

Brimscombe Mill

Social Impact

Report

2023/24



WELCOME

“One of the most special venues and communities in all the land!”

Brimscombe Mill Customer

Thank you for taking the time to read our social impact report for 2023-24, sharing the amazing work that our team has achieved this year, across our social enterprises. While this report sits alongside our financial accounts, this year we wanted to write it before the financial accounts. Looking at money is important, but so is looking at how we serve our community.

Here at Brimscombe Mill we have worked to create an economy that's better for everyone, enabling our customers to share what they can, take what they need and see their community transformed.

We hope every one of the (almost) 180,000 customers this year experienced this for themselves and shared with others, when they entered through the doors of Brimscombe Mill (even these were only put on halfway through the year!).

We, our teams and our broader community, have worked hard to create a place of welcome, of peace, and of belonging. The roof may not be water tight, our heating may be limited and our toilets might be outside, but the sense of hope and expectation pervades every corner of the building, from the words written on our wall, to the actions of our staff, and the broader participation, from people local and farther afield.



WELCOME

“We exist to “to show the vulnerable that change is possible. To help free people who feel trapped and tell the world of a new way of living, to help free people from the things, systems and choices that oppress them, to proclaim a new start, a second chance of a good life.”

Our response has been to build a community that can rewire the local economy, so that it helps people, society and planet flourish. This ambitious vision simply would not be possible without the thousands of community partners, customers and supporters who come through our door each week, helping us create this space through positive action and participation.



Once again, this year has been one of change for Brimscombe Mill, but also one of amazing work and impacts achieved by our amazing staff and customers.

Gloucestershire House Clearances, The Great Plate and Kick Off Stroud have stayed within our wider network, however have moved out of the The Mill to a new home at Aston Down. Gloucestershire House Clearances still come down twice a month to run a pop up bric a brac sale.

The headline news came in the last month of this year, when we learned we had to leave our warehouse. Our old landlord had sold the building without giving us the opportunity to counter. When we announced this to the public, we were awed by the outpouring of love and support from our community. The comments we received summed up better than we ever could, what we are trying to achieve at the Mill and beyond...

IMPACT WALL

Some of the comments we received

Brimscombe mill has completed me in a way I never thought possible. You are the family I never had, the hands I love for dearly and the community I have always craved. You are humans, never perfect but always have your arms open & never change
Always remember your MAT

We traveled the country looking for a community that was right to bring up our family. After a dinner with friends at the Long Table, we knew it was Stroud. Love it!

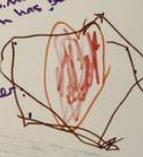
Never found somewhere I could actually relax, bring toddler, not worry about it's not worry about being self conscious. De-regaled to hear the news, hopefully I'll see to be part of this chapter and the rest of many more.

The Community & people at Brimscombe are symbolic of the possibility they are. At a time when powerlessness against what we know to be good. They and believe that another is already a different.

I can't define what's different about here but I have been part of other community projects/spaces before and none felt like home like here.

no obligation, no pressure, no judgement
just love & joy

I've got a daughter with special needs. Many places are too much for her, so its hard for me to go out with her. She loved Brimscombe with all its offerings... which has been a blessing for me. Thank you! This is from her.



This place was rare in welcoming me with a grumpy jaundiced baby, giving me somewhere to go on my loneliest days.

Its just wonderful to have this community right in the centre of Brimscombe - touching so many Mums & Dads, as well as single people and other people as well - everyone is made welcome & helped. So much going on - there's nowhere else quite like it! - blessed, lives changed - amazing (beyond) - Thank you! Please keep it going!!

Wherever we go - your love

Consistently blown away by the genuine spirit of what happens here... something openhearted and expansive, something affirming and inclusive and deeply vital that has something precious for Stroud and the valleys but also models something the world needs. We feel it every time we're here and are hugely grateful for it.

This is not soft, fluffy stuff
This is a real community need
For people, by people.

you give love to Brimscombe mill
and people who come here

This is THE asset of the town what makes me feel pride in place a sense of belonging. It is a place of sanctuary for our family a rare place to go on rainy days or to dance together. I always felt that made Stroud a perfect place for families -



THE MILL COMMUNITY

Community is everything at the Mill, as a welcoming, vibrant space open to everyone. We are told by many that the Mill is their safe space. Our mission every day is, do what we can to make The Mill more accessible, more welcoming and more open to more people in our local community.

