



**THE BRIDGE COLLECTIVE C.I.C.**

**ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2018 TO MARCH 2019**

## **Mission Statement**

Adopted 10th February 2010.

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 organization set up as a Community Interest Company with members; with each member having shared control and all staff paid the same hourly wage.

The Bridge Collective aims for everyone involved to have the same power to make decisions as everyone else. Decisions about the running of the collective are made at monthly directors' meetings open to all. Directors are appointed by vote by all members at the AGM. There is no executive director, chair or treasurer. The chair or co-chairs of the community meetings are chosen monthly by people volunteering to chair or co-chair.



There is no co-ordinator/manager of the organisation: management is by peer/collective management. The Bridge Collective has a small part time staff team and is run largely on good will and volunteer input. The Bridge Collective achieves a lot of peer support on a small budget. Keyholders (volunteers and part time staff) open and lock up the building for a group/activity and are the responsible persons whilst the 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 at the collective may have multiple roles including: director, employee, sessional worker, self employed, facilitator, keyholder, trainer, volunteer, member, attendee, visitor; and people take part as both providers and beneficiaries of the collective's activities. 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.

## Themes and Challenges

**new opportunities**

**courage and bravery**

**successful recruitment**

**communication**

**adapting to change**

**loss**

**capacity building**

**decision making styles  
& skills**

**new responsibilities**

A key theme for this year has been capacity building.

*“Community capacity building is defined as the “process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive....” Ann Philbin, 1996.*

In the year 2017/18 The Bridge Collective faced cuts and uncertainties in funding and we experienced the loss of three employees, an employee leaving the locality to work remotely and an employee on extended compassionate leave. As a result we began the year 2018/19 at a position of low capacity. While most of our funding continues to be short-term and uncertain, we were in the fortunate position of having secured three years funding from the Tudor Trust to support us in building capacity and company infrastructure, but with a small part time employee team a challenge has been how to implement this effectively.

We planned to create two new posts starting midway through the year. One of these, funded by the Allen Lane Foundation, was for a second Experts by Experience facilitator. The second was to have been for a Community Development Worker with responsibility both for development of volunteering at the Bridge and development of the music project. Unfortunately we were unable to appoint to the second of these posts. In the event we appointed two new Community Development workers Gill and Sarah: facilitating Experts by Experience, and our existing employees took on

additional responsibilities. This left our staffing in the second half of the year at the equivalent of 2.4 full-time workers, split between a team of 7, many of whom had a wide range of responsibilities.

So one of the challenges for the employee team and the collective has been to develop structures and ways of working that allow us to continue a meaningful level of activity alongside keeping up with the day to day needs of running a company and staying safe and legal, and to progress the work of building capacity and sustainability.

By the end of the year we achieved significant results in that our employees' areas of responsibility and time allocated for them had been clarified in much more detail than had been the case previously, while work in defining these roles and allocating realistic time to achieve them remains to be done. This will be a key theme for the year 2019-20.

The theme of building capacity through greater participation has been reflected in the continuation of the Company Systems Working Party, the advent of the Volunteer Development drop-in, and in progress towards shared involvement in preparation and planning for our community meetings. Margaret joined the Thursday volunteer facilitation team and Ben became voluntary Company Secretary Assistant, moving us towards sharing knowledge of company administration tasks, which feels like a significant breakthrough. But we have come to recognise more clearly as a collective the challenges involved in creating new named volunteer roles in the Bridge until we have further capacity to carry out fair and robust recruitment, induction, training, support and safeguarding processes. So this will be a second significant theme for the future.

## **Activities at the Bridge**

Our monthly “*What’s Ons*” show 235 opportunities advertised over the year for people to participate in the Bridge, including peer support groups, group activity sessions, and opportunity to take part in company running, development and maintenance.

*“So good to see so many activities going on despite funding difficulties”*

We recorded monitoring data (number of paid and unpaid participants) for a total of 324 activities during the year, with an average of 5.3 unpaid participants per event. The following regular groups and activities took place during the year. Reports from each group are in the appendix.

