



## A Message from ECI

As the funding for Exeter Connect is coming to an end, in this final update, we want to celebrate with you our highlights in all that has been achieved over the duration of our service, and by the VCSE sector in Exeter.

From the great breadth of the training programmes, to supporting funding that has been raised, to establishing networks that have provided so much information and opportunities for collaboration. Our service has been delivered with the objective that we support the sustainability of services within Exeter beyond our help. We are pleased to be able to step back knowing that the amazing work you do will continue because of the dedication and passion you have and we are proud to have been able to support you.

We would also like to thank Exeter City Council for having made the funding available for this work and in particular we would like to thank portfolio holder for Communities, Councillor Martin Pearce and Dawn Rivers, Programme Manager – Communities for their support.

**Exeter Community Initiatives**

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## Dawn Eckhart



"It is with a heavy heart that I have to say farewell to all the amazing people and organisations in the Exeter VCSE that I have had the pleasure of working with over the past 3 years.

It has been a tough time for the sector what with recovering from the pandemic, cuts and increasingly hard to access grants, recruiting new volunteers and the spiralling utility costs, but the resilience, passion and impact of our sector never ceases to amaze and inspire me.

The highlights for me have included: Working with many of you in a 1:2:1 advisory capacity, helping you to deal with your particular challenges whether deciding on legal forms to exploring financial sustainability. Another highlight has been hosting networks – for community centres, digital inclusion, Down 2 Zero, and the wonderful Socially Enterprising Exeter! I hope that members will continue to communicate together to enable collaborations and peer support. Delivering training has also been a big part of my role and a personal passion, I hope the skills, capacity building and confidence that my workshops provided will be a lasting legacy for the work of Exeter Connect.

My personal mission and mantra has always been "Think Global, Act Local" and I genuinely believe that is the path to a better future for everyone across the planet.

Power to the People! I am not sure where my career will take me next, but I don't feel ready to retire!

So, I hope that our paths will cross again. In the meantime, wishing you all the very best, cheers, Dawn"

## Johanna Korndorfer



"It's been my privilege to work with communities in Exeter over the past 3 years. So much has happened! As we moved out of the upset of the pandemic, it was great to see how groups revived in energy and commitment to do good things in their communities.

Highlights for me has been organising ward stakeholder networks – people doing wonderful things in their own local areas; delivering training in crowdfunding and volunteer recruitment; supporting the Scrapstore's roof appeal; supporting networks and creating events around food and community growing; and initiating the annual Volunteer Fayre now held in the Cathedral.

We know it isn't an easy time for anyone in the VCSE sector with cutbacks felt everywhere. But the creativity and resourcefulness of the sector won't be deterred and I'm personally hopeful for better times ahead"

Thanks again, Johanna

## Volunteer Fayre Celebration



Through extensive networks and relationships with the VCSE sector in Exeter we hosted the Volunteer Fayre for the third year running, this took place at Exeter Cathedral and attracted over 60 local organisations and 850 local people. As a direct result of such a successful event the Volunteer Directory which is available on [www.eci.org.uk](http://www.eci.org.uk) for Exeter locals, now has over 69 organisations signed up and is continuing to grow.

The Volunteer Fayre will continue under the umbrella of Exeter Community Initiatives and is a legacy of Exeter Connects work.

We have always strived to connect and be a catalyst for lasting change and sustainable development in our communities and are so pleased that this legacy will continue.

To see our Volunteer Directory click [here](#)  
To advertise as an organisation click [here](#)



Photocredit: Ella Foster/Exeter Cathedral

## Follow up from The Big Exeter Feast

The Exeter Minifeast webinar held on 13th March continued the question about the role of food in our communities: How can we make real systems change in order to make food more local, sustainable and accessible? Our 3 wonderful speakers provided different angles into this complex topic.

Will North, Director and General Manager, spoke about the Long Table Stroud, an exciting community café where good local food is prepared for lunch and dinner and everyone in the community is invited to the table using a 'pay what you can' model. Will spoke about the CIC's 'social footprint'; how good local food should be accessible to all and a space provided to eat it in community rather than isolation – creating a transformational rather purely transactional space; that those working within the social enterprise are not volunteers, but receive a fair wage thereby also feeding into the local economy; and how good food is an essential element of good health and wellbeing.



