



2023

Impact Report





Tom Gaskin
CEO and Founder

Community strength in the face of adversity

“ I am pleased to present our 2023 Impact Report to you. Reflecting on the past year, it’s hard to ignore the challenges we faced with the threat of possible eviction from our headquarters, which also houses our Shoebox Community Hub and the historic underground ‘hidden street.’ Nonetheless, this report serves as a powerful reminder that our journey was not solely defined by these challenges. While it was undoubtedly a tough and concerning period for everyone involved, it showcased the remarkable strength and resilience of both our community and organisation.

This report is jam-packed with moving stories and positive outcomes that highlight the difference our community makes every day. It’s been exciting to see the Shoebox community continue to grow, welcoming new members to the team and embracing fresh collaborations and partnerships to reach and support more people and communities. As always, I am incredibly grateful to everyone who has helped to make this possible and look forward to continuing to increase our impact together.

“ I am always blown away by the volume of impact, growth, resilience and dedication our community, volunteers, supporters and staff bring to our organisation.

2023 was a year of highs like expanding our community to the wonderful town of Great Yarmouth and welcoming new team members to lows like the uncertainty around our flagship community hub’s lease. Whatever the news, challenge or celebration, our community has trusted us to continue working towards our vision, enacting our mission and doing the vital work that means we will still be here in years to come.

I’d like to say a massive thank you to every single person who has been through our doors or supported our mission - and there are a record number of you!



Willow Farrell
Operations Manager

2023

About us



The Shoebox Enterprises CIC is a social enterprise dedicated to empowering people to connect with their communities and lead fulfilling lives. We have been running for eight years and are committed to creating environments that foster community cohesion, personal growth, and shared experiences.

At The Shoebox, we believe in the power of community. Life is richer when people **discover, laugh and grow together**. Through our projects and community hub, we support access to opportunities for people to form connections, develop skills, and find fulfilment in shared endeavours.



We currently operate across Norwich and Great Yarmouth and our flagship Shoebox community hub on Castle Meadow, Norwich, offers a welcoming space for community groups and activities, running on a “pay what you can” model.

Our social enterprise model

Our profits, and a range of contracts and grants, support:



Growing and empowering the Shoebox community in Norwich and Great Yarmouth.

Enabling members to engage with and develop a range of community groups, activities and volunteer opportunities.

Delivering community projects and building partnerships to help strengthen communities and enable people to realise their potential.

Delivering a range of unique guided tours and experiences through The Shoebox Experiences including our famous ‘hidden street’ tours in Norwich.

We also offer team development days, school packages and meeting spaces.

Why



We believe life is better when we have meaningful connections, shared experiences and opportunities to **discover, laugh and grow together.**

Vision



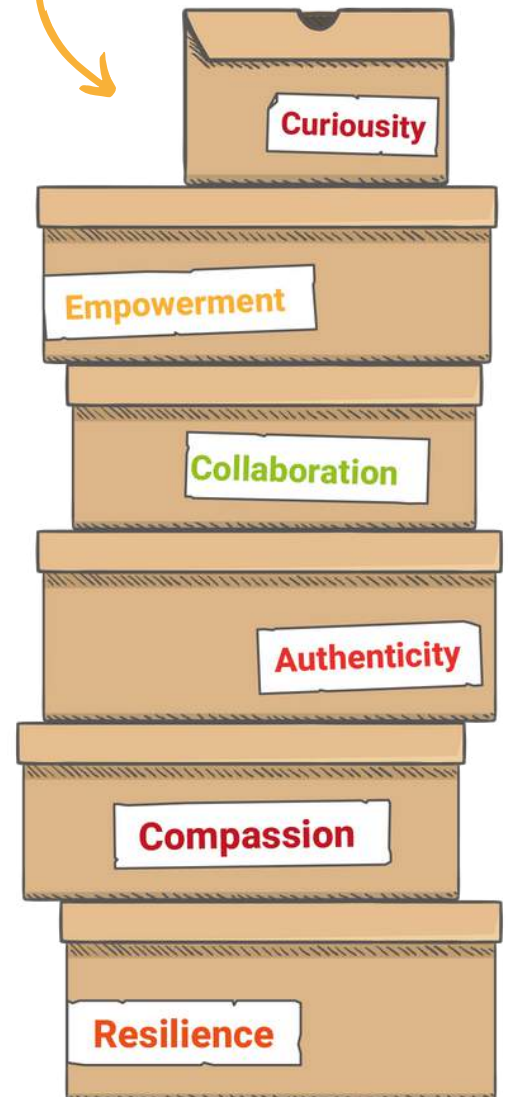
Leading the way in creating inspiring, supportive and entrepreneurial solutions to build resilient communities and empower people to make their mark on the world.