- Art at the Bridge (p13-15)
- Company Systems Working Party (p15)
- Experts by Experience (p16-21)
- Greenwood Project (p22-25)
- Newsletter (p25)
- Open Afternoons (p26-27)
- Open Minds (p28)
- Open Reflection (p28)
- Rainbowbridge (p28-30)
- Underground Sound (p30-32)
- Volunteering Development (p33)
- Wholefoods (p34)

## **Additional one off activities**

Here is a selection of additional events and activities that took place during this year:

- Annual Big Dinner at Herbies
- Bridge 11<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebration
- Bridge Collective Annual General Meeting
- Christmas craft workshops
- Data protection training
- Director's safeguarding risk assessment training
- *"Exploring peer-led democratic processes"* – update on research with the Bridge Collective by Gemma Budge, Clinical Psychologist
- Elizabeth Svanholmer visit from Open Minded Training to collect stories and ideas about people living and coping with voices and similar experiences.
- Fire Marshall training
- First Aid training by Moorland First Aid, St John's Ambulance, Devon Communities Together: eleven people successfully gained first aid qualifications this year
- Funding planning
- Health and Safety training for Directors
- Mixed art group sessions for men and women: Weaving Workshop and Seedbomb Workshop with Magic Carpet at the Bridge
- Recruitment planning
- Safeguarding awareness training
- Stall and tombola at Wonford Community Day

## **People at the Bridge**

**Attendees:** Estimated number of people involved in the Bridge groups and activities in a year: 225

**Members:** Members on 31 March 2018: 15. Members on 31 March 2019: 17

**Keyholders:** Sarah E, Rachel, Nicola, Lena, Fleur, Ben, Ashley, Andrew, Chris, Sarah T, Gill, Margaret

**Regular contracted employee hours:** at 31/3/2019 were 85 hours/ week, 2.4 full time equivalent.

**Student placement:** Ness on a Work-Based Learning placement for BA (Hons) Integrative Counselling course with Iron Mill College, Exeter.

**Voluntary hours:** People input unpaid time into making the Bridge Collective happen both through informally getting involved, working parties and through named voluntary roles. Informal contributions include: washing up, cleaning, shopping, mending, writing up meeting notes, proof reading, chopping wood, typing, writing funding bids, washing tea towels, checking first aid kit contents, compiling and formatting our newsletter.

### **Volunteers (named roles):**

- Assistant Company Secretary: Ben
- Bridge representative on Devon Partnership Trust Open Dialogue Steering Group: Margaret
- Company secretary: Andrew
- Directors at 1/4/18 and 31/3/19: Mark Burnett, Sarah Trickett, Sarah Everson, Andrew Barkla, Margaret Turner, Ben Durkin
- Experts by Experience workshop speakers (see below)



- Open Minds: peer support group facilitators: Ashley, Ben
- Rainbow Bridge peer support group facilitators: Lena, Rachel
- Thursday Volunteer facilitators: Andrew, Ashley, Ben, Chris, Nicola, Margaret
- Volunteer drivers: Katharina
- 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, Ben, Beverly, Caroline, Petra,
- Bank employees: Ali, Katharina, Nicola, Rachel, Sarah, Ami
- Self-employed: Jane, Mary, Joy
- Facilitating sessions: Gill, Katharina, Nicola, Sarah T

### **Community Development Worker Team:**

- Art: Chris and Fleur, with bank worker cover from Sarah T and Nicola
- Company system working party: Andrew, Nicola
- Communications: Andrew, Nicola, Sarah
- Data protection officer: Nicola

- Experts by Experience: Nicola (first 6 months), Gill, Sarah, Nicola (second 6 months)
- Finance: Sarah with additional bank work from Andrew to learn some of the finance role
- Greenwood Project: Andrew, Chris
- Health & safety named persons: Andrew, Nicola
- Music: Nicola
- Newsletter: Andrew
- Safeguarding officer: Nicola
- Thursday Open Afternoon volunteer coordinators: Chris, Nicola
- Volunteering Development: Nicola

### **Help we've received**

- Fire training given by Jon Hazlehurst
- Grants: Tudor Trust, Self Heal Association (Art), Devon County Council, Devon Community Foundation (Greenwood), Allen Lane Foundation (Experts by Experience), Co-op Bank (Laptop and iPad), Alpkit Foundation (Greenwood residential)
- Private donations from individual supporters
- Help from Titan Computers to use software on iMac
- New chairs donated from Exeter University
- Advice and repairs to Underground Sound music equipment – from Duncan at Sound Gallery

## Our Stakeholders and how we communicate and consult with them

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

Currently the following is in place at the Bridge:

- Bi-monthly group supervision for facilitators (facilitated by a guest facilitator, Mary Booker)
- Quarterly Open Reflection sessions (facilitated by a guest facilitator, Michelle Virgo) for the Bridge community to review, reflect and plan.
- Monthly Community Meetings – these are the overall decision-making meetings at the Bridge and all participants in the collective are invited to contribute.
- Monthly Development Team meetings for the Community Development Workers to work out the practicalities of working together as a part-time team, sharing of workload, mutual support and information.

