

# Annual Review 2023



*Helping communities across  
Greater Bristol to thrive*

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# Welcome

Welcome to the 2023 edition of the [Society of Merchant Venturers \(SMV\)](#) Annual Review. So much has taken place over the past twelve months, it has been a difficult task to select only a small handful of stories to include.

Thank you to the many inspiring individuals and organisations who have helped us to achieve our social purpose objectives this year, including [Black South West Network](#), whose mentoring programme has been immensely successful, so much so that it will be repeated in 2024. Also, [South Bristol Youth \(SBY\)](#), just one of the charities that ensured funds raised in our Winter Crisis Appeal reached the families most in need. Our ongoing partnership with SBY will grow next year to include support of their Green Futures Programme for students, focusing on career pathways associated with sustainability and where we will sponsor an annual environmental prize.

This fits well with SMV's increasing support of environmental issues, with our [Social Enterprise Committee](#) expanding its activities to take considerably more interest in organisations across the region that are working together to protect and enhance the environment for everyone.

My personal focus this year has been on extending our reach into minority faith communities. We are here to help everybody and only by building stronger relationships with underrepresented groups will we truly be able to deliver our mission to help all communities across Greater Bristol to thrive.



Patrick Despard with Abdul Malik, Chair of the Easton Jamia Mosque.

Recently, I had the privilege of visiting several mosques and a Hindu Temple in Bristol and Bath to meet faith leaders to ask how we can support their communities more effectively. I was also invited to attend a Sikh awareness event organised by the Punjabi International Forum at the Gurdwara in Fishponds, an enlightening experience and I hope to return again soon.

SMV's custodianship of the [Downs](#), which we manage and protect with [Bristol City Council](#), has also benefitted from stronger partnerships this year. Following the public consultation, the Downs Advisory Panel (DAP) was established to advise and support the Downs Committee, thus ensuring that voices from all stakeholder groups can be heard. The Committee is usually chaired by the Lord Mayor but, due to illness, I have been standing in for him for almost six months. Chairing the Downs Committee really has been a considerable honour during a year of so much positive collaboration and progressive change.

We are also incredibly grateful for the support of our members, partners and friends, all of whom give so generously of their time, expertise and resources; and who share our determination to make Greater Bristol a better place for everyone who lives and works here. Thank you for everything you do to help us.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Patrick'.

Patrick Despard  
Master 2022-23



Patrick on the Clifton and Durdham Downs with Robert Westlake, Chair of the DAP and Anna Stevens, Biodiversity, Engagement and Learning Manager for Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project.

# Outward Bound in Snowdonia

**B**right and early on a Monday morning in March, 27 students from Merchants' Academy (MA) and Montpelier High School (MHS), accompanied by their teachers, boarded a coach destined for the [Outward Bound](#) camp in Aberdovey, Snowdonia. For many of the students this would be the first time they'd spent a week away from their families and everyone was feeling excited at the prospect of spending a week together in the great outdoors. How did it all begin?

Earlier this year, a group of students from across Bristol were invited to take part in an incredible opportunity delivered by the [Outward Bound Trust](#), an educational charity that inspires young people to take on adventures, overcome challenges and develop confidence and self-belief, preparing them to embrace all the opportunities that life will offer them.

The week-long adventure, referred to as 'Marvin's 100', came about after Mayor Marvin Rees created a challenge to send 100 young people from Bristol schools on an Outward Bound adventure. Marvin himself took part in an Outward Bound course as a teenager, an opportunity that he describes as a key factor in helping him strive to reach his full potential by escaping the city's physical and cultural boundaries, climbing hills and mountains and experiencing awe.

Speaking to students who were considering whether to take up the offer, Marvin told them: "You might get wet, you might get cold, you might get tired and feel outside of your comfort zone. But you will overcome the challenges and feel great".



*Taking on responsibility and being independent for a week was a great experience for the students. They have returned to school with more confidence, resilience and a greater sense of maturity.*

**Ceri Donovan, MHS teacher**





*We asked students and staff who spent the week in Aberdovey what they enjoyed most about the adventure...*

**Binta, MHS:** "My biggest challenge was stepping out of my comfort zone but once I did, it was really worth it."

**Lewis, MA:** "The best part is that you get to experience things you've never done before."

**Edith, MHS:** "It was such an amazing experience and I think everybody would love to do this."

**Poppy, MA:** "The abseiling was scary but once I'd done it, I felt successful."

**Mariam, MHS:** "My biggest challenge was fasting while going on the hike, but it was so worth it."

**Elissa, MHS:** "I really enjoyed myself and it was fun to hang out with other people our age."

**Chloe, MA:** "The campfire at night was memorable, we toasted marshmallows which was a lot of fun."

**Jumanah, MHS:** "It was interesting and adventurous; and great to do something different away from school."

**Zoe Grafton, MA teacher:** "I was really impressed with how students supported each other and were receptive to instructions and feedback."



*I never thought I'd be able to achieve the climbing challenge, but I did, and afterwards I felt really brave.*

**Tegan, MA**

Alongside a subsidy and grant from the Outward Bound Trust and [Avon Outward Bound Association](#), full financial sponsorship was secured for all participating schools from donations given by several members of the Society of Merchant Venturers (SMV). This meant that the opportunity could be offered at no cost to the schools or the families invited to take part.

The additional Outward Bound places were snapped up by students from Bristol Brunel Academy, City Academy Bristol, Oasis John Williams, Bristol Metropolitan Academy and Bridge Learning Campus.

During the week, which fell during Ramadan, students faced a range of challenges including rock climbing, abseiling, river walks, hiking, camping, rope balancing and even jumping into the sea from a speed boat. In tackling every task head-on, each young person demonstrated bravery, resilience, determination and teamwork.

SMV has already pledged to provide financial sponsorship to repeat the trip for young people from across the region in 2024.