Mission



Empowering people to connect with their communities and lead fulfilling lives.

Values



Our year in numbers...



Members spent over 6,200 hours participating in community groups, activities and volunteer roles



6 new community projects launched

24 supported work experience placements hosted



Members visited community groups and activities over 3,450 times!



400 community events and activities hosted

Over £5,000 worth of tours and experiences donated to charity fundraisers and the wider community



1,500+ community conversations facilitated



6 new Advisory Group members recruited



Over 500 Stuff Hub items loaned for community events & projects



Over 12,500 tickets sold for tours and experiences



360 Community members



Over 1,000 5 star reviews for The Shoebox Experiences



Worked with 4 new partners



7 new staff members recruited

The Shoebox Community Norwich

The Shoebox on Castle Meadow, Norwich is our flagship community hub. In 2023, our community membership grew substantially. Members are finding us through a number of different ways such as word of mouth, social media and external referrals, highlighting the strong reputation we have established.

Our Shoebox code of conduct, which was developed with our community, sets out the expected behaviour of all members and ensures everyone contributes in helping to ensure The Shoebox offers a friendly, welcoming space for all.

We host and support a wide range of community groups and activities. We have something for everybody, from coffee mornings and a board game group to sessions to try out creative writing, baking and so much more!



"Because of The Shoebox, I am more confident in myself and have gotten involved in my community much more!"

Our community model relies on members sharing their time, skills and interests to support the running of community groups and activities. In 2024, we hope to secure funding to recruit a Community Kickstarter to work alongside community members and groups to strengthen our offering and to help build the capacity of our members to participate at a level that is right for them. We also want to explore how we can increase diversity and support more evening and weekend groups to reach more people.

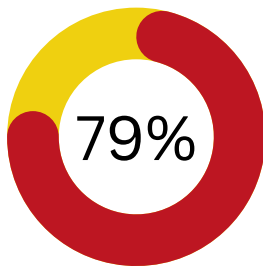


In 2023, our hub celebrated it's second birthday with our fantastic community!

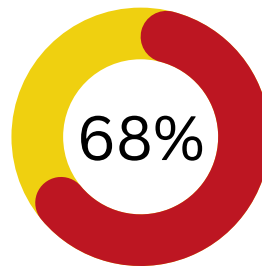
Member feedback

As our Shoebox community continues to grow and more people attend and support the running of groups and activities, we're continually exploring different ways to measure our impact effectively. One method we've adopted is our quarterly members' feedback survey. We know that surveys aren't for everyone, so we also capture stories of impact through conversations and observations, but it's a helpful way to encourage reflection and to gain a snapshot of how our community is feeling.

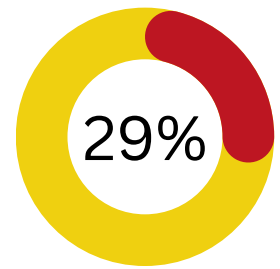
When asked "Over the last three months, because of the Shoebox Community I have...."



of members said they made new connections and friendships



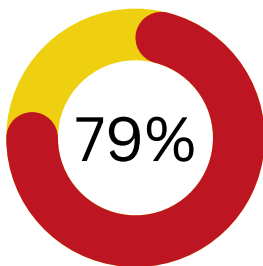
of members said they increased in confidence



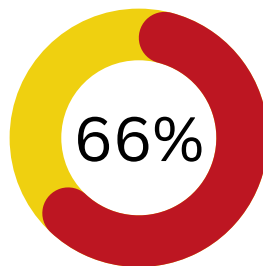
29% of members said they learnt a new skill

and 100% said they met new people!

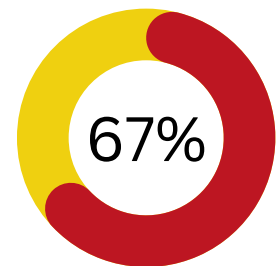
When asked "Since joining The Shoebox Community, I feel..."



of members said they felt more connected to their community



of members said they felt a sense of fulfilment more often



felt they had taken steps towards something they want to achieve

Insights from our community...



