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**We are Stronger Together**

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GLCOMMUNITIES.ORG.UK

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# Annual Report 2022-23

**Special points of interest:**

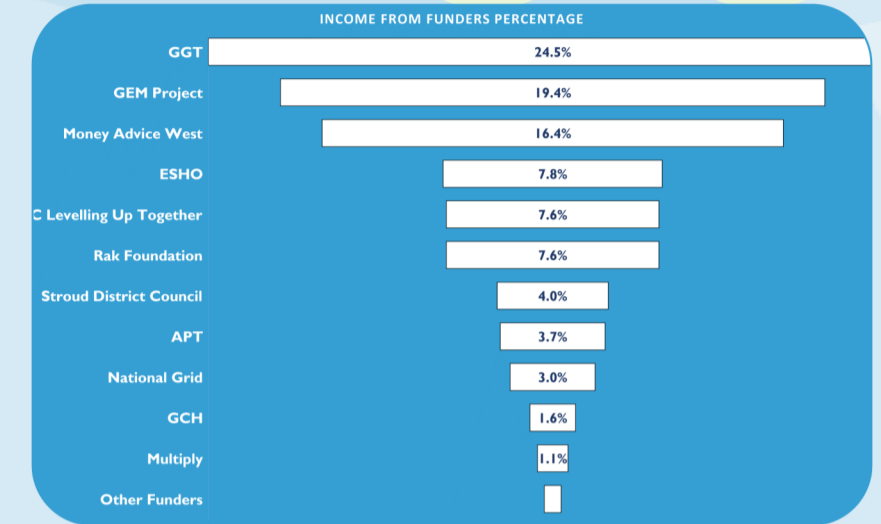
- Managed £1,228,148 of household debt.
- 183 lunches to struggling families.
- Warm Spaces provided 243 prepared meals.
- 40 Job Seekers found their way in the job market.
- 60 men that shared a shed.

**Message from the Chairs**

In a year where the cost-of-living crisis has begun to affect our communities, we have witnessed its impact not only on those requiring emergency support, but also on the increasing number of individuals falling into debt and the effects that stress has caused on peoples mental and physical well-being. We have made concerted efforts to address these challenges by enhancing our services, initiating new projects, and fostering strong partnerships. However, the demands continue to grow.

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who have supported us, whether through funding, donations, partnership working, volunteering their time, or through the dedication of our staff and Board members.

Finally, we would like to thank all the many people we have worked with for their strength, humour and desire to bring about positive change for themselves and for others.



**Leadership, Partnership & Collaboration by the CEO**

GL Communities is an anchor organisation that is working in some of the most deprived areas of Gloucester/shire. We have been asked to perform in some of these areas as part of our infrastructure within Leadership, Partnership development and Collaboration.

**We do this in several ways:**

- To support organisations with supervision and management
- To support with leadership
- To support in partnership working
- To work collaboratively
- Representation
- Organisational Development

**To support organisations with supervision and management**

- We are funded by Gloucestershire Gateway Trust with core funding, and we manage and supervise:
- The Ewe Space development team.
  - "Looking out for Potential" team of Connectors.
  - The Community Growing Project Co-ordinator that sits on the M5 Service Station Northbound which is an amazing environmental space.
  - The Fair Shares Project that delivers and supports residents to access free food donated by shops.

**To support with leadership**

- CEO supports the Blackbridge Charitable Community and Sports Benefit Society in Podsmead as a Director and Chair.
- CEO supports the Venture Community Hub as a Director and as Vice Chair.
- CEO/Resident supports the panel of Podsmead Big Local and as a champion for projects.

**To support in Partnership working**

- We work closely with Gloucestershire Gateway Trust (GGT) to support projects they want as part of community driven development.
- GL manages in partnership with All Pulling Together a community development/engagement worker in Stonehouse.
- We work in partnership through our advice services to provide ongoing support and advice in welfare benefit and debt work.
- APT and GLI Stroud
- Trussel Trust for Financial Capability.
- MAPS in partnership.
- Member of Matson, Robinswood and White City Partnership "Power of Three"
- GL Communities in partnership with Brendon's Bridge on health and social care provision.
- In partnership with both Gloucester Food bank and Severn Wye

- We were partners in the GEM project (Going the Extra Mile) within Gloucester/shire and the BAME communities.
- We are partners in ESHO (Employment Skills Hub Outreach) for both Gloucester and BAME.

