



Good Stuff Report

2024 - 2025

the **Balgam** Centre

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Project Story

The Good Stuff team has continued to meet its key aims and objectives in Year 3. The project funding has enabled us to fund a small team of project staff who have provided regular groups and one-off events as well as working with individual people with differing support needs and requirements. We have worked in existing and new partnerships and woven together enthusiasm, skills and expertise in our community to bring texture, colour and passion to the project.

Connecting people, services and activities has been the theme of the third year which has seen a significant increase in the project's activities and numbers of beneficiaries. The story of the project is told in the following pages through our narrative, and the quotes and photographs of the many people who have shared their Good Stuff experiences with us and helped us both develop new and refine existing activities and services for our community, and communities of interest within it, with over 200 people attending regular groups and activities during the year.

Saturday opening, which had been run in Years 1 and 2, mainly in the form of a children's cooking club, was expanded to meet the needs of families on low income with free family activities, a low cost café, repair café and clothes bank. After trialling opening every Saturday and consulting with everyone using the Centre on a Saturday we are now opening on two Saturdays a month only, enabling greater resource and a richer offer on those days.

Community partners have supported our service delivery from the public sector, other charities and the private sector, all with generous support and enthusiasm for the aims of Good Stuff. One of the most exciting partnerships has been with the nearby iconic Haynes Motor Museum, where Good Stuff worker Bruce used men's interest in cars to set up a group hosted by Haynes to bring together lonely and isolated men with a shared passion for motor vehicles.

We've had difficulty engaging with the agricultural community, one of our target communities for the project. However, through meeting with our health, social, and other partners we are now involved with setting up a South Somerset Rural Health Hub, soon to go live at local agricultural events and to 'pop up' at agricultural merchants, with the intention of providing accessible health, social, and mental health services across our area.

The 16 posters on the following page are for groups running in Year 3 of Good Stuff. Every group apart from one has been hugely successful both in personal terms for individual beneficiaries and families, and in terms of meeting the thematic and specialist needs identified throughout the project.

Involving the Community

Every group, activity and event has been set up with the findings of our community consultation as a starting point, and each one has been co-produced with the people attending, so the difference made has been focused on meeting people's needs and creating a springboard for further engagement in whatever form that takes. For example as a result of the Good Stuff team's engagement with military families and military welfare we were able to understand their needs and successfully apply for a 3 year Armed Forces Covenant Fund grant to support newly arrived military families in the area.

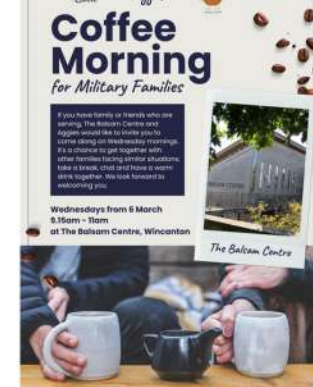
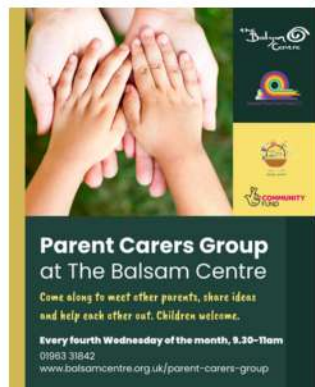
We have worked in partnership with Lynne Franks, hugely successful global PR entrepreneur and activist to support local women's journeys into business, and we are working with two local artists to create a Good Stuff/ Balsam Centre wide piece of community art to be exhibited in Wells cathedral later this year. We have worked with the Octagon Theatre to give people who have never experienced Opera, an opera workshop, supper and a performance of Don Giovanni, and the Town Council, who have commissioned a new town survey and funded a Christmas lantern project and lantern parade for our families. And in the Chat Café a volunteer with learning difficulties has brought and firmly established crochet as a key activity for the group.

The difference we're making

The theme this year has been 'connection' at many different levels: people, services, partnerships. The quotes from beneficiaries on the following pages illustrate how people have reduced their levels of isolation or loneliness, made friends, felt a sense of belonging, felt valued, contributed their skills, felt rewarded through volunteering, or progressed in education or employment. Most of all it has been about giving people a sense of belonging and a sense of what may be possible in their community.

We have successfully reached out to women who have dreamed of starting their own businesses but not known where to start and brought them together with Lynne Franks who has helped and inspired every one of them. Their peer support and connections have continued well outside their time with Lynne, with all of them now actively pursuing their goals. Two of the women are now working together in therapeutic support and recently trialled their incredibly uplifting workshop with Balsam Staff.

Good Stuff Year 3





Chat Café

The Chat Café has continued to flourish. We've welcomed 39 new people into the group this year; with the total number of unique beneficiaries rising from 67 in Year 2 to 106 in Year 3.

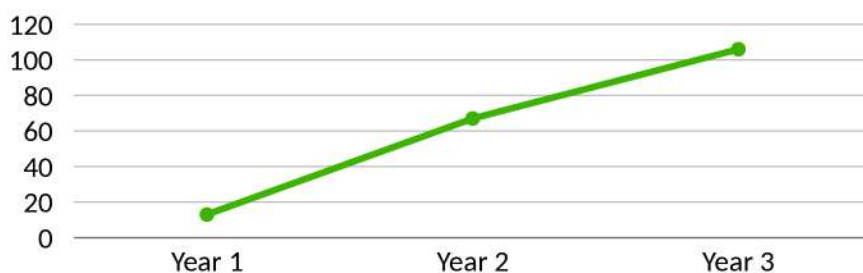
106
beneficiaries



932
attendances



● Total Number of Unique Beneficiaries



The average weekly attendance across the year is 14, with a monthly range of 11 to 18 people.

When asked how the Chat Café had helped them, people responded with:

"I live alone so coming to the Chat Café has meant that I get to speak to other people."

"Eases my loneliness and helps my mental health."

"It's nice to talk to ordinary people from Wincanton. I count people here as my friends and we've connected."

"It has got me out of the house, so I'm not isolated."

"It gets me out and I'm able to speak to the Health Coach."

Susan

Susan started coming to the Chat Café as she felt very lonely following the recent loss of her husband. Since joining the group, Susan has become a volunteer - welcoming new members, helping to cook lunch and supporting the group. She has also made several good friends, who meet regularly outside of the Chat Café.

