



The Power of Us

One City, Many Communities

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023





Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people and communities whose stories have been an inspiration and which demonstrate the Power of Us. These stories were collected in April 2023, with the exception of the Black South West Network (BSWN) case study on page 24. They have not been edited.

Also thanks to the editors and contributors who have brought it all together:

- **Claire Ferraro**,
Public Health Registrar, Editor
- **Penny Germon**, Head of Service, Communities, Editor
- **Julia Foligno**,
Community Development Practitioner
- **Mark Allen-Richardson**,
Senior Public Health Specialist
- **Bethan Loveless**,
Public Health Registrar
- **Adele Mildon**,
Senior Public Health Specialist
- **Elise Hurcombe**,
Arts Development Manager
- **Sado Jirde**, Director
and **Chiara Lodi**, Senior Research Officer,
Black South West Network
- **Paul Housden**,
Transformation and Commissioning Manager,
Adult Commissioning.

Foreword

Social relationships play a hugely important part in our individual wellbeing. Indeed, social isolation and loneliness can be as bad for our health as other risk factors such as smoking.^{1,2}

The extent to which we have control over our lives, have good social connections and live in healthy, safe neighbourhoods are all important influences on health.³ While social groups and communities can help us maintain and enhance our sense of self-worth through collective self-esteem.⁴

These community-level factors are some of the building blocks for good mental and physical health and can act as a buffer against stressors throughout our lives.

Communities are live, dynamic, delicate eco-systems established through the connection and action of the people who are part of that community. People's identities and allegiances may shift over time and in different social circumstances.

A community is a group of people who have common characteristics or interests. Community may arise from a sense of shared identity⁵, affiliation or common bonds or may be linked to a place, neighbourhood or country.

And of course, we should remember that while social connection is vital for our health and wellbeing, communities can also be conflicted and uncomfortable places.

However, the thing that all communities have in common is that they share a story, sometimes called an identity forming narrative.⁶ It is this storytelling that helps people share aspects of who they are and what is important to them.

Vibrant, cohesive and inclusive communities are our most important asset.

In Bristol and across the country, there are some inspiring examples of community organising, community ownership and community wealth-building.

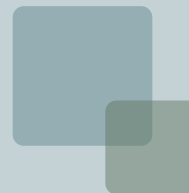
In this report, with the support of some wonderful stories of community in action, I explore the science underpinning why communities are important for health and what we can do in the city to create the conditions to help promote and support positive, thriving and resilient communities.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this report as much as I have enjoyed writing it.



Christina Gray

Director for Communities and Public Health, Bristol City Council



Contents

Foreword	3
Contents	4
Chapter 1: Communities and Health	5
The Power of Us: Social Action for Everyone	6
The Power of Us: St Christopher's Brislington Over 55 Luncheon Club	7
Chapter 2: Communities and Power	8
The Power of Us: One Green Kitchen	11
The Power of Us: Brandon House Community	12
Chapter 3: Communities and Places	13
The Power of Us: Fox Haven Nature Garden	16
The Power of Us: Pen Park Pickers	17
Chapter 4: Communities, Art, Culture and Wellbeing	18
The Power of Us: Community Play	19
The Power of Us: Sound of the Forest	19
The Power of Us: Bristol Umbrella Singers	21
Chapter 5: Communities, Decision Making and Resource Allocation	22
The Power of Us: The Ardagh Community Trust (Horfield Common)	23
The Power of Us: The Make it Work Programme:	24
Chapter 6: Bristol; One City, Many Communities	25
Chapter 7: A Call to Action	27
Further Information	28
References	28



Chapter 1: Communities and Health

Social capital is a well-established theory which describes human networks of connection, norms and trust.

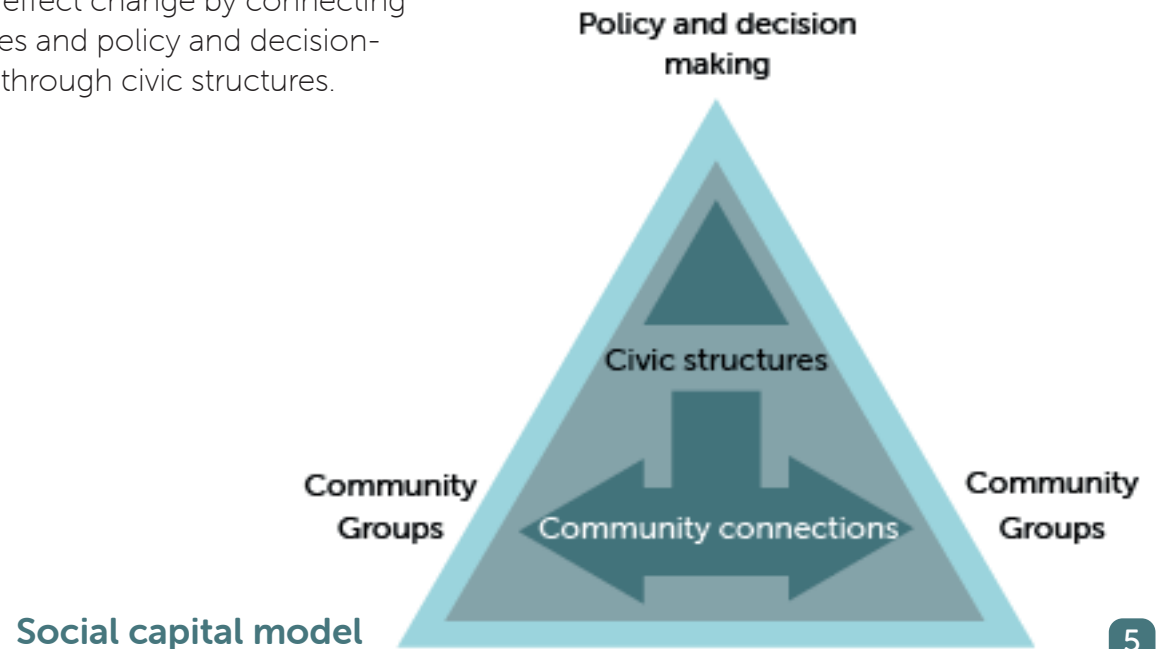
Social capital research explores the impact and quality of these networks which can be positive, facilitating coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit, or can be negative, creating closed groups and promoting exclusion.⁷ Robert Putnam's research in Italy demonstrated that social capital was more apparent in regions with historically dense networks of medieval towns and formal associations encouraging collective action.⁸