**To work collaboratively**

- GL Communities work collaboratively with Community Builders Collective through our Digital Divide.
- We work collaboratively with Gloucestershire's Carers Hub for GL Carers Hub
- We work collaboratively with Healthy Lifestyles.
- CEOs of both organisations working collaboratively to develop and embed a Jigsaw Community Co-operative that is built on membership recruitment with local people providing a service for local people. Developing a mental health services provision and putting in a Community College.
- We work in a co-operative collaboration with GGT, GCH, MRG and GL Communities for the Ewe Space.

**Representation**

- VCS representative for Integrated Locality Partnership for Gloucester.
- CEO/resident sat on the advisory group for GCH Regeneration

**Organisational Development**

- We supported the Matson Anglers with a registered address.
- Royal British Legion – space
- Gloucestershire Older Person's Assembly – space
- Gloucestershire Credit Union – support
- Jigsaw Community Co-operative – space

We support local groups to form organically so that strengths-based approach can happen naturally. GL Communities has always evolved its work and services and can naturally support others to do the same. We have a skilful team in their experienced themed areas and has leadership, partnership, and collaboration opportunities. We find the activists in the communities we work with and invest in their pathways.

**Trustee's**

**As stated in Accounts**

- Albert Gardiner
- Jason Dunsford
- Jan Parrott
- Liam Kelch
- Brendon O'Donnell
- William Seare

**New Members**

- Ashleigh Doyle
- Jessica Stone
- Anita Pope

**Volunteer's**

- Sheena Scarratt
- Michael Burrows
- Matt Crabb
- Andrea Davies
- Tracey Ngugi
- Agnes Joshua
- Jan Parrott
- Sue Harris
- Roy Kellet
- Janice Bird
- Buket Buyukcelebi
- Pam Sysum
- Dan Wyatt

**Funders**

- PBL – Podsmead Big Local
- Big Local Trust
- GGT – Gateway (Ewe Space)
- GGT – LOOP (Looking out for Potential)
- GGT – Community Growing project
- GGT – Food Fair Shares
- GGT – Core
- Period poverty (Gloucestershire County Council) GCC
- Thriving communities (GCC)
- Digital innovation fund (GCC)
- Health Inequalities funding (Partnership) CCG
- Carers Glos (GCC)
- She's Ready (GCC)
- Glow Grant (GCC)
- GLI I
- GEM Project (GCC&ESF)
- ESHO (GCC)
- Good Things Foundation
- APT
- Gloucester Community Fund (Cost of living)
- Stroud District council
- Multiply (GCC)
- DFSW – Money Advice and Pensions Fund

*"We would like to thank all those that have given resources through the year, whether that was financial, or goods for emergency stores for people who are in crisis, or those who give their time."*

*We could not do this without you!*

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"What would you say to others thinking of becoming a GL Communities volunteer?"

**JUST GO FOR IT!**

# LOCAL PEOPLE ARE MORE INSPIRED TO BUILD CONNECTED AND COHESIVE COMMUNITIES WITH A STRONG SENSE OF PRIDE

## ADVICE & BENEFIT SERVICES



We provide a specialist service for both Debt and welfare rights. We deliver this with a team of professionally qualified caseworkers and trained assistants.

It has once again been another busy year with the needs of residents growing more and more in the cost of living crisis. We are able to offer a holistic approach to supporting people with internal and external referrals as needed throughout our organisation and our partners.

**"We do not turn anyone away and when they present we see them that day."**

We can support someone when they need it, by easing the pressures of creditors, those living on low income and enabling clients to claim everything that they are entitled to.

