



Annual Report

April 2009 - March 2010

The Bridge Collective CIC. Company no. 6201528.

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This Report

We compiled this report at the AGM on September 23rd 2010. It covers the period from April 1st 2009 to March 31st 2010. We used material from newsletters and other Bridge Collective documents from that period, submissions from Bridge groups and individuals that were sent in advance, and contributions generated in the meeting.

Bridge Collective 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.

From our report to the CIC Regulator, January 2010

The Bridge Collective has continued to facilitate activities, support and self-help groups for people in Devon and neighbouring counties who have experiences that may have been labelled as mental illness.

About 150 people have directly participated in these activities. The Bridge Collective has continued to develop as an accepting and supportive community.

In addition the Bridge Collective has contributed to greater understanding of mental health issues in the wider community. We have given mental health awareness training to mental health professionals, trainee professionals, and others, and hosted student visitors, impacting on the effectiveness of mental health and other services.

This year we have established a new website for the Bridge Collective making our work more easily accessible to more people.

Our stakeholders are members of the Bridge Collective and the groups it supports, other participants in its activities, mental health service commissioners and providers, and others who commission work including training from us.

Our monthly directors' meetings are open to all stakeholders to attend. We have held other stakeholder events including work facilitated by the Exeter

Community Enterprise Unit which has helped us to develop the company's mission, values, policies and procedures.

Meetings have been held with our biggest funders, Devon Partnership NHS Trust, resulting in a grant being renewed for 2009/10, and including useful discussion about the way we work, for example review of our complaints procedure.

Activities at the Bridge

The following activities were recorded in newsletters through the year:

Company secretary meetings; Experts by Experience (general meetings, planning, and delivery of training); Open days (Thursdays); Spirit of the Bridge meetings; BOGOF (Bridge Extra Meetings); Escot; Underground Sound; Rainbow Mind; Allotment; WAGS (Women's Art Group); Better Believe It; Wild Things at Wonford House; Charlotte Hubbard's visits; Lockbar Wood (Greenwood days and Work days); Social Anxiety Group; Bipolar Group; Medication Survey; Discussion Group; Cleaning and Health and Safety days; Donation and Disposals days; Voices Group; Directors' Meetings; Group Karaoke; Broadhempston Community Woodland; Meetings with Plymouth Ecotherapy; CEU presentation (Bridge – The Future); Group Formerly Known As Devon Spiritual Emergence Network; Tarka Trail Bike Ride; Lockbar Camp; Exmouth Beach Picnic; Wild Things Escot; Human Rights Workshops; Dartmoor walk; Visit by Elemental; Stover; Annual General Meeting; Escot Camp; Wholefood sales; Jon Perry research project; Yoga; Lived Experience Module (6 week course delivered to trainee nurses at Plymouth); PA (Participatory Approaches or Appraisal) Network; Victim Support training session "Impact of Crime" delivered to Bridge in exchange for Mental Health Awareness provided by us for their staff; Emotional Freedom Technique taster session; attendance and account of Bridge at SNUG (South West Network of User Groups); Fundraising attempt for making anti-stigma film (didn't get funding); writing, editing, producing and distributing the Newsletter.

Groups that are part of the Bridge (see statement on group relationships under "communication and consultation" below) are:

- Woman's Art Group
- Better Believe It
- Social Anxiety Group
- Discussion Group
- Greenwood Project
- Voices Group
- Rainbow Mind
- Bipolar Group

- Underground Sound
- Experts by Experience
- Group formally known as DSEN

Individuals do not need to be a member of the Bridge to attend groups or join in with activities, but are asked to respect the policies and procedures of the Bridge whilst in attendance.

Notes from some of the groups:

(group formerly known as) Devon Spiritual Emergence Network - DSEN

The group has been meeting every six weeks or so, for the last four years.

Until recently, we have been meeting at various outdoor venues throughout the county, but now tend to remain more local with the gatherings in the Exeter/Mid Devon areas. We usually share food cooked on an open fire and then have a circle sharing to acknowledge and celebrate the time of year as well as aspects of our personal journeys. This sharing is optional.”

Rainbow mind continues to meet at The Bridge Collective on the first Saturday of every month for a low-key, informal afternoon. The group has now been running at The Bridge Collective since August 2008; so we are proud to say we are 2 years old!

Rainbow mind welcomes all people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Trans (LGBT) and who have an experience of mental health issues.”

People at the Bridge

In March 2010 the Bridge Collective had 32 members

We estimate about 150 people were involved in Bridge activities

People who took part came from all over Devon and from as far away as Stourbridge in the West Midlands. Most activities were Exeter based but the Greenwood Project travelled all over Devon (and into Cornwall), and Experts by Experience worked as far afield as Plymouth and Bournemouth.

