

# FOREST VOLUNTARY ACTION FORUM

BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

---

**ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 2021/22**



“

---

ALONE, WE CAN DO SO  
LITTLE; TOGETHER, WE CAN  
DO SO MUCH.

HELEN KELLER  
AMERICAN AUTHOR

”

---



# CHAIR'S REPORT

---

**I am delighted to report on another year of amazing achievements at FVAF and the continued growth which enables us to provide the best possible support to communities.**

Whether it is the impact of a pandemic, war, poverty or the climate crisis, our dedicated team of staff and volunteers strive every day to make people's lives a little bit better and their voices a little louder.

FVAF's core purpose is to build stronger communities, and I can confidently say that we have made great progress on this journey. I am also proud of how the organisation has maintained its values and principles despite the pressures created through significant growth. We are here to support citizens to pursue the things that matter to them, and that will never change.

We understand that in times of need it is easy to take for granted those that go the extra mile to help others. As Trustees we take responsibility for the wellbeing of our staff and volunteers and acknowledge that as an infrastructure organisation we must become a trailblazer for better pay and working conditions. As well as making investments in existing capacity, we also welcomed six new members of staff to the team in a variety of different roles.

We also saw changes in the Board of Trustees, with Penny Hulbert, Di Martin, Louise Penny and Emily Timmins bringing a wide range of new skills, experiences and connections to the organisation. After several years as a member of staff and later a Trustee, Kate O'Keefe decided to stand down to spend more time with her family. We are grateful for her valuable contributions to the cause.

It has been an honour to Chair such a vibrant and successful organisation over the last three years and I'd encourage anyone else that shares our energy and our values to consider putting yourself forward for one of our two remaining vacancies on the board.

**SID PHELPS**

Hon Chair of FVAF

# CEO'S REPORT

---

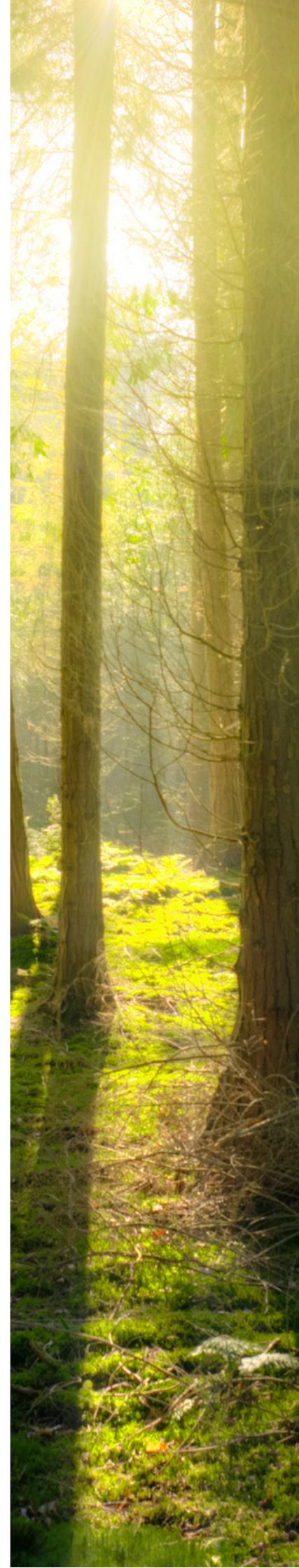
**Every year I seem to reflect on how FVAF and the country has gone through enormous adversity and, from an organisational perspective at least, come out the other end stronger.**

In a time of 'permacrisis' where the economy is the focus of most news items, it is easy to forget that it is in fact the 'core economy' of love, compassion and community that provides the vital foundations to a healthy society. It is an ongoing pleasure, now more so than ever, to see how we have contributed to some of the most resilient communities in the country.

As my role has evolved through the growth of the organisation, I have been lucky enough to connect with individuals, organisations, and services from across the country and beyond. This has provided valuable insight for the work we do and helped to put the Forest of Dean's voluntary and community sector on the map. What I have learned most though, is how unusual we are as a rural area in 2022 to have such significant voluntary sector infrastructure. I would go as far to say that we are perhaps the only area in the country that has significantly stronger voluntary sector infrastructure than pre 2010. To achieve this in a district which only receives 8% of Gloucestershire's charity income is quite remarkable. I am now asked on a very regular basis by a wide array of bodies about how they can set up a FVAF in their area.

Our involvement in strategic work across Gloucestershire has increased dramatically over the last 12 months. We were a leading member in the creation of Gloucestershire's volunteering strategy and supported the implementation of a memorandum of understanding between the VCS and Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group.

We continued to advocate for the sector at the Integrated Locality Partnership and Community Safety Partnership, and I was recently elected to the Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Partnership which is responsible for identifying and addressing health priorities across the county.



