



Building Community Resilience Together

Community Resilience Fund Evaluation Report

People's Voice Media

May 2026

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Foreword from Councillor Stephen Williams

Chair of Public Health and Communities Policy Committee, Bristol City Council

As Chair of Public Health and Communities Policy Committee I see first-hand the essential role that community spaces play in Bristol. One of the pleasures of my role is travelling around the city visiting many of community anchor organisations, large and small. Among others, I've been pleased to see the great work being done by Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust, Redcatch Community Garden and Hartcliffe City Farm. I was struck particularly by the work of One25, supporting sex workers, some of the most marginalised people in our city.

Warm, welcoming, accessible community buildings and other spaces where people can gather, connect, learn skills and work together are a vital part of our communities. The Community Resilience Fund (CRF) aimed to strengthen the future of Bristol's neighbourhoods by investing in these important buildings and organisations. The Community Resilience Fund is a one-off capital grant fund of £4m established in 2022 to build city resilience by growing the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality.

In 2020 Black South West Network, working with Locality and Voscur, were commissioned to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the VCSE sector in Bristol. [*Designing A New Social Reality*](#) set out a framework for recovery and resilience. CRF was a direct response to this report.

CRF had two aims – to award funding to improve important community spaces and to put communities at the heart of the decision-making.

The first stage was about community and voluntary groups, residents and councillors codesigning the process and communities taking a lead in deciding which projects should be funded. This process was evaluated by the University of Bristol and Vivid Regeneration in *Participatory democracy in practice: evaluation of the Bristol City Council Community Resilience Fund*. You can [read the Executive Summary here](#) and [read the Full Report here](#).

The second stage was about implementing the decisions to invest in community and voluntary projects across the city to create more accessible, welcoming and energy efficient community buildings, upgrading digital infrastructure and improving environmental sustainability.

Continuing this participatory approach, Bristol City Council commissioned [People's Voice Media](#) to evaluate the impact of the funding that was awarded to community and voluntary groups.

People's Voice Media trained and supported seven resident decision makers to become Community Reporters and invited representatives from funded VCSE organisations to reflect on their outcomes in meaningful ways. This report is a product of conversations between resident decision makers and VCSE representatives, alongside reflective activities completed by grantee organisations.

CRF has formed part of Bristol City Council's investment in community organisations alongside grants such as Bristol Impact Fund (BIF) and the Voluntary Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) infrastructure support grant:

- From 2021 to 2025, BIF 2 provided £6.4million grant investment into projects that build the power of communities facing disadvantage.
- From 2026 to 2030. BIF 3 builds on the foundations of BIF1 and BIF2 prioritising investment of £8.8million into neighbourhood organisations and citywide equalities communities that

increase community skills and knowledge, address community identified priorities through co-production and aim to tackle inequity

- From 2022 to 2026, the Enabling VCSE grant invested £1,266,432 into support for VCSE organisations, this was awarded to Voscur and Black South West Network
- From 2026 to 2031. under its new name the VCSE Infrastructure Support grant will invest a further £1,583,040 to organisations that support VCSEs in Bristol

We hope the recommendations in this report will be useful to a range of audiences: residents and organisations gathering evidence to influence local democracy; decision makers evaluating the benefits of community infrastructure investment; and future community investment programmes or capital building works.

I would like to thank everyone who has engaged with this process. The impacts highlighted in this report reflect our collective efforts and I am confident that the benefits will continue to be felt across our communities in the years ahead.

1 | Introduction

1.1 | About People's Voice Media

People's Voice Media is a civil society organisation established in 1995, that uses storytelling as a tool for social change in the UK and across Europe. As a team we:

- Learn and adapt
- Work collaboratively and equitably
- Act authentically and with integrity
- Come with optimism and joy

Our Board, team, and network of freelancers are a diverse group of people committed to working in this way to achieve our vision.

In 2007 we launched the Community Reporting methodology and began to build the Community Reporter Network. Community Reporting is a digital storytelling approach that supports people's participation in research, policymaking, service development, and decision-making processes. We know we cannot achieve our ambitions alone. The Community Reporter Network now spans the UK and Europe. It has 50+ active partner organisations from different sectors in the arenas of policy, research and services, and has trained over 2,000 Community Reporters.

The core objectives of our work are to:

1. Enable people's lived experience to be heard and provide platforms for marginalised voices.
2. Support people, communities and organisations to use lived experience to address inequalities and injustices.
3. Inform and influence services and policies so that they better meet people's needs and enable people to live well.

Our work puts lived experience at the heart of service improvement, policy development, and research practices.

1.2 | What is Bristol's Community Resilience Fund?

The Community Resilience Fund (CRF) is a one-off capital grant fund established in response to recommendations of the Bristol Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Strategy Group. It is part of an overall goal to build city resilience by growing the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality. CRF has invested £4 million capital funding in the community and voluntary sector since July 2023, including £800,000 for dedicated grants for city wide equalities communities.¹

The CRF put communities at the heart of decision-making, building on the Port Communities Resilience Fund,² devolved Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)³ and citizens' assembly by inviting community and voluntary organisations to put forward ideas and proposals. These were then shortlisted through deliberative and participatory decision-making.

100 residents from across Bristol worked alongside 25 Councillors from January to May 2023 to recommend the funding of 53 projects proposed by VCSE organisations: 39 geographic and 14

¹ [CRF Cabinet Report Feb 22 - V2](#)

² [Port Communities Resilience Fund Project Summary](#)

³ [Community Infrastructure Levy \(CIL\)](#)

city-wide equalities projects. This part of the process was evaluated by University of Bristol and Vivid Regeneration in 2024.⁴

The fund supports recovery and longer-term resilience, responding to the recommendations from 'Designing a New Social Reality'.⁵ This is achieved by investing in community spaces and allowing revenue streams to be re-established and assets to be managed effectively by community organisations and anchors, social enterprises and community businesses.

Reinforcing the focus of The Bristol Impact Fund 2,⁶ the CRF facilitates stronger connections between people and enables community-led action by investing in the sustainability of important community facilities and infrastructure. The funding allocation process aimed to increase participation in decision making, build connections and shared understanding through deliberative conversations.

Exclusion and inequity undermine community resilience. Equity was at the heart of the CRF process. As well as ensuring decision makers were diverse and broadly representative of Bristol's population, participants were paid for their time, and expenses were covered to ensure a wide range of people were able to take part. They were asked to consider the impact on communities experiencing inequality when deliberating and making decisions. The CRF also intentionally invested in communities experiencing the greatest inequality – the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods and citywide equalities communities.⁷

Capacity building and revenue support

With the understanding that organisations face challenges to delivering capital projects – such as lack of capacity, skills, knowledge or resource – the CRF offered revenue and capacity building support to enable the successful delivery of their projects. During the development stage of organisations' projects, they were offered a range of support to help them successfully complete their Full Project Plans:

- 1:1 support from external partners who have skills and expertise in digital infrastructure, sustainable energy, construction, and accessibility.
- Online, two-part webinar around the implications of VAT.

This support was paid for by Bristol City Council (BCC) and, in some cases, offered pro-bono through connections made through the Quartet Community Foundation's ProHelp scheme.

Improving accessibility in community spaces was a core aim of the Community Resilience Fund. To ensure that BCC's Environmental Access Standards were met by organisations with related projects, the CRF team referred organisations delivering these to accessibility experts, West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL), to work on a 1:1 basis throughout the lifespan of their project. WECIL provided a holistic approach to ensure access improvements were produced to a high standard, following best practice and taking a range of access needs into account.

Throughout the delivery stage, Bristol City Council also offered peer learning and skills building opportunities in relation to asset management, to enable networking and the development of a community of practice. These opportunities contributed to the CRF's overall goal of building a more resilient city.

Enabling VCSE Grant

The CRF recognised the vital impact of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations on the life of the city and the key role they play in addressing inequity; delivering often innovative and niche services; promoting inclusion; strengthening voice and influence; and

⁴ [Participatory Democracy in Practice: evaluation of the Bristol City Council Community Resilience Fund](#)

⁵ [Designing a New Social Reality: The Future of Bristol Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sector Beyond COVID-19](#)

⁶ [The Bristol Impact Fund](#)

⁷ As indicated in the [2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation Report](#)

enabling social action. To strengthen and build the capacity of the sector, BCC awarded grants to Voscur and Black South West Network (BSWN) to:

- Encourage organisations to build connections between neighbours and people with shared interests.
- Foster a culture of strong and collaborative relationships between groups and with partners.

The CRF extension to the Enabling VCSE grant ran from March 2023 - March 2026. Among other priorities set out in its approach, there was a focus on supporting organisations to manage existing community assets and supporting those who aspire to acquire a community asset.

This evaluation seeks to understand, as part of its remit, the impact and value of support provided by Voscur and Black South West Network through these grants, as part of the wider investment in supporting the development, maintenance and effective use of community assets and infrastructure.

An **asset-based approach** in the context of community development is a strategy which focuses on the community's strengths, assets and skills, as opposed to focusing on its deficits.

Principles

CRF aimed to support the recovery and resilience of the community and voluntary sector in areas of greatest deprivation, and self-organised equality groups, so they would be better placed to:

- Address inequity, by recognising past injustice, understanding power, and taking positive action to make a change.
- Take an asset-based approach by building on and strengthening what already exists to develop community connection and community action.

1.3 | Funding Priorities

CRF aimed to build the resilience of community and voluntary sector organisations serving their communities by investing in the following priorities:

Accessibility Improvements

- Access is a major barrier to Disabled people of all ages preventing participation in community life. Accessibility improvements would increase inclusion but also create a more viable space.
- This could include accessibility improvements to community buildings and equipment, such as installing ramps, a hearing loop, or an accessible toilet.

Environmental Sustainability

- Energy efficiency improvements to save money on bills, make spaces more usable, increase environmental sustainability.
- Energy generation projects to create an income, save money on bills, increase environmental sustainability.
- This could include upgrading to renewable energy, installing efficient heating systems, or improving efficiency with insulation, building controls, or double glazing.

Financial Resilience

- Space improvements or expansions to bring in and maximise income.

- Changes to increase usage and increase viability.
- This could include physical improvements to the building that allow the organisation to rent out more space, host more activities, or sell more services and/or products.

Digital Infrastructure

- Upgrades to digital capability and future proofing.
- This could include installing smart technology or a new IT system, for example.

The CRF was managed by the Community Resources Team, which is part of the Communities service at Bristol City Council. The service uses an asset-based approach to work with the Voluntary and Community sector, to support communities of place and shared experience.

1.4 | Aims of the Evaluation

This evaluation captures the impact of the £4 million capital investment from the CRF as well the impact of the capacity building programme, and makes recommendations about continuing to address the needs of the VCSE sector, and to build sustainable community infrastructure in the city.

The main aims of this evaluation are:

- To find out if the funding helped VCSE organisations become stronger, more resilient and more able to cope with challenges.
- To see how the funding affected the people and communities these organisations support, especially groups facing inequalities.
- To check whether the funding helped make grant opportunities more equitable for everyone.
- To understand what difference the support for capacity building made, including things like one-to-one help, learning with peers, free professional advice, and consultancy, in developing and using community resources and spaces.
- To create ways for residents who helped make decisions to also take part in checking and reviewing the CRF projects.

2 | Approach & Methodology

Influence of approach

The Bristol City Council Community Resources team wanted to incorporate creative ways of monitoring the CRF programme in keeping with the participatory nature of its delivery. The preferred approach has been for resident participants to have a research role in the monitoring and evaluation, speaking directly to grantee organisations on site. This aimed to build on the collaborative approach of the CRF, which is in keeping with the principles of the programme:

- To address inequity, by recognising past injustice, understanding power, and taking positive action to make a change.
- Take an asset-based approach by building on and strengthening what already exists to build community connection and community action.

As part of the CRF process, 100 residents were trained to make important decisions in their communities. 73 out of 78 CRF decision makers who completed a feedback survey answered that they would consider taking part in a similar activity in the future, which shows the appetite for, and positive engagement with, this type of participatory work.

Involving resident decision makers in the evaluation stage of the CRF aimed to build their confidence and skills and grow their connections with community organisations. This approach has helped to sow seeds for further social action and establish a network of community connectors and champions. Their local presence and community knowledge have deepened the team's understanding of the fund's impact.

For this reason, People's Voice Media selected two complementary methodologies to evaluate and monitor the programme. These are Community Reporting and Ripple Effect Mapping, which are briefly summarised in Diagram 1 below, and outlined in more detail in the following sections. Both methodologies are participatory, with a focus on collaboration, lived experience and human insight. A full outline of evaluation activities can be found in Appendix 1.

Community Reporting

What it is

- A qualitative, peer-to-peer research method that gathers and mobilises digital stories of lived experience to enhance citizen participation in:

-  Research
-  Service development
-  Policymaking
-  Decision-making

- Stories were collected from grantee organisations by local residents to understand the impact of the grant and their experience of the process.

Why it was applied

- ✓ Draws on lived experience within community organisations
- ✓ Generates rich, nuanced insights
- ✓ Scalable approach to gathering data
- ✓ Reduces power imbalances; inclusive and accessible

Ripple Effect Mapping

What it is

A participatory impact evaluation technique that helps participants and stakeholders visually map intended and unintended changes within a project. It captures “ripples” of impact that traditional methods often miss and focuses on understanding how an intervention contributes to outcomes or system change.

Why it was applied

- ✓ Measures impact through human insight
- ✓ Participatory and easy to replicate across contexts
- ✓ Based on appreciative inquiry — a strengths-based approach to strategic change

Diagram 1: Overview of evaluation tools used

2.1 | About Community Reporting

Originating in 2007, Community Reporting has been developed across the UK and Europe as a mixed methodological approach for enhancing participation in evaluation, research, policymaking, service development, and decision-making processes (Keresztély and Trowbridge, 2019; Geelhoed et al, 2021; Trowbridge and Willoughby, 2020). In-line with work such as Glasby (2011) and Durose et al (2013), this method emphasises the validity of lived experience and knowledge-based practice in these fields. It supports people to tell their own stories, in their own ways via peer-to-peer approaches. It then connects these stories with the people, groups and organisations who can use the insights within them to make positive social change. When used like this, storytelling, as Durose et al (2013) argue, allows for the representation of ‘different voices and experiences in an accessible way’. Central to Community Reporting is the belief that people telling authentic stories about their own lived experience offers a valuable understanding of their lives.

