Annual Review 2022

Helping communities across Greater Bristol to thrive
Welcome to the 2022 edition of the Society of Merchant Venturers (SMV) Annual Review, where we bring together a collection of highlights from the past twelve months and shine a spotlight on some of the fantastic individuals, organisations and charities that we have been privileged to work with and support.

With so many activities, events and initiatives taking place across the region to improve the health of communities and with so many people working tirelessly to bring about positive change, it’s a tough challenge to pick only a handful to feature in this Annual Review.

On our website we’re able to share much more news about the people, charities and organisations across Greater Bristol who are truly making a difference. Making more information available online is just one element of the work we’re doing to make sure that SMV is more open, accessible and transparent.

Listening to a wide range of views continues to be an important factor across SMV’s activities. As the Master of SMV, I’ve been a member of the Downs Committee for the past two years and I was very pleased that almost 1,900 Greater Bristol residents took part in a new survey inviting people to help shape the future strategy for the management of the Downs. You can read about the results of the survey on pages 10 and 11.

Working with inspirational individuals and organisations has been a particular highlight for me over the past year. For example, we’re working closely with Black South West Network (BSWN) on a mentoring programme for entrepreneurs, an initiative that I’m excited to be involved in.

We’ve also accelerated the work that we’re doing to help young people as they think about and prepare for life after education. Through events such as Inspiration Week and World of Work Wednesday, alongside careers talks, mock interview practice and the Career Pathways Directory, our members are working closely with the schools we support to help wherever we can. We’re determined to ensure that all children from all backgrounds are given the knowledge, skills and confidence to succeed.

Encouraging young people to raise their aspirations and work hard towards ambitious goals during their time in school opens up so many more enjoyable and rewarding opportunities for them when they move on to further education and employment. With the expertise of the brilliant staff across Venturers Trust and Collegiate School and with the support of parents and carers, students can achieve whatever they set out to do.

The care homes that we support, namely Katherine House and Griffiths House, continue to provide the best standard of care while delivering real quality of life to the residents. I hope you will enjoy reading about some of their latest adventures within this review.

Of course, none of the work we do would be possible without the generous support of so many individuals and organisations who share our determination to make Greater Bristol a better place for everyone who lives and works here. Thank you for your energy, enthusiasm and commitment – whether in small steps or giant strides, the work you are doing is genuinely making a difference.
I t’s been another busy and exciting year for Bristol & Bath Regional Capital (BBRC), with a diligent team, led by Chief Executive Ed Rowberry, working hard to deliver a wide range of impact-driven projects across the region. Here, Ed describes just some of the highlights from the past twelve months.

Community Rejuvenation

We’ve invested in community hubs in many communities experiencing inequality in Bristol, from purchasing a former pub in Barton Hill to transform into a multi-purpose community asset, to our £2m investment in the redevelopment of the much-loved Park Community Centre in Knowle West.

Tech for Health and Wellbeing

Championing pioneering technology, we have invested £150k in Autonofi, a Bristol-based company whose digital app delivers personalised employment / independent living skills for people with learning disabilities and autism. As well as this, we’ve invested £200k in Genesys® communications devices, to help tackle loneliness and coordinate health services for older people; and our £550k investment in mobile cancer diagnostic units will address potential health inequalities faced by those in lower income areas.

Environmental Projects

As we journey towards the challenge of achieving net zero, we have made a £750k investment in a landmark renewable energy project to deliver the Ambition Community Energy community-owned wind turbine. Once built, the turbine will sell energy to the grid, bringing in valuable surpluses for community use and directly benefiting people living in Lawrence Weston. We’ve also invested in green transport solutions in Bristol with £450k to launch an electric bike scheme in the city, as well as £300k in XeroE, a sustainable 100% emission-free delivery service.

Responsible Housing Delivery

Through our subsidiary, BBRC Homes, we focus exclusively on delivering sustainable housing schemes that support the health of communities, including affordable homes, mixed communities, intergenerational living and key worker homes. This involves investing in refugee housing, charity-supported housing and co-living homes.

We work in partnership with organisations such as community groups, charities, faith groups and small housing associations to help find people good homes.

Housing Delivery Impact

- Enabled the development of 161 homes as part of the Elderberry Walk development in Southmead
- Over £1m invested in housing projects across Bristol
- Letting affordable, high quality co-living housing for 11 tenants
- Providing housing for a refugee family as part of the Bristol City Council resettlement scheme
- Over £4m of capital investment currently in the pipeline with numerous new projects at different stages of development.

To deliver the Elderberry Walk development, we’re working alongside partners Cheyne Social Property Impact Fund, United Communities Housing Association and Bristol City Council. The project uses highly sustainable construction methods and 70% of the homes built will be available at sub-market rates with discounted rent for keyworkers, long-term ethical rent and rent-to-buy options. The homes will also cover six different tenures, creating a truly mixed community.

To find out more, please visit: bab-rc.uk

Ed Rowberry, Chief Executive of Bristol & Bath Regional Capital

Social enterprise

A social enterprise is defined as a business that has specific social objectives that serve its primary purpose. Social enterprises seek to maximise profits while, at the same time, maximising benefits to society and the environment, and their profits are principally used to fund social programmes.

For SMV, our Social Enterprise Committee is not about giving grants, instead we invest in or make loans to businesses with the potential to make a profit and thus, by the nature of being a social enterprise, support social programmes in their local communities.

Unlike the Charity Committee, there are no earmarked SMV funds. Instead, for each specific project, we raise money directly from SMV’s members who are used to making rapid business decisions and taking calculated risks. These funds are often difficult to attract.

Through our ongoing relationship with Bristol & Bath Regional Capital (BBRC), itself a social enterprise company of which SMV was a founding member, we have made a £750k investment in a landmark renewable energy project to deliver the Ambition Community Energy community-owned wind turbine. Once built, the turbine will sell energy to the grid, bringing in valuable surpluses for community use and directly benefiting people living in Lawrence Weston. We’ve also invested in green transport solutions in Bristol with £450k to launch an electric bike scheme in the city, as well as £300k in XeroE, a sustainable 100% emission-free delivery service.

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At BBRC, we believe that place-based impact investment can be a powerful lever for change. Through our impact investment fund, City Funds, we’ve already invested over £5m in purposeful businesses that generate positive social and environmental benefits for our region.

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Ed Rowberry, Chief Executive of Bristol & Bath Regional Capital

Dr Andrew Garrad CBE
Chair of SMV Social Enterprise Committee
Entrepreneurs matched with mentors

Black South West Network (BSWN) is a regional racial justice organisation supporting the development of dynamic, independent, strong Black and Minoritised communities, businesses and organisations. Earlier this year, SMV was invited by BSWN to support a new initiative aimed at widening access to business start-up support, finance and networks for businesses and social enterprises across the South West of England.

In this first phase, seven members of SMV are working with a group of dynamic entrepreneurs from Bristol’s Black and Minoritised community in a mentoring role as the group develops their individual businesses over a 12-month period.

In September, the first “mentoring mingle” was held in St Pauls, hosted by Sado Jirde, CEO of BSWN, and Derek Tanner, Enterprise Development Manager. The energy and enthusiasm of everyone involved resulted in valuable connections being made with each entrepreneur matching up with a mentor.

Over the coming weeks and months, they will spend time getting to know each other and building their working relationship so that the mentors can add real value as the entrepreneurs develop their start-ups. Every other month the teams will come together to share learning and broaden the experience as a wider group.