The stronger these positive networks and bonds, the more likely it is that members of a community will have access to trustworthy information, provide social support and cooperate for mutual benefit. In this way social capital creates the conditions for health and wellbeing.⁹

Most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted just how vital communities are for city resilience through building circles of trust, sharing learning, delivering services and providing feedback.¹⁰

Social Capital theory proposes two distinct dimensions of community connectness, horizontal connection, between groups and vertical connection to policy and decision making. Asset-based community development (ABCD) is an approach which celebrates what is strong (not wrong), and enables horizontal, people-to-people, connections at a community level. However, vertical connection is required to enable communities to effect change by connecting them to resources and policy and decision-making abilities, through civic structures.

Social Capital theory also reminds us that there are positive and negative types of connection. In our community making we need to build on the best qualities of openness, inclusion, honesty and fairness. We can all think of examples which are closed, excluding or worse. I spoke about this dimension of community and the importance of ensuring that young people in particular have access to positive networks and feel that they have voice and influence in my [Director of Public Health Report, Mental Wealth \(2019/20\)](#).



The Power of Us: Social Action for Everyone – Ruby, Lannie, and Keira

“We live in Hartcliffe, studying at Sixth form. In 2021, we went to an activity looking at social action, and ended up forming Social Action for Everyone (SAFE), a group for young people interested in community. In 2022 we organised a ‘Reclaim the Night’ walk in Hartcliffe raising awareness of violence against women and girls. Later in the year we took part in the Bristol Youth Conference and had a conversation with Bristol’s Mayor, Marvin Rees, about what it’s like for young people in South Bristol.”

“Youth Community Meal - We had talked a lot about the cost-of-living crisis and welcome spaces. Youth Moves had funding for social action projects and we applied. For six weeks, we cooked meals (with the help of our mums) and fed around 120 young people.”

“In August, we held a picnic in Wilmott Park, the Community Development team and Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership helped. We set up a table and gazebos, had sports, we welcomed youth groups. The police were there too. We wanted local families with children to have a free day in the holidays. Over 100 people came.”

Key message

Ruby, Lannie, and Keira were inspired to act, whilst attending free training in their community. Supported by the council, local organisations, the police and local people, they were able to raise awareness, elevate young people’s voices, and access funding to support local families.



The Power of Us: St Christopher's Brislington Over 55 Luncheon Club

– Pat and Bill Campbell

“We’ve been going for five years, we said that when we retired, we’d like to do something more in church and would like to do a luncheon club. We both love cooking and meeting people.”

“People come here early with potatoes and vegetables to cook. Eight of us in the team. In the beginning we didn’t know how popular it would be, but very quickly people came and kept coming.”

“I like the company. I love the food. I get to meet up with my neighbours. I also got to know other people that don’t live so close that I wouldn’t have otherwise met so it’s kind of broadened my knowledge of people that live around here. I think it’s important because it gives us something to look forward to; that can mean a lot to someone who doesn’t see many people.”

Key message

“If you’ve got an idea and there’s a couple of other people, find out where you can do it, and go for it, you’ve got to have the support behind you.”

Bill, Pat, and the other volunteers use their passion for cooking to connect with their neighbours, using the asset of the church hall and relationships with community groups. Relying on food donations, people’s time, and a small fee for lunch, they bring people together monthly.



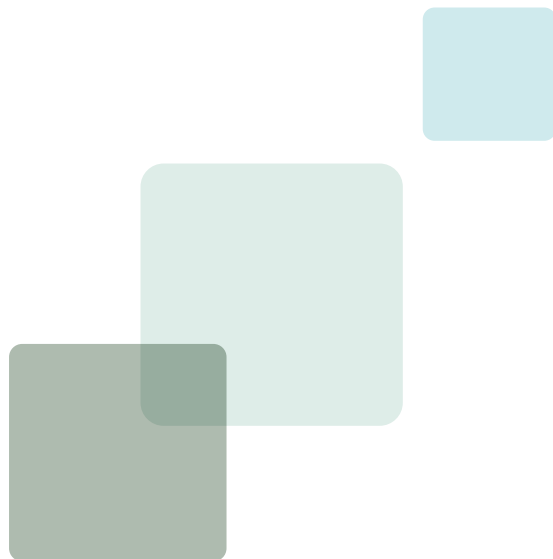
Chapter 2: Communities and Power

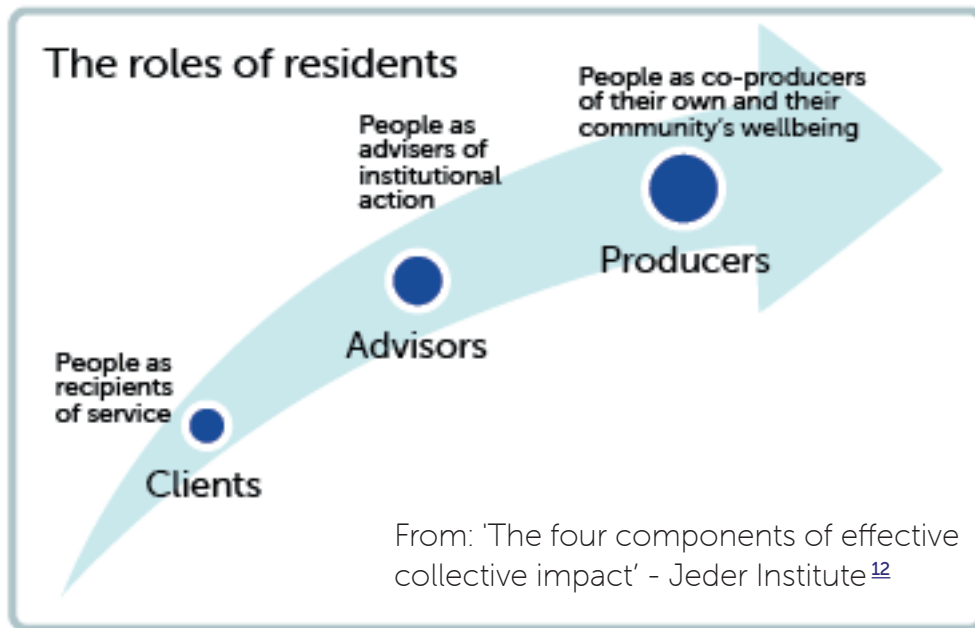
Communities, and the people within them are rich in skill, talent and ideas. Asset-based approaches value “capacity, skills, knowledge, connection and potential in a community.”¹¹ This approach supports the aspiration within ‘Fair Society, Healthy Lives’ – The Marmot Review 2010 which identifies that; “Effective local delivery requires effective participatory decision-making at local level. This needs individuals and communities who are informed, engaged and able to act.”³

