

The Bridge Collective C.I.C



Annual Report April 2020 to March 2021

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Our Mission Statement

To be a company whose members are creating:

A democratic community where people who have experiences, beliefs, and feelings that have sometimes been labelled as mental illness are welcomed and can talk about these experiences freely, safely and without judgement; a place to participate in friendship, support, learning, teaching, discussion, being active, and making a valid contribution both within the collective and the wider community.

How the Bridge Collective Works

The Bridge Collective has a unique organisational structure. It is a flat organisation set up as a Community Interest Company with members; each member holds shared limited liability and shared control. Directors are appointed by vote at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Directors serve company members and the Bridge Collective community; directors carry legal responsibility for company conduct.

The Bridge Collective aims for everyone involved to have access to the same power to make decisions as everyone else. Decisions about the running of the company are made at monthly Community Meetings and are open to all to participate.

Directors' meetings were renamed Community Meetings to emphasise the Bridge Collective's aim to give everyone within the community shared access to power and ability to contribute and participate in company direction and decision making. The Bridge Collective is governed through the emergent democracy of its community. There is no co-ordinator/manager of the organisation: management is by peer/collective management. Our invitation to all participants is that we all co-create our leadership and management style.

The Bridge Collective has a small part time paid employee team and all employees are paid the same hourly wage. The Bridge Collective's accomplishments are largely thanks to good will and volunteer input. Keyholders (employees and volunteers) open and lock up the building for groups and activities and are the responsible person whilst activity is taking place.

There is no assessment /referral process to take part in Bridge activities; people decide for themselves if activities are something they would benefit from. People within the collective may have multiple interchanging roles including director, employee, sessional worker, self-employed, facilitator, keyholder, trainer, volunteer, member, attendee, visitor, non-defined role and self-defined role. The nature of the Bridge Collective is that it is about participating in something together. In essence that participation is equal for everyone regardless of 'roles' they have.

How this report was produced

This Annual Report has been compiled and edited from the following sources: feedback received during the year from people who have interacted with the Bridge; content generated collectively by those present at our AGM; reports submitted by group and project facilitators.

Activities at the Bridge

- Over the year April 2020 - March 2021 we advertised a total of 150 events and opportunities for participation.
- We recorded the number of participants at 153 of our events and activities over the year. The average number of participants was 4.5 per activity.
- We do not record individual participants by name, so we don't have the precise number of individuals who participated in the Bridge over the year, but we estimate that it was approximately 110

The following are groups and projects that happened in 2020/21

Art at the Bridge

Community Meeting

Company Secretary Team

Company Systems Working Party

Director Team

Experts by Experience

Exploratory Boundaries Working Group

Greenwood Project

Newsletter

Open Minds

Open Reflection

Thursday Open Space

(Wholefoods - on hold except for some sales of old stock)

Additional activities and events

AGM and online lunch

Online Annual Big Dinner

People at the Bridge

Our community: Estimated number of people involved in the Bridge groups and activities in a year: 110

Members: Members on 31 March 2020: 19; members on 31st March 2021: 15

(Keyholders: Sarah Everson, Nicola, Fleur, Ben, Ashley, Andrew, Chris, Sarah T, Gill, Margaret)

Regular contracted employee hours: at 31/3/2021 were 90 hours/ week, 2.6 full time equivalent.

Voluntary hours: People input unpaid time into making the Bridge Collective happen both through informally getting involved, working parties and through named voluntary roles.

Volunteers (named roles):

- Assistant Company Secretary: Ben (to 24/9/2020)
- Company secretary: Andrew (to 24/9/2020); Ben (from 24/9/2020)
- Directors at 1/4/20: Sarah Trickett, Sarah Everson, Andrew Barkla, Margaret Turner, Ben Durkin.
Directors at 31/3/21: Sarah Trickett, Sarah Everson, Margaret Turner, Ben Durkin.
- Experts by Experience workshop speakers (see below)

- Open Minds: peer support group facilitators: Ashley, Ben
- Thursday Open Space Volunteer facilitators: Andrew, Ashley, Ben, Chris, Fleur, Gill, Nicola, Margaret, Sarah E, Sarah T,
- Wholefoods Project facilitator: Mike

Experts by Experience Workshop Team:

Due to 'service user- involvement work' being a special category of work, members of the Experts by Experience workshop team take part in one of the following ways: paid employee, self- employed and in a voluntary capacity. People taking part this year include:

- Volunteers: Ashley, Caroline, Nicola, Petra,
- Bank employees: Katharina, Ami
- Facilitating sessions: Gill, Sarah Trickett

Community Development Worker Team:

- Art: Chris and Fleur

- Company system working party: Andrew, Nicola, Chris
- Communications: Andrew, Nicola, Sarah Everson
- Data protection officer: Nicola
- Experts by Experience: Gill, Sarah Trickett
- Finance: Sarah Everson, Andrew
- Greenwood Project: Andrew, Chris
- Health & safety named persons: Andrew, Nicola
- Newsletter: Andrew, Chris
- Safeguarding team: Nicola, Sarah, Andrew

Help we've received

- We are grateful for grants received from the following organisations for work during this year and towards future work:
- Devon County Council, as well as a grant for core funding we received a Covid relief grant, and a small grant to fund a remote art project
- The Tudor Trust

- St Edmund's and St Mary Major Charities – for a residential event (deferred due to Coronavirus)
- Taw Valley Ventures (deferred due to Coronavirus)
- Tudor Trust wellness grant (deferred to 2021 - 2022)
- We received donations from private individuals.

