



Bridges
for Communities



Bridges for Communities Strategy 2023–2025



Executive Summary

Creating kinder, fairer and more welcoming communities where people of different cultures, races and faiths live well together.

This strategy is the result of careful listening and reflection. Coming out of the Covid pandemic and into this next key period as an organisation, we have spent the last 6 months listening to people who use our services, our supporters and donors, our volunteers, our staff and our trustees. We have consulted with our key partner organisations, who have shared their experiences and thoughts on Bridges' future work. We have evaluated the impact of our work to date and identified our strengths and areas we need to improve. We have examined the external challenges and changes facing the organisation and the communities we serve.

This report outlines what we have learned in the process, and the decisions we have made about where we are heading.



Our strategy for 2023–2025 consists of 3 key strands of work:

- **Connecting and Inspiring** local people and communities in Bristol
- **Welcoming and Enabling** refugees and asylum seekers in Bristol
- **Resourcing and Equipping** individuals and organisations in Bristol & beyond

We have also identified 4 strategic priorities that will help us to implement this strategy:

- Improve the depth of our existing project work in Bristol
- Increase the reach of our work through impactful storytelling, listening spaces and helpful resources
- Invest in improving the diversity and equity of the organisation and strengthening management
- Improve the long-term sustainability of Bridges

This report outlines why the 3 key strands of work are vital to furthering our mission, it explains how we will work towards our 4 strategic priorities, and it explains how you can partner with us to help fulfil our vision.

Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision

A society where people of different cultures, races and faiths live well together.

Our Mission

To build kinder, fairer and more welcoming communities in Bristol, and to inspire and equip others to do the same elsewhere.

We do this by facilitating connection and relationship between people of different backgrounds in Bristol, by welcoming those who have fled war and persecution and enabling them to use their skills here, and by sharing our knowledge and resources with others who share our vision and values.



Our Values

How we work is as important to us as what we do.



We value people

We believe that all people have intrinsic and equal value, and that everyone deserves justice, peace and opportunity. We don't view people as projects or statistics and we seek to keep relationships at the centre of our work.