# CEO'S REPORT

---

My proudest achievement however was instigating Digital Divides, a cross sector group of influential people from across Gloucestershire with focus on identifying digital exclusion in a way that had never been done before. The Digital Divides report evidenced how some parts of the Forest of Dean are among the most digitally excluded in the country, and as a result have since been appropriately targeted with resources and support.

The recognition of our strategic value in Gloucestershire continues to grow as we also become more involved in reshaping commissioned services in a way which devolves power and resources to local community provision. For too long the Forest of Dean was the missing seat at the table in Gloucestershire, but now we are finally starting to drive the agenda.

6 years ago when we were offering to support community groups outside of Cinderford, people would often be reluctant to let us in, often asking "why would you help us without expecting something in return?". I learned very quickly that you could only travel at the speed of trust. Now fast forward to 2022 and we are actively supporting groups from Sedbury to Staunton, and in some cases even beyond the district.

I'd like to thank everyone that continues to make all of this possible. From our trustees that give us the support and trust to go out and pursue the things that matter to communities, to the staff and volunteers on the coalface that give their everything to the cause. I couldn't think of a better group of people to grow with and help grow. I'm privileged to be part of this amazing journey and I'm thankful for the people that I get to share it with.



**CHRIS BROWN**

Chief Executive Officer



# TREASURER'S REPORT

---

**The financial year ending March 2022 must be noted for the continued and increasing success of the organisation.**

From a financial point of view FVAF has proved that its services in the charitable sector are respected and appreciated by donors and the colleagues and beneficiaries we serve. The total funds received during the year were £730,774. [In the year 2021 £338,367 - an increase of 116%].

Expenditure increased by 90% which indicates a careful management of resources.

The total funds carried forward were £339,181 unrestricted funds and £239,061 restricted totalling £578,242 an increase of 139% over the previous year.

However, the economic situation in the UK becomes ever more challenging and while FVAF moves forwards the management team and trustees are ever aware of the need for careful use of the funds given by other bodies. The new premises will be a welcome expansion of working space and gives the organisation a higher profile in the community, but they also come with additional challenges of a financial and organisational nature. Our staff numbers increase to manage current and future needs and we have been able not only to meet the additional costs but have been able to offer suitable salary increases to meet the inflationary situation in which we find ourselves.

Since March 2022 the pace of activities has not slowed. As the AGM will take place in our new premises it will offer attendees proof of the success of the organisation and its confidence in the future. The organisational infrastructure that we have slowly built up has also helped to present some substantial opportunities for our Forest communities which may be coming to fruition in the near future. New opportunities offer new challenges, and the management and trustees are aware that control of financing future expansion is increasingly vital in the current national situation; our services have never been more necessary in offering support to those most affected by inflation of the cost of living and foreseeable recession.

We would like to thank the following funders for supporting us over the last 12 months:

Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group, Heritage Lottery, Barnwood Trust, National Lottery Community Fund, European Social Fund, KW BELL Group, Co-op Foundation, Cinderford Town Council, Coleford Town Council, Feeding Britain, Youth Music Fund, Children in Need.

Trustees are satisfied that all known liabilities are affordable.

**JONATHAN GAULT**

Treasurer

# FVAF ACCOUNTS 2021/22

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

### INCOME

INCOME - CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES	YEAR TO 31.03.2022	YEAR TO 31.03.2021
FODDC SLA	£13,500	£13,500
TRAINING	£630	£700
FORESTERS' FOREST	£36,318	£19,656
PROJECT GRANTS	£636,447	£247,647
OFFICE SHARE & SERVICES	£4,600	£4,514
DONATIONS & MISCELLANEOUS INCOME	£108	£7,018
SUBSCRIPTIONS	£10	£10
JOB RETENTION SCHEME & KICKSTART	£39,158	£45,314
DEPOSIT ACCOUNT INTEREST	£3	£8
<b>TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES</b>	<b>£730,774</b>	<b>£338,367</b>

### EXPENDITURE

EXPENDITURE	YEAR TO 31.03.2022	YEAR TO 31.03.2021
SALARIES AND NIC	£269,520	£160,774
EMPLOYERS PENSIONS	£2,052	£4,370
RENT & RATES	£7,918	£7,356
INSURANCE	£421	£338
PRINTING, POSTAGE & STATIONERY	£2,415	£1,219
TELECOMMUNICATIONS & DATA COSTS	£2,310	£3,034
ACCOUNTANCY FEES	£864	£792
SUNDRY EXPENSES	£1,765	£1,766
PROJECT EXPENDITURE	£107,381	£27,801
<b>TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>	<b>£394,646</b>	<b>£207,450</b>
<b>NET INCOME / (EXPENDITURE)</b>	<b>£336,128</b>	<b>£130,917</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>£578,242</b>	<b>£242,114</b>

# PROJECTS OVERVIEW

As decided by our members in 2020, FVAF currently has four key strategic aims:

- Establish a **positive presence** and reputation throughout the Forest of Dean
- Support **stronger, resilient** and **sustainable communities**
- Establish 'what works', tell the stories and **demonstrate** the **value** of strong communities across the country
- **Build capacity** with the focus of facilitating productive conversations with communities

Over the coming pages is a brief review of just some of the projects that FVAF have continued to deliver on over the past year in order to help achieve some of these aims. We have also included some of our other exciting projects for you to look out for in the future!



## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

*"It has enabled our organisation to establish a positive profile in the community and work with like-minded people who are all for the good of the community. I learn something new at each meeting plus able to help others too."*

Member of KYP Network

*"A massive thank you to you and everyone that made the Forest Volunteer Awards such a wonderful event. It was awe inspiring to hear all the achievements of the many inspirational people that help and support our local communities. We were honoured to be part of such a marvellous event."*

Attendee at Forest Volunteer Awards

*"We are very grateful to FVAF for including our child in the HAF scheme. She has benefitted in confidence from meeting different children. Thank you."*

Parent (Ukrainian Refugee family)



# VOLUNTEERING

We are grateful to the Forest of Dean District Council who continue to provide us with a Service Level Agreement to:

- **Run the Volunteer Centre for the Forest of Dean.**
- **Provide advice and support to community groups.**

In a typical year we **support around 1000 volunteers** (individually and within organisations) and are available to **support over 800 community groups** in a variety of ways.

## Volunteering Opportunities

We continue to advertise volunteering roles and help organisations to recruit to roles on a weekly basis. We are now presenting this in a more visually appealing way by creating adverts for each role. Our social media is a valuable tool in promoting roles. The new Volunteering Newsletter has been sent out every few weeks with a summary of available roles sent directly to our growing mailing list who are specifically interested in volunteering news. We are developing this newsletter to also include:

- Useful information for volunteers
- Training information
- Profiles of local groups and organisations
- Volunteer case studies

## Placing Individual Volunteers

This year we have directly worked with around 400 volunteers to help them find voluntary roles, more information or to signpost. We are committed to an individual response for each volunteer. Some may just need some information, or an initial contact set up, but we give what support is needed for each case through our person-centred approach.

FVAF have been investigating the possible provision of **DBS checks for volunteers** in local groups and organisations. We have gathered information from around 20 groups who initially need support and are developing a programme to give 1-2-1 input around individual and organisational safeguarding.

## [www.GoVolunteerGlos.org](http://www.GoVolunteerGlos.org)

We have supported the development of the new countywide 'Go Volunteering' website which will fill the role that the 'Do It' website used to – but in a much better way. It is clever and intuitive and should allow organisations to connect roles with potential volunteers (and vice versa) in a beneficial way. We are promoting the website to all local organisations and volunteers that we encounter. Take up is slow, and we are planning further presentations, support sessions and 1-2-1's to gradually increase the use of it. 'Go Volunteering' is a fantastic tool to help us promote roles and place individual volunteers in a more streamlined way.

## Organisational Support

FVAF provided a variety of support to local groups including:

- support with calling AGM's
- guidance on review and creation of Constitutions
- funding advice and signposting
- supporting individuals who want to start (and restart) new community groups
- helping groups to find suitable venues for activities
- advice on Terms of Reference
- policy templates and advice
- review and creation of Constitutions
- advice on governance structures
- Lease advice
- Insurance and Public Liability support
- Help talks to groups
- Safeguarding

# VOLUNTEERING WIDER DEVELOPMENT

In April 2022, Deb Cook moved from Co-ordinating Foresters' Forest to be Volunteering Manager. Having a member of staff dedicated to running our volunteering function has allowed us to build further on what we do in this area:

- Integrating volunteering with all the other work that FVAF does, such as Community Hubs.
- Promoting and develop youth volunteering, through the Volunteer Awards, identifying volunteering opportunities open to young people and through links with the Forest Youth Association.
- Developing business links through the Forest Economic Business Partnership to look at new ways for companies to fulfil corporate social responsibility. We are developing an offer to businesses with a variety of different volunteering routes for staff which can support personal development as well as strengthening local volunteering.
- Celebrating and sharing volunteering stories.

## FOREST VOLUNTEER AWARDS

**This year we rebranded and relaunched our volunteer awards.** Created to recognise and celebrate the amazing efforts of volunteers in the Forest of Dean, local people were asked to nominate those volunteer heroes who have demonstrated exceptional and outstanding support to the local community over the past 12 months. The response was amazing and FVAF received hundreds of nominations. An expert panel had the tough task of shortlisting the nominations and picking the winners. However, one category - Volunteer of the Year - Peoples' Champion - was decided by a public vote with almost 900 votes cast.

We introduced new categories - New Volunteer of the Year and Young Volunteer of the Year, alongside the existing ones, to help encourage and celebrate new and younger volunteers.

Winners were crowned at an inspiring and energetic celebration evening held at the AccXel Training Centre in Cinderford.

For the first time, local businesses were approached to provide sponsorship and thanks to the generous amount we received, we were able to host a special event to honour local volunteers. Our main sponsor was local construction company the KW Bell Group, who also donated the venue for free. Other local businesses who provided sponsorship included Hot Tubs Rock, Versarien and The Midcounties Co- Operative.