Margaret

Shoebox member

“ It makes a lot of difference. I live on my own, my family all work, so sometimes I can go all weekend, not see anybody, and during lockdown I suffered with a lot of depression, so it has helped me.

I also enjoyed the baking for wellbeing sessions and that has helped me tremendously. They're a lovely group and I love cooking and I love seeing how other people do their cooking.

If someone was thinking of coming to the Shoebox, I'd definitely advise it because I think it's a wonderful place and I hope it continues. Definitely come, you'll never regret it!

“ I have gained the confidence to step up as a volunteer to facilitate the Bridges Creative Writing Group alongside Nicole and Abby!

I can draw on many years of creative writing, other forms of writing and various courses in creative writing, including my very first which was run by Hilary Mellon who was running the group until her health has sadly stopped her.

Terry Sandy

Shoebox member



“ Part of my job is going around community hubs and offering advice and support to people aged over 50. I'm very happy to be the advisor at The Shoebox. It's a great community feeling! It provides a nice, friendly, safe space where we can work mutually together to empower clients to reach the goals that they want to achieve.

Stephen Allen

Information and Advice

Officer at Age UK



Bridges Creative Writing Group



This community group has been meeting at The Shoebox for many years. 2023 was a year of growth for the group with many new members joining with brilliant new ideas, members stepping up to lead the group and supporting each other through challenging times.

Over the year they had more than **500 visits** to the group and created countless amazing pieces of writing including the one below.

Thank you for sharing, Eleanor!

'The Shoebox' by Eleanor Turnbull

I will never forget the first day I joined The Shoebox. I felt at home straight away, no second thoughts.

When it is cold and pouring with rain, come into The Shoebox and you will feel happy and warm. Everyone is super lovely and friendly. Everyone is like family.

The Shoebox is such a lovely place to be, so much so it is my favourite place to be. I definitely recommend it. It is like my second home. When I am not there, I miss everyone so much. So when I live in Norwich, I will be there more often. You can't get rid of me that easily!

If you are having a bad time, then The Shoebox will put a smile on your face.

I know this sounds morbid, but I will remember The Shoebox to the day I die.

I wouldn't change a thing about The Shoebox as it is perfect in every way.

How to end this? Well there is only one way and that is by saying thank you to everyone for making me and everyone else feel welcomed and happy.

So if you are looking for a place to chat and feel loved, then pop into The Shoebox and say hello.



2023

Challenges



The future of The Shoebox, Castle Meadow

In October 2023 we had to share an important but very difficult update regarding the future of The Shoebox Community Hub and home of the famous 'hidden street'. Unfortunately, we received notice from our landlord to vacate our much loved flagship venue.

This came as a big shock to many as it's been the treasured heart of our Shoebox community for over two years. Originally the landlord wanted us to leave the venue by the end of the year but fortunately we managed to negotiate an extension, initially until the end of April 2024.

This news was unsettling for everybody but the extension granted us a little more time to make plans for the future of The Shoebox. We approached this situation with a positive outlook but were sad at the thought of leaving our home and mindful of the potential impact this uncertainty could have on our valued community members and customers, as well as our dedicated staff.



After sharing this news with our community members and customers, we were blown away by the outpouring of supportive messages, comments on social media and press coverage.

In early 2024, largely thanks to the overwhelming response from our community, customers and supporters, our landlord had a change of heart and our lease was extended for another three years!

In 2024, we launched a Crowdfunder campaign to help us raise funds to try and buy the building. Visit Crowdfunder to see how we got on!

Find out more!



The Shoebox Community Great Yarmouth

In March 2023 we were thrilled to receive funding from the Know Your Neighbourhood fund, which aims to increase regular volunteering and reduce chronic loneliness.

We initially delivered a one month pilot to explore opportunities to expand the Shoebox Community to Great Yarmouth. We received really positive feedback from Great Yarmouth and Gorleston communities and found that it was possible to grow a Shoebox community without a physical community hub, as we have in Norwich. We learnt lots from this initial pilot and this insight led to us receiving further funding to continue this work until at least 31st March 2025!



Delivered in
partnership with



We're proud to be working with this local social enterprise who are passionate about supporting communities to be their best!

Funded by



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport



During our one month pilot, we hosted **22 community groups and activities** supported by **17 Shoebox Volunteers** and had **72 visits from Great Yarmouth community members!**

Sessions included Baking for Wellbeing, historical walks, craft groups, board games groups and more!