Some comments collected at our Annual General Meeting:

- *Being willing to discuss difficult issues*
- *Consultation about the future of art at the bridge - thanks to Nicola for facilitating*
- *People who put together the newsletter: it's always interesting informative attractive and enjoyable*

- *While I've been unable to attend it's been good to have been kept in touch thank you all*
- *Finding solutions for communicating (remotely) with Sarah E more easily*
- *Owl camera purchased to increase accessibility for remote participation in Bridge activities*
- *People from local groups and organisations coming to Thursday opening - community connectors*
- *I'm always talking to people about the special place and people of Bridge to encourage more groups like this in remote areas*
- *Talking at conferences*
- *Margaret - new reading group at Saint Sidwell's – ripples of support and connections made at the Bridge reaching out into the wider community*

## **Hopes for the future:**

Ideas from our Annual General Meeting:

- *Art group for men and women as a regular activity*
- *Continued funding*
- *Discussion group?*
- *Fundraising idea: I would like to be able to offer useful household items in good condition for free to any who need them - donation box? I could photo items and send via email so people could choose before I bring*
- *Generating new training for Experts by Experience*
- *Greenwood visiting Sidmouth*
- *More activities with Organic Arts*

## Appendix: Reports from groups



### **Art at the Bridge**

This year we have continued to run the Women's art group fortnightly on a Monday, with attendance on average of 5-6 people. Activities the group has taken part in have included textile work such as sewn flowers and felt making (wet method), printing (lino and monoprints), paper mache, collage and paper sculpture, glass painting, leaf rubbings, prints and paintings, willow and tissue paper lanterns, Christmas crackers and decorations...

In addition to the Women's Art Group we have had 2 joint sessions with the Greenwood Project: one in May decorating our 'Obby Oss' Delilah, with flowers and ribbons, and pressing flowers found in the wood. The second was in December, when we went for a morning walk foraging for greenery followed by an afternoon workshop making wreaths and garlands to decorate the Bridge for Christmas. These joint sessions were open to both women and men.

Also open to both men and women were a pair of half-day pottery workshops at Unearth Studio. This was available to all but as numbers were limited, people interested were asked to book ahead. These were very popular, and we are planning further workshops that are open to all, while continuing to provide the regular women's groups. At the end of this year we had 2 sessions provided by Magic Carpet: Seedbombs with Stephen and Weaving with Lyndsey.

We did an evaluation over a period of a month, putting up a painted tree with questions along the branches, and leaves on which people were invited to write responses and comments and attach them to the tree. The questions and responses are shown below:

- **What do you most enjoy about the group?**

*'Friendliness' 'I like that you can do what you like rather than what everyone else is doing'*

*'Being able to do different crafts' 'work together as a team' 'non-judgement'*

*What do you get from the women's art group or any other art activities at the Bridge?*

*'A space to be creative' 'A space to be myself' 'A feeling of being together with others doing things I enjoy' 'I feel safe in the environment using colour and being creative is good for me'*

- **Is there anything we could do differently to support you to attend art activities?**

*'Allow men in the art group, have a mixed group'*

- **If there were also some mixed art groups (men and women) would you attend?**

*'Yes, I'd like to attend any other art activities' 'Yes I'd like to attend mixed group' 'I like mixed groups and more activities for men and women'*

- **If you haven't come to art lately, can you tell us why?**

*'There are no mixed groups'*

- **Are there any things you found difficult?**

(There were no responses to this question)

- **Any ideas for future art activities?**

*'mosaic work or bead work' 'Visit art exhibitions, make Christmas cards and decorations' 'Glass paint' 'paper mache' 'Flower arranging or Christmas wreath'*

- **Additional feedback received for the experience of being in the women's art group:**

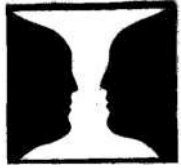
*'Delight' 'Being with other people without having to talk' 'Having a focus or shared focus' 'Playing' 'Not having to be accomplished'*

Two extra Christmas workshops were held at which some of these suggestions were met, one in collaboration with the Greenwood Project as mentioned above. These were run by our colleague Sarah, who also co-facilitated the Women's Art Group for 3 months to cover a period of extended leave.



## **Company Systems Working Party**

This monthly working party is for skill sharing, learning and doing bite size chunks of our company running systems e.g. – admin, safety and maintenance. We've met 12 times and 14 people have participated in this open monthly working space over the year. We've been joined by new people taking part and Chris shadowing the facilitators learning what we do. Things we've done this year include: cleaning, shopping, counting money from tea and coffee donations, mending equipment, typing, safety checks, tidying, filing, sorting. We fixed our toilet, bought fans for hot weather, got a new hot water heater and new more flexible and accessible lighting.