People that we want to thank

- Michelle Virgo for facilitating our open reflection sessions
- Mary Booker for facilitating our group supervision sessions
- Chris and Steve for helping with safety
- Nick thanks for noticing what needs doing at the bridge and for all the maintenance work.
- Eryl from the Tudor trust.
- Thank ourselves – every one for keeping with it.
- Thank the internet for occasionally working.
- New people that came to meet us online.
- Thank you to all the background people that walked though zoom.
- Thanks to people in team technical

Our stakeholders and how we consult them

Our stakeholders include: Members, employees, volunteers, and other participants in Bridge activities; funders, commissioners of training, students, trainees, workers in local services. Some information on how we have consulted and communicated with our stakeholders can be found below.

During 2020/21 the following took place at the Bridge, through online conferencing:

Annual General Meeting - anyone welcome, Members can vote on appointment of Company Directors, Company Secretary and other formal company resolutions. All participants are invited to review the past year at the Bridge.

Monthly Community Meetings – these are the overall official decision-making meetings (Open Directors' meetings) at the Bridge and all participants in the collective are invited to contribute.

Open Reflection sessions (facilitated by a guest facilitator, Michelle Virgo) for the Bridge community to review, reflect and plan.

Bi-monthly Team supervision for people with facilitation or governance roles (facilitated by guest supervisor, Mary Booker).

Open meetings and working spaces throughout the year to discuss plans for activities, events and projects, development of the Bridge, creation and review of policies and procedures, and to participate in Company running and maintenance tasks.

Some feedback from participants

We spent some time together gathering thoughts and feedback at our pre AGM meeting and at our AGM, much of the following feedback are recorded thoughts from there.

Memorable moments and impressions from last year

Receiving a big book of minutes last year signalling that I wouldn't have to be chairing for the foreseeable future but it did mean I had to be attending all community meeting to take minutes

Remembering the online weekend we did! I enjoyed watching N & A, having supper and singing with G and I enjoyed doing that. Watching people eating and talking as we did.

Really enjoyed doing ted talks when we all went into lockdown when we were wondering what to do. People that had never been to the bridge before someone from America came, I thought Wow! feeling going from feeling isolated and hemmed in to wow there's all those people out there.

First open afternoon on lockdown was very exciting to come together and we decided to take a screenshot...

Glad to see people over zoom over Christmas, all plans got scrapped sat alone with me and the cat was not how I envisaged so it was really nice to be able to connect with people from the Bridge

Receiving my rhino package in January. Hated lockdown and just doing this knowing other people were doing theirs at home and when I got the book...but actually doing the rhino in January and knowing other people were doing it too really helped.

I've enjoyed chatting.

I really enjoyed and valued when we did the first newsletter in lockdown: EbyE doing photos, pictures, recipes, of "things that have nurtured us" theme... creative things and the natural world, very rich and a lot of warmth, a special newsletter.

The map we made with dots on where everyone was. Lovely to see where everyone was.

Gill's painted tree and hearing the story behind the painting – beautiful.

Liked seeing all the Rhinos when they came in and putting them up and seeing them all on the website, a feeling of connection with lots of people, not all people that we necessarily meet at the bridge too, including families and children.

We've managed to keep the Bridge Collective going all through the pandemic even though we've been isolated we haven't because we've had these meetings.

We need to pat ourselves on the back for managing to keep something going!

We have made use of facebook as a good way to connect.

I liked having the rhino as a thing to do at home.

Managing to take our experts by experience training online felt big – I don't think it's ever been done – an achievement, the speakers embracing that because that's a hard thing to do..there was nervousness about it, courage. Received confidence from Ashley sharing experience of online working.

Our funders were very supportive towards us at a time when we had to do things very differently from what was expected.

I love Andrew's films particularly, flute and walking in woods ...I really like the pace that the camera moved around and looked at small details.

Thinking about our last open reflection, when Michelle invited us to say nice things to each other when we were invited to say appreciative comments about each other, it was intense but I really enjoyed the appreciative comments that stayed with me..

I feel as though I've seen more people and have connected with a wider group because of zoom. Because of that I feel more connected to the bridge through having this time, even though it's nicer to see people in reality.

I have quite enjoyed meeting on zoom because I was getting really stressed about having to catch the bus and didn't have to worry about the stress of the bus jumping up and down.. I have really enjoyed zoom.

There have been people in open minds that we haven't seen in lockdown I think about them a lot, in some ways zoom has been good but in other ways it has brought an end.

People that have not been online have missed out on a year and a half, other people that don't want to do all the screen time find it really hard.

I've enjoyed bumping into people randomly in the street. Bumped into Margaret at the Quay and that was really nice really emphasised how nice it is to see people from the Bridge.

Bumping into Fleur is one of my highlights.

There's been an awful amount of upskilling this year – technical stuff – doing stuff technically that you never thought you would, being forced to do stuff has meant learning new things and gaining confidence.

We've got a very stable and enthusiastic Art online group, but there were some people who usually came to art at bridge that haven't, we do have a very loyal online art group coming regularly and it's a very nice space.

A fear. We've got so used to this, I have a fear of us getting too comfortable with this and it being too hard to getting back in person at the Bridge. Not for everyone but when you settle into a routine – want us to keep the impetus for that to happen.

Have enjoyed being able to turn up to meetings in my pyjamas.

We did a lot of work on principles of being together at the bridge, really nice to do talking about our shared values... really good project to work on.

Have enjoyed bringing my cat to work.

I have enjoyed meeting people's pets.

Wonderful to see a rabbit on lap.

Like seeing context...glimpses of colour, books, walls and pictures the context people are in.

Huge amount of safety work has been done progress on backlog

Appreciated being invited into the facilitator meeting which was closed to only employees before

Meeting online - it helped people having to experience it how I've experienced it. People have voiced stuff I've felt.

Seeing people we hadn't seen for a long time.

Quite sad - people we haven't seen.

Connection and loss.

Opportunity to connect and link in.

Connecting over distance.