“ I live with my parents, and I don't go out much. It's good to come here and get out the house. It helps me be with other people and helps me to socialise more. Coming to these sorts of things gives people a purpose. It's like, 'I've achieved something today!' ”

Ollie

Shoebox member



Growing our Great Yarmouth Community

In October 2023, following being awarded further funding, we welcomed Hari to The Shoebox team as Community Kickstarter in Great Yarmouth. She is working closely with Hayley, a fellow Community Kickstarter from ProCommunity CIC to expand our community groups and activities and to find ways to reach more people who may be experiencing loneliness.

Our Great Yarmouth Community already has 40 registered members and had 88 visits to community groups!

“It's been amazing to be able to hit the ground running with this project, we've been able to meet with so many different organisations and people who have been able to guide us in the right direction of what the community needs and wants to see. I'm really excited to see how we can use these different ideas to improve the sense of community within Great Yarmouth!



Hari

Community Kickstarter



Hayley

Community Kickstarter

“I am absolutely amazed at how much we have achieved so far! We have started three weekly groups which will be doubling in January. One of our biggest achievements was connecting with Elliott at the Gorleston Pavilion. It was perfect timing as he was looking to set up a Warm Hub. I can't wait to see how Creative Writing Group and Knit, Stitch and Natter Group go in that beautiful, welcoming venue. The local community have been really enthusiastic when we have engaged with them, they are excited to see our vision become reality.

In 2024, we will continue to grow the Shoebox community in Great Yarmouth, reaching a diverse range of people, helping to reduce feelings of loneliness and supporting the creation of more volunteering opportunities.

Baking for Wellbeing

The Baking for Wellbeing project provides a fun way for Shoebox members to meet new people while baking and cooking delicious treats!

Sessions are for all abilities from complete novices to the more experienced to bake together in a kind and inclusive environment.

Each session focuses on a single recipe which the group will make together with Mark and other volunteer helpers. At the end of the session, everyone takes their delicious baked treats home along with the recipe to recreate.



“ I took part when it started and was then asked if I'd like to help out. I do enjoy it. Some come for the cooking and some people come along simply because they've lost their confidence. There's one lady who has changed dramatically since she started here. You can really see how she's got her confidence back.

Josie
Volunteer

“ We get people come for very different reasons. Some have baked before, some haven't baked before. Some have lost the drive to bake, maybe through bereavement or people leaving home and so on. So it gives them the opportunity to practice new skills but also to share the skills that they've learned with other people.



Mark
Volunteer Baking for Wellbeing Coordinator

In 2023, we...

hosted
10
sessions

for
21
members

with over
100
hours volunteered

Supported by



Maths in Baking

This year we launched Maths in Baking, part of the national Multiply Skills for Life campaign. Building on the learning from our popular Baking for Wellbeing project, we created three fun, friendly workshops to explore the maths skills used when baking to build participant's confidence in using day to day maths.



Over the three sessions, participants get to bake shortbread, rocky road and cheese straws. While baking, we collaboratively look at estimating, scaling, weighing and costings.



In 2023, we...

hosted
12
sessions

for
29
members

Kerice Howell
Multiply Champion



“ Maths in Baking is doing something fun! It's a little bit different, you're not in a classroom setting as such it's more of a relaxed sort of environment and you really get to be very creative.



Funded by



Norfolk
County Council



Funded by
UK Government

Next Steps

2023 saw the end of our supportive work experience project, Next Steps. Over the course of one year, we worked with 31 people, each for up to eight weeks, who were looking to grow new skills and confidence.

Over the course of the project, 25 participants **completed more than 20 hours of bespoke work experience** within our organisation, could **identify more personal strengths** at the end, shared they **felt more confident** and **moved on to further training, personal development or work!**

“ When I first started Next Steps I was so nervous and worried. You put me at ease. Thank you. I found it really interesting and have learnt new things.

Naomi

Next Steps Participant



“ I have become more confident in this time with you. Since I have been with you I've noticed I feel and act more confidently in interviews.

Connor

Next Steps Participant



Supported by



Shoebox Stuff Hub

We store, maintain and lend equipment, tools and resources to individuals and community groups for free to enable them to host community events and activities, maintain the local area and even improve their homes, gardens and allotments!



Supported by



LUMi
A brighter way to share



NORWICH
City Council

Over the last year, we have facilitated over 65 loans and supported events including...