New directors: Mike, Richard

Retired directors: Margaret, Peter, Clare, Elaine

Margaret Branch: Margaret died at the end of July 2010 at the age of 91.

Margaret has contributed a huge amount to community groups and projects in the Devon area. She was a valued member of the Bridge Collective who served us and supported us on our board of directors until September last year when she had to give up the post due to her reduced mobility. However Margaret did continue to give, show interest in us, and made sure that we were in pocket for a good supply of cake at our meetings. Margaret’s passing was very quick and we hope in minimal discomfort.

New keyholders: Christoph, Jonathon

Company Secretaries: Elaine, Andrew, Bridie

Our partnership with Charlotte Hubbard and Ed Coutts in Experts by Experience had to end because of a change in their roles, as did Charlotte's regular visits to the Bridge to offer a listening ear. Fortunately we continue to work with them, though with less regular contact, in their new positions in Be Involved Devon

"Nearly all members who attend these gatherings are current or former members of The Bridge." – GFKADSEN

"People have come to the group who live locally but we have also welcomed people from Torquay and Taunton to Rainbow mind over the past year." – Rainbow Mind

Questions:

When did you turn up?

Why did you turn up?

Why did you keep turning up?

"I come here because I need to keep in contact with my family"

"It gives me a reason to get out of bed"

"I've been coming for 11 years" [The Bridge Collective CIC is 3 years old but some of the projects that make it up have a previous history.]

"I had a brave conversation with a member – where I said a little, they said a little, and then they told me about the Joan of Arc Room and Experts by Experience."

"What I like about the Bridge: I can be myself and if I feel wobbly can say that and feel ok to be here."

Help we've received

Financial Help. Thanks to the following people and organisations for making our work possible:

Ralph Hayward (Devon Partnership Trust), Ian Gibson (Devon County Council) continued to support us with grant funding for revenue costs and also with a capital grant for building work and computers (agreed but not spent during the period covered by this report.)

Allen Lane Foundation (Experts by experience research project)

National Lottery (women's art group)

Donations from private individuals.

Other Help. Thanks to the following:

Sue Linsley – Lived Experience Module

Ralph Hayward, Rethink, and Charlotte Hubbard assisted with mediation and advocacy.

Alan Bruford and his volunteers have been our generous hosts at Escot.”

“The group has been funded by the Bridge Collective for its duration. Financial help consists of the occasional payment of rent for a venue used, payment of a fee for facilitation and the contribution to a meal at Winter Solstice at The Lamb Inn last year. Other, non financial help and support the group has received has been the regular attendance of Andrew Barkla, Bridge member, who accompanies members on public transport to the venues and ensures the fire for cooking the meal is safe, well managed and fit for purpose.” - GFKADSEN

Wolf and Water for facilitating the Women’s Art Group

Rachel for helping us put together our Equality and Diversity Policy

“Thank you to the Bridge Collective for letting us hold our meetings here!” – Rainbow Mind

“The LGBT Collective website has been a useful resource through which people have discovered Rainbow mind. There are now two keyholders for Rainbow mind so the responsibility for opening up the room is shared.”

Consultation and communication within the Bridge

Newsletter

Website

Facebook

Charlotte Hubbard’s visits

Meetings open to all Bridge members and participants: directors, BOGOF, Keyholders, Events planning; Money; Health and Safety.

Effectiveness and accessibility of meetings has been improved by: agreeing a set of ground rules; attendance at training provided by CVS in Charing; policy on travel expenses; director induction.

See the next section for more about development of policies and ways of working.

“The group facilitator maintains regular communication with The Bridge by email and, somewhat less often, by phone.” – GFKADSEN

“Members of the group have been invited to contribute some of their thoughts and feedback about the group.” – GFKADSEN

“Rainbow Mind emails are very friendly and welcoming”

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Outcomes and achievements for the company

The “Bridge-The Future” review facilitated by CEU (Community Enterprise Unit) mostly took place before April 2009 but during this year CEU gave us their final presentation and report and the Bridge has been working through the recommendations in BOGOF meetings. Here is a quote from the October newsletter:

In the Bridge Extra meeting on July 23rd we put the recommendations in an order to start working through. We came up with:

1. Agree the Bridge Collective's
 - mission
 - aims
 - objectives
 - values
 - ground rules- both for director's meetings and in a broader sense
2. Display and communicate the mission etc. internally and externally.
3. Decide what comes next out of:
 - Agree meeting structures
 - How many employees can be directors?
 - Appointing a chair
 - Membership responsibilities and role
 - Director's responsibilities and role
 - Staff job descriptions, responsibilities and role
 - Keyholders, facilitators and anybody doing work- responsibilities and role.