The table describes some of the differences between an approach which focusses on ‘whats wrong’ and one which focus on community assets, skills and talents:

From ... Deficit approach	To ... Asset-based approach
Focus on problems, deficits or weakness; focus on past failures	Focus on opportunities and strengths; focus on future possibilities and successes
Local people as ‘customers’, ‘clients’ or ‘service users’	Local people as ‘citizens’
Provide services to people	Develop and co-produce services with people
Responds to ‘problems’	Finds opportunities for growth and social change, gives people ownership of their experiences
Reliance on outside ‘experts’ and bureaucratic systems	Non-bureaucratic, focus on people’s strength and knowledge, prioritises community
Grants or funding given to agencies or government	Grants or funding given to local associations or groups
Programmes are the answer	People are the answer

From: A glass half-full: how asset approach can improve community health and wellbeing.¹²





Power was originally defined by Max Weber, renowned German sociologist [1864 - 1920], as "the ability to control others, events or resources [and] to make happen what one wants to happen in spite of obstacles, resistance or opposition." ¹³ Later, American sociologist Talcott Parsons [1902 - 1979] developed a more positive and shared definition of power where it flows from a society's potential to coordinate human activities and resources to effect positive change.

Academics publishing in The Lancet journal argue that social inequality limits full participation in democracy and adversely affects mental and physical health across all ages, contributing to health inequities. ¹⁴ Research by Dr Richard Wilkinson, made popular in 'The Spirit Level' ¹⁵ describes how exclusion directly affects the body through activation of a stress response, resulting in both short and long-term biological changes with intergenerational consequences.

This generates population-level differences that are perpetuated by pervasive historical, economic drivers. ¹⁶

Discrimination is intersectional with race, gender, migration status, ethnicity, religion, poverty and other dimensions overlapping with lived experience, civic status and access to systems of influence. ¹⁷

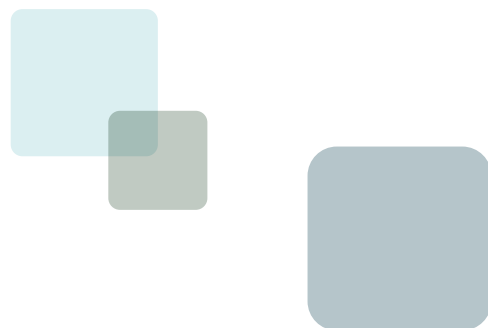
These multiple factors play a key role in the structuring of communities and is why purposeful action, with and by, minoritised and excluded communities is essential if we are to address these health inequalities. ¹⁶

It is often said that we value what we count and we count what we can see. Traditional evaluation approaches measure effectiveness using specific outputs or metrics. This inevitably preselects for short-term financial and overly simplistic priorities and often fails to capture the vibrancy of community activism, connectedness and resilience, and the soft power which reflects the true value of community activity.

As I have described, communities are complex, dynamic and multi-layered. Effective community action and community building is long-term, incremental, cyclical and often best understood through stories communities tell about their experiences.

New Local, an independent policy think tank, describes the differences between these two approaches as an 'evidence paradox', as described in the table.

If we are serious about community building, we need to think carefully about how we evaluate effectiveness. The final chapter of this report describes the developing Bristol's 'One City, Many Communities' approach which provides a framework to support this.



Evidence required by the state-market hybrid paradigm	Nature of community power
Guided by metrics	Guided by ethos
Quantitative	Qualitative
Immediate	Long-term
Large scale for efficiency	Small-scale for impact
Within a service silo	Embedded in the community
Related to a service output	Related to individual outcomes
Focused on proving	Focused on improving
Reporting data	Recalibrating relationships
Uniformity	Pluralism
Policy implementation	Human-centred design
Linear	Adaptive
Immediate cashable savings	Avoids costs occurring

From: New Local. (2021). Escaping the Community Power Evidence Paradox.¹⁸

The Power of Us: One Green Kitchen - Anne Su

"Run entirely with volunteers, our vision is to have green meals to change the world's future. We focus on food, culture and community, sustainability, wellbeing, and empowerment. We support marginalised groups such as the elderly and women from diverse backgrounds."

"We have women attending from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Pakistan, Ireland, India, Egypt and Somalia. Everyone is welcome. We have been running weekly food hubs, wellbeing activities and cooking and eating together sharing ideas and insight on how we could work together as one community to promote food sustainability across Bristol."

"I've really enjoyed meeting new people from different cultures, learning from them. Women sharing experiences has been a great opportunity. We can talk about what's happening in the world with climate change and eating healthily."



Key message

One Green Kitchen has harnessed the power of volunteers through inter-generational and diverse opportunities for people to be involved in their community. From wanting to give back to their community to gaining work-based skills, volunteering is a vital part of community building.

Anne uses her insight and lived expertise to reduce the barriers communities face in connecting with others. As a Community Champion, she helps bridge the gap and build trusted relationships between residents, communities and institutions.

The Power of Us: Brandon House Community - Fartun Osman



"I am a British Somali and mother of five children and I have lived in this area for 15 years.

At first, we didn't really know anyone but then we started to come together, with an activity for the kids, called Jumpstart.