Katy Reeves, Assistant Vice Principal Secondary for Merchants' Academy, said that the trip made a huge impact on the students who took part: "Students said how proud they were to have been part of it, that they did things they never would have believed they could have done, and that they pushed themselves out of their comfort zone to take part in activities they would have turned their backs on before."



*It was amazing to be able to see the ocean from our dorm room, it was only a short walk down to the beach.*

**Moussa, MA**



## Inspirational entrepreneurs

This year, SMV was invited to collaborate with Black South West Network (BSWN), a regional racial justice organisation that supports the development of dynamic, independent Black and Minoritised communities, businesses and organisations.

The partnership focused on a mentoring initiative, where seven members of SMV were matched with seven Black entrepreneurs, who worked together over a six-month period with regular catch-ups as a whole group. With the official pilot programme having come to an end this summer, how have the matches worked out?

### Jerk King

**Jerk King** is an award-winning Afro-Caribbean events catering business led by Ashley Burrowes. Ashley was teamed up with Mike Bothamley, a retired development lawyer.

A regular vendor at St Pauls Carnival and Bristol Rovers home games, Ashley has also been building up his large event catering footprint with his team of 15. "We're looking at getting into bigger festivals next year," says Ashley. "I received a surprise call from Mike who was at Glastonbury Festival – I didn't know he was there and he called to tell me about what catering was being represented at the Festival!"

Since being connected with Mike, Ashley has taken on commercial kitchen space at the Malcolm X Community Centre in St Pauls, which offers more operational capacity to grow his weekend delivery business. Jerk King is now scaling up with plans for a catering van that will enable the business to operate from multiple locations on the same day.

## Black South West Network



Ashley Burrowes with Mike Bothamley.

When Mike first met Ashley, he already saw a successful businessman: "Ashley didn't need advice on how to run his business, he was already doing that really well. What he did need, however, was contacts." Mike introduced Ashley to Simon Stallard, British chef and event catering innovator, and this turned out to be a game-changer. Simon has built a world-class brand with impressive sponsorship credentials; and Ashley has been bouncing ideas off him about his own brand development: "He gave me lots of advice, every time I speak to him, I'm inspired."

Ashley hopes opportunities to collaborate with Simon will come to fruition in 2024, and Mike looks forward to being there to see the business go from strength to strength: "Although the mentoring has officially finished, the relationship we've built continues."

Edward Ware with Latoya Adlam.



### KC Concepts

Latoya Adlam runs **KC Concepts**, Bristol's first Black-owned pop-up shop showcasing 40 Black British brands across art, lifestyle, beauty and fashion. Latoya was matched with Edward Ware, whose career has been in property investment and construction.

"Over the last few years e-commerce has become really tough. People's spending habits have changed and regular sales have slowed," says Latoya. "Edward was great at helping me come up with new business approaches to re-strategise how to brand my products and implement subscription models."

Edward also introduced Latoya to several contacts to support her longer-term objective of opening a permanent flagship store in Bristol. "Regular customers want a physical presence so bricks and mortar will definitely be my next step, but it's really challenging." KC Concepts currently has temporary shop space in Bristol and weekly pop-ups in London, Birmingham and Cardiff.

Edward says: "It's more difficult than ever for small businesses to grow but Latoya is a determined and inspiring businesswoman who works incredibly hard, has a clear vision, a great client base, excellent products and a wealth of high street retail experience. I have no doubt she will succeed."

## Adolescent Support Home Services

Registered social worker Simon Ashman runs **Adolescent Support Home Services** to help young people transition to independent living, many of whom have had adverse childhood experiences. He was connected with David Freed, co-founder of independent Bristol-based property group Deeley Freed.

Linking up with David meant that Simon could regularly explore his ideas about the direction of his business. “David helped to reaffirm what I was thinking, he encouraged me to see my work from a different point of view and he delivered some very interesting networking opportunities.”

One such opportunity was ACH, a social enterprise in Bristol that provides supported accommodation primarily for refugees and migrants, who invited Simon to take part in some specialist training.

David also encouraged Simon to push on with his strategy of expanding the business model, which he felt was within Simon’s reach. He plans to take on an additional care home property and feels confident of achieving his objectives in a shorter timeframe.

Simon has found the mentoring programme invaluable: “It reminded me how important it is to make brave decisions sometimes. You never know what can come from putting yourself out there.”



David Freed with Simon Ashman.

## Jikoni

**Jikoni** is an East African café and event caterer in St Pauls founded by Iman Salat and James Hillier. They were matched with Sam Roberts, co-founder of café group Boston Tea Party.

Having developed BTP into a chain of 23 independent cafés across the UK, Sam spent time with Iman and James looking at their current day-to-day business operation and strategy. “Jikoni is still in its fledgling stages and apart from the café, most of our time is spent building our outside catering work,” says James. “We’re still figuring out the system but our vision is much clearer now, in part due to Sam’s advice.”

“Working in the catering industry is incredibly busy,” says Sam. “It can be hard to find time to even think about what long term success might look like.” He encouraged Iman and James to focus on the business’s identity, such as branding, café location, customer experience and potential finance options.

“Sam has given us a great base of knowledge that will carry on informing our plans and decisions as we build the business,” says Iman. The café is currently expanding to provide more space and seating, and the duo have plans to offer more restaurant-style cuisine.

## The Green Melon

John Aguirre and Tara Miran operate **The Green Melon**, a fruit and vegetable store and vegetable box scheme promoting healthy eating with affordable, fresh and culturally appropriate food. John and Tara were matched with Mark Burchfield, who built his career in engineering and IT managed services.

John’s working day starts at the wholesalers at 5am to buy fresh fruit and vegetables for the day ahead. The Green Melon is a labour-intensive operation and John was interested in the mentoring programme as a way of assessing the business from a different angle: “Mark helped me to focus on the bigger picture. His advice was to concentrate on the most profitable products and how much time and effort they take.”