4. Recommendations we've completed:

- A standardised agenda issues in advance. Advertised on the board in the Crow's Nest at the end of the Bridge Extra meeting and on the internet (as of 12/8/09).

5. Recommendations partially completed:

- Policies and procedures work.
- Ground rules
- Staff job descriptions"

Among our achievements during the year in this process have been: agreeing a Mission Statement (See beginning of this report); making a list of Values; creating policies including Equality and Diversity, Complaints, Donations and Disposals, and Keyholding.

We have also done work on clarifying the relationship between the Bridge and the groups within it. We agreed the following statement on:

Autonomy and Group Relationships:

"Groups have their own life.

Each group as a part can communicate with the whole.

Each part has its own dynamics.

The Bridge is the sum of its individuals, groups and activities.

What is happening in all of the parts is the foundation of the Bridge.

The purpose of the Bridge structures is to support the individuals in groups and activities.

Being a Bridge member or group implies a willingness to participate in what the Bridge does and how we do it."

"The Bridge is offering support and acknowledgment for the more spiritual aspects of recovery as well as opportunities for outdoor activities in Nature for which, there is growing evidence, is valuable for both emotional and psychological well - being." - GFKADSEN

Outcomes and achievements in groups

"People gaining in facilitation experience in Experts by Experience training.

New people joining Experts by Experience and facilitating for the first time.

Training swap with Victim Support.

Progress in organising Experts by Experience work e.g. payments and communications for each part of the process.

Jon Perry research into training mental health nurse students.

Designing and delivering a module at Plymouth University to student mental health nurses."

- Experts by Experience

“GFKADSEN takes an equal part of the overall mix of groups at The Bridge and offers a valuable, an often overlooked, spiritual level to the organisation”

“Members of Rainbow mind attended the Exeter Pride march earlier this year, in which LGBT people and friends came together in solidarity, followed by events held at the Exeter Phoenix.”

“Rainbow mind is still a safe place for all LGBT people who experience mental health issues to feel welcome.”

Re DSEN – It’s good to have a place to slow down and connect to what’s important”

The best things: all the effort that we’ve put in together in making it happen, and then it happens. It does happen, and somehow it always does seem to turn out all right, and I’m never sure how that is. And the fact that people always exceed my expectations, it’s not that they were low, it’s just that it’s always so much better than I thought it was going to be. I’ve always assumed it would be good, but it’s actually been terrific.” – Jon Perry, researcher with Experts by Experience.

Feedback re WAGS: “Important for structure for week. Good space to meet, and safe and secure. Sewing for Peace.”

Outcomes and achievements for people within the Bridge

“People facilitating Experts by Experience training for the first time” – Experts by Experience

members enjoy social interaction and the opportunity to share more deeply, if they choose, about their personal life stories” - GFKADSEN

“We need a place and organisation to come to that treats us like complete human beings. That is why Bridge is so important. It is good for our well-being and human rights.”

“I enjoyed Escot Summer Camp.”

“I find Better Believe It group useful, helpful.”

“The Bridge has given me back my life again helping others.”

Challenges we have faced

Experts by Experience – Ed and Charlotte leaving. Thank you to them both for their support and facilitation of Experts by Experience Training.

A long period of trying to resolve some complaint/conflict issues which began in the previous year. The following is quoted from a report written about this issue:

“The Bridge has been challenged by the issues raised by the conflict, but I think it is fair to say that we have addressed them in a thorough and responsible way. We regret that it was not possible to resolve them to the satisfaction of all the parties but we believe that an outcome of the experience is that the Bridge is stronger and has much more clarity about accountability and where authority lies to resolve issues.”

“We processed it well.”

“Finding the right name for the group – one that reflects its essence.” - GFKADSEN

Challenges and hopes for the future

“Surviving and flourishing in a harder economic climate”

“Discussion Group needs more people - need to publicise it. Put notice in library advertising group?”

“Keeping attendance numbers up to a viable level and, hopefully, continuing to develop an awareness of the connection Nature has with our personal experience” - GFKADSEN

“We are as a group looking forward to new exciting plans re new funding” – WAGS

“Make a profit on wholefoods.”

“Increasing opportunities for creative arts”

“Reduce the number of meetings we have!”

“Continue to give training to professionals to help improve services” – Experts by Experience”

“Opportunities for getting training in facilitating for Experts by Experience”

“Opportunities for office skills training.”