Amongst the Bristol-based start-ups to have signed up to the programme are:

- Adolescent Support Home Services and Diverse Dolls 4 All, both projects aimed at supporting young people who have suffered child abuse and exploitation, run by registered social worker Simon Ashman.
- Tech Trader, a local vegetable box scheme promoting healthy eating with affordable, fresh, plastic-free, culturally appropriate food, run by husband and wife team John Aguirre and Tara Miran.
- Matched with SMV member Mark Burchfield, who built his career in engineering and IT managed services and grew his company to be a European market leader.
- International Graduate Success Accelerator, run by Kiki Paddy, connects international graduates with public and private sector companies, helping them to integrate into the UK labour market and build successful careers.
- KC Concepts, Bristol’s first Black-owned pop-up shop showcasing 40 Black British brands across art, lifestyle, beauty and fashion, driven by owner Latoya Adlam.
- Maroon Fist, a martial arts blend of traditional Chinese and African moves with Tai Chi, boxing and self-defence, led by coach Leonard Jackson.
- Jerk King, an Afro-Caribbean award-winning events catering business, led by Ashley Burrowes.
- Matched with SMV member Michael Bothamley, a retired development lawyer and former partner at Bristol-based international law firm DMC Beachcroft.
- Jikoni, an East African food outlet and event caterer whose customers are able to share the unique history and culture of East Africa through food, run by Inman Salat and James Miller.
- Matched with SMV member Sam Roberts, co-owner of independent cafe group Boston Tea Party.

By this time, a charity had been formed to run The Park with a board of trustees led by David Freed, this year’s Master of SMV, and a plan was created. The community interest company Bristol & Bath Regional Capital (BBRC) stepped in to help and vital funding was secured from a wide range of sources including individual private donations.

Already committed supporters of the South Bristol community, SMV has been privileged to play a supporting role in the development of The Park, as founding members of BBRC and through substantial donations made by some of SMV’s members. As hands-on sponsors of Merchants’ Academy and Venture’s Academy, both in Withywood, and as long-term supporters of South Bristol Youth and the Haniffle and Withywood Community Partnership, SMV was well aware how important The Park was and would continue to be for an area beset by inequality, not only in financial terms but in education, health and housing as well.

An £8.5m investment led to brand new buildings and facilities being built adjacent to the old site, which in turn will be redeveloped into a new secondary school opening in 2024/25. The new Park Centre was opened in February 2022, throwing open its doors to everyone who’s part of the local community. We just needed the tools to get things done and now everyone who’s part of The Park is taking it from strength to strength. It’s brilliant that the people of South Bristol are demonstrating how to grow mighty oaks from little acorns!"
Ambition Lawrence Weston

Lawrence Weston in north-west Bristol has experienced diminishing local services over many years.

The closure of its post-16 college in 2012 proved to be a turning point for the area. Galvanised by the loss, 80 residents came together to form a community-led development trust, Ambition Lawrence Weston (ALW), and within a year it had already been awarded a £1m Big Lottery Fund grant.

Determined to regenerate the area, ALW has achieved significant success over the past ten years, including saving the youth centre from closing, reviving the community carnival and instigating a local, affordable supermarket. In 2015, ALW implemented a neighbourhood development plan that set out its objectives across housing, green spaces, employability, wellbeing and community facilities – a plan that has since become a template replicated across the UK.

Engaging with the community is at the heart of ALW’s work. Consultations take place every three years and influence what services it offers, such as childcare and parenting courses, debt advice, adult reading classes and a free veterinary clinic. The local community centre is not only the hub from which the support services are coordinated, it’s also a versatile venue for a range of locally-led events and groups, including children’s parties, keep-fit classes such as kickboxing and ‘Men in Sheds’, a DIY-based social inclusion initiative for residents to meet others, share their experiences and seek support services.

ALW’s development manager is Mark Pepper, a former youth worker who grew up in the area. “We’re a determined team,” he says. “We’re always thinking, ‘what are we missing in Lawrence Weston?’ and that’s what drives us.” When Mark first took the reins of ALW, one of the things he recognised was a lack of community awareness about renewable energy, not only to combat climate change but also as a tool to establish financial sustainability. Fast forward to 2022 and ALW has launched Ambition Community Energy, a community interest company, or CIC, raising £4m to build its own wind turbine. Once complete, it will be the largest onshore turbine in England. Mark describes the project as “more than just a wind turbine, it could be a gamechanger for Lawrence Weston”. The turbine, due to be completed in Spring 2023, will generate power the equivalent of all the homes in Lawrence Weston and it will provide an annual income of at least £100,000 for the community funds.

Now with 280 dedicated members, ALW continues to look to the future and is working with property developers to improve the choice of housing available for both new and existing residents. A new community centre is also on the cards. Ambition House will replace the current centre which is approaching the end of its lease with Bristol City Council. With £1.5m in funding already secured, the purpose-built facility will be the new heart of the community, as well as adding significant value to the area. “Not only will Ambition House increase footfall for the services we already offer,” says Mark, “it will open up huge potential in terms of what we could offer in the future.”

Over the year we’ve been working with Dr Richard Stone, University of Bristol lecturer in history, to help us understand more about the role the Society of Merchant Venturers played in the Atlantic economy and overseas trade in Bristol.

Dr Stone’s ongoing research is contributing to a city-wide project about the Atlantic economy to discover how Bristol became the city it is today and to build an improved, shared understanding of Bristol’s story for future generations.

Using 21st century research techniques Dr Stone continues to unlock new information, shedding more light on Bristol’s dark past. In his interim report, Dr Stone confirms that although the Society as an organisation was not a slave owner or trader, it’s clear that in its role as a merchants’ guild, the Society supported the business activities of its members, many of whom were benefitting either directly or indirectly from the slave trade.

In stark contrast to the organisation of the past, SMV today is defined by its members, who share a determination for Bristol to become a place of equality and inclusion. But that doesn’t change the past, which is one of the reasons why we’re so determined to find meaningful ways to support the Bristol communities most impacted by the legacy of the transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of African people.

We’re grateful to Dr Stone for helping us understand more about SMV’s past and the actions of our predecessors and we wholly support his ongoing research.
Bristol residents help shape the future of the Downs

The Clifton and Durdham Downs have been enjoyed by residents of Bristol, as well as millions of visitors to the region, for hundreds of years; and now the people of Bristol are helping to shape the future of this precious space.

As a much valued and historic area of open green land in the heart of Bristol, it’s no wonder that those living in or near the city are passionate about what happens to the Downs. Over recent years there have been calls for more clarity when it comes to how the 441 acres of land are managed and decisions made.

During Spring 2022, the Downs Committee consulted the people of Bristol to understand what they think about the Downs and its management, to help inform the Committee’s strategy going forward.

Almost 1,900 people from across Bristol took part in the survey. 92% of this number were members of the public who use the Downs for recreation and/or exercise, with community groups and local residents amongst the other respondents.

With the aim of reviewing how the Downs Committee works, Bristol residents were invited to comment on a series of guiding principles, including:

- Recreation and nature conservation
- Funding
- Events
- Building and infrastructure
- Openness and involvement
- Governance

Listening to the feedback, the Downs Committee has taken on board the range of views which are already helping to shape how the Clifton and Durdham Downs are run.

The Downs Committee comprises members of the landowners, Bristol City Council and the Society of Merchant Venturers, and is required by law to work within the 1861 Downs Act.

- 90% of respondents supported keeping the Downs Act as it is, versus changing the Act
- 68% wanted the opportunity to raise issues for debate at Downs Committee meetings
- 63% requested more involvement through workshops and regular meetings
- 73% thought that the strategy for the Downs should be reviewed every five years.

The full report can be read by visiting the Bristol.gov.uk website.

What did Bristol say?

Of almost 1,900 responses:

- 74% believe the focus on recreation on the Downs is a priority
- 65% said the focus on nature conservation is a priority
- 54% advocated self-funding through events and activities
- 46% thought the Downs should continue to be funded by Bristol City Council
- 80% said the focus should be on improving or updating the infrastructure already on the Downs
- 44% wanted to know more about the role of the Downs Committee
- 78% wanted more news about the events programme
- Most respondents felt that the number of events is just right
- Many expressed a desire for more educational and smaller entertainment events.

Bringing history to life

The importance of educational events taking place on the Downs was highlighted by respondents in the survey. One such event earlier this year welcomed 150 children from local schools, as well as residents from local care homes and members of the public to learn about rearing sheep in the 21st century.