One such product is the store’s office delivery service, where there is scope to build longer-term customer relationships. Mark encouraged John to implement some small operational changes, such as agreeing favourable credit arrangements, both with customers and suppliers, to take some pressure off the business’s accounting. “I’ve always been anti-credit,” says John, “but it was a change in perspective that is now opening up more possibilities to go for bigger customers without affecting my cashflow.”

Mark saw his mentor role as helping John and Tara to clarify their business goals and then develop a strategy to achieve them. “The reality is if you’re doing everything, it’s very difficult to lift your head up and see the wood for the trees. Sometimes you just need someone to ask the right questions and the steps to success become clear.”



## Maroon Fist

Martial arts coach Leonard Jackson runs **Maroon Fist**, a blend of traditional Chinese and African styles with Tai-Chi, boxing and self-defence. He was matched with David Powell, a retired solicitor.

Leonard launched Maroon Fist in 2012, running it alongside his day job at BT. Now focused solely on growing his own business, Leonard joined the mentoring programme hoping to gain advice on promoting Maroon Fist in Bristol's competitive martial arts market, with ambitious plans to scale the business. "We want to get into schools, universities, community centres, and further down the road, into the film industry. But it's just me doing it all so I needed a strategy that would deliver results.

"I've built a great relationship with David, he's incredibly supportive. He's also introduced me to several contacts who have helped me to accelerate my business plan, including a communications consultant and a filmmaker. We've spent time fine tuning my marketing strategy and I now have a number of plans that I intend to pursue."

The growing reputation of Maroon Fist has seen Leonard's student numbers grow and both his group classes and one-to-one training are in popular demand. "As well as providing beginner classes to help people of all ages improve their health, fitness, wellbeing and self-defence skills, we also host classes for more experienced

students who are working towards next year's World and European Championships. But I'm so busy delivering classes, my marketing was largely reliant on word-of-mouth recommendation. Since joining the mentoring programme I've spent time looking at potential growth areas and how to access them by taking part in more community events and using my website and social media presence to engage with potential clients more effectively."



Leonard Jackson with David Powell.

## International Graduate Success Accelerator

Kiki Paddy founded **International Graduate Success Accelerator (IGSA)** in 2021 to help international students and graduates to secure post-university employment and build successful careers. She was matched with Mohammed Saddiq, Lord-Lieutenant of Somerset and former Executive Director of Operations for Wessex Water.

"Having Mohammed as my mentor was ideal," said Kiki. "His knowledge of higher education governance really helped me to explore how to take IGSA forward." Mohammed is chair of Bristol Future Talent Partnership, an employability programme for young people that supports Black and Minoritised students to find their path into education and the workplace. With closely aligned values in helping to reduce inequalities experienced by young people from minority ethnicities, Kiki and Mohammed were on the same page from the start.

"Mohammed completely understood my objectives and made excellent suggestions about how to improve my business strategy. It's much clearer now." Mohammed believes that Kiki's approach is vital in bringing Minoritised people together to learn from each other's experiences. "The personal challenges that Kiki and her applicants have, ultimately reflects the inequality we see in the city."

It is not lost on Mohammed how IGSA reflects the mentoring programme between BSWN and SMV, and how important it is to reinforce the relationship between the two organisations as well as the wider community that BSWN serves. "Like my fellow mentors, I'm immensely privileged to have learnt so much during my career," says Mohammed. "It is only right that we pass on the knowledge that we have acquired so that someone else can benefit from it."



Mentors and mentees met regularly as a group.

The mentoring programme has been managed and led by Derek Tanner of BSWN's Enterprise Team.

"A strong sense of authenticity in each of the matches has enabled trust to build and fundamentally, that's the key to success," says Derek. "Building a relationship with someone from a different level of business success strengthens you as an entrepreneur and your ability to overcome a particular issue or question. Mentors can assist in problem solving and enable a solution, or even just offer a different perspective. The mentor may or may not have the answer, but is likely to know somebody who does!"

Derek is currently encouraging more Black and Minoritised entrepreneurs to take part in the mentoring programme in 2024, this time involving ten matched pairs.

# The Downs

## Finding solutions for change

**T**his summer has seen the creation of a new Downs Advisory Panel (DAP) whose members are volunteers and professionals tasked with assisting and advising the Downs Committee on matters of governance.

The DAP is one of the reforms introduced following a public consultation held in 2022 focusing on how governance of the Clifton and Durdham Downs could be improved and made more transparent.

The Society of Merchant Venturers (SMV) and Bristol City Council (BCC) have a statutory duty through the 1861 Downs Act which created the Downs Committee, to ensure that the 441 acres of green space are freely available for people to enjoy.

Although the Downs Committee isn't allowed by statute to delegate its powers, it was clear that a fresh solution was needed to take the results of the consultation forward, while preserving the much-loved space for recreation and nature conservation.

With input from a wide range of stakeholders, a memorandum of understanding, or MOU, was agreed between the Downs Committee and the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FODAG) to create the DAP.

From FODAG, the new chair of the DAP is Robert Westlake, who worked for 50 years within Bristol City Parks Department, including seven as the Downs Ranger, and therefore knows and understands the Downs as well as anyone. Robert says: "Preservation of the Downs is a huge responsibility to carry for the Downs Committee and for the DAP – but we're up for it, and we're approaching the challenge with fresh eyes.

"We're here to make change happen and we'll act as a conduit to instigate action, offering advice and solutions to the Downs Committee. We have alliances with other stakeholders so we can truly represent the people who use the Downs and we can offer solutions that will protect the Downs through the Act."

Top of the list for the DAP is to make sure that the Downs is financially sustainable. "I think we're missing a trick with this amazing area," observes Robert. "The Downs needs to be self-funding and generate income in order to preserve its future. One of our first tasks will be to come up with new, creative income streams that fit into our vision for the future."







As well as working to identify solutions to funding issues, the DAP will also help to navigate other issues that need resolving, for example anti-social behaviour, new toilets by Sea Walls and new changing rooms by the water tower. Robert concludes: “We’re not here to pass on problems. We’re here to find solutions.”