Family Friendly

At the Mill, every family should be able to come and have fun without it costing the earth. There's free table tennis and air hockey, a free play area for children, and every Saturday and school holiday free crafts for all. Pay as you can events have included toddler singing classes, meet the owls(!), and scavenger hunts.



“Not sure where I would be without this place. With it, I am coming back to a life of connection, activity and well-being. Heartfelt gratitude.”

Brimscombe Mill Customer

The Sanctuary

The Sanctuary is ‘A space for awe, for creativity and the arts, for worship and connection. A space for flourishing’. In this space we host regular events for our community. All are free of charge or pay as you can. Since its opening this year, the Sanctuary has hosted art exhibitions, book launches, community talks and maternal journaling courses to name a few.

THE MILL COMMUNITY

Board Game Saturday

Twice a month on a Saturday Board Game Dave runs a free, drop-in board gaming club.

The aim is to create an inclusive, safe, friendly environment for all folks to meet, helping combat loneliness and isolation. Board games are expensive, so board game Saturday allows people to play these games without financial barriers.

- ***252 people have come along since it started in Aug 23***
- ***110 games have been added to a board game library for people to borrow and share***



Cloister events

The public areas act as cloisters, which are part of our original Seven Spaces vision for the Mill, as a place to build community and make friends. This is where our businesses put on events for our community, and where we greet customers and bump into each other. This year we have hosted musicians (even Grammy award winning ones!), craft tables, talks, film showings, sales and more.

THE MILL COMMUNITY

We estimate that there were roughly 180,000 visits to the Mill last year

We hope each one of those visitors felt part of our community, whilst they were at the Mill, whether they stayed for 15 minutes once, or come along for an hour or two every week. When they are here we want them to feel included, that they feel welcome whatever their background or how their day is going, that they can feed and clothe their family no matter what money they have, that they can amble through the Sanctuary, or take 5 minutes out to sit quietly in the Retreat and watch the river. They might even see the otters!

“I came here in a really low place, staff have me leaving with a smile I can’t remember wearing for a while. Thank you for your kindness”

Brimscombe Mill Customer



STROUD GRACE NETWORK

Stroud Grace Network Community Benefit Society is the parent organisation at Brimscombe Mill. We own the social enterprises based at the Mill, and we run compliance and central services for these enterprises as well as looking after the Mill building. This means the enterprise leaders can focus on growing their businesses and social output without the distraction of essential (and sometimes boring!) business functions which can take energy away from achieving their aims.

The energy of the subsidiary business staff then is focused on revenue, social output and community building.

The Stroud Grace Network is a community benefit society, which means that it is collectively owned by its members.

“Wonderful, so pleased to see that these buildings are being utilised and provide a meeting place for the community”

Brimscombe Mill Customer



PLACEMENTS

Our community is built up through welcoming everyone and being place-based whilst having an entrepreneurial spirit focused on growth of the entire person, not just business growth.

We want to build a community that can rewire the local economy so that it helps people, planet and society flourish.

This drives collective outcomes and creates new business leaders, thriving hubs of community and a wide range of social outputs.

To enable this, we believe people need worthwhile employment with an employer that cares for the whole person. We strongly believe that people should be paid for the time and skills they offer, we have a variety of different job roles on site ranging from full-time to a few hours a week, some which are highly skilled and some that are entry level positions.

We created our placement scheme to add an extra level of support to the work we can offer and help those who may need extra support into the broader world of paid work.



“A truly special and heartwarming experience that I will remember forever.” - Placement Student

PLACEMENTS



Our placement program is not only for those who have traditionally been seen as needing employment support. Other reasons include medical issues, lack of qualifications and experience, or life changes and challenging life circumstances. We are completely inclusive and understand that anyone of us could need the opportunity, at some point in our lives.

The placement programme helps those in need of extra support in the working world by giving them paid work over a 6-9 months placement. During this time, placements are encouraged to pursue a path that resonates with them and has more longevity, helping people flourish and thrive rather than just survive. In the 6-9 months with us we look to build foundations for growth to occur, providing training and experience in a particular field or by helping them discover their dreams and passions for future careers.

OUR TEAM

We believe everyone is empowered by paid employment, so we have a strong team of paid staff, rather than relying on volunteers. However we acknowledge that not everyone wants full time work and so we provide flexible employment that fits around our staff's personal and family commitments.