## Experts by Experience

### Achievements:

- People have spoken about experiences including: being assessed under the Mental Health Act, communication with doctors, making meaning, suicidal thoughts, self harm, hearing voices, seeing visions, trauma, foundations and rebuilding life.
- Organizations we've done workshops with include: University of Exeter Medical School, Plymouth University School of Nursing, Devon County Council, Plymouth University Urgent and Emergency Care Programme.
- We've delivered: 20 training sessions this year.
- We've spoken with: approximately 247 people including: trainee doctors, trainee mental health nurses, AMHPs (Approved Mental Health Professionals), paramedics, nurses
- EbyE training has bought £7240 into the Bridge this year.
- Expanding the number of workshops we do with student nurses
- Experts by Experience made new contact with RiPfA and is in the process of developing work. (RiPfA Research in Practice for Adults develop evidence informed resources to support practice improvement across the social care sector.)
- Experts by Experience new contact with Faye from research department at Devon Partnership Trust



## Team work:

- 47 people have participated in Experts by Experience session teams (15), monthly meetings (32) and development meetings (6)
- new speakers: 6, new volunteers: 5, new bank work employees: 2, new people facilitating sessions: 2
- 2 new community development workers: Experts by Experience each working 9hrs/week
- Volunteer input into Experts by Experience training over this year is estimated at 106 hours
- Ness (counselling student on placement) undertook 30 hours of work, focussing on offering one to one personal development reviews with Experts by Experience participants.
- Doing successful handover work between Nicola, Gill and Sarah

## Allen Lane Foundation grant - steps achieved:

- *“Set up twice monthly meetings-aims of them.”*
- *“Choose a 2nd working party day and time.”*
- *“Review all advertising materials.”*
- *“20 Workshops per year work out time scales.”*
- *“Clear plan for Allen Lane on a 6 month basis.”*
- *“Sharing our learning, conferences.”*
- *“Capture other achievements-personal testimonies.”*
- *“Signposting/other info given (eg flyer for engagement event for crisis drop in centres etc.)”*
- *“Recruitment of second part-time workshop co-ordinator.”*
- *“Costing recruitment.”*
- *“Cost development time-What done, contract, fixed-term, bank.”*
- *“Recruitment process for new co-ordinator.”*



- *“Updated project co-ordinator/facilitator job description written.”*
- *“Cost E by E co-ordination time current and regularise.”*

### **Challenges and hopes for the future:**

- **Challenges-** Over optimistic and could take on too much, getting a training package up and running to help people to be involved in the ways that they want to be eg, public speaking, IT. Funding and payment for non-involvement work, how to carry on one to one review sessions and implement suggestions from them, accessing decision making without attending community meetings (proxy voting, sending in suggestions), website, managing facilitators’ time and priorities, fallow year of nurses, funding.
- **Hopes-** training package up and running, consistent social days, more funding to include a training budget and travel expenses, delivering new Bridge workshops, networking- uni/college freshers’ fayre, greater contact with the general public, more advertising, updating website, working with general nurses, getting involved in more research.

### **A selection of feedback from this year:**

- *“in my ideal world I think I would include a year of the course listening to people's experiences, I think it's the best way to change the bits that still need improving. I think what you guys are doing is so inspirational so thank you!”*
- *“the group were really engaged with two very engaging facilitators....they were great advocates for mental health and how to engage.”*

- *“I am.....really keen to have involvement with EbyE again. I have come away feeling very positive”*
- *“I always look forward to the incredible sessions delivered by the experts by experience from Bridge Collective C.I.C. Always so humbled to hear about peoples experiences with mental health and exploring the meaning of recovery and resilience.”*
- *“It was revelatory, It did make a difference, It is worth doing, Can see the impact.”*
- *“Really enjoyed the ‘recovery’ conversation, made me think more about the word and how it is a very broad term to use. Always find out what ‘recovery’ means to people. Get to know individuals as it definitely means many different things. “*
- *“Knowing I am not alone with my struggles and reassured that it is OK to talk about it.”*
- *“Listening to strategies eg massages, animal therapy, tap therapy, swimming in cold water”*
- *“Rob, thank you so much for yesterday. It was a great session and clearly the product of loads of work you've put in with colleagues at the Bridge Collective.”*
- *“It's funny but the meeting had quite an impact on an assessment I did on Friday! I think I felt more confident in slowing the doctors down. I'd like to think it was always my way but I definitely felt the A&E [accident and emergency] pressure!”*
- *“Really enjoyed working with Gill and Sarah T as E by E facilitators”*
- *“Thanks so much for organising this opportunity, the time to reflect and understanding of both perspectives of a MHA [mental health act assessment] was informative, positively challenging and thought provoking. Please pass thanks again to all the facilitators, their openness, honesty and respect of the role we hold made the time incredibly engaging.”*