Continuity is a strength of the DAP because it doesn’t operate under the same terms as the Downs Committee whose make up is ever changing. As dictated by the 1861 Act, the Committee has a new Chair and Vice Chair every year, together with around a third of its members changing.

Former Downs Committee Chair Cllr Paula O’Rourke will represent Bristol City Council, with Committee member Robert Bourns representing SMV. They will be joined by Robert Westlake and two more members of FODAG, two representatives of the [Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Partnership](#), the Council’s Parks Department lead, a representative from [Sneyd Park Residents Association](#), together with independent experts as and when required.

Mike Bothamley, a member of SMV and the Downs Committee, helped to draw up the MOU. “This is such a big step forward,” says Mike. “The panel is an informed intermediary with first-hand experience of life on the Downs that can act on any concerns and suggestions that stakeholders may have. They report directly into the Downs Committee with ideas, recommendations and solutions. The DAP is a fantastic development to come out of the public consultation, which will ensure that recreation and nature conservation remain at the heart of life on the Downs.”

## An area of global ecological significance

When the Downs Act was created in 1861, no one had even heard of climate change. The Act was focused on preserving the Downs from developers wanting to encroach on the green space. Although this threat hasn’t gone away, the urgent need to protect the ecology of the landscape is greater than ever.

“The environment is vital to the longevity of the Downs and Avon Gorge,” says Robert. “On my wish list is to regain a coveted Green Flag for the area. Who knows, World Heritage Status may even be a possibility.”

The DAP meets regularly and always in time to inform the agenda before each Downs Committee meeting. Although early days, initial feedback has been one of excitement and enthusiasm for the pioneering plan.

Robert concludes: “This is a milestone for the management of the Downs and has come about as a direct response to calls for greater stakeholder engagement, more communication and greater transparency. The Downs Committee is committed to making this happen, and now together we will drive it forward.”

Mike adds: “Robert and his colleagues are all passionate ambassadors with only the best interests of the Downs at heart. Everyone on the Downs Committee is fully supportive of this ground-breaking initiative.”

Should anyone wish to direct an issue to the DAP, please contact: [downspanel@gmail.com](mailto:downspanel@gmail.com) / 0117 963 4755.



## Care for Older People



Dr Jacqueline Cornish OBE

Over the past year, our focus has not only been on recovery from the far-reaching effects of the pandemic, but also on flourishing, with the quality of care delivered and the demonstrable joy, health and happiness of our residents as absolute priorities.

It is a tribute to our Care Manager, Leanne Thorne, and her dedicated and exceptional team, that Katherine & Griffiths House continues to achieve good external evaluations by the Care Quality Commission and, importantly, excellent feedback from our residents and their families.

As we look forward, SMV's Care for Older People Committee is currently developing our strategic direction for the next five years, to ensure that we can achieve our ambitious goals. One objective has emerged with absolute clarity – the need to focus on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our residents, so that they can lead as healthy, comfortable and enjoyable a life as possible.

New technologies offer exciting possibilities in this area and we are exploring an innovative initiative with the [University of the West of England](#) to consider Assisted Living with their Robotics Research. We have also been approached by the Royal Osteoporosis Society to explore how we can work together to improve outcomes for older people.

SMV is also responsible for the [Almshouse Charity](#), with accommodation on St Michael's Hill home to 12 residents. We are currently considering various projects across the city to ensure that the charity can continue for the long-term to provide warm, safe and comfortable almshouse accommodation for those in need.

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



Leanne Thorne

Leanne Thorne is the Care Manager for [Katherine & Griffiths House](#), both part of the [Cote Charity](#), and the Almshouse on St Michael's Hill. Here she provides a summary of highlights from the past year.

After the restrictions of the pandemic, we've been busy rebuilding connections with the local community which has resulted in a number of wonderful new activities in our home.

Community groups have been visiting our residents to enjoy coffee mornings; the Brownies and Cubs have been taking part in a variety of arts and crafts activities with our residents; we've recently connected with a local nursery group whose children will be coming to see us soon; and through the growing

relationship we have with local schools and colleges, we've also been able to welcome a number of young people for work experience programmes.

Over the summer we redecorated all of our communal areas, with the colours chosen by our residents because this is, after all, their home. They have excellent taste and everyone is enjoying the fresh new look. Empowering our residents to make decisions, share their ideas and suggest new initiatives helps to maximise their independence.

Our wonderful residents really are the heart of our home and we love finding out about their fascinating lives, taking the time to listen to their stories and memories – and working together to create wonderful new memories too!

Last month we organised an exotic animal encounter which was a huge hit. We held a bearded dragon, a chameleon and a python, along with several other fascinating creatures. The look of pleasure on the residents' faces was truly wonderful and reinforces the importance of offering this type of immersive, interactive experience. We have so many events, activities and special moments that are enjoyed by our residents and staff together.





Residents, staff, family and friends all enjoyed the circus themed summer party.



One of the many strengths that sets Katherine & Griffiths House apart is that every member of our team agrees that our residents don't live in our workplace, instead we work in their home – a mindset that places respect, dignity and privacy at the top of the agenda.

For the first time since Covid, we are completely full, with all of our newer residents having joined us through word-of-mouth recommendation, which is a wonderful testament to the quality of care and quality of life that every member of our team strives to provide for each resident.



An exotic animal encounter with a chameleon.

I'm thrilled that once again, several members of our team were shortlisted for the Annual Care and Support West Care Awards, which took place in November. Sabina Green from our Wellbeing Team was a finalist in the Activities Coordinator of the Year category; and Deputy Manager, Sue Thorne, was a finalist in the Rainbow Heart Outstanding Contribution to Social Care category, which Sue won in 2022.