After that, as neighbours we decided to have parties to bring the community together and to get to know each other. At our first party, neighbours came out to join in and they liked the idea of having a garden party. Our neighbours helped with setting up and it was a success.

We had the Lord Mayor (Paula O'Rourke) as our guest. Now we are trying to renovate our community room with help from the council thanks to the help of Paula O'Rourke and the Community Development Team. In the future, as neighbours we intend to come together and organise more events and help each other."



Key message

Self-organising around an activity like a party, and bringing people together, can lead to action around other things that matter. Connecting with civic power through working with the Lord Mayor and support provided by the Housing Department and Community Development team has helped to support the unlocking of a community asset.

Chapter 3: Communities and Places

The places in which we live are where many of our social connections are formed and the built and natural environments play a key role in facilitating this.

Built and natural environments refer to the characteristics of the places where people live, work and play, including schools, workplaces, homes, streets, communities, parks/recreation areas, green (i.e. grass, trees and other vegetation) and blue spaces ¹⁹.

An ever-increasing body of research indicates that the environment in which we live is linked to many health and wellbeing outcomes including social connectivity¹¹. These links, however, are often complex and are influenced by many factors.

The importance of place has been especially evident since Covid-19 when we spent the majority of time in our homes and neighbourhoods. For some, this led to a strengthened sense of connection with their neighbours while for others, their loneliness and isolation was heightened. Access to green and blue space was highly valued.

Green space can be urban or rural and can include both public and private spaces such as parks, gardens, playing fields, play areas, woods and other natural areas such as cemeteries and allotments, green corridors, rivers and canals.

Natural spaces improve social cohesion and can help bring communities together, especially in urban settings, where people can engage in social activities and connect to their communities²⁰.

Evidence from a systematic review suggests that green space is associated with a number of community wellbeing outcomes including:²¹

- a. boosted social/community cohesion
- b. improved families' wellbeing
- c. improved individual mental wellbeing
- d. improved social relations/interactions
- e. increased individuals' knowledge/skills
- f. increased social capital.

Evidence also suggests that access to green and blue space, including urban greening, may reduce loneliness ²².

The location, access, quality, quantity, maintenance and useability of the green space are all key considerations.^{23,24,25}

Green space which is accessible and appropriate for the needs of the community is more beneficial. Access to good quality greenspace, however, is often unequal, with people from less affluent communities less likely to live near accessible, quality green space²⁶. Increasing the use of good quality green space for all is likely to reduce health and wellbeing inequalities.



Our streets are what make places vibrant and keep communities strong. Good street design and walkability has an impact on physical and mental health, but also on social interaction²⁷. This is supported by a systematic review undertaken in 2018 which summarised that there is a significant relationship between social capital and the built environment, specifically between social cohesion and access.²⁸

A walkable neighbourhood is widely recognised to be mixed-used, complete and compact and have good connectivity. Evidence has informed a set of principles known as the Healthy Streets Indicators which include the following:²⁹

- Everyone feels welcome
- Are accessible
- People feel safe and feel relaxed
- There are things to see and do
- There is adequate shade, shelter and places to stop and rest
- Spaces are not too noisy
- People choose to walk and cycle
- The air is clean and roads are easy to cross

Hugh Barton, author of 'Shaping Neighbourhoods for local health and global sustainability', reports studies have shown, unsurprisingly, that there is a strong relationship between traffic levels and community. High traffic flows can make crossing roads challenging and conversations difficult which can lower the number of neighbours known by residents. Places where children can play lead to more social contact and an increased sense of ownership of space. On busy roads, street trees and wide pavements can give a sense of separation from traffic.^{30,31}

Improving access and walkability to recreational and non-recreational destinations (such as grocery stores, schools and other amenities) was also found to impact positively upon social interaction among older adults.¹⁹ Age-friendly design and environments are important to support health and enable everyday mobility.³² This includes community spaces in accessible locations which are vital for community activities such as community halls, faith spaces, clubs, libraries and leisure centres. These shared spaces provide opportunities for people and communities to come together, facilitating social connection and a sense of community.³⁰

We spend a large proportion of our lives within buildings, from our homes to our workplaces, and their design can impact our health and how we connect with people.³³ Housing is a key determinant of health and wellbeing.

Where someone lives is more than just a roof over their heads. A healthy home is affordable, warm, safe and stable and is somewhere that helps connect people to their community, work and services.³⁴ A healthy home is integral for good health and making small improvements can have profound impacts. For example, improvements to residential lighting and interventions to reduce hazards in the home can lead to improved social outcomes and reduce fall-related injuries among older adults.¹⁹

Good design of communal areas (such as shared entrances, utilities and facilities) can also facilitate community interaction and help build relationships by providing opportunities for people to mix and bump into each other.³⁶

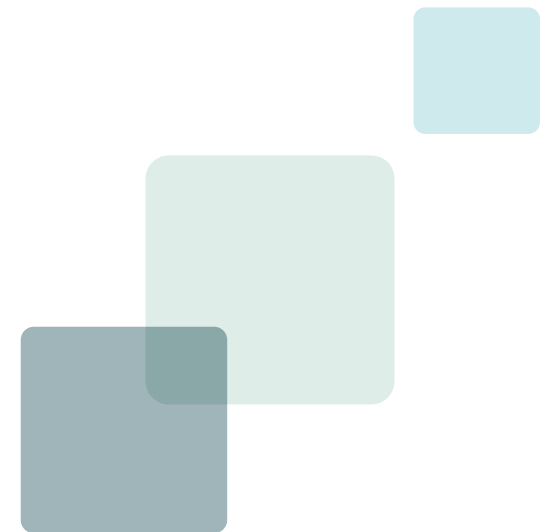


Ensuring that neighbourhoods include varied housing provision of different tenures and property sizes enables people to stay within the same neighbourhood as they age and their housing needs change, which helps maintain a sense of community.³³

A positive contribution to communities of place are homes which meet the needs of older people and disabled people supporting independent living and enabling engagement in community life. In the future, there is an opportunity to ensure that homes are being built to M4(2) standard (accessible and adaptable dwellings) and that there is an adequate supply of homes which are M4(3) standard (wheelchair user housing). Some research suggests that, adopting a tenure blind approach – where the design of different tenures are indistinguishable from each other – can help prevent distinguishing between people from different tenures and avoid preconceptions about neighbours.³⁷



Bristol City Centre Development and Delivery Plan.
Image: Grant Associates



The Power of Us: Fox Haven Nature Garden - Sally and Luke

"We started as a community, in the wasteland over the back of our flats, overgrown by brambles, removing all waste, bringing back the shrubs and plants. I used my skills to build fences, making the garden look nicer. We keep vegetable beds for children, enticing them into growing plants. Me and a neighbour wrote to the council asking if we could turn it into a nature garden and the Communities Team and Housing Officer supported us to get things happening."