This approach to lived experience storytelling as a changemaking tool has three phases, loosely based on the Cynefin framework for decision-making in complex environments (Snowden and Boone, 2008).⁸ The Community Reporting approach is depicted in Diagram 2.

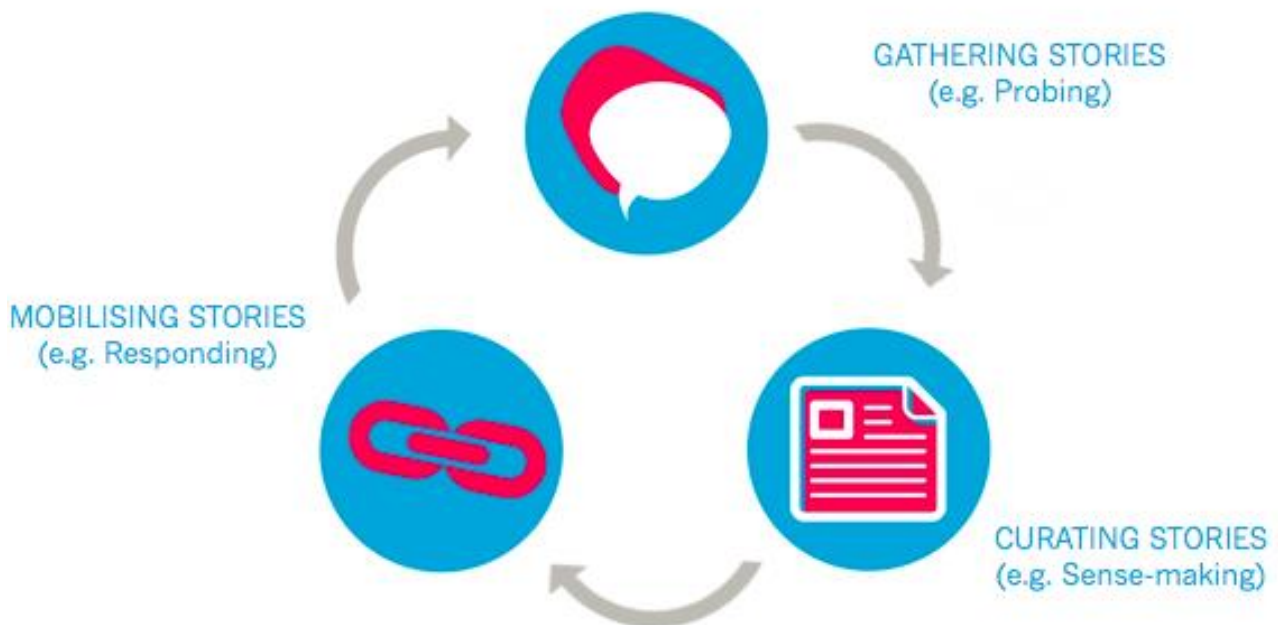


Diagram 2: The Community Reporting cycle

For this evaluation, residents⁹ were trained as Community Reporters to conduct and record dialogue interviews with grantee organisations. These take the format of peer-to-peer ‘interviews’ that do not have pre-determined questions. Instead, an opening question (i.e., a conversation starter) is asked which enables the storyteller to start to tell their story. The Community Reporter recording the story then asks any questions within this storytelling process that naturally occur to them and interacts with the storyteller to support them to communicate their experiences. In essence, the structure of this practice mimics our day-to-day conversations and the questions and interactions that take place are those that occur naturally as the story progresses. The storyteller

⁸ Cynefin (pronounced kuh-nev-in) is a Welsh word that signifies the various interlinked elements in our environment and experience that influence how we think, interpret and behave. The framework was designed initially to help leaders understand the challenges in their environment and make decisions in that context, using a sense-making approach.

⁹ Although 12 residents were trained initially, several dropped out due to various reasons during or after the training, meaning 7 went on to gather stories. We address this further in Section 6.

is largely determining the 'agenda' of the conversation, whereas the Community Reporter is the 'agency' facilitating the conversation.



Image 1: Community Reporter conversation at The Nelson Trust

To ensure a degree of consistency within the Community Reporting practice and how it is implemented, **Responsible Storytelling** is embedded into each Community Reporting activity. Responsible Storytelling is our term meaning the ethics and values of Community Reporting and gathering lived experience. It ensures informed consent goes beyond data protection law and puts people's online and offline safety at the heart of our research.

Responsible Storytelling is our approach to lived experience storytelling. It ensures power imbalances are addressed and that Community Reporters don't inadvertently 'do harm' when gathering stories.

Story Curation is how we analyse lived experience stories to garner insights from them without imposing biases or beliefs upon them.

Story curation (or sense-making) within the evaluation period involved working with Community Reporters and members of the Community Resources team to review and analyse the stories gathered to produce a set of findings. This participatory process borrows from existing qualitative data analysis practices which provide a framework through which insights can emerge *from* the data rather than being imposed *upon* it. Pierre Lévy's (1997) concept of 'collective

intelligence' underpins the group sense-making aspects of the approach; in principle, multiple people's knowledge combined is greater than an individual's knowledge alone. People's Voice Media replicated this process internally to curate any stories not covered in the participatory sessions.

People's Voice Media used a structured framework to categorise and group the different changes and impacts shown on the Ripple Effect Maps. This sorting helped us to analyse the information by placing the evidence from the maps and presentations into categories. We then assessed how significant each change was, deciding if it was transactional, transitional, or transformative. This idea is based on Hansen's (2017) model:

- **Transactional Impacts** – These are quick, smaller changes that happen in a short space of time. Usually, they affect just one person or a small group and do not change the dominant beliefs or the structure of the community. Examples include one-off events or changes for individuals.
- **Transitional Impacts** – These changes take place over a longer period and start to influence how people think, work, or how the community is organised. They usually affect groups of people or organisations and are connected to other changes.
- **Transformative Impacts** – These are large, long-term changes that completely alter how entire communities, regions, or wider systems operate. They can impact society in a big way.

Direction of Travel maps are a way in which change can be presented visually in a living document. They can be seen 'in action' in Section 5.

We synthesised these findings with those from the Community Reporter stories to create **Direction of Travel maps** (Section 5). Direction of Travel Maps are a way of visually presenting impacts and changes revealed through evaluations or cycles of learning. Insights and data are plotted on a map (similar to a graph), with their placement showing whether the change is transactional, transitional, or transformative, or somewhere between

levels. The idea of Direction of Travel maps is that they allow for continuous, long-term evaluation and learning. As further impacts and changes are uncovered, the maps can be added to reflect the journey of the community over time. It also allows for recommendations for change to be made based on the current picture at any given time.

2.3 | A note on the purposeful sample

The Community Resources team, with input from the Steering Group and People's Voice Media, created a purposeful sample of organisations to include in the evaluation. It takes into consideration the location and/or community of interest, the support received, and the type of project carried out. WECIL, BSWN, and Voscur were also included as they have provided capacity building support after the decision-making stage and so it was felt important to include their perspective. The full purposeful sample can be found in Appendix 2.

Purposeful sampling is a strategy for research and evaluation in which participants (in this case, grantee organisations) are selected deliberately to provide information-rich cases so that insights are in-depth rather than generalised.

3 | Community Reporting Story Insights

In this section, we will explore the insights from the 23 stories gathered from grantee organisations by local Community Reporters. The Community Reporters evaluated the stories over the course of two sense-making sessions and, from their deliberations, five thematic areas have been identified. These are:

- Meeting diverse community needs
- Broadening and deepening community reach
- Financial resilience through cost reduction
- Strategic planning and futureproofing
- A positive, trust-based funding experience

Over the coming pages, we will present a narrative analysis of the CRF and its impacts, as told by the grantee organisations to people within their communities. These will, in turn, be mapped to the funding priority areas, with some key recommendations made. Further in the report, we will synthesise these with the outcomes of the Ripple Effect Mapping sessions (Section 3) to present Directions of Travel for each of the funding priorities, with recommended next steps (Section 5).

Where permission has been given for stories to be made public, we have made them (and two short films edited from the collected stories) available [on the Community Reporter website's Bristol CRF story archive](#).

3.1 | Meeting Diverse Community Needs

The CRF has acted as a catalyst for inclusion across grantee organisations in Bristol, enabling them to move beyond generic service provision towards specialised, person-centred approaches. By providing capital investment, the fund allowed grantees to transform physical environments into safe havens that prioritise the specific sensory, cultural, and physical needs of their communities.

Grantees have highlighted in their stories the ways in which the CRF has given them the means to better meet these diverse needs in four key ways: trauma-informed design, accessibility as a form of dignity, the fostering of community belonging, and holistic support from WECIL.

Institutional, in this context, refers to impersonal, bureaucratic, clinical environments without a person-centred approach.

Trauma-Informed Spaces

A significant insight from the stories is that for populations experiencing multiple disadvantage, the physical environment of a service can either be a barrier or a bridge to recovery. **The Nelson Trust**, for instance, highlighted this by using the funding to ensure their building did not feel, in their words, “institutional”. They recognised that clinical settings could be triggering for survivors of abuse, stating:

It's also really important to us that our buildings feel and look and perform in a way that is trauma-informed and is something that women want to spend time in, that they don't feel like they're institutional buildings. – The Nelson Trust



This was reflected in the way in which they designed their space avoiding “clinical” colours and furniture to ensure that the spaces won’t be triggering for women with negative experience of institutional and clinical spaces, and remaining accessible for, for example, neurodivergent women.



Image 3: The Nelson Trust

One25 applied a similar logic to their outreach services, replacing a "last legs" diesel vehicle with a specially designed electric van that can go out seven nights a week to be available to women engaged in street sex work at times when they are working. This new space was created in consultation with women who access their service to ensure it felt like a “soft, gentle space” rather than just "the back of a van," providing a mobile, confidential environment for women to access food, first aid, contraceptives, emergency clothes, period products, toiletries, harm reduction equipment and early evidence kits. The gentleness and comfort of the space was important to deliver One25’s trauma-informed values to women who have, in most cases, faced traumatic experiences.



Image 4: One25’s night outreach van

In terms of giving trauma informed services, physical spaces are really important and there needs to be care and thought for that. We wanted a space that, actually, women would feel really comfortable coming into. And, actually, they deserve a really comfortable space.

– One25



Inclusive Spaces

Many of Bristol's community organisations are using very old buildings that do not comply with contemporary accessibility standards. This creates barriers for Disabled people to access local spaces and activities. Evidence suggests that the Community Resilience Fund has made progress in addressing this issue. One of the impacts that CRF grantees have reported is that physical modifications have regularly gone beyond compliance, making spaces not just accessible, but welcoming and inclusive.

Southmead Development Trust noted that their previous 1950s school layout was “slightly undignifying” for Disabled people who had to navigate long, uncomfortable routes to reach basic facilities. The CRF funded accessible toilets in high-traffic areas, ensuring that users feel “safe and respected”. **Café Conscious** designed their space with “natural organic” aesthetics and “mood lighting” specifically to meet the sensory needs of adults with learning disabilities, creating a “safe haven” for people. **Square Food Foundation**, meanwhile, retrofitted their new-build kitchen to cater to all Disabled people ensuring everyone enjoys the same learning experience. **The Bangladesh Association** installed a lift to support a growing number of wheelchair users and elders, which has made the building a “huge welcoming” space for those who previously could not climb the stairs. **Full Circle @ Docklands** enhanced their reach to D/deaf residents by installing hearing loops. This simple addition meant their monthly elders' group, which includes a significant proportion of people with hearing impairments, could “now hear clearly amongst the noise”.

These examples demonstrate how accessibility isn't just about the physical modifications made to a space, but how those modifications make the experience of accessing and using those spaces effortless. It also means they can participate in community life more fully, access services and build connections.

Fostering Community Belonging

The CRF focused on some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Bristol, working with organisations that act as the “backbone for the community”, as one Community Reporter put it, in areas where other facilities have disappeared due to lack of funding.

Cafe Conscious in Barton Hill serves as a vital hub for elders, people with learning disabilities, and those struggling with addiction. For the founder, the grant was the difference between carrying on and closing: “I gotta be just totally honest, I think I would have given up”. The funding allowed her to create a space that meets sensory needs through lighting while providing a “safe space” for those in complex situations. **Oldbury Court Out of Schools Club (OCOSC)** used a new kitchen to scale up its support for low-income families, providing 720 free holiday meal places a year for children who access free school meals, helping reduce the adverse effects of childhood poverty, pointing out that “the whole community benefits”.



Image 5: Hartcliffe Club for Young People's new exterior

Hartcliffe Club for Young People (HCYP) found that even aesthetic changes – such as replacing solid wooden doors with glass – had an impact on the position of the organisation within the community. The building shifted from looking like a "dodgy place" with "menacing" bars to a transparent, engaging facility where staff can “wave, smile, and see everyone outside”, forging more of a connection between the organisation and local community, and giving the organisation more visibility with local people.

Holistic Accessibility

A defining feature of the CRF was the technical support from **West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL)** which helped organisations take a holistic approach to the accessibility of their buildings. This support ensured that organisations had tailored recommendations for improvements that catered to meet a wide range of access needs.

Sturminster Community Association focused on external accessibility, removing a "trip hazard" brick patio and replacing it with smooth slabs. They prioritised the specific needs of people with visual impairments, choosing light toned slabs that contrast against dark surround. As well as installing their hearing loop, **Full Circle @ Docklands** also installed magnetic door holders to keep double doors open for wheelchair users, alongside inclusive signage featuring Braille and high-contrast colours. These are just some examples of capital works focusing on accessibility but demonstrate how the technical support from WECIL ensured there was a person-centred approach to accessibility that focused on inclusivity beyond simply installing ramps.

This support allowed organisations to plan their projects strategically and in an inclusive way.

Key Insight

The stories demonstrate that the CRF has enabled the meeting of diverse community needs, which is not a static impact but an ongoing commitment to inclusivity within the community. Whether it is the **Sturminster Community Association** removing trip hazards for partially sighted members or the **169 Scouts in Henbury** hiring out their overflow space to an educational trust for one-to-one SEND support, the fund has enabled resilience within grassroots and community organisations, which is founded in a person-centred, holistic approach.



