



Dudley CVS

ANNUAL REVIEW 2023-24

Celebrating 50 Years 1974 - 2024





Supporting the voluntary and community sector in Dudley borough since 1974.

Alongside our Annual Review of 2023-2024, we reflect on our history and the evolution of the voluntary and community sector since the 1970s.

We feature stories and highlights to mark this special 50-year milestone and reflect on our journey and achievements across five decades and our role in working alongside and supporting individuals and organisations to foster positive change within our communities.

Our history is rich with countless inspiring stories, and we're excited that our 2024 AGM and Awards will celebrate the incredible journeys and accomplishments of Dudley borough's vibrant voluntary and community sector through the decades.

Our vision and mission

At Dudley CVS, we are passionate about nurturing and supporting people and the communities they are part of to make a positive difference.

Our vision is for a borough that has **caring, vibrant and strong communities** where **everyone can fulfil their potential**.

Our mission is to **connect, inspire and work alongside people and organisations** to achieve **resilience and positive change**, while **championing** their value to partners and the wider community.

Our culture and values

We work together to create a culture which places trust, integrity, humility and caring at the heart of what we do.

What we do

Our work is guided by our culture and values, our teams principles, and the four functions of local infrastructure:



Leadership and Advocacy

Mobilising and encouraging community action, strengthening our sector's voice and influence on key decision-makers and funders.



Partnerships and Collaborations

Creating opportunities and driving effective joint working by building networks of local organisations and strategic partners.



Capacity Building

Providing practical support and development for local people and organisations, to nurture skills and build community resilience.



Volunteering

Building an environment in which volunteers and their communities thrive, by encouraging and nurturing volunteering opportunities.



A STEP BACK IN TIME...

1974 -1984

- ◀◀ Social and economic changes in the 1960s led to a volunteering "boom". At the time, it was seen as a way to positively engage young people with society.
- ◀◀ The late 1960s to the 1980s saw significant shifts in how volunteers were perceived and integrated into social service delivery. The 1969 Aves Report redefined volunteers' roles, advocating for a funded network of volunteer bureaux and emphasising that volunteers should supplement paid professionals. Soon after, local volunteer bureaux were established along with organisations such as the Volunteer Centre UK in 1973 to support voluntary service.
- ◀◀ This period saw the establishment of the government's Manpower Service Commission, which aimed to combat unemployment through various programmes, notably contributing a substantial portion of government funding to the voluntary sector.
- ◀◀ Reports in the early 1980s, like "Voluntary Action in a Changing World" and "Helping Others to Help Themselves," emphasised mutual aid and self-help, paving the way for the Big Society approach. These developments strengthened the relationship between the government and the voluntary sector, shaping social service delivery.



DID YOU KNOW?

- DID YOU KNOW?**
In 1974, the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley was created following the Local Government Act 1972.
- On 6 December 1974, Dudley CVS became a registered charity, marking the beginning of our journey with 133 members by 1975.
- In 1976, we acquired our first minibus to support community efforts.
- In 1976, we supported the Dudley West Indian Community Association, the first charity in Britain to include 'West Indian' in its title, earning praise from the Jamaican Consul and High Commissioner.
- During 1978 we made plans to house 6 field officers to supervise 60 young people to carry out tasks such as gardening and decorating.
- In 1978, we extended our work, including a Manpower Services Commission employability project with Dudley Youth Volunteers.
- In 1978, we received funding to extend our work from Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust.
- DID YOU KNOW?**
In 1977, Greenpeace was founded.
- DID YOU KNOW?**
In 1982 the first Neighbourhood watch in the UK was set up.
- In the poor winter weather of 1982 we discussed an operation to take older and disabled people shopping in our minibuses.
- During this period, we had conversations with groups about a 'flying team of volunteers to help anywhere in the Dudley borough'
- FUN FACT**
In the 80's we decided to stop smoking during our committee meetings!



50 years supporting children, young people, and families

Supporting children, young people, and families has always been a priority for Dudley CVS. Our journey began with practical projects in the early days, such as organising a borough-wide Toy Appeal and providing transportation for youth groups using our minibuses during the 1980s. In the early 1990s, we recognised the importance of early intervention and appointed our first officer dedicated to children and young people.

Listening to the voices of children, young people, and families has always been central to our work. In 1998, our conversations with families underscored the need for mental health support. By the 2000s, feedback from parents helped us advocate for a change in terminology from “disabled” to “special needs.”

Since then, we have actively connected organisations and advocated for enhanced services in the borough. The establishment of our Children, Young People, and Families Network (CYPF) in 2004 marked a significant milestone. With **over 150 members**, the CYPF Network provides a vital platform for collaboration, training, and information sharing.

In recent years, we have launched several impactful projects. **The Dudley Young Health Champions** project amplifies the voices of young people and influences decision-makers. We also introduced initiatives like **iZone**, an online directory for young people to find health and wellbeing services. Additionally, we have supported various local groups with their governance, funding, and best practices. Through the **Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)**, we **distributed over £3 million** to increase community capacity and, in 2024, **allocated £200,000** to community groups to build capacity and offer peer support to parents and caregivers.

Our work bridges the gap between statutory services and the voluntary sector, influencing policies such as Brighter Futures, Every Child Matters, and the First 1001 Days initiative. We have also contributed to strategies in SEND provision, youth crime reduction, and early years. Our involvement spans **over 300 steering groups**.



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Inspiring and empowering young people across Dudley borough to deliver health-related messages to their peers and their community

The Dudley Young Health Champions programme is a 4-week training programme where young people choose health topics that are important to them and develop creative projects to highlight and communicate health-related messages to their peers.

During the year, we worked with Sutton School, which supports students with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs. In collaboration with a local artist, the students created a legacy project called Transition Tales, a booklet with poetry, artwork, healthy recipes, and staff quotes, to help new pupils transition from primary to secondary school. Another cohort of young people, Here4Youth, are producing an animation exploring choice and consent, featuring original music and poetry.

Throughout the year, DYHCs participated in the Dudley People’s Panel, presenting poetry on mental health and delivering mindfulness activities, allowing them to interact with various local services and providers to share their experiences and ideas. DYHCs have also consulted on the Child-Friendly Dudley initiative, providing input on messaging, logos, and language. They have also shared their experiences regarding young people’s access to GP services with Healthwatch Dudley.