"We went door-to-door discussing the field, to all surrounding households and they said, 'we want the field to be cleared and maintained so wildlife can use it and we can enjoy it'. The council, having seen the work done, granted us a new fence, prompting our group to plant trees and flowers beds. Now there are birds, hedgehogs and bats, and it brings the neighbours together. It's a sanctuary for us all."



Key message

Luke and Sally used their passion and skills to connect with neighbours, improving the place where they live. By building relationships with the local authority and sharing resources, they have created a sense of belonging for everyone.

The Power of Us: Pen Park Pickers – Adele and Alfie

"My son Alfie, now aged 11, created the idea of our litter picking group. He is a keen advocate for making the world a better place and was frustrated by the local area. Every time we took our dog for a walk, we would be taking pieces of litter out of her mouth. We asked Sustainable Southmead to come over to this area for a litter pick and they suggested we start our own group. So that is exactly what we did!"

"On the last Sunday of every month we have our litter pick. It has created a lovely community group and the area is visibly much cleaner and safer. Even on non-litter picking days, our team will report any areas of concern, do an extra pick even. But we also look out for each other, often having small get togethers involving tea and cake. Pen Park Pickers has had a positive effect on the local area and the health and wellbeing of the local residents."



Key message

Residents coming together to take action in their community has benefits for their own wellbeing as well as the wider community.

Chapter 4: Communities, Art, Culture and Wellbeing

In 2017, an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW) undertook a major inquiry into the role of the arts and culture in health and wellbeing.

The inquiry yielded a substantial report – Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing – providing evidence that creative and cultural activities can have a positive impact on people’s health and wellbeing.³⁸

Arts engagement can improve mental health, help with the self-management of long-term health conditions, promote healthy ageing, tackle health inequalities and begin to address obesity. Around 9.4 million people in England participate in the arts through more than 49,000 amateur arts groups, with others engaging in informal creative activity in their homes and communities.³⁹ As the biggest public-sector investor in culture, spending over £1 billion per year, councils help to forge the partnerships necessary to realise the health and wellbeing benefits of the arts and culture.

Bristol is a city known for its creativity and innovation, which in the health and wellbeing sphere has resulted in a thriving network of community organisations and partners piloting innovative approaches to social prescribing through access to culture.

There has been an growing interest in approaches known as social prescribing, which is connects people to groups and activities in their community to improve health and wellbeing.

Thriving Communities Bristol brought together partners working in arts and culture, nature and physical activity and social prescribing. It was funded by the National Academy for Social Prescribing Thriving Communities fund, with match funding from Bristol Beacon, Age UK Bristol and Bristol’s cultural and creative industries. Lead organisation, CreativeShift CIC, has 15 years’ experience delivering creative wellbeing activities to adults experiencing isolation and mental health challenges across Bristol. Its model connects primary, secondary and community health through bespoke arts interventions delivered in the community, to support people to engage with wider community assets and services. Its work has been integrated into the local social prescribing framework since 2013.

Participants reported improvements in mood, attention and loneliness. They described feelings of increased social connection, self-efficacy, confidence, and moments of awe, beauty and escape. They valued the sense that activities took place in a safe space that was created and held by trusted specialist facilitators. Data from the project suggests that the workshops had a significant impact on momentary wellbeing, both mood and social bonding and especially on anxiety reduction (increased calmness and relaxation).



The Power of Us: Community Play

The community play was an activity for parents and caregivers of lockdown babies and young children affected by isolation during the pandemic. Participants were referred via link workers from a Children's Centre. Sessions took place weekly for two hours at Trinity Community Arts venue and encouraged creative play in natural surroundings between parents, carers and their children.

Participants across the projects described moving from feeling alone to feeling they belonged to something bigger. They talked about a developing sense of connection within the group and about feeling generally more socially connected. Caregivers in Community Play reported feeling closer to their children. Groups were felt as inclusive, safe and motivating spaces. Artist facilitators played a crucial role in creating and shaping these spaces; they set the tone, which was characterised by kindness, enthusiasm, collaboration and a lack of judgement.

The Power of Us: Sound of the Forest

Sound of the Forest is a programme for young people aged 8-11 experiencing mental health challenges who were referred by young people link workers from Southmead Development Trust. It was co-designed with link workers and young people, and co-delivered by Forest School and theatre practitioners in local woodland. Participants spent two hours each week after school exploring nature connectedness, forest school and creative activities such as poetry and sound recording. The theatre practitioner worked with the children to create an audio walk of the woods.



The first two chapters of this report set out how asset-based approaches can increase community cohesion and a sense of belonging which have positive impacts on individual and communities' wellbeing. Published reviews summarising the evidence for community-based interventions on mental health and wellbeing found many examples that address individual or social determinants of health.^{38,39}

Thrive Bristol aims to improve mental health and wellbeing by focusing on how different parts of our city, such as our communities, our places of education and work and our homes, can keep us mentally healthy. The community programme supports local wellbeing projects to bring residents together through a wide range of activity that has included Men in Sheds, Friends of Parks groups, physical activity sessions and a community market.

Other examples include:

- **WECIL**, a disabled people's organisation, runs a befriending service that connects disabled adults with a volunteer befriender on the phone or online. Creating matches between people with shared interests gives people the opportunity to speak about things that matter to them, helping with feelings of isolation and low mood.
- **Dhek Bhal Elders** a group for South Asian elders helped bring people back together after lockdowns and learn IT skills to communicate more easily with friends and family elsewhere.