Image 6: 169 Scout Group Henbury's new building

As one Community Reporter summarised, the passion for these projects goes beyond "four walls"; it is about creating a "community gel" that ensures no resident is left out due to their circumstances, background or impairment.

3.2 | Broadening and Deepening Community Reach

The CRF has helped to shift the trajectory of community engagement across Bristol by helping to transform overlooked and, in some cases, decaying structures into vibrant, visible local assets. By addressing "unglamorous" but critical capital needs, such as windows, doors, and basic safety, the fund has enabled organisations to shed negative public perceptions, increase footfall, and cultivate a sense of shared ownership among residents. Resulting in a more sustainable income and increased resilience.

Transforming Perceptions

A recurring insight from the stories is that the physical exterior of a building often serves as the primary gatekeeper for community trust and involvement.



Image 7: Hartcliffe Club for Young People's new doors

Many organisations reported that prior to funding, their premises were perceived as "dodgy" or inaccessible within the community, which directly limited their reach. **Hartcliffe Club for Young People** noted that their old building, featuring polycarbonate windows and solid wooden doors,

was a deterrent for local families. Now, after the renovation work, they feel that the exterior better reflects the “friendly” atmosphere of the club. **Sturminster Community Association** experienced a similar “turnaround” by simply brightening their exterior. They noted that their building previously looked like a “warehouse” and was “blending into the background”. After renovations, the association reported increased interest from local organisations, including a new film club, allowing them to generate further income from hiring out the space.

Similarly, **The Rock Centre** reported a dramatic increase in nightly rentals, moving from two nights a week to five, and is now effectively “at capacity”. This growth has fostered a multi-generational environment with people of all ages using the space. Likewise, **Hartcliffe City Farm** used the funding to revamp their barn and other buildings, which has acted as a catalyst for a “steady flow of people” to turn into “real excitement”. Their opening day attracted 750 people, and the farm has since become a “hub” for families from across South Bristol and beyond, helping to challenge city-wide perceptions of the Hartcliffe area, encouraging visitors and increasing positive associations with the area.



Image 8: Community group at The Rock Centre

Establishing Hubs in Areas of Deprivation

Grantees in areas with higher levels of deprivation reported that the funding from the CRF was a “key enabler” for survival and growth, while offering provision for often marginalised communities.

Meadow Vale Community Association operates in an estate where the perception of some local people is that “all the facilities have gone”. By improving the car park and storage, they increased the site’s “lettings attractiveness and revenue potential,” allowing them to connect with a multi-ethnic community that had no other facilities in walking distance. **The Bangladesh Association** installed a lift and accessible toilets to better serve disabled and elderly members of the community. These modifications ensure the building will remain “alive” and fit for purpose for the “next 25 years,” continuing to serve the community. For **Ujima Radio**, capital funding for digital equipment was the bridge between being a simple broadcaster and becoming a community “media house” that can empower local black communities. **Misfits Theatre Company** discussed the impact of the grant they received. They now have room to improve their service and can think more about plans for developing further activities for their members.

Key Insight

These stories demonstrate that “reach” is not merely about numbers of people accessing a service, but about the establishment of a space within the community, such as The Bangladesh Association making the space more accessible, or The Rock Centre being able to rent out more space to community groups.

When community assets feel "loved" and maintained, they naturally become "shared spaces" where support is offered and received.

3.3 | Financial Resilience through Cost Reduction

It's clear from the stories that the CRF has successfully addressed one of the most significant drains on charitable resources: escalating operational overheads. By funding structural repairs and green energy transitions, the fund has enabled organisations to move away from a crisis maintenance cycle, where funds are constantly diverted to patch-up failing infrastructure, towards a model of long-term financial resilience.

The grantee stories suggest that CRF projects have done this via three key mechanisms: the "colossal" impact of energy efficiency, the "fabric first" approach to structural preservation, and enabling the reallocation of savings into core community services.

The "Colossal" Impact of Energy Efficiency

For many community centres operating out of older, draughty buildings, energy bills represent a primary threat to viability, particularly in the current economic climate. The stories from grantee organisations reveal that capital investment in solar energy and modern heating systems has provided immediate and substantial relief.



Image 9: Meadow Vale Community Centre before and after works

Meadow Vale Community Centre reported that their investment in solar panels, batteries, and infrared heating was transformative for an old building that was previously unsustainable. The association noted that "energy bills have gone down colossally". **The Rock Centre** similarly found that replacing failing doors and windows allowed them to finally "address the issues" of heat loss. The efficiency gain was so significant that it required a change in user behaviour, turning the heating *down* so the building does not get *too hot*:

“It’s a bit swings and roundabouts, but it’s a nicer problem to have and it’s an easier problem to address than what it was previously.” – The Rock Centre



In a similar way, **Bedminster Quaker Meeting House** took a strategic view, tripling their solar capacity from 4kW to 12kW and installing a large storage battery to move toward self-sufficiency, and to power their new air source heat pump system. By transitioning the whole building to electric and selling excess power back to the grid, they are proofing themselves against future price hikes, as well as working towards net zero.



Image 10: Increased solar capacity at Bedminster Quaker Meeting House

“Fabric First’: Sealing the Building for Long-Term Savings

A core insight from several of the stories is the benefit of the "fabric first" approach – prioritising basics such as insulation, windows, and roofing to ‘seal’ a space to ensure that future energy upgrades are not wasted on a heat-leaking building. These improvements represent a form of preventative financial resilience. Given the context of aging buildings in Bristol, it’s unsurprising that many grantees opted for projects that took this approach, particularly those wanting to install heat pump systems which require buildings to be ‘sealed’ before they can be fitted.

The Jobs, Training and Enterprise Hub at Shirehampton Methodist Church, for instance, decided to focus on tackling heat loss before looking at "fancy things like solar," refurbishing leaded windows with secondary glazing that "worked a treat". The result was a noteworthy “lack of draughts” that immediately improved the comfort of the space for NHS and community users. Similarly, **Easton Christian Family Centre** used their grant to replace windows that were “almost falling out” and install cavity wall insulation, causing them to point out that “thermal comfort is increased”.

Southmead Development Trust highlighted that their gas heaters were “absolutely ancient,” “really expensive to run,” and “almost impossible to maintain”. The CRF-funded window replacements were a mandatory prerequisite for moving to low-carbon electric heat pumps:

“We could not do that [the heat pumps] ... until we've got stuff like this [improved windows] in place.” – *Southmead Development Trust*



As such, the fabric first approach at Southmead is enabling further works (and further savings) down the line.

Reallocating Savings to Support Core Missions

One of the most significant ripple effects of cost reduction is the ability of organisations to unlock internal funds, and thus reducing their reliance on external funding sources, and increasing resilience. By lowering the “cost of existence,” charities can redirect their limited income from building upkeep into frontline support.

Oldbury Court Out of Schools Club used lower utility costs from solar panels to maintain their primary objective of “high quality childcare at affordable prices”, an example of an essential community service that removes barriers to employment for low-income families. **Full Circle @ Docklands** provided a stark reflection on the burden of maintenance for community-run buildings. They noted that “maintenance is constant” and often feels as though “as soon as you fixed one thing... something else breaks.” By being able to use the CRF to provide core building infrastructure, this cycle can be broken.

In a similar way, **Misfits Theatre Company** are now able to use their own space, rather than rent other places to make their own films and create content for the website. The new space and digital equipment is really helping them develop their core mission.

Key Insight

Cost reduction is not merely about “saving pennies”; it is about organisational survival in an uncertain economic landscape. Without these grants, many organisations stated they would be “miles behind” or would have had to spend “six figures” of their own reserves on repairs and maintenance, potentially creating organisational instability.

The CRF has demonstrated that capital investment acts as a “big bonus” that breaks the cycle of poverty for community assets. As the **Rock Centre** manager summarised, the fund has “taken a massive burden off our shoulders” because they no longer must look for funds to replace failing items, allowing them to focus on securing long-term running costs from funders such as the National Lottery. By reducing the cost of running a building, the CRF has ensured that these organisations remain alive and financially viable for the next generation.

3.4 | Strategic Planning and Futureproofing

The Community Resilience Fund has served as a rescue and reset for Bristol’s community sector, enabling organisations to move beyond piecemeal repairs and towards long-term strategic development. By addressing fundamental structural needs and investing in modern infrastructure, the fund has allowed organisations to shift from a state of survival towards ambitious, multi-year – and even multi-decade – visions for community service. The following section looks at how the CRF has helped organisations plan and become more sustainable. This has been achieved through the fund creating means for new sources of income and attracting further funding by showing that their projects work in practice.

Diversifying Income to Reduce Grant Dependency

Futureproofing is as much about financial independence as it is about physical modifications and repairs. The CRF provided the capital for organisations to launch or scale trading arms (through the development of spaces and facilities), creating “unrestricted income” that secures their mission regardless of the changing funding landscape.

Some examples of how this was achieved include:

- **Square Food Foundation** utilised the grant to purchase an electric van and blast chillers, which became the engine for their new catering company.
- **The Vench** removed overgrown, costly conifer hedges to install a community café in refurbished shipping containers. The café is for public use and can be used to generate income.
- **169 Scouts Henbury** generated new revenue by hiring their improved space to an educational trust for SEND provision, a move that made the group more “financially self-sufficient”.

Being able to generate an income – by hiring out spaces, for instance – helps organisations top up their reserves or even fund their own without being wholly reliant on external funding, making them resilient in the longer term.

Unlocking the “Grant Ladder” and Security of Tenure

For many organisations, the CRF acted as an investment catalyst, that provided the credibility needed to secure larger, multi-year funding from national bodies.

The Rock Centre provides the clearest example of this ripple effect. To qualify for the CRF, they had to resolve a long-standing lease “limbo”, as they described it, with the church diocese, eventually securing a new five-year lease (with a right to renew). This structural security then allowed them to win three years of running costs from the National Lottery. **The Nelson Trust**, meanwhile, used the grant to fulfil their model of permanence, renovating a building they had already purchased, to be held in trust for the women’s sector “in perpetuity”. They noted that the grant “sealed the deal” on a project that allows them to be “ambitious” rather than performing piecemeal work.

Key Insight

It’s apparent that strategic planning is often blocked by the immediate “burden” of maintaining a failing building. By investing to ease these physical and financial weights, the CRF has empowered organisations to “dream big” again.

Whether it is **Ujima Radio** upgrading their technical “brain” to transition from a broadcaster to a “media house” or the **Bangladesh Association** securing the use of their building for the next “20 to 25 years,” the fund has provided the momentum required for grassroots organisations to survive for the next generation. As **Southmead Development Trust** noted, the fund did not just fix a roof; it provided the “firepower” to launch the next phase of their organisation’s life.

3.5 | A Positive, Trust-Based Funding Experience

The Community Resilience Fund has been widely described by grantee organisations as a “breath of fresh air” in the often-rigid landscape of public sector funding. By prioritising human relationships, flexibility, and ethical values over bureaucratic perfection, the fund shifted the power dynamic between the Local Authority and the voluntary sector. This approach proved transformative, particularly for grassroots organisations who historically felt “locked out” of large-scale capital investment.

The CRF also distinguished itself from traditional grant programmes by embedding a holistic model of expert, person-centred support directly into the funding process. For many grassroots organisations unused to such complex projects, the journey from application to completion was fraught with bureaucratic hurdles and technical complexities that could have led to project delays or abandonment. By providing access to advisors, structural experts, and governance specialists, the fund did more than simply fix assets; it built the organisational confidence and professional resilience necessary for these groups to flourish. The evaluation reveals that the trust was not just about the money, but about the partnership model. By providing advisors (such as Black South

West Network) and technical experts (like WECIL), the CRF prevented organisations from feeling overwhelmed by the complexities of chasing quotes or managing contractors.

Lowering the Barrier to Entry

A defining feature of the CRF was its two-stage application process, which allowed organisations to submit an "Expression of Interest" based on their community mission before being asked for technical project plans in the second stage. This ensured that the selection was driven by a "ethical, value-based choice" and levelling the playing field for organisations without the resources to employ/hire a bid writer – one of the ways inequities in funding was addressed. As **Hartcliffe Club for Young People** put it, "for us to get that without any of that expertise amongst us is just so refreshing."

This was highlighted by multiple organisations as a positive. **The Bangladesh Association** pointed out that this was useful for organisations with limited capacity to devote to applications. **The Rock Centre** highlighted the fact that there was little jargon and repetition compared to similar application forms from other funders and that this reduced the "time-consuming" self-doubt that they can trigger.

However, of the organisations that made it to the second stage, some highlighted that the second form was considerably more challenging. **The Jobs, Training and Enterprise Hub at Shirehampton Methodist Church**, for example, stated that "the second part of the application ... it's onerous in the sense of the additional forms about equalities and risk." This could, however, be down to how used the organisation is to funding applications, and their basis for comparison since other organisations stated how simple it was compared to other funders. For instance, as **Southmead Development Trust** pointed out:

"[The CRF's forms] balanced the right level of kind of detail with trust... you know you can give simple answers and they'll meet you halfway." – *Southmead Development Trust*



"Human Mechanics" and Flexibility in Delivery

The CRF team was praised for its patience and realism during the project delivery phase. Grantees reported that the "mechanics of the project were very human," which was vital when organisations faced escalating construction costs or "nasty surprises" in old buildings.

Square Food Foundation, for instance, found the team's willingness to allow budget reallocations (such as pivoting from a garden pod to IT upgrades when it was found the former would not be possible) "extraordinary" compared to other funders. **169 Scouts Henbury**, meanwhile, highlighted that "other organisations tend to be very, very micromanaging. This [the Community Resources Team] just let you do it and then... allowed you to just get on with it."

The only "challenge" in delivery that was given any significant platform was by **Meadow Vale Community Centre** who mentioned that the phased release of funds meant it was difficult to schedule works and contractors around the availability of the money.

Emotional Resilience: Advisors as "Rocks"

For small, volunteer-led organisations, the administrative burden of a capital project can be overwhelming. The stories reveal that the presence of an advisor was often the only factor preventing leaders from withdrawing due to stress or burnout.