We asked local dignitaries to present each award including Roger Deeks (Deputy Chief Lieutenant of Gloucestershire), Andy Lewis MBE, Yvonne and Nicola Bell, and Neill Ricketts (CEO, Versarien) as an extra way of spreading the message about the importance of volunteering. The evening was expertly hosted by Kate Clark from BBC Radio Gloucestershire and was covered extensively by the Review, Dean Radio and BBC Radio Gloucestershire. Our Award winners were delighted, and the evening was a great start in elevating the status of volunteering in the Forest.



# COMMUNITY HUBS

---

**Following on from the Digital Hub that was first trialled in Bream 2021, funding was secured via Gloucestershire County Council's Digital Innovation Fund to further develop and roll out "Hubs" in community spaces across 10-15 locations within the Forest of Dean.**

The funds have enabled the evolution from Digital Hubs to a Community Hub model, with its primary offer being digital support. Alongside digital support, each hub provides holistic support to communities. This includes, but is not exclusive to, employability support, service hand holding, energy saving/debt advice, connecting people to community groups and volunteer brokerage.

Across the locations trialled we have received over 450 visitors and engagements in just 12 months. The person-centred approach and focus on establishing safe, trusting environments, has allowed for many great success stories to be captured.

With the Hubs' success and their growing reputation, it has brought about many opportunities to co-facilitate drop-ins with third party organisations. These special sessions were set up to capture voices of the community on important topics, and to provide bespoke support on things such as, energy saving, cost of living and debt management. These third-party organisations include Carers Hub, Severn Wye Energy, Two Rivers Housing and Healthwatch Gloucestershire.

## ANGELA'S STORY

Coleford Community Hub attendee

“

*I have been attending for about nine months now and it has helped me such a lot since I lost my husband nearly seven years come December. It has helped me build up my confidence a lot because I lost my confidence after I lost my husband and also when going through the lock down my confidence was at an all-time low. Seeing Alex and Illyana has helped me build up my confidence again and I am very grateful to have them for that and I would like to thank Alex and Illyana for helping me by getting the funding to get this iPad for me and for teaching me how to use it.*

”



# DIGITAL HUBS (GLOUCESTERSHIRE)

---



**The Digital Hubs development project is a joint venture between Gloucestershire County council and the Forest Voluntary Action Forum that was formed in early 2022.**

First trialled in the Forest of Dean, The Digital Hub model provides community builders and other resources to support residents and groups to access technology and improve their digital literacy. The main aim of the Digital Hubs is to create a 'front door' to supporting people to access technology and improving their digital literacy in a safe, supportive, and social way.

From the evidenced success in the Forest of Dean, we are now developing the model countywide by identifying suitable Community Partners in each district to co-produce digital hubs, that are bespoke to their locality.

To date we have been successful in finding Community Partners for Gloucester, Stroud and Tewkesbury. These are made up of, Gloucester Community Building Collective and GL Communities for Gloucester, GL11 and Creative Sustainability for Stroud and Priors Park Neighbourhood Project and Brockworth Link in Tewkesbury. The next phase of the project is to identify and select Community Partners for the Cotswolds and Cheltenham which is aimed to be achieved by March 2023.

Alongside identifying and selecting Community Partners - extensive work has been ongoing in developing a Digital Inclusion Toolkit to support the facilitation and delivery of Digital Hubs across Gloucestershire. To host these tools and resources, a website has been created- <http://www.gloucestershire-digital-hubs.co.uk/>. Alongside the purpose of hosting resources, the website has purposely been set-up to create awareness of Digital Exclusion in Gloucestershire, the Digital Hubs projects aims, values, aspirations, and to guide communities and professionals to where their nearest Digital Hub is.

A county wide Digital Hubs forum is being created, bringing together Community Partners and Stakeholders to work, learn, share and develop Digital Hubs together.

## WALKING WITH WHEELS

---

**The Walking with Wheels project continued to go from strength to strength during this last year with well over 200 people, both local-residents and visitors to the Forest of Dean, accessing the forest using the all-terrain mobility scooters (Trampers)**

Located at Forest Holidays in Christchurch and the Speech House Hotel, we are extremely grateful to the Forest of Dean Ramblers and Barnwood Trust for their generous funding to enable the Trampers to continue to operate through until at least March 2025.

# COMMUNITY CONNECTORS FORUM/ KNOW YOUR PATCH

**This year has been a busy one for the CCF/KYP network. We have had our regular fortnightly meetings as well as our first in-person gathering since the start of the pandemic.**

The structure of the meetings evolved organically in response to the needs of those attending. As more groups asked to lead discussions about projects they were developing, or groups were looking for information from those working in certain areas, we built this into the programme.