Celebrating the historic event of sheep grazing on the Downs, local school pupils and other visitors had the amazing opportunity to meet seven Welsh Black Mountain sheep with their shepherdess, learn how to spin wool into yarn and find out about the range of plants growing on the Downs and the importance of wildlife conservation.

The tradition of grazing sheep on the Downs goes back hundreds of years and, quirky as it may seem, to maintain this traditional right, at least one sheep must be tethered on the Downs for one day every five years.

The children learnt about the role that sheep once played in helping wildlife survive, what happened when the sheep grazing stopped and how the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project’s new herd of goats is helping to save the rare plants of the Avon Gorge. The only disappointment came when visitors learnt that they will have to wait a few years for the sheep to return!
Education

Education is the key to unlocking the potential of every young person. It therefore positively impacts the health and wellbeing of communities. For this reason, we are both proud and privileged to share with the University of Bristol the responsibility for the education of over 3,800 young people in Bristol through Venturers Trust, alongside our longstanding support for the independent Collegiate School, formerly Colston’s School, and its 800 students.

Covid continues to affect the education sector and schools have been, and are, working relentlessly to rectify the gaps in learning which have arisen through the pandemic; whilst also offering much-needed wellbeing support to students and staff. Even in times of unprecedented pressure schools must adapt quickly to rapid change, a difficult challenge that was exemplified this year by a critical Ofsted report on Montpelier High School (MHS), on the other hand, received an excellent report from Ofsted. The inspector recognised the many improvements that have been made over the last four years, describing a thriving and inclusive school which is at the heart of its community.

Our aspiration that all children from all backgrounds will succeed is based on the excellence of leaders and staff in all the Venturers Trust schools and in Collegiate School, who are dedicated and determined to develop and maintain the highest standards of education provision for every student.

I pay tribute also to SMV’s members who have helped us to accelerate our support for young people as they transition to the world of work. Through initiatives such as the Career Pathways Directory, Inspiration Week, Careers Day, mock interviews, mentoring and work placements, our members are delivering practical solutions to ensure that students across the schools we support have a real opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Chris Curling DL, Chair of SMV Education Committee

In each school supported by SMV, every student has access to the directory, enabling them to coordinate work placements, apprenticeships and workplace visits, as well as careers advice, mentoring and support with interview techniques and CV writing.

It was inspiring to meet women who are so successful in their chosen career. If they can do it, then so can I!

Naveen Ubhi, Year 13, Montpelier High School

The main take-away for me was to go into an interview knowing what you want the employer to know about you. Then use the questions you’re asked as a springboard to talk about why your qualifications, skills and personality will be a great fit for the job.

Katie Crossman, Year 12, Collegiate School

Career pathways directory

Last year, we launched an initiative to help young people develop and pursue rewarding career pathways. Accelerating the role that SMV plays in supporting students to bridge the gap between education and employment, the Career Pathways Directory brings together a wide range of opportunities covering 14 different industries offered to students by SMV’s members through their own businesses and networks.

An interview is daunting at any age so we asked SMV to help field a group of professionals who could help our Year 12 students to develop their CVs and then put them through their paces in a mock interview scenario. All the students who took part valued the experience and said that it helped them to improve their confidence and interview technique.

Kate Hardcastle, Careers and Employability Advisor, Collegiate School

Teachers have also been making good use of the directory, inviting various SMV members to participate in a range of ‘education to workplace’ initiatives, including Inspiration Week at Merchants’ Academy, World of Work Wednesday at Collegiate School and Interview Day at Montpelier High School, to name just a few.

It was a real privilege to be able to speak with Year 12 students at MHS about pursuing a career in medicine. They had so many questions and so much enthusiasm, these young people have very bright futures ahead of them.

Dr Jacqueline Cornish OBE, member of SMFV

Members have regularly been spending time in all three secondary schools, delivering careers talks, mock interviews and CV writing advice. For example, last term at Collegiate School, eight Year 12 students took part in mock interview practice with Mark Burchfield and Laura Marshall, 85 Year 9 students connected with Jonathon Baker and Dr Jacqueline Cornish; 80 Year 8 students and 79 Year 7 students also connected with Dr Cornish.

Dr Jacqueline Cornish OBE delivering a careers talk

The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School has been busy providing advice to students keen to pursue a career in the creative industries.
The Society of Merchant Venturers is helping to educate over 4,600 pupils within the following family of Bristol-based schools:

- **Bannerman Road Community Academy**
  - Executive Headteacher: Oliver Laken
  - 389 pupils, age 3-11

- **Barton Hill Academy**
  - Barton Hill
  - Executive Headteacher: Stuart Woodburn
  - 334 pupils, age 3-11

- **Collegiate School**
  - Stapleton
  - Headmaster: Jeremy McCullough
  - 805 pupils, age 3-18

- **The Dolphin School Montpelier**
  - Executive Headteacher: Stuart Woodburn
  - Headteacher: Kate Wells
  - 224 pupils, age 4-11

- **Fairlawn Primary School Montpelier**
  - Principal: Julie Molesworth
  - 266 pupils, age 4-11

- **The Kingfisher School St Anne’s Park**
  - Principal: Kirsteen Craig
  - 151 pupils, age 3-11

- **Merchants’ Academy Withywood**
  - Head of Primary: Geeta Verrell
  - 374 pupils, age 3-11
  - Head of Secondary: Nickie Starkie
  - 935 students, age 11-18

- **Montpelier High School Cheltenham Road**
  - Principal: Kerry McCullagh
  - 991 students, age 11-18

- **Venturers’ Academy Withywood and St Anne’s Park**
  - Executive Headteacher: Steve Holden
  - 241 pupils, age 4-19

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**Inspiration week**

Alongside the responsibility to provide high quality teaching, schools need to work hard to make sure that all students are in the classroom and interested in learning. If not, the quality of teaching makes little difference to those students who are regularly absent or disengaged.

Like many other schools in South Bristol, Merchants’ Academy has seen a fall in regular attendance since the pandemic, especially amongst students in Key Stage 4 and 5. To address this challenge, school governor and SMV member Karl Tucker and Merchants’ Academy Head of Secondary Vicki Starkie, came up with the idea of Inspiration Week. What began as a seed of an idea to tackle poor attendance, quickly gathered pace...

**What’s Inspiration week all about?**

**Karl:** In a nutshell, for our students, we’re looking to answer the question: What’s the point of school? We want to show them the wide range of career opportunities that are out there for them. Coming to school every day, ready and eager to learn, is a stepping stone to achieving a future they’ll enjoy.

**Vicki:** Young people often realise too late that if they’d worked harder in school, they’d have had far more control over the years of their life that will be spent working. Getting a good education opens up more opportunities, it’s that simple.

**How did the concept take shape?**

**Karl:** We started with a blank piece of paper with just a title, ‘ Blow your mind business engagements’. Before long we had speakers from the space industry, cyber security, renewable energy, electric vehicles, live events, film and TV, equine veterinary science, hospitality, utilities, construction, manufacturing and healthcare… the list kept growing.

**Vicki:** The programme has been designed to draw the students in, starting off by asking them what they enjoy doing in school and in their free time; then what do they see themselves doing after school to earn a living; and what job would they choose if anything was possible. Step one: build aspiration. Step two: show them how to get there. Step three: give them the confidence, knowledge and skills to succeed.

**Who’s taking part?**

**Vicki:** Events are taking place over three days for students in Years 7, 8 and 9. We want them to grasp early on how important it is to get a good education because their future depends on it.

**Karl:** The response from industry has been fantastic and we’ve been able to put together a truly inspiring programme of events. Altogether we have 13 speakers representing nine companies across multiple different industries.

**What about the more traditional careers?**

**Karl:** For more traditional industries like construction and care, we put a twist on it by showing the wide range of roles within the sector. For example, in food manufacturing, the industry I work in, Yeo Valley has people working in engineering, laboratories, finance, product development, forecasting, planning, procurement, supply chain management, logistics, manufacturing, administration and so on.