- *“I came to an Experts by Experience meeting shortly after leaving hospital and was amazed to find a space where my experience of 'psychosis' could be useful. The meeting was very open and welcoming with no pressure to speak. I soon found an opportunity to speak to junior doctors, which gave me my first real opportunity to put my thoughts about what I had been through into order. Speaking to trainee professionals was daunting, but it made me think differently about my experiences and it was the first time I had spoken openly about things that until then felt like a shameful secret.”*
- *“E by E is a project through which I help facilitate the learning of health professionals and other allied persons. It means I can use my experiences, both positive and negative to help shape how patients are treated-importantly I can be a voice for the voiceless and help explain some of the pitfalls that otherwise might get missed. Through E by E I have learned new skills to do with the importance of pacing, boundaries and navigating the different needs of all participants. These skills are things that I have been able to transfer into other areas of my life. Being able to be part of the future of mental health care as a collective gives us the power to make a real change and shape the future. This is a very valuable resource and I am proud to be part of it.”*
- *“What have I gained from participating in Experts by Experience?  
Resilience and self esteem  
Clarify thinking  
Confidence  
Safe social space  
Supported to speak”*





## Greenwood Project

**Successes:** we were successful in getting a grant from Devon Community Foundation which, supplemented by a contribution from the Devon County Council grant, enabled us to have two Greenwood sessions a month this year: woodland visits, campfire cooking, greenwood crafts, nature walks, wildlife watching, beach art, apple picking and pressing, mindfulness walk, foraging, wassail, mummers' play.

**Challenges for us:** reconciling people wanting sociability and peer support with people wanting quiet nature connection - resolved by variety in choice of activities and venues, and discussion about people's needs and mutual respect; challenge of getting to new venues, some of them remote - resolved by meeting and travelling together for most events, choosing some venues close to where participants live (eg Exeter, Exmouth, Topsham) - easier way in to getting to know the project.

### Some feedback:

- *"Absolutely fantastic day" (spoon carving)*
- *"It's a good place. Nobody told me about this place. I can come again by myself now" (Ludwell Valley Park)*
- *"Friendship, relaxation, activities that we don't normally do, freedom, exercise, walking, seeing nature, seeing the views"*
- *"It's like family, feels safe - confidentiality is important"*
- *"Learning to make a whistle, whittling a spoon, things we haven't done before"*

- *“Therapeutic, calming, relaxing”*
- *“Skills - using the apple picker”*
- *“Sharing practice - bringing our skills from other places, sharing knowledge”*
- *“Saw my first Thrush anvil - someone told me what it was”*
- *“Sharing passion - someone bringing bird boxes he’d made”*
- *“Journey is a big thing. Wouldn’t have done it on my own - wouldn’t have known where to get off the bus”*
- *“Good for your soul, eating good food. Humans were made to be caring and looking after each other gives a sense of community, a feeling of love”*
- *“So glad I pulled myself out of bed to go to this. Friendly faces at the bus stop. The wood working its gentle magic. Outdoors, trees, the river, Andrew pointing out wild garlic and the strange orange peel mushrooms when we went for a walk. Pancakes on the open fire. Christine made the first batch of batter. I felt pleased with myself when I made up the next batch. Mine was delicious with the hummus. Then making the little stick figure which now has a place in my home. Trying out something new. Yes thanks for a good day out.”*
- *“I started going on the greenwood activities in the autumn. It was beautiful, sitting and walking among the trees in their autumn colours. In the winter it was nice to enjoy the warmth of the campfire, and boil up drinks, and toast pitta bread on it. The craft activities were fun too. Visiting the hide at Topsham gave us a ringside view of the wading birds. I hope funding will be granted so that we can enjoy the magic of spring, out in the countryside. Thank you for providing this escape from the city.”*

### **Residential weekend:**

We had a residential woodland weekend at Blytheswood Hostel, Steps Bridge, Dunsford, in April 2018, supported with funding from the Alpkit Foundation.

17 people participated in the event overall, of whom 10 stayed overnight throughout the weekend. The weekend gave the opportunity of sharing time with others, and of experiencing the peace and freshness of the woods and riverside. Walks through boggy woods and climbing Heltor Rock offered confidence-building challenges and there was the chance for everyone to contribute to the household tasks that made the event work. We cooked on the open fire outside and made drawing charcoal from twigs in a tin can in the fire and drew with it. We made paper lanterns by the firepit and sang and played games together and people played instruments they had brought.