“*Witnessing pupils grow in confidence as they collaborate with various staff members and peers has been remarkable. This collaborative environment has fostered the development of wonderful ideas and the impact on students has been truly inspiring.*” Mrs Doman (teacher)

“*Being a DYHC has given me the opportunity to have my voice heard by the people who need to hear it. It has allowed me to express the issues that I've had in the past but also work toward a better future for people like me.*” Dudley Young Health Champion

Commissioning activities that have a long-lasting impact on the community through HAF Dudley

Between 2021 and 2023, Dudley CVS delivered the Dudley Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, a government scheme supporting children aged 5 to 16 who receive free school meals.

We believed we were best positioned to deliver the programme to ensure it was built around recognising the value of the voluntary and community sector and what families could gain from connections beyond the HAF programme. It presented an opportunity to help build capacity through the provision of grants whilst also ensuring groups focused on sustainability.

We had an allocation of £1.3 million to distribute to groups annually, split between Easter, Winter, and Summer holidays. We believed it was important to commission activities that would have a long-lasting impact on the community. We ensured that successful providers met quality assurance standards and supported those who needed to develop procedures and policies.

We asked groups to complete a self-assessment identifying areas for development. We identified the need for training on safeguarding, managing volunteers, and nutrition. We partnered with Street Games to offer safeguarding training, ran volunteer management workshops for groups, and HAF helper training for parents interested in supporting the delivery of the programme. Providers were given resource packs and guidance from Purely Nutrition, and we partnered with Black Country Foodbank to provide **recipe bags for 300 families** to cook a healthy meal together at home.

Through HAF, we were able to direct significant investment into the sector and showcase its impact on reaching and supporting families. As a result, some groups have received further investment and contracts for targeted work from Dudley Council and partners.



1984 - 1994

A STEP BACK IN TIME...

1984 - 1994

- ◀◀ In the late 80s and early 90s, the UK's approach to the voluntary sector and charitable organisations underwent significant changes. In 1989, the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) was founded as a membership association for foundations and independent grant-makers in the UK. In 1990, the Home Office released a report introducing an instrumental justification for funding the voluntary sector, based on whether the work was useful to the funder, was doing what the funder wanted, was cost-effective and was good quality. It also encouraged 'service' funding over core or project grants. That same year, The Finance Act of 1990 introduced the Gift Aid tax relief system, making donations more tax-efficient and encouraging charitable giving.
- ◀◀ In 1991, the Big Issue launched in response to the growing number of rough sleepers in London. The organisation believed that the key to solving the problem of homelessness lay in helping people to help themselves with vendors buying magazines with their own money and selling them at a profit or loss.
- ◀◀ 1994 saw the establishment of The National Lottery Charities Board to distribute a share of the funds from the National Lottery to charitable, benevolent and philanthropic organisations throughout the UK. It later evolved into the Big Lottery Fund.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1984, we received a grant from the DHSS Consortium on Opportunities for Volunteering to employ a Volunteer Bureau Organiser.

Our Volunteer Bureau opened in June 1984 with the aim of enabling unemployed people in Dudley borough to participate more fully in their community.

In 1985, we ran a community chest funding program in collaboration with the Local Authority and the Department for Environment.

During 1986, we secured 3-year funding for the Volunteer Bureau with conditions to work on addressing racial disadvantage.

During 1989 we collaborated on a pilot scheme to establish a disclosure unit to screen local voluntary sector members with substantial access to children—one of three nationwide.

During this time, we supported groups such as Lye Ghausia Mosque, Dudley Mind, Dudley Victim Support, Fens Pool Voluntary Association, and Halesowen Yemeni Community Association.

In 1988, we launched the Echo newsletter!

In the late 1980's we highlighted the need for training organisations in supporting volunteers.

In 1991, we registered the borough's 1000th volunteer with the Volunteer Centre.

FUN FACT
We purchased three new Apricot computers, replacing 'outdated' Apple computers!

We acquired a Funder Finder package to offer financial support services to groups in a challenging economic climate.

In 1994 we recognised the need for a Development Officer to support voluntary groups, especially in underserved areas.

50 years supporting groups and organisations to become strong, efficient and sustainable

Dudley CVS has a long history of supporting community groups and organisations to become strong, efficient, and sustainable.

In June 1984, we opened the doors of our Volunteer Bureau and received a grant from the DHSS Consortium to employ a Volunteer Bureau Organiser. At that time, our work via the Bureau focused on helping unemployed individuals engage with the community, shortly followed by work to address racial disadvantage. Towards the late 80s, we focused on training local organisations in supporting their volunteers.

Throughout the 1980s, we supported groups such as Lye Ghausia Mosque and Dudley Mind. In the early 1990s, we introduced a Funder Finder package to help voluntary groups identify funding sources, and proposed a Development Officer role to support areas with underserved voluntary groups. During this period, we focused on diversity by appointing a specialist officer to expand the Community Care Project and assisted the Sikh community in establishing a Senior Citizens Forum.

Over the years, we have been there to support communities through challenging times. Amid austerity and governmental changes during the 2000s, we supported social enterprises such as Just Straight Talk, navigated new charity laws, and assisted user-led organisations such as Dudley CIL and Disability in Action. We supported Dudley Council with an asset transfer policy, empowering community groups to take ownership of local assets and enhance their service capabilities.

Today, we are looking at ways to open our door to new people, ideas, and organisations to connect them to opportunities and support them on their journey to making positive change in their communities.

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Opening our door to people and communities in a way that enhances connection and opportunities

This year, our Group Development Team aimed to become more accessible to new people, ideas, and organisations by opening up their weekly team meetings to visitors.

Monday Morning Open Door invites anyone new to Dudley CVS to meet for a friendly 30-minute chat over a cuppa. This is a great way for people to tap into the wealth of experience, networks and connections held by our team. The idea was that from the initial meeting, we could connect people to appropriate networks or plan further one-to-one support.

Monday Morning Open Door has been a great success. Over the year, **26 people representing 14 groups** (or people with ideas for new groups) and **7 businesses or partners** have visited us.

Our guests gained a better understanding of our work and we developed new relationships and insights. We gave **follow-up support to 11 not-for-profit groups** and **improved the connections of 12 of our visitors**, like Team Pumpkin Boxing, who we subsequently supported with planning and fundraising, **resulting in them being awarded a £4,000 grant** for a project to keep local children eating healthily and exercising.