To date we have run 64 meetings, equating to over 3,000 cumulative hours. There have been 1,469 cumulative attendees and over 300 separate groups and organisations represented. Achievements include:

- Achieving better allocated and a more collaborative approaches to funding
- Mutual Aid co-ordination
- Supporting New Groups
- Development of a Sustainable Food Network
- Holiday Activities and Food Programme
- Sharing stories
- Feeding into the Countywide Volunteering Strategy
- Supporting the Ukraine Appeal
- Helping with DBS checks and Safeguarding
- Development of Community Hubs
- Digital Inclusion Mapping

Our first in-person event looked at the work of the CCF/KYP network, the evolution of the FVAF Digital Hubs and the work of the Community Wellbeing Service in the Forest - the latter delivered by Gary Deighton and his team at the District Council. We also had a focus on Health and Wellbeing - being aware many had suffered to some degree through the pandemic and the need to encourage members to be mindful of this. We ended the event by providing attendees with a taste of activities that they might use to help in difficult times.

The format of the second event (November 2022) was based around networking and delivering information about support available to those in need, as they navigate their way through the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Members asked to have the opportunity to see what other organisations are doing or offering - enabling them to either signpost or look at developing partnerships.

We continue to have a good attendance at the online meetings, and we still have a regular flow of new inquiries from people who hear about our work and ask to join us - and we are delighted that the word continues to spread.



# GEM

## GOING THE EXTRA MILE



**The GEM (Going the Extra Mile) Project supports unemployed people from Gloucestershire where they are struggling with more traditional routes into education, training or employment.**

Funded by the National Lottery, it has been a successful partnership of over 30 organisations in Gloucestershire.

FVAF has taken feedback from 40 GEM Participants from the Forest of Dean since our involvement in 2020. Some worked with us for a few weeks, some for over a year depending on their needs and circumstances. We have been struck by the skills and strengths of GEM participants, as well as a recurring theme of their confidence having been 'chipped away' over the years, often related to mental health issues. 90% of participants have cited the most helpful thing being 1:1 support and confidence building. The project has therefore been invaluable to people who may struggle with traditional recruitment methods or government employment schemes.

When the project closes in December, 80% (32/40) of participants will have graduated from the project with a positive and meaningful outcome: either moving from being 'economically inactive' to active job searching; landing a job; or enrolled onto an accredited education course or apprenticeship. 37% (15) have also taken up volunteering, towards confidence and skills development.

Building on lessons from the GEM project for 2023, FVAF hopes to further integrate our employment and volunteering support into our existing Community Hub, as part of the new countywide Employment and Skills Hub Outreach Project (ESHO).

## VICKY'S STORY

Vicky\*, unemployed, wanted to start work to boost her finances, her confidence, and her independence. Because of challenges related to childhood trauma, mental health and learning difficulties this was a big step for Vicky.

Vicky was introduced to the GEM Project at one of our Community Drop-Ins. Cathy (GEM Navigator) supported Vicky through tailor-made 1:1 sessions. As a result, Vicky was supported to apply for and secure a job as a midday supervisor at a local school. Vicky says that having a 1:1 coach helped her get her first ever job. She feels way more confident in her life in general.

\* Name changed





## KICKSTART

**FVAF signed up to the Government funded Kickstart programme**, which encouraged employers to take on young people up to the age of 24, to give them 6 months employment in the work environment so they have experience on their CV's, enhancing their employability, and to give them an understanding of the basic skills required in the workplace.

Through the Kickstart Scheme we recruited 6 young people into various roles. All local to the Forest of Dean, meaning we encouraged and supporting local employment.

During this time, we offered training and support, experience of the roles they applied for, and lots of other skills to make it possible for them to carry out their roles.

Of our 6 'Kickstarters', 3 were offered extended contacts, of which two, Courtney and Illyana remain with us today as Youth and Community Builders. The third person, Jack, has progressed to a career within the Probation Service.

Through funding from the Kickstart scheme and the outstanding skills and dedication of the young people, FVAF were able expand and increase our delivery on many projects, especially Community Drop-in Sessions, the HAF programme and Youth engagement work.

## HOLIDAY ACTIVITY AND FOOD PROGRAMME

Following an approach from Gloucestershire County Council in 2021, we became involved in discussions to support the distribution of food to Children and Young People in receipt of free school meals during the school holidays through the HAF programme which is the Department for Education's response to the lobbying from professional footballer Marcus Rashford. FVAF undertook the role of District lead for the Forest of Dean during Easter 2021 and the success of our actions led to a much wider role throughout the remainder of 2021 and into 2022. **We have now secured the role of District Lead for 3 years**, and the project has grown into something many families look forward to every school holiday. This summer we provided over 3362 activity spaces and had an overwhelmingly positive response and many touching responses from families who may not have been able to have days out together otherwise.

## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY FOOD

**We have continued our work in this area over the last 12 months supporting a number of local groups and organisations in a variety of ways.** These have included, but are not limited to, re-distribution of supermarket surplus food, provision of food hampers, support with governance for community gardens, facilitation of a sustainable community food network, and representing the Forest of Dean on the Feeding Gloucestershire network board.