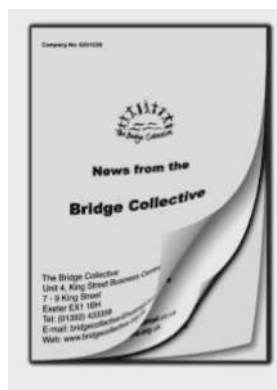
### **Some feedback from participants:**

- *“I needed to challenge my anxiety being with other people and the weekend has been an ideal opportunity to do that.”*
- *“Such a confidence builder.”*
- *“It’s my dream place and I enjoyed every moment of the time I spent with you all in it, including meandering along the tangled pathways, wading through the mud, and even doing the washing up! I feel I could live here. So a huge thank you to each and every one of you x”*
- *“Now I’ve got the bus, I can come out again.”*
- *“Thank you for a beautiful, peaceful place. Lovelier than could have imagined.”*



- *“My visit to Steps Bridge felt like renewing a vow – my vow to love, be mindful of and respect Nature. Nature is there and gives to all of us. All we need to do is see, hear, feel and breathe its diversity and healing magic.”*
- *The time went very fast. We filled most of it up with walking, cooking, conversation and relaxing by the fire and we didn’t fit in all the greenwood art and craft activities we hoped.*
- *This was a new venue for us and some people who wanted to come didn’t feel confident to commit to staying in an unknown place, but came for a day and said they would like to come for a whole weekend in the future. Most of us travelled to Steps Bridge by bus together. People said that now they knew the route and the area they would be able to come out by themselves or with friends. We hope we will be able to use this venue for a similar activity again.*

## 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. There is a deadline for contributions which is advertised at the Bridge and in each newsletter, with a dedicated email address. Four issues were produced during the year. There were written contributions and images from 13 named contributors and more than 10 anonymous contributors. Each quarter an average of 160 people received the newsletter by post or email. The newsletter was also posted on our website and copies were available at the Bridge.



## Open Afternoons

We are open on the first Thursday of each month, and as many other Thursdays as we can. Open Thursday afternoons are a space for people to connect with the Bridge and with each other. During this year we have had 34 open Thursday afternoons. One of our achievements this year has been to recruit a new volunteer facilitator, and we now have a team of 6 volunteers.

### **How it works:**

1st Thursday - 2 paid facilitators

2nd Thursday - Community Meeting

3rd, 4th, 5th Thursdays – 2 volunteer facilitators

2 paid co-ordinators organise a rota of 2 volunteer facilitators and 1 reserve volunteer for each open Thursday; they are also responsible for acting as back-up if both a volunteer on the rota and the reserve volunteer are unable to make a session. It was questioned whether it was necessary to have paid facilitators, or whether we could have every session facilitated by volunteers, as this would save the Bridge some money. However, there are specific things which are done on the first Thursday: printing out information we have been sent, making sure there are leaflets and flyers available in our information folder, answering phone calls, dealing with new membership enquiries and payments, which are not done by volunteers on other Thursdays. It is also a time for co-ordinating the volunteer rota. It was noted that it can sometimes be hard not to get distracted by other Bridge things that need doing.

## Feedback on how the Open Afternoons are going:

- *“Thursday open afternoon is very popular and well attended”*
- *“Nearly every Thursday through the year has been open”*
- *It’s an opportunity to invite people along – mostly a gentle open space to be together – often a place to find a way in*
- *‘Always different’, ‘I really like it’, ‘I enjoy it’, ‘therapeutic’, ‘no pressure’*
- Mostly people like the structure, or lack of it; words used were *‘freedom’, ‘relax’, ‘chill out’, ‘be a community’*. Some would prefer a more structured, or partly structured time, mentioning *‘uncertainty with lack of structure’*.
- There was a question whether the open afternoon could be longer (starting in the morning) with an activity for the first part and *‘free form in the afternoon’*, however at present the Bridge is often in use already on Thursday mornings.
- People facilitating the open afternoons said they liked the experience of working with different people. *‘It makes all the difference that we do it as a team’*. The system of having a reserve facilitator in place means that people don’t feel worried if they have to pull out at short notice, and we have not had to cancel any planned open afternoons so far.
- At our year’s review of our Open Afternoons we noted that a freeform space is a particular way of being together and something to celebrate!



## Open Minds

We have had a successful year of regular monthly meetings, with lots of new members attending. We estimate 25 people have been involved over the year. We have been contacted by a number of researchers looking to recruit to projects, and distributed relevant information to group participants. The group is centred on open conversation about our experiences. Members have given regular feedback that it is a rare opportunity to talk openly and freely about experiences that are widely stigmatised. The group has been described as *'a place of safety'* and *'an oasis of non-judgmental space'*.