A chat with Make More Community CIC led to introductions to help them run STEM activities for children. Our one-to-one support to identify funders for this project resulted in the group receiving a grant:

“We applied for the National Grid Funding that you shared and we were awarded funding to help deliver Pop-up STEM workshops throughout the Black Country. Much of this was possible because of the work that you and the team did to introduce us to the right people... Over 250+ children have engaged in the workshops which has been great to see.” Make More Community CIC

When Michael Killin from Dudley College visited, he left with connections and support for a new ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) for Volunteering course. We supported in developing the course content and introduced him to local not-for-profits who could help to develop and enhance the course and provide volunteering opportunities for learners. This collaboration has been instrumental in connecting the college with local charities and volunteering organisations.

Thanks to our support, Michael confirmed the ESOL for Volunteering course was fully approved, with several institutions agreeing to participate as external speakers as well as offering learners volunteering opportunities.

Our team could see the potential for this as a way of developing a wider (and more diverse) volunteer pool, promoting some of the groups we support and linking in with our thematic work to convene services that support migrants to Dudley.

“The good news is that our ‘ESOL for Volunteering’ course has now been fully approved and, thanks to your introductions, we now have a number of institutions who are happy to be involved as external speakers as well as offering our learners volunteering opportunities.”

These are just a couple of examples of new ways in which people can access the one-to-one group support we've offered over the last 50 years.

Learn more about our support:
www.dudleycvs.org.uk/support-for-your-organisation

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

In the last year, we have given one-to-one guidance and support to **196 not-for-profits or people looking to set up new projects.**

- **44** of them have received support on **setting up, governance and trustee recruitment**
- **80** of them have received support with **recruiting and managing volunteers**
- **73** of them have been **connected to each other or to new opportunities**
- **38** people and **21** organisations new to us have been welcomed to the Group Development Team and our wider teams through our **Monday Morning Open Door and drop ins**

Resulting in:

- **6** new groups: **3** small groups, **2** registered charities and **1** CIC getting set up
- **11** governing documents reviewed and revised
- More than **20** early-stage ideas discussed with connections and guidance given to help people get to the next stage of their journey.

Our support has unlocked £1,868,303 of funding for 52 not-for-profits we've supported over the year:

- **6** directly supported with their funding applications received **£353,205** this year.
- Our contribution to supporting not-for-profits to set up, govern themselves efficiently and increase their planning and fundraising skills has seen **48** of them access **£1,515,098** this year.

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A System Approach to Supporting the Sustainability of the Voluntary and Community Sector

During the year, Dudley CVS advocated for partners across the system to join together to lead on workstreams to support the sustainability of a vibrant, diverse and strong voluntary sector across Dudley borough.

Over the last decade, the voluntary and community sector (VCS) has seen significant challenges. Austerity measures brought severe financial cuts to local organisations, many were forced to downsize, and some ceased operating. Income from central and local government has fallen significantly. Many organisations are small with an income below £100k and these are declining locally and nationally. Larger organisations have also seen finances fall due to less public giving, shrinking in real terms of government contracts and tenders moving out of the borough to organisations with larger economies of scale and infrastructure. Many are operating deficit budgets, subsidizing services and utilizing reserves, a clearly unsustainable position. Against this backdrop, most local organisations have seen a significant rise in demand for their services, with many now operating waiting lists for some of our most vulnerable residents.

Spiralling costs due to inflation and energy costs are also having a significant impact, as well as challenges in recruiting and retaining trustees.



To help tackle some of these challenges, a system approach to supporting the sustainability of the Voluntary and Community Sector was included as a key priority in the Dudley Health and Care Partnership 5 Year Forward View Plan. This work would:

- Establish an external funding group of system partners to develop collaborative investment bids and maximise potential external funding opportunities.
- Have anchor organisations supporting staff as potential volunteer trustees.
- Refresh the Local Compact, redefining principles, commitments and relationships between system partners and the sector.
- Refresh the Compact funding code of practice, setting out clear commitments about commissioning, procurement, and investment in the local VCS, prioritising local, the importance of social value and supporting full cost recovery principles.
- Consider additional investment opportunities for VCS delivery, identifying potential for statutory partners outsourcing services.
- Support the identification of small grant pots to support innovative projects and new pilot schemes.

In the first year (2023 – 2024), we achieved the following:

- Established a Steering Group and three new workstreams with elected representatives from the VCS and system partners.
- Launched the updated Dudley Compact in Summer 2024.
- Developed and featured a trustee recruitment pack on Dudley's CVS website.
- Promoted trusteeship roles across system partners.
- Created a voluntary sector trustee sign-up pack.

Work will continue in 2024 and beyond.

Bringing new blood into the sector

The voluntary and community sector is facing a shortage of people and skills at all levels. As society changes and technology advances, this will become a bigger challenge. Therefore, we must prioritise bringing new people into the sector to ensure sustainability and resilience.



This year, we have used strategies to bring new people into the sector with different levels of formality so that we can be as accessible as possible. This has included:

- Informal opportunities to connect with us through our Monday Morning Open Door and our new monthly drop-in, Communi-tea. This allows people to meet us in the friendly surroundings of our meeting space or a local coffee shop
- New commitment-free volunteering initiative called Time to Give Where You Live (TTGWYL)
- Support to people new to being the leader of a nonprofit (a trustee, director or committee member)
- Quarterly 'Welcome to the sector' sessions that move around the borough
- Work with statutory leaders to encourage staff take-up of leadership positions in the sector.

● Launching in December 2023, Time to Give Where You Live (TTGWYL) is our new initiative designed to help people try out volunteering in a way that works for them, flexibly and commitment-free. We know that volunteering is changing with many people less able to commit to regular days and times. TTGWYL gives people access to simple opportunities to help in their community.

People sign up with us as TTGWYL volunteers. The only information they need to share is an email address and the localities where they're happy to help. In return, we send them details of good causes looking for one-off volunteers for their activities and events. It gives groups access to a pool of helpers and individuals the chance to try something new, connections to local good causes and a simple way to feel more connected.

By the end of the year, 67 people had signed up as TTGWYL volunteers.





50 YEARS

1994 - 2004

A STEP BACK IN TIME...

1994 - 2004

- ◀◀ In 1994, the Government launched the 'Make a Difference' campaign, an initiative designed to promote an integrated approach to involving individuals in their communities and to bring together business, voluntary and public sectors around a programme of local action. The initiative aimed to encourage first-time volunteers and improve access to volunteering opportunities.
- ◀◀ By 1997, The Social Exclusion Unit coordinated and informed policy tackling social exclusion, through joined-up solutions, with the voluntary sector as a central partner, leading to the 2001 National Strategy Action Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal. The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund highlighted the importance of tackling challenges in deprived communities through local action and investment while empowering residents to lead the change.
- ◀◀ From 1998 to 2008, the New Deal for Communities programme sought to transform deprived neighbourhoods by addressing crime, community, housing, education, health, and worklessness. The Programme was fundamentally rooted in partnership working, and local partnerships were established for each regeneration area to ensure that change was community-led, working with partners such as the police, Primary Care Trusts, schools, Jobcentre Plus, and their parent local authority.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1994, we appointed a Development Officer to manage increasing workloads and support voluntary groups, especially in underserved areas.