Andrea Gibbons, Sustainable Food Places Coordinator, spoke about the organisation's aim to make healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where people live. She spoke about the 6 areas of making this happen: good strategic food governance; public awareness and active food citizenship; tackling food poverty and associated ill health; creating a vibrant, diverse and prosperous food economy; revitalising local catering and procurement with sustainable and local food supply chains; ending food waste and tackling climate and nature emergency with sustainable farming practices.

She spoke of food partnerships working in local authorities such as Plymouth food Co-op movement enabling local communities to buy in bulk thus reducing prices on food ; Hull City Council becoming the first city allowing 'right to grow' on unused council land for its citizens; and how Healthy Start vouchers are being used in Bury Market, Greater Manchester to enable low-income families access fresh produce.

Dr Rebecca Sandover, University of Exeter Lecturer, Trustee of Food Exeter, and steering group member of Devon Food Partnership (DFP), spoke about DFP's work in the County. She spoke of the challenges of progressing a sustainable food model for a huge and diverse county like Devon which includes Exeter. This included the disparities of responsibilities within the differing political structures (local, county and city); differing geographies and infrastructure issues; health and wealth disparities; and continuing impacts of Brexit, climate change, Covid-19 and cost of living. She stressed the potential of Devon which grows some of the best food produced in the UK with small farmers eager to tap into local markets. She spoke about the conversation needing to widen in order to become a fertile collaboration for a collective focus and purpose.

Rebecca also spoke about DFP's Task Group on food Insecurity in Devon which led to the Devon Food Insecurity Summit May 2023 and report. This was coordinated by Devon Community Foundation.

Anyone wanting to join the Exeter Food newsletter, please go to the Food Exeter website.

## Down 2 Zero networking event - Think Global - Act Local!



In February we hosted a networking and information event for VCSE organisations that are keen to reduce their carbon footprint.

Around 20 organisations from small voluntary groups to larger professional charities explored the steps that we can all take on the journey to a more sustainable future for the planet.

We heard inspiring presentations from agencies who offer practical support including: Councillor Josie Parkhouse, Tara Bowers from Exeter Community Energy ([tara@ecoe.org.uk](mailto:tara@ecoe.org.uk)); Helen Vines from Community Action Groups Devon ([helen.vines@resourcefutures.co.uk](mailto:helen.vines@resourcefutures.co.uk)); and Victoria Hatfield from Exeter City Council ([victoria.hatfield@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:victoria.hatfield@exeter.gov.uk))

The participants agreed to share one another's email contacts so that they could continue to network together for peer support and future collaborations.

# Feedback

Here's what people have to say about Exeter Connect



Exeter Connect has been incredibly helpful to our organisation over the past few years - signposting us to several funding pots that we have been successful in applying to, and connecting us to other social enterprises who we have built positive relationships with. Their experience and wisdom in the field is very valuable and we hope they remain on hand to support us and other social enterprises in these challenging times.

**Nick - MIDI**

On behalf of Exeter City Council, I am writing to thank you for all of your hard work over the past few years in your different roles at Exeter Connect and Exeter Community Initiatives. You have delivered the work with great skill, imagination, enthusiasm and expertise. The impact for community organisations and social businesses across the city has been immense.



**Exeter**  
City Council

**Dawn Rivers - Exeter City Council**



'It was good to have a city-wide organisation facilitating our Beacon Heath Stakeholder meetings. They have the 'pulling power' in bringing people together across the community. It might be more difficult in the future for that to happen.

ECI acts like an umbrella that can share stuff that's happening across the city to groups in other areas.'

**Brian Murray, Pastor Beacon Heath Church**

# Feedback

Here's what people who have attended training by Exeter Connect say...

"Support has been vital, putting us in touch with those who could advise, help with grant applications and general planning!"

"Dawn has a friendly and involving style of presentation and obviously wants the best for everyone attending her sessions. She clearly understands her subject and expressed herself very clearly!"