## Open Reflection

Is a quarterly sessions facilitated by a guest facilitator, Michelle Virgo for the Bridge Collective Community to review, reflect and plan. Our session topics this year were:

- Underground Sound – time to plan a project re-launch
- Open Reflection on how we're doing as a community. Planning Oct 2018 to Mar 2019 priorities
- Communication – part 1
- 6 month planning. Planning our April – Sept 2019 priorities
- Communication – part 2



## Rainbowbridge

Rainbowbridge is a peer support group for people who identify as LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Trans) and are affected by mental health issues. We meet once a month for coffee, tea and a chat. There are two regular peer support group facilitators. There have been approximately 20 people attending the group over the course of the year, 7 of which are new to the group. Exeter Pride still remains a regular annual event for us. We hand out our Rainbowbridge flyers, Bridge Collective leaflets and gather information about other groups and organisations. At Pride 2018 I met with the 'Institute Of Physics' who were new to the event. They had a very impressive stall with a number of wonderful experiments on show inviting people to participate. Their message was simple – sciences are accessible to everyone. The 'Devon Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Services' had a giant informative 'Jenga' game – a fun and accessible way for people to learn about this organisation. However, the stall that captured my imagination the most was 'MyUmbrella'. 'MyUmbrella' are a voluntary led support group based in Reading for the lesser known LGBT+ identities. Most people know that the LGBT+ flag is a rainbow, and while the rainbow flag works as a 'general' flag for all LGBT+ people, other parts of the community have created their own flags (for example, 'Bisexual', 'Transgender', 'Asexual', and many, many more). The 'My Umbrella' project has helped many individuals who have felt the need to identify as something more than just LGBT+. For some people separate flags are necessary so that they can

feel more connected to a specific group or community. These flags are visible symbols of pride and can be very powerful.

At Rainbowbridge we welcome everyone with or without a flag. We acknowledge that many of us choose to define our sexual orientation and/or sexual identity. However, some of us maybe unsure, or may prefer not to have a specific definition. At Rainbowbridge nobody should ever feel the need to define themselves in any way. We aim to be an inclusive group. We welcome anyone who maybe questioning their sexual orientation and/or sexual identity. We welcome LGBT allies (friends and family) who wish to accompany someone, or perhaps attend a group for themselves for a chat and a discussion. Our door is always open.



## Underground Sound

**April-June 2018:** our music project was on a break at the beginning of this year. In May we met for an “*Open Reflection*” session to look at how we develop the music project as a community.

**July-Sept 2018:** we had a monthly working party on a Friday for shaping the music project and equipment: mending, maintenance and storage. We met to plan for recruitment of a temporary 16hr/wk paid community development role for music & volunteering for Oct18-Mar19. When we didn't fill the advertised post, we met for “*plan B*” planning. One member of the community development team could offer 2hrs/wk a week and so we came up with a temporary idea to see: what can we achieve with a once a month music session for 6 months?

**Oct-Dec 2018:**

we met one Friday a month for project development and jamming e.g. playing guitars, keyboards, samba instruments, percussion, drumming. People donated, bought, cleaned, fixed, set up, instruments and equipment, tuned and re-strung guitars and banjos. We wrote a music volunteer role description.

**Jan-Mar 2019:**

New plug sockets fitted to avoid trailing leads and new lighting to see the decks. Between us we did jamming with drum-guitar-keyboard-bass, mixing, learning new drumming rhythms, drumming to dance music, banjo teaching. In January we had an “*Old song-new song*” session: sharing favorite tracks to see in the new-year. In February we had a DJ workshop with DJ Roominator.

**Challenges:**

- Underground Sound was a weekly project in the Bridge Collective for over 10 years. Following council funding cuts and the loss of 3 music project facilitators in 2017, these weekly sessions closed in July 2017.
- Re-opening the project as a once a month session
- Exploring ways to support volunteer facilitation of this space.
- Disappointment and frustration that we’ve lacked capacity to support new volunteer recruitment to meet more often.
- Updating our recruitment principles and practices