We increased our focus on ethnic communities in 1995, appointing a specialist officer to assist the Sikh community in establishing a Senior Citizens Forum.

DID YOU KNOW? During 1996-7 Headway Black Country formed.

In 1997, we held our first Lottery briefing on making a good application held at 'Stafford Street Day Centre'.

FUN FACT
By the year 2000, we were proud to have developed a 'new modern logo'!

In 1999, we were asked to support the development of five Area Committees across the Dudley borough.

During 1998, our Volunteer Centre ran a pilot befriending scheme with Social Services for people 60+ with dementia.

By 1998, as part of a joint venture partnership, we successfully tendered to deliver a voluntary sector option of New Deal.

During the late 90s we worked to strengthen our partnerships with various sectors to promote the interests of Dudley communities.

In 2001, we established Dosti, a Community Empowerment Network, an umbrella network of place-based, interest-based and faith-based networks in the borough spanning over 800 not-for-profit groups and organisations.

In the early 2000s we focused on professionalisation, including support around business planning, evaluation, project management, and contracts.

Building on 50 years of trusted relationships in communities to nurture resilience, sustainability, connectedness and optimism for the future

Dudley CVS has continued its place-based work, bringing networks together in five areas of the Dudley borough for connection and collaboration.

The starting point for these networks has been the relationships built by Dudley CVS and our previous colleagues over the last 50 years – relationships with groups we have helped to establish and partners who have contributed their skills and assets. These relationships provided a foundation and values to welcome new people and groups into our place-based networks.

We facilitated these networks as an asset-based platform for local people to share what they love about their community and what would make it an even better place. We aim to collaborate on identified community priorities and nurture strong connections rooted in communities. Because of that, each network has grown differently.



Brierley Hill: Connecting and sharing resources

Nonprofits, statutory partners, residents and businesses have convened to share and gain support for their diverse areas of work. Team Pumpkin Boxing is a newly-established community club aiming to build skills and aspirations among people principally from disadvantaged backgrounds who lack a sense of hope and ambition. Through the network, Team Pumpkin found Top Church Training (TCT), a recipient of Dudley CVS's capacity-building support over the past 20 years. Team Pumpkin Boxing recognised that TCT was working with the same community in different ways, and so started offering physical activities to TCT's beneficiaries. The club also began to work with local schools and take referrals from the Police, working with young people on the cusp of exclusion.



Our Group Development Team gave Team Pumpkin further connections and a better understanding of VCSEs and the sector. Our bespoke capacity building support helped Team Pumpkin to do outcomes-focused planning so that they could better demonstrate the difference their work makes to potential funders and supporters. We supported the club to plan two projects, identify potential funders for each and successfully apply for its first grant of £4,000.

Most importantly, the mix of networked and one-to-one support has helped a new nonprofit to understand itself and where it fits within the wider landscape, increased trust and laid important groundwork for future activity.

Developing new initiatives in Halesowen

Our convening in Halesowen has brought a range of people together to start new activities. A dementia café has been established as well as a women's mental health support group. We have developed wellbeing walks in partnership with Dudley Council's Public Health, where residents are trained to become walk leaders. These are now entirely led by the community and have become a place for further connection and collaboration.

One resident told us about how she met our Halesowen locality lead when she was feeling low and unconfident. She described how the wellbeing walk and connections made were like 'fairy dust', giving her the confidence to set up a social enterprise to support the community. The locality network has developed individuals' skills and confidence to such an extent that two social enterprises have set up there (Advance Beyond and Without A Trace CICs). They work jointly and have successfully applied to us to deliver peer support activities to parents as part of the Peer Support Project run by our Children's Team.

Uniting around action in Stourbridge and beyond

In Stourbridge, network members told us that they wanted to meet for action. In response, our locality lead developed an ideas canvas for anyone with an idea. This is a simple and visual tool to help people share their vision, explore their skills, assets and talents and put the call out for support.



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This year, the Growing Up Green Festival that started in Stourbridge expanded to Brierley Hill and beyond. This has increased connections between residents, businesses and organisations that are dedicated to **climate action**, resulting in mutual aid and the establishment of a green providers network led by Ekho Collective and funded through our **Integrated Plus Social Prescribing Fund**.



Although place-based work has looked different in each locality, common outcomes are:

- Solutions are found in communities and in the assets of local people. Local priorities are owned not only by Dudley CVS but with other organisations leading, codesigning and sharing work, which has greater relevance to local people.
- Sharing connections and ideas has led to the development of new nonprofits with our support. Through this work, our Group Development Team has had conversations with 7 emerging organisations.
- It has been informed by our capacity building support – we started with local groups we know and have built trusted relationships with throughout our 50-year history. We link new groups into these ever-expanding networks, creating sustainability and resilience.
- It has informed our capacity building support. New nonprofits have been supported by our Group Development Team through their welcome to our place-based networks, meaning our capacity-building support is much more proactive. We run frequent drops-ins and **'Welcome to the sector'** sessions across the borough, making sure we have coverage in each locality so that new people, skills and resources are always added to the mix.



2004 - 2014

A STEP BACK IN TIME...

2004 - 2014

- ◀◀ In 2004, the establishment of the Community Interest Company (CIC) through the Companies Act was a significant milestone. This legal structure provided a new avenue for enterprises with a social mission, balancing profit-making with community benefits, and reflecting a growing recognition of social enterprises' role in societal development.
- ◀◀ Following the financial crisis in 2008, the UK entered a recession, and the government began austerity policies with large-scale public funding cuts. By 2010, the government's Big Society agenda set out to shift culture – from government action to local action and equip people and organisations with the power and resources they need to make a difference in their communities.
- ◀◀ The Localism Act 2011 introduced 'Community Rights', including empowering communities to bid to take over ownership and management of 'community assets' owned by the local council. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 provided for the set up of Healthwatch organisations, enhancing public engagement in health and social care.
- ◀◀ During this era, there was a substantial focus on the role of the voluntary sector in service delivery, with many policy efforts directed towards commissioning. The role of the sector in health and wellbeing led to an increase in health sector partners becoming involved in commissioning, e.g. CCGs and Health Partnerships.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2004, Dudley's Compact, chaired by Dudley CVS, received a commendation for its innovative range of Compact initiatives, including training, consultation, and funding achievements.