**Vicki:** The point we’re making is that the opportunities are endless. Every student has unique talents and interests that they enjoy. By working hard at school, they’ll have the skills and qualifications to build a fulfilling career for themselves.

**What’s in the programme?**

**Karl:** Three jam-packed days focusing on the world of opportunities that exist post education. There are presentations, talks and workshops from industry professionals; as well as a whole range of activities designed to help build confidence, courage and resilience, including teamwork skills, public speaking, problem solving and leadership.

**How will you measure success?**

**Karl:** By every student being able to answer the question ‘What’s the point of school?’ and wanting to attend school every day because they understand why it’s important for their future.

**Vicki:** Students identifying at least two possible career paths that they aspire to achieve, which they might previously have considered beyond their reach. I know these students and I know what they’re capable of. Nothing is beyond their reach and after taking part in Inspiration Week, I hope they realise that too!

**What’s Inspiration week all about?**

Layla D, Year 7

The apprenticeship presentation was really energetic and informative. I may now consider applying for one when I leave school.

Preedy D, Year 7

The space talk was amazing. I never realised there were so many jobs available. It’s really made me think about this for the future.
Year 13 students at Collegiate School have been taking part in an inspiring series of events, aptly named World of Work Wednesday. Every Wednesday morning a guest speaker meets with students to talk about life in their field of work. Speakers are asked to give an overview of their company, the range of roles and responsibilities within the company, what qualifications and experience are required to work in the industry, whether the company offers apprenticeships and if so, how to apply, and crucially, what it’s like to work there every day!

SMV’s members are always looking for new ways to support young people through ‘education to employment’ initiatives, so finding enthusiastic speakers is an easy task. The most recent speakers were Tom Cooper and Adam Laister from Icon Films who spoke about their roles working in the TV and film industry; Emma Cox spoke about her business and marketing role at Thatchers Cider; and SMV member Michael Bothamley spoke about his career in Law.

As part of the Future Leaders Careers and Employability programme, students spend time the day before researching the company and the person they’ll be meeting so that they can prepare questions for a Q&A session. This is also good interview practice, with students learning how important it is to prepare for a meeting in advance, whether it relates to a potential job, apprenticeship or university place.

World of Work Wednesday has been such a successful initiative that Collegiate School is already filling up the diary several months ahead.

It’s been great to see so many of our Year 13 students engaging in these sessions and inspired to pursue careers that they are passionate about.

Kate Hardcastle, Collegiate’s Career and Employability Advisor
have since breathed new life into the school and accelerated a significant number of changes that are already delivering excellent outcomes.

In Easton, Bannerman Road Community Academy also received a visit from Ofsted, who found that the school has improved significantly since it was last judged by Ofsted four years ago. Located in one of Bristol’s most deprived areas, the school has become the heart of the community, described by the inspector as ‘thriving and inclusive.’ The Trust’s specialist primary phase team has been working closely with the school to help raise standards, a positive collaboration that is being expanded across our family of schools.

As we look to the year ahead, we’re inspired by our shared values that have recently been developed with input from students and staff across Venturers Trust: Work hard. Be kind. Have courage. I regularly have the privilege of spending time in our schools and already I can see these powerful values being embraced as students of all ages and across all our schools, raise their aspirations and realise their true potential as global citizens who can shape the future.

David Watson OBE, CEO of Venturers Trust

A Royal visitor for two Venturers Trust schools

T his summer, HRH The Princess Royal visited Withywood in Bristol to officially open Merchants’ Academy Primary and Venturers’ Academy.

As well as meeting staff and pupils, Princess Anne enjoyed a tour of the new buildings where, much to the delight of pupils, she spent time in several classrooms. Princess Anne also listened to a joyful musical performance given by 14-year-old Venturers’ Academy student Lakhile who played the keyboard.

“T’m so happy that I could play music for Princess Anne today,” said Lakhile. “She asked me if I like my new school and I said that I love it!”

Venturers’ Academy is a school for children aged four-19 with a primary diagnosis of autism. With demand for places at an all-time high, the school now operates over three sites in Bristol, two in Withywood and one in St Anne’s Park. When it first opened in 2016, Venturers’ Academy had 28 pupils, a figure that has risen to over 240, while staff numbers have risen from 14 to more than 165.

Merchants’ Academy Primary is also located on the campus, with 374 pupils aged between three and 11. Situated next to the secondary school and sixth form, it serves one of the most disadvantaged wards in the UK.

Merchants’ Academy Primary has 14 classrooms, a dance studio, an art/design/technology room, a spacious hall and a library. Venturers’ Academy includes a sports hall, science lab and rooms for art and design technology, life skills and music, as well as classrooms, therapy rooms and multiple breakout spaces.

The site also incorporates the Bradbury Centre, a specialist training hub located within the new Venturers’ Academy building. Funded by a generous donation from a Hong Kong-based charity called the Bradbury Foundation, the centre has been specifically designed to provide professional training to teachers and therapists who specialise in supporting young people with complex educational needs.

As central to this is regularly reviewing and implementing the curriculum to match the needs and abilities of every child to ensure that as they advance through school they develop the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to succeed in learning, life and work.

Every school within Venturers Trust is on a journey of improvement. We have a responsibility to deliver the best teaching and learning and there can be no compromise on the quality of education we provide for each young person, because through education we have the power to address and improve both social and educational inequality.

This year we invited Sir David Carter, former National Schools Commissioner for England, to undertake an independent review of Venturers Trust and our family of schools. External scrutiny is an important part of our development and the key messages from Sir David’s report have helped us to identify areas to focus on, as well as confirming our strengths.

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Alongside the pastoral role that schools play in their communities to support health and welfare, teachers are working hard on closing the learning gap created by lockdown. Central to this is regularly reviewing and implementing the curriculum to match the needs and abilities of every child to ensure that as they advance through school they develop the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to succeed in learning, life and work.

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Community in more than just name

“A thriving and inclusive school which is at the heart of its community”. These are the words chosen by Ofsted to describe Bannerman Road Community Academy (BRCA) in Easton, which recently received a glowing report from Ofsted.

With almost 400 pupils aged between three and 11, the school is located in a bustling community with strong social values but is none the less one of the most deprived areas in the region. Ventures Trust, the multi-academy trust that is responsible for BRCA, has a clear strategy to address inequality and improve social mobility. “Education has the power to change the fabric of an entire community,” says Gail Bragg, Chair of Trustees. “But it’s not as straight forward as simply having fantastic teachers and an inspiring curriculum. Underpinning that is being able to truly engage with young people and their families so that children want to come to school and are eager to learn.”

The Ofsted inspection team saw evidence of this for themselves, writing in the report: “Pupils value their education. The school motto ‘Believe You Can’ underpins pupils’ aspirations... this helps them to believe in themselves and to do their very best.”

The inspectors also said that pupils “understand the importance of tolerance and respect towards other cultures,” a quality that Interim Headteacher Oliver Laken says is one of the school’s many strengths. “We’re very proud of our school’s diversity, it’s something we celebrate regularly. 86% of our pupils identify as BAME and 74% speak English as an additional language. The children love to find out about different places around the world, learning about new cultures, traditions, food, costume, language and history. Much of our curriculum overlaps with these topics so the children understand how it all fits together.

“We’re well known throughout the community for being a beacon of inclusive practice. Parents and carers value the school and trust us to be there for them.”

Trystan Williams is the Deputy CEO for Ventures Trust. He’s been working closely with the senior leadership team at BRCA, implementing the Trust’s investment in staff development, mental health and wellbeing, while also helping the school to raise standards. “This is a school where the entire community is willing to do whatever it takes to build a better future,” said Trystan. “The staff and pupils all work hard and they don’t hesitate to help each other. The parents and carers are equally supportive and altogether, the school has everything it needs to succeed.”

Indeed, pupils are often fundraising for local charities, such as holding cake sales for St Peter’s Hospice, and they are eager to volunteer for positions of responsibility on the school council.

‘Believe You Can’ is the perfect motto for this thriving school where the decision makers of the future are getting ready to change the world!