We were also shortlisted in two other categories, which we went on to win! Our amazing Administrator, Martin Brooks, is a very deserving winner of the Office Support Worker of the Year Award; and we are all incredibly proud that the Cote Charity was named the winner of the Care Home of the Year Award, which recognises the calibre of our entire team and our happy, fun-loving residents who together make a very special community.





## One Wish Project

Everyone who lives and works at Katherine & Griffiths House believes that life is for living and the residents love to prove that age is nothing more than a number! Determined to help residents make the very best memories to share with family and friends, the Wellbeing Team launched the wonderful **One Wish Project**, making a promise to grant a special wish for every resident.

Here are just a few of the wishes that have come true over the past year:



Above: The Wellbeing Team,  
L-R: Raj, Sabina and Ruby



### Live wrestling

Jane told the Wellbeing Team about the fond memories she had of watching live wrestling matches with her late husband. At 97 years young, Jane jumped at the chance to attend a special live wrestling match in Thornbury. Jane was in her element from the moment she arrived, accompanied by members of the Wellbeing Team. She was fully immersed in the match from start to finish, laughing, gasping, punching the air and 'high fiving' wrestlers as they passed by. The highlight for Jane was meeting her heroes in a 'meet and greet' experience after the match.

Thank you so much for arranging this for me, I had the time of my life.



## All aboard

*Never in my life did I think I'd be able to ride this bus!*

Once a member of Bristol Vintage Bus Group, Roland remembered seeing a particular bus go past his house every day with a very specific registration number. He always wanted to ride that bus, but it was so long ago. After a bit of research, and with the help of the Bristol Vintage Bus Group, the Wellbeing Team managed to track down the exact vehicle. When the bus arrived at Katherine & Griffiths House with the driver in full vintage uniform, Roland was speechless, but only for a moment! He boarded the bus and invited staff and residents to join him for a guided tour of Bristol, passing some of Roland's favourite places, including the church where he was married.



## Lights, camera, action!

In her younger years, Betty spent time in the USA where she loved to dance. Betty wished to be transported back in time to the hey day of her youth, so the Wellbeing Team threw a surprise Hollywood themed party on Betty's 100th birthday, with a red carpet, catwalk, photoshoot, sparkly decorations, an amazing three-tier cake and live entertainment with a set entitled 'hits from the silver screen'. Betty was completely surprised and absolutely thrilled.

*I felt 21 again amidst the Hollywood glamour of the silver screen!*





### A night at the orchestra

Ian is a huge fan of classical music and a life-long listener of Beethoven. He wished to be immersed in the experience of live orchestra so the Wellbeing Team booked seats for a special performance by the Aurora Orchestra at Bristol Cathedral. The concert was an amazing and memorable experience for everyone and Ian was moved to tears of joy. Afterwards, Ian spoke with the chief conductor and several members of the orchestra, delighted to be sharing his love of music at such a wonderful event.

*I am utterly amazed! This is a magnificent day that I will never forget.*

### The magic of musicals

Joan is well known to be the biggest Broadway fan at Katherine & Griffiths House. When she's not singing along to classic musicals, she can be heard reminiscing about seeing musicals in her childhood and then taking her own children as often as she could. Joan wished to see a musical with her son, but she didn't want to travel to the city so the Wellbeing Team sourced 'A Spoonful of Sugar', performed by Mini Concerts, a musical tribute to Dame Julie Andrews. Joan was ecstatic to witness the magnificent show in her own home and joyously sang along to the music. When Joan joined in with 'Fly a Kite', it was clear that she and her son were being transported back in time, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house!



*Broadway in my own home, whoever would have imagined that?!*



# Environmental Focus

Climate change is an urgent issue that requires collective action from organisations, businesses and communities everywhere. As the effects of global warming become increasingly evident, strategies and initiatives that mitigate our impact on the environment are more important than ever.

SMV's members have been exploring how our organisation could support environmental projects and initiatives in the Greater Bristol area. We know from experience that SMV is most effective when our members work alongside organisations that have the knowledge, expertise and reach to make things happen.

Already a number of independent, powerful initiatives are underway in Bristol, such as the Green Futures Programme, delivered in schools by [South Bristol Youth](#), which focuses on careers associated with sustainability; and through the work of [VOSCUR](#), the support and development agency for Bristol's voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

We're in conversation with both organisations to determine how our members could add value.

Tackling environmental projects collaboratively is more likely to result in innovative solutions, for example, in Lawrence Weston, residents launched a community interest company and joined forces with [Bristol & Bath Regional Capital](#) to plan, develop, fund and build a wind turbine, which you can read more about on [page 31](#).

It's clear that local communities have the ability to address climate change at a grassroots level, businesses can bring knowledge and expertise, and not-for-profits and community interest companies can be the vehicles that coordinate resources and effort.

We believe that by plugging in to existing initiatives, nurturing the innovation and entrepreneurship of climate-focused startups and ventures, and raising awareness of climate change impact, we can join others in helping to foster a green economy and safeguard the future of our planet for future generations.

In terms of our own carbon footprint, SMV's members have agreed to launch an Environmental Sustainability Committee that will be responsible for examining our activities and setting ambitious sustainability targets over a ten-year period. Already we have installed electric car charging points at Merchants' Hall and in our role as trustee of the St Monica Endowment Trust, we have commissioned a Natural Capital Review of the land, buildings and businesses that form part of their investment portfolio.



# Career Pathways

## Bridging the gap between school and the workplace

Parents, carers and teachers are united in encouraging young people to feel aspirational about their futures, work hard in school and study subjects that will hopefully lead to a successful and rewarding career. But, in a rapidly evolving and highly competitive job market, how can young people bridge the gap between the theoretical knowledge learned in school and the practical skills needed to thrive in the workplace?

Helping students to become well prepared for their future careers and well equipped to achieve their aspirations has become an increasingly key focus of SMV's work across Greater Bristol.

**T**his year, Collegiate School had 75 Y13 leavers, Montpelier High School had 91 and Merchants' Academy had 48.

With options ranging from university and further education to apprenticeships, full time employment or taking a gap year, which pathways have this cohort of leavers chosen?