The founder of **Café Conscious** provided a moving account of this impact. She highlighted how her advisor from **Black South West Network (BSWN)** acted as a vital emotional anchor:

"She knows her stuff. She's just amazing. I don't know what I would have done without her help and support. I can see how much I don't think I would have done ... without her." – *Café Conscious*



The advisor herself noted that grassroots leaders can become “totally floored” by the “rhyme and reason” of bureaucratic quantifications. The advisor role provided a “trusted space” to navigate these challenges.

Technical Expertise: Turning “Nasty Surprises” into Solutions

Community buildings, many of which are aged or historically significant, frequently present structural challenges that small grassroots organisations and their trustees are not equipped to manage. Expert support offered as part of the CRF provided the technical “firepower” to resolve these issues safely and cost-effectively.

Oldbury Court Out of School Club were awarded a revenue grant to pay for a project manager for their works. They noted the immense value of having this dedicated oversight: “It was a blessing having a project manager”. **169 Scouts Henbury** faced a potential crisis when they noticed the walls of an existing building were “leaning outwards”. Through a connection to a structural engineer, they received accurate, expert advice.

The partnership with **WECIL** allowed organisations to move beyond “box-ticking” in terms of access modifications. **Southmead Development Trust** noted that WECIL helped them fund architects for a “proper master plan” rather than just “hoping for the best”. **Full Circle @ Docklands** implemented specific WECIL recommendations, such as Braille signage and colour-contrasted walls for the visually impaired, which they acknowledged “wasn't part of their [original] scope”.

Governance and Legal Empowerment

The CRF acted as a “reset” for organisational structures, helping groups understand the laws they operate under and unlocking their ability to access future funding.

Voscur provided one-to-one support to update policies and develop teams. They helped groups realise that “charity law has changed” and assisted them in registering trustees and updating health, safety, and safeguarding policies.

The **Bangladesh Association** encountered a major “governance issue” that threatened their funding. **BSWN** stepped in as a guarantor, managing the weekly invoices and fund releases to mitigate risk for the trustees. Without this, the project may have been abandoned.

Key Insight

The above demonstrates that the CRF successfully moved away from an “us and them” relationship between the council and the community. By embedding person-centred support into the grant structure, the fund ensured that money was successfully spent even by organisations currently in “crisis mode” or lacking project management experience.

As one advisor summarised, the value of the fund was that it “saw through” the varying levels of literacy and bid-writing skills to focus on where the money was needed. This trust-based approach built collective resilience and professionalised grassroots groups, helping to make them more viable for future funding opportunities.

An ‘invisible’ legacy of the CRF is the transfer of confidence and skill to grassroots leaders. By providing holistic advice, the fund ensured that money was not just spent but *invested* in the local communities. As one Voscur advisor noted:

“[The process allowed organisations and the people involved to realise] the power that they have... to make changes that are positive for their community.” – Voscur



Through the “magic” of dedicated support, the CRF has supported further professionalisation of the sector, making it “fit for purpose” for the next generation.

3.6 | Conclusion

The insights gathered from Community Reporting shows that the CRF has been integral in making the funded VCSEs stronger. By focusing on accessibility, financial resilience, and building trust, the fund has helped organisations solve urgent problems and gain skills and confidence for the future. This all-round support has made community buildings and services more welcoming, stable, and better prepared for what comes next. As a result, local communities will continue to benefit from these improvements for a long time.

In the next section, we explore the outcomes of the Ripple Effect Mapping workshops, before moving to synthesise these with the insights in this section.

4 | Ripple Effect Mapping Insights

This section gives a comprehensive analysis of what was learned from Ripple Effect Mapping with 20 organisations that received CRF funding. It looks at the changes made for individuals, organisations, and the wider community. Each group created a map to demonstrate how the funding helped them improve their buildings, become more sustainable, make their spaces easier to access, and offer more services to local people. Core change areas consistently identified include:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Skills development and employment creation
- Income generation
- Environmental sustainability
- Support for mental health and wellbeing
- Improvement of community offerings.



Image 11: Ripple Effect Mapping Workshop

At the **individual level**, projects led to increased comfort and safety for staff and those accessing services, new job opportunities, improved wellbeing, and greater access to essential services and healthy food. Facility upgrades have made environments more welcoming and accessible, providing direct benefits to staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries.

Organisational impacts included reduced energy and maintenance costs, enhanced financial sustainability, and increased capacity to deliver services. Many organisations reported improved project management skills and the cultivation of stronger partnerships with contractors and stakeholders.

On a **societal scale**, initiatives fostered deeper community engagement, reduced social isolation, advanced environmental sustainability, and encouraged a stronger sense of pride and belonging among residents. Projects also supported vulnerable groups and reinforced connections within neighbourhoods.

4.1 | Summary of Core Change Areas

The Ripple Effect Maps demonstrate that there have been both expected and unexpected impacts of the CRF within six Core Change Areas.

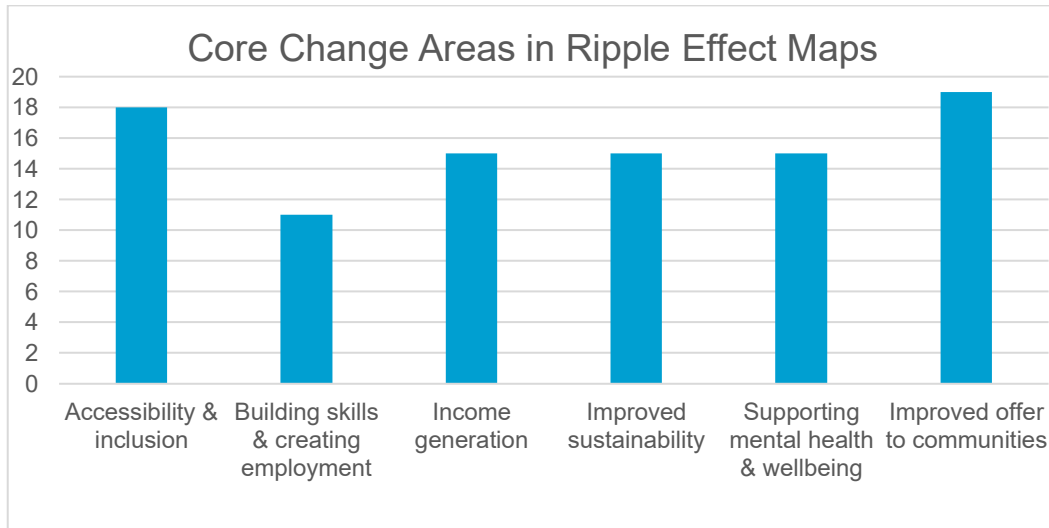


Diagram 3: Chart showing weighting of Core Change Areas

Accessibility and inclusion

- 18 out of 20 organisations (90%) who completed a Ripple Effect Map mentioned accessibility and inclusion as a core change area.

Developing skills and creating employment

- 11 out of 20 organisations (55%) to complete a Ripple Effect Map mentioned building skills and creating employment as a core change area.

Income generation

- 15 out of 20 organisations (75%) to complete a Ripple Effect Map mentioned income generation as a core change area.

Improved sustainability

- 15 out of 20 organisations (75%) to complete a Ripple Effect Map mentioned improved sustainability as a core change area.

Supporting mental health and wellbeing

- 15 out of 20 organisations (75%) to complete a Ripple Effect Map mentioned supporting mental health and wellbeing as a core change area.

Improving offer to communities

- 19 out of 20 organisations (95%) to complete a Ripple Effect Map mentioned improving offer to communities as a core change area.

Suggested Future Action

Due to delays in project completion for many grantee organisations, the impact of the CRF is indicated/anticipated but not yet fully evidenced. It may be useful to hold a further Ripple Effect Map workshop in 6-12 months to see how those ripples of impact have developed within the organisations and their communities, and how the weighting of the Core Change Areas shifts.

4.2 | Analysis of Individual Ripple Effect Maps

Avonmouth Community Centre Association (ACCA)



Image 12: ACCA's Ripple Effect Map

Avonmouth Community Centre Association (ACCA) manages a community building in Avonmouth, providing accommodation for local community groups and public sector organisations, as well as enhancing local services for residents – in particular people who are experiencing the impacts of poverty. They have used their funding for building renovations, including new windows, boiler panel, radiators, pipes, and thermostats to complete work on a heating system that was already started.

The core thematic change categories present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Developing skills and creating employment
- Income generation
- Improved sustainability
- Improving offer to communities

ACCA has specific impacts on individuals, the organisation and the wider community in their map (Image 1). These have been outlined below.

Individual impacts

- “CRF was actually the very first funding bid thing I've ever done. And so being involved in that whole process ... I have learned hugely, and so one of the important things [on] my Ripple [Effect] Map is the organisations that were part of it, that we connected up with, [from] which I learned from, through the process of the discussions.” They include the people who were involved in the decision-making in this, who went “over and beyond” simply providing funding.
- The community centre now has modern radiators, getting rid of the old iron pipes which could burn, making the centre safer for those who use it, as well as warmer.
- People using the centre are “happier” to be there.
- People working in the building are more comfortable as it's warmer in winter, and cooler in summer, since windows can now be opened.



Image 14: New windows at Bedminster Quakers Meeting House

Organisational impacts

- By project managing the different contractors and stages involved, the organisation has developed skills in managing complex projects.
- Energy bills will be reduced thanks to the combination of insulation, solar panels, battery and more efficient heating system.
- As a venue, the building is attracting more hirers and therefore increasing income.
- The organisation is better able to cater for new hires as the heating can be controlled remotely.

Societal impacts

- “We are now not emitting any CO2 at all.”

Bricks

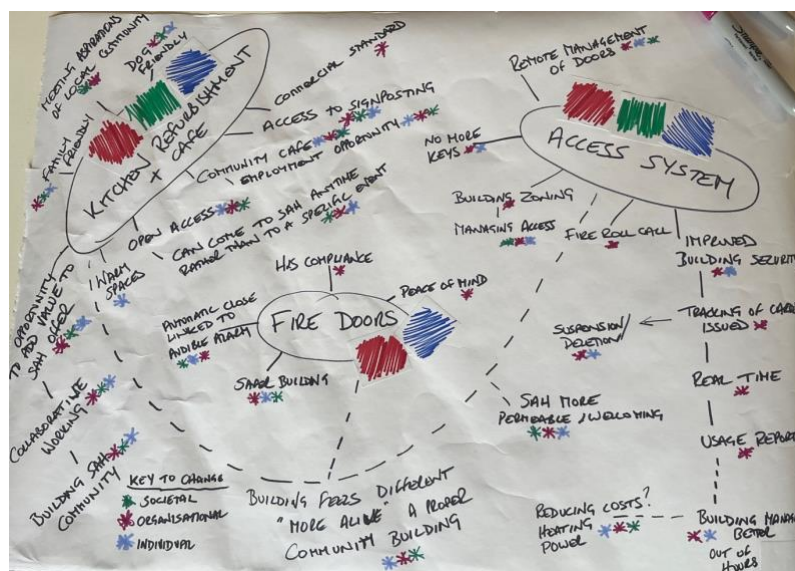


Image 15: Bricks' Ripple Effect Map

Bricks is a charity that works with creative, local and social enterprise communities, producing public artwork programmes, delivering creative collaborative activities, and securing permanent spaces in Bristol to build sustainable futures. They used their grant to purchase new fire doors, a new access system, and a refurbished kitchen and café.

access support, and participate in activities that promote connection and wellbeing. Their funding was used to transform old office spaces into their Vassall Community Hub in Oldbury Court. This included a community garden, a kitchen, a café area, and a soft play.

The core thematic change categories present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Developing skills and creating employment
- Income generation
- Improved sustainability
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- Residents have access to community events, lunch clubs, toddler groups, community choir, exercise classes, etc.
- Friendships have developed between volunteers at the hub *and* between residents accessing services and events.
- “We've got someone who attends the local children's centre session who's now an employee.”
- The food club takes referrals from the local food bank, helping vulnerable residents access healthy food.
- Individuals who attend and volunteer at the hub have a pleasant space that “feels like home”, allowing them to “experience joy” while there.
- “There's always kind of continual magic that then happens. One of the ladies who's a local resident who's got cancer said that it now gives her joy, like she was really depressed and kind of didn't ever leave her house. And now she comes to our lunch club all the time and then helps. In fact, she's always there now.”
- “We also had an 80-year-old local resident lady who now runs the Tai Chi there and has like, is one of the most popular classes.”

Organisational impacts

- They have been able to launch the hub because of the works and “have now got a huge number of services that we run from [there] kind of directly.”
- “As an organization, we can get additional revenue income, which has been key. ... So, this has given us loads of pipeline into additional grants. Now we've got the space to deliver additional services.”

Societal impacts

- People in the community can holistically support each other, reducing overall isolation in the area.
- “Because it turns out gardens are expensive, in order to finish the garden had to do a community action day where 20 local residents came out and helped us to finish the garden” – lots of those residents now sit on a community DIY project because of showing interest and getting involved. They help members of the local community with household maintenance, garden maintenance etc., having a positive effect on the community as well as on individuals.
- “For me, the amazing thing about this grant is the long term, it's now providing a long-term asset for the local community.”

Community Church @ Lawrence Weston

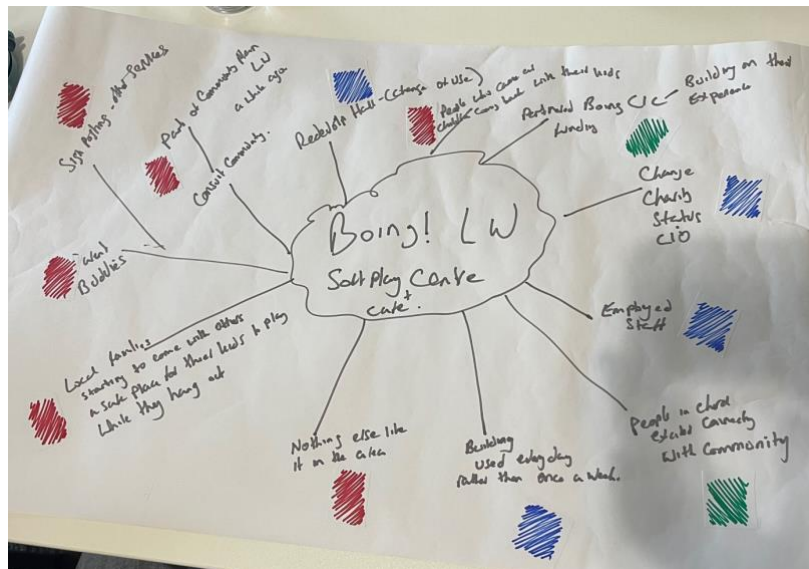


Image 17: Community Church @ Lawrence Weston's Ripple Effect Map

Community Church @ Lawrence Weston have used their funding to create a Boing! Softplay Family Centre for local families. This allows families to access an affordable play café which can also generate income.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Developing skills and creating employment
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- Provides a safe place for children to play.
- Parents don't need to travel out of town to take children to soft play.
- They provide a listening service to parents while children are playing.
- People are provided with employment.