During 2009, we helped the Alzheimer's Society win a public sector contract from Dudley PCT amidst national competition. We also launched a commissioning guide.

During this time our focus was on 'Transforming Social Care' and personalisation, enabling disabled people to commission services directly.

Facing unparalleled cuts, in 2010, we responded to the Big Society agenda with 'Our Society', which aimed to enable communities and volunteers to play a pivotal role in enhancing the lives of local people.

In 2011, we were selected as the local trusted organisation to support the residents of East Coseley Big Local to make lasting positive change in their area.

In 2011, we received funding from Dudley CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) to create a post dedicated to supporting carers at Russells Hall Hospital.

In 2010, we organised a Doctor's Orders event to facilitate dialogue between health service commissioners and the voluntary sector.

Through our work during this era we emphasised the broader value of voluntary groups beyond cost-effective service provision.

In 2012, we successfully tendered for Healthwatch Dudley, with a launch event in 2013.

In 2012, we worked with Just Straight Talk (JST) to support in its establishment.

In 2013, we assisted Dudley MBC in developing an asset transfer strategy and toolkit.

By 2014, our focus was Building Better Health Partnerships to foster collaboration between CCGs and the voluntary sector, leading to an integrated health agenda.

Supporting Carers since 2011

In 2011, Dudley CVS received funding from Dudley CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) to create a post dedicated to supporting carers at Russells Hall Hospital. Over the last decade, this has led to a transformative journey to raise awareness and provide essential support to carers within the hospital environment.

From the beginning, the primary goal of our Carer Coordinator was to raise awareness of family carers, identify them, and provide them with information and support. Initially, the focus was to identify carers through interactions with hospital staff, however, it soon became apparent that many carers remained invisible within the hospital setting.

Recognising the need for a different approach to identifying carers, our coordinator began spending significant time in high-traffic public spaces within the hospital, such as the health hub in the front reception, which allowed for more accessible drop-in support for potential carers and hospital staff.

Through this approach, our coordinator was able to build strong relationships with hospital staff, people who regularly visited the hospital due to their long-term conditions, and their families. These relationships facilitated essential connections and the dissemination of important information, such as raising awareness of Attendance Allowance to enable people struggling to access a cleaner or carer to support them, access to Dementia services and local social and community groups, and various processes including discharge and end-of-life care.

In 2014, along with the help of dedicated volunteers and funding from Sainsbury's, our coordinator launched the **Tea and Chat Carers Support** initiative. This pilot project involved a mobile tea trolley that visited hospital wards during visiting hours to identify potential carers, offering them a drink, a biscuit, and a friendly chat. Collaboration with **Healthwatch Dudley**, the **Carers Network**, and local charities additionally provided information on local services and a listening ear to families, visitors, and staff.

Tea and Chat allowed carers to receive timely information and support, empowering them to make informed choices. The feedback from visitors, families, and staff was overwhelmingly positive, enabling the project to become a hospital charity with donations to support the replenishment of refreshments.

For over five years, until the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, **Tea and Chat sessions engaged with over 40 people per session, totalling over 10,000 contacts.**

The data gathered from these interactions played a crucial role in the hospital securing funding to build a carers information hub to identify family carers in an informal, nonclinical way.

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Following this work, in the spring of 2024, an **Information Hub** opened in the front reception area of Russells Hall Hospital. This Hub now serves as a generic information centre for patients, carers, and staff, offering resources, information and support from various local charities and organisations, including Dudley Stroke, Black Country Headway, and Whitehouse Cancer Support in collaboration with DMBC Access and Prevention Services. This collaborative effort between health and social care and the voluntary sector ensures that carers are no longer invisible and their voices heard, enhancing the quality of support they receive.

The establishment of the Information Hub marks a significant milestone in this decade-long journey, ensuring that carers continue to receive the support and information they need to navigate their roles effectively.



Collaborating to provide support to unpaid carers

In 2017, the first Carers Support Group was launched at DY1 to support carers through monthly drop-in sessions. Recognising the need for more frequent support, a second group was formed in Stourbridge. The group evolved into a 'walk and talk' format in 2019, promoting physical activity and meaningful conversation. During the pandemic, we continued to meet outdoors, and after developing a partnership with Dudley Crossroads, we established two walking groups monthly. As many members faced bereavement, the group shifted focus to support those grieving.

Walking groups have continued to this day, and Dudley Crossroads is now seeking funding to formalise a bereaved carers group, aiming to expand services for end-of-life and bereaved carers.



"With your help and guidance we have applied for Attendance Allowance for both my mum and dad. I can't thank you enough for your kindness and patience with this. You have also signposted us to Dudley Crossroads and to the walk at Mary Stevens Park which my mum will hopefully go to and enjoy. Your help and support have helped us navigate this difficult period and hopefully, there are better days ahead for my mum and we are both very grateful to you."

During the year, our Carers Coordinator has continued to support carers, listen to their needs and connect them with appropriate services so they can receive the support needed to continue in their caring roles.



"I am really grateful for the support you gave me. I was in Russells Hall Hospital at a time when I was at a particularly low point with the stress of the situation. I knew that you couldn't change things but I just needed someone to listen to my concerns, which you did, as I felt so helpless."

Over the year we connected with **720** carers.

Celebrating 10 years of Healthwatch Dudley

In April 2013, Healthwatch Dudley began with a clear mission: to give people a chance to have their say on health and social care services, ensuring that NHS leaders and other key decision-makers listen to and use valuable feedback to improve services.

In its early years, Healthwatch Dudley established the Community Information Point Network. Training a dedicated group of information champions by collaborating with local organisations, 80 Community Information Points were placed throughout Dudley borough, offering residents reliable information about available support and services.

Over the past decade the team has worked closely with community groups to champion their care needs. Since 2015, Healthwatch Dudley has partnered with the deaf community and the Dudley Deaf Focus Group. Joint efforts have created an "I am Deaf" card to address communication needs, and from 2016 to 2020, vibrating pagers were introduced at Russell's Hall Hospital, making sure Deaf patients were notified when it was their turn to be seen.

Relationships have also been built with the Asian community to break down communication barriers when accessing healthcare, directing individuals to relevant services and keeping the community well-informed.