- Litter picks
- Street parties
- Local markets and fairs
- Community network events
- Fundraisers
- Community garden open days
- and so much more!

over
500
items loaned in 2023!

Due to the uncertainty over our community hub's lease towards the end of 2023, we paused loans from our Stuff Hub. However, we are looking for a new, sustainable way to continue supporting this great scheme.

Community Connectors Project

Our team of Community Connectors have conversations with local residents in key neighbourhoods in Norwich to discover what matters to them, what they are passionate about and what they would like to do with others to help them flourish in community life!

Community Connectors have been recruited from their local neighbourhoods and are managed and supported by The Shoebox but work for the benefit of their local community. Norwich City Council works in partnership with The Shoebox to support the continued development of the Community Connector team and wider Community Conversations project. Additionally, they oversee the analysis of community conversations and sharing of insights through the Community Conversations Insights Hub.

Norwich City Centre | Mile Cross | North Earlham

Our friendly team of
Community Connectors
had **over 1,500**
conversations in 2023



Community Conversations

You can now view key themes and findings from our community conversations on the Insights Hub!

Find out more!



Delivered in
partnership with



NORWICH
City Council

Community Voices
Using your feedback to improve care

It is hard to boil down over 1,500 conversations into any report, so we asked our team of Community Connectors...

What is your Community Connector highlight from 2023?



“ The Crafty Hearts group has really developed and grown reaching new people in the community and has now secured funding for more resources!

Claire

Mile Cross

“ St. George's hotspot community has grown from strength to strength with our support and now regularly has 40-50 people attending.

Chloe

Norwich City Centre



“ A conversations with a young person we met in the cafe at West Earlham, who is disabled and part of the LGBT+ community and spoke about some of the issues they face.

Another conversation we had when door knocking highlighted issues with 18-29 year olds not working and the pressure it puts on parents finances.

Sonya

North Earlham

What is your Community Connector highlight from 2023?



“ The Mile Cross Green Hearts project on Hedgehog Alley where I painted the telecom box has led to further creative painting opportunities with Sustrans!

Ally
Mile Cross

“ Working with the Community Conversation Officers from Norwich City Council, we compiled a calendar of social activities that are held in the city centre. We then distributed this among the groups we attended and the residents we spoke to. Many didn't have internet access or weren't aware of where to look for these social events.

One person I spoke to said that she didn't see many people from day to day. I told her about the St Augustine's Lunch Club for example - she lived one street away and never knew it existed. I believe our distributing these has grown the numbers in group!



Saskia
Norwich City
Centre



“ The door knocking activity was great for connecting with local people in Motum Road. These conversations highlighted the need for SEN groups and now there are two new groups supporting SEN young people and children in the community!

Anwasha
North Earlham

Exploring Experiences of Smoking

Over the summer, our Community Connectors ventured out into local 'bumping spaces', pubs and community spaces in Norwich to have conversations with residents about their experiences of smoking and quitting smoking.

This work was funded by the Norfolk Community Foundation and the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB) through the Community Voices programme.

The Connectors received smoking cessation training to help equip them with the knowledge required to hold community conversations with residents on this topic.

They utilised their existing networks and knowledge of their neighbourhoods to identify opportunities to have conversations with residents in a range of settings.



“Connectors are skilled in starting conversations whilst out and about in the community. They have a great ability to put people at ease and quickly establish rapport, which enables them to capture rich insights into people's experiences of living and working in their communities.

Tom Gaskin
CEO and Founder

The Connectors had over 100 conversations in their neighbourhoods with a wide range of people aged 18 and over who considered themselves occasional or regular smokers as well as those who had quit smoking.

Initially, the Connectors were unsure how having a specific focus would affect their conversations and were concerned that 'it might be intrusive' but they found that people were generally happy to chat and in many cases were very open about their life circumstances and what they felt had led them to start smoking or triggered them to return to smoking.

Norfolk Public Health are going to be making some decisions around smoking cessation services in the future, and will use the learning to ensure these services are designed to work for all communities, particularly those experiencing the greatest inequalities.



Community Voices
Using your feedback to improve care

Our core projects are supported by profits from The Shoebox Experiences.

A one stop shop for local, unique experiences where customers can make great memories together! These experiences include guided tours of unique spaces that customers can't usually access and walking tours celebrating our fine city.