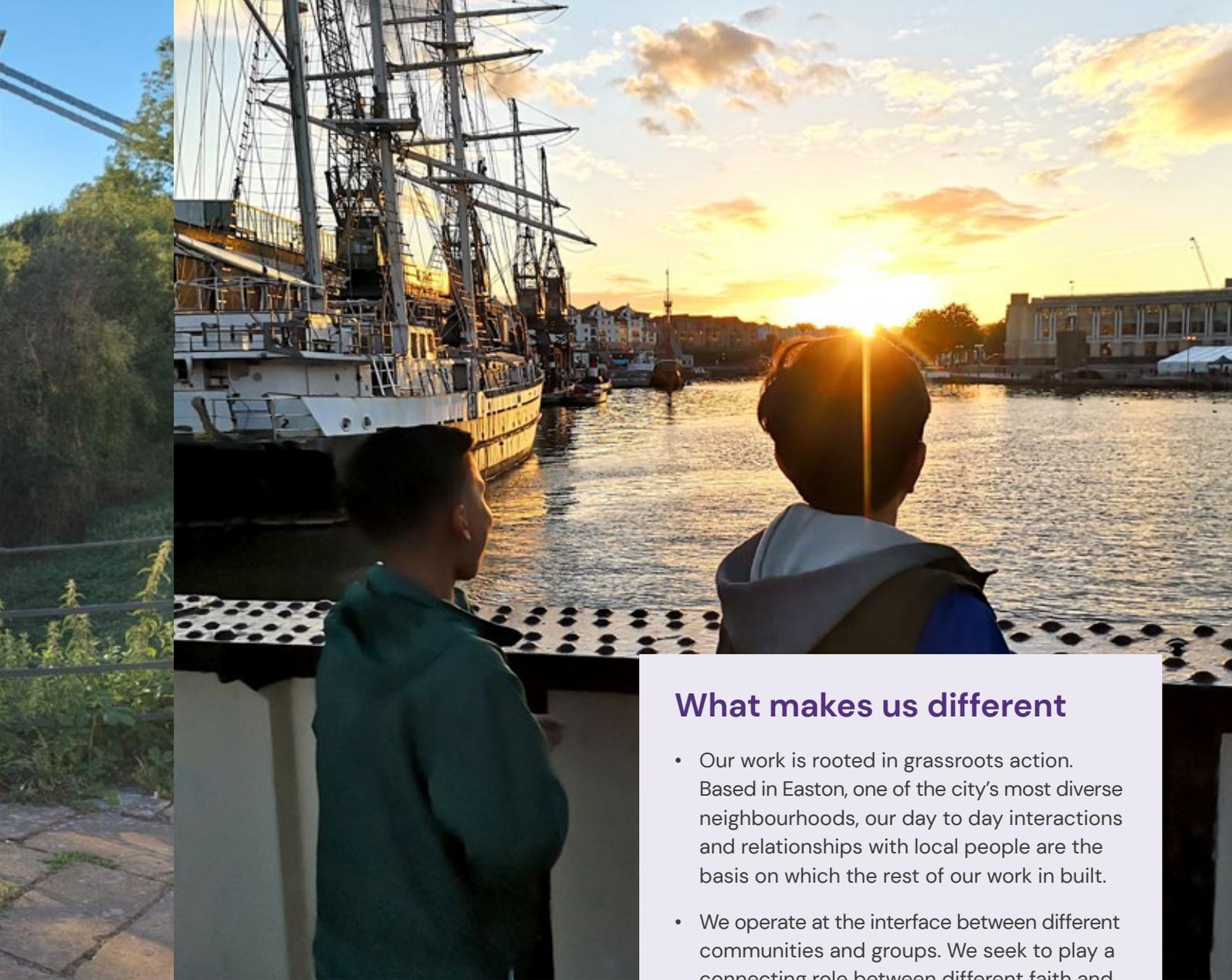
We celebrate diversity

We celebrate the richness of diversity in human cultures, traditions and faiths and we look to build on common ground and similarities while not minimising or ignoring differences. We recognise that people's identities are multi-layered and that simple labels are often problematic.



We practise hospitality

We believe that everyone deserves to be welcomed and included, and that nobody should be isolated or lonely. We recognise that people coming together around food or other shared experiences can be transformational for our communities.



What makes us different

- Our work is rooted in grassroots action. Based in Easton, one of the city's most diverse neighbourhoods, our day to day interactions and relationships with local people are the basis on which the rest of our work is built.
- We operate at the interface between different communities and groups. We seek to play a connecting role between different faith and cultural groups, but also between the refugee community and settled or 'host' communities. Although Bridges was originally set up by people with a Christian faith, it is not 'faith-based' and it welcomes the involvement of everyone.
- We believe in the mutuality of relationships, believing that when people interact it is always an opportunity for both parties to learn and benefit. This challenges some of the common dynamics and language around charity work such as the hero-victim or helper-helped relationship.
- We recognise the complexity of the issues involved in our work, and try to avoid offering neat and easy solutions to complex problems. We have therefore created a varied toolkit of programmes and initiatives that cover a broad range of responses.



We act with integrity

We recognise that people will have different motivations for getting involved in this work. We create safe, open spaces, without hidden agenda, where people can discuss their experiences and beliefs, learn from and build trust with one another.



We are reflective

We seek to learn from what is happening around us and from our mistakes. We are flexible, adapting to opportunities and needs as they arise, innovating to find creative solutions, and continually reviewing the language and terminology we use.

Theory of Change



Creating kinder, fairer and more welcoming communities where people of different cultures, races and faiths live well together.

Our society is fractured and divided. Political views are polarised, hate crime is on the rise, government policies towards refugees and immigrants are hardening, and our asylum system is widely acknowledged to be broken. The latest census figures show Britain to be increasingly diverse¹, and yet diversity is seen by some to be a problem rather than something to be celebrated. In Bristol, where we are based, systemic inequalities exist along lines of race and class, reinforcing the perception that this is a segregated city².

And yet there is hope. Much of the mistrust and division is caused by stereotypes and misperceptions that are rooted more in the distance between people³ (the fact that they don't know one another or interact meaningfully) than in the differences between them. By connecting people of different cultures and faiths, we can enable them to understand one another better and recognise their shared humanity. By celebrating what we have in common and by working together to make our communities more welcoming for people who have fled war and persecution, we can build bridges and enable people of different backgrounds to live well together.

1. See www.ons.gov.uk/census data on ethnic group, national identity, language and religion

2. See www.bristol247.com 'Is Bristol a Divided City?'

3. See 'Fractured' by Jon Yates, p22

We do this by:

1

Connecting & Inspiring local people & communities in Bristol

Growing our understanding and empathy for one another, reducing fear and intolerance, and influencing action.

- **Peace Feast** – gathering people around food and stories
- **School Linking** – bringing children together through classroom connections
- **Listening Spaces** – facilitating dialogue and learning between people





2

Welcoming & Enabling refugees & asylum seekers in Bristol

Creating a hospitable city that connects people into local communities, improves confidence and wellbeing, and enables people to use their skills.

- **B.friend** – one-to-one support for asylum seekers & refugees
- **Resettlement Support** – welcoming families who have fled war & persecution
- **RefuLingua** – language & culture classes taught by people of refugee and migrant backgrounds
- **Stitching Together** – welcoming spaces where refugee women sew together
- **Walk With Me** – one-to-one and group walks to improve people's wellbeing

3

Resourcing & Equipping individuals & organisations in Bristol & beyond

Helping people to understand other cultures and traditions, and to feel more hopeful and confident so they can take action to build more welcoming communities.