Rhinos

Art - really worked well online - some people can come more often - comfortable chatty space.

Newsletters have been a wealth of beauty.

Got to have an insight into more parts of the Bridge and its workings.

Doing things over Zoom is more tiring.

Managing zoom Experience more reasonably this year - wasn't possible to learn how to balance in first wave.

We had to face some fears - what to do if the whole world turns up? - door open on the global internet.

Working out principles - what's ok on Zoom - working out how to be when online.

Some things have been quite a challenge - Greenwood - how to make it work online.

Lots on facebook.

More conscious of who we're in touch with and who we're not.

Like the freedom to switch off and stamp my feet.

Like seeing people in their own surroundings.

Anticipating a tsunami of emotion.

In the last year the Bridge has sustained my need for human contact.

We've been a really strong community together.

You are in contact with a lot of people.

Sense of purpose - a reason to come together.

Goes back to the principles of what we're creating together.

New groups - facilitators - principles.

Lost Michelle and Mary.

Wholefoods on hold.

Purposeful connection is a really significant thing without being onerous.

You can get involved when it's right for you.

I like lots of little connections.

I've been nourished by Bridge connections over the year.

Way we operate makes it possible to be connected without being burdened or things being demanded of you.

Opportunity to reflect.

2020 was a very ironic year

Thanks for support from people when I've had wobbles and needed reassurance thanks to people that have been there and let me off load and given words of wisdom and advice.

Like to thank the mute button for when I've been able to go off to the kitchen and scream, I never realised how much I need it until this last year.

Thanks to our principles for keeping us together.

Hopes for the Future

We have learned a lot about working online - how can we include this in the future?

I hope to get back to the bowling green marsh, watching birds and having a bat walk.

Be nice to be able to have a greenwood camp and or residential soon

I hope to be able to facilitate Experts by Experience back in the Bridge without having the background fear of people being too close together.

I hope to be able to get to a point of being close to people and not having to worry. Covid fears.

I look forward to being back in the bridge and seeing the people that can't do online.

I hope there's blended working to come.

Taking the best bits of this necessity into the future of in person.

I hope we get the insurance that lets us have a fire at greenwood again.

I look forward to being in the bridge and being able to share meals.

I'd like to be able to give people hugs!! (with permission)

Community activism in some form...not quite sure what to say about it

Looking forward to being able to share cake again.

Looking forward to welcoming a new employee hopefully

I hope we find a new facilitator for open reflection because I think it's a really important space.

Looking forward to using the new dishwasher!

Looking forward to experience all the new things that have happened in the bridge while we've been away

Looking forward to doing First aid training again.

Looking forward to going up in the loft again and accessing resources!

Looking forward to doing policy work and updating them together.

Adapting to Coronavirus

Since lockdown was implemented at the end of March we have been working hard to maintain our contact as a community. We have shared information on how we are adapting and have striven to make people feel welcome and included, even though we have not been able to meet face-to-face. Our community has rallied round and despite the challenges, existing participants and new people continue look to The Bridge Collective to give and receive mutual support.

How we have adapted our provision during covid

Adapting to changes as a community

- Offered access to our groups and activities through online meetings, to maintain contact, share thoughts and ideas, and keep continuity of the Bridge as a community
- Here is a link to our programme of online activities during this time:
<https://www.bridgecollective.org.uk/whats-on/whats-on-history/>
- Kept people informed of these through the website, social media, notices pinned to the door of the Bridge building
- Being in contact with people via zoom/post/email/phone/text/facebook
- Invited contributions to our facebook page and newsletter
- Moved our open access meetings online, e.g. Art, Experts by Experience, Greenwood, Open Reflection, Community Meetings. Holding more frequent meetings for shared decision-making.
- Taking Open Space online at a regular time most Thursday afternoons, hosted by new volunteers on a rota
- Contacted people by email, phone and text to find out how we can keep in touch and update people about our activities and plans
- IT training and help with technology for joining online activities
- Moved group training sessions for employees and volunteers online e.g. safeguarding training
- Groups contact via facebook e.g. photos and films of nature in the places where the Greenwood Project regularly meets; ideas of art activities for people to do at home (and kept in mind the limited access there)

may be to materials during lockdown, so using things readily to hand, or natural materials that can be gathered easily)

- Sent out the Bridge and project newsletters by email and a few by post to people who don't have internet, free of charge
- Being with and managing uncertainty
- Sharing what nourishes us and supports us
- Holding an 'Open Reflection' workshop on the question of 'In the light of the pandemic, how do we cope with change and what are the opportunities for The Bridge Collective?
- Continuing to deliver Experts by Experience workshops online to student doctors and health professionals.
- Initiated online Ted Talk meetings as a way of connecting with themes related to feelings during pandemic: talks followed by discussion time.
- Invited people to take part in Working Party discussions (e.g. contributing to risk assessments for how we may safely return to face to face contact at the Bridge), and in Newsletter planning
- Making preparations for accessing the Bridge building/ outdoor meeting/ re-opening in stages

Adapting for employee and volunteer well-being

- Supporting working from home
- More frequent contact (by zoom)
- Employee and volunteer remote training and tech support
- Team building – new facilitator team meeting, weekly employee team meeting
- Safeguarding training

- More frequent supervision
- Supporting access to IT devices and equipment
- IT training

Adapting our Infrastructure and equipment

- Updating our IT systems and database
- Updating our website so that it is easily accessible on a phone (phone compatible)
- Improvements to our building in preparation towards safer staged reopening when possible

Positives of online connecting

- We can connect
- Some people finding it a good way of seeing each other
- Some people participate more often
- Meeting some people we've not met in person before
- Appreciation of connection at this time
- Being able to join by landline
- Meeting online increases accessibility for some people
- Some people who were at work before during the day, have been able to join online activities due to working from home at this time
- Variation of size of zoom meeting appreciated - some people have found small online meetings really helpful as it can be hard to speak up and find your voice in a big online meeting

- Some people much preferring online meeting e.g. due to
 - challenges of sensory processing
 - physical disability
 - finding it hard to venture out of the house
 - caring responsibilities
 - tiredness (only so much energy for going about)
 - being able to dip in and out of connecting online (smaller time commitment)

Appendix: group and project reports

Art at the Bridge



From March 2020 we responded to the coronavirus restrictions by suspending all in person groups at the Bridge. Art at the Bridge has been holding fortnightly groups via Zoom from May 2020, advertised through our What's On page and Facebook.