Their work has directly improved lives for people like Norma, who used guidance from Healthwatch Dudley to get a new set of dentures, and Bunny, who, with support, registered with a GP and accessed healthcare for the first time in 17 years.

Healthwatch Dudley continues to play an active role in the Patient Experience Group with Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, sharing valuable feedback to enhance care.

Across the years, **over thirteen thousand people have shared their healthcare experiences.** Each voice has contributed to meaningful improvements in health and social care across the borough.

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Listening to the people's experiences of accessing GP services

During the year, Healthwatch Dudley listened to people's experiences of accessing GP services. In the previous year, 29% of residents the team spoke to wanted to share their experiences of GP services. Responding to these concerns, we conducted a detailed study to understand and improve access to GPs in our community.

Healthwatch Dudley spoke directly with residents at six GP surgeries during Enter & View visits, hearing from **117** people. Additionally, we reached out to **176** people in **14** community groups.

To gain a broader perspective, we conducted a survey from November 2023 to February 2024. This survey was designed in conjunction with local GPs, DIHC, Black Country ICB, and Healthwatch Dudley volunteers.

756 people completed the survey, 60% of respondents had trouble booking appointments, and 45% were unaware of all the services offered by their GP practice.

“Booking an appointment feels like a lottery; it's always so difficult to get through on the phone.”

Volunteers reviewed six GP websites for user-friendliness. Feedback indicated a community need for more accessible and informative online platforms.

Our research was a collaborative effort with health and social care representatives, stakeholders, community groups, and volunteers. These partnerships ensured diverse perspectives and enriched our findings.

We are continuing conversations across services and strategic meetings to support the borough's implementation of a charter endorsing our recommendations. **Six GP surgeries we visited under Enter & View have implemented patient-facing service improvements based on feedback.**

Listening to those whose voices are seldom heard – Exploring the over-representation of minority ethnic young boys in the Dudley Youth Justice System

During the year, Healthwatch Dudley was asked by the Dudley Youth Justice Service Management Board to explore the over-representation of minority ethnic young boys in the Youth Justice System and learn more about challenges and potential barriers to support from the view of those affected.

We believed conversations should be led by a member of the minority ethnic community to ensure the young boys could be open and comfortable to discuss race and discrimination in a safe way. We collaborated with CIC, One Love Community Music and Arts to gather insights from both the young people involved in the Youth Justice System and the professionals who work with them.

We heard from eight young males who shared their thoughts on what contributed to their involvement in the YJS.

All participants reported experiencing racism, predominantly in school environments where they felt stereotyped. They also described being targeted by police through 'stop and search' practices. One young male stated, **“[My] problems weren't classed as mental health, more behaviour.”** Data supports their experiences, with stop and search rates being significantly higher for Black individuals (27.2/1000) compared to White individuals (5.6/1000).

Despite six of the boys being referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, none received any intervention. Minority ethnic individuals are 40% more likely to access mental health services via the criminal justice system, highlighting a significant gap in mental health support for these youths.

Five out of the eight boys had disengaged from education to some degree, with one boy avoiding

school entirely due to perceived racism from teachers. The participants expressed a lack of activities that cater to their needs and a scarcity of positive role models. They emphasised the necessity for strong Black leaders and mentors to guide and listen to them. Research supports the link between lack of activities and increased criminal behaviour, suggesting that sports-based interventions can improve youth outcomes.

Our research has sparked meaningful changes to support Black and Mixed Race youths in Dudley.

- A steering group has formed with a diverse group including educators, volunteers, social workers, healthcare providers, and the YJS. Collaboratively tackling challenges faced by young people in Dudley.
- Members of the steering group is teaming up with One Love to launch a pilot program. It aims to provide crucial mental health support to at-risk youth, tailored to their specific needs.
- Funding has been secured and allocated to train mentors from minority communities. These mentors will guide young boys, helping them avoid involvement in the YJS and make positive life choices.

Read more about Healthwatch Dudley: www.healthwatchdudley.co.uk





2014 - 2024

A STEP BACK IN TIME...

2014 - 2024

- ◀◀ Early 2014 continued to focus on the role of the voluntary sector in service delivery and health and wellbeing which saw an increase in health sector partner commissions.
- ◀◀ In June 2016, the majority of those who voted in the UK referendum chose to leave the European Union, and by January 2020, the UK had left the EU. UK charities faced new challenges with many reliant on funding from the EU for projects and initiatives.
- ◀◀ In March 2020, the sector faced further challenges when the COVID-19 pandemic caused severe social and economic disruption. Thousands of support groups emerged to support the most vulnerable and isolated people in society. Amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, Dudley CVS coordinated the community response in Dudley borough by establishing six virtual support networks consisting of the local authority, police, NHS, and voluntary and community organisations. Our call-out to mobilise volunteer support saw an overwhelming response, and 669 people came forward to support vulnerable people in their community and those who were shielding at home.
- ◀◀ The energy and cost of living crisis of 2022 left households facing steeper gas and electricity bills. In response, we brought together a network of community organisations that could open their venues to provide warm and welcoming places to go if people were struggling to heat their homes.

DID YOU KNOW?

- In early 2014, our work to build better health partnerships led us to develop and deliver an innovative and complementary service called 'Integrated Plus'.
- CoLab Dudley launched in 2014, for sharing, networking and collaborating as a way of "releasing the experience and creativity we have in the borough to help organisations and communities adapt to new challenges."
- By 2014, our focus was doing things with communities rather than for, including designing activities and projects that build skills, and bringing community venues back to life.
- In 2014, Dudley MBC officially signed over the former Age UK building based on Stafford Street to Dudley CVS. DY1 is now a thriving community hub and meeting space in the heart of Dudley. In February 2015, we also took on the day-to-day management of the Brierley Hill Civic on an 18 month trial.
- In response to the pandemic, in March 2020, we established six COVID-19 support networks across Dudley borough, consisting of the local authority, police, NHS, and other voluntary organisations such as Black Country Foodbank.
- In March 2020 we took on ownership of the Brierley Hill Civic after a formal asset transfer from Dudley Council.
- In 2016 we opened the doors of DY1 for a regular monthly drop-in for anyone who wanted to learn more about being part of a not-for-profit or volunteering.
- In 2015, the Dudley Youth Health Champions project was established. To this day, young people continue to communicate important health-related messages to their peers.
- During the pandemic, **669** volunteers came forward to support vulnerable people in their community. **984** people received help from one of our volunteers.
- In response to the cost-of-living and energy crisis in 2022, we coordinated 'Warm Welcomes' to bring together a network of venues that could offer local people a warm place to go.
- During 2021-23, we distributed over £3 million to increase community capacity through the Dudley Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.
- Over the last 4 years, we have supported Dudley MBC to distribute the Household Support Fund (HSF) to the most vulnerable in society. To date we've distributed **£250,000** to 20 organisations to allocate to residents in need.