The Venturers Trust Endowment & Fundraising Committee carefully reviews each application so that every school receives its full share of the fund to support special activities. This year, the endowment fund has made 178 individual grants to schools totalling £124,665. Amongst the many educational activities that were supported, was a trip to Bristol Aquarium for children in Pelican class and Puffin class at Venturers’ Academy. As well as the excitement of seeing the animals, children particularly enjoyed the sensory displays. More excitement arrived when some reindeer visited the school! Children enjoyed meeting them and learning about how to take care of them.

Montpelier High School used the fund to bolster its enrichment programme which provides students with a wide range of activities spanning STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), sport and the creative arts. These experiences give students additional skills that support employability and develop confidence and self-esteem.
The 2021-22 post-pandemic theme of returning to normal was felt across a great many areas of life; and schools were no exception. However, at Collegiate, previously Colston’s, the very notion of ‘normal’ was one we explored time and time again.

What was our normal? Could we return to normal with a new name? What would our new normal be?

Well, the first thing to say is that our ‘normal’ is really quite extraordinary— and sorely missed during Covid, of course. Those amazing relationships between staff and students that do so much to make our school a happy place were hampered by screens, face masks and limited interactions, so we were all desperate to get back to our version of normality.

The idea of being able to return to a full co-curricular programme with our vast array of clubs, societies and school trips; this was what we had all been dreaming of! Together, these opportunities make up a really amazing holistic experience for our students, so what we had all been dreaming of! Together, these opportunities make up a really amazing holistic experience for our students, so it has been truly exciting to be able to get back to them.

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Charitable giving

Our approach, consistent with our values, is to direct SMV’s charitable funds to support the delivery of services by others. Bristol has an extraordinary number of charitable organisations, which demonstrates both the extent of need and the strength and capacity of local communities to drive improvement, the widespread concern for others and the number of people who are willing to do something about it.

Demand for services combined with financial pressure on service providers of all shapes and sizes has only increased with the pandemic, sustained cuts to public spending and now, the cost of living and other financial challenges. Uncertainty over future funding can limit the potential of organisations supporting our community and therefore we are increasingly looking to provide funding over a two or three year term, hoping to support the development of these vital services over time.

Without the real, sustained and effective work undertaken by so many people across the region to help their communities, the donations that SMV is able to make would have limited impact. It’s a privilege to be able to work with and support so many inspiring individuals and organisations who never hesitate to put the welfare of others first.

Robert Bourns DL, Chair of SMV Charity Committee

Sight Support

Sight Support provides practical and emotional support to blind and partially sighted people via home visits and drop-in clinics in 23 locations across the West of England. The pandemic impacted hugely on the charity’s older and more vulnerable clients, often because eye appointments were delayed on the high street and at eye hospitals, sometimes leading to irreversible deterioration in people’s sight.

With a financial grant from SMV, Sight Support was able to recruit a new Community Sight Loss Advisor (CSLA) to provide more support in Bath and North East Somerset. As a result, the Sight Support hub in Bath Central Library has reopened, a new hub in Keynsham has been launched and the two hubs in MidSomerset Norton and Chew Valley are thriving. By increasing capacity in more rural parts of the region, people who find it difficult to get to city locations can access face-to-face support services.

The new CSLA has also been delivering training at local care homes, helping staff members to learn about sight loss and how best to support their blind and partially sighted residents so that they can retain their independence even with restricted vision.

Marc, Community Sight Loss Manager, with a client

Access Sport

Over the past four years, the charity Access Sport has created and set up BMX tracks in some of Bristol’s most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, including Lawrence Weston, Hillfields, Hartcliffe and Stockwood. The charity’s inclusive cycling programme aims to give all young people access to a bike alongside the skills and confidence to use it and somewhere local, safe and exciting to enjoy riding.

Access Sport’s Cycling Inclusion work helps young people in deprived communities to put cycling into action as a life skill, whether for sport or in their day-to-day life. Feeling included and encouraged, young people come along to the tracks to take part in the programme of activities. Specially adapted bikes are available so that anyone who might be less physically able can participate equally.

The fully asphalted pump tracks have a wide range of berms, rollers and jumps that are suitable for all ages and abilities. In the words of one participant, “these are proper full-on BMX tracks!”. Groups of local volunteers, initially trained and supported by Access Sport, become the beating heart of each track, developing a group or club that’s run by the community for the community.

SMV was thrilled to support Access Sport with a grant to extend the reach of its Cycling Inclusion work in South Bristol. Funding enabled the programme to coach an additional 250 young people in Hartcliffe and Stockwood, many of whom are excluded from education or suffer from attention or behavioural issues. As well as increasing the number of structured sessions for young people from the local community and school groups, over 5,000 recreational riders are now visiting the various tracks every month.

Feedback from participants highlights the benefits of the programme, which include expanding their horizons through cycling. Eight out of ten say they have higher levels of confidence and are more motivated to take part in sport since attending the courses, while over 70% recognised improvements in their communication and social skills. In the past year, Access Sport’s Cycling Inclusion work has coached over 1,100 young people in South Bristol and local statistics have shown a 52% drop in youth anti-social behaviour, which Access Sport believes has been helped by the opening of the outstanding new facilities in the area.

Sixty-One

Through a city-wide partnership, Sixty-One enables individuals, churches, charities and businesses to support offenders before and after release by providing the relational and community based support to live free from crime.

To stop reoffending in the long-term, investment is needed in the ex-prisoner’s self-sufficiency and self-esteem to build a positive connection between them and the local community. Sixty-One’s programme, MentorMe, provides support, signposting and practical help through regular mentoring and long-term befriending. SMV made a charitable grant to the MentorMe project which has supported an average of 53 mentees per month and received 64 new referrals so far this year. Evidence shows that the mentees supported by the project have a reoffending rate ten times lower than the national average.

Mentors and mentees talk about the benefits and achievements at a Sixty-One celebration meal

My mentor has been amazing at reminding me of all the progress I’ve made. Regular contact with someone who listens has made a difference and really kept me going.

Ex-offender

Robert Bourns DL, DL

Marc, Community Sight Loss Manager, with a client

Vocational Academy pupils with Olympic BMX Freestyle Bronze Medalist and Access Sport Ambassador Declan Brooks at Staplegrove Bike Park

Ex-offender

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Access Sport

Over the past four years, the charity Access Sport has created and set up BMX tracks in some of Bristol’s most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, including Lawrence Weston, Hillfields, Hartcliffe and Stockwood. The charity’s inclusive cycling programme aims to give all young people access to a bike alongside the skills and confidence to use it and somewhere local, safe and exciting to enjoy riding.

Access Sport’s Cycling Inclusion work helps young people in deprived communities to put cycling into action as a life skill, whether for sport or in their day-to-day life. Feeling included and encouraged, young people come along to the tracks to take part in the programme of activities. Specially adapted bikes are available so that anyone who might be less physically able can participate equally.

The fully asphalted pump tracks have a wide range of berms, rollers and jumps that are suitable for all ages and abilities. In the words of one participant, “these are proper full-on BMX tracks!”. Groups of local volunteers, initially trained and supported by Access Sport, become the beating heart of each track, developing a group or club that’s run by the community for the community.

SMV was thrilled to support Access Sport with a grant to extend the reach of its Cycling Inclusion work in South Bristol. Funding enabled the programme to coach an additional 250 young people in Hartcliffe and Stockwood, many of whom are excluded from education or suffer from attention or behavioural issues. As well as increasing the number of structured sessions for young people from the local community and school groups, over 5,000 recreational riders are now visiting the various tracks every month.

Feedback from participants highlights the benefits of the programme, which include expanding their horizons through cycling. Eight out of ten say they have higher levels of confidence and are more motivated to take part in sport since attending the courses, while over 70% recognised improvements in their communication and social skills. In the past year, Access Sport’s Cycling Inclusion work has coached over 1,100 young people in South Bristol and local statistics have shown a 52% drop in youth anti-social behaviour, which Access Sport believes has been helped by the opening of the outstanding new facilities in the area.