We have suggested themes for each session that relate to things people are doing to relieve the stress of lockdown, and ideas for using materials that could easily be obtained: natural materials that can be found in gardens or when out walking, or materials that might be available at home such as card from packaging, paper from bags or envelopes, collage materials from magazines or advertising flyers.

For visual sources we have looked at things around us: patterns and textures found at home or in nature; and there has been a strong seasonal theme that reflects the healing and inspiration of the natural world and relates to themes in other projects at the Bridge, Greenwood and the newsletters. - Things that nurture us (Summer), Night/sky (Autumn), Hope (Spring).

Themes for our sessions this year have included Collage, 'Inspired by Nature', Still life, 'Through the Window', Watercolour, Night, Sunsets, Autumn, Pattern and texture, Printing workshop – leaves/ fireworks, Weather, Birds, Winter and Christmas seasonal themes, Festive hat making, 'Winter Brightness', 'New Year, New Beginnings', Rhino workshop, 'Spring Energy'/International Women's Day

We have held 21 regular online sessions over the 11 months from May 2020 – March 2021. An estimated 14 individuals have attended the sessions, with an average of 5 participants each time, slightly fewer than at our in person groups at the Bridge last year, but equivalent to the numbers in the previous year.

In December 2020 we successfully applied for a grant from Devon County Council's Covid-19 rapid response fund to set up a project to keep people connected and support mental health and wellbeing during the third coronavirus lockdown. The project was time limited to between the beginning of December 2020 and the end of March 2021.



From January 2021, 32 small wooden rhinos were sent out on request to people throughout Devon and further afield, to be decorated and brought to life in the way that each person chose. The Rhino Project was a way of making something for the future, and working on a shared activity at a time when many of us are separated from family and friends, and from each other as members of the Bridge community.

We asked for the rhinos to be returned to the Bridge by the end of March to be displayed together; looking forward to the time when we are able to be in the building together to enjoy them. In the meantime, photos of the returned rhinos will be shown on the website.

The rhino was chosen in recognition of Bridget, our resident art-decorated rhino sculpture, which (or who) is such a prominent presence in the Bridge, as well as having come with us to some outside events, and so has seemed to take on a personality of her own and also to represent something about the Bridge.

It has been a pleasure sending out the rhinos to be decorated, and anticipating bringing them together as a group in a display for everyone to see. This project has involved a wide group of people, including some taking part in a Bridge project for the first time.



Some feedback received from Art at the Bridge participants:

“Thank you for giving up your time and effort you put in. I feel the zoom art groups are enjoyable, good company with others, gives us ideas/inspiration and most importantly motivation to carry on with art, it’s got a lot to offer.”

“I would be lost without the online Art Group. It helps me keep in contact with people. It has also pushed me into doing something that I have always wanted to do but always put off. That is, learning how to paint. It is invaluable to me. Before the last session I was stressed and angry but after I felt a lot better.”

Community Meeting

At our monthly Community Meetings, which are open to everyone, we make decisions about how the Bridge is run and what happens here. We discuss policies and training, report on activities and bring ideas for new ones, and agree decisions about how money is raised to fund the Bridge, and what we spend it on. There is an agenda which is prepared before the meeting, and an electronic form is available which can be completed by anyone who wants to bring an item. All who come are welcome to join the discussion and express their views, or just to listen and get a feel for how we work.

Originally called Directors’ Meetings, these meetings are where company decisions which need to be agreed by directors are formally made, and a quorum of directors needs to be present in order for this to happen. The name was changed to Community Meeting to recognise that this meeting is open to all and our aim is for decisions to be made by the community together.

This year our community meetings were held online and at the start of the first lockdown we moved to 3-weekly meetings for a time to ensure that the Bridge Community was able to be as fully involved in planning our response as possible.

In all there were 13 online Community Meetings between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021. In all 16 people attended Community Meetings and the numbers attending each meeting ranged from 6 to 11.

Every month the meeting is chaired by someone who has volunteered to do this at the previous community meeting, and everyone is welcome to volunteer for this.

We have set up working spaces for planning and preparing for our Community Meeting. Currently this process has been facilitated by a paid employee (Andrew) and a volunteer role Assistant Community Meeting Secretary - this role was formally agreed this year and is held by Ben.

Company Secretary Team

This year saw Andrew Barkla step down as Company Secretary, and Ben Durkin taking over after a couple of years as an assistant. Both continue to meet regularly once a month to review and process the tasks associated with the role, and assess any additions or changes to the manual.

Company Systems Working Party

This working party is for skill sharing, learning and doing bite size chunks of our company running systems, e.g., admin, safety and maintenance. During this year of remote working we've used this space to work on adapting to new ways of working, preparing for outdoor meet-ups and planning for future return to our premises.

Director Team

After serving as a Director from the Bridge Collective's founding, Andrew Barkla stepped down this year. As we did not have any new applications for becoming a Director, it was resolved at the AGM that the minimum number of Directors would be temporarily reduced. This reduction naturally places extra burdens upon the remaining Directors, and so concerted efforts need to be made to recruit.