KEY OUTCOME:

- 7,227 hours of employment paid this year by Stroud Grace Network.

THE LONG TABLE

**WHAT IF EVERYONE IN OUR COMMUNITY
HAD ACCESS TO GREAT FOOD AND PEOPLE
TO EAT IT WITH?**

The Long Table is a restaurant that strives to answer the question, 'What if everyone in our community has access to great food and people to eat it with?' We provide delicious meals made with the best local ingredients to anyone who joins us at our table, at whatever price they can afford.

Food, particularly in the context of restaurants has been unaffordable for many and has become unobtainable. Eating restaurant quality, hyper local, seasonal food should not be a luxury and we have found through a Pay-As-You-Can model a way for people from all backgrounds to feel welcomed at our table.



***“ We travelled the country
looking for a community that
was right to bring up our
family. After a dinner with
friends at Long Table we
knew it was Stroud. Love it!”***

Long Table Customer

By showcasing the finest local produce, we establish a direct connection between our customers and producers, highlighting the vibrancy of our local food economy.

Our home creates a space for all by showing radical hospitality and allowing community the space to grow - amazing things happen when we eat together.

THE LONG TABLE

THE LONG TABLE'S FIVE PRINCIPLES



AGRICULTURE

We champion, celebrate and cook with food from our communities whenever we can. This supports local farmers and suppliers and helps nurture a precious food system that is fit for our children's generation without destroying the only home we have: our planet.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 3.8 tonnes of food repurposed back into meals that would have entered the food waste system
- 1.9 tonnes of food waste composted in our biodigester



B'COOKING

A kitchen bustling with creativity, where everything we serve is cooked from scratch and strives to be nutritious and delicious.

KEY OUTCOME:

- 2.5 tonnes of local veg and meat and british grains and pulses purchased.



COMMUNITY

Fostering resilience and togetherness through partnerships with community groups, connecting businesses, schools, churches and charities around the table.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 2 community cafes funded
- 1,365 meals funded and served at these cafes
- 2,040 freezer of love meals sent out local community freezers.

THE LONG TABLE



DINING

Where strangers become friends. Every meal is a celebration of community and always pay as you can. To eat at the Long Table is to experience 'love in action', as one customer recently put it.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 34,698 people ate a pay as you can meal at our table
- 41% of these meals were paid below what it cost us to make the meals
- 3,101 people claimed a meal paid forward by someone else in our community



EDUCATION

Beyond serving food, we cultivate minds and skills through training and apprenticeships, building capacity for the table as it grows ever longer, and helping people on a journey to healthier choices and happier outcomes in life.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 11 teenagers graduated our teenage cookery course.
- 3 training placement roles created within Long Table.
- 1 report completed by university of bristol on our Mens Table project
- scan the qr code to watch the video.



THE LONG TABLE

“We absolutely loved it- the whole ethos behind everything that is happening here really restores our faith in humanity. When I was growing up my family struggled with a period of homelessness so I can empathise a lot with the feeling of shame for needing to rely on foodbanks, but at the Long Table the shame is taken away and customers are met with complete compassion. Thank you so much for caring for those vulnerable members of society and giving them a light in an otherwise dark time in their life. ” Long Table Customer

We believe everyone is empowered by paid employment, so we have a strong team of paid staff, rather than relying on volunteers. However we acknowledge that not everyone wants full time work and so we provide flexible employment that fits around our staff's personal and family commitments.

KEY OUTCOME:

- 20,482 hours of employment paid this year by Long Table.

“Amazing! I have seen the future of food!”

Long Table Customer



KIDS STUFF

We want every family to thrive as they go through life's journey.

We want to build a sense of belonging, sharing and community and show that raising a family doesn't need to cost the earth.

Our Vision is to create a circular economy where families in the Stroud District pass us their children's items that are no longer needed to be reused by families in need of support, families who have restricted budgets and families that want to use recycled items to reduce their impact on the environment.

We want to build a sense of belonging, sharing and community so everyone, regardless of circumstances can get the support they need without stigma, whilst raising the awareness that raising a family does not need to cost the earth.



“You're just the best. As a new mum in the area, I don't know what i'd do without you. Community vibes 100%.”

Kids Stuff Customer

Our mission and aim is to provide support for the children and their families in our district alongside empowering our staff to improve their current situations by offering flexible working opportunities that support them in their personal lives.