Jo - Chat Café Volunteer

I have volunteered at the Chat Cafe for almost a year. The staff at the Balsalm Centre are professional and have made me feel welcome and safe. I have enjoyed meeting all the different visitors and I have witnessed how important the Cafe is for many people. It provides company, support and structure for so many. Additionally, a delicious home-made lunch is provided for visitors and volunteers every Monday. I am enjoying this opportunity whole heartedly and hope to continue volunteering at the Balsam Centre for as long as is possible.

Chat Café Christmas Lunch

Having seen an increase in attendance on the lead up to Christmas and people sharing that Christmas was a lonely time of year for them, the Chat Café came together to share a delicious festive lunch, all prepped, cooked and served by the Good Stuff team. A total of 27 people gathered round one enormous table to tuck into turkey and all the trimmings followed by Christmas pudding and delicious mince pies made by a volunteer.





Motor Heads

Motor Heads is a monthly social group held at Haynes Motor Museum for men who love cars. Through a shared interest, men can find a sense of community beneficial to their mental health.

When asked why they initially joined the group, the men said:

"To find kindred spirits and help my mental wellbeing."

"Because of my love of cars and wanting a social outlet."

"To improve my mental health, reduce stress and for my love of cars."

The setting for the group proved very popular, with the men commenting that they especially enjoyed:

"Seeing and experiencing the Haynes facility."

"Exploring the garage and the workshop."

They also liked the social aspect of the group:

"Meeting new people."

"Social interaction and engaging in things that interest me."

"Yes, it is good to be with and talk with other like minded guys."

"It is a good idea as it brings guys together (despite their problems) and helps to stop loneliness."

This group is still relatively new, however the men are engaged, keen to co-produce and have lots of ideas for how to take the group forwards. A few suggestions were:

"More of the same with visits to similar venues."

"Plan half and full days out to other car events, races or museums. Perhaps we could meet one evening at a pub for a beer."

"Talk more about individual car ownership. I am happy to get involved in the practical matters of organising this."

10
beneficiaries



"Social interaction
and engaging in
things that
interest me."



1:1 Enterprise

This is the ongoing story of Jenny who is autistic and has learning disabilities...

Since March 2024, Jenny has attended the Balsam Centre every fortnight to bake a selection of cakes before selling them from a table in Reception. A project worker supports Jenny to plan for the following session, costing ingredients and calculating projected profit.

Since the project began, Jenny's independence and confidence have grown tremendously; from needing full time support in the kitchen and help to remove cakes from the oven to being mostly self-sufficient and using the oven independently.

"I feel like I've really progressed in this last year. My confidence has improved."

Jenny is consistently developing a variety of new entrepreneurial skills; she is starting to make suggestions to progress the project and open to exploring new possibilities. For example, Jenny requested to change the planning schedule from weekly to fortnightly, to be more time efficient. She has started to advertise her bakes on local Facebook groups and suggested the possibility of taking card payments through the Balsam Centre system. She's also started selling at local events; booking a stall at a several Balsam Centre events and attending Wincanton's Free Play Day, where her bakes were incredibly popular and sold out within 3 hours.

"Coming to the Balsam Centre makes me get up in the morning - I like seeing the end result."



"Coming to the Balsam Centre makes me get up in the morning."



42
sessions





Women's Enterprise

This year, we have collaborated with Lynne Franks to host two Women's Enterprise groups, providing 24 additional places to local women. The total number of unique beneficiaries for this project has risen from 9 in Year 2 to 33 in Year 3.

33
beneficiaries

The participants appreciated meeting and working alongside a community of like-minded women:

"It was powerful because they had ideas for how my business could work better and could give me a steer. As a woman entrepreneur myself, I often work alone. And though I am productive, it feels like a godsend to have other women entrepreneurs to bounce ideas off like this."

"I truly don't know where to start on this question as there are so many benefits. I gained constructive and invaluable insights on my business idea. I also gained insight and learning from each person on so many different things. Hearing the stories, sharing experiences and just being there."

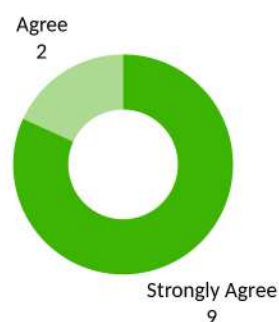


Whilst attending Women's Enterprise I felt...

a part of a group

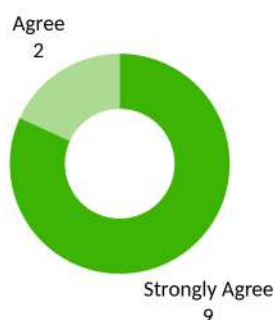


a sense of purpose



"I feel more confident in marketing, finance and keeping a balance between work, life and self."

a sense of identity



a belonging to the community



Meet some of the women who took part...

Jess

"Locally, there is a current concern with the reduction in footfall into shops. I would like to support high street businesses with digital marketing, brand consulting (visual and digital), video creation and editing to build a strong brand for their business. I'd also like to work with independent estate agents to increase market value, decluttering, home staging, and interior redesign. Lynne Franks is an inspiration and her way of communicating is direct, but gentle and kind and made me delve into answering some deep questions about myself. A huge thank you for being flexible with having my daughter at the training so that I could access this valuable advice and guidance to start a business. By working alongside other women, I was able to harness their energy and motivation to bring change in our community. They empowered me to think differently."

Laura

"The biggest thing for me is that this course has given me the permission and the encouragement to dream bigger in how I might be able to use my skills and interests to serve people. I received brilliant guidance by Lynne and the space to look at how to create businesses that do good things for our communities, our environment and ourselves too. I also had an amazing group of wonderful, talented women to do this with. It has been an amazing and empowering experience to be a part of this group and I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity that has been provided by the Good Stuff Project. Thank you so much."

Sarah

"Lynne Franks is a wonderfully supportive teacher. She really listens and provides beneficial insights while respecting your endeavors. Her wealth of experience, knowledge and enthusiasm that she shares is priceless. Having recently moved to the area I thought this would be a useful course to help me kick start my business. How wonderful it is to say this experience has proved way beyond that initial thought. It's helped me gain a clearer picture of my business idea but also shown me that I am not alone. I believe that I will continue to learn new skills especially as we want to continue to support each other in our group. I feel truly blessed to have been given the opportunity to attend the course with a great teacher and amazing women and I look forward to being part of something that is already growing from that seed. Thank you so very much!"



"It was a transformational experience for me!"