134

students secured a university place.

3

students went on to alternative further education.

18

students secured an apprenticeship, with companies including AON, Burges Salmon, PwC, the BBC, MOD, QinetiQ, Wessex Water and St Monica Trust.

17

students entered full time employment.

42

students have taken a gap year to travel, volunteer, gain further work experience or resit exams for university places next year.



Through mentoring, careers advice, CV writing support, mock interviews, networking opportunities, workplace visits and work experience, SMV's members offer their skills, resources and contacts to support students as they prepare to leave school.

For example, mentoring helps to provide students with real-world guidance, allowing them to gain insights from experienced professionals and build up their own professional networks.

Work experience allows students to apply their classroom knowledge in real-world situations and to find out first-hand what it's like to work in a particular industry or setting.

CV writing and mock interview sessions help students to fine-tune the skills they will need to speak confidently about their strengths and make a great impression on a potential employer.

Learning how to network effectively can be an invaluable skill in the workplace, helping young people to maximise their career opportunities. Attending events with business people, such as the Triangular Sports Presentation and Dinner, and the Governors and Prefects Dinner, helps students to grow in confidence when outside their comfort zone, meeting new people and networking in a professional setting.

As well as spending time in schools and facilitating workplace visits and other opportunities, SMV has created a Career Pathways Directory which offers a wide range of opportunities spanning 14 different industries covered by the businesses and networks of SMV's members. Students can select an opportunity that appeals to them and SMV will connect the school's careers advisor with the relevant member of SMV to make things happen.

If you're a teacher or a student and you would like to know more about SMV's career pathways offer for young people, please contact [enquiries@merchantventurers.com](mailto:enquiries@merchantventurers.com).



## Spotlight on Venturers' Academy

Sam Roberts is the co-founder of Bristol-based [Boston Tea Party](#) (BTP). He's also the 'careers link' governor at [Venturers' Academy](#) (VA), a school for children with a primary diagnosis of autism, which means he supports the school to help students consider and prepare for opportunities in the workplace.

"I joined the governing team in 2022," says Sam, "and within six months I'd become the careers link governor. It seemed like a good fit because I have a business with a well-oiled work experience programme and I've seen first-hand what a difference this can make to a young person's aspirations, confidence and self-worth. Some of the students who complete a programme with BTP stay on and become permanent and highly valued members of our team, working in various different roles including catering, marketing, finance and management."

"At VA, encouraging high aspirations and then facilitating work experience is especially important because many of our students struggle with self confidence and social interaction and, without support, finding a job that allows them to flourish and reach their full potential can be really challenging for them."

Sam works closely with Mandy Field, the Deputy Head at VA, whose long list of responsibilities includes spending one day a week dedicated to fulfilling the role of careers lead. "We're really lucky that Mandy has been given the time to engage in training, lay the foundations and build the structure to provide careers support to our students," says Sam. "At VA we can't look at the world through

the lens of a fixed structure, we have to get to know each individual student, find out about their passions, aspirations and skillset.

"Taking a one-to-one approach is powerful and helps students to identify a positive career path. We'll then bring in speakers from the industries that students are interested in who give presentations and take part in careers talks. We invite parents and carers to attend these sessions too so that support, encouragement and enthusiasm for students to have aspirational career goals is wrap-around."

"Our students are amazing, they have so much potential and we have a responsibility to ensure that when they leave school, they have the skills and confidence to lead fulfilling and independent lives. Being ready to enter the workplace is a key part of that."

*"Our students are amazing, they have so much potential."*

Mandy agrees that the joined-up approach between home and school is key. "We encourage parents and carers to accompany their children to open days at local colleges, to explore apprenticeship opportunities and to attend careers fairs. It's important for our students to know that they have choices. We've never placed a ceiling on what they can achieve and one of the first things we did when we established a bespoke careers curriculum spanning Year 7 through to post-16, was to challenge the 'people like us' stereotype. "People like us don't become lawyers." "People like us don't become scientists." "Yes they do and yes you can!" is always our resounding response.

"The truth is that pathways have changed and opportunities for young people with autism are getting better all the time. Not having formal qualifications isn't necessarily a barrier, there are other ways to access really good jobs, such as through apprenticeships and we guide students to follow the right pathway for them. Every student who graduated from VA this year has gone on to further education or apprenticeships. We couldn't be more proud of them."

"I'd recommend that all schools identify a careers link governor because it really ramps up your capacity to deliver information and opportunities to students. Opening their eyes to the huge range of possibilities ahead of them is the first step in raising aspirations. Sam's already working on an exciting series of speakers, presentations and workplace visits for the coming year."

"For our students, we believe that having autism isn't a barrier to achieving a rewarding and successful career. They can achieve anything they set their minds to and we'll do everything we can to help them get there."

Sam Roberts with Mandy Field.



# Education



Chris Curling DL

Together with the [University of Bristol](#), SMV has been working in partnership as sponsors of state-maintained primary and secondary schools in [Venturers Trust](#) for 15 years. We are immensely proud of what has been achieved in this time, overseeing the improvement of the schools in our care, all of which are operating in challenging communities in Bristol.

[Bannerman Road Community Academy](#) and the [Kingfisher School](#) have both been judged as 'Good' in their latest Ofsted inspections. For Kingfisher this is the first time in its history that it has been rated so high, and according to staff who have worked at the school for many years, Bannerman Road has been transformed as part of Venturers Trust from a school with serious shortcomings to a great school which also provides much-needed wider support across the community.

[Montpelier High School](#), which was rated 'Inadequate' by Ofsted in spring 2022, largely by reason of safeguarding deficiencies, is now well on the way to becoming a beacon of best practice in safeguarding; and despite a year of considerable turmoil following the Ofsted inspection, its results at GCSE and A-level are still very strong with 85% of Year 11 students receiving a 4+ or more in English and Maths. [Venturers' Academy](#), the school that we created from scratch for children with a primary diagnosis of autism, initially for 63 pupils, now has over 240 students located across three sites in Bristol. [Merchants' Academy](#) remains a challenging school but it is in a very different place from the old community school which the Academy replaced in 2008.