# COLEFORD SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT



**In the last year the Forest Youth Association has continued to build trusting relationships, and rapport with children and young people across Coleford. As part of a service level agreement with Coleford Town Council, Alex and Illyana from our community team have:**

Achieved over 440 engagements during conversations and targeted activities. This strong engagement has been a lynchpin in creating opportunities to connect with young people in order to address the reported anti-social behaviour that is perceived by the wider public. A continuation and development of the "Thursday Music and Chill Night" at Bells Field Skate Park has played a pivotal role in laying foundations of a safe, trusting environment for people as young as 9 to attend. The success of Thursday night sessions, and regular outreach walkabouts around the town can be measured from the continual increase of engagement week on week. With multiple sessions topping 30+ engagements it demonstrates that the reputation and trust of Forest Youth Association is spreading organically. To celebrate the positivity the team put on a HAF Pizza Party during August which was attended by 20+ people. Despite the poor weather it was an amazing evening and was well received by the young people and families that were present.

The Forest Youth Association continue to play an indispensable role within Coleford and its unique ability to conduct open, honest conversations with young people, raising the many issues relating to anti-social behaviour. Insight, views and aspirations of young people are continuously being captured and shared across multiple agencies. This insight and feedback loop is crucial in our collective aims to reduce anti-social behaviour such as, graffiti, underage drinking, and the smoking of drugs in public spaces.

## YOUTH MUSIC

**This new project for FVAF commenced in the summer of 2021 with in excess of 200 young people sharing their voice about the Forest of Dean music scene, what it means to them, how they access it, and what they would like to see more of. This helped us to cocreate a programme of events and activities which included:**

- Two Under 18 year old live events - one held at Ritmo Coleford and the other at The Wesley in Cinderford. These events attracted over 400 young people, included 15 young people in the organisation and promotion, and welcomed performances from a number of younger musicians.
- Supporting Coleford Music Festival in a number of ways including site build, sound and lighting production, stage management, volunteer stewarding, booking of artists and over 20 young people directly performing at the event.

As this project continues into its second year our priorities are to strengthen the links with local music-based events, and to work with existing youth centre provision to provide lessons and taster sessions to music making, working with partners such as The Music Works.

**FVAF have co-ordinated the volunteering for the Foresters' Forest Heritage Lottery programme over the past 7 years - first during the development stage (2014-17) and then during the delivery from 2017 to 2022. The main purpose of the programme was to educate and involve more people in the cultural, natural, and built heritage of the Forest of Dean. We have worked closely with Forestry England and a great number of other local organisations to support and monitor the involvement of volunteers.**

The programme came to an end in March 2022. Volunteering was one of the central ways of engaging people with Foresters' Forest. It's been incredibly successful, and we have some impressive outcomes to celebrate:

There have been more than 1,000 (unique) people volunteering their time over the duration of the programme. Volunteers have collectively spent over 38,000 hours supporting Foresters' Forest projects and that contribution adds up to a staggering value of £842,000 of volunteer time. This is nearly double the initial target of £474,000.

Individual volunteers have contributed significantly. The Foresters' Forest awards scheme presented badges and certificates for 50, 200 and 500 hours. We have given out around 150 of these, with several volunteers giving more than 500 hours of their time.

As the programme ended, we worked to facilitate a smooth transition for the many volunteers involved. Two thirds (26/38) of the Foresters' Forest projects were able to continue independently and many volunteers have been transferred across to be supported by a variety of local organisations such as Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Forestry England and The Rewild Project.

With the help of Foresters' Forest legacy funding, FVAF were able to produce the 'Volunteering in the Forest' Guide, which contains detailed information about a huge range of local volunteering opportunities. We also started a new 'Volunteering Newsletter' which regularly sends out details of new volunteering opportunities to a mailing list of 600+ local people. These tools have been invaluable in helping former Foresters' Forest and other potential volunteers into new roles.

FVAF have been instrumental in ensuring that the online legacy of Foresters' Forest has not been lost. We have taken on the monitoring of the website and Facebook page for the programme and remain as the main contact for anyone who is interested in the work of Foresters' Forest, to link them to continuing projects.

Our organisation is also actively involved in the development of 'Our Forest in Future', led by the Forest of Dean Verderers, to look at what can be developed from the many achievements of Foresters' Forest. At the first day exploring this in July, we presented and led discussions on how to engage diverse and marginalised groups of people, as well as young people in looking after the heritage and nature of the Forest.



# LOOKING FORWARD

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VEHICLE

Thanks to funding received from the Children in Need Youth Investment Fund earlier in the year, FVAF have now been able to purchase, respray and completely brand a Community Engagement Vehicle to support community activity in the Forest of Dean. The vehicle will serve as a mobile Youth Space, a DigiHub and also give FVAF and community partners a strong presence at events and in town and village centres across the Forest of Dean. If anyone is interested in partnering with FVAF in using the Community Engagement Vehicle please contact Nick Penny, Projects Manager via [projects@fvaf.org.uk](mailto:projects@fvaf.org.uk).