Experts by Experience

Achievements

- People have spoken about experience including: self harm, suicide attempts, seeing and hearing things other people don't, peer support, medication side effects, anxiety, depression, neurodiversity, recovery, coping strategies
- Organizations we've done workshops with: University of Exeter Medical School, Plymouth University School of Nursing, Research in Practice for Adults (RiPfA)
- We've delivered: 10 training sessions.

- We've spoken to approximately 188 people including: Mental Health nurses, trainee doctors, trainee mental health nurses
- E by E training has brought £3360 into the Bridge this year.
- The publication of our conversations for the organisation Research In Practice for Adults (RiPfA) was delayed due to the pandemic but over the last year we have managed to finish and publish 2 conversations on the RiPfA website.
- Due to the pandemic all our meetings had to move online. We learned how to use Zoom in order to do this and successfully continued to do all of our bimonthly meetings using this platform throughout the year.
- All of our training and workshops with other organisations had to be conducted online due to the pandemic. We managed to adapt our training methods and models to enable this and in addition to Zoom we learned how to use MS Teams and interact with the training attendees using breakout rooms, white boards and group sessions.
- Continuity and ongoing professional development of trainees - we conducted a "training" session with an individual who previously attended our University training, this time to help them better understand people's lived experience of unusual experiences (what is often referred to as psychosis)
- To help us cope with the changes to online working and feel connected to each other we hosted a series viewings of Ted talks about a range of subjects from international development and listening to vulnerability and language. This drew in some new attendees and people who had not connected with us for a while.
- We met with and found out about making a Podcast with Recovery Devon and hope to do that in the future.

- We met with and contributed to a meeting with the Psychological Professions Network which has led to opportunities for Lived Experience involvement for individuals who participate in EbyE.
- We were invited to facilitate 2 discussion sessions with patients of Langdon Hospital about our and their Unusual Experiences (often labelled as psychosis). 1 session has already taken place.
- To help us through the initial impact of the pandemic on our lives we set up a creative project for our members called "Things that are nurturing us at the moment". Participants contributed art work, photos, poems and recipes, and some of these were entered into our Spring Newsletter.

www.bridgecollective.org.uk/download/Newsletter-Spring-2021.pdf

The Bee.

May '20

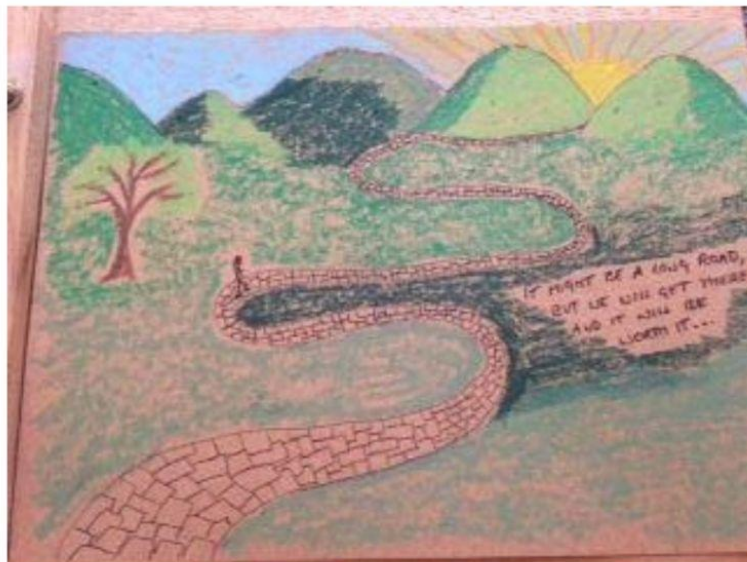
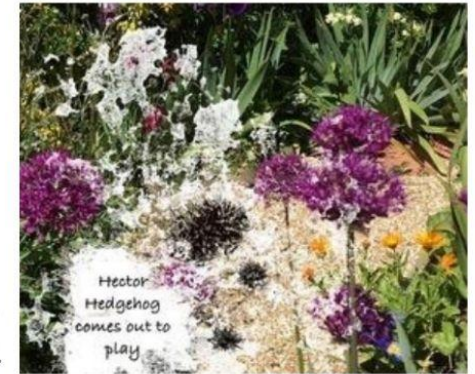
I saved a bumble bee today,
I scooped him up
He flew away!



Songs of nature.

May '20

I've never spent quite so long
Just hearing nature's garden song,
the hum of bees, the call of birds,
rustling wind in the leaves on trees,
Such simple pleasure all belong
to lockdown.
I've seen a hedgehog shuffling past,
Late, as the day almost gone so fast.
It made me think how sweet life is,
When we stop and wonder,
Such simple pleasures become so vast
In lockdown



- Paid bank hours input by speakers into Experts by Experience training over this year is estimated at over 33 hours.
- There were 3 people facilitating sessions this year
- At the end of March 2021 one of our co-facilitators stepped down due to personal circumstances. They have however continued to facilitate stand alone training sessions and take part as a speaker.
- One of our participants and a regular speaker with EbyE successfully found full-time employment with the civil service in February and has stepped back from many meetings but has continued to participate as and when work allows. In their exit interview they commented that:

I've learnt so much. Learnt value of loving kindness towards myself and others.....People in the Bridge saw value in me when I didn't see value in me. Taught me to have courage and press for the important things out there and taught me about the importance of maintaining my own integrity. Just because I am different to other people doesn't mean I have to change to be accepted and valued and that those differences are strengths.Looking back, the Bridge and the regularity of the training, using my adverse experiences for other people was good. Using my experiences to help other people. .. Now at work I am open about my diagnosis. That confidence gained through the work at the Bridge to be myself has helped me find courage.

- Our co-facilitators learned a new data storage system and method of emailing our information to our participants.
- We have begun developing new training resources for our EbyE team covering health and safety, safeguarding, fire safety and Bridge Collective working systems.