"We needed to raise min. £20k to replace the failing roof covering on our building. Johanna has been instrumental in helping us achieve this via a crowdfund and grant applications"

"Very welcoming, encouraging & informative, Very friendly and put us at ease, knowledge at her fingertips for any questions raised"

"It's going to be such a loss for Exeter; Exeter Connects support has been fundamental in the running of Centres across Exeter."

**Kate - The Beacon Centre**

I think having this kind of support for voluntary groups is much needed!

**Stella - Sylvania Hall**

Thanks so much for organising the St Thomas stakeholder meetings. They are invaluable to our network of community services. These meetings (and the opportunities they bring) will be sadly missed.

**Zoe Woodbridge - St Thomas Library**

"It's such a valuable resource to have in Exeter. We are very lucky".

**Places for Nature**

"Exeter Connect has been the first service to bring support, knowledge, information network and connection, to the community groups in Exeter. The benefits have been clearly visible across the city."

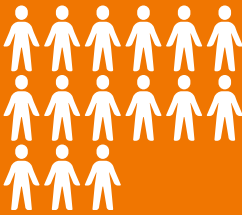
**Faith - Ubuntu Counselling Services**

# Our Impact



## **New Groups:**

Exeter Connect have provided bespoke 1-1 support to 115 new and developing groups



## **Training & Events:**

706 people attended our training courses & events with over 430 organisations represented



## **Networks & Relationships:**

Established and convened 11 Networks of interest and held relationships with 376 local organisations



## **Supporting VCSE:**

Dawn & Johanna have given advice and ongoing support to over 450 local organisations.



## New VCSE Energy Efficiency Scheme



VCSE Energy Efficiency grants for VCSE

Use our eligibility checker to see if you're eligible to apply for the cost and delivery of an Independent Energy Assessment (IEA) or a Capital Grant. If you're successful, we'll match you up with an independent energy assessor who will work with you to assess your building and help identify energy-saving opportunities.

An IEA is a comprehensive evaluation of your building's energy usage, efficiency and potential for energy savings, conducted by a qualified and experienced independent energy assessor.

With a satisfactory IEA, and provided you meet the wider eligibility criteria, your organisation may also apply for a Capital Grant. Capital Grants of between £2,000 and £150,000 can be used to install capital energy efficiency measures, identified in your IEA, to reduce your building's energy costs and support the delivery of your frontline services. Check if you're eligible for an Independent Energy Assessment or Capital Grant or visit the Programme Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions information using the links below.

Capital Grants: Grants can be used to install capital energy efficiency measures, identified in your IEA (see above), to reduce your building's energy costs. You can apply for a Capital Grant if you have a satisfactory IEA (see Eligibility Criteria for Capital Grants below). You can apply for a grant of between £2,000 and £150,000, with up to £20 million available in total. Cost savings should be used to support the delivery of your frontline services.

include:

Organisations directly supporting individuals and communities with critical needs, particularly those related to the rising cost of living. Examples include:

- Services that address poverty, including by providing food, warmth, emergency supplies or personal grants
- Shelter, accommodation and housing for those most in need
- Advice services for people experiencing financial, housing or legal challenges
- Services that address specific physical and mental health issues (such as disability, addiction and dementia)
- Education, training and employment services that improve employability
- Community hubs or centres, out of which a number of these services operate

## Where do I get advice now?

Exeter Community Initiatives are able to offer advice on a paid consultation basis, if you need any further information on this please email: [info@eci.org.uk](mailto:info@eci.org.uk)

Need advice now on any of the below, our resources page has plenty of information to support you.

- Structures
- Governance
- Constitutions
- Recruiting and managing volunteers
- Managing buildings
- Insurance

Visit our website: [www.eci.org.uk](http://www.eci.org.uk)



### Resources

A range of useful links and resources for VSCE groups in Exeter. For more information and support tailored to you, including template policies, please get in touch.

## Who we are

Exeter Connect is a project of Exeter Community Initiatives. We are a voluntary and community sector support service providing free one-to-one mentoring and advice; training and events; and networks to help community groups in Exeter develop and grow.

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**Exeter**  
City Council



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