Organisational impacts

- Building is now used every day.
- Employed staff.
- Redeveloped building.

Societal impacts

- Community needs being met - it was something the community already wanted.
- Local parents' mental wellbeing is improved.

Ebenezer Church Community Hub



Image 18: Ebenezer Church Community Hub's Ripple Effect Map

Ebenezer Church Community Hub (Ebetrust) provides a community space for a variety of groups, clubs, events and programmes that serve local people, especially people experiencing inequalities. The funding they received as a grantee organisation was used to make improvements to the building: better insulation, a new flat roof, and a new internal ceiling.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Developing skills and creating employment
- Income generation
- Improved sustainability
- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- Due to funds released because of new roof, a person has gained employment as a children and family worker.
- More people can use the hub because it's open more consistently - not having to close for leaks.
- Individuals working out of the building are more comfortable as "they're no longer having to wear gloves, hats, and scarves."
- They now have "a better, warm, welcoming space for our community to come into."

Organisational impacts

- New insulation will have significant positive impact on energy bills.
- It also has a significant impact on maintenance costs: "We had been holding money back in the event we had to do something with the roof. We're now able to release those funds."
- The above has enabled them to employ a new children and family worker for at least two years.
- The new internal ceiling has benefited the organisation as "we no longer have to worry about it falling down - and it was literally stuck up with tape."
- The space looks nicer which increases the opportunity to hire out space and increase income.
- As they had to empty the loft before the new ceiling was installed, they were able to declutter.

Societal impacts

- New flat roof enabled increased insulation "which has had an immediate impact on carbon reduction," and has been verified by energy expert.
- The new children and family worker will have an impact on the local community.

Full Circle @ Docklands

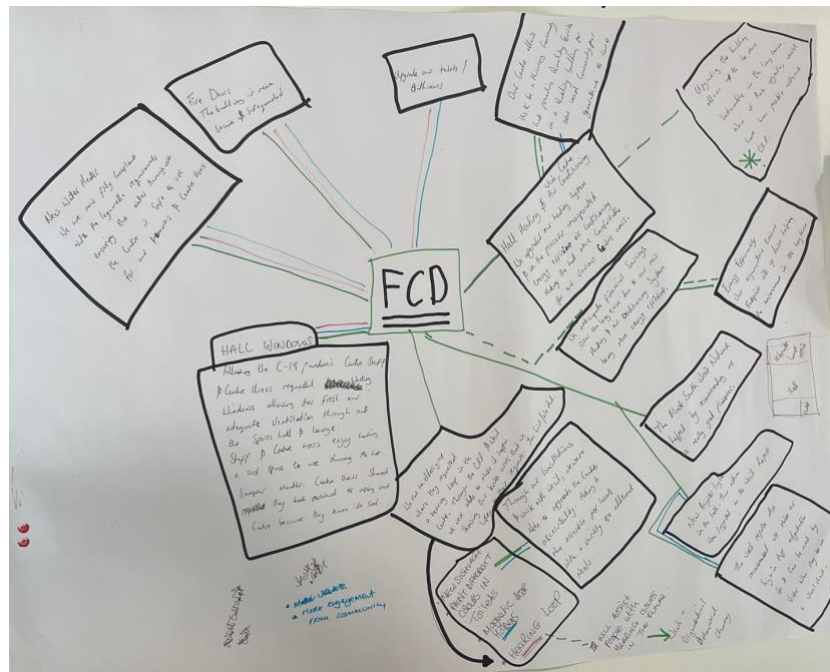


Image 19: Full Circle @ Docklands' Ripple Effect Map

Full Circle @ Docklands provides youth and elder services, training, and accessible spaces for local organisations, clubs and individuals. Their funding allowed them to carry out upgrades of the Docklands building. This included a full air conditioning system, new heating system, new windows, new water heater, new fire doors, upgrades to bathrooms, and a range of accessibility improvements recommended after consultation with WECIL (new signage, painting toilet doors different colours, a hearing loop, magnetic door holders),

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- Individuals working at and accessing the centre are now more comfortable thanks to the new heating and air conditioning. Previously "it was often like a greenhouse and a sweat box in the summer, or it was very cold in the winters," but now they have "proper, nice, lovely air conditioning in our offices, making it a cool space for service users as well as staff."
- WECIL's recommendations have made the building more accessible to visitors.

Organisational impacts

- The hearing loop was a recommendation that came from the Hub's elders' group, so the fund allowed the organisation to meet the needs of the people it caters for.
- The building is now health and safety compliant, particularly in terms of the water heater and fire door.
- The upgrades have made the organisation sustainable in the long-term.

Societal impacts

- The local community now has a “quality building” for “generations to come.”

Hartcliffe City Farm



Image 20: Hartcliffe City Farm’s Ripple Effect Map

Hartcliffe City Farm is a working city farm in Bristol, which provides a green space, market and flower gardens, as well as producing food and offering opportunities for volunteers. Their funding was used create their Playful Barn, a community kitchen, and a volunteer space.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Developing skills and creating employment
- Income generation
- Improved sustainability
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- Cafe trailer in playful barn has allowed a local trader to have a premises.
- Local parents have a space to socialise while children play - informal place for families to connect.
- Children have access to natural play equipment.
- Cafe trailer is breastfeeding friendly - these spaces are limited locally, and they have been sent thanks from people for being so welcoming.
- Community kitchen offers cooking for wellbeing and supper club; families learn cooking skills and get a free meal.
- Improved volunteer space allows them to provide support for a broader group of people with diverse needs.
- Volunteers make friends, develop skills, and improve confidence.
- Other classes (e.g. art) help people improve and develop skills.

Organisational impacts

- Playful barn has brought more people to the site: "I feels full of life now."
- Farm sells produce at playful barn café, generating income.

- Potential to host other events (music, theatre) pending licence applications, which would bring more people and generate further income.
- They can provide space for other organisations to run events (e.g. stay and play).
- Hosting children's parties has helped the organisation get noticed by others: "People keep saying, 'Oh, it's really nice here'."
- Able to improve offer to local community thanks to improved spaces: "We can provide to people that are a bit more vulnerable because there's a warm space." Previously, groups had to be held outside.
- Employment of staff funded, helping shape organisation identity to reflect local population.

Societal impacts

- Through the cafe and kitchen, local people can enjoy healthy, homegrown food.
- People being able to enjoy a community space together increases a sense of pride and belonging. "It's created a real sense of belonging."
- Better pens for animals improves welfare.
- Better reflecting local population enables them to serve local needs better.

The organisation staff who took part in the Ripple Effect Mapping workshop drew together all their impacts under one theme:

“All of the site developments that have been funded by this have allowed us to make that a welcoming space for people.”



Nelson Trust Bristol Women's Centre

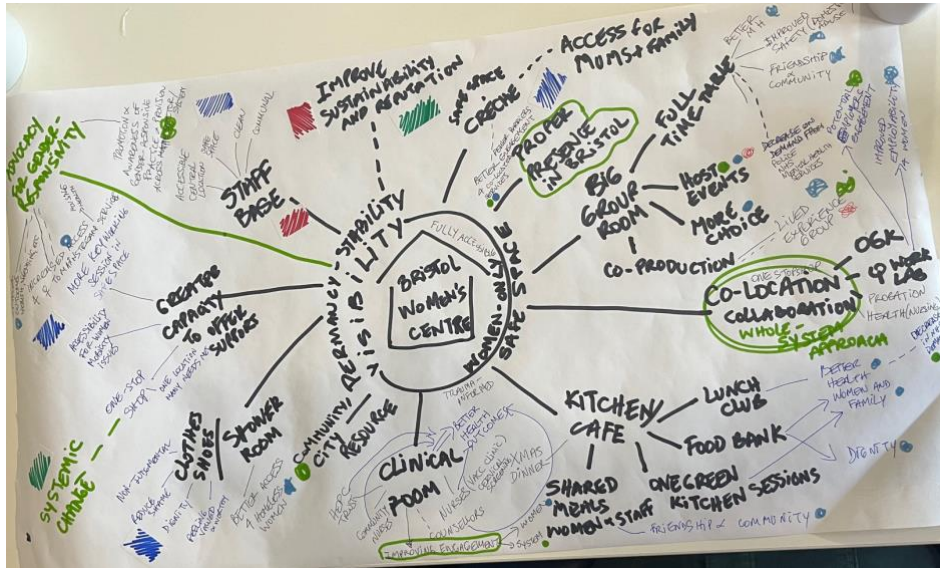


Image 22: Nelson Trust's Ripple Effect Map

The Nelson Trust Bristol Women's Centre is a charity supporting women whose lives are affected by multiple disadvantages. They used their funding for a new building to create a safe, women-only space where they can offer trauma-informed and gender-sensitive services.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Improved sustainability
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities



Image 23: New decor at The Nelson Trust

Individual impacts

- A safe space for women has been created.
- New kitchen and eating space allows the women greater connection with support workers as they can make and share a meal.
- Able to host partner organisations in the space to help women with food education and cooking skills.

- Clinical space provides gender informed services - specifically designed not to look like surgery or rape crisis centre: "That's given us a chance to create something that isn't there for women otherwise."
- Women choosing clothes (for whatever reason) now have a nice staging area so it's a better experience.
- The new building is a co-location space so people from partner services can be based there.

Organisational impacts

- There is now space for donations of food and clothes.
- "As staff we feel we are able to offer something meaningful" – Staff are proud of what they can offer and of the building.
- More space means "we can offer more."
- "We've got something tangible in a building that's brilliant to grow from."

Societal impacts

- The building is more sustainable.

Nilaari

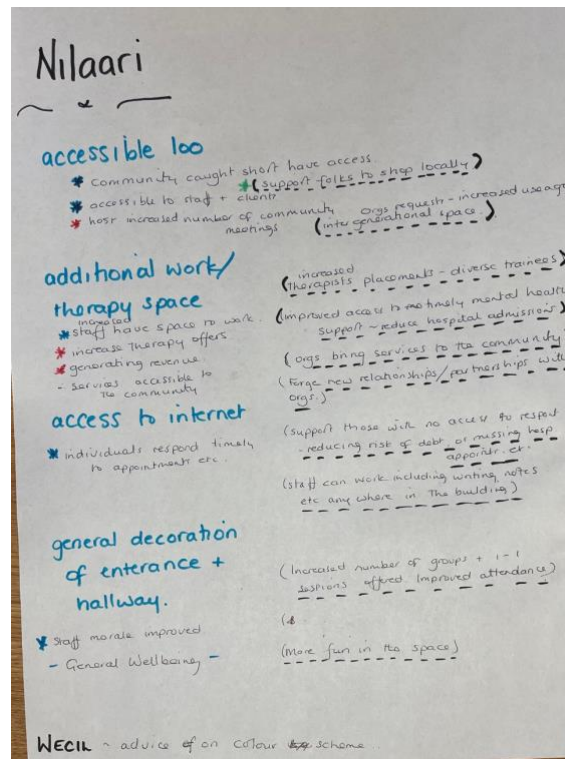


Image 24: Nilaari's Ripple Effect Map

Nilaari is a black-led charity that provides mental health assistance to adults from racialised communities, including culturally sensitive talking therapies and person-centred support. Their funding was used build accessible toilet facilities on their ground floor, create additional therapy space, give internet access to the entire ground floor, and general decoration of the ground floor area.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Developing skills and creating employment
- Income generation
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing

- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- The accessible toilet is available to staff and clients, but also to members of the community who are “caught short” on Stapleton Road, since there is no public toilet there for people who shop locally.
- There are now more spaces for therapists and practitioners to rent to have 1:1 sessions with clients.
- More trainee therapists can be offered placements thanks to the increased space, and they can feel supported.
- Individuals can come to use the internet, and staff can help them with “whatever it is that they may be struggling with.”
- The redecoration has made it a nice environment to work in, and “the general wellbeing of staff is just off the Richter scale in terms of improvement. It's been absolutely fantastic for that.”
- Quiet areas mean there is space for people to wind down or pray.



Image 25: A counsellor at Nilaari

Organisational impacts

- The accessible bathroom has allowed Nilaari to increase the number of groups and organisations who can access the space.
- An unintentional benefit is that they can also “now work with all ages. ... For example, we’re working with Bristol Black Carers who are coming and doing some work there.”
- “It means we can also generate revenue.”
- The organisation no longer feels as if it is “fighting for space.”

Societal impacts

- “We’ve got universities who are contacting us from all over the country now wanting their therapists to do placements with us” – this is helping to tackle the high dropout rates of racialised students on therapy courses.
- The internet access is helping to tackle the digital divide in the community.

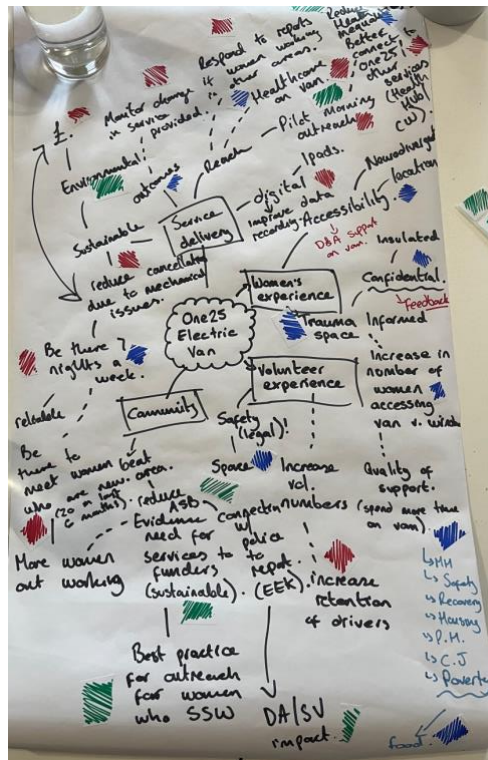


Image 26: One25's Ripple Effect Map

One25 is a charity that supports women who experience street sex work, supporting them to move from crisis and trauma towards independence within the community. They used their funding to purchase a new electric van for use in outreach work, designed by volunteers, staff, and the women they support.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Improved sustainability
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities



Image 27: One25's electric van

Individual impacts

- The women they speak to have a nicer experience because the van is soft and comfortable.
- More women can be introduced to the service as the new van is electric. The old one was diesel and, as such, wasn't allowed in certain areas.
- "That holistic experience of being able to have a hot chocolate with a volunteer in a welcoming space is really important to us."
- Allows One25 to act as a bridge between women and police.