10 years of improving wellbeing and social isolation through Social Prescribing

Integrated Plus is a social prescribing support service provided by Dudley CVS and initially funded by the Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group (now ICB Black Country). As we mark our 50th anniversary, we also celebrate a decade of our Integrated Plus service.

Since 2014, our Integrated Plus team has worked with people to enhance wellbeing and foster a sense of purpose. Dudley CVS was one of the first in the country to deliver a social prescribing and high-intensity user service, winning several awards. During 2019, we rolled out a social prescribing training programme for link workers across the West Midlands. In 2020, we were commissioned by NHS England to write the social prescribing online learning programme for new NHS Link Workers.

Our Integrated Plus service supports individuals aged 16 and over who frequently visit their GP, are at higher risk of hospital admission, or may be vulnerable and could benefit from social prescribing interventions. We aim to understand each person's needs and work together to find solutions to their challenges and opportunities to become more connected, involved and active in their community, which can enhance their overall wellbeing. Our team ensures access to the services and activities that best meet individual needs.

Social Prescribing aims to address people's needs holistically, recognising that people's health is determined primarily by social, economic and environmental factors. Support is often provided in people's homes to get a true picture of their living conditions and family support networks.

Over the years, our Integrated Plus team has supported many clients affected by job loss, housing issues, poverty and isolation. During the year, our team have continued to support vulnerable members of the community and those facing financial challenges.



“My Link Worker got me immediate help with funding for my gas and electric bills which took the pressure off me financially. It was practical help which is quite rare these days.”

Integrated Plus Client

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Supporting groups to become sustainable to ensure our community continues to thrive

Dudley CVS provides support, training, and guidance to people, groups, and organisations, ensuring they possess the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to operate efficiently, confidently, and independently.

Our Integrated Plus social prescribing service plays a crucial role in this ecosystem. A thriving community is essential for providing a diverse range of options when working with clients. It's vital to maintain a balance; community groups need active participation and engagement. However, with funding cuts and a cost-of-living crisis, there is a risk of overwhelming small groups and disrupting this balance.

Historically, Integrated Plus has benefited from available funds to support the team's extensive onward referrals. Through the work of Integrated Plus, the team has identified gaps in community provision, creating a comprehensive understanding of what is and isn't available. Our Community and Volunteer Development Officer has sourced and commissioned various community projects in response to borough-wide needs, addressing these gaps and ensuring that our community continues to thrive.



In early 2024, we revised and relaunched our grants programme. The **“Spring into Action: Grow through What You Go Through”** social prescribing micro-grants programme enables community members to develop projects contributing to Dudley becoming nurturing, caring, vibrant and strong. The programme provides financial support for small groups to deliver community projects, whilst our group development team work with them to ensure their sustainability.

Helping people to unlock their passions, gifts and talents

The Building Resilience In Communities (BRIC) Fund supports clients to improve their health and wellbeing and provides an opportunity to find sense of purpose. The fund enables Integrated Plus to support clients to access items or services that can support the individual to flourish.



During the year we supported Warren who had faced significant challenges due to alcohol dependency, leading to frequent hospital admissions. Warren's struggle with alcohol dates back to his early teens. Despite undergoing multiple detox programs and relocating to different environments, he found himself returning to Dudley and relapsing. Currently, Warren is receiving support from Atlantic House Recovery Center and actively participating in recovery groups. However, he continues to battle low mood and depression.

During our initial assessment, Warren revealed that he used to enjoy cycling along the canals, an activity that had a positive impact on his mental health. Unfortunately, his bike was stolen while he was homeless. Warren is now excited about obtaining a new bike through BRIC funding. He strongly believes that cycling will play a crucial role in his recovery, especially on weekends when Atlantic House is closed. Having a bike would greatly enhance Warren's independence, reducing his reliance on Atlantic House staff for transportation. He is deeply grateful for the opportunity to regain access to cycling, as it not only boosts his overall well-being but also helps him manage his low mood more effectively.

By addressing both his physical and emotional needs, and providing opportunities for activities that promote mental health, such as cycling, Warren stands a better chance of achieving long-term recovery and stability.

CoLab Dudley: supporting community-led social innovation

In 2011, two books* were published that shared research and case studies of new ways people in communities across the UK were imaginatively creating opportunities for people in their neighbourhoods to connect and collaborate. They had developed projects which pioneered change towards more sustainable futures, in everyday ways, using the skills, talents and resources around them. We picked up on this work and connected with the people behind the research. Dudley became one of a small number of places developing and testing neighbourhood-scale infrastructure to catalyse and support this kind of community-led social innovation. (Social innovations are new social practices that aim to meet social needs in a better way than the existing solutions.)

We introduced projects from these books through Dudley CVS's work. This led to people in Dudley getting together to start **Repair Cafes, Trade Schools, Incredible Edible growing projects, SOUP micro-granting dinners** and more. To help cultivate and legitimise such creative, collaborative, community-led solutions to complex challenges, we established **CoLab Dudley** in 2014 with a group of colleagues from different local organisations.

CoLab Dudley supports learning through doing. Since 2014, CoLab Dudley has been creating conditions for, and providing tools and tactics to support community-led experimentation and collective learning. Many and varied experiments, projects and activities are held in relationship so that insights, knowledge, skills, ideas and many other kinds of resources can flow between them.

Through **Open Hub Wrens Nest** and **Doing in Dudley** over **70** new ideas were co-designed and tested by hundreds of local people over 7 years. Alongside this, CoLab Dudley was experimenting with new ways of learning and evaluating,

(*Hand Made, and the Compendium for the Civic Economy)



Dudley SOUP micro-granting dinners

and inviting everyone to be part of the learning by becoming detectorists (we made this term up). By 2019 local people were demonstrating an appetite to **re-imagine Dudley High Street** using ways of working cultivated by CoLab Dudley. To date this has led to a wide array of experiments (from parklets to exploring a More-Than-Human High Street) and 19 designs for the future by 59 students we have collaborated with since 2021.