Sixty-One

Through a city-wide partnership, Sixty-One enables individuals, churches, charities and businesses to support offenders before and after release by providing the relational and community based support to live free from crime.

To stop reoffending in the long-term, investment is needed in the ex-prisoner’s self-sufficiency and self-esteem to build a positive connection between them and the local community. Sixty-One’s programme, MentorMe, provides support, signposting and practical help through regular mentoring and long-term befriending. SMV made a charitable grant to the MentorMe project which has supported an average of 53 mentees per month and received 64 new referrals so far this year. Evidence shows that the mentees supported by the project have a reoffending rate ten times lower than the national average.

Mentors and mentees talk about the benefits and achievements at a Sixty-One celebration meal

My mentor has been amazing at reminding me of all the progress I’ve made. Regular contact with someone who listens has made a difference and really kept me going.

Ex-offender
Back a Yard in St Pauls

With the traditional, much loved St Pauls Carnival not yet back in full swing following the pandemic, the Carnival team were determined to deliver a programme of summer activities and community events to celebrate culture and diversity in the heart of St Pauls.

Back a Yard drew together people of all ages from all over the city to play, perform and participate in four immersive events focused on food, music and art. The programme featured a Carnival library in the Kuumba Centre, a community picnic on Portland Square, a community celebration in the Malcolm X Centre and a Carnival takeover at Lost Horizon.

In addition, the traditional Elders Brunch was as successful as ever and local schools participated in Carnival dance and costume making workshops, subsequently sharing performances across all the events. The free community picnic was particularly popular with local families who came along in multigenerational groups to enjoy the music, crafts, storytelling, food and dance.

A repeat sponsor of the St Pauls Carnival, SMV was delighted to support Back a Yard this year, an event that brought together over 1,300 people from the St Pauls community and beyond to celebrate the spirit of Carnival.

If your organisation would like to apply for a charitable grant, we welcome applications from across the Greater Bristol region.

For details of the application criteria, please visit our website.

Charity impact report

This year, the SMV Charity Committee received a total of 77 grant applications. Over £350,000 has been awarded over six key sectors to charities and organisations in Greater Bristol, directly supporting over 12,000 people.

If your organisation would like to apply for a charitable grant, we welcome applications from across the Greater Bristol region. For details of the application criteria, please visit our website.
How a farm in Worcestershire is helping to support older people in Greater Bristol

The St Monica Trust (SMT) is recognised as a leading provider of retirement accommodation and care in a range of different settings. Since 1922, SMTV has been engaged by SMT to manage its endowment fund, the annual income of which provides financial stability to the trust to continue its important work.

Much of the fund’s value is in the ownership of large agricultural estates which are leased and managed by tenant farmers, often with the tenancies being passed down from generation to generation. Once a year the SMV Estates Committee visits estates owned by SMT in order to meet and support the tenant farmers, finding out how they are managing and working their land and farms, exploring diversification, looking after the environment and interacting with their local communities.

This year’s visit included the Croome Estate in Worcestershire, where this Red Tractor certified farmland is managed by tenant farmer Stephen Watkins. To diversify the use of land in a way that supports the local community, Stephen provides a piece of land to be used by Kingsleighs Equestrian Centre, run by Deni Harper-Adams.

Deni approached Stephen 17 years ago with a business idea based on her vision to support and work with a wide range of children and adults who would benefit from being around horses and ponies. Over the years, Stephen has helped Deni to build an outdoor and indoor riding arena, a set of grass gallops, install an Aga in the school classroom and increase stabling and tie rails for the ever-increasing number of horses and ponies, now totalling 70.

“Stephen is so supportive, he just makes things happen,” says Deni. “He’s happy for us to ride all over his farm, which makes for very safe and peaceful rides.”

Deni offers a wide range of lessons, clubs and interventions for children and adults of all abilities and backgrounds. She’s a firm believer in the therapeutic power of horses, describing them as “gentle, calm creatures that respond to human behaviour”.

“For example, if someone is feeling very anxious,” she says, “just standing next to a horse and touching it can help lower their heart rate and blood pressure.”

Young people with a wide range of problems and often no longer able to attend mainstream schools, attend the therapeutic education centre, which is accredited to provide out-of-classroom education. Alongside regular lessons, students spend time learning to care for the horses. They become a valued part of the team and can see the difference they make, developing a sense of purpose, resilience, self-pride and personal ambition.

Now registered as a government-funded Marcus Rashford Holiday Activities and Food programme, groups of children spend the school holidays at the centre. They enjoy breakfast, lunch and dinner together (now you can see where the Aga in the school classroom comes in) and as well as learning about and looking after the horses, they also learn about food, digging up seasonal vegetables on the farm, preparing and eating the food they’ve harvested.

The equestrian centre also supports people with a wide range of physical disabilities who spend time with the horses, taking part in carriage rides if they aren’t physically able to ride. The hard-working, patient and enthusiastic team members who help to deliver activities for disabled guests are often those who first arrived because they had a range of problems that prevented them from attending mainstream schools. Deni attributes this transformation to “the life changing power of horses!”.

Beyond the peaceful rides across the farmland, Deni encourages everyone who visits or works at the centre to explore the wider opportunities available within the equine industry. Some join the twelve-week youth training race programme, including visits to Ascot and Cheltenham Races. Others explore British eventing and show jumping disciplines, with many going on to win awards.

Deni’s vision for the future is “more of course!”. She would like to grow the indoor school, incorporate residential accommodation, offer a wider range of activities and increase access for those less able. Thankfully, ever supportive Stephen is on board with her vision and is determined to help make it happen.

Completing the circle, the success of the equestrian centre supports the success of the farm, with the tenant farmer paying rent on the land which creates an income for the SMT endowment fund. Income that goes directly to supporting the invaluable work of the St Monica Trust to care for older people and those who are most vulnerable.
The overarching remit of the Care for Older People Committee is to oversee the delivery of safe and high-quality care to the residents of Katherine House and Griffiths House, as part of our trustee designation for the Cote Charity. We also look after the Almshouse Charity, where the building on St Michael’s Hill provides accommodation for 12 residents who have experienced challenging circumstances.

The residual impact of Covid meant that Katherine House and Griffiths House locked down on three occasions between September 2021 and April 2022, each time for three to four weeks. The dedicated team of staff coped brilliantly throughout, working hard with resilience, care and innovation, such that residents who were unable to have visits from their families were nonetheless united on Zoom which kept their spirits up. Despite these challenges, and under the outstanding leadership of Care Manager Leanne Thorne and her deputy Sue Thorne, staff continued to maintain the very highest standards of compassionate care to the residents, combined as always with enthusiasm and unswerving dedication.

An action-packed programme of activities is provided by the Wellbeing Team, such as guest musicians, a visiting gardening team, an intergenerational picnic and ‘share a sherry time’, but this year I particularly loved attending the 60’s themed party in August. Residents were joined by family and friends who all sat together in the sunshine to enjoy a sumptuous meal, a sing-along and plenty of colourful entertainment from talented singers and dancers. It was a memorable occasion and I was delighted to have been invited.

As winter approaches we will continue to review how we provide the very best care across the homes for which we are responsible. It has been such a pleasure to be involved and the reward of this role is often the warm and amusing interaction I have with residents and staff when they are kind enough to share a story from their fascinating lives.

Dr Jacqueline Cornish OBE
Chair of SMV Care for Older People Committee

Although the pandemic has continued to present challenges, keeping everyone healthy and safe remains our priority, alongside ensuring that life in our care homes is full of laughter and enjoyment. We’re incredibly fortunate to have such a wonderful community of fun-loving residents and caring staff; and we’re grateful to all the wonderful visitors, not only family and friends, but also those who provide such a varied array of entertaining and therapeutic activities.

Our Wellbeing Team of Sabina, Imogen and Raj provide a busy and creative programme of activities and events that appeal to our community, as well as spending meaningful time with each resident.

Our chickens created some excitement earlier this year by laying their first blue eggs. Led by Griffiths House resident Norma, also known as ‘Official Guardian of the Hens’, residents from both homes regularly enjoy collecting the eggs and feeding the hens.