Organisational impacts

- New electric van allows them to carry out their outreach work with street sex workers more efficiently/effectively.
- They are saving money as old van had a lot of mechanical issues.
- The space in the van is nicer for staff and volunteers.
- Health and safety compliant.
- The new van aligns better with One25's trauma-informed values.
- Better for staff/volunteer retention. "We got a lot of feedback from volunteers that they really didn't want to drive the old van."

Societal impacts

- The new van enables them to be out seven nights a week, which is essential as the number of street sex workers is increasing.
- Enables stronger connection with the women and allows One 25 to put them in touch with health services at centre - tackling health inequalities.

Southmead Development Trust

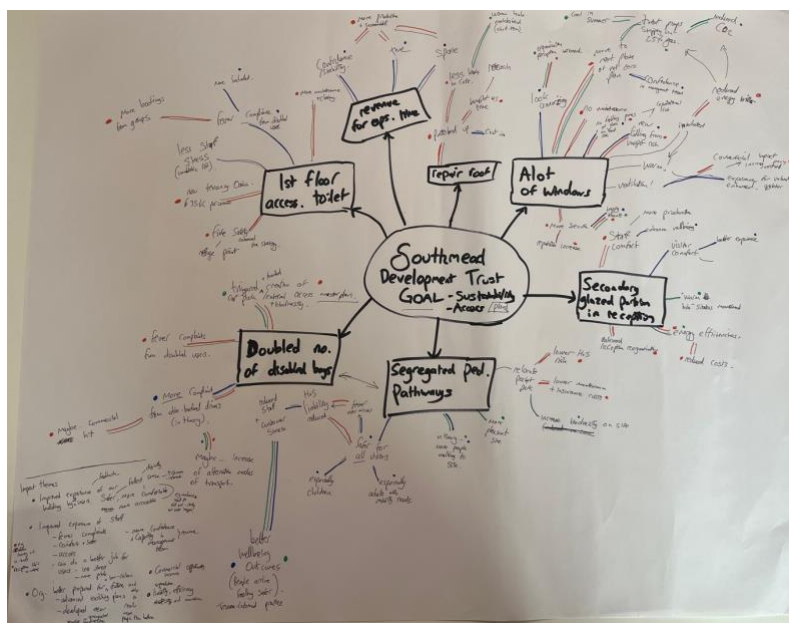


Image 28: Southmead Development Trust's Ripple Effect Map

Southmead Development Trust centred their CRF-funded project on their flagship community and business hub, the Greenway Centre. They have used the funding for new glazing and insulation, a redeveloped carpark with twice as many disabled bays and a segregated pedestrian walkway, a new accessible toilet, and roof repairs. This was to tackle what they recognised as barriers to engaging with the local community.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion

- Income generation
- Improved sustainability
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- Building users feel “safer and more comfortable” which creates a “greater level of dignity.”
- More people are using the building’s “warm hub.”
- The carpark pathways mean children can no longer run out of the centre and into open traffic.
- The reception staff can now keep warmer.

Organisational impacts

- There are fewer complaints about accessibility and safety.
- The team can operate in a more trauma-informed way due to improved spaces.
- “We feel that the organisation is better prepared for the future.”
- The improved look and increased accessibility of the building have increased the number of hires, generating income.
- The hedges planted to line pathways in the carpark have boosted biodiversity.
- Maintenance costs have been reduced: “the windows would occasionally fall out of their frames. They now don't do that anymore, so, uh, which is better all round.”

Societal impacts

- This work means they are now able to bring forward further plans to get them to net zero.

Square Food Foundation

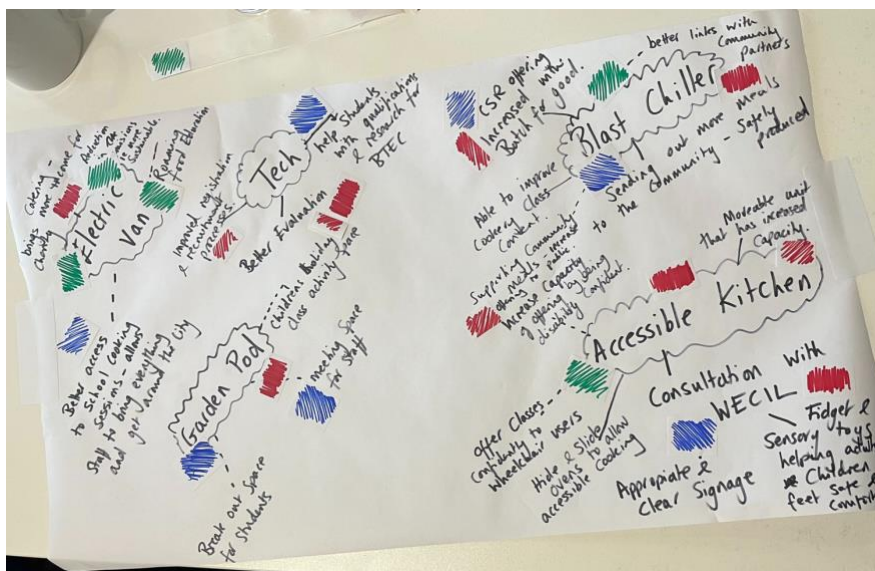


Image 29: Square Food Foundation’s Ripple Effect Map

Square Food Foundation provides free and subsidised cooking classes to people from Knowle West and the surrounding South Bristol area who may be experiencing barriers, marginalisation, and deprivation. They have used their funding for digital technology, blast chillers, an electric van (forthcoming), a garden pod (forthcoming), and an accessible kitchen.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Developing skills and creating employment
- Income generation

- Improved sustainability
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- Investment in iPads and laptops means they can offer a programme for students doing a BTEC.
- Blast chiller makes bigger batch cooking possible so they can serve more (safely produced) meals to partners/communities.
- Accessible kitchen unit means wheelchair users can be included in the kitchen.
- The future garden pod will allow for a breakout space/quiet space, as well as a proper staff meeting room.
- The electric van will improve inclusivity by allowing better access to schools and other spaces.

Organisational impacts

- A wider disability audit has allowed for appropriate signage and other improvements.
- Electric van will help them do more outside catering - the profits for which go directly to the charity.

Societal impacts

- Blast chillers and electric van make production and distribution more sustainable.
- Roaming food education thanks to van - better reach and better links.

St. Agnes Adventure Playground

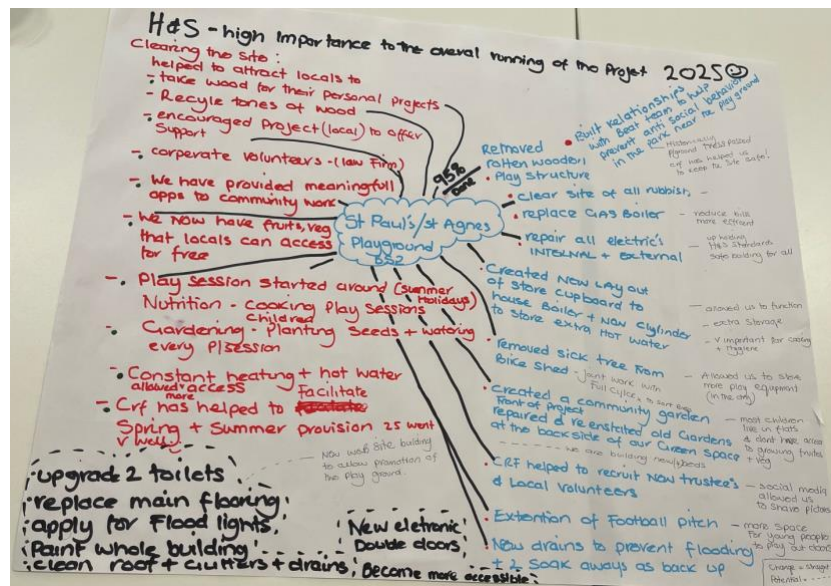


Image 30: St. Agnes Adventure Playground's Ripple Effect Map

St Agnes Adventure Playground is a community free play space for children aged 8 to 16. They provide free meals to children, and particularly welcome children who are eligible for free school meals. Their CRF funding was used for a complete overhaul of the site including removing an old wooden play structure that was rotting, clearing the site of all rubbish, replacing the gas boiler and repairing all electrics, a new storage layout to house the boiler and hot water cylinder, removal of a sick tree, new drains, the creation of a community garden, and the extension of the football pitch.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are¹⁰:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Developing skills and creating employment
- Income generation
- Improved sustainability
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- During the clearing of the site, locals were able to take wood for their personal projects.
- Locals can now access fruit and veg from the site for free.
- They can offer play sessions around nutrition to give children education around healthy foods.
- Local children (the majority of who live in flats with no outdoor space) can garden, plant seeds and water plants.
- The extension of the football pitch gives the young people more space to play outdoors.

Organisational impacts

- Links were established with a local law firm who volunteered to help clear the site.
- The organisation can allow access more regularly thanks to constant heating and hot water.
- The site is now health and safety compliant with the removal of the rotten play structure, the repaired electrics and the new boiler.
- The new heating and hot water system has reduced energy bills.
- The removal of a sick tree from the bike shed has created storage space to provide more play equipment.
- The fund has helped them to recruit new trustees and local volunteers.
- The new drains have stopped the site from flooding in bad weather.

Societal impacts

- “Tonnes” of wood were recycled
- The community was offered meaningful opportunities of community work.
- They have built relationships with the Beat team to help prevent antisocial behaviour in the park near the playground, which benefits the whole community.

¹⁰ Due to extenuating circumstances, St. Agnes Adventure Playground did not deliver a presentation of their map, so this summary evaluation is based on the written map only.

The Jobs, Training and Enterprise Hub at Shirehampton Methodist Church

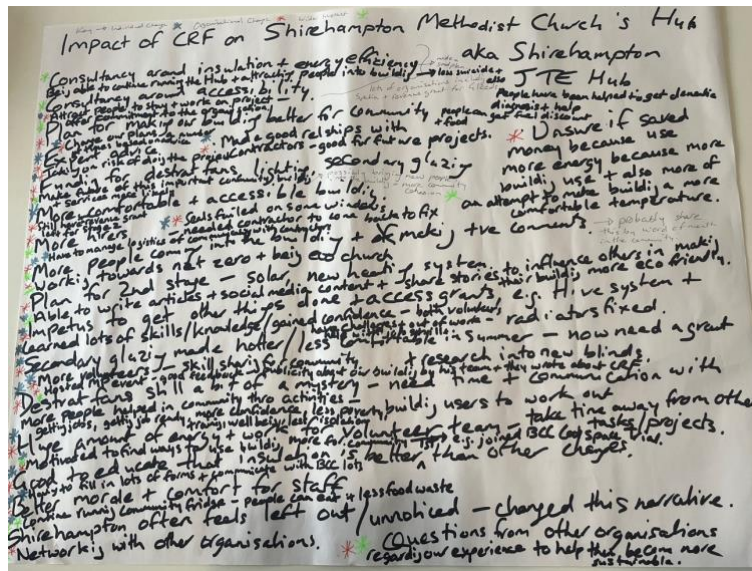


Image 33: The Jobs, Training and Enterprise Hub at Shirehampton Methodist Church's Ripple Effect Map

Shirehampton Methodist Church used their funding for their Jobs, Training and Enterprise Hub, which is a one-stop skills and job shop designed to help local people in education, enterprise, and employment. They used the WECIL consultancy on energy efficiency and accessibility to guide their spending plan. From that, they have developed several projects, and the CRF was used to fund Phase One: fans, secondary glazing, and lighting.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Developing skills and creating employment
- Income generation
- Improved sustainability
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities

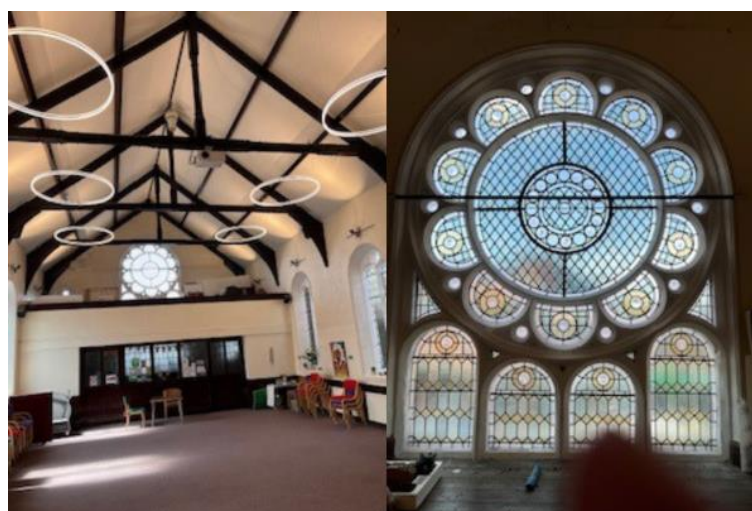


Image 34: The Hub at Shirehampton Methodist Church

Individual impacts

- The Hub is a more attractive and comfortable place for volunteers and visitors.
- More people can access food from the community fridge.

- “People literally say that the hub saves their life through lessening their chance of suicide, because it helps reduce isolation and so on.”

Organisational impacts

- The organisation has developed several project phases for developing the building because of consultancy.
- Their clear plan has helped them to cultivate positive relationships with contractors who they will re-use on future projects.
- They have had increased demand for space-hire, which is generating more income and creating financial sustainability.