Challenges

- Adapting to the pandemic, both personally and in our project work. We rose to this challenge and as highlighted above have continued in our work and developed our skills and opportunities.
- The impact of the pandemic on our working systems has focused our Bridge team on getting our health and safety protocols and documents up-to-date. This has been both positive for the ongoing governance of the Bridge and challenging for some project development such as training project participants as facilitators.
- Difficulties in working with external organisations relating to the roll out of the national “Community Mental Health Framework for Adults” due to uncertainty about what our involvement will look like and how it can be implemented.
- Difficulty for some participants to continue participating online. The challenges of technology and also the personal impact of the pandemic has been a barrier to participation and we have struggled to overcome this. We have not been able to meet in person at all and are working towards beginning this again as soon as it is safe to do so in our specific collective circumstances.
- Moving to a new data storage system over the last year and adapting to new project mail out systems.
- Having submitted an “Awards for All” funding application, we submitted it just as the pandemic hit and were caught up in the move of the fund to supporting only Pandemic related applications. We believe this to be a significant reason for the application being unsuccessful. We were able to have continued funding as a project from other Bridge Collective sources.

- One of the co-facilitators of EbyE stepped down at the end of March 2021 which has meant extra pressure and lone working for the remaining co-facilitator. Despite this they have managed to continue the project as before.

Hopes for the future

- We hope that we can begin face-to-face meetings as soon as possible and are working with the Bridge Team to make this happen in a safe way.
- Recruiting a new EbyE co-facilitator in the autumn.
- We hope to continue with our regular yearly student training in 2021-22 and hope that some of this can be conducted in person.
- Finalising our final RiPfA conversation with a participant who can only participate face to face.
- We hope to resubmit funding applications sometime in the future when we have capacity.
- Being able to input into the roll out of the "Community Mental Health Framework for adults" with external organisations.
- Engaging more project participants and more organisations to offer training and workshops
- Having more discussions and talks within our project and being able to meet up with project participants for social activities

A selection of feedback from this year:

From our training with Student Mental Health Nurses and Student Doctors

I must say how brave all the speakers were, telling us their stories. I had to catch my breath at times, with shock and admiration

It continues to make me aware of the person & nurse that I want to be.

Hearing the journey that you have all been on and managed to find meaningful and hopeful lives that you conveyed to others. The emotional honesty was very humbling and helpful to hear. Thank you all so much.

It was beneficial to hear your feedback on practices such as CBT and how you perceived the term recovery. It taught me to consider that placing recovery on people could be really daunting and unnecessary.

I need to spend more time inspecting my values and reflecting on interpersonal responses.

[I have learned] More insight into the trauma experiences that cause MH illness

Yes I really need to dedicate more time to searching my value base. Challenging practices and being with people therapeutically without speaking, I am trying to work out how best to proceed with the above and thank you for the learning experience.

It's hard working on zoom, but I felt that we were still able to 'feel' your stories

You have shown that recovery, in any form & forever long that lasts can work, you can have a meaningful, loving fulfilled life

I would just say what a privilege it was to be afforded the opportunity to have people share such honest accounts and experiences with us all.... I wish I was as brave as you all have been and thank you all very much for sharing what you did.

What lovely, brave and inspiring souls are about. I love the peer support and narratives of hope offered today. Connection and meaning seem to be the most important aspects in experience of mental and emotional health.

[I will] Improve my use of silence and try a lot harder to get to the real stories and meanings. Giving the pen to the person I am with will now be a considered priority. Thank you.

Another powerful day, thank you all. Its good to individualise care & recovery. It looks different for everyone & means different things too.

As ever I really enjoyed everyone's contributions and as a fly on the wall feedback and observations are always gratefully received by the students and me personally. Thank you again for all your hard work and managing the days on the module so wonderfully.

Thank you again for the session, and for sharing your powerful stories.

Feedback from RiPfA

We have - and continue to collaborate - with Experts by Experience at The Bridge Collective for the past year on this project, which has been warmly and well-received by our membership network. It is my continued hope that it may affect change in practice where needed, and support professionals with the learning they need.

Feedback from Unusual Experiences sessions

I enjoyed the discussion and thought it was a good format. Thanks for facilitating and hosting. There was enough structure to make it feel like a safe space but open enough to allow for ideas to bubble up. I like facilitated spaces that allow free-ranging discussions. It also felt like the right number of participants for everyone to get a chance to speak.

Thank you to you both also for all your work and contribution yesterday. Please send our thanks too to [..] and [...]. Being able to share their stories as they did allows others to feel courageous but also to see the hope going forward how things can be different.

Feedback from EbyE speakers and project participants

Compassionate people with similar experiences who have the innate ability to listen and hear

Providing a sense of purpose for people with lived experience

Being able to understand how others cope and sharing experiences

When I came to meetings I felt welcomed and included even as an 'outsider'

A sense of doing something useful in an area that I am passionate about.

I wish the whole world worked in the same way as EbyE...it would be a much happier place to live

Thank you for still keeping in contact despite my non communication. I miss the actual face to face meetings.

Sense of community. Shared space, open to ideas and feedback, working stuff out together. Experts by Experience are a wonderful group of people and this project helps us to realise our own value as well as hopefully broadening the perspectives and touching the hearts of the people who attend our training sessions.

I want to always be part of EbyE wherever and whatever I do in life I hold it dear to my heart. It had been my lifesaver and I will never ever forget

If you have been to our online activities, how has being online affected your experience of EbyE?

I feel like there's less connection with each other. The teaching feels different when you know that students are at home and may be distracted by other things. It's hard to teach when people have their camera's off because you don't know if they're listening.