"Loved the course, Wincanton you are so lucky to have this!"





Military Cooking Club

Initially, in collaboration with Aggies, we set up a Military coffee morning to gain interest. From this we began a military families after school cooking club, which led to more sessions being offered in the school holidays. Overall, these sessions were attended by 30 people.

When asked what they enjoyed most about the Military Cooking Club, families said:

"We enjoyed meeting other people, learning different skills, making the different recipes and eating what we made."

"My kids being able to cook and play with other military kids. The quality and thought that went into the food products and recipes we used. The welcoming, easy going atmosphere."

"It was lovely to meet other military families. It's not something we get to do often as I find living in Wincanton and not near Yeovil itself, there aren't a lot of events for military families locally."

When asked how the group had benefitted their family, they said:

"My daughter enjoyed cooking before, but now she has an interest in growing vegetables, where food comes from and eating healthily."

"My kids have enjoyed every single week of cooking club. They have a broader understanding of how different meals are made, as well as connecting with other children in the same situation as themselves."

"It's been lovely for the kids to have the opportunity to independently prepare meals for themselves. They were more willing to try new foods which was nice to see."

"It gave us a fun weekly activity to help get through my husband's deployment and added routine to our week. Meeting other military families was really nice."

30
beneficiaries



When asked if they had learnt any new skills, the families responded:

"All of the recipes, my favourite were the burgers. I have learnt how to chop finely, crush garlic and how to roll pastry."

"Yes definitely! The naan bread was a really simple and interesting recipe I hadn't thought of making myself! My kids enjoyed making the cannelloni and sausage rolls particularly, and of course eating all the desserts!"

"Yes, although cooking is an interest of mine it was nice to learn some different methods of doing things."

"Yes! And we are using the recipes at home."

Debbie - Military Cooking Volunteer

"I started working with the Military Team last year, 2024, it being my first volunteering role with The Balsam Centre. Working with my two leaders, Isobel and Joanne, we worked with up to five families (mainly children and their mothers) introducing them to food and cooking simple meals such as pasta with home made sauce; freshly made pizza and toppings; cakes and biscuits. It enabled the adults in the families to bond as a group and the children, ranging from three years old to teenagers, to interact with each other whilst learning about different foods. I found it extremely rewarding to talk to the children and parents as well as to guide them with the cooking and preparation. I believe we all benefitted immensely as a group. For my part; it helped me rekindle my community spirit and regain my confidence as I had been struggling with mild isolation issues after leaving a busy career working overseas and returning to a very much quieter life in the UK.

Working with the Military Cooking Club also facilitated me working with a the sister charity of The Balsam Centre; The Growing Space. During Military Cooking, we took a group of parents and children to the garden to show them the flowers, fruit and vegetables as well as highlighting some of wildlife (birds, insects etc). I loved the experience so much that I am now a permanent volunteer!!!

So in conclusion, I am very happy to have volunteered with the Military Cooking Club as it was a positive stepping stone to a very positive volunteering journey!"



"It gave us a fun weekly activity to help get through my husband's deployment."



"It was lovely to meet other military families."





Military Bushcraft

Due to the group's success in Year 2, we decided to offer another Bushcraft group for our local military community. This comprised of 6 weekly sessions for 6 attendees. They enjoyed many outdoor activities such as: friction fire lighting, knife sharpening, making natural cordage using nettles, fish filleting and charcoal making.

The group said that they enjoyed:

"Spending time in the woods with like minded people whilst learning new outdoor skills."

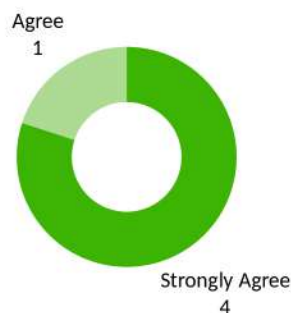
"Learning new skills, making friends and practising mindfulness."

"Great camaraderie and much enjoyment."

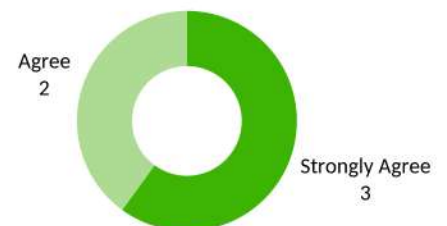
"It was delivered at exactly the right pace and renewed my interest in foraging,"

Military Bushcraft sessions helped me to feel...

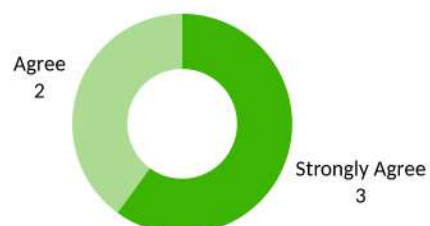
a part of the group



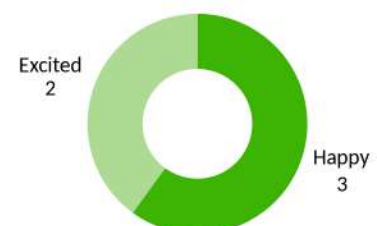
a sense of purpose



a sense of identity



a sense of belonging to the community



Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The group was set up following the news that Deaf+, the local hearing loss charity, were due to lose their funding. Deaf+ have a van that travels around the county and offers hearing aid servicing and repairs. They also offer lip reading classes to people affected by hearing loss. The Deaf+ lip reading teacher advised that students attended for the social element as much as the learning.

Eight people attended the first session, where we collected people's thoughts and ideas for the group moving forwards. As requested in this consultation, we invited a professional from Gordon Morris Hearing Equipment to explore different options to help the group hear better. He gave various demos and offered the opportunity to trial the equipment at home.

Despite initially expressing a lot of interest and our best efforts to advertise and engage, group attendance was inconsistent and the group naturally came to a close after five months.

However, through running the Deaf and Hard of Hearing group, the Good Stuff team were able to learn more about hearing equipment and explore possibilities of making the Balsam Centre more accessible. We were advised by Gordon Morris that installing a portable loop system would be most practical for our building and users.

We successfully gained funding and purchased a portable hearing equipment set for the centre to support our existing and new users with hearing loss.

Led to the purchase of a new portable loop system, making the centre more accessible.

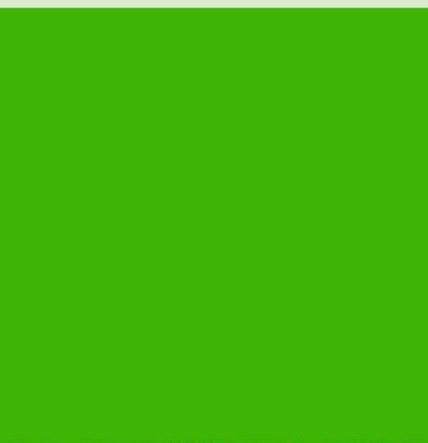
8

beneficiaries



8

beneficiaries



TDAH!

TDAH! is a monthly group to support and celebrate women with ADHD. So far, the group have enjoyed a variety of activities, such as: shared cooking, a discussion focused on an area of ADHD that the group would like to explore and 'bring it along' sessions where the group support each other to complete a task that they've been finding difficult. Topics the group have chosen to discuss so far have included: sleep, procrastination, organisation and relationships.

The women report that the group helps them in multiple ways. For most, TDAH is a place to gain peer support and feel that they belong. While others, have requested practical support with their 'Right to Choose' diagnosis applications.

"It's made me feel welcome, safe and to belong."

"It's helped me to feel a part of a group and to hear from other people about how ADHD affects them."

"I feel part of a group and feel more positive about living with ADHD and the struggles it brings."

"Meeting like minded people and realising I'm not on my own makes me feel more accepted."

"It's helped me understand the condition and helped me to be more social."

"It has helped me to belong and to feel part of a community."

Most reported that the social, friendly atmosphere is what they most love about the group:

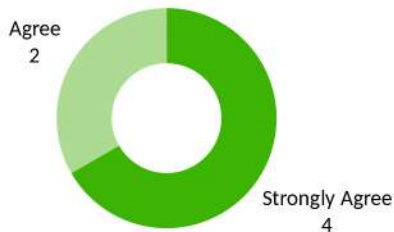
"The friendliness and welcoming-ness of the group."

"The ladies have become good friends."

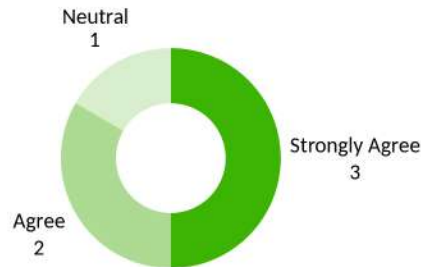
"Everyone was so incredibly welcoming and kind and I found it so lovely to chat to everyone."

Whilst attending TDAH I have...

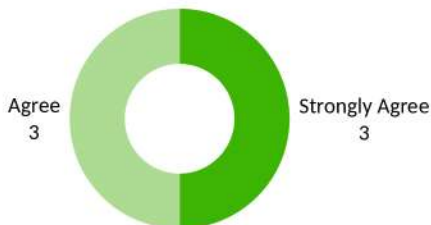
felt part of the group.



gained a greater understanding and/or acceptance of my ADHD.



felt a sense of belonging to my community.



developed life skills.



"I feel more positive about living with ADHD and the struggles it brings."

"The ladies have become good friends."

Millie

Millie has been a member of TDAH since it began. She was new to the Balsam Centre and felt nervous about joining. Millie shared with the group that she was mis-diagnosed as a child and has only been diagnosed with ADHD as an adult. By meeting other women with ADHD and having an open space to discuss how it affects her, she has gained a better understanding and insight into her own challenges and how to manage them.

"Coming to the group has helped me feel like I've found people who understand 'me' and what it's like to be ADHD. It's a breath of fresh air and I absolutely love coming!"

Millie has now gained the confidence to attend other groups at the centre, re-connect with friends and is now considering volunteering here.

Parkinson's Support

“Thank you for your exceptional work and commitment to making a difference.”

We were approached by the Wincanton's branch of Parkinson's UK, who wanted help to support their members' mental health. They explained that there was plenty of support for the physical aspect of being diagnosed with Parkinson's, but felt there was a gap in providing wellbeing support, specifically focused on anxiety, a significant feature of the condition.

Working in collaboration with Parkinson's UK and Open Mental Health, the Good Stuff Team created a 6 week psychoeducation course open to people diagnosed with Parkinson's and their families. The course was attended by 20 people, and the group is continuing to meet weekly.

James, Chair of Parkinson's UK, Wincanton

“As Chair of the Wincanton Branch of Parkinson's UK, I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the outstanding team at the Balsam Centre for their support, passion, and dedication in co-designing and delivering an exceptional programme for members of our branch. The profound positive impact on participants has been notable, with overwhelmingly favourable feedback highlighting the transformative nature of this initiative. Your efforts have not only improved the lives of those living with Parkinson's in Somerset but has also garnered interest from Parkinson's UK Head Office, promising to extend this positive influence to individuals affected by Parkinson's far beyond our local community. Thank you for your exceptional work and commitment to making a difference.”

20
beneficiaries

People felt that the most useful strategies were:

"Breathing and understanding that what I was experiencing was normal and could be explained."

"The model inspired by CBT involving thoughts, feelings and behaviour."

"Hand tracing mindfulness."

When asked what one thing they would take away from the course, they said:

"This too shall pass! Bad days don't last. Plus I now have an excuse to sing loudly and out of tune as it will improve my mood."

"Mindfulness - using various techniques, to bring my attention to the 'here and now' and give myself a break as I'm always busy."

"Breaking down anxieties into thoughts, feelings and behaviour. The intro to mindfulness was excellent too."

They also felt that it was beneficial to connect with others who were facing similar challenges:

"A burden shared is a burden halved. Our little group is supportive and friendly. We seem to be able to discuss important personal issues without undue constraint. This is partly down to Emma's style which begins from real problems and consists in a delicate and sensitive conversation with the group."

"It's always good to join a group of people who are challenged with the same symptoms, life's challenges and good to be able to support each other through the sessions and beyond."

"It made us realise that we weren't the only people experiencing certain things."

Steven

"The sessions were delivered with a relaxed teaching style, comfortable pace and adapted appropriately for peoples priorities. The easy to follow diagrams and handouts of exercises and techniques were developing our wellness toolkit. All areas covered were appropriate and relevant to life's challenges and I can't thank you enough for your kindness and support for our future life's journey. Really really enjoyable, wanting to come back for more!"

**"A burden
shared is a
burden
halved."**

**"All areas
covered were
appropriate and
relevant."**



KA Growing Project

13

beneficiaries

We worked with King Arthurs, the Wincanton Secondary School to collaborate on a growing project with vulnerable students experiencing difficulty at school. They had a plot of land which housed raised beds and a small enclosed wild area. The school selected two groups of Year 9 students who needed a nurturing environment to build confidence and teamwork skills.

The groups started on 7th November 2024, meeting weekly during term time.

Izzie Koch, one of our Good Stuff Project Workers, explains:

"We have built good relationships and the young people look forward to the sessions. We have dug over a raised bed and planted herbs. We have also cooked over the fire, made friendship bracelets, rebuilt a wooden bench, sawed and split logs and carried out general team building activities. It has been really nice seeing the individual students building trust with us. They have got to the point where they are comfortable enough to talk to us about home as well as school."

When the young people were asked how the sessions had helped them, they replied:

"It helps me to focus better."

"Makes me want to come to school more."

"It has helped my confidence to be around people."

"I feel more comfortable around people."

"I am more talkative."

"I have learnt outdoor skills and team work."

"It makes me feel good."

"When you do stuff like starting a fire it gives you a sense of achievement."

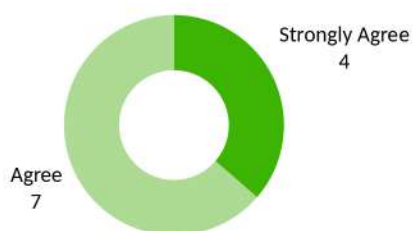


"I feel more comfortable around people."

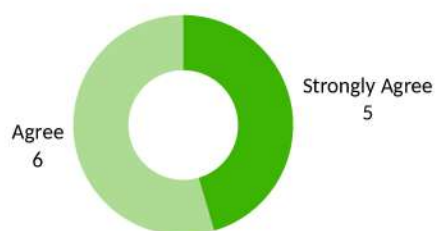


Whilst attending the outdoor sessions...

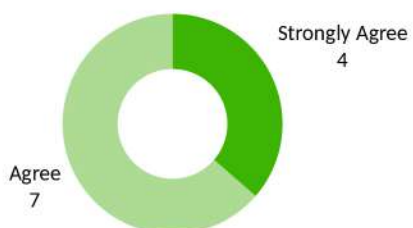
I feel able to be myself.



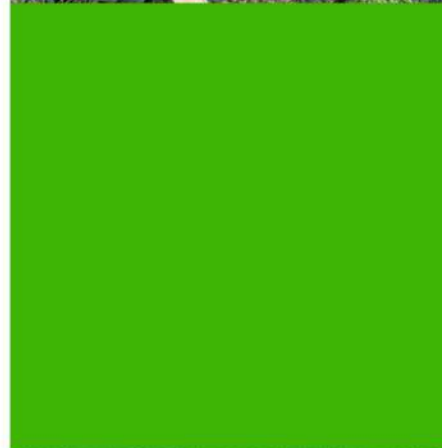
I feel part of the group.



I learn new skills.



I feel...



Parent Carers

Parent Carers has continued to grow. We've welcomed 13 new people into the group this year; with the total number of unique beneficiaries rising from 19 in year two to 32 in year three.

32

beneficiaries

When asked what they enjoy about the Parent Carers group, people said:

"Meeting people in the same situation. Being able to chat about our worries or concerns."

"Being around like minded people who have empathy and understanding."

"Talking to like minded people and getting current information."

"Feeling accepted and that your not alone. I've made friends through the group."

They feel the group has supported them by:

"Giving me ideas and support for transitions."

"Showing me how to get help, different avenues I could take and help filling in referral forms."

"Supporting me through the process of applying for an EHCP as the school were blocking the process."

"Getting information and help as well as meeting new people."

Pam

Pam first attended Parent Carers having had a difficult morning dropping off her child to school. She was feeling deflated and having seen the group advertised that morning, decided to come along. She has now become a regular member of the group and whilst looking into support for her child, has also recognised her own needs. She has since starting attending TDAH, our ADHD group for women.

Saturdays @ the Balsam Centre

We currently open on Saturdays twice a month, providing a variety of activities such as:

- Special events and workshops
- Repair Café
- Children's clothes bank
- Craft activities and games

By opening at weekends, we have made the Balsam Centre more accessible to people that work full time and have therefore reached many new beneficiaries. When asked how opening on Saturdays has benefited them, people said:

"It's given a focus to the start of the weekend, which could otherwise drag for a single parent family."

"It's made our weekends more enjoyable and fun."

"Saturdays at the Balsam Centre is amazing and helps people who are lonely and have nothing to do at the weekend."

"It adds another choice of things to do and opens the space to the wider community."

People particularly appreciate the opportunity to socialise in an inclusive space:

"Opportunity to meet and spend time with a variety of different people. Feeling of community and connection with others in a relaxed atmosphere."

"It's something nice to do with my daughter on a Saturday and also a good way to socialise."

"Friendly and inclusive atmosphere. You can meet friends there."

"It reduces isolation and is accessible."

"It's a safe space for my son to build confidence and social skills."



461
beneficiaries





Inclusion Days

Through the Summer holidays, the Good Stuff delivered three inclusion days. Each day had a different theme: Get Crafty, Get Gardening and Get Active.

Activities included:

- Berry fabric printing
- Making sensory wands
- Making paper windmills
- Printing
- Harvested vegetables
- Sorted and dried onions
- Picked flower bouquets
- Cooked popcorn
- Carved elder necklaces
- Fire building
- Toasted marshmallows

22

beneficiaries

The sessions were attended by 15 unique beneficiaries with 19 attendances overall.



100% of attendees asked felt included and enjoyed spending time together.

"Being able to meet others."

"My children thoroughly enjoyed themselves and the staff were really good with them."

"It is very good for children with SEND needs."

"It enables my child to be independent and I can interact with parents and carers a like."

"It enables my child to be independent."

Families told us that they enjoyed the sessions and had experienced new activities.

"It has helped me to think about what we can encourage my child to look for during a walk, such as pointing out lots of flowers and berries that could be used for a painting!"

"Great activities and great staff!"

Due to its success, the Good Stuff Team ran a further two days during the October half term.



Good Stuff Events





Pride Day

On the 3rd August, the Balsam Centre held Wincanton's first ever Pride event. It was a fun day of activities in celebration and support of diversity, and the uniqueness in all our families.

70% of attendees asked said that they hadn't attended a pride day event before and appreciated the LGBTQ+ visibility within the community.

"Thank you for this. Rainbow families visibility is very important for our two girls."

"It is good that things like this have visibility in the community."

"Focusing on families is genius! It helps bring family together to celebrate - it feels more gentle and warm."

"A sense of community and inclusion."

Importantly, people commented on the 'welcoming', 'safe' and 'relaxed' atmosphere of the event. They also enjoyed the wide range of family-friendly activities:

"I enjoyed all the stalls and the food was delicious! I really liked the hair stall - I got tinsel extensions!"

"A lovely variety of things to do together. The crafts and hair glitter were a great addition too!"

"The range of activities - all great for kids."

"Fun, Fun, Fun! Definitely worth a day out and would come again."

"Absolutely loved the range of activities. Our 5 year old son got stuck in. We only expected to pop in but we stayed for hours. He has had so much fun! I think we did all the activities."

Many attendees commented that they would love to see the Pride Day become an annual event:

"I would love to see this as an annual event - I'm sure the event would gain more traction with time."

111

Attendees



"Rainbow families visibility is very important for our two girls."







Wild & Green

On 14th September 2024, we held our Wild & Green Community Fair, which was visited by 180 people. We were thrilled to be joined by many local groups and organisations, all in an effort to raise awareness of sustainable, environmentally-friendly living.

Green Enterprise...

The Orchard was taken over by participants of our second Women's Enterprise Course who offered a range of activities for all ages, including: a drumming workshop, felt soap making, stick wand, fairy crown creations and story telling. This area was really buzzing and the activities were thoroughly enjoyed by everyone.

Laura, a participant from the Women's Enterprise course, had just launched her new CIC called 'This Living Place'. Wild & Green provided a stall where she could share details of her new project with the local community. She created a showcase of local fibre craft and enthralled us with a live demonstration of spinning raw wool into a product that can then be dyed or made into clothing.

Wild & Green Friends...

One Planet Wincanton Repair Café, who attend the Balsam Centre once a month, led a plant swap at the event. The Balsam Centre Men's Shed also sold their handcrafted wooden items.

We had a display from the "Sew Good Group" who meet at the Balsam Centre every Thursday. They created a beautiful display of handmade tree dresses and tablecloth blouses. The group only create garments out of recycled materials and particularly like using curtains, tablecloths and duvet covers. They also share and re-use patterns, inspiring others to 'have a go; at creating sustainable fashion themselves.

Similarly, we were also joined by Jenny from De-fashion Dorset, who spent the day showing the public how to visibly mend wool garments by felting different coloured patches over the holes. She also brought a couple of rails of her upcycled clothing for sale.

Outside we were really excited to be joined by Somerset Wildlife Trust who engaged the community in their draft Beaver management strategy report. SWT also gave a well-attended presentation on the reintroduction of beavers.

180
attendances



"There was a lovely happy atmosphere and the food was delicious."



Other organisations who joined us included: CATCH, Brue Crew, Carymoor Environmental Trust, Forest of Selwood Group, Chesterblade Hills, The Fixy Van (offering a tech amnesty), the Somerset Wilder Gardens Team, One Planet Wincanton and Somerset Bus Partnership.

The Growing Space...

Our sister charity, the Growing Space used fresh produce from their gardens to cook and serve healthy planet-friendly, seasonal food which included: freshly baked seeded bread, homemade humous, chutneys and pickles, and a leafy side salad decorated with edible petals. For a sweet option we served cakes made with seasonal fruit and veg – beetroot brownies, Carrot cake, blackberry and apple cake and a courgette and walnut cake.

Visitors enjoyed *"the diversity of projects involved"* and praised the event for its welcoming atmosphere and delicious healthy food options.

" There was a lovely happy atmosphere and the food was delicious."

"Lovely atmosphere at the event and felt like a truly inclusive space."

"The number of families wandering around with a grin on their face was brilliant. It also provided an opportunity to connect and talk to so many people. The food was beyond amazing."

"The people - so positive, friendly and welcoming. And the amazing catering - the savoury dish was superb!"





Opera

On the 13th July, we took 12 local people to the Don Giovanni Opera being performed at Wincanton Memorial Hall by the Bath Opera Group. The group were treated to an hour's workshop before the show to learn more about opera and were also served a delicious, healthy two course meal cooked by volunteers.

The tickets were offered free of charge; providing the opportunity to experience opera to people who may not usually get the chance. This could be due to a variety of reasons, for example: expense, no access to transport, rural isolation, poor mental or physical health.

The group were very positive about the experience, expressing that they enjoyed the company as much as the show.

"It was a wonderful opportunity to go to a great performance."

"I enjoyed talking to the 90 year old lady sitting next to me and discussing her experience of the evening. She had never been to an opera before and had no idea of what it would be like."

"It was my first opera and I am so pleased that I had the opportunity to go. It was a great evening."

"I enjoyed the opera and meeting the group beforehand."



"It was my first opera and I am so pleased that I had the opportunity to go."



12

attendees





Lantern Parade

Every year, Wincanton Town Council arrange a Christmas light switch. It's a busy event that starts with a lantern procession through the town. This year, the Balsam Centre organised the making of the lanterns. We welcomed many new families through the door, to create their lantern ready for the parade.

61% of people hadn't made a lantern before and **78%** reported learning a new creative skill while taking part in the workshops.

"The setup was great, everything you needed was easily available, instructions were very clear and the volunteers were extremely helpful."

"It was lovely! There were ample resources, instructions and staff were very helpful. My daughter and I had a lovely time. It was the first time we'd ever made a lantern, so also came away with a new craft skill!"

91% of people felt that the lantern workshops provided a space to spend quality time with their family.

"It was great opportunity to spend some quality time with my son."

"It was so lovely to be able to create something with my children."

The workshops also led to **87%** of people feeling more engaged and connected to their local community.

"It was so nice to see everyone getting involved."

"It was a lovely day bringing families and the community together. Well run by The Balsam Centre team."

"Lovely experience and fun. Hopefully it will be on every year. My Children loved making the lanterns and can't wait to be in the parade."

The final parade was a great success, with around 50 people walking in procession down the high street with a magical array of lanterns in all shapes and sizes.

201
workshop
attendances



Christmas Extravaganza

Christmas can be an expensive, stressful and lonely time of year for many. The Good Stuff team wanted to provide an event that would bring the community together and provide a welcoming, festive space for little to no expense.