KIDS STUFF REFERRALS



Newborn Bundles

We work in conjunction with local business Cloud Perspective to provide Newborn Bundles. Aimed at providing the essentials needed for mum and baby in those first few weeks, these are for families who have been displaced or are vulnerable. Newborn Bundles are distributed by local maternity units.

KEY OUTCOME:

- 64 newborn bundles

Red Referrals

The items in these bundles provide immediate support to the families who come through our referral process. This process is open to carers, health visitors, local authorities, school, midwives and those who work alongside local families.

KEY OUTCOME:

- 81 bundles to 374 people

Amber Referrals

A gift card for our shop is given to families so they can come and choose the items they need for themselves. These gift cards can be used without any stigma. Having the ability to choose the items promotes and encourages independency.

KEY OUTCOME:

- 46 giftcards given out

Holiday Giftcards

Gift cards for our shop are given out to local families through our referrers at Christmas and school holidays.

KEY OUTCOME:

- 423 holiday giftcards given to 570 children

KIDS STUFF

Creating a Circular Economy

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 51.4 tonnes of items were donated to us to repurpose
- 90.7% of all donations given to us were recycled through our shop, referrals, CTR collections or scrap metal

Our Shop

Our shop is open to everyone! We keep our prices low to make it accessible to every family. This reflects our mission to support families, whether with a limited budget or a desire to reduce their impact on the environment. Our shop allows access to the things that help children thrive, whilst showing that reusing everyday items is the way forward.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 21,486 people visited our shop last year

Community events

We hosted a wide range of community events at the Mill with the aim to support parents, carers and their children by providing an all year round safe space to meet, socialise, make friends and have fun.

Our weekly family drop in sessions are a place where families can receive debt and energy advice, a listening ear over tea or coffee and community whilst their children have access to snacks and supervised play activities.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 293 activities
- 2,310 people attended our saturday and holiday craft tables
- 1,988 adults and children have come along to our weekly family drop in sessions.



KIDS STUFF

Our Team

We believe everyone is empowered by paid employment, so we have a strong team of part time staff, rather than relying on volunteers. We provide flexible employment that fits around our staff's personal and family commitments. By closing our shop at 2.30pm each weekday we provide the ability for parents and carers to collect their children from school.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 9,642 hours of employment paid this year by Kids Stuff.
- This year our director Anna was chosen to be on the WISE100 list for 2024. The WISE100 recognises the most inspiring and influential Women In Social Enterprise. Go Anna!



“Kids Stuff is the only way I could give my son Christmas presents last year. And he loved them all. I come every Wednesday and Friday to see how many bargains I can find, as we struggle for money a lot. I love Kids Stuff so much, thank you for everything you do.”

Kids Stuff Customer

FURNITURE BANK

We want everyone to have everything they need to make their house as wholesome as possible without putting further pressure on the Earth's resources.

Creating a Circular Economy

We create a circular economy model to support the structure of the home and the things we put in it whilst providing worthwhile paid employment and training opportunities to all.

Amazingly we managed to collect and re-use 149 tonnes of unwanted furniture this past year. This has all since gone on to find new homes, and probably will do again in its next cycle. This is the beauty of recycled furniture, it has great longevity and has many stories to tell! For some perspective, a majestic Orca weighs 1 tonne, so imagine 149 of those all together!

Recent investigations by the Waste and Resources Action Programme reveal that refurbishing existing furniture has significant environmental benefits compared to producing new items. In fact, it takes up to 1,000 times more CO₂ to manufacture new furniture than to refurbish existing pieces. Surprisingly, the positive impact of reusing one tonne of sofas is equivalent to recycling one tonne of plastics. Choosing refurbishment over new production can play a crucial role in reducing our carbon footprint.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 7898 items throughout the year were reused. This is 7,898 new items of furniture that were not produced from the finite earth's resources.
- This equates to 149 tonnes.

FURNITURE BANK

Customer Story

Charlotte met up with a long term customer who found us back in 2017 when her and her husband moved over to the UK.

In July of that year his friend mentioned that Furniture Bank would be able to help with some household essential items of furniture, to furnish their newly acquired council property before the arrival of their first child.

The family were unable to have access to their flat until their child was born, and the Furniture Bank were able to deliver the items they needed at short notice so mum and baby were able to leave hospital and settle in their new home.

From this first visit the Furniture Bank were able to continue assisting this family with furniture when it was needed. They were also able to help them get items from Kids Stuff.