It's obviously not the same as I can't give people a hug ...difficult as I am a hugging person (of course, respecting people who don't do hugs)

What has been the best bit of EbyE in the last year?

Zoom meetings that have made me feel at ease and valued as a human being

Being able to overcome the challenge of teaching online due to the pandemic.

Words people have used to describe the Experts by Experience project over the last year.



Exploratory Boundaries Working Group

During 2020 a series of “Exploratory Boundaries Groups” met to consider some questions that had come to our Community Meeting about boundaries at the Bridge - how we’d like to be with ourselves and each other. Below is a list of “principles” offered from these groups for discussion. We are inviting feedback on these.

Bridge Collective Draft Principles: ‘How we intend to be with ourselves and each other’

- Talking one at a time and leaving space for others
- Offering opportunities to be seen and heard
- Being aware and respectful of each others’ feelings
- Respecting different beliefs and preferences
- People being allowed to be themselves
- Being aware that people who are not speaking may still have an opinion or a feeling
- Keeping warmth, compassion and empathy for ourselves and others at the heart of our discussions
- Thanking others for their contributions, including those with whom we might not always get along or agree with
- Recognising the validity of individual experience
- Being curious about differences of opinion and our own opinion
- ‘Imperfection in relationships is an expectation’ - using differences of opinion and style as an opportunity for growth
- Traveling together at a speed we are all comfortable with
- Respecting confidentiality (in accordance with our confidentiality policy and legal limits to confidentiality)
- Doing what we need to do to look after ourselves
- If anyone experiences feelings of unsafety or discomfort in any part of the Collective it matters to us
- Anyone can point out if we’re not keeping to these principles

- These principles are up for discussion and can be added to, amended and updated

Greenwood Project

This year all our Greenwood meetings have been moved online due to coronavirus. We have had a monthly online meet up sharing films, photos and sound recordings from nature in our local environments. It has been possible for one facilitator to host the meeting from outdoors in their garden, in the mid-Devon countryside, where slow worms and grass snakes can be seen. We have been able to watch film from Yeo Vale wood, where we normally meet once a month, keeping us in touch with the wildlife, plants and river over the changing seasons. There have been films and photos from the Bowling Green nature reserve and bird life on the Exe estuary, where we often meet to walk in normal times.

The Bridge facebook page has been used to share films, photos and ideas for making art outdoors and with natural materials, between our monthly meet-ups via Zoom.

The Greenwood Project would normally have a residential weekend and a camp each year, where we cook, eat and sing together round a camp fire, go for walks and use natural materials to make art reflecting the local surroundings where we're staying. We had been awarded grant money for a camp and a residential this year, and were planning to stay at Blytheswood Hostel at Steps Bridge in the Spring of 2020, and to camp at West Town Farm at Ide in the Summer. Because of coronavirus these plans had to be postponed. The funders agreed to our keeping the grants to use, and Sarah and Lewis who run Blytheswood Hostel agreed to keep our deposit for a later date, when it becomes safe.

Instead in January 2021 we held a 'virtual residential', or 'Wembworthy on the Web'. Wembworthy was a former residential outdoor activity centre where Greenwood stayed on 3 occasions. For our online version we had an evening Zoom meeting on Friday, eating a meal together, and singing some of our traditional Greenwood campfire songs, which had been printed out and posted to participants. (To avoid sound feedback, we muted ourselves and had Youtube versions of the songs playing on one of the host computers for everyone to sing along to.) We had the live presence of a log burner via Zoom, to give the campfire atmosphere. On the following morning we met for breakfast on Zoom, then each person spent the next hour in their own area, going for a walk or watching nature from their windows. We came back together for a final hour to share photographs or accounts of what we had seen.

Some of the activities in our monthly meetings, shared on Zoom:

Making mini cairns, decorated with flowers

Leaf art

Video from Yeo Vale Wood

Wildlife watching from the garden

Film from Topsham Bowling Green marshes and Exe estuary

Driftwood mobiles

Nature poems and discussion

Making apple dumplings

Making reed pens

Hallowe'en lanterns and pumpkin soup

Christmas songs and pomanders

Wassailing the apple trees

Pancakes and signs of Spring

Seed sowing

Newsletter

We have continued to produce the quarterly newsletter collectively. Open working spaces for being involved in producing each newsletter were advertised in the monthly What's On. This year because of Covid restrictions these have been held online. There is a deadline for contributions which is advertised in posts on our Facebook page, with a dedicated email address. Four issues were produced during the year, with reports from groups and events, posters advertising upcoming events, descriptions of roles within the Bridge and opportunities for getting involved in our activities, as well as individual contributions of artwork and photos, poetry and prose, recipes. There were written contributions and images from 20 named contributors and at least 21 anonymous contributors. Each quarter an average of 170 people received the newsletter by post or email. The newsletter was also posted on our website.

Open Minds

Open Minds is a confidential, safe space for sharing our experiences of seeing, hearing or sensing things that other people don't. A place where we can talk freely without feeling overheard or judged.

It is open to anyone who identifies with this description.

Open Minds paused for a couple of months at the start of the pandemic before moving online in May 2020. Since then we have met every month on Zoom. This has enabled some new people to access the group who could not have joined us in person. It also means we have lost contact with some people (who have been missed!) One participant described the group as 'a lifeline' over the last year and an 'important' resource for them. One participant described the Zoom-based meetings as 'great' as they found it 'difficult to get to places' sometimes. We have agreed as a group to continue providing Zoom access to Open Minds when it becomes possible to meet again in person.

Open Reflection

Open Reflection topics are based on what is alive and important to people at the time and are agreed at our community meeting, the sessions are then structured as a reflective space which engages with how we are doing and how we might positively develop our skills in relation to the chosen topic as a community. These sessions have been facilitated by an external facilitator, Michelle Virgo. This year the two sessions were online

and the topics were "In the light of the pandemic how do we cope with change, and what are the opportunities for the Bridge Collective?" and "Open Reflection: looking back and thinking forward".