After COVID we have been able to put into place an array of how to contact them through:

- ✓ What's App
- ✓ Website Tawk Chat
- ✓ Email
- ✓ Telephone Service
- ✓ And finally face to face



## Case Study - Advice

The client, a 43-year-old white British single person, approached us for help with managing their debts. Upon speaking with the client, it became evident that they were also seeking treatment for addiction, escorting and mental health issues while struggling to live comfortably.

We recognized that our client needed additional support in reducing their debt and focusing on their recovery. We provided them with a financial capability assessment to ensure they were receiving all relevant benefits.

We worked with the client's creditors and placed holds on their accounts to await the outcome of their benefit applications. However, we later found out that they had relapsed due to

pressure from job centres.

When the client returned, we provided them with additional support and aided them in choosing an insolvency option to clear their debts and focus on their goals. We are proud of the client's dedication to their gradual improvements in gaining their master's degree and encouraged them to take their time and not feel rushed in achieving their goals, reminding them they are human, not robots.

Overall, we helped our client tackle their debts and improve their financial situation while receiving the support they needed for their mental health, addictions.

*"Advisor was there for me when I had nobody and didn't judge, she reassures me every time through the service"*

## Case Study - Advice

Miss R is a single mother with a young dependent under school age child.

She is living in a 2 bed social housing property. She is in receipt of Universal Credit including full Housing Costs and Child Benefit.

Miss R presented with both Priority Debt – Council Tax, Gas and Electricity also Non Priority Debt – Water Charges. Contacted Council Tax department to query why client had Council Tax debt as on basic Universal Credit and they would be an entitlement.

We were advised that based on information received from the DWP previously her Council Tax Support had been stopped.

We submitted a request for claim to be reopened and backdated as issues were not clients fault.

The account was brought up to date and a refund of previous paid charges of £660.00 was repaid to the client. She continues to receive full Council Tax Support.

Client had debt with energy supplier as she had been struggling to maintain payments due to the increase of charges and the Cost of Living.

A referral was made to Severnwyne Energy – Debt Advocates – who assisted in clearing the outstanding balance with funding and amending her direct debit to an affordable amount.

Regarding the water charges – an application was made to Severn Trent Big Difference Scheme to contain the debt and lower ongoing charges.

Miss R was very appreciative of the assistance she was given and felt more at ease with her situation knowing that many of her issues had been resolved.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY (GEM to ESHO)

Going the Extra Mile (GEM) was a large partnership working across Gloucester.

We had the BAME team for Gloucestershire and the Gloucester area to work in

The Gem team provided intensive support to 40 participants who was the furthest away from the job market and experiencing barriers to employment

They signed up and had a variety of outcomes Education and training = 18 participants attended various courses

- Volunteering = 8
- Employment = 5

For example

**:- establishing a strong link with All Nations Club and building that connection enables us to run a IT course for them using phones.**

Disengaging from the Project is always a task that we try and work with and support however some participants are not ready to go forward.

We had 9 disengage for several reasons

Last December this project came to an end and was refunded under our new ESHO project for participants who are economically inactive.

ESHO – Employment Skills Hub Outreach

Our work continues to support BAME participants working in partnership still with GARAS

We also support residents in Gloucester

Between January to March we have signed up 25 participants and supporting them in various ways

The support workers go through with an assessment which helps with their action plan, we do CV development, job search and applications.

The programme is to help with self-development, socialising and confidence building.

So far we have

- 14 job outcomes
- 2 gained qualifications
- 5 volunteering

The rest are still currently still working with us.



Scion Perry (L) & Gorana Amin (R)

## IMPACT STATS

- ✓ We provided Money Advice to 909 people
- ✓ Managed £1,228,148.83 of household debt
- ✓ Secured £28,259.27 in benefits
- ✓ Charitable payments £18,038.51
- ✓ Provided 1551 Food Bank Vouchers which fed 2235 adults and 1657 children
- ✓ We issued and assigned 24.56% of all the referrals to Gloucester Food Bank
- ✓ We provided 332 referrals to Severn Wye and 286 received financial support
- ✓ 46 referrals received support from an Energy Advocate



## Case Study GEM

One of our participants joined us in GEM who lives with his mum and dad and has never worked.