A current focus for Thrive Bristol is peer support, working in partnership with **Changes Bristol** to provide volunteer-led wellbeing groups in Welcoming Spaces that were set up in response to the cost-of-living crisis. Changes Bristol is a mental health charity formed by people with lived experience who came together to build a support network for those experiencing mental distress. Sessions provide a comfortable space for people to share how they are feeling and to discuss a mental wellbeing topic.



Mural in Stokes Croft produced for Changes Bristol. Photo credit: Jenna Steadman-Bailey, Remain Indoors Photography

The Power of Us: Bristol Umbrella Singers - Kate Staniforth

The Old Library on Muller Road wanted groups to start using its community space. Kate decided to see if she could start a choir, and Bristol Umbrella Singers (BUS) was formed.

"It's a fully inclusive choir that meets weekly, everyone is welcome, and we have so much fun together. We have built great relationships with local organisations and have performed at various events across the city, giving disabled people the opportunity to be seen and heard."

"Our highlight was performing at the Choir Festival at the Bristol Beacon. Parents and support workers joined in too. The choir provides a supportive and safe space for people to come together, make friends and build confidence. When we sing, we feel positive health benefits (better mood, reduced anxiety). Each term we learn new songs (members choose and suggest songs) and we learn them with harmonies, actions and Makaton signs."



Key message

Collaboration and sharing experiences are vital to creating stronger communities. BUS brings people together in an inclusive and safe setting for everyone to thrive. The group enables disabled peoples' voices to be heard, disabled people to be seen and encourages equal participation, providing a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Chapter 5: Communities, decision making and resource allocation

Enabling communities to mobilise, grow and own local resources is an approach supported by Local Trust, a funding organisation spearheading a proposal to establish a [Community Wealth Fund](#) using the funds within bank accounts which are dormant. We have some inspiring examples of this in Bristol.

Local Trust has invested in Bristol, supporting [Ambition Lawrence Weston](#) to undertake the feasibility and development of a wind turbine on Bristol City Council land. This is set to be the largest onshore turbine in England and is a formidable response to fuel poverty and sustainability with benefits for the local community.

[Southmead Development Trust](#) is working with the local residents group, Arnside and Glencoyne Square Regeneration Project and Bristol City Council on one of the biggest community-led housing schemes in the country with 187 flats and mixed use on the

ground floor. This is an ambitious project which responds to the priorities in its Community Plan.

Another example is the community of Bedminster Down who purchased [Zion Community Centre](#), by raising £230,000 through a community share offer. Right across Bristol we see the ingenuity of organisations, rooted in communities, to secure community assets and generate community wealth.

Participatory decision making is a key component in developing community resource allocation and in 2022, staff from several voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations took part in a participatory grant-making process for Thrive Bristol. Collective priorities were identified, and the grants programme was designed to address these.

Grants were subsequently awarded to increase accessibility of advice and wellbeing services, staff wellbeing and reflective practice.

From this work, a health and wellbeing consortium has been formed to sustain the relationships and learning between diverse organisations with a common purpose to address the complex impacts of poverty. The consortium is looking at new approaches, including how to measure impact. As a result, several organisations have felt empowered to only take funding from bodies they trust or that allow them to work in a way they find important.

“We are aligning with our purpose as an organisation and not just doing stuff because funders want that information. Really being quite strict: ‘this is what we are here for and this is what we will measure.’”
Lucie Martin-Jones - Head of Community Services, West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL)

A further example of community resource allocation through participatory decision making is [Bristol City Council's Community Resilience Fund \(CRF\)](#).

This fund was established in response to a report entitled 'Designing a new social reality' by Black South West Network⁴⁰ which assessed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Bristol's community and voluntary sector and presented a framework for promoting greater community resilience. The fund builds on the Citizens' Assembly model and the Port Resilience Fund by involving over 100 citizens from diverse backgrounds, community groups and elected councillors, to decide together how to invest £4m in community buildings and infrastructure.

These inspiring examples show what is possible through community ownership and co-production. This is not easy or quick. All of these examples are the result of many years of community activity and leadership. But this provides a glimpse into what is possible when we support and sustain local community action.

The Power of Us: The Ardagh Community Trust (Horfield Common) - Sam

"The Ardagh was once a little-known space on Horfield Common. After ten years of work from a dedicated team of local residents, we secured a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) from the council and have repurposed the old toilets into a welcoming and inclusive café. There is a food growing project linked to the local holiday club, a choir, Tai Chi and a food bank. It's completely community led, and we now employ over 20 local people."

Many people have been involved throughout this project and it would not have happened without a huge collective effort; local residents, our trustees, amazing volunteers, local councillors and the Parks Forum. It just wouldn't have happened without everyone working together."

To read more of Sam's story and to find out about more community led action in Bristol's Parks, please visit the [Parks and Green Spaces](#) website.



Photo credit: www.theardagh.com and Sam Thomson

Key message

Horfield Common is a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) from Bristol City Council parks department to The Ardagh Community Trust. CAT enables the local authority to "transfer land or buildings from the council's freehold ownership into the stewardship of third sector organisations."

The Power of Us: Building Equity in Adult Social Care commissioning – Sado, Chiara, and Paul

The **Make it Work programme** offers a real-life example of true co-production in practice. Black and Minoritised providers were offered a safe space to learn and share learning with the Adult Social Care commissioning and procurement teams. This collaboration resulted in tangible positive changes in the lives of everyone involved and the impact is already being felt by Black and Minoritised communities in the city.

The programme achieved a staggering £377,000 increase in economic benefit for the Black and Minoritised Adult Social Care Sector in Bristol. Most importantly, it opened strong lines of communication for genuine reflection and learning involving different people and sectors. A full learning and evaluation report can be read and downloaded from the Black South West Network ([BSWN's website](#)).

The programme created the space for Bristol City Council to reflect upon how it works in partnership with black-led small and medium sized (SME) organisations and voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations in co-producing policy and strategy that ensures a more level playing field in terms of opportunities to provide services to the local authority in the future.