## MOBILE DIGIHUBS

Since receiving funding from round 3 of GCC's Digital Innovation Fund, we have started the preparation and planning for FVAF's Community Engagement Vehicle / Mobile Digital Hub to be taken to areas within the district that have been identified as being most at risk of being digitally excluded, and that lack community spaces to facilitate and run our Community Hubs.

Positive conversations with stakeholders and partner organisations are taking place, exploring key locations based on Digital Divides research for target support in communities.

The vehicle is now fully branded and is equipped on board with laptops donated from IT Schools for Africa. The next focus is securing Wifi connectivity via new innovative solutions to ensure internet signal can be received in even the most rural, isolated spaces which reputationally have zero mobile internet signal. with the aim to have communities accessing mobile support from early 2023.

## LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS

A big part of what we do at FVAF is listen to what people want and one of the things that has come up a few times from young people is an opportunity to learn the skills they need for when they leave home, such as cooking, budgeting, how to heat their homes effectively, how to support their friends with mental health, etc.

After successful funding, we have recently launched the pilot of our Lifeskills workshops from CANDI in Cinderford aimed at 15- to 17-year-olds. The aims of the sessions are to make meals and have meaningful conversation around the table and invite guest speakers where necessary. This is because we want the sessions to be relevant, meaningful, relaxed and engaging and to achieve this we want to make sure they are not delivered in a classroom environment/style. The sessions will be shaped by what the young people feel they need and what is relevant to them and the current affairs impacting their lives.

If successful, and as always, funding dependent, we would like to roll out to other areas of the Forest of Dean. Working with youth clubs to make this possible and in the long-term empowering them to take the sessions on.

# LOOKING FORWARD

## FOREST COMPASS

The first edition of this directory of community activities was extremely well received by the community and has been an invaluable tool for local people. This year we have been in regular contact with local groups and services to monitor the progress in terms of restarting of clubs and activities. We are now at a stage where a reprint of the 'Forest Compass' booklet is needed. We will be gathering information from as many local contacts as possible over the coming weeks ready to print the new version of the guide in March 2023.

## COLEFORD WELCOME GROUP

This Project is funded by Gloucestershire County Council and overseen by Active Impact. It seeks to address education and training setting concerns that many disabled young people leave without having established links in their local community. It is piloting two new ways of working in Gloucestershire: a) Pathways, which provides disabled young people with trained mentors via Young Gloucestershire and b) Welcome Groups, where people from a local community can meet and make connections. FVAF was commissioned to trial a Welcome Group. There is a second one in Stroud, and potentially a third to be started in Gloucester.

FVAF staff were supported to learn the methodology to be used, through a training video and support from Inclusive Solutions. Learning from young people, FVAF staff also met with 10 Gloucestershire College (Cinderford Campus) students who advised on the food, music, and activities for the Welcome Group.

## LILY'S STORY

Lilly\* is a young person from Coleford. Lilly loves art, magic tricks, power rangers and making friends. Lilly has autism and can find new situations challenging. Lilly and her mother were introduced to the Coleford Welcome Group via our Coleford Community Hub and a Social Prescriber who had heard about it at the Community Connectors Forum. Lilly has been coming to the Welcome Group with her Mum. Lilly enjoyed the music, snacks and facilitated chat. She enjoyed the circle discussion where we exchange good news, wants and offers and learning what's on in the local community. As a result, Lilly has agreed with the Social Prescriber that she is ready to come to the Welcome Group on her own. This is a big step forward, for Lilly's independence.  
\* name changed



# WE'RE ON THE MOVE!

## New community space in the heart of Cinderford

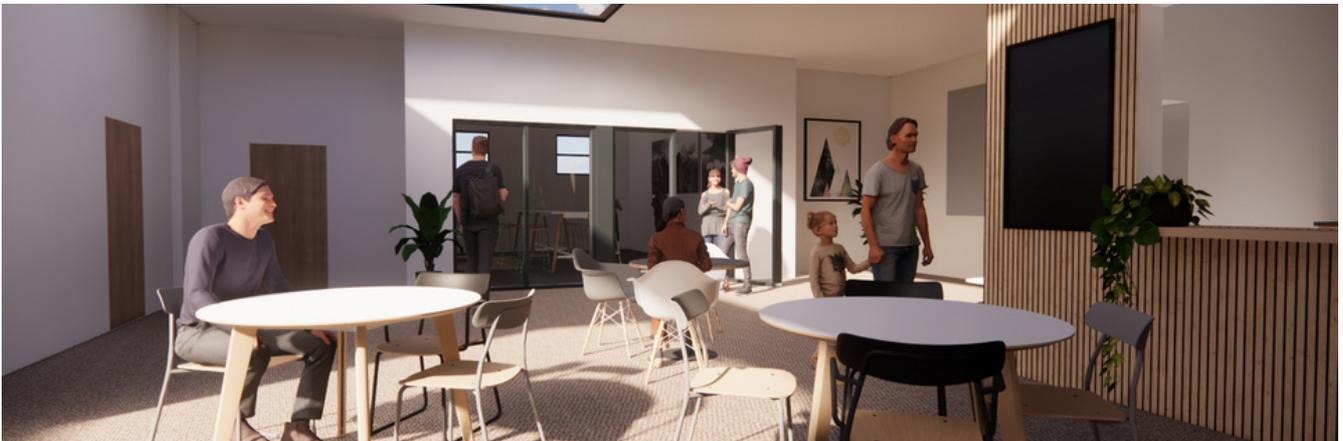
Possibly our largest project to date – the refurbishment of the former Dockham Road Health Centre into a centrally located multi use community space for Cinderford. The community space will bring together organisations such as the NHS, Citizens Advice, CCP, Ice Creates and FVAF around welcoming community spaces including a digital suite, training rooms and in time a Community Café and community garden space.