- **Cultural Awareness Training** – equipping people to thrive in an interconnected world
- **Volunteer & Digital Resources** – tips, tools and inspiration for bridge builders
- **Replicable Activities** – enabling others to do what we do where they live
- **Learning Intensives** – immersive experiences that provide in-depth learning opportunities



4 Strategic Priorities

In order to implement the 3 key strands of our strategy effectively, we have also identified 4 strategic priorities for Bridges over the next 3 years.

1. Improve the depth of our existing project work in Bristol

- Improve partnership working with key organisations and networks across Bristol (see page 10), to increase our understanding of the needs of the city, to avoid duplication and maximise outcomes for people who use our services.
- Explore ways in which we can reach new audiences, especially in areas that are less diverse or have higher levels of intolerance.
- Invest in monitoring and evaluation so that we have a better understanding of how many of our potential beneficiaries we are reaching, the barriers to us reaching more, and the true impact of our work.
- Review and improve the experience we give our volunteers, including recruitment, training, support and structured progression opportunities.

2. Increase the reach of our work through impactful storytelling, listening spaces and helpful resources

- Amplify voices of people with lived experience and develop positive and humanising messaging in order to help address structural inequalities.
- Use the arts and digital resources to help inform and motivate people to act. Develop our understanding of the impact of digital content and interaction compared to in person.
- Explore ways to facilitate difficult conversations and develop 'listening spaces' as a way of challenging and changing perspectives and resourcing others to live well with difference.
- Develop a communications strategy..





3. Invest in improving diversity and equity of the organisation and strengthening management

- Improve our understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion as well as of racial justice, and identify ways in which we can be more inclusive as an organisation
- Increase our lived experience at Board, staff and volunteer level so that we are more representative of all communities we work with.
- Share responsibility, leadership and visibility more broadly among our growing staff team.



4. Improve the long-term sustainability of Bridges

- Invest in staff welfare and wellbeing and provide pathways for professional development.
- Prepare for changes in local politics, including when the Mayor of Bristol position is replaced by a committee system in 2024.
- Seek to minimise the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on our volunteer recruitment/management, fundraising and project delivery.
- Ensure financial sustainability by developing an income generation strategy that ensures we do not become over reliant on any one source of funds.

Each of these goals will be underpinned by operational plans and a monitoring framework that will enable us to measure our progress towards them. The goals will be clearly communicated so that trustees, staff, volunteers and partners understand them.

Our wider strategic fit



We are firmly committed to working in partnership with other organisations who share our goals, and to contributing towards wider strategies that overlap with our work. We will continue to invest in these during the next 3 years.

**BRISTOL
ONE CITY**



Bridges is part of a vibrant voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Bristol. We also work with the local authority, Bristol City Council, and in particular seek to contribute towards their One City Plan. We are part of the Inclusive Cities stakeholder group, a community partner in the Bristol Integration Framework (a coproduction of 38 Community Partners, Bristol City Council, The Mayor's Office, and the University of Bristol's Everyday Integration project), and an active partner with the Council's refugee resettlement team.



We are part of the Bristol City of Sanctuary network and a member organisation of BRASP (Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seekers Partnership), the local network that collaborates and coordinates refugee services across the city – we work closely with other organisations in both networks to ensure that our work complements theirs. We are also a member of the Together With Refugees coalition, and of The Linking Network that supports school linking nationally.

We are also grateful for significant partnerships with several local organisations and venues. At the time of writing these include Arnolfini, Bristol Refugee Festival, Bristol Beacon and Easton Family Centre among others.

Join Us

We would love you to join us as we enter this exciting next stage of growth for the work of Bridges.

There are many ways that people and organisations can help us achieve the goals laid out in this strategy:

- **Partner with us**
bridgesforcommunities.com/partner
- **Make a donation**
bridgesforcommunities.com/donate
- **Fundraise for us**
bridgesforcommunities.com/fundraise
- **Volunteer**
bridgesforcommunities.com/volunteer
- **Come along to an event**
bridgesforcommunities.com/events
- **Spread the word**
follow us on social media and share our work



Let's talk about what your partnership with Bridges for Communities could look like.

Please email
info@bridgesforcommunities.com

Thank You

Email:

info@bridgesforcommunities.com

Address:

Bridges for Communities,
Easton Family Centre,
Beaufort Street,
Bristol,
BS5 0SQ

Web:

www.bridgesforcommunities.com

Follow:

Twitter: @bridgestweets
Facebook: Bridges for Communities



**This strategic plan was developed
with the kind support of:**



Registered Charity in England & Wales no. 1137092
Company limited by guarantee no. 7245606

Design: Tom Barnard