This work contains valuable learning not just for Bristol City Council, but also for its strategic partners across the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care Board (ICB), for how we strategically commission and co-produce diverse and relevant services within our local communities.

The provision of more culturally appropriate and diverse services is one of the key outputs that will develop from this work.



"The Make it Work programme has been very insightful and very informative. I have appreciated it. I think you are obviously propelling us, which is something we need in the community. I am very happy that I was this privileged. Thank you."

"It's been a wonderful programme. Having access to advice, commissioners, mentors. It is a very comforting environment."

"The beauty of Make It Work for me is that it was organic. It was about listening to organisations involved and finding out what they wanted. For me, its been a really positive experience. Genuinely, everybody involved has been positive."



Chapter 6: One City, Many Communities

As the wonderful stories in this report show, people all over Bristol are taking action to build the foundations for wellbeing and health.

Through the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living pressures, individuals and communities have found new ways of working together and making an impact with everyone playing their part. As a result, Bristol becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

As we responded to the early days of the pandemic, individuals and communities stepped forward to look after one another. This was our greatest asset.

However, we know inequity undermines community connection making it harder to come together, organise and take action. We need to be purposeful about building community cohesion and resilience, ensuring everyone has a voice and can act on the things they care about.

The One City, Many Communities response to the cost-of-living crisis has shown again just what is possible when as a city we act with intent to remove barriers, to listen, collaborate and share leadership and resources.

One City, Many Communities

Together we are building something unique and powerful which we want to strengthen and accelerate. This is being called One City, Many Communities.

Partners have committed to taking what has been developed, keeping our focus on equity, social justice and wellbeing to:

- **find sustainable ways forward, supporting people most impacted by low income, poverty and inequity**
- **continue to build community power and community wealth for the long term**

We continue to live through challenging times.

We have committed to collaborate, share resources and align resources.

19 April 2023, One City, Many Communities event, City Hall, Bristol



Welcoming spaces and community response to cost of living event at City Hall, 19 April 2023



Over the winter of 2022 – 2023, 105 welcoming spaces led by communities for communities and launched by the Mayor, opened their doors all over Bristol. They were supported by city-wide organisations to improve access to advice, wellbeing, support and funding.

This surge of energy and action came from the tenacity and personal commitment of unsung heroes all over Bristol as well as the investment of money and time over decades to build community infrastructure. We cannot take this for granted. We need to put communities at the heart of what we do and invest in the things that grow the power of us.

We all have a role to play. Public sector organisations, business and developers are pivotal in creating the conditions for communities to thrive. The decisions we make about urban design, placemaking, housing, health and social care services, parks, waste, public amenities, and the economy all contribute to community life for good or ill. Aligning our collective assets and releasing the enormous potential requires commitment.

As the evidence summarised in this report suggests, there are a number of essential conditions that need to be nurtured to support community resilience:

- the bringing together of different worlds of public sector, business, and communities (to build better understanding and trust)
- supporting communities to grow their own capacity in social action and leadership
- freeing communities to have greater control over resources and enabling civic participation
- a commitment to learning together what works.

The wonderful and inspiring stories throughout this report show just some of the 'Power of Us'. However, this cannot be taken for granted. The ability to respond quickly in a crisis and the ability to achieve things like local energy production and housing, all depend on a long term commitment to community building, community action and community leadership.

This is not the responsibility of the local authority alone, indeed, as austerity bites further, it can't be. Resilient communities are positive for the economy, for health and for the environment. Every sector and communities themselves have a role to play, and we are all beneficiaries.



Celebrating the work of Community Champions

Chapter 7: A call to action

Creating the conditions for health through community requires commitment from everyone; individuals, businesses, the NHS, the voluntary sector, the local authority and of course, communities themselves. Everyone can support the creation of One City, Many Communities by:

- Finding ways to promote, nurture and enable **local community action and leadership**
- Creating the conditions to support local **community owned infrastructure**
- Taking an **asset-based approach** to developing communities, by focusing on what's strong and not what's wrong
- Actively engaging in **networks** for community connection and knowledge exchange
- Investing in the development of trusting and **trusted relationships**
- Developing the conditions to support collaboration, co-production and **shared decision making**.



Further information

Ambition Lawrence Weston – [Home - Ambition Lawrence Weston](#)

Community Resilience Fund – [Community Resilience Fund \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)

People Power – [People Power Project - Can Do Bristol](#)

Southmead Development Trust – [Home - Geenway Centre](#)

Thrive Bristol – [Home - Thrive Bristol](#)

Thriving Communities – [Home -Thriving Communités](#)

Welcoming Spaces – [Welcoming Spaces \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)

Zion Community Centre – [Home - Zion Bristol](#)



References

1. Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB et al. Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-analytic Review. March 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>
2. Valtorta, N.K., Kanaan M, Gilbody S, Ronzi S, Hanratty B. Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal observational studies. Heart. 2016;0:1-8.
3. Marmot Review 2010 Fair Society, Healthy Lives (instituteofhealthequity.org)
4. Crocker, J., & Luhtanen, R. (1990). Collective self-esteem and ingroup bias. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58, 60–67.
5. NICE Guideline: “Community Engagement: improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities” Published 4 March 2016. Community engagement: improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities (nice.org.uk)
6. Centre for Public Impact (2021). Available from: [What is ‘community’ and why is it important? | Centre For Public Impact \(CPI\)](#)
7. World Health Organisation Health Promotion Glossary of Terms 2021 [9789240038349-eng.pdf \(who.int\)](#)
8. Putnam RD. (1993). What makes democracy work? Available from: [What makes democracy work? - Putnam - 1993 - National Civic Review - Wiley Online Library](#)
9. Rocco L, Suhrcke M. Is social capital good for health? A European perspective. Copenhagen: World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe; 2012 (https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/170078/Is-Social-Capital-good-for-your-health.pdf, accessed 8 July 2021).
10. Byanyima W, Lauterbach K, Kavanagh MM (2023) Community Pandemic response: the importance of action led by communities and the public sector. The Lancet. Available here: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(22\)02575-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(22)02575-2)
11. Improvement and Development Agency (2010). A glass half-full: how an asset approach can improve community health and wellbeing. Available here: www.assetbasedconsulting.net/uploads/publications/A_glass_half_full.pdf
12. [2 The Four Components of Effective Collective Impact – The Jeter Institute](#)
13. Johnson, A. (1995). The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.

14. Selvarajah S, Maioli SC, Deivanayagam TA, de Morais Sato P, Devakumar D, Kim SS et al. (2022) Racism, xenophobia and discrimination: mapping pathways to health outcomes. *The Lancet*. Available here: [Racism, xenophobia, and discrimination: mapping pathways to health outcomes \(thelancet.com\)](https://www.thelancet.com)
15. Wilkinson RG, Pickett K. *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. Penguin, London 2010
16. Abubakar I, Gram L, Lasoye S, et al. (2022) [Confronting the consequences of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination on health and health-care systems \(thelancet.com\)](https://www.thelancet.com)
17. Shannon G, Morgan R, Zeinali Z, Brady L, Couto MT, Devakumar D et al. (2022) Intersectional insights into racism and health: not just a question of identity - ([thelancet.com](https://www.thelancet.com))
18. New Local. (2021). [Escaping the Community Power Evidence Paradox](https://www.newlocal.net). Available here: [Community Power: The Evidence - New Local](https://www.newlocal.net)
19. Public Health England (2017). [Spatial Planning for Health: An evidence resource for planning and designing healthier places](https://www.gov.uk).
20. Public Health England (2020). [Improving access to greenspace A new review for 2020](https://www.gov.uk). Available at: [Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
21. Bagnall, A.M. South, J. Di Martino, S. Southby, K. Pilkington, G. Mitchell, B. Pennington, A. Corcoran, R. (2018). [A systematic review of interventions to boost social relations through improvements in community infrastructure \(places and spaces\)](https://www.whatworks.org.uk). London: What Works Centre for Wellbeing.
22. Astell-Burt, T. Hartig, T. Putra, I. GNE. Walsan, R. Dendup, T. Feng, X. (2022). [Green space and loneliness: a systematic review with theoretical and methodological guidance for future research](https://www.sciencedirect.com). *Sci. Total Environ.*, 847.
23. van Dillen, S.M.E. de Vries, S. Groenewegen, P.P. Spreeuwenberg, P. (2012). [Greenspace in urban neighbourhoods and residents' health: adding quality to quantity](https://www.euro.who.int). *Journal of epidemiology and community health*.66(6):e8-e
24. Hartig T, Mitchell R, de Vries S, Frumkin H. *Nature and Health*. (2014). *Annual Review of Public Health*. 35(1):207-28.
25. Nguyen PY, Astell-Burt T, Rahimi-Ardabili H, Feng X. (2021). [Green Space Quality and Health: A Systematic Review](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. Oct 20;18(21):11028.
26. Public Health England and Institute for Health Equity (2014). [Improving access to green spaces](https://www.gov.uk). Available at: [Briefing8_Green_spaces_health_inequalities.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
27. Carson, J. Conway, T. Perez, L. Frank, L. Saelens, B. Cain, K. Sallis, J. (2023) [Neighbourhood walkability, neighbourhood social health, and self-selection among U.S. adults](https://www.healthandplace.com), *Health & Place*. Volume 82.
28. Mazumdar, S., Learnihan, V., Cochrane, T., & Davey, R. (2018). [The Built Environment and Social Capital: A Systematic Review](https://www.sciencedirect.com). *Environment and Behavior*. 2018. 50(2), 119–158.
29. Healthy Streets Ltd (2023), [Healthy Streets Indicators](https://www.healthystreets.org.uk) Available here: [What is Healthy Streets? – Healthy Streets](https://www.healthystreets.org.uk)
30. Barton, H., Grant, M., & Guise, R. (2021) [Shaping Neighbourhoods: For Local Health and Global Sustainability \(3rd ed.\)](https://www.routledge.com). Routledge.
31. Plumb, N. Millinship Hayes, H. Bell, R. (2016) [Integration City](https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk). Available at: [7.-Integration-City.pdf \(belongnetwork.co.uk\)](https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk)
32. Corran, P; Steinbach, R; Saunders, L; Green, J (2018) [Age, disability and everyday mobility in London: An analysis of the correlates of non-travel in travel diary data](https://www.tandfonline.com). *Journal of transport & health*. Available here: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2017.12.008>.
33. [People, Place & Community: Belonging in Unprecedented Times](https://www.futureoflondon.org). Future of London (2021). Available at: [People-Place-Community-report-29-03-2021.pdf \(futureoflondon.org.uk\)](https://www.futureoflondon.org)
34. Health Foundation (2018). [What makes us healthy? An introduction to the social determinants of health](https://www.healthfoundation.org.uk). Available at: [What-makes-us-healthy-quick-guide.pdf](https://www.healthfoundation.org.uk)
35. Public Health England (2020). [Improving access to greenspace. A new review for 2020](https://www.gov.uk). Available at: [Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
36. All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing. (2017). [Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing: All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing \(culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk\)](https://www.creativehealth.org.uk)
37. Gordon-Nesbitt, R. (2015). [Exploring the Longitudinal Relationship Between Arts Engagement and Health](https://www.mmu.ac.uk). Manchester: Arts for Health. [MMU | Arts for Health | Exploring the Longitudinal Relationship Between Arts Engagement and Health](https://www.mmu.ac.uk)
38. Duncan, F., Baskin, C., McGrath, M. et al. [Community interventions for improving adult mental health: mapping local policy and practice in England](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). *BMC Public Health* 21, 1691 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11741-5>
39. China R. Harrison, Naomi Leonard, Judi Kidger, "Unobtrusive and Acceptable Ways to Gather Participant Perceptions of Community-Based Interventions and Their Effectiveness at Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Literature Review of Peer Reviewed and Grey Literature", *Health & Social Care in the Community*, vol. 2023, Article ID 1466200, 9 pages, 2023. www.hindawi.com/journals/hsc/2023/1466200/
40. Lodi, C., Retief, A. and Osuntokun, A. (2021). 'Designing a new social reality: the future of the Bristol Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sector beyond COVID-19', *BSWN, Bristol*