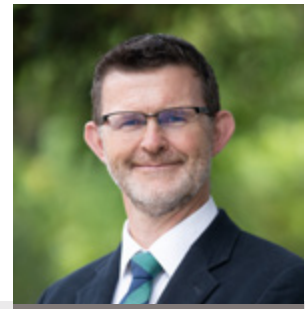
We set out 15 years ago, with the University of Bristol as co-sponsor, to deliver a step improvement in the broad education provision of a limited number of Bristol schools located in disadvantaged communities. It was never our intention that Venturers Trust would be big for the sake of size. It is clear, however, that the financing of academies nationally, together with the concentration of school improvement resource, is driving schools into the membership of a smaller number of bigger national multi-academy trusts (MATs). The Trust Board therefore decided earlier this year that the time is now right for Venturers Trust to benefit from being part of a larger MAT. In consequence, it is now moving towards becoming part of [E-ACT](#), one of the most successful MATs nationally. It is hoped that SMV and the University, with the encouragement of the Department for Education, will retain a connection with the Venturers Trust schools, but our reduced governance role will enable us to broaden our reach in support of young people across the city in other ways.

This is therefore an extremely exciting time for SMV as we plan the recalibration of our work for young people so as to maximise our impact over the next 10–15 years, as we have done so successfully during the past 15 years. Importantly, however, the move into E-ACT will not be completed until sometime in 2024, and so until then we continue to work with the schools and their students with the same commitment and vigour that we have always applied.

Meanwhile, independent schools face their own challenges, both with the looming prospect of a Labour Government levying VAT on school fees and with rapidly rising staff salary and pension costs. [Collegiate School](#) has for some time been evaluating the impact of these matters and the school's response to them. The fact that Collegiate and its students continue to perform at outstanding levels places it in a strong position as it navigates through the choppy waters of the next few years.

**Chris Curling DL, Chair of SMV Education Committee**





Jeremy McCullough



Above: Students performing *Kursk*.

We are Collegiate! 2022 – 2023 was our first school year under our new name and we are officially **Collegiate School**, Bristol, but we answer to most combinations of those titles and, most importantly of all, we are still the same holistic, busy and diverse school that we have always been. Indeed, as I am in the habit of saying, we have always been collegiate.

Our conscientious students are supported by hard-working staff and, of course, by their parents, many of whom are also working hard in order to support their children through independent education. This sense of all parties working together to help our young people develop into the best version of themselves and to reach their full potential is what makes our school such a happy place to attend, and to work.

The school year began in a very sombre mood as the nation came to terms with the loss of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. In common with most schools, we marked her passing internally and everyone was able to watch the State Funeral with the additional Bank Holiday.

However, schools are rarely sombre for long and the energy and drive of our young people soon got us back up to speed and enjoying everything that the Collegiate brand of holistic education offers.

The end of the Autumn term saw a simply remarkable performance of Bryony Lavery's '*Kursk*', a challenging and emotional production acted entirely in the round; quite the departure from last year's memorable '*Grease*'!

The school's talents were on display again in January when our Year 12 students organised and ran '*Collegiate's Got Talent*'. An amazing evening showcasing many of the eclectic talents of our pupils and raising funds for four very good charities in the process: Action Duchenne, Suicide Prevention Bristol, Hyperinsulinism Organisation and Feed the Homeless. That term ended with the highly coveted House Song Competition. We were delighted to have this year's leader of **SMV**, Patrick Despard, as a guest judge for this event and we hope he enjoyed this very competitive whole school event.

Of course, the summer term inevitably turns our attention towards public examinations and our Year 11s and 13s performed brilliantly in their GCSEs, A-levels and BTECs. Our students achieved amazing results but their grades remain only a small part of the personal and professional development that our young people achieve in their time with us.

**Jeremy McCullough**  
Head of Collegiate School



Collegiate leavers 2023.

## Strength in Differences

Strength in Differences or 'SiD' is Collegiate's student inclusivity group, whose members work together to improve inclusion and student experience at Collegiate.

For example, SiD organised Collegiate's first Culture Day where students were encouraged to express their own culture and the cultures of others through food, dress and music. It was a great success and really showed that Collegiate students are united through their appreciation and celebration of difference.

The members of SiD have also been working to improve antidiscrimination practice, advising on school procedures and policies, and encouraging students to report any discrimination they or someone else has faced. In addition, they have raised awareness of issues including neurodiversity, racism and homophobia, and led the way in celebrations such as Pride Month. SiD also delivers outreach activities, and members of SMV warmly welcomed the group to deliver a presentation entitled 'how to be an ally of the LGBTQ+ community'.



Collegiate Culture Day.

## Flying high

Spence Wewe joined the Collegiate Sixth Form in 2020 as part of the 110% transformational bursary programme with Orchard School, formerly Monks Park.



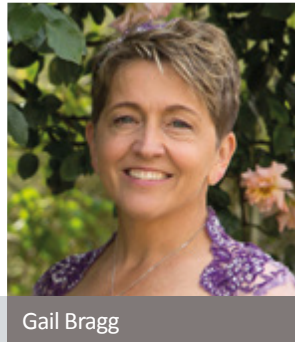
Spence at the Collegiate Prize Giving with Charles Densham, Chair of the Edmonds and Coles Scholarships Charity, and Caroline Duckworth, Trustee of the Charity and Treasurer of SMV.

Despite immediate success with the Bristol Flyers Basketball Team, Spence found the academic aspect of post-16 education more challenging. Eventually, with ongoing pastoral support from the school, Spence made the difficult decision to re-start his Sixth Form journey with new subjects and a new attitude.