CoLab Dudley now works at neighbourhood and borough scale. Most of the activity developed by local people we work with is at the scale of the neighbourhood, High Street or specific green and blue spaces. In 2020 the CoLab Dudley team responded to the pandemic by bringing longer-term thinking and collective imagination into the heart of the doing, inviting local creatives and doers to convene as **Time Rebels** and collaborate on related experiments and projects. This, in turn, inspired the crafting of **Dudley Creates: a 100 year cultural strategy in action for Dudley borough**.

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Time Rebels of Dudley

The Time Rebels of Dudley are a vibrant collective of local doers and creatives convened by CoLab Dudley. They help to craft everyday creativity, collective imagination and long-term thinking in Dudley borough. Their actions contribute to **Dudley Creates: a 100 Year Cultural Strategy in Action for Dudley Borough**.

During the year we supported **29** talented creatives to team up with **15** local community groups and organisations to co-create and bring to life innovative projects. Together they hosted **66** workshops and activities in **38** locations. Projects popped up in local parks, high streets, cafes, markets, community gardens, museums, artist studios, reservoirs, and community hubs. **433** local residents joined in, enriching their neighbourhoods and themselves through a wide range of projects that sparked joy and creativity.

As a result of CoLab Dudley's convening, **5** local people came together as an informal group to host and share their creative skills in **Time To Make** sessions. These are 3 hour, free, drop-in sessions, open to all. The group accessed a range of spaces for free; our CoLab Dudley space on Dudley High Street, and spaces in a museum, a cafe and a shopping centre. They collaborated with another **4** creatives and introduced **10** creative practices. **139** opportunities to participate were taken up.

Two leaders from local CIC **Creart Collective** worked with five young Black artists to initiate **Giving Voices**, a podcast exploring the impact of racism in Dudley on the mental health of Black young males. The group developed practices in scriptwriting, videography, editing, sound engineering, improvisation and story-telling and recorded **9** podcasts.

In their project **Field Works**, **Workshop 24** reached out to groups of marginalised people who rarely



Winter Gathering celebrating Time Rebels of Dudley projects. Photos by Paul Stringer

have opportunities to get away from the everyday and engage in creative explorations. They were taken on field trips to Coalbrookdale in Shropshire and the Elan Valley in mid-Wales. On their return the groups explored their experiences through hands on making. These participatory, art-based ventures started to investigate the complex relationship between humans, water and climate change locally.

To inspire local people and communities to think about how important their connection to nature and the environment is, we put out an open call for anyone to join this work by submitting ideas for small creative projects. **6** projects were supported, including one which specifically worked with LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse people. They hosted poetry, mark making and nature-inspired workshops, inviting participants to make a co-created sculpture.

“*This was more than an art project. Having the time and space for creative experimentation and these conversations gave rise to seeds of ideas for further projects together that help explore our connections to nature and each other. We recognised the talent amongst the group and would like to help develop some of these project ideas and support some of the participants to facilitate more activities.*”
Deb McDonald, project lead.

The activities above were supported by investment in CoLab Dudley work by Arts Council England, Reaching Communities and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Brierley Hill Civic – Transforming a vibrant cultural hub in the heart of Brierley Hill

Amidst the bustling energy of Brierley Hill stands a grand building with a storied past and an even brighter future...

In early 2015, the Brierley Hill Civic faced an uncertain fate. Since Dudley CVS took on the day-to-day management of the Civic in February 2015, the venue has been transformed and reinvigorated with a new lease on life. It now draws in crowds with an impressive line-up of comedians, performers, and bands, both local and international.

Fast forward to March 2020, when Dudley CVS officially took ownership of the Civic through a formal asset transfer from Dudley Council. This move ensured the venue's continued operation as a vibrant community hub and live entertainment venue. Since day one, when we took on the Brierley Hill Civic's management, the aim has been to breathe new life into the venue, transforming it into a bustling centre of entertainment and community activities.

Beyond its entertainment offerings, Brierley Hill Civic has become a versatile space for various events. It hosts specialist shows, amateur dramatic performances, Soul & Motown nights, tribute shows, sporting events, and charity nights. The venue is also a highly-rated destination for Christmas parties and weddings.

We aim to encourage local artists, residents, and businesses to utilise the Civic to reflect local culture and talent. The Brierley Hill Civic showcases how proactive management and community spirit can transform and preserve historical venues into vibrant cultural hubs.



During 2023-2024, 255 public and private events, meetings and conferences were held.

Over 50,000 people visited during the year.

Find out more about Brierley Hill Civic:
www.dudleycvs.org.uk/community-venues/



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Dudley People's School for Climate Justice

Before this annual report year began, we'd been invited by the National Lottery Community Fund to submit a full proposal to their Climate Action Fund. They wanted to invest in work that could show how creating a deeper connection with nature leads to greater care for the environment, and how bringing nature back into the places we live and work can help communities reduce or adapt to the impacts of climate change.

We wanted to build on nature-based activities and curiosity about alternative futures that our CoLab Dudley team had seen emerging through collaborations with partners bringing different knowledge and practices to our work. All CoLab Dudley work builds on and learns from work which has come before. We had learning from the **More-Than-Human High Street** experiment developed by **Workshop 24**. We had observed local people interacting with and being inspired by ideas for regenerative futures generated by Birmingham City University architecture and design students we've worked with. Local people had been noticing ways that nature is and isn't present through Stories of Place explorations on Dudley High Street. And long-time collaborators, **Creart Collective CIC** shared a desire to explore permaculture design and land connection among migrant communities.

We read in some research that in Dudley our most vulnerable communities are at high risk from climate change. We also have natural habitats listed as being at high risk and very high risk from climate change. Thus, social justice and nature connection and care are critical. We saw an opportunity for hundreds of people across Dudley borough to share their ideas, skills and knowledge to respond to the climate crisis. And to reimagine the structures and systems which created both the climate crisis and the inequalities which people face every day.

We came up with the idea to initiate a community-led School for Climate Justice in which everyone is a teacher, and everyone is a learner.

In August 2024 we heard the great news that our partnership was being **awarded £578,000** to do just this.

So began some detailed work on our partnership. Creart Collective CIC decided to hand the part of the project they had developed on to **Ekho Collective CIC**. Ekho had also been developing work on connection to land with people historically removed from land by colonisation. This exploratory work, **Reclaiming our Roots** was supported by CoLab Dudley in 2023.

We found ourselves in a team of 8 collaborators. In winter 2023, before we started anything, we took time to connect around our work, our practices, qualities and skills, and some hands on making. By early 2024 we had developed learning and evaluation plans from our project plans, and were ready to invite local people to get involved.

www.dudleycvs.org.uk

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