"Lots to do! Kept our rather busy tribe of five happy and contained. Left feeling all Christmassy!"

"Fantastic activities. Ideal for families. Great Santa. Great value. Loved the value table."

"Well organised. The crafts for children were wonderful! Grotto area was great and Father Christmas! A wonderful Christmas fair."

As parents ourselves, we noticed the rising cost of visiting Father Christmas locally. We wanted to provide a quality experience at an affordable price. Our Father Christmas cost £1 per child and included an age-appropriate, eco-friendly Christmas craft gift. The activity was warmly welcomed:

"Thank you so much for a great morning! Father Christmas and the elves were so welcoming and the crafts were excellent - perfect for Christmas cheer!"

"Seeing Santa and making reindeer food was so magical! Thank you!"

"We really enjoyed all of the activities. The children loved seeing Santa!"

There was also a pocket money stall, where children were able to buy small gifts and wrap them for their families. This was a big hit with both the parents and the children, with lots of families commenting on its inclusivity:

"Very lovely event! Kids all seem to be enjoying. Absolutely love the pocket money presents stall."

"I enjoyed looking around at all the stalls, especially the pocket money stall. Very inclusive."

"I loved crafting and buying my mummy and daddy a present." (5 years)

And if there was just one reason to put on an event like this, it'd be this:

"This is the best day of my life!" (8 years)



170
attendances





Easter Extravaganza

Following the success of our Christmas Extravaganza, we decided to provide another low-cost family friendly event to celebrate spring during the Easter holidays.

We created an Easter trail in the wildlife garden, where children were able to complete a letter hunt whilst also connecting with nature and spotting life in the pond. Every child received a free Easter egg for completing the trail which were kindly donated to us by Morrisons Community Champions.

In addition, we organised a craft market, where people were able to sell their homemade items for a small table fee. A few Good Stuff group attendees had a stall, selling crochet decorations and baked treats.

The Balsam Centre wool group kindly made characterful knitted teddy bears to hide (and be found) around the centre. Not only were these gratefully received by visitors, it also provided an opportunity to explore the act of giving - one strand of the 'five ways to wellbeing'.

Families were also able to join in with a variety of spring-themed crafts, Easter stories outside in the Orchard and bake their own Easter nest cakes in the kitchen.

Here are just a few of the many positive quotes from visitors on the day:

"A lovely event with a mixture of activities for all ages. Thank you!"

"I enjoyed the Easter egg hunt. I also loved making the Easter bonnet and Easter card." (Age 7)

"To everyone at the Balsam Centre, you are all amazing and run this brilliant place. Families are so lucky to have this facility. Well done!"

"Wonderful day. Everyone was having a great time. Lovely community atmosphere. Thank you!"

"What a lovely day out with the kids. I had a crown made and wore it proudly! Also had a few delicious treats. Thank you!"

"Marvellous experience full of so many surprises. Very entertaining!"

"Lovely atmosphere. Lots to do for children. Affordable. Thank you a lot,"

120
attendances



VE Day Celebration

On VE Day, the Town Council organised a family fun day in the park. It was a busy day of activities planned with bouncy castles, pony rides and military vehicles. Two of the Balsam team went along and shared information on a stall.

However, at the Balsam Centre, the Good Stuff team wanted to cater for those who would like a quieter celebration. Aimed at the older members of the community, the team provided an afternoon tea with music and a quiz. Tea was a selection of homemade sausage rolls, cream tea, finger sandwiches and mini Victoria sponge cakes with more than a nod to the 1940's.

Marie, 13 years old, baked scones and helped serve them. Jenny, who bakes as part of our 1:1 enterprise project, made mini Victoria sponge cakes for the event.

"Loved the scones - are there any more that I could take home?"

"Lovely event, the food was delicious!"

"Who made the Victoria sandwich cakes they are really nice!"

"It's been lovely, thank you!"



18

beneficiaries



Lovely event,
the food was
delicious!





Hate Crime Pop-up Event

We were contacted by our local police station to see whether we would like to host a hate crime pop-up event. We jumped at the chance to support this event and were also joined by equality charities 2BU and Diversity Trust.

The event was aimed at people who had been affected by hate crime or felt concerned about the potential of becoming a victim. We provided an open, safe space for the community to come and talk to the organisations attending.

Attendance for this event was low, but it was good to be offering such an important topic visibility within the community. Three young people came to the event accompanied by their school's mental health co-ordinator.

Hosting this event also strengthened our connection with the local Police and 2BU, which led to their support at our Pride Day event and provided an introduction to Diversity Trust.



Community Consultation

The Good Stuff team have attended different community events this year. Each has provided an opportunity to share what's available, find out what's missing and establish important connections.

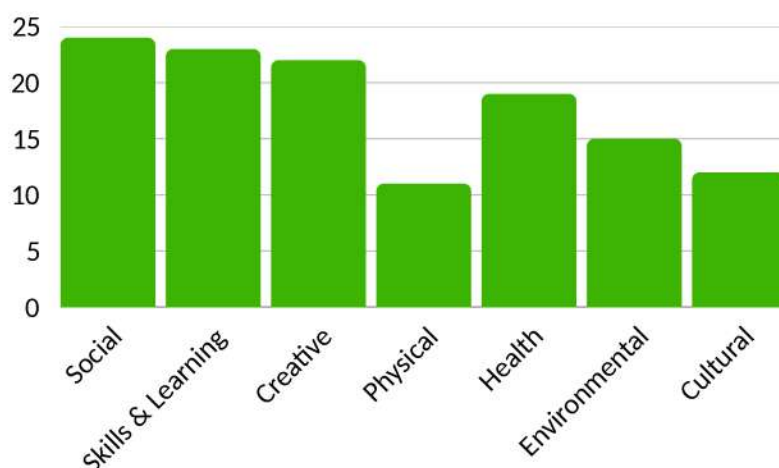
A few of the events we attended were:

- Wincanton Holiday Play Days
- Wincanton's Chamber of Commerce Events
- Military Events

Recently, 40 local people filled in our Community Research Questionnaire. We are continually reflecting on the interests and support needs of our community to inform our delivery, so these insights are very valuable to us!

Here are some of the outcomes from our research:

What type of activity would benefit Wincanton?



What groups, activities or events would people like to see in Wincanton?