Still playing basketball at a high level, Spence worked really hard and achieved better A-level grades than he ever thought possible. As he prepared to set off for the next stage of his life, Collegiate's Special Educational Needs Coordinator felt that an additional educational assessment would be beneficial for Spence, however, this in-depth specialised assessment would be expensive. Spence and his family were delighted when the Edmonds and Coles Scholarships Charity stepped in to support him, with the charity funding the full assessment that will now allow Spence to access a number of additional areas of support, both educational and financial, while at university.

However, before that happens, Spence is heading to Canada on a specialist basketball programme to see if he has the necessary attributes to potentially make a career of basketball. A high-flier indeed!





Gail Bragg



The Ventures Trust mission – all children, all backgrounds, all succeeding – underpins absolutely everything we do. We have over 700 members of staff across eight schools and in the Central Team who chose to pursue a career in education because of the positive impact they are able to make every day on the lives of over 3,500 young people in our care.

Each one of us, whatever our age, can remember ‘that teacher’, the one who ignited our love for learning or who made us see school as an opportunity that must not be wasted. I am extremely proud that our schools are full of such teachers, making a difference day after day.

It is this level of commitment that helps to drive improvement in schools, as the [Kingfisher School](#) experienced in July when Ofsted awarded the school a rating of Good in all areas for the first time in its history. In their report, the inspectors stated that “pupils benefit from the high expectations that leaders and staff have of them, both academically and socially. Pupils meet these and are positive in their attitudes towards their learning. They strive to succeed and recognise that everyone should receive the support they need to do so.”

As the inspectors witnessed, and a theme that is evident across all Ventures Trust schools, equality, diversity and

inclusion remain high on our agenda, woven into every element of school life, including the curriculum, to guide pupils as they grow. Preparing children to become global citizens who will make a positive contribution to their communities goes hand in hand with helping them to thrive in school, aim high and achieve their full potential. With their boundless enthusiasm, curious minds and positive approach to learning, our pupils certainly have bright futures ahead of them.

In the words of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, ‘change is the only constant in life’ and as the academic year progresses, Ventures Trust is preparing to embrace a significant change. We are part way through the process to merge with [E-ACT](#), a high performing national multi-academy trust. Although the Ventures Trust brand will disappear once the merger is complete during 2024, we will be keeping all the best parts of Ventures Trust while growing and thriving as part of E-ACT.

With 28 academies across the country, including six primary schools in Bristol, E-ACT shares our belief that combining our strengths and resources to form a strong Bristol hub would be in the best interests of the children, families and communities we serve.

The planned merger will give us greater capacity to improve schools rapidly; better economies of scale to ensure that resources are deployed effectively and where they are needed most; more co-curricular experiences for students; and wider career development opportunities for staff. All of these things ultimately result in greater progress and better outcomes for all children from all backgrounds.

The important partnership we have with our two sponsors will also change, but we will endeavour to retain the clear advantages that the [Society of Merchant Venturers](#) and the [University of Bristol](#) bring to our schools, including the potentially life changing opportunities offered to students during their time in school and as they transition to the world of work or higher education.

As we step forward into growth, I want to thank everyone in our Trust-wide community for the hard work, determination and resilience with which you approach each new challenge. Our motto ‘Stronger Together’ has never been more apt.

**Gail Bragg, Chair of Trustees, Ventures Trust**



Pupils from the Kingfisher School.

## Lord Justice Singh goes back to school



Lord Justice Singh visiting Bannerman Road Community Academy.

One of the UK's leading judges, Lord Justice Singh, gave an inspirational talk to children at his former primary school. Sir Rabinder Singh KC told Year 6 pupils at Bannerman Road Community Academy (BRCA) in Easton, Bristol: "Take the opportunities given to you, try to make things happen and don't be put off by setbacks. Fifty years ago, when I was a pupil at this school, I would not have dreamed that today I would be one of the most senior judges in this country."

Lord Justice Singh, who was born in Delhi, India, recalled how he spoke no English when he joined the school at the age of five, but a fellow pupil who spoke Punjabi told him what the teacher was saying, a kindness he has never forgotten. He advised the children, "always be kind to others".

He said it was a strong belief in fairness, equality and standing up for people's rights, which he had from a young age, that led him to study law. After attending BRCA and Bristol Grammar School, he earned a double first at Trinity College, Cambridge, then worked and studied in the US before being called to the bar. Highlights of his career include being the first Sikh to be appointed a High Court judge – he wears a turban instead of a wig; being knighted by the late Queen; and being the first judge from a black or minority ethnic background to become a judge at the Court of Appeal.

Pupils Yasmine, Fardosa and Israfeel gave Lord Justice Singh a tour of the school, which has 400 pupils.

Robert Bourns, chair of governors at BRCA, said: "We are so proud to welcome back former pupil, Lord Justice Singh. I hope that he has inspired our children to believe that they can achieve anything they put their minds to, just as he has done."

## Venturers Trust music concert

In March, Venturers Trust held its first Trust-wide music concert at the impressive Great Hall in the Wills Memorial Building, bringing together schools from across the Trust for a collaborative celebration of music.

The event was a great success, with eight schools represented, 142 young people performing on stage throughout the

afternoon, and over 230 people in the audience, made up of proud family members, friends, teachers and support staff.

Music provides young people with an opportunity to express themselves, explore their creativity, learn a new skill, persevere and shine. Already we are looking forward to next year's event!

Venturers Trust students performed at the Great Hall in Bristol.





## Raising awareness of diversity in education

A group of students from Montpelier High School (MHS) have been helping teachers to develop awareness of working in multicultural classrooms. After noticing that some teachers mispronounced students' names and unintentionally made assumptions due to unconscious bias, the students approached their tutor, Jess Bray, who helped them form a group they named Tackling Diversity in Teaching (TDT).

Their first project was to put together a presentation for MHS staff that was so well received, TDT was subsequently invited to speak with staff in other Bristol schools, as well as giving a presentation to trainee teachers at the University of Bristol's