Michelle has now moved on from facilitating Open Reflection for us. We thank her for all her work over many years and we have a treasured archive of valuable material generated by the sessions and written up for us each time by Michelle.

Thursday Open Space

Since April 2020 we have held an online open space on Thursday afternoons between 1pm and 2pm, as many weeks as possible, depending on the availability of volunteers to facilitate. We have a rota of 10 volunteers. 3 people volunteer for each session, plus one reserve, to ensure that each week there will be at least 2 facilitators, even if unforeseen circumstances mean that someone becomes unable to be there at short notice. The rota is filled in for each month, one month beforehand.

As with the Open Afternoons held at the Bridge when the building is open, these online meet-ups are a space to connect with the Bridge and with each other, providing

- A welcome for new people
- Informal chat and meet up
- Warmth, connection
- Different, wide-ranging conversations, humour
- A stepping stone to find out about the Bridge and what happens here

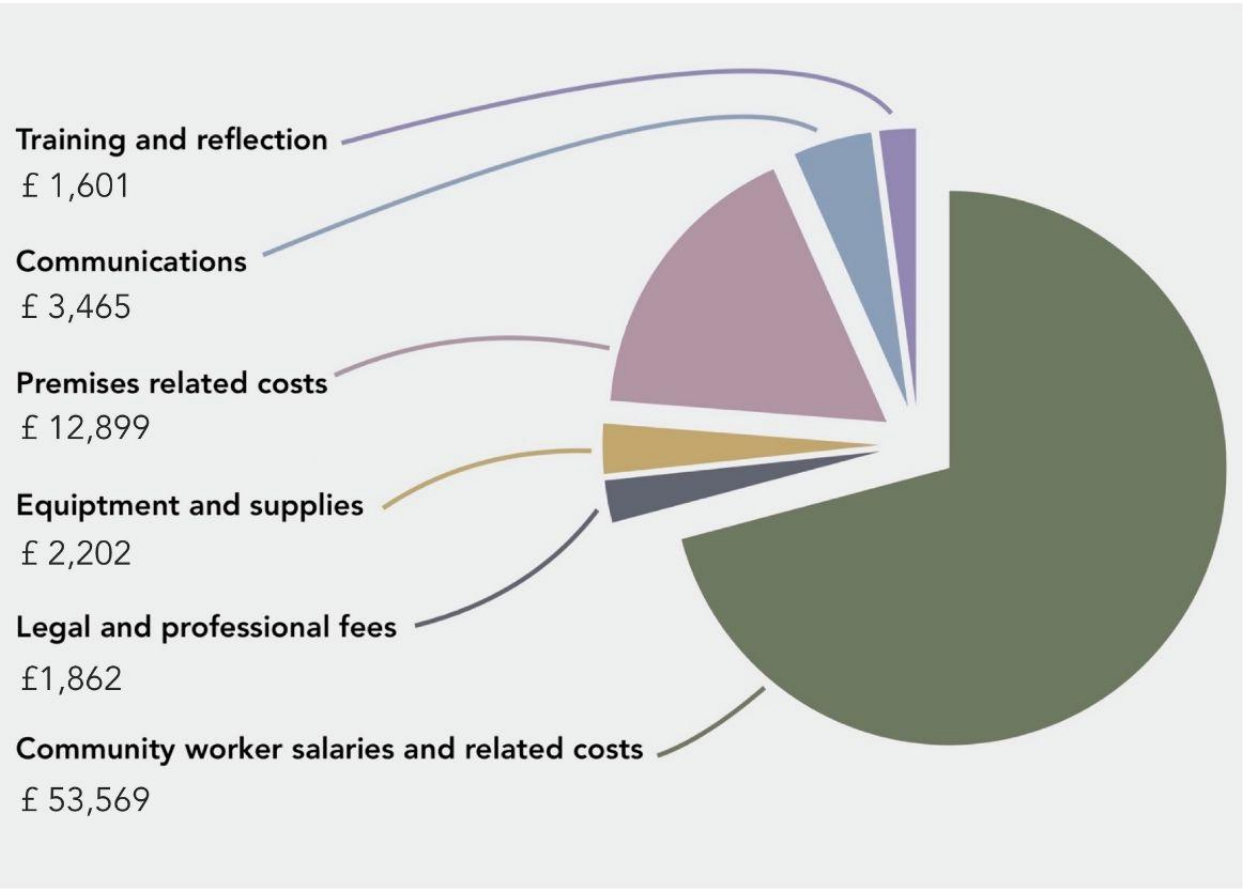
- Links and contacts with people from other organisations
- A space to find out about Bridge membership



(Wholefoods - on hold except for some sales of old stock)

FINANCIALS

TOTAL EXPENSES: £ 75,598



EXPENSES

Communications	£ 3,465
Community Worker Salaries and Related Costs	£ 53,569
Equipment and supplies	£ 2,202
Legal and professional Fees	£ 1,862
Premises Related Costs	£ 12,899
Training and Collective Reflection	£ 1,601

TOTAL EXPENSES	£ 75,598
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SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Donations	£ 5,819
Grants	
Access to work	£ 1,313
Devon County Council - Open Access	£ 38,214
Devon County Council - Prompt action	£ 381
Exeter City Council - Small business	£ 9,000
Self Heal - Art at the Bridge	£ 2,391
Tudor Trust	£ 25,000
TOTAL GRANTS	£ 76,299
Memberships and subscriptions	£ 50
Training	£ 2,550
Wholefood sales (old stock)	£ 386
Other income	£ 77

TOTAL SUPPORT AND REVENUE	£ 85,181
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