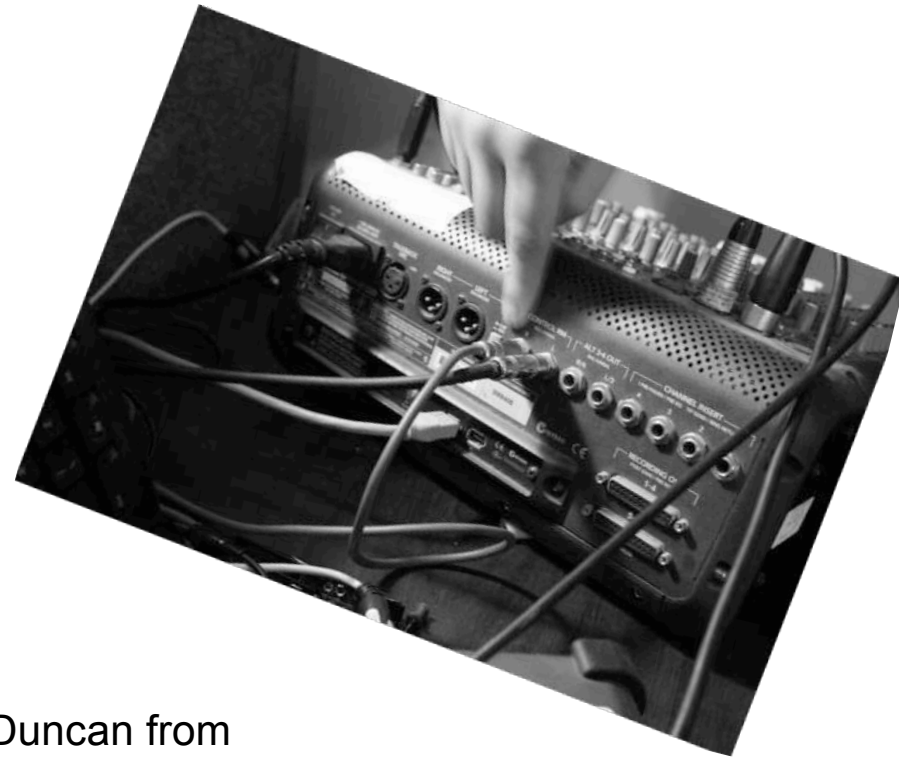


## Successes:

- *“Keeping the Underground Sound project going”*
- In this year we went from no music sessions to 9 music sessions over the year.
- An average of 14 people attending each monthly session with 24 individual participants over the year.
- *“Pitching in and piecing know-how together.”*
- *“....its looking to take good shape”*
- We wrote a music volunteer role description.
- At the DJ workshop someone asked: *“Can music save lives?”* and the answer was a resounding: *“yes!”*

## Looking to the future:

- We have five sessions of Sound Recording training with Duncan from Sound Gallery booked for six people in May.
- 5 people interested in being music session volunteers.
- Building our ability to open up for new recruitment.







## Volunteering development

In April we planned where we want to be in 3 years time with our volunteering development. The work we highlighted was more than could be facilitated by the current team so we looked to recruit for a new 16hr/week employee role covering both volunteering development & music project development (for 6 months). We didn't fill the advertised post, and instead recruited internally for a 7hr/week post for 6 months covering music and volunteering.



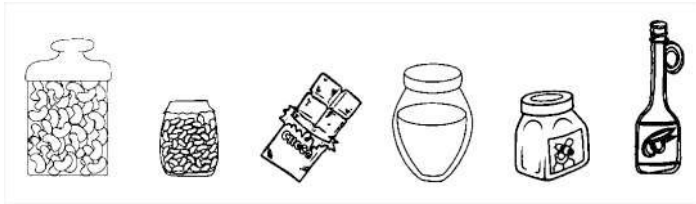
### Challenges:

- How to go from a team covering multiple project areas with reduced hours, getting bogged down and overwhelmed to a team with realistic workloads
- Updating our recruitment to be fit for recruiting, training, support & back-up to volunteer teams

### Success:

We had 7 volunteering development working spaces this year, attended by 4 people on average and 9 people in total. We focused on work of interest to the people turning up on the day including:

- Taking stock of our interests, experience and skills we'd like to offer and learn at the Bridge.
- *“Learning with each other, encouragement, peer support, sharing local knowledge”*
- Writing new voluntary roles, role descriptions reviews, planning volunteer training.
- *“buddying up to get something done”* e.g. – one person typing and one person reading and checking spelling.
- *“I can talk in a small group- I couldn't talk if lots of people were here”.*



## Wholefoods

The whole foods project is voluntarily facilitated by Mike. Supplies are ordered from Essential Trading, a Co-op based in Bristol, and sold at low cost to participants at the Bridge (17 customers in this year, 37 different products sold and a turnover of £626), as well as providing tea, coffee, cleaning materials and other supplies to the Bridge (value £155). The project introduced 13 new products during the year, and turnover doubled compared with last year, with a 40% increase in customers.