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In warmer weather our residents are able to spend more time enjoying the tranquil gardens and watching the plentiful wildlife. Our walking club is a popular activity and a great way to unwind in the fresh air. Residents who are less mobile are supported to join in with excursions using wheelchairs, such as visits to the Downs to see a traditional sheep grazing event and to the Botanic Gardens where we gathered inspiration for our own garden.

Celebrations for the Platinum Jubilee lasted a whole week, with a wide range of fun activities. The dining room was transformed into ‘Her Majesty’s Tavern’ where residents designed their own cocktails with fresh ingredients and we hosted a Royal Garden Party in the Griffiths House garden, complete with delicious cakes made by our talented in-house chef.

“Fabulous event, definitely the best residential home ever and the staff are fantastic! Thank you for your hard work, making Katherine House a lovely home for my grandma.”

Family member

Our Wellbeing Team: Sabina, Imogen and Raj

New members

Dr Bevis Watts

Bevis’ career has been spent working in sustainability across public, private and voluntary sectors. Starting out in the recycling industry, Bevis later became the CEO of Avon Wildlife Trust and is currently the CEO of Triodos Bank UK.

Bevis co-founded the all-party Parliamentary initiative ‘Bankers for Net Zero’ and he has a regular column in the Metro newspaper on how to ‘green your money’, providing advice on ways to combat climate change and make a difference through money held in current accounts, pensions and investments.

Alongside national advisory roles in banking and impact investing, Bevis has held numerous directorships and trusteeships for voluntary organisations in Bristol and the South West. Bevis has a first-class business degree, a PhD in Management Science, he is a Chartered Environmentalist and was recently awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of the West of England for his leadership in sustainability.

Lee Gardhouse

Lee has lived in Bristol for almost 30 years, moving to the city after completing an Economics degree in Liverpool. He joined financial services company Hargreaves Lansdown and has worked his way up to become the Chief Investment Officer. Over three decades, Lee has seen first-hand the journey of transformation from a relatively small founder-managed company into a major FTSE 100 quoted business.

For a number of years he was the executive sponsor of the company’s graduate scheme, mentoring graduates to become future business leaders. Lee is looking forward to using his professional expertise to support several of SMV’s core objectives, primarily in education, social enterprise and environmental sustainability.

Towards the end of the school year, we welcomed a number of students from local schools and colleges on work experience visits. The residents especially love spending time with young people and they were thrilled when one member of the group brought in his violin and had us all spellbound with his fantastic musical talent.

Our Charlie and the Chocolate Factory themed intergenerational picnic this year brought together the families of residents and staff, an event that was so successful we held an intergenerational summer party too! With a 1950s and 1960s theme, everyone was encouraged to dress up and we all enjoyed the wonderful singing and dancing performed by local entertainers, topped off with a banquet of food and vintage-style milkshakes.

This year, our work has been recognised by Care and Support West whose Care Awards acknowledge the positive work delivered by so many hard working people in the Care sector.

A selection of photos from the summer party.
Member highlights

Tracey Killen
During Tracey’s first year as a member of SMV she has joined the Charity Committee, a role she describes as “an eye-opener”.

“So much care and due diligence goes into considering each grant application and the breadth of organisations that SMV supports is incredible,” she says. “Equally insightful is the committee’s focus to ensure that where money is awarded and planned to be spent, the maximum value will be delivered for the community that each charity seeks to serve.”

Tracey has also become a governor at Merchants’ Academy. “I’ve been blown away by the resilience, grit and determination that has been shown by the Head of Secondary Viki Starke and her team in order to cope with the complexities and challenges presented by Covid and, as far as possible, to provide an uninterrupted education for all students,” she says. “Faced with extraordinary circumstances, the school has stepped up in so many ways to support its community, a characteristic that is not unusual in South Bristol where communities have such strong social values, they care for and support each other.”

Aside from the voluntary positions of responsibility that Tracey has taken on as part of her membership of SMV, she has continued to support the Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance as a trustee, as well as Be the Business, an independent not-for-profit organisation that provides targeted support and guidance for small to medium-sized businesses, where Tracey is a fellow.

Sam Roberts
It’s been a busy first year for Sam Roberts too. As well as becoming a governor at Merchants’ Academy and a member of SMV’s Communications Committee, his company Boston Tea Party (BTP) has set up the Boston Tea Party Foundation. The foundation provides work experience opportunities for young people from some of the most disadvantaged areas of Bristol, Bath and soon also Birmingham, who just need a springboard into the world of work to help them find their feet and their focus. Some of those who’ve taken part in the programme have gone on to stay on with BTP and are now fully fledged members of the team.

As a school governor, Sam has been spending time with students and staff at Merchants’ Academy, a school for young people with a primary diagnosis of autism. He describes the pastoral care as “genuinely life changing, particularly for students who simply wouldn’t be able to achieve their full potential in a mainstream school.”

Sam says that the school’s motto, ‘Where everything’s possible’ is perfect for the Merchants’ Academy community, where everyone starts each new day with a positive outlook that they can achieve anything they set out to. “The division between home and school is particularly effective, with a shared sense of aspiration for each student. There’s simply no ceiling placed on what these incredible young people can accomplish, and, with the dedicated support of their fantastic teachers, their achievements are inspirational.”

Kathryn Bishop CBE
During Kathryn’s first year as a member of SMV, she has brought to the role her experience in helping organisations and leaders from the public and private sectors to navigate change. Many of the schools, care homes, charities and other organisations that SMV helps to support have faced immeasurable change over the past two years, largely a result of the pandemic.

As Kathryn becomes more involved with the wider range of areas in which SMV works, her first question is often, “how can I help?”.

“The landscape has changed for everyone,” she says. “People have been affected in different ways by the events of the last two years. If my experience can be of use to the organisations that SMV supports, that’s all to the good and my purpose in becoming a member.”

Already Kathryn has become a governor at Collegiate School where her approach to adding value is to start by getting to know the school, as well as members of staff, governors and pupils. She’s also enjoying being back in the classroom at the Said Business School in Oxford, where she both directs and teaches. Earlier this year Kathryn delivered leadership training to over 50 women from around the world, “in person”, at last!” said Kathryn. “There was such a sense of energy and optimism, we’ve all got to hold on to that as we face the inevitable challenges ahead.”

Professor Mahesh Sooriyabandara
During his first year as a member of SMV, Mahesh has taken the time to understand the full remit of the organisation to identify where he can most add value and make a difference. Already he’s become a member of the Social Enterprise Committee and a governor for Collegiate School.

Mahesh is the MD of Toshiba Bristol Research Lab and his professional expertise is adding real value to SMV’s social enterprise work, particularly its commitment to help Bristol reach its carbon zero goal. For example, Mahesh is closely involved with Umbrella, a partnership between Toshiba Europe Limited, South Gloucestershire Council, the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership and the West of England Combined Authority. Umbrella aims to accelerate new technologies, solutions and business models for the Internet of Things era in the South West region. The platform is already being used to develop smart city sensing including air quality monitoring and street light maintenance.

Umbrella is currently providing technical and financial support to more than ten small-to-medium sized enterprises to accelerate the development of innovative solutions to pressing issues. For example, helping citizens and cities to achieve net zero targets, reduce energy bills, reduce waste and litter, and promote wellbeing amongst older people.

Heather Frankham
When I was asked to become a member of SMV, I thought long and hard before accepting. Despite growing up and then developing my business in Bristol, only in recent years have I learnt about the work they do across the region. The reaction of others when I mentioned SMV was a bit like marmite with some very positive and others believing that it was an outdated institution. When I met with the Treasurer, Caroline Duckworth, I was impressed by her drive to support the modernisation of SMV and surprised by the volume and breadth of voluntary work delivered by members.

