**YOUR PARK BRISTOL & BATH – REIMAGINING PARKS CAMPAIGN**

**Media pack**

**About Your Park Bristol & Bath**

Your Park Bristol & Bath (YPBB) is a locally based charity that uses Bristol and Bath’s parks to deliver positive social change through activities and initiatives, to support people and communities with the greatest need.

Founded in February 2019 as part of the national Rethinking Parks programme, YPBB is only the second parks foundation charity created in the UK, designed to reimagine how local communities can benefit from and support their parks and green spaces.

The charity works in and with local communities to create opportunities to improve health, wellbeing and social cohesion with the people most in need.

It leads a range of park-based initiatives and activities to engage with under-represented groups and those that have experienced inequality, including older people, unpaid carers, Disabled people, children and young people, and people living in the top 10% most deprived areas of Bristol and Bath & North East Somerset.

YPBB works closely with the two local authorities, Bristol City Council and Bath & North East Somerset Council, who are responsible for the upkeep of the 2,000+ hectares of local parks and green spaces, but operates completely independently in their parks.

**Impact**

In five years, YPBB has:

* Reached nearly 4,000 people through its activities and work
* Supported improvements in 55 parks across the two cities
* Raised £1.2m for local parks
* Supported over 150 smaller groups to make the most of their park
* Delivered over 600 in-park activities with over 1,200 people
* Delivered over 260 Roots to Wellbeing (mental health) sessions

In 2023 alone, YPBB reached over 3,000 people through 270 in-park activities across 40 parks.

Last year, an impact survey undertaken with its beneficiaries revealed that:

* 100% of beneficiaries felt their mental and physical health improved as a result of the activities;
* 92% felt a greater sense of belonging in their community;
* Safety in parks was the weakest outcome for both beneficiaries and volunteers, highlighting the need for more work in this area.

**Case studies – Parks**

**Hartcliffe Millennium Green, Bristol**

Hartcliffe Millennium Green (HMG) in Bristol has been chosen by YPBB to become an exemplar park to demonstrate the simple changes that can be made to parks to support people that struggle to access them.

YPBB worked with a group of local Disabled people with a mix of impairments and differences, including neurodiversity, mobility and sensory impairments, to carry out what the charity believes is the world’s first community-led accessibility audit of a park. The learnings from the project are being used to develop a toolkit that can be shared with other communities to help make their parks more accessible.

Friends of the Earth found that Hartcliffe is a hotspot for Green Space Deprivation and relatively proportion of Disabled residents.

In Hartcliffe & Withywood ward:

* 19,056 residents
* 46% of households have at least one Disabled resident

<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/7019-population-profile-disabled-population/file>

HMG is a small park with a play area, community garden and orchard, along with a performance arena, wildlife pond and wetland. It’s open 24 hours a day and accessible from a main footpath crossing the site from the Bishport Road entrance. The play area includes a slingshot, dish roundabout, trampoline, accessible nest swing, climbing frame with slide and cargo net as well as boulders, logs, seats and bins. The play area is fenced off to make it dog free.

Supported with funding from the Friends of Hartcliffe Millennium Green group, improvements already underway include:

* An accessible gate
* Entranceway being made more inviting and attractive, with planting and tidying up
* New accessible paths and resurfacing
* Ease to access information about the park, with a new notice board installed
* Easy access online information
* Texture added to paths for visually impaired people to tell the difference between centre/edges of parks
* A pilot access bench and handrail

Additional funding is needed for other measures identified through the access assessment:

* Accessible bus stop with raised kerb
* Adding texture to more pathways to support visually impaired people
* Tapping rail for long cane users
* Better play for Disabled children and younger children
* More community activities to make the park feel better used and safer

YPBB has also been running its Roots to Wellbeing programme in the park for two years, supporting around 41 local people in that time.

**Brickfields Park, Bath**

Brickfields Park is surrounded by three areas of multiple disadvantage: Whiteway, Twerton and Southdown which are some of the most disadvantaged wards in the country. It is a large park, which was mainly used for dog walking and as a pass-through for commuters. It was underused due to antisocial behaviour. It contains a play park, pump track and the only free, full size basketball court in Bath, to which people travel from all over the city and outskirts to use.

Within the locality:

* 23% of people live in purpose-built blocks of flats with extremely limited outdoor space.
* There are over twice the amount of Gypsy or Irish Travellers and people from mixed or BAME backgrounds compared to Bath & North East Somerset’s (B&NES) average.
* 11% of residents’ lives are limited a lot and over twice the amount of people are in very bad health.
* Over double the amount of people compared to B&NES as a whole are in very bad health, are long term unemployed, have never been employed, are carers, long-term sick or disabled.
* 32% have no qualifications and of those who are employed, only 50% work full time.
* 16% of residents are single parents – over twice the B&NES average.

Before 2021, the site was otherwise barren. Now, the space hosts more than 500 trees, thousands of wildflowers, a nature pond and natural habitats for more than 2,000 species. It will soon be reimagined for girls and women.

YPBB has chosen Brickfields Park to become an exemplar park for accessibility for women and girls. The charity undertook a consultation with young people to understand what they wanted from Brickfields Park, and used the opportunity to work with another charity, Make Space for Girls to understand the needs of teenage girls.

The Brickfields Park Youth Consultation focused on improving access, safety and usage for 11–19-year-olds. It was carried out in partnership with the University of Bath in November and December 2021, and found that:

* 20% of users estimated between the ages of 9-19 were accompanied by an adult (5 female, 4 male);
* Young people were only observed in the park without peers when accompanied by an adult;
* Males using the park engaged in a much wider range of activities including using the sports facilities;
* Females didn’t use the basketball court or football pitches and primarily engaged in social activities (talking and using phones) while cutting through the park.

The exercise was repeated in July 2022 with charity Make Space for Girls, with a focus on determining the current use of sporting facilities in Brickfields Park.

It found that:

* 89% of users of the basketball courts were teenage males with only 10% of users being teenage females;
* No females of any age used the football pitches;
* Girls walking through from Hayesfield School mostly used benches or the grass to sit and chat, so mostly engaged in social activities;
* Males used the park most weeks, but most females only visited a few times a year;
* 25% of females do not feel safe enough to visit Brickfields Park at all.

Improvements that have taken place in the last year or are ongoing include:

* High hedges and height of fencing dropped to make pathways more open and increase visibility across the site;
* Entrance gateways opened to make them more accessible and welcoming;
* More natural features added, such as plants, flowers and water;
* More social seating – three brand new social seating areas going in;
* New swings for teenagers outside of the children’s play area.

Further funding is required to deliver further improvements over the next year, including:

* Shelter and lighting;
* Wide pathways for roller skating pathways;
* RRedesigning the sports area and shelter in collaboration with teenage girls;
* Outdoor gym with a charging port for phones.

Read the full Brickfields Park Youth Consultation report here: <https://yourpark.org.uk/uploads/Brickfields-Park-Youth-Consultation-Report.pdf>

**Case studies – Bristol people**

1. **Colin – wheelchair user**

Colin is 30-year-old wheelchair user and has been a Bristol resident for 5 years. He was involved in the first stage of access work and enjoyed it so much he became an employee and led the access assessment of Hartcliffe Millennium Green.

Colin got involved with YPBB in March 2023 working on a project that assessed how to make parks more accessible for disabled people and carers, subsequently joining YPBB as an Access and Community Lead to carry out phase two of the project which involved testing the process on HMG.

Colin found that many parks in Bristol are not accessible even at the front gate, with entrances often uneven and narrow with heavy gates that are difficult to move in a wheelchair. Even once in parks, there is a lack of disabled parking, toilets, pathways and equipment suitable for disabled people. These are barriers that a non-disabled person does not even need to think about when accessing a park or green space. These experiences have been echoed by the partners Colin worked with on the project.

Colin said: “YPBB has been working hard to highlight the fact that minorities suffer from unequal access to parks and green spaces - this included disabled people, women and girls and people of colour as well as those from poorer backgrounds. This is an issue that often goes unhighlighted within society but one, I feel, is vital.

“Research shows that being able to access a park or green space improves people's health both mentally and physically. In addition, YPBB is putting co-production with the local community and lived experiences at the core of its project delivery. This is important because it means the communities and people who will be using the parks and green spaces can have their voices front and centre.”

1. **Jane Ibbunson – visually impaired**

Jane has lived in Bristol for the past 12 years and has worked in the voluntary sector for most of her career. She is in her late 50’s and started losing my sight about 20 years ago, which presents a lot of daily challenges but also new opportunities and insights.

She was introduced to Your Park through another volunteer (also sight impaired) which gave her confidence that getting involved wouldn’t present any barriers for her. Initially, Jane participated in a video explaining how having access to parks and green spaces benefitted people living with sight loss.

From there, she was invited to attend a series of workshops comprising a range of physically and mentally disabled people. The aim was to produce the first community led tool kit to increase levels of access to parks for people of all abilities. Jane felt it was fantastic to be a part of this first.

Jane says: “Its sounds like a bit of a cliché, but it really felt like I was making a difference, and it gave me a greater understanding of the needs of others living with different disabilities. Its quite empowering to be asked what accessibility looks like for you and for your opinion to be taken on board. Based on my positive experiences with Your Park, I have decided to continue volunteering with the charity and am hoping to become more involved with other projects.

“My local park is really important to me - it’s my free gym, quiet space and a way of being close to nature – so important in the 24/7 culture that goes with living in a busy city. It is also a welcoming space that brings everyone in the neighbourhood together. Your Park plays a key role in ensuring that those with responsibility for our parks know just how important they are and how parks contribute to our quality of life.”

1. **Jane:**

Jane joined Roots to Wellbeing at Eastville Park in March 2023 after seeing the GP for anxiety and panic attacks. Her loneliness had been persistent for many years but was steadily getting worse, and she was feeling isolated from friends and family.

Jane knew Eastville Park well already, so was reassured that she wouldn’t be too anxious attending sessions there. She found the group welcoming, loved the activities, and surprised herself by discovering a love for creativity. The Roots to Wellbeing group were helpful and supportive, and it has helped Jane to feel a part of something.

Jane says that since attending the programme, she has been given back a piece of her life and has now done things she struggled with before, like joining a gym and attending a Church lunch group. She has restarted walking in nature and is feeling stronger and more determined. Jane now has plans to start a social group of her own and feels enthusiastic about bringing people together to battle loneliness.

1. **Matthew – Roots to Wellbeing participant**

Matthew Whinstone has suffered from depression and issues with anger for many years. He grew up in Hartcliffe living with his mum and siblings until he was 10-years-old, when he moved in with his nan. Now in his 20s, he has his own place and is a part-time carer for his 16-year-old brother.

A mental health nurse referred him to the Roots to Wellbeing scheme after he recently lost his job due to an altercation with the manager. After that he felt he couldn’t trust himself around people and became increasingly concerned about starting another job.

Before attending the sessions, he was struggling with negative thoughts and lacked motivation. Sometimes he would wake up in the morning and ask himself “Why am I here?”

He has attended nine sessions at Hartcliffe Millennium Green and now looks forwards to Thursdays. His favourite activity has been using the different tools to prune the fruit trees. He also enjoys the nature walks, counting the birds and sometimes the trollies too. He now feels less isolated, more confident and ready to get back to work.

1. **Jo Parker – Dementia Support Worker at Devon Partnership NHS Trust**

Jo has referred three people to the service after attending the Hartcliffe Millennium Green sessions herself in 2022 as a support worker. Since then, she has helped to develop a specific dementia pathway that means users with dementia will be able to stay in the group indefinitely, and will benefit from appropriate support.

She says: “I believe the service is one of a kind due to the fact it offers community transport. This allows people with dementia to attend even if their carers are not available. This also gives the carers much-needed respite whilst knowing the person they look after is safe and doing something nice.”

**Case studies – Bath People**

1. **Tony Hickman – Alice Park Café Owner**

Tony feels very passionately about parks. He says: “I don’t think there is a single other activity with only positive benefits and outcomes, all for free. But not everybody can access parks which is shocking.”

He first discovered Alice Park in 1991 after the birth of his son, AJ. He became a regular visitor and always noticed how he felt much better being in the park and how his son was much calmer. It’s a feeling that has stayed with him. After some time spent working in London, he returned to Bath, and in 2008 opened Alice Park Café.

Tony strives to create a welcoming community, which means many locals see the café as the centre of the community. Working in the community is what drives Tony.

He believes parks offer a place to find peace, a chance to think and get away from the hustle and bustle of city life. It’s free dopamine and great for your head, heart and body.

1. **Rich** – **Roots to Wellbeing participant**

Rich has struggled his entire life with depression. Anti-depressants did not work for him and only left him feeling worse. He’s battled with addiction too. After decades of unsuccessful treatment, his doctor assigned him to a social prescriber and through this service he joined the Roots to Wellbeing project.

“Gardening and nature are my saving graces in a society where I feel I do not fit in,” says Rich.

50-year-old Rich joined the group when he was feeling socially isolated, did not have any friends, felt highly anxious and lacked any sense of purpose of self-worth. He needed a reason to get out of bed and feel useful.

After attending Roots to Wellbeing, his life completely changed. He finally felt acceptance from others and was able to ‘be himself’. Now on Tuesdays, he wakes up excited to see his friends and go to a place where he can talk openly about his thoughts, feelings and concerns in a non-judgemental space. And for the first time ever, last winter, he didn’t suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

“If you feel anxious, depressed or socially isolated, then please consider Roots to Wellbeing where you will find friendship, acceptance, inclusion and understanding. You may even find yourself again.”

**Case studies – Projects**

Roots to Wellbeing

Roots to Wellbeing supports people through access to stress-relieving and collaborative sessions in nature.

Following a successful pilot programme, the charity raised over £250k to expand the programme to support around 300 people a year in Bristol and Bath.

Participants are either referred to the programme by their GP or can self-refer. They can take part in up to 18 sessions, each with 15 people in the group. Activities range from arts and crafts and photography to planting, all designed to connect people with nature. Recognising the cost-of-living crisis and impact of this on many of the participants’ wellbeing, the programme also provides free travel and hot lunches for each session.

YPBB is currently focusing the programme on the five areas in Bristol and Bath with the highest health deprivation: Hartcliffe, Withywood, Stockwood, Twerton and Eastville.

After taking part in Roots to Wellbeing,

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| I feel less anxious / calmer | 64% |
| I feel happier | 91% |
| I feel less isolated / lonely | 64% |
| I have made friends | 59% |
| I feel more active | 82% |
| I feel more confident | 55% |
| I feel more hopeful | 77% |
| I feel healthier | 77% |

**The evidence behind the campaign – Bristol & Bath’s parks**

In 2023, YPBB conducted a survey, which was shared with supporters and followers on social media and via email. The survey found that despite 97% saying access to parks is important and that parks are important for their health, 44% of participants said they cannot easily access them. In addition, 96% said nature-rich parks are important, but only 46% felt Bristol and Bath’s parks are nature-rich now.

There are approximately 600k people living in the two cities of Bristol and Bath, of which around 15% of those are disabled people, and 10% of the population providing unpaid care.

**Bristol-specific data**

According to the [Bristol Quality of Life survey 2022/23](https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiMjMyNWQ2ODItNjhhMS00NGM3LWFmNGYtYWU0MmExOTQ0YzMzIiwidCI6IjYzNzhhN2E1LTBmMjEtNDQ4Mi1hZWUwLTg5N2ViN2RlMzMxZiJ9), which collects data on Bristol residents every year, only 56% of people visit parks at least once a week, with that number down to just 34% of disabled people and 44% of BAME people visiting parks at least once a week.

* Disabled people:
  + Only 33.8% visit parks weekly
  + 60.7% health stops them getting involved in their local community
  + 43.8% have poor mental wellbeing

**Bath-specific data**

There is less detailed demographic data available specifically for Bath, but the [Bath & NE Somerset Council Green Space Strategy 2015-2029](https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/bath_area_profile_final.pdf) reveals from analysis undertaken in 2016 that all parks in Bath have poor or only moderate quality in terms of access; welcoming; management and maintenance; health, safety and security; and community involvement. All however have moderate or high potential of being improved.

In terms of access, the strategy assessed all parks from A-D, with A = top 25% of quality and potential improvement, and D the bottom 25% for the same criteria. No parks received an A rating and the following parks received a D rating: Hazel Way Play, Excelsior St Play, Foxhill open space, and Moorfield Rd open space.

**The YPBB team**

**Charlee Bennett, CEO**

Charlee brings more than 14 years’ experience in the charity sector, including with Save the Children and CPRE Hampshire. With a keen interest for the outdoors and a degree in Oceanography with Geography, Charlee is passionate about improving access to parks and creating community in green spaces to transform health, wellbeing and quality of life.

**Rob Acton-Campion, chair**

Rob is Your Park Bristol & Bath’s Founder and Chair, who brings more than 30 years experience in the construction industry and a love for Bristol’s green spaces since moving to the city in the 1980s.

Over the years, Rob has played an integral role in the city’s parks – as founding member of Friends of Troopers Hill in 2003; committee member of the Bristol Parks Forum in 2007 and acting as their secretary until 2022. Rob was also the brain behind the bids submitted to Nesta’s Rethinking Parks programme in 2018, which was later used to set up the charity Your Park. As a regular walker, Rob cares about providing people living in urban areas with the opportunity to experience wildlife on their doorstep.

**Megan Belcher, access lead (trustee)**

Megan is a Disabled Person and YPBB’s Access Lead, who brings a wealth of experience in equalities as Bristol City Council’s Equalities Support Officer and the Vice Chair of the Bristol Disability Equality Commission.

Megan is passionate about the representation and inclusion of Disabled People and wider equalities communities in all conversations from a community level to a strategic level and is excited to be leading the conversation on park access across Bristol and Bath.

**Sara Laking, Mental Health Lead**

Sara leads the charity’s mental health service, Roots to Wellbeing. She uses her lived experience of mental health to create a safe, supportive space in Bristol and Bath’s parks, informed by nature connection and psychological best practice. Sara has grown Roots to Wellbeing from pilot project to fully fledged service.