He has Aspergers and ADHD. He suffers with anxiety and depression and was currently concentrating on his fitness with a PT

His dream was to join the Marines. He struggled with school due to being bullied and his confidence was very low. He did not know what sort of work he wanted to do but wanted to gain some independence and start earning some money.

During our regular meetings he started to gain some confidence. It was a slow process at a pace with his needs. We started to work on his CV together, showed an interest in cooking and started our cooking on a budget course. He started to build relationships with other GEMs and talk to people and learn new skills.

He decided that he would try out for the Gloucester Services

He liked the idea of working in cold prep making sandwiches So he linked to Bridging the Gap which is run at the Phoenix Centre supporting his application for work

It supports people to speak to staff at the services, and then when he visited the place he decided to try out for the butchery department as a trainee.

Once the training was over he was automatically interviewed as part of the process and accepted into the roles as a trainee.

He now works at the Services and enjoys this work.

He can openly talk to people and working part time, learning new skills every day and studying to complete his food hygiene course.

I received one to one support and they actually listened to me, they helped build my confidence and find the right job to suit me and my needs.

## THE EWE SPACE

Is a multi-use space where residents are supported to decide, develop, and deliver projects to address community need. It was named the Ewe Space after Matson's free roaming sheep when the space reopened in June 2021 after the Pandemic. We have been focusing on strengthening the voice of the residents and have a small core of residents that are working with us to engage more residents.

They have carried out a couple of litter picks and both have been sponsored by a business that has links with one of the committee members. After the most recent litter pick the children that took part were treated to a MacDonald's and sweets.

The residents' group have also worked in partnership with other organisations to provide refreshments at events. At the Ewe Space we have also worked with the GAS project who hold fun arts and craft sessions called Matson Makers.

We also took part in a National Listening Campaign where we participated with 10 Neighbourhoods throughout England to give a snapshot of how residents perceived their neighbourhoods. Once analysed the information that was gained gave us at the Ewe Space an insight into what was important to residents, and we identified priorities that included: -

- infrastructure,
- transport,
- housing,
- health,
- open spaces

We have used this to shape our work and to help develop what we offer or what we encourage residents to take responsibility for at the Ewe Space.

*"The Ewe Space is like a family, and you have your community network around you for support"*

## COMMUNITY GROWING PROJECT

This is a site that can be found adjoining the Motorway Services on the M5 and was developed to support the work of local producers being served and an opportunity of working together with local communities in an outdoor space full of potential.

The site continues to thrive with a diversity of wildlife. Whilst mammals are generally elusive, there are always lots of insects and birds to see. Birdsong in spring, hundreds of goldfinches eating the knapweed and thistle seeds in the autumn. More uncommon sightings are skylarks and woodpeckers. And the highlight this year was a beautiful tawny owl.

A small tree nursery has been established with a selection of species, including hazel, oak, guelder rose, hawthorn and elder. These have been propagated from seeds and cuttings and in a couple of years will be planted on site and offered to local community projects. The plan is to add more species to the collection each year. Volunteers helped to plant donated trees during the winter.

## MEN'S SHED

Since April 2022 to March 2023 the facility has run on Wednesday and Thursday from 10 am till 230 pm. It has a regular attendance of between 5 and 10 people on each day and has had over 60 different people attend the facility in that year.

The woodworkers regularly meet to discuss the groups development so that everyone owns the activity and decides all development that they undertake or tool and equipment they purchase. Two staff members cover a day each and ensure access to all and safety within activities. The facility prides itself in its support and engagement for new recruits and provides a welcome home for people interested in practical skills.



*"We enjoy a good chat and everyone is involved each stage of building and running the activity."*

## WARM SPACES

Warm Space / Community Kitchen was open for 10 weeks from 23rd January 2022 to 27th March 2023.