Societal impacts

- More people are accessing the Hub’s services which is helping them find work or set up their own business, reducing poverty within the community.
- The community fridge helps reduce the effects of food poverty and food waste.

Wellspring Settlement

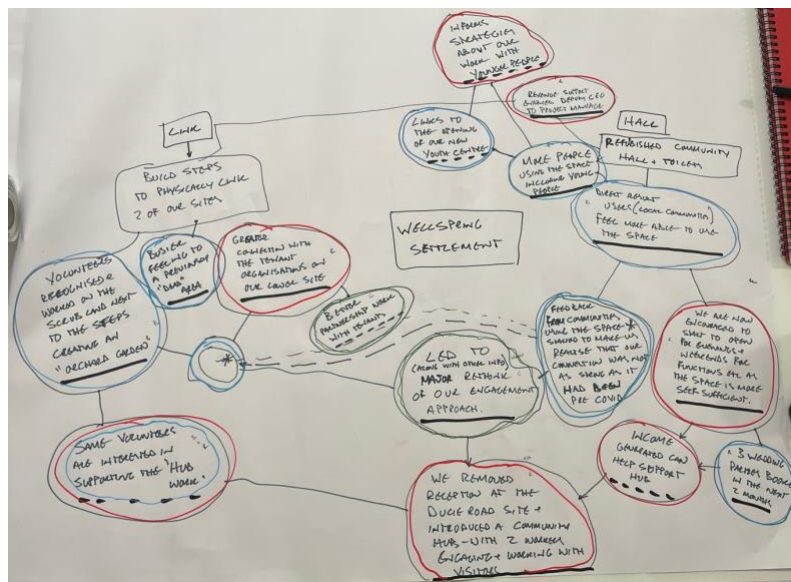


Image 35: Wellspring Settlement’s Ripple Effect Map

Wellspring Settlement is a community organisation that strives to support the local area and people, aiming to create strong, dynamic communities. They have used their funding to refurbish their community hall, particularly the toilet block within the space. They have also created a physical link between their lower site and main site.

The core thematic change categories that were present in this map are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Improving offer to communities

Individual impacts

- Toilets were previously “unusable” but are now in “really good shape” for staff and those visiting the site.
- The refurbishment has created a more pleasant environment.

Organisational impacts

- As a result of the refurbishment work, they have seen an increase in bookings, and different people visiting the hall.



Image 37: Improved provision at Young Bristol's Stockwood youth club

Individual impacts

- The development work has allowed them to offer more provision for young people, helping them develop skills and interests in art and sports.
- It gives the young people a safe space with trusted adults.
- The new entrance made the youth centre accessible for disabled visitors.
- Magnetic door locks, roller shutters, and a foyer where adults can wait to collect their young people have made those who use the centre feel safer.

Organisational impacts

- The improved accessibility has allowed the organisation to “appeal to a wider audience in terms of the hire of the space” to generate income.
- The new meeting room has increased efficiency for staff (previously there was only one meeting space which was often double booked) and given them a confidential space for sensitive discussions.
- The new lighting and flooring in the main hall has made it compliant with health and safety.
- The energy efficient lighting will create a reduction in energy costs as they use a sensor.

Societal impacts

- The centre having an improved external appearance will help develop community pride in the local area.

4.3 | Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from the Ripple Effect Mapping process demonstrate that CRF funding is generating broad and substantive impacts at individual, organisational, and community levels. The support provided has not only improved physical infrastructure and service delivery, but has also strengthened community cohesion, resilience, and sustainability. Collectively, these outcomes highlight the significant value of targeted funding in empowering communities, supporting vulnerable populations, and facilitating sustainable, positive change across a diverse range of settings.

In the next section, the Ripple Effect Map findings will be synthesised with the insights from the Community Reporting to produce direction of travel maps to demonstrate to what extent impact was created within the different thematic areas of the fund, whether these impacts are short-, mid-, or long-term, and use this learning to make recommendations.

5 | Direction of Travel

To synthesise the learnings from the Community Reporter stories and the Ripple Effect Maps, we have developed two Direction of Travel maps. As the name suggests, these maps are navigational tools designed to support learning from the evaluation data, and to make appropriate, holistic recommendations based on the current picture.

The two maps each focus on two evaluation aims. The first focuses on resilience, looking at ways in which grantee organisations are moving towards financial resilience, and the ways in which they are better serving their communities. The second looks at the impacts of capacity building embedded into the funding programme, and the ways in which inequity in funding was addressed.

For each map, there is an overarching direction of travel, representing the destination the CRF is striving to reach. Insights from stories and Ripple Effect Maps have been added, their level of impact indicated by a labelled node. The nodes are also colour-coded to demonstrate which funding priority they most sit under. The positioning is guided by two factors:

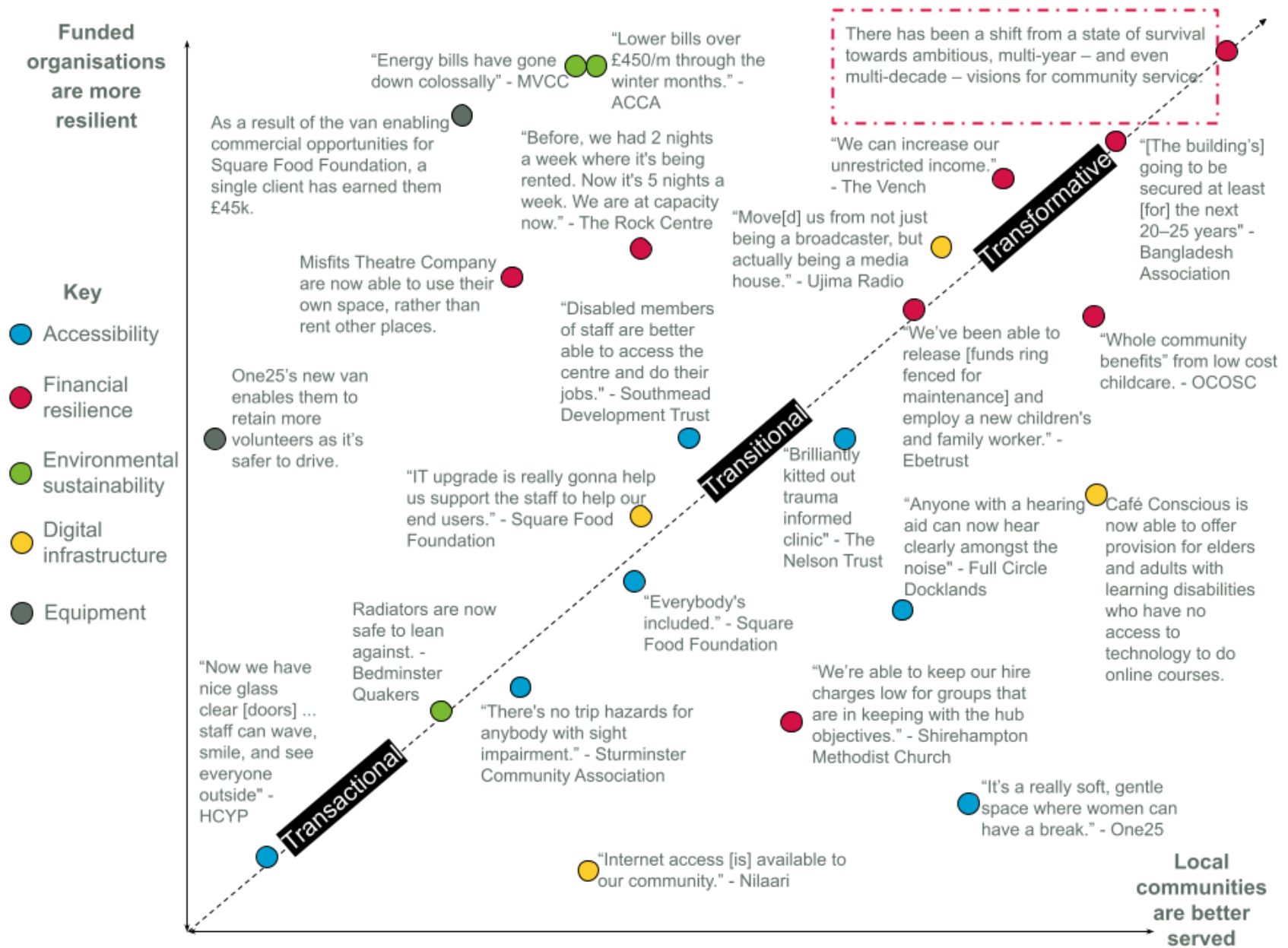
- **Axis labels:** These detail the specific pathways that support the journey towards the overall destination
- **Change level:** This indicates whether the insight reflects transactional, transitional, or transformative change (see page 12 for a full definition of these terms)

This visual reference enables us to easily identify adjacent possibilities – what is realisable given the current picture. They form the basis for the recommendations.

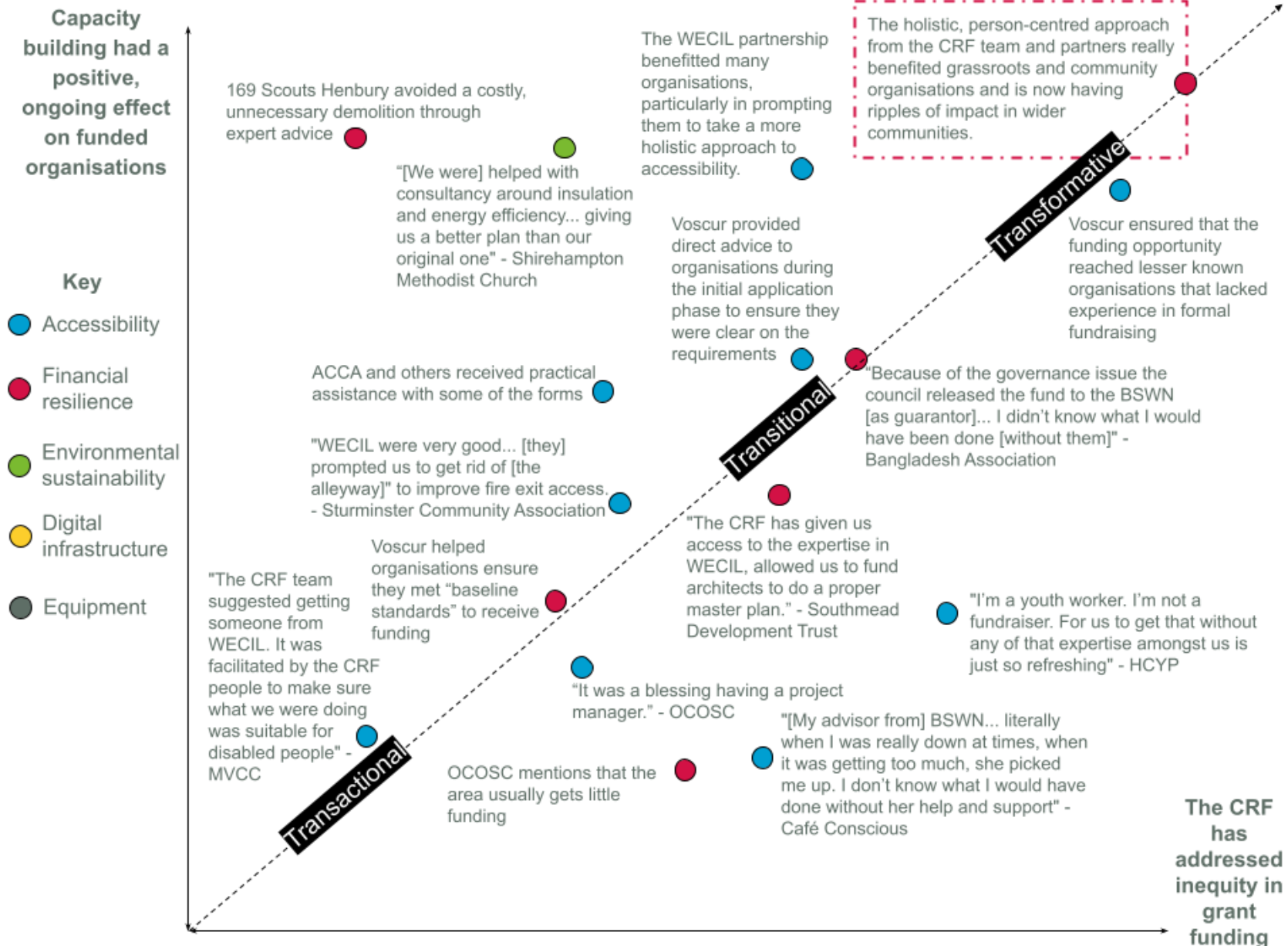
It is important to note that the maps are *not* hierarchical – a change indicated in the bottom left of the map is not ‘inferior’ to a change in the top right of the map. It is more accurate to view the changes as building blocks – with changes at the bottom of the maps forming the foundations for the longer term, more complex changes at the top of the map.

These maps provide an ongoing form of evaluation for the CRF and Bristol City Council. Access to editable copies of the maps has been given to the council. The link to these can be found in the separate Guide to Updating Direction of Travel Maps which accompanies this report.

5.1 | Map 1: Organisational and Community Resilience



5.2 | Map 2: Capacity Building and Inequity in Funding



5.3 | The Current Picture and Recommendations

In this section, we have synthesised the key insights and recommendations from across the evaluation, with the recommendation on how further transformative change might be achieved. These insights and recommendations have been mapped to the aims of the evaluation.

Two short films have been created based on the findings here. They can be viewed [here on the Community Reporter website](#).

Organisational and community resilience

The first two aims of this evaluation were:

- To find out if the funding helped VCSE organisations become stronger, more resilient and more able to cope with challenges.
- To see how the funding affected the people and communities these organisations support, especially groups facing inequalities.

The Current Picture

It is apparent from both the stories and the Ripple Effect Maps (as synthesised in section 5.1) that the CRF has made **real impact in terms of increasing organisational resilience**, with signs that there is transformative change in play. There has been **a shift from organisations existing in a state of survival, to ambitious multi-year – and even multi-decade – visions for community service**.