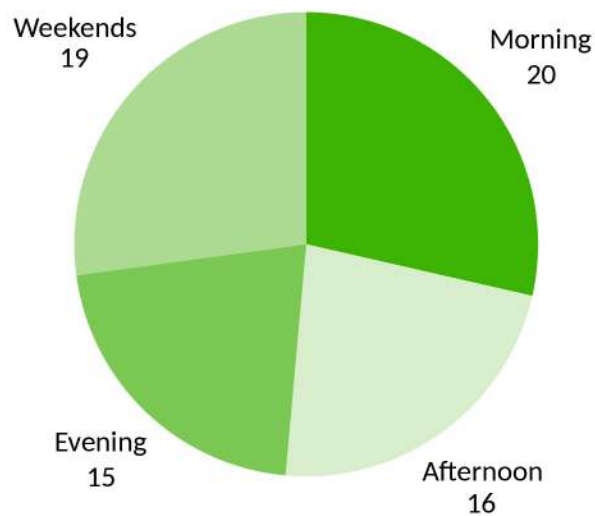
- "Adult dance classes"
- "Dog walking group"
- "Table top sale"
- "Plant sale"
- "Movie nights"
- "Re-wilding group"
- "Home working group"
- "Amateur music club"
- "Children's activities"
- "Cooking group"
- "Creative writing"
- "Home education group"
- "Poetry"
- "Drama"
- "Photography"
- "40+ social group"



What training or short courses would people like to see in Wincanton?

- "Life skills"
- "Pottery"
- "Family tree"
- "First aid"
- "Business start-up"
- "IT skills"
- "Interview skills"
- "Printmaking"
- "Dressmaking"
- "Painting"
- "Writing a CV"
- "Animal care"

What time of day would suit people best?



The Good Stuff project has already responded to some of the suggestions above, such as:

- Opening the Balsam Centre two weekends a month.
- Running groups in the evening.
- Table-top sales
- Plant sales at events
- Women's enterprise group
- Military cooking club
- Youth holiday activities

However, with community consultation at the heart of the project, we are very excited to put more community ideas into action during Year 4.



Volunteers

In Year 3, the Good Stuff Project has had 26 volunteers.

They have worked in a variety of roles, including:

- Cooking
- Craft activities
- Creating marketing materials
- Event photography
- Father Christmas and his elf

Pete

"I have volunteered at Balsam Centre at a number of events over the past few years. It is always a pleasure to be part of these occasions. The Balsam Centre staff are an inspirational group who always go the extra mile to make people feel welcome. Special events, like last year's Christmas Extravaganza, are a lot of work but the results are amazing and there are a lot of happy people, adults and kids alike, who benefit.

More recently I have been involved in the Motorheads project which takes place monthly at the famous Haynes Motor Museum and gives petrolheads the chance to meet the staff, view the cars and engage in motoring nostalgia (free of charge and with tea and biscuits thrown in!). A great way to spend Friday mornings, and the collaboration with Haynes has been popular and highly successful."

Sally

"I have really enjoyed cooking for the Chat Cafe. It was been a lovely way of getting to know different members of the community and they are always so appreciative of the service we are providing. It has been very rewarding seeing Chat Cafe go from strength to strength and people returning each week because they love coming. I have also loved working alongside the Balsam Centre team who have been so welcoming and friendly."

Learnings

What's gone well...

The growth of meaningful peer support across all areas of the project, which is its glue!

The Chat Café has now become the focal point of the week for the people using it, many of whom have previously been lonely or very isolated. It's a hubbub of chatter, with many friendships having been made, but it also offers a space for people to just quietly be with others and pick up a craft activity, or talk to the project worker or the mental health professional who is always there.

TDAH! A new group for women with or without a diagnosis of ADHD and run by people with lived experience, has provided a different, slightly chaotic, but welcome sense of peer support and sense of belonging, whilst the Parent Carer Forum has brought specialist individual support as well as a framework for peer support to its monthly meetings.

The one-off events have been hugely successful, the first ever (Family) Pride event in Wincanton, The Wild and Green environment day, Christmas which was magical and Easter which was just fun, meant that families on low income could all celebrate and enjoy some really special events and activities without the financial stresses that usually accompany them.

Not so well...

Apart from engagement with the agricultural community as described above, another area that has proved difficult has been engagement with school leavers and young adults not in education, employment, or training. This was a group that we had hoped to bring together to offer different opportunities to, including help to set up micro businesses. The partner agencies working with these young people and young adults have themselves been difficult to engage and making contact with this group will be a priority in the final year of the project.

In the month before Good Stuff started, in 2022, Wincanton Town Council elections brought about a complete change in the council, and with it a decision not to continue with the pro-active community development initiative, 'Wincanton for the Future', of the previous Mayor with whom we had worked to develop Good Stuff. We have of course continued to work with them as closely as possible and when opportunities have presented themselves, including being involved with a new community survey, which it is hoped, with encouragement, may provide a platform for the Town Council's re-engagement.

Unexpected or interesting...

Most days bring something unexpected or interesting !

Following on from the difficulties with the town council above, a small group of high street shop owners and community activists has recently come together to support each other in generating interest in the high street and its social and community value as well as economic value. They are very open to supporting and working with young people and young adults especially in the arts and enterprise and a member of the Good Stuff team is part of their development group.

What we have learned...

Especially in this year is how to really listen to individuals, groups, to the community and to each other as practitioners, to work within all of the necessary structures and constraints of the project and as a charity, but within that to be open to partnerships and opportunities and to fully utilise the wealth of skills of our staff and volunteers.

The Balsam Centre has expanded its reach and activities in the last three years and one of the benefits of this is that Good Stuff beneficiaries are more easily able to access additional support or opportunities across the wider Centre as needed.

How we're changing...

In the last year, a long planned and long awaited extension to our old Men's Shed has been completed. This has given us a light, airy space, now known as The Workshop. Our Year 4 plans are to make the best use possible of the space for creative, practical and employment skills development, all of which we hope to make our focus in the last year.

Wincanton is characterised by a low income, low skills, part time economy, with poor access to education and training and part of the Good Stuff project is aimed at addressing this through both conventional means but also through softer skills development.

Skills development will also be around food, cooking and food growing, gardening for wildlife, and more outdoor activity in the gardens and with our sister charity, The Growing Space, social and therapeutic horticulture project.

In short we will continue to use all of the resources available to us to meet our key aims, this time with a greater focus on young people/adults who have slipped through the net, and on skills - for life, leisure and employment.

Thank you for your
continued support.



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