With meals being served each week, there were generally takeaways available for those people who wanted them. These meals included soups, curries, pastas and oven-bakes.

Total number people served	154
Average number served weekly	16
Total number prepared meals	243
Average number prepared weekly	24
Average cost per meal	80p



*"One of our regulars commented on how much he enjoyed the liveliness of the warm space"*

## PHOENIX CENTRE

During this year the footfall at the Phoenix Centre increased to over 3,000 attendances at the many and varied activities and events that we held. The people attending the Phoenix Centre came from a wide range of ages and abilities. We worked with the community to address their needs, supporting, and encouraging attendance as a result the feedback at activities and events has been good.

Digital Inclusion including members of the Afro Caribbean community to learn how to use their smart phones, tablets etc. supported by the carers' connector. Job Clubs were supported by Gem workers and are now part of a new programme of work and so will be sustained beyond the Postcode Lottery funding.

Gardening led by an inclusion worker with volunteers who grew herbs in raised beds and took on the responsibility of the outside grassed areas and borders. Planting bulbs and bedding plants. There have been discussions about growing produce to be cooked on site and the herbs and salad grown in the garden being cultivated and offered to residents that come for the weekly Fare Shares food.

We have a good relationship with local residential homes and a weekly Arts and crafts session takes place for people with additional needs, on the same day a group of elderly ladies hire a space to do crafts and cardmaking, a very sociable bunch who love meeting up at the Phoenix Centre and get involved in helping with events whenever they can.

During the summer holidays we held a daily lunch club for families that would struggle to feed themselves which included 4 weekly events – they were making bug houses, bird feeders and planting sunflower seeds, a QR code treasure trail, A bubble science session and a fruit tasting session. Over the period of the summer holidays, we provided.

**22 sessions serving 183 lunches to 53 different families who between them had 128 children.**

We have monitored attendances through a booking in system which also has helped us to see what the most popular activities has been

**Arts and Crafts 440 attendances, Dance 434 attendances, Woodwork 385 attendances.**

## LOOP (Looking Out for Potential)

During this period of as a loop worker I do a regular detached session where I get to have conversations with members of the community I don't get to meet during my time at the Venture/toddler group and Dickens close. During this time, I can connect and form relationships and get to know the wider part of our community. During these conversations I have been able to sign post them to activities and support services that we have within our ward. A big part is just listening to them and each time the conversation becomes more open and honest. We got offered a table at the Community Christmas lunch at Kings School. I organised a group of ten OAPs with transport from within the community to be part of this and they all had a lovely time. Overall, I was able to signpost people in need to get food vouchers, whitegoods, and money advice. Supported with a listening ear with more personal problems.

## LOOP (Looking Out for Potential)

Went around, local events that were taking place, sat in coffee shops, looked around the area of GL10 so that people would start to recognise a familiar face and then could approach me, to find out what I did. This was still a very slow three months, as people still didn't want to interact with myself because of covid and I was still building a relationship with the Community. I rung around parish councils offices to be able to go and meet with them to explain my role and spoke to local businesses in the street, and also spoke to people on the street who asked me about my logo on the hoodie. I spoke to a lady who wanted to play in a bridge group, but didn't want to set one up. I am still looking for somebody to play bridge with her.

## DIGITAL INCLUSION

We made significant strides towards fostering digital inclusion, ensuring that no one is left behind in the increasingly digital world. Our commitment to bridging the digital divide was epitomized by the distribution of free data SIM cards, in partnership with 'The Good Things Foundation' to 10 participants, a small but impactful step towards creating a more connected and empowered society.

Our focus extended to the communities of Matson, and Robinswood. These areas, often underserved in terms of digital infrastructure, witnessed a positive change through targeted interventions. The free data SIM cards acted as catalysts for change, breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of community empowerment.

With recipients of the SIM cards accessing services like Universal Credit, job and volunteering opportunities, NHS online facilities, these are just to name a few.

The provision of free data SIM cards marked a milestone in our commitment to creating a digitally inclusive society, and we look forward to building on this foundation in the years to come.