It has also highlighted that **funding which invests in infrastructure is just as vital for resilience as resource funding**. In fact, in some cases, it can underpin funding for resources. For instance, when Ebetrust fixed their roof, they didn't need to save for maintenance anymore and could hire a family worker instead. Similarly, the work carried out by The Vench and Square Food Foundation now allows them to generate their own unrestricted income to spend on developing their work further.



Image 38: Community exercise group at The Rock Centre

The same can be said in terms of local community resilience, wherein **the assets improved by the CRF are creating spaces that benefit those communities**, including the most marginalised groups within them. For instance, The Nelson Trust being able to provide care and support in a truly trauma-informed environment, or One25's new electric van having greater access to parts of the city within the Clean Air Zone, enabling them to expand their offer to even more women. Other

projects have helped **create pride in communities** that have sometimes felt left behind. For example, Hartcliffe City Farm has shown that when community spaces are looked after, people within the community are increasingly likely to get involved and work *with* the project. Communities have also shown interest in the regenerated spaces, such as The Rock Centre reporting significantly more interest from the community in hiring their spaces.

Recommendations in this insight area:

- **Build** resilience in community organisations by providing advice and guidance on sustainable business plans, which can be underpinned by capital works. This might include advice on generating unrestricted income, reducing maintenance costs, or strengthening infrastructure. As well as helping organisations create long-term strategies, it will also help them in completing applications for future funding.
- **Consider** ways in which community organisations and their facilities can be made more visible to communities, to both allow people to see what these organisations do in their neighbourhoods, but also to help foster a sense of community pride. This might include, for example, showcases of community work, or help with organising community events.

Equitable funding

The next two evaluation aims were:

- To check whether the funding helped make grant opportunities more equitable for everyone.
- To understand what difference the support for capacity building made, including things like one-to-one help, learning with peers, free professional advice, and consultancy, in developing and using community resources and spaces.

The Current Picture

It is clear, again from stories and Ripple Effect Maps (synthesised in section 5.2), that both the CRF application process, and the embedded support and capacity building have had a positive impact, particularly in **addressing inequity in the funding sector, by giving access to funding to organisations that would not normally be considered contenders for such grants**. For instance, Hartcliffe Club for Young People mentioned that they do not have access to a professional fundraiser, and that the two-stage application process – with support in the second stage – made it possible for them to access that funding as a small organisation. The Bangladesh Association were helped in overcoming complex governance issues by Black South West Network to ensure they could receive their funding.

The capacity building support also helped with this inequity by **offering valuable advice and consultancy that smaller, grassroots organisations might otherwise be lacking**. For instance, the direct advice provided by Voscur ensured the funding was accessible to lesser-known organisations. The advice provided by Black South West Network was invaluable, with Café Conscious in particular highlighting how they might have given up on the work without their support. While some organisations highlighted that they would have liked further project management support, the overall view was that **the person-centred, holistic approach of the CRF meant that each individual organisation had their needs met**, and that is now having ripples of impact in the wider communities.

The **flexibility and trust shown by Bristol City Council here was vital**. Square Food Foundation, for example, cited the way the needs of their organisation were prioritised when part of their original project was discovered to be unviable. With other funding models, the funding could potentially have been withdrawn when it was realised that the pod wouldn't be possible, but the flexible approach of the CRF meant that the project was able to change and succeed.

Recommendations in this insight area:

- **Adopt** the 2-stage application process in future open grants rounds for capital funding, particularly those aimed at smaller, community and/or grassroots organisations, for which this process was shown to be less daunting
- **Use** a holistic, person-centred approach in future open grants rounds for capital funding, incorporating advice and capacity building support that focuses on the needs of the specific organisation and the inequities they may face.

6 | Resident Involvement

It was decided that residents who took part in the decision-making stage of the CRF process would be given the opportunity to train as Community Reporters to give further opportunity for involvement. The Community Reporters were asked to complete a questionnaire on their involvement and the impact it has had on them.

Unfortunately, the response rate was very low (only three of Reporters completed the form), but the detail they have given has enabled us to have insight into their experiences.

6.1 | Development of skills

The Community Reporters discussed the skills that they developed over the course of the project. These included:

- **Interview techniques:** in particular, engaging people through dialogue interviews without imposing an agenda.
- **Digital skills:** participants engaged with video and audio recording apps, file transfer software, digital consent forms, and digital communications over the course of the evaluation.
- **Responsible storytelling:** Community Reporters learned and then practiced the ethics and values of lived experience storytelling, including critical thinking around the purpose and uses of stories.

6.2 | Networks and relationships

The evaluation project and Community Reporting process necessitated the development and/or strengthening of relationships within the local communities involved, generating social capital for participants.

- **Bristol City Council:** Reporters strengthened the links they had made with the BCC team during the decision-making process and have indicated that they would like to be included in future projects and events. One Community Reporter made a specific point of saying how they plan to maintain their connection to BCC people and spaces.
- **Community groups and organisations:** The process (combined with the earlier decision-making phase) has allowed the residents to get to know their communities and what they have to offer. This includes one Community Reporter who plans to attend Easton Christian Family Centre's parent-toddler group and the Vench's playground with their own children, and another who intends to hire spaces at Full Circle Docklands for future professional and social events.

6.3 | Continuing Community Reporting

The Community Reporters all indicated that they would be interested in using their Community Reporting skills in future projects with Bristol City Council *and* independently. They did identify a selection of key learnings that they would take into future story gathering sessions:

- **Plan for transcription:** Factor in the time required for full interview transcripts; this is a critical requirement for story submission that can be easily overlooked. Even if AI is being used, time still needs to be allocated to check for errors.
- **Allow for file sizes:** Handling large video files requires a reliable workflow and software to avoid delays in the final stages. A good solution would be to use lower resolutions before recording a story to reduce file sizes

- **Clarify expenses:** Maintain a clear list of what expenses are and are not covered by the project. This prevents administrative confusion regarding items such as printing costs or travel.
- **Make use of available support:** Don't hesitate to ask for someone to join your first few interviews. Reporters found this "shadowing" phase provided the necessary confidence-building before they felt ready to go solo.

6.4 | Conclusion and Recommendations

Residents trained as Community Reporters mentioned that they had **developed skills** (including interview techniques, digital skills, and Responsible Storytelling), they had **developed relationships** with both Bristol City Council and their local organisations, and that some of them would like to **continue Community Reporting** both independently and in future projects. The overall process allowed the residents to **see how their decisions in the first phase had impacted the organisations and communities involved**.

However, it is also important to note that not all the Community Reporters completed the work, with several dropping out after the training for a variety of reasons. Those that continued, did experience some challenges (as noted above) and we have included a recommendation to accommodate for these in the future.

Recommendations

- **Learn** from emerging and existing participatory models both locally and nationally and recognise the benefits of these approaches for community and service development.
- **Look** for ways in which models of participatory democracy and citizenship might be used in the future, to more fully include the voices of people and organisations in decision- and policymaking. Methods such as Community Reporting, Ripple Effect Mapping, focus groups, citizen assemblies, and other formats might be considered.
- **Engage** with current resident Community Reporters on the challenges of the role and how best to mitigate them in the future and ensure Community Reporters are supported to complete projects. This may include clearer expectations of what the role involves, more information about the role technical guides on the creation of smaller file sizes, online consent and story review forms for simplified data collection, or recommended software for transcription.

7 | Visualisation & Celebration Event

Artist Connie Noble was commissioned to produce a visualisation based on the outcomes of the evaluation, with both sides below (Images 39 and 40).

The visual was showcased at a celebration event on 22 April 2026. This brought together the Community Resources Team, councillors and council leaders, grantee organisations, Community Reporters, the People's Voice Media team, and others to celebrate all that has been achieved so far, and to begin thinking about what could happen next. As well as the visualisation, a short film on the impact of the fund was premiered. This used extracts and findings from the Community Reporter-gathered stories and can be viewed [here on the Community Reporter website's Bristol CRF story archive](#).

For the final part of the celebration event, the Community Resources Team planned an activity which encouraged attendees to think about **who is missing from community centres and/or spaces**, and why this might be. Attendees were then asked to come up with initial ideas for **how this disconnection might be tackled**.

The discussions at the event have generated useful ideas and conversations around inclusion and connection in community spaces and will be analysed by the Community Resources Team in conjunction with this report and the earlier first phase evaluation¹¹ to feed into how they take forward the learnings from the Community Resilience Fund and continue building resilient communities in Bristol.



Image 39: Side 1 of visualisation of findings by Connie Noble

¹¹ [Participatory Democracy in Practice: evaluation of the Bristol City Council Community Resilience Fund](#)

"[We can] now work with all ages... It means we can also generate revenue."
- Nilaari



"We wanted a space that, actually, women would feel really comfortable coming into. And, actually, they deserve a really comfortable space."
- One25

The evaluation of the Community Resilience Fund has made clear that the fund and its participatory nature has allowed community organisations, residents, and Bristol City Council to build resilient communities together. This is not a final 'destination', but an ongoing process that aims to entwine co-creation and resilience so that communities are heard, engaged and empowered.

The image overleaf is a visualisation of the kind of resilient community we are building together. Organisations are warm, inviting and sitting at the heart of neighbourhoods, connecting with residents of all ages, races, religions and genders, who benefit from what they have to offer. Spaces are accessible to all, without barriers to inclusion, offering dignity to all who visit. Buildings and vehicles are cared for and sustainable, using green energy and efficiency measures to reduce overheads and contribute towards a cleaner environment to all. Councillors and council workers engage intentionally and meaningfully with residents and organisations, making participation in democracy easy and fruitful. Residents feel heard and powerful.

"The whole community benefits!"
- Oldbury Court Out of School Clubs

The Community Resilience Fund (CRF) is a one-off capital grant fund established as part of an overall goal to build city resilience in Bristol by growing the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality. CRF has invested £4 million capital funding in the community and voluntary sector since 2023, including £800,000 for dedicated grants for city wide equalities communities. The fund supports recovery and longer-term resilience, by investing in community spaces and allowing revenue streams to be re-established and assets to be managed effectively by community organisations and anchors, religious organisations and social enterprises. The CRF builds stronger connections between people and enables community-led action by investing in community facilities and infrastructure. The funding allocation was decided by Bristol residents, building connections and shared understanding through deliberative conversations.



To find out more, please visit www.bristol.gov.uk/CRF



"[The process allowed organisations and the people involved to realise] the power that they have... to make changes that are positive for their community."
- Voscur



Image 40: Side 2 of visualisation of findings by Connie Noble

For further details about our work:

Visit: <https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>

Check out: <https://communityreporter.net>

Email: enquiries@peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk

8 | References

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Appendix 1 | Overview of Evaluation Activities

The following activities were undertaken over the course of the evaluation period:

- Community Reporter training delivered to resident decision-makers in Bristol (November 2024)
- Community Reporters begin story gathering from organisations in purposeful sample provided by the Community Resilience Fund team (January 2025)
- First Ripple Effect Mapping workshop delivered to grantee organisations (December 2024)
- First sense making session held with Community Reporters (March 2025)
- Interim report produced by People's Voice Media (April 2025)
- Second Ripple Effect Mapping workshop delivered to grantee organisations (June 2025)
- Third Ripple Effect Mapping workshop delivered to grantee organisations (September 2025)
- Community Reporters end story gathering (November 2025)
- Second sense making session held with Community Reporters (November 2025)
- Celebration event held at City Hall, Bristol (April 2026)
- Final evaluation report produced by People's Voice Media (May 2026)

Appendix 2 | List of Grantee Organisations

A list of the organisations who received a CRF grant. Those in **bold** were included in the purposeful sample for the evaluation process.

Where a story was recorded and consent was given for it to be made public, it will be viewable [here on the Community Reporter website's Bristol CRF story archive](#).

1. **169 Bristol Scouts**
2. 91 Ways to Build a Global City
3. **St Agnes Adventure Playground (A.P.E. Project CIC)**
4. Age UK Bristol
5. **Avonmouth Community Centre Association**
6. **Bangladesh Association, Bristol, Bath, and West**
7. Barton Hill Old Boys RFC and Barton Hill RFC Charity Cafe
8. **Bristol Area Quaker Meeting / Bedminster Quaker Meeting House**
9. **Bricks**
10. **Bristol Charities**
11. Bristol Methodist Centre: Project of the Bristol and South Gloucester Methodist Circuit.
12. Bristol Somali Resource Centre
13. **Bristol Women's Voice with Refugee Women of Bristol**
14. **Café Conscious CIC**
15. Centre For Employment and Enterprise Development (CEED)
16. **Easton Christian Family Centre**
17. **Ebetrust (Ebenezer Church)**
18. Filwood Hope
19. **Full Circle @ Docklands**
20. **Hartcliffe City Farm**
21. **Hartcliffe Club For Young People**
22. Hillfields Community Garden
23. inHope
24. **Community Church @ Lawrence Weston**
25. Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust (LNT)
26. Malcolm X Community Centre
27. Manor Farm Boys Club
28. **Meadow Vale Community Association**
29. **Nelson Trust**
30. **Nilaari Agency**
31. Novers Social Club
32. Oasis Hub South Bristol
33. **Oldbury Court Out of School Clubs**
34. One Bristol Curriculum and Cognitive Paths
35. **One25**
36. Re:work
37. Shirehampton Public Hall Community Association
38. **Southmead Development Trust**
39. **The Haven at Speedwell**
40. **Square Food Foundation**
41. St Agnes Church
42. St Barnabas Church
43. **The Cabin at St. Mary and St. James Church, Lockleaze**
44. St. Paul's Carnival Community Interest Company
45. **Sturminster Community Association**
46. The Avon Centre

- 47. The Brigstowe Project
- 48. The Inns Court Community & Family Centre (ICCFC)
- 49. The Jobs, Training and Enterprise Hub at Shirehampton Methodist Church**
- 50. The Misfits Theatre Company UK**
- 51. The Rock Centre**
- 52. The Vench, Lockleaze Play and Adventure Space, managed by Groundwork South**
- 53. Ujima Radio**
- 54. Wellspring Settlement in partnership with Bristol Refugee Rights**
- 55. Windmill Hill Community Association
- 56. Young Bristol (BS14 Youth Club)**

The following organisations acted in a capacity building and/or consultancy capacity but were not grantee organisations. They were, however, invited to contribute to the evaluation process.

1. Voscur
2. Black South West Network (BSWN)
3. West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL)