Other examples of our project work, activities and achievements include:

The delivery and support of 7 community events including our Easter Fair in Springbank and HWP’s annual Easter Eggstravaganza in Hesters Way, Summer Fair, “ECO Fun Day and Peace Week in Springbank”, Halloween Party, Winter Wonderland and a Family Christmas Party - all helping to improve community cohesion, offering engagement opportunities for service providers, fund raising for local groups, and providing lots of fun for all the family.

Fun day trips – great days out for all the family was had by scores of people, young and old alike, to places like Weston Super Mare, Barry Island, Porthcawl, Cattle Country, Dick Whittington Farm Park, Jolly Roger, Noah’s Ark, and Magic land. These trips brought lots of people together, some for the first time, have proven to be a low cost way of helping local families have some time away, and are set to become a regular feature of our work in the future. A total of 353 day trippers enjoyed a total of 16 trips away together - how about that for some community outings!

We continue to help hundreds of people access services through our sign-posting activities and day-to-day working with specialist agencies in housing, money and debt management, youth support work, careers and jobs advice, social services, benefits advice, drugs support, mental health and counseling.

We continued to provide support and services to locally active community groups including AA, ALAnon, Cheltenham West Carers, Friends of Springbank, Springbank Craft and Art Clubs, Hester’s Way Writers Club, and our Hesters Way “Playtime for Older People Project”.

Friends of Springbank – there was talk of this resident led group being closed down as it did not appear to be active any more, but, through our work with members, the group continues lending weight to local issues such as promoting the development of the derelict Springbank Way Shops and challenging the decision by Stage Coach to cut off part of a local bus route.

Community Partnership Working – like our volunteering programme community partnership working is also at the heart of everything we do. We continue to be committed to building strong strategic relationships with key community based delivery partners and resident led community groups.

Our Town – The Newsletter of Cheltenham Civic Society – a regular update on how the Civic Society is working to keep Cheltenham a great place to live - we are delighted to report that the Neighbourhood Project responded positively to the desire of the new editor to include coverage of things happening on this side of town. It is great to see local articles in the newsletter and to feel part of the larger community that is Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.
Our Vision Statement

“To be a truly sustainable and professionally managed Neighbourhood Project that delivers and develops a range of high quality services and opportunities to meet the needs and aspirations of our local Neighbourhoods, and to contribute substantially to the socio-economic well being of the whole of Cheltenham.”

Background

Set up in 1995 through a self help neighbourhood initiative, the Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project became a registered charity in 1996 and a company limited by guarantee whose purpose is to help transform people’s lives by providing local services to local people. A not for profit organisation, we provide a range of services, directly and indirectly, to people living and working on the West side of Cheltenham in the neighbourhoods of St. Marks, Fiddlers Green, Cavendish Park, Springfields, Arle Farm, Springbank, St. Peters, Newlands & River Leys, Arle, Alstone, Rowanfield and Hesters Way, which makes up over 20% of the town’s population.

Run by local people for local people the organisation is truly resident-led and helps tackle social exclusion issues across local neighbourhoods, helping to relieve poverty, ill health and disadvantage through advocacy, education, personal development, volunteering, self help initiatives, active community projects and community partnership working.

At our core is our Team of Volunteers who gave in excess of the equivalent £110,000 worth of benefit in kind to local people and organisations in 2015/16.

Active Community Projects

We run a number of Active Community Projects (ACP’s) that help to serve the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well being of participants, whilst addressing issues such as isolation of older and younger people, partnering with organisations such as Community Roots CIC, Gloucestershire Mentoring and Support CIC and community groups such as POPP’s (Playtime for Older People Projects), as we aspire to build a strong and loving community. ACP’s include the organising of community events such as our Easter Fair, ECO Fun Day & Peace Week and Christmas Winter Wonderland, organising Day Trips on a budget, our free IT drop in classes, art classes, tai chi, our ever present volunteering programme, and our outreach work which is in its infancy.

A good number of these projects are part funded through Cheltenham Borough Council’s Community Investment Grant programme (2011-16) through Cheltenham Borough Homes and Hesters Way Partnership. This is a really important source of funding for the area which continues to be recognised nationally as having some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country. It is also an important source of match funding for the Neighbourhood Project. We are proud to be the recipient of this grant funding, and continue to give a healthy return on the £6M buildings maintained and developed to a high standard.

Facilities Management

Underpinning all of our charitable work is our facilities management of the Hesters Way and Springbank Community Resource Centre’s, where we are landlord to 19 organisations from the private, statutory and charitable sectors, ranging from community nursing to GP surgeries, counselling to nursery care, housing, cultural activities and languages, day care services for the elderly, community infrastructure development, training and education, a hair salon, a hearing aid specialist and a community café. The Resource Centre’s are also home to a variety of community groups who run activities such as indoor bowls, crafts, gentle exercise sessions, tai chi and creative writing classes. All our customers and service users require high levels of customer service, and the £6M buildings maintained and developed to a high standard.

The Future

Our longer term goal is to become a £1M charity. It is not the money that is the target, it is what reaching this target will mean to local people and our local communities, socially and economically, as we attract more investment into the area and create more opportunities for volunteering, self help groups, training, wellbeing, employment, social enterprise and lots of fun for everyone!

In order to reach this aspirational goal we will need to go and knock on the doors of as many local people as possible to find out what hopes and aspirations they have for the future, for themselves, their families and their community. This is happening though our work with Locality and the national Trainee Community Organiser Programme and the good work continues through Community Roots CIC (community investment company).

“Our Vision for the Community

“To help one another to enhance local people’s quality of life, and will do this by being caring and sharing, and by creating and supporting opportunities for ALL to take ownership and be the voice of their community and the decisions that affect it, believing in a strong, resilient, self-reliant, confident and loving community.”

Our Vision Statement

“To be a truly sustainable and professionally managed Neighbourhood Project that delivers and develops a range of high quality services and opportunities to meet the needs and aspirations of our local Neighbourhoods, and to contribute substantially to the socio-economic well being of the whole of Cheltenham.”

Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project & Friends “...run by local people for local people…”

Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project & Friends “...run by local people for local people…”
## EXTRACT FROM CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year Ending 31/03/16</th>
<th>Year Ending 31/03/15</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted Funds</td>
<td>505,054</td>
<td>540,986</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted Funds</td>
<td>35,932</td>
<td>39,648</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Funds</td>
<td>540,986</td>
<td>540,986</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Resources Expended</td>
<td>495,197</td>
<td>534,845</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Movement in Funds</td>
<td>9,857</td>
<td>-3,716</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Transfers between funds</td>
<td>1,784</td>
<td>-1,784</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balances Brought Forward</td>
<td>109,033</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance Carried Forward</td>
<td>120,674</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The summarised accounts may not contain sufficient information to gain a complete understanding of the financial affairs of the Project. For further information, a copy of the full annual accounts should be obtained.

## EXTRACT FROM CONSOLIDATED BALANCE SHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year Ending 31/03/16</th>
<th>Year Ending 31/03/15</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted Funds</td>
<td>9,227</td>
<td>9,227</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted Funds</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Funds</td>
<td>9,227</td>
<td>9,227</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed Assets</td>
<td>171,947</td>
<td>171,947</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Assets</td>
<td>-60,500</td>
<td>-60,500</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creditors</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Current Assets</td>
<td>111,447</td>
<td>111,447</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Assets</td>
<td>120,674</td>
<td>120,674</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds</td>
<td>120,674</td>
<td>120,674</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
<td>120,674</td>
<td>109,033</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL FUNDS</td>
<td>120,674</td>
<td>114,533</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our overall message is positive but we continue to face challenges that we are determined to overcome working as best we can with Community Partners, old and new, Members, Service Users and Residents as we move towards celebrating 21 years of delivering and developing much needed services across our local neighbourhoods and the community that is Cheltenham West.

Our Charitable Business Plan – we continue to make the tough decisions on what projects we can and cannot run or support. This is ensuring the underlying stability of the Neighbourhood Project whilst remaining attractive to potential funders, tenants, service delivery and development partners.

Continuing from last year we have done this by rethinking how we deliver services and have enjoyed a number of new roles including a “hands on” commissioner of youth services, a “specialist” partner organisation, encouraging and helping partners to secure funding to deliver local services, and working with emerging organisations such as Axiom Arts and Cheltenham and CoWorking CIC and through our work with George Training and Development. Whilst we have always worked in partnership it seems that there is a gap in local provision and partner organisations like the way we do things. This bodes well for the future as we look to maximize our flexibility to bring new services, partners and activities into the area to complement established structures.

Unfortunately despite renewed efforts we have yet to secure a financial breakthrough that would allow us to reach out to those parts of the community that have yet to connect with the resources and all the good things that are happening in the area, but we are in the running to play our part in the county wide £3.2 million pound Building Better Opportunities “Going the Extra Mile (GEM) Project”.

Our Rowanfield Living Room initiative is an example of where we are achieving success involving and engaging people who are living on the fringes of society in a forgotten neighbourhood of Cheltenham. Outreach work such as this always brings surprises as you get to meet so many resourceful people who simply need a leg up to get on in life, and in doing so you discover they’ve helped you too!

All four community venues - Hesters Way Community Resource Centre, Springbank Bank Community Resource Centre, Hesters Way Neighbourhood (charity) Shop and The Living Room in Rowanfield - continue to provide services into the community whilst our volunteering programme remains at the heart of everything we do, whether that be dealing with governance matters as a board trustee, as a lead volunteer helping run activities such as Springbank Little Steps and IT Drop In’s, as part of our front of house meet and greet service teams, keeping our community garden looking great, running a peace education programme or supporting community events.

Opened in 2002, we had excellent tenancy levels of the Hesters Way Community Resource Centre for part of the year and with the departure of one tenant have enquires to return to 100% tenancy in the year ahead. This is a fantastic achievement.

We have had 100% tenancy at the Springbank Community Resource Centre, which opened its doors in 2008, but, in recent years this has fallen to about 80%. We have been reminded that this is still quite an achievement. We continue to have interest in the office spaces available and patiently wait for the right organisation (s) to come along.

One such organisation is The Wiggly Worm, a charity that exists to improve the health, well-being and self-esteem of people who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or seldom heard. We are to welcome them as a new tenant of the Springbank Centre in the coming year, looking forward to working with them in the community delivering courses, building partnerships and supporting events.

We are also pleased to report our on-going success of our work through the Community Investment Grant programme which has been described as “rich” by our funders. This grant programme part funds our volunteering and adult education programmes, our work with excluded groups such as children and young people, and community events.

We are grateful to all our tenants for all they do to improve the quality of life of residents. It’s a great feeling to be part of the bigger picture, that our contribution matters and is appreciated. We are nearing the point where all tenants, community groups and service users see that we are all part of something “collective”, and not just doing our own thing independent of everyone else. …………..cont’d
Youth Working – during the year we teamed up with Gloucestershire Mentoring and Support CIC after securing some grant funding from Gloucestershire County Council to lead and develop our junior (8 to 11yrs) and intermediate (12 to 16yrs) groups.

We have now completed our fifth and final year of our 5 year plan to establish a new youth club in Springbank following the withdrawal of county wide funding in 2011. In the first three years we directly delivered youth working activities with a lot of success working in partnership with University of Gloucestershire and a great resident led and well trained volunteer team.

In years four and five we commissioned service providers Young Gloucestershire and then Gloucestershire Mentoring Support CIC (GMAS) to shape and steer youth working activities.

Moving forward, we are supportive of GMAS’s plans to set up a café enterprise in the Ron Smith Pavilion opposite the Springbank Centre to help finance youth work activities longer term across the area and to working with them on community events and linking them with the children and young people’s activities run at the Springbank Centre.

Sadly, we were unable to secure funding to continue the brilliant work of National Play Award Winners (2014) Play Gloucestershire in Springfield’s Park. Their work is quite simply amongst the best available and we look forward to seeing them return to the area in the coming years when we are able to either finance ourselves or via new grant funding.

We were however fortunate to receive a donation from The Spirax Sarco Charitable Trust which we put towards continuing the venue based work with GMAS and some Active Community Projects.

We believe that venue based and outdoor based youth work is a powerful combination that engages children, young people and their families especially when the provision is available week in and week out and youth groups regularly take part in community events.

It will be interesting to see how GMAS and other youth service providers fair in the coming years to develop joined up services across Cheltenham West.

Our forthcoming research work with the University of Gloucestershire will hopefully identify local needs and opportunities to feed into a strategy that will somehow help to secure long term funding for delivering and developing schemes of work for children and young people living and working locally. Our sense is that that something “radically new” is needed or plain old better understanding of the challenges faced by C&YP and a way is found to simply give them the “space and time to grow and discover at their pace” without the pressures of doing things in certain ways to satisfy other drivers.
Hesters Way Community Resource Centre opened its doors in May 2002. The facilities are managed by Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project under contract with the local area partnership (HWP).

Conference & Meeting Rooms
We have 3 small interview rooms suitable up to 6 people and two medium sized meeting rooms including our Conference Suite which can seat up to 50 people.

Our meeting rooms and lobby area are suitable for consultations and exhibitions and other functions.

Car parking at the centre is free for those attending meetings. There is also a large pay and display car park at Coronation Square Shopping Centre which is within 5 minutes walk from Hesters Way Community Resource Centre.

Conference & Meeting Rooms
We have 3 small interview rooms suitable up to 6 people and two medium sized meeting rooms including our Conference Suite which can seat up to 50 people.

Our meeting rooms and lobby area are suitable for consultations and exhibitions and other functions.

Car parking at the centre is free for those attending meetings. There is also a large pay and display car park at Coronation Square Shopping Centre which is within 5 minutes walk from Hesters Way Community Resource Centre.

Hesters Way Partnership, Gloucestershire Listening Post and Re-Think Mental Health Support occupy serviced offices on the first floor.

Digital Den
Cheltenham Borough Homes run a state of the art computer suite helping people access the internet, a variety of IT based classes, a twice weekly job Club and IT Drop In classes (run by Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project).

Interview Rooms
There are two small rooms near the reception area that are available at a modest cost to enable various agencies to conduct interviews, offer information, advice, guidance, support or counselling.

Serviced Offices
Hesters Way Partnership, Gloucestershire Listening Post and Re-Think Mental Health Support occupy serviced offices on the first floor.

The Healthy Living Centre
The Healthy Living Centre opened in May 2002 providing a new way of delivering health services. The centre has recently become The Cheltenham Health Access Centre

JT'S Cafe
JT’S Cafe is owned and run by a local resident and offers an informal meeting place where a cup of coffee or a full meal can be enjoyed. As well as providing a café facility for members of the public it is for anyone using the Resource Centre, provides catering services for meetings, functions and conferences held at the Centre and specialist on-going contracts to businesses.

Puddles Nursery
Puddles Nursery provides a purpose built childcare setting and a safe play area and garden for up to 31 childcare places and is open from 8am to 6pm, five days a week.

Enterprise Units
There are units along the side of the centre which house new local businesses and/or social enterprises, including:

The Cutting Shop (Hair Salon), Andrew Bird Hearing, Cheltenham Dial-a-Cab and Gloucestershire Mandarin School.
Volunteering Programme – as already stated, at the heart of our organization is our Teams of Volunteers who help run our Neighbourhood Shop, Rowanfield Living Room, the two Community Resource Centres in Springbank and Hesters Way and our volunteer led Board of Directors/Trustees who steer, guide, develop, protect and promote the charity.

Our Team of Volunteers also help run a number of our Active Community Projects including Springbank Little Steps Mother and Toddler Group, our Hesters Way Playtime for Older People Project (POPPS), SmART (Strong Minds Achieve Recovery through ART) and our Springbank Youth Club. Some of our volunteers have recognised disabilities including physical and mental health conditions, and we take care to support them appropriately.

Our growing volunteering programme includes offering school, college and university placements, and teams of volunteers come together to help run community events and support days trips away.

We make use of every opportunity available to ensure the volunteering experience is as positive and as involved with the running of the Neighbourhood Project as possible. This includes facilities management of both resource centres, the charity shop and the Living Room, as well as our active community projects. This helps to build confidence and overtime experience as new skills are gained, talents are realized and recognized, allowing relationships and community spirit to build. Our volunteering programme truly involves, engages and empowers people. It’s not without its challenges and requires time, skill and money to run. It does of course bring lots of rewards for everyone involved and that’s why we do it.

Clearly, any volunteering programme needs funding to run and develop. We hope we will continue to attract funding to sustain our current programme and better still to develop and expand it so more people and therefore the community can benefit from it.

Money advice service – originally funded for 2 years by the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales in 2012, we were able to continue this highly valued and effective service with funding from our reserves for part of the year but, sadly, had to close it down in December 2015.

Our network of referral agencies and partners were also saddened to see the service end. During the lifetime of the service we received letters of commendation from partners whose clients had benefitted from the service and letters of gratitude from clients.

An added value aspect of our service was that we made home visits when required and we provided an after care service. The number of cases handled were wide and varied with help provided on a seemingly small scale to some (but enormous to those helped) to large scale such as one client being helped to keep her mortgaged property after being involved in a near fatal car accident.

Of course, the success of any service is largely down to the skill and experience of the worker(s) involved. We were lucky to have had one of the best and are glad to say she was gainfully employed by another agency out of town to continue her skilled, caring and effective work.

Successes - part 4

Springbank Community Resource Centre opened in October 2007 and is managed by Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project on behalf of the local area partnership (HWHP).

Large Community Hall
The hall holds a wide range of regular weekly community activities and is available for hire for one off or regular meetings, conferences and events.

Meeting Rooms
There are a range of interview rooms and meeting rooms available for hire. These are regularly used by agencies for drop-ins and community group meetings.

Purpose Built Multi Use - Youth Centre
The Centre hosts a youth club where weekly sessions are run, together with a mother and toddler group. Age UK Gloucestershire run a day centre in the space on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays. The room is available for hire at other times.

Serviced Offices
Tenants include: Springbank Surgery, Gloucestershire Care Services NHS Trust Teams (Dentist, Health Visitors, School Nurses, Special School Nurses, Community Nurses), People and Places in Gloucestershire, and Carers/Young Carers Gloucestershire.

Cheltenham Pharmacy
The pharmacy offers confidential advice and healthcare services including a free dispensing service, free prescription collection from any GP surgery in Cheltenham and delivery within a 10 mile radius.

Giggles Nursery
Is a family run setting which offers care for children from 3 months to 5 year olds. Morning or afternoon sessions are available.

Community Garden
A lovely community garden maintained by People and Places who support local people to get involved in the community.

Ministerial Group display

Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project & Friends - “...run by local people for local people...”
The following successes are a credit to our committed team of Staff, Volunteers and Trustee, and the many people and organizations who support our work.

Facilities Management and Tenancies of Hester's Way and Springbank Community Resource Centres. As previously mentioned we have 90% tenancy across both Resource Centres, which is a fantastic achievement ensuring services are delivered by a variety of organisations across the area. The vision and purpose of the Centres continues to be realized and the decision taken many years ago to have a local organisation which is run by local people to manage the centres continues to be a wise one with so many local people involved in running and using the centres.

Customer service levels continue to be rated overall as “good” by our tenants, with scores of 10 out of 10 given in some categories such as the helpfulness of our staff and volunteers.

We provided day to day and planned maintenance at the centre which are home to 19 different organisations including a Pharmacy, two GP practices, a Dental practice, several charities including Gloucestershire Carers, Listening Post counselling services, Chinese Mandarin Centre, People and Places in Gloucestershire and Hesters Way Partnership, several private businesses such as Puddles and Giggles nurseries, Andrew Bird (Hearing Specialist), the Cutting Shop (hair salon), JT's Café, as well as teams of Health Visitors, School and Community Nurses, socially conscious property management company Cheltenham Borough Homes and Dial-a-Cab Cheltenham.

As can be imagined this represents a demanding workload for our staff and we have not mentioned all the health and safety tasks that need to be carried out on a weekly and annual basis such as fire alarm testing. We are therefore proud to report the equivalent of 22 years of running the two resource centres without any interruption to the business of any of our tenants. We are of course well supported by our network of specialist contractors and suppliers, for example, Western Power Distribution, but it is the responsiveness of our staff and maintenance team that ensures everything runs well.

Room hire and conferencing – a whole range of organisations continued to hire rooms for training and meeting purposes, some hiring for the first time and as ever, children's birthday parties were a regular feature throughout the year. Annual income levels fell from £68,150 to £66,123 but this is still a healthy figure. We are constantly told our facilities and services are excellent and we continue to offer good value for money.

We are however aware that things are changing, that room hire and conferencing activities are being affected by more and more organisations making better use of technology to communicate their messages and by holding virtual meetings, and are making better use of spaces in their own premises. We are also noticing that more and more organisations are offering meeting room and conference space, giving customers a wider choice than ever before.

We therefore continue to explore different approaches to marketing our room hiring and conferencing facilities, and remain vigilant and open minded as to how to make best use of them to best serve an increasing range of customers and our local community.
Hester's Way Neighbourhood Shop – although income fell from £23,538 to £19,751 the success of the shop continues with many people benefiting from all that it has to offer. Proceeds cover running costs and some of the costs of running The Living Room.

The shop is also a community hub for many local people who come in for a chat, a laugh, catch up on what is going on locally, seek advice and, in times of despair, a shoulder to cry on and a helping hand. Our prized Volunteers provide much more than good quality second hand clothes and bric-a-brac they help in whatever way they can and if they can’t invariably know “a man (or woman) who can”.

We have seen a drop in donations of clothes and people coming into shop, perhaps because people are using car park collecting containers or “cash for clothes” shops. On talking with other charity shops it seems we are not alone in this but we remain vigilant to ensure sustainability. We have links with the YMCA and also donate clothing for the homeless via Open Door in Grosvenor Street.

We remain ever so grateful for all the donations of clothes and bric-a-brac from our local community and to the relentless efforts of our local and vocal Volunteer Team who are just brilliant.

The Living Room in Rowanfield – is a small resident led community project, where people come to socialize, help one another, find out what other people in the community like to do, organise themselves, share skills and talents, raise funds and run activities.

The Living Room is a place where arts and crafts activities are run, where children can come with parents after school to do homework and have fun in a safe and friendly environment, where mum’s can meet and have chat, learn about money saving ideas, parenting tips, and everyday tips for easier living.

It’s a place where IT drop in sessions are run to give access to on-line services for job seekers and sites like Gloucestershire Home Seekers, email accounts to send and receive emails, and improve IT skills via Direct Gov Learn My Way. And it’s a place where other community led initiatives such as a Parent/Guardian and Toddler Group, community garden project, community litter picks, Christmas Carol Singing and seasonal celebrations are organized and run.

One of the many highlights of The Living Room during the year is what has become an ongoing singing group called the “Roomers” following the inspiring success of the “Going for a Song” project with Cheltenham Festivals. Who would have believed that a group of relative strangers could have worked together over 10 weeks or so with a young music composer, writing their own songs together and putting them to music, and then sing live at a number of venues with children from St. Thomas More’s RC School including on “Family Day” at the Cheltenham Music Festival. The comraderie, laughter and good feel factor was palpable and continues to flow. Thank you Cheltenham Festivals for truly being amongst us and thank you to everyone involved, you’ve got the X Factor and we look forward to the album coming out!

