeing work, signposted people to frontline services and benefits checks during crisis, signposted to Online Art Workshops, Coffee Mornings and phone performances by Black Country Touring. Approximately 45 hours have been spent on the project since December 2020.

Volunteer Led Projects:

"It brightened my day!"

-Anon feedback

05

Dip into a Book with the Hub

'Dip into a book with the Hub', a shared reading experience, was born out of a 'Hub Coffee Morning' where participant Coral spoke about wanting to have more experiences with people. She reminisced on when she used to run a reading group 'Get into Reading' for Sandwell Libraries. Sarah (an experienced theatre and drama facilitator and actor) agreed that it would be a good group to have and to be able to use it to perhaps read plays and poems. Renata (BCH) worked closely with Coral and Sarah (now Lead Volunteers) to develop the shared reading experience group. A pilot took place on 9th February, 2021 on Zoom with 4 participants, 2 volunteers and Renata as facilitator and tech support. The aim was to test how a shared reading group would work online. Since then we have hosted three reading experiences with 13 regular participants and we get at least one new participant for each session. Approximately 11 hours have been spent developing and delivering 'Dip into a book with the Hub'.

"It made a huge difference, because I have spoken to such a limited number of people in the past year. It was good to see new faces and to focus on something other than our day to day existence; to find a little about our neighbours and their opinions on the characters in the reading. It proved to be a friendly (therefore a safe environment to share freely) and an informal but stimulating experience. I can't wait for the next one!"

-Anon feedback

06

Bearwood Community High Street Garden:

The High Street Garden was set up quite simply because Community Gardens and the importance of green space had been mentioned repeatedly at Hub engagement events and, as we started to work with St Mary's Church on the potential of their underused community spaces, we realised the potential of the redundant, overgrown courtyard area at the back of the church, with its own entrance from Bearwood Road.

The community garden had two separate 'beginnings' due to the Covid-19 pandemic: at both, local volunteers brought tools and energy to clear brambles, ground elder and debris. For the second clearance we set up a partnership with the Princes Trust. Over two weeks in autumn 2020, around 5 -8 young people (depending on the day) worked hard to clear, design, build, plant, paint. They also fundraised and as a result were able to invest around £500 of equipment and plants. We had set a brief to them in pre-meetings and the young adults had free reign over what they wanted to do. We also allowed a small number of regular volunteers to come and join in the efforts, within the social distancing guidelines.

The garden would not have been created to be the beautiful sanctuary that it is now without Bearwood Hub being clear about its role:

- A convenor. Bringing volunteers together to achieve a common goal
- A partner. Forging new partnerships of mutual benefit, such as that of the Princes Trust.
- An income generator. One recent funding application included funds to install fencing and other key structural elements, and funds for an outdoor playgroup.
- A delivery partner. Bearwood Hub is working with New Baby Network and Wild Lives Forest School. Our partners are running a popular and impactful Nature Playgroup, whilst the Hub coordinates bookings, promotes and hosts.

06

Bearwood Community High Street Garden:

Two mothers supported by Bearwood Action for Refugees, and known to be vulnerable, have attended the play group. Both loved it and want to come again next week:

“One is very newly arrived, has an 18 month old who never usually leaves her side and amongst her many anxieties, one of them is that he will have to go to nursery in September. She said to me: “Now I am not worried. Look at him, he has been playing without me the whole time. He has loved it”.

The children are expressing the difference the playgroup is making to them by not wanting to leave, and we’re hearing reports from parents that they are showing great excitement at coming. For the parents, being able to connect with other parents has been really powerful for some after the isolation of the past year. We are being told that this is just as important as the children enjoying themselves.