Around the same time, the Colston statue was toppled in Bristol, opening up the conversation about Bristol’s links to the slave trade and how some of the early members of the Society had been involved in trade organisations that had supported this. Like everyone else, I find this history abhorrent. I watched the amazing production of The Meaning of Zong at the Bristol Old Vic this year and it uncomf ortably highlighted the horrors of that time in our history. My optimistic takeaway however was that doing nothing changes nothing, but shining a light on what’s wrong will help to bring about change. For that reason, I’m really pleased that SMV provided funding to support the filming of this production for educational use.

Ultimately, I decided to become a member of SMV because I want to be able to give something back to Bristol, using my educational and commercial experience as well as philanthropic giving.

Since joining, most of my time has been focused on supporting SMV’s work in education because that’s where my professional experience can add the most value. I was educated in the state system in Bristol at a comprehensive school in Kingwood and whilst the resources may not have been the best or the most up to date, the commitment of some great teachers enabled me to build the foundations for a successful career in business. I believe that all children should have the same opportunity that I had, but the quality of education is not consistent in all schools, which has a significant impact on young people.

I recently became a trustee of ‘Venturers’ Trust and Chair of the Education Standards Committee. The Executive Team have had a challenging few years, with children having missed so much time in school due to Covid, but I’m looking forward to supporting them, and Gail Bragg as Chair of Trustees, to lift educational standards and levels of aspiration in these critical post pandemic years.
Emeritus membership allows long-serving members to retain their connection with SMV, but with a reduced level of commitment on their part. Emeritus status is extended to members who have made a contribution to SMV’s work over a sustained period of time.

Andrew Densham CBE
Andrew has been a member of SMV since 1990 and he served as Master in 2003/2004. Andrew was also closely involved with a number of other charities including Walk the Walk, Penny Brohn Cancer Centre and the World Wildlife Fund.

Nick Hood CVO CBE
Nick has been a member of SMV since 1997 and he served as Master in 2007/2008. Nick was President of the International Water Association, Deputy Chairman of Brewin Dolphin plc, a former Chairman of Wessex Water, past Chairman of Winterthur Life plc; a past non-executive Director at the RUH in Bath; a life Vice-President of @Bristol/We the Curious and a past non-executive Director at the RUH in Bath, a life Vice-President of @Bristol/We the Curious and a past member of HHR Prince of Wales’ Council for the Duchy of Cornwall. He was also closely involved with a number of other charities including Walk the Walk, Penny Brohn Cancer Centre and the World Wildlife Fund.

Colin Skellett OBE
Colin has been a member of SMV since 2001 and he served as Master in 2009/2010. Colin is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry and he has worked mainly in the water industry for over 45 years. As Chief Executive of Wessex Water, he led the company through privatisation, creating a business that has consistently delivered the highest environmental and customer service performance within the industry. Colin was awarded an OBE for services to business and WaterAid in the Queen’s Birthday Honours of 2012 and he holds Honorary Doctorates in Engineering from the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol.

Nick Bacon
Nick has been a member of SMV since 2005 and he served on the Standing Committee from 2013 – 2016. He studied at Bristol Polytechnic before joining the Saatchi Group in 1977. Over the next ten years Nick launched a number of new businesses for the Saatchi Group in London and was appointed Saatchi Group Managing Director UK Regions in 1990. Nick formed his own business in 1993 and the Mission Group was floated on the stock market in 2005.

Jim Hood 1933 – 2022
Jim became a member of SMV in 1979, serving as Master in 1999. He was a member of the Standing Committee between 1989-1992 and 1997-2005, during which time Colledge School became co-educational, the Clifton Down Charitable Trust was incorporated and proposals for the Roger Newport Foundation were approved, with the latter being registered as a charity during Jim’s year as Master. Jim also served on the Charity, Membership and Downs committees, becoming an Emeritus Member of SMV in 2015.

Jim held numerous other voluntary roles, including as a member of the St Monica Council; a governor of Montpelier High School from 1984 to 1993; a past Master of the Antient Society of St Stephen’s Ringers; a past Master of the Worshipful Company of Vintners; and a member of the Court of the University of Bristol for over a decade.

Simon Brooks 1931 – 2022
A member of SMV since 1990, Simon served on the Standing Committee from 1997-2000, during which time both the Roger Newport Foundation and the Kenneth Hilborne Foundation were approved by the Charity Commission. Simon also served on the Almshouses Charity Committee and the Downs Committee. He became an Emeritus Member of SMV in 2015.

Outside SMV, Simon was the Prime Warden of the Worshipful Company of Dyers in 1996-97, President of the Anchor Society in 1993, as well as being a member of the Antient Society of St Stephen’s Ringers.

Roderick Davidson 1938 – 2022
A member of SMV since 1996, Roderick served on many of SMV’s committees including the Standing Committee between 2003-2004 and 2005-2008. During this time Merchants’ Academy opened and Montpelier High School moved to academy status, making one of Bristol’s highest performing schools accessible to girls from all backgrounds. Roderick was also a member of the Almshouses Charity Committee from 2004 until 2010 and he became an Emeritus Member of SMV in 2019.

Roderick devoted much of his time to a number of other charitable organisations, including in the role of trustee for the Bristol Archdeaconry Charities from 1998-2007 and the St Stephen Ecclesiastical Charity from 2007-2010; and as president or chair for organisations including the Dolphin Society and the Antient Society of St Stephen’s Ringers, as well as being a past High Sheriff of Bristol.

Charles Lucas 1969 – 2022
Charles became a member of SMV in 2014 and made a significant contribution to many of SMV’s activities, including as a member of the Charity Committee and the Membership Committee. Charles also served as a governor for Collegiate School.

In his professional life, Charles was able to combine work with his keen interest in wine, through his leading role at Bristol Fine Wine. He was also Commandeur and the Cellar Master of the Commanderie de Bordeaux in Bristol, as well as being a member of the Jeroboam Club. Charles also managed the Alexander Hastings Group of property companies. Charles’ voluntary activities included his work with Young Bristol and the Antient Society of St Stephen’s Ringers. He also enjoyed organising charitable events to raise money for good causes. As well as being a Freeman of the City of Bristol, Charles was a councilor for Clifton ward, a candidate for Bristol Mayor and Chairman of South West Conservatives. Above all, Charles was a devoted father to his three boys.
Looking ahead

Charter Day in November is an annual event in the SMV calendar that commemorates the signing of our first Royal charter by Edward VI in 1552. It’s also the day on which we appoint a new leader for the year ahead and this year, Patrick Despard picks up the mantle.

A member since 2013, Patrick has supported a great many of SMV’s activities, often applying his professional expertise in the property sector to help safeguard the financial stability of charitable organisations that we support. For example, as a member of the Estates and Property Committee for Venturers Trust, Patrick has helped to ensure that the various buildings meet the current needs and future aspirations of the schools and communities they serve.

In the year ahead, Patrick intends to sharpen SMV’s focus in several key areas, including providing support for those most impacted by the rising cost of living. Helping communities, groups and individuals who are disadvantaged and vulnerable has long been a key priority for SMV, but the number of people who are struggling to cope is higher than ever.

Increasing the number of quality apprenticeships available to young people as they leave school is also on the agenda. Helping communities, groups and individuals who are disadvantaged and vulnerable has long been a key priority for SMV, but the number of people who are struggling to cope is higher than ever.

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“In every committee meeting, across the breadth of SMV’s activities, whether its education, care for older people, charitable giving or something else, there’s always a wave of voices asking ‘how can I help?’ or ‘what can I do?’ With the practical approach and can-do attitude of our members, alongside the many proactive partnerships that we have with other groups and organisations, I believe that together we can make a positive impact on some of the toughest challenges facing communities.”

“The membership of today is very different from the past,” says Patrick. “Early on, the Society’s members shared business interests and worked together much like a trade association. Today’s members have a particular characteristic in common. They each want to do whatever they can to make a difference to the lives of others.

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Despite having only twelve months as leader, Patrick is also working on a long-term strategy relating to the environment. He says that we simply can’t underestimate the impact of not doing enough, so we’ll be looking across all the areas we operate in to make improvements that will help safeguard the future of the planet.