They are both able to support themselves financially now and continue to support Furniture Bank, furnishing their new private rented house with Furniture Bank items.

This is a testament to the work Furniture Bank can do from helping those in their time of need and low income journey to them being able to support others by buying second hand from us.



FURNITURE BANK



Our Referral Programme

Our referral program is designed to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to make their house a home regardless of their financial stability. There are many ways that our customers can access this heavily subsidised furniture; they can be referred to us from professionals such as social workers, charities and churches, they can come to our shop and show evidence of certain benefits or they might be housed in a council property that has been furnished by us. As much as we can we want to allow our referral clients to pick the furniture themselves to suit their needs and likes.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 551 items of furniture delivered in through the referral program
- 291 families supported through this families.

Our Team

We believe everyone is empowered by paid employment, so we have a strong team of paid staff, rather than relying on volunteers. However we acknowledge that not everyone wants full time work and so we provide flexible employment that fits around our staff's personal and family commitments.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 10,118 hours of employment paid this year by Furniture Bank.

“Bought my first piece of furniture for my first flat at the furniture bank. Fair prices and amazing staff. What an amazing and essential service. Thank you for what you do for the community!”

Furniture Bank Customer

THE BIKE DROP

What if there were more reasons to ride a bike than not?

We want to chip away at current barriers to cycling to help build a better bike infrastructure and get more people on bikes. We deliver this through operating a world class leading cycle mechanics training academy in Brimscombe Mill that supports a professional bike repair workshop and bike shop selling new and refurbished bikes along with parts and accessories.

We strive to develop bike usage across as many platforms as possible focussing on three activity pillars: commercial, leisure and commuting. We ask ourselves the question: What if there were more reasons to ride a bike than not?

“Bike drop...Helpfulness is their creed.

An awesome community project that helps out local people and businesses.

5 * rating.”

Bike Drop Customer



THE BIKE DROP



Community

At The Bike Drop, we want to support healthy communities to use bikes as transport for people and cargo, enabling as many people as possible to receive the physical and mental benefits whilst driving change within the industry by providing new opportunities, training and employment. We believe that it will take a mindset change to put the bike first and reduce our reliance on carbon central transport. This year we have supported monthly mass family bike ride from Brimscombe Mill to the centre of Stroud to highlight the need for bike friendly roads around our District and the importance of bikes in family life.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 12 family friendly mass bike rides

Also, working with Transition Stroud, we have set up an e-bike loan scheme, launching within Brimscombe, Thrupp, Chalford, Bisley, Minchinhampton and Stonehouse with plans to extend further across the district. The scheme will give people low-cost (2-weeks) access to electric bike and electric cargo bikes to see if and how transitioning to an e-bike fits in with individuals' day to day lives. E-bikes and E-cargo bikes are transforming what can be done on a bike, and we want to help people understand the benefits of simple changes to routines such as school runs or weekly shops. This loan scheme will support and empower local communities to use bikes more, Drive towards a greener future and help build healthier, happier places to live.

THE BIKE DROP

“I dropped my bike off to be serviced. I was having a bad day, so thanks for the delicious food and warm smiles. Cheered me up a bit”

Bike Drop Customer

Deliveries

We want to help our local economy to become carbon neutral, one way we can help contribute to this is providing local businesses a delivery alternative to the traditional delivery van. Currently, we focus on delivering publications around the District.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- This year we have delivered 37,933 items
- Visited 1,709 locations
- Cycled 1,181 miles
- 302.3kg carbon saved doing the journeys on ebike. If these deliveries were done by van they would have produced 320kg of carbon. On bike these journeys produced only 17.7kg of carbon



THE BIKE DROP

Servicing

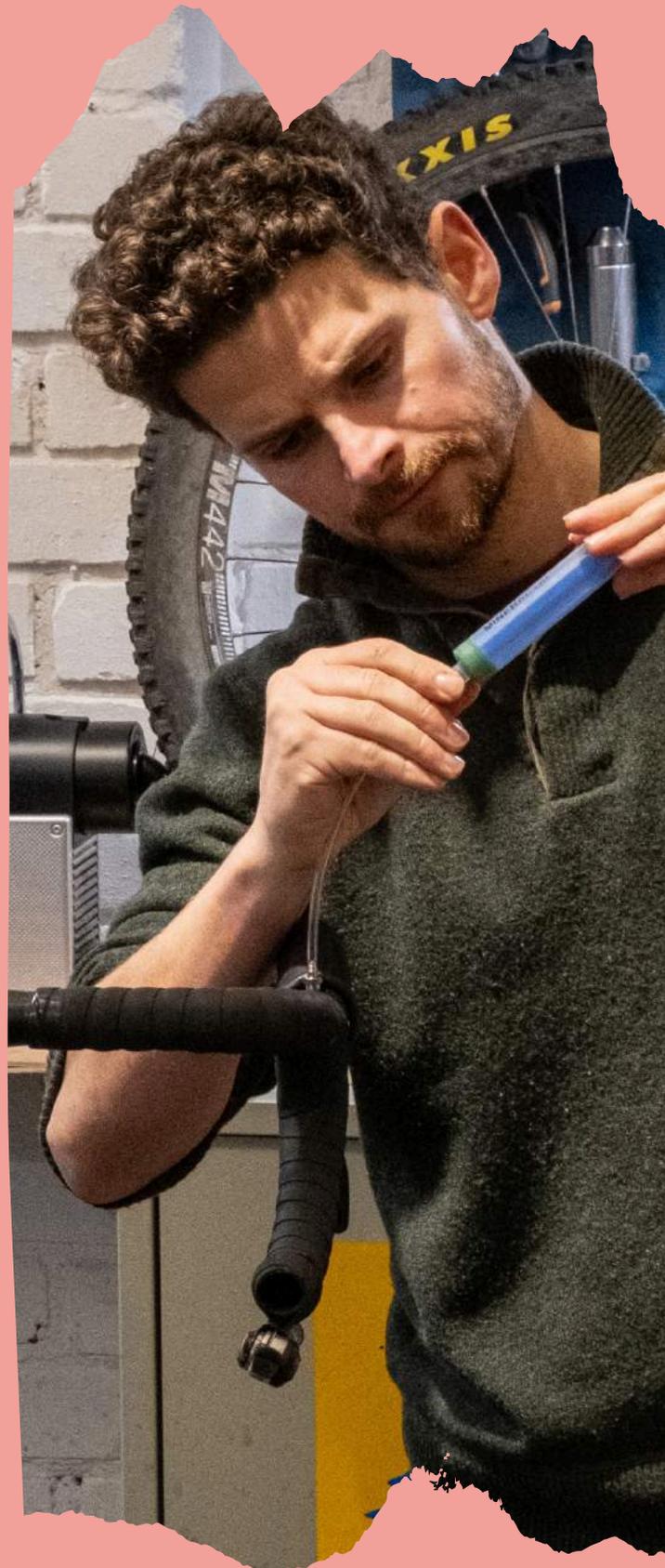
Every bike we service and repair helps us achieve our mission of putting more bikes on the road and removing cars, supporting a low carbon future our community longs for and drive a future towards active travel.

Our workshop recycles and services donated bikes. These bikes are then sold at an affordable price or given away.

According to Trek (the large US bike brand) the production of a basic model of its best-selling bikes - an entry level mountain bike - emits about 100kg of CO₂e. Therefore by refurbishing used bikes there is 100kg fewer CO₂ emissions per bike. Our refurbished bikes have reduced carbon emissions by 24.9 tonnes.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 249 bikes refurbished
- 588 bikes serviced



THE BIKE DROP

Bike Drop Academy

We train people to get well-paid work in the cycling industry. We set up our first cycle mechanic training workshop in January 2020, and now employ one of the graduates as a fully qualified mechanic.

We now run the Bike Drop training academy from a professionally equipped training workshop. We offer 18-month apprenticeships paid higher than apprenticeship wages that allow people with no prior experience to gain Cytech L1, L2 & L3 internationally recognised qualifications, along with 18-month industry experience. We think this is crucial to the future of bikes and cycling.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 1,320 hours of paid highly skilled training hours in our academy

Our Team

We believe everyone is empowered by paid employment, so we have a strong team of paid staff, rather than relying on volunteers. However we acknowledge that not everyone wants full time work and so we provide flexible employment that fits around our staff's personal and family commitments.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 7,388 hours of employment paid this year by Bike Drop.



THE MILL COLLECTIVE

Each of our social enterprises has their own social impact goals and ways of working, however we believe that the only way to change the global economy is to work together. Like a five cord rope, we are stronger if we work as one single rope as opposed to five threads. Our businesses are owned collectively, work collectively and have the collective goal of bringing social justice to our local area.

Our social impacts tie us together as a collective. They come to life when you see someone come to the site and use all the parts, as summed up beautifully in a recent review below...

“The first place like this I've ever felt truly at home. A cafe where I'm not rushed, a kid's area where I'm not stressed for my toddler, a toy shop where my toddler can get excited but my heart doesn't sink over the expense, a furniture store where I can fall in love with something and thrill over the bargain rather than being excluded by the cost (and as a side effect I've learned how to clean up and do basic antique restoration!). A walk along the canal, a gallery space to browse and connect, amazing collection of cycles, but most of all the only place I've ever really felt relaxed and welcome to visit no matter how I feel. No obligation, no feeling like I'm under a spotlight or judgement. Space to breathe.”

Brimscombe Mill Customer



THE MILL COLLECTIVE

Collective Impact

Equally, this collective impact allows us to have conversations with those in charge of our local economy- Council leaders, titans of industry and influencers. When we combine together the broad impacts much can be achieved. For example each company may recycle little, but put the outputs together and we reveal our collective impact and demonstrate how our social economy is more than the sum of our parts.

Our collective impacts may look different this year as three of our enterprises moved out of our hub at Brimscombe Mill into their new hub up at Aston Down. However we believe there are so many levels of our impacts, at a business level, hub level and whole network level.



THE MILL COLLECTIVE

Impacts of The Mill & Businesses Collated Together

224 Tonnes

244 tonnes of items reused throughout the year. This is just under 1 tonne reused each working day. Each one of these items reused is one less item in landfill and one more item which has found a new home, and probably will do again in its next cycle. This is the beauty of recycled goods, they have great longevity and so many stories to tell.



54,857 Hours

54,857 hours of paid employment created across our businesses. These jobs range from full time Monday to Friday to part time hours which fit around family life.

As well as creating paid employment we also want to create a working environment which allows all of our staff to be whole at work. We use our 7 spaces to create a space where all our staff can grow as individuals whilst growing the enterprises.



1,189 Referral Packages

1,189 referral packages were given out for free or heavily subsidised to individuals and families in need. These include children's bundles, gift cards to our shop, furniture and bikes. That is 4.5 referral packages each working day.



THE MILL COLLECTIVE

Impacts of The Mill & Businesses Collated Together



38,305 Meals

Long Table produced 38,305 meals across the year at The Mill. This includes meals at the table, freezer of love meals and community cafe meals. That is 147 meals every working day.



389 activities on site

389 activities and events were held on site at Brimscombe Mill. These include craft activities, music events, book launches, board game club and cookery courses. This is 1.5 events each working day.

MORE THAN AN ENTERPRISE HUB

What makes us more than just an enterprise hub?

How do we create space and opportunity for people to change and grow?

The goal of the Grace Network is simple to read:

'To show the vulnerable that change is possible. To help free people who feel trapped and tell the world a new way of living, to help free people from the things, systems and choices that oppress them, to proclaim a new start, a second chance of a good life'

However, working to deliver this vision and make it a lived reality is hard. We aspire to be more than just a collection of social enterprises.

We want to support and facilitate change in people across their life – this hub is not just a charity space, not just a job, but a chance to change your whole life. We use the key words heart, soul, mind and strength to summarise the broad ways that people in our Grace Network communities grow:

HEART = EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

SOUL = SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

MIND = INTELLECTUAL WELLBEING

STRENGTH = PHYSICAL WELLBEING.

MORE THAN AN ENTERPRISE HUB

What makes us more than just an enterprise hub?

So what are we?

We tried lots of models- being a charity, being a social enterprise incubator, being a social business and being a community group. None of them mapped neatly onto the vision. None of them gave us an operating model we felt suited us. Ultimately, we found our operating model by chance, after reading a pamphlet on how monasteries worked.

Looking back to a time before state-sponsored religion, centralised governments and globalised economies, we realised that the ancient practise of monastic living provided the perfect conditions for heart, soul, mind and strength growth whilst also being fertile ground for economic empowerment. It has since become the language of choice when describing what we are trying to do in each of our hubs.

What is a monastery?

Monasteries can be of any size, and they exist in all religions and across all time periods. They are spaces for caring for the poorest in society and hubs for the distribution of emergency charitable supplies; they include spaces for people to pray, sit in silence and explore their souls; and they include spaces for commerce, education and healthcare.

Monasteries from all backgrounds have historically been places where people can reflect on life and find deep, transformative change. They are safe places of refuge and community.

We believe that to build a new world and develop a new way to live, we need to transform as individuals. Too many mindfulness apps and social change movements seek to offer cheap change, telling us that we're ok and everything else is the problem or, that we are perfectible (not true), and if only we can make ourselves perfect then our lives will be perfectly happy.

MORE THAN AN ENTERPRISE HUB

What makes us more than just an enterprise hub?

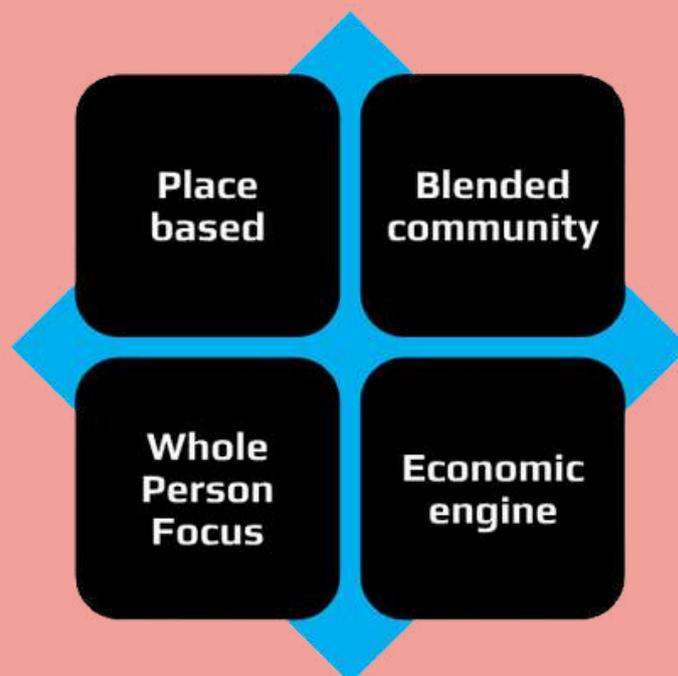
So what are we?

We believe that lasting change can only come from a deep, conscious, transformative context where people can develop in community. A monastery holds a space for this to happen.

Rarely has deep change happened from one individual doing something on their own. Monasteries are groups of people living and working together. This is a concept too often forgotten in social change projects. Groups that eat, learn, think and work together are changed and recreated by it. We are building a network of people who are more than just colleagues or funders or cheerleaders. We want to build a diverse, networked community.

This dual combination of personal transformation and community development offered by the monastic model articulates our vision. That is why we talk about being a modern-day monastery network.

A monastery has four key elements:



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Being place based

Each community space is rooted in a geographic community. It doesn't have to worry about other places, but focuses on the here and near. It allows a community to focus on delivering change in a place they can influence.

Building a blended community

Each monastery is a mix of different people- religious and non-religious, the unwell, workers, intellectuals, artists, young and old. We are not just the same type of person but instead are a broad range of the entire local community. This means we have diversity of thought and leadership.

Developing an economic engine

Monasteries, once they get up and running, are self-sufficient. This gives them control, agency and self-determination. Any profit generated is ploughed back into realising the vision of the monastery.

Maintaining a whole person focus

Monasteries hold together the need for personal development with the need for collective development. This simply means that an individual can develop personally whilst an entire community develops at the same time, like a person growing in kindness at the same time a whole group of people becomes more collectively kind.

This is the inspiration around the way the hubs are set up, and it is the model and language we are using to help develop our network. If you come on site and think we are more joyful, more merciful, more open or more optimistic than other spaces it is because of these four elements being at play.

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An unorthodox monastery?

Although we use the language of a monastery, there are some key differences between our modern, re-imagined monastery and the traditional model.

People who work here aren't nuns or monks, and being religious isn't a prerequisite for working here.

Our leadership teams include people from a range of faith and no faith backgrounds, and we take care to keep our language as open and accessible as possible.

However, our sites at Brimscombe, Cirencester and Aston Down are - really - monasteries. It's just a new kind of monastery. It sits in a secular governance framework.

People are left free to add their voice and energy and different groups of people can exist together in vibrant harmonies despite all being broken in different ways and bringing a range of experiences, skills and motivating beliefs.