A final story from one of our staff members:

“ At the end, I was handing out little gift boxes we'd been given at Christmas by Costa and partners, but had not managed to give out. I noticed a lady leaving so ran up to make sure she got a box. Turns out she was crying. I asked if she wanted to come back and go inside. She said yes. Because we had space in which we could do that away from others, we were able to talk about what was wrong and support her (family breakdown, as of last night). As a result she, her friend (and playgroup leader) Ellie now knows what's going on, she has my number if she needs help, and Brianna (also from New Baby Network) gave her her number. She instantly got a little network of supportive people who know what's going on. This wouldn't have happened without us being present in the same space as her and recognising that something was up.”

Hub's Projects:

07

Online Coffee Mornings:

The online Zoom Coffee Mornings with the Hub were set up as a direct reaction to the third national lockdown at the beginning of 2021. We knew from conversations with our local networks that although resilient our community was struggling with the lack of connection and lack of having 'things' to look forward to. There is no agenda! It is about connection. We are always open to having Coffee Mornings that have an agenda - which we have tested by hosting a Thimblemill Library Update Coffee Morning with Julie Mckirdy and Brum YODO joined us to tell us more about their project 'In Memoriam' which we have also taken part in as Community Partners.

The Coffee Mornings have been running since January 2021, with over 40 participants, mostly women and 2 men. Some participants are regulars and others have attended only once or twice. Facilitated by Sally Taylor (BCH) and Renata (BCH). Our other project 'Dip into a Book with the Hub' was born out of a chat among participants during a Coffee Morning. While the Hub's main responsibility is delivering the Coffee Mornings, time is spent promoting them and signing up participants. Approximately 13 hours have been spent on the project.

"I met new people from my neighbourhood and I was introduced to new ideas."

-Anon feedback

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08

YPDC (Young Person's Design Company) Art & Culture Manifesto



From February 2021 through to May 2021 we have been working with three young people from The Bearwood Young Person's Design Company (YPDC) and two facilitators, Alice (GU) and Renata (BCH), through zoom workshops where we work with YPDC to get on paper what is important for them as designers, makers and young people living in Bearwood – from emotional and environmental needs to practical needs such as having a space to work in and meet new people.

The main outcome is that in the next two weeks we will be ready to release the manifesto for community consultation. Where we will be asking our community to tell us what they like and do not like about it. This will be done through online surveys and a focus group. The YPDC have decided that once the consultation and the manifesto has been amended it will be distributed on all of the Hub's social media channels (Instagram, Twitter and Facebook), our website and our newsletter. As well as having a poster that is displayed at the entrance of the Hub.

Conclusion:

Across the eight projects outlined in this report the Hub has seen participation from over 257 people. We have spent approximately 132+ hours enabling and setting up projects for community benefit. Furthermore, on two occasions the Hub was able to use funding that two of our partners were unable to use due to changes in Covid-19 restrictions.

The importance of this seed funding is very clear to us. Whilst it might not have directly funded some of the activity above, it has been absolutely integral to our success and our learning. We are learning the hard way at the moment just how limited short term funding can be.

Having the support of SCVO and other funders to be flexible with the funds and focus on outcomes rather than precise outputs or methodologies, has enabled us to develop a truly responsive approach to our community work. That in turn enables it to be more inclusive and to go at a pace that is right for people who want to be involved.

Recommendations:

- Continue to work on Bearwood Bonds until the end of June when SCVO funding for that project finishes.
- Release The Young Person's Design Company Art & Culture Manifesto for community consultation. Then finalise the manifesto and publish on website, social media and newsletter.
- Continue to Support Borough Of Sanctuary Sandwell.
- Continue to support 'Dip into a Book with the Hub' volunteers through administrative duties.
- Although the Online Coffee Morning were a success during lockdown, now that Covid-19 restrictions have begun lifting they have lost momentum. It is recommended that face-to-face coffee mornings could take place outdoors at the Community Hub High Street Garden, providing that Covid-19 restrictions allow.
- Continue to work and share resources with partners. We believe that creating a strong network of local organisations will benefit the community far more than working alone.
- Work with partners and community to develop a project to engage with men in the community.