Work is already underway on the building, with the intention for Phase 1 to be complete, allowing for us and our partners to start occupying the space before the end of the year.



## PHASE 2: Draft visuals

Exciting plans are in development to transform the look and feel of the centre and create a vibrant, welcoming space for the whole community to enjoy.



# RECOGNITION OF OUR WORK

Over the last 12 months, FVAF have once again been recognised through the work that we undertake.

## GEM GREEN IMPACT GOLD AWARD

2021 - 22 was a very successful year for our efforts on the project. We matched our feat of the previous year by achieving the "Gold" standard in the overall programme, as well as winning special awards for "Community Action" and "Participation Engagement" and being Highly Commended for "Innovation for Engagement".

The team worked brilliantly together and as individuals. We believe that everyone has gained some benefit, however small, from being part of the project. The influence of the project on our thinking as an organisation is evident from the Corporate Social Responsibility Policy that has evolved over the last few months. This was highlighted in our completion of the project last year - we didn't have one at that time - and FVAF felt it important to develop this as an organisation, to help lead the field.

One aspect of Green Impact was to be mindful of Health and Wellbeing of employees - and over the course of the project, FVAF held two staff development days with Health and Wellbeing as a focus. These were thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended and eyed with envy by those who were not able to be there!

Our participation in the project has also helped inform the planning of the refurbishment and development of our new offices. Indeed, had we had more capacity, and been a little further forward with the renovation, we may have been able to be put ourselves forward for consideration for another award - but we were commended for the work that we were doing, our consideration for the climate, and our approach to be as sustainable as possible in what we do.



## INCLUSIVITY AWARD/ DISABILITY COMMITTED EMPLOYER

The Gloucestershire Inclusive Employer Award recognises employers who are committed to building an inclusive culture where diverse groups of people can come to work, feeling valued and confident to be themselves. Gloucestershire Inclusive Employers believe every person should have the opportunity to engage in meaningful work. They lead by example offering employment opportunities to people facing barriers to work.

As a team, we have used the Disability Confident Scheme (Level1) award and the Inclusivity Works scheme, to think about how we move forward as an inclusive employer. As a result, team members have told us they are more confident to talk about their own needs as well as support others; and it has given us greater confidence to encourage others to seek the benefits of diversity and inclusion in their own organisations.



## COMMUNITY RESPONSE UKRAINIAN CRISIS

**At the beginning of 2022, news of the devastating impact of the Ukrainian War reached the UK.**

Our wonderful community wanted to help, so we jumped into action and led in co-ordinating **donations of vital essentials** for Ukrainian people fleeing their homes.

The response and generosity from across the Forest of Dean was staggering. Mountains of goods were donated at the district-wide drop-in locations, which we set up with the help of our many partners.

Such was the response, we reached out to the community to ask for volunteers to help us collect, sort and pack the donations – a HUGE thank you to everyone who gave up their time to help us, to help the Ukrainian people.

In total over **200 boxes of supplies were transported** to Poland and were distributed to camps and institutions near the border.

The community effort was also recognised by the local press who widely reported on the generosity and kind actions of local people.



# **BIG THANK YOU TO...**

## **FVAF Trustees during the year**

Sid Phelps – Chair

Penny Hulbert – Vice Chair

Simon Murray – Vice Chair

Jonathan Gault – Treasurer

Roger Deeks

Diane Martin

Bob Rhodes

Christopher Walker

Graham Morgan

Louise Penny

Emily Timmins

Kate O'Keefe

## **Observers**

Cllr Bernie O'Neill



BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

# FOREST VOLUNTARY ACTION FORUM

---



[fvaf.org.uk](http://fvaf.org.uk)



[contact@fvaf.org.uk](mailto:contact@fvaf.org.uk)



01594 822073



[@ForestVoluntaryActionForum](https://www.facebook.com/ForestVoluntaryActionForum)