Norwich's Hidden Street Tour



The Tavern Trail Tour



The Norwich Knowledge Tour



Lantern Light Underground Tour



The TIPSY Tavern Trail Tour



Magnificent Marble Hall Tour



Secrets of the Tunnels Escape Game



Matriarchs, Mayors and Merchants Tour



City of Centuries Tour



Chronicles of Christmas Tour



An update from The Shoebox Experiences



Lisa Willett
Customer
Experience Manager

“ We introduced six fresh tours, collaborating with local partners to offer visitors unique opportunities. We were thrilled in February when Aviva opened the doors to their Norwich flagship building for us to host our 'Magnificent Marble Hall' weekly tours. Our inaugural 'Norwich Knowledge' tour began in July, highlighting the city's most notable landmarks and sharing captivating untold tales with guests.



Paul, landlord of
The Murderers
Pub has
continued to
partner with and
support us!

August saw the launch of three exciting partnerships and collaborations. The first with four local pubs for a premium 'Topsy Tavern Trail Tour', and another tour with Anteros Arts Foundation charity who benefit from a share of the proceeds of our 'Matriarchs, Mayors and Merchants Tour'. The final exciting partnership of August was with The Association of City of Norwich Tour Guides, presenting 1,000 years of Norwich's history on the 'City of Centuries' Tour'. November welcomed the debut of a magical seasonal experience with 'The Chronicles of Christmas', exploring festive celebrations through the ages.



With this diverse and extensive range of tours, we are proud to have received the Travellers' Choice award from Trip Advisor and to retain the number one position in the 'Tour & Activities in Norwich' category with over 1,000 five star reviews!

The Shoebox Experiences

●●●●● [1,181 reviews](#) • [#1 of 57 Tours & Activities in Norwich](#)

Heritage Open Days

The Shoebox Experiences have had a very busy year, on top of **launching six new tours**, welcoming **two new Experience Hosts** to the team and **selling over 12,500 tickets** we also took part in the annual Heritage Open Days festivities!



Creativity Unwrapped...

This year's theme was Creativity Unwrapped, celebrating creativity in all its forms and showcasing the amazing artistic imagination in Norfolk! We developed a brand new themed experience and partnered with Aviva to facilitate access to the simply stunning Marble Hall.

Sounds of ye Undergrunde

This unique event was music to our guest's ears - quite literally! In the remains of the medieval hidden street beneath Castle Meadow, guests discovered more about music in Norwich through the ages. Delivered in collaboration with local musician, Pete Turrell.

120 free tickets given away!



Aviva's Magnificent Marble Hall

We offered a spectacular one hour tour of one of Norwich's architectural hidden gems, Surrey House. Designed by local architect George Skipper, step inside and marvel at the breath-taking marble interior.

150 free tickets given away!

Pop Up Visitor Experience Centre Pilot

In collaboration with The Forum, Broads National Park, and Visit Norwich, we facilitated the launch of a Pop Up Visitor Experience Centre in The Forum!

It was **open for 19 days** across the summer and handled a whopping **790 enquiries** from members of the public!

Almost all of these were from locals and tourists looking for things to do in Norfolk or how to find places of interest.

The Pop Up was staffed by members of The Shoebox Experiences team and supported by volunteer City Hosts.



We are constantly reviewing our environmental impact and trying to find ways to have a positive impact on the world around us!



We are proud that our Shoebox Experiences all celebrate our fine city. We welcome many local customers alongside the tourists who visit us.

To encourage our customers to travel to us car free, we are part of Good Journey! Not only do Good Journey help you plan your travel to destinations around the country car free, they offer you discounts for doing it!



Customers can get 10% off our famous Hidden Street Tour if they use the Good Journey discount code and travel to us car free.

We've also worked with Konect Bus to offer discounts and incentives to their customers visiting Norwich to enjoy our walking tours and our community hub members.



We also reduce the need to travel by recruiting from within the communities our projects operate and utilising existing community assets to host activities within neighbourhoods.

All of our marketing materials and our Hidden Street Tour Souvenir Guidebook are printed on recycled paper and use sustainable inks.



We keep in-house printing to a minimum and print on recycled paper but as many members of our community have been digitally excluded elsewhere, we know that a real need to print some resources remains.

Our headquarters recycles the majority of its waste and avoids the use of single use plastics where possible.

2023

Our partners



Over the last year, we have been lucky to work with some incredible organisations...