The development of The Living Room has been underpinned by the excellent work of Community Roots CIC which is a grass roots community engagement organisation. We are indebted to their work and for securing funding from Gloucestershire County Council to help people through financial difficulties and to become active.

To show our on-going commitment to the residents of Rowanfield and the team of people who volunteer their time and skills to support the running The Living Room we signed a new 5 year lease with Cheltenham Borough Council during the year. Our hope is that the newly formed Friends of The Living Room will be able to take on the total running of the venue in around 3 years’ time at which point we can exercise a break clause to allow the group to run things independently. Meantime, the Neighbourhood Project manages the venue through a team of volunteers working in partnership with Friends of the Living Room.
Peace Education Programme – we encouraged and supported two local residents to follow their passions and run a 10 week workshop exploring inner resources. Our ECO Fun Day and Peace Week events held in Springbank in September 2015 caught their eye so they got involved and we were delighted to be able to support their workshops. They have gone on to run a second 10 week programme with Carers Gloucestershire.

JT’s Café – over the last 5 years a local resident and friends have been running the café at the Hesters Way Community Resource whilst working full time for an internationally based company as a highly experienced chef. Our willingness to help and his determination to build a successful café and catering business has meant he has been able to step away from his former employment and devote all his time and energies into his own business.

George Training and Development – in July 2015 we were approached by two local residents who operate their private training company from home to set up an office at one of the Community Resource Centre’s and to pilot a co-working initiative. This initiative was to provide sole traders and aspiring entrepreneurs a meeting space where they could work, share skills and experiences to develop their ideas and businesses. The office base and pilot was run on a month to month basis for about 6 months and has grown into something really exciting for the area. Cheltenham Coworking was set up and working together with AXIOM Arts (who we helped start up in the previous year), “CREATE on the SQUARE” was formed and now works from a shop unit on Coronation Square, helping to invigorate it with new ideas and initiatives including a Traders Forum.

Cheltenham Festivals – our work with the Festivals was fun and exciting writing original songs from the experiences of people connected with the Rowanfield Living Room and culminated in singing together with children from St. Thomas More’s Primary on Family Day at the Cheltenham Music Festival. This project is part of a 3 year programme for Cheltenham Festivals working specifically with people living on this side of town to release talents, build community and to get connected with the Festivals.

AGE UK Gloucestershire – with all of the above positive news we are sad to report however that we received notice from AGE UK that their 3 day a week Day Care Service at the Springbank Centre would be closing at the end of the year as part of an organisational review. We received a lot of thanks for our welcome and support of AGE UK Gloucestershire which had been operating from Springbank since 2012, and every effort was made by AGE UK to minimize the impact on their customers.

Community Investment Grant (CIG) 2014-16 – this highly valued grant programme supports our Active Community Projects with a particular focus on our volunteering programme, our work with excluded groups including work with children and young people, adult education, community events and communication activities.

We have enjoyed and benefited from the new monitoring format introduced by Cheltenham Borough Homes in 2014 especially the emphasis on the production of case studies. The feedback received has been more than positive with our work being described as “rich”.

Throughout the CIG programme we worked closely with Cheltenham Borough Council, Cheltenham Borough Homes, Hesters Way Partnership, Oakley Neighbourhood Partnership and Oakley Neighbourhood Project.

We believe we continue to provide excellent value for money through the CIG programme by giving a healthy return on investment of 5:1 which includes 10,409 hours of volunteering time (equivalent to £104,090 per annum) and £31,146 of “invisible” added value work supporting small community groups.

We are proud of our achievements that have led to our being the Council’s nominated Service Delivery and Development Agent in our part of the town, and hope that out work will continue to be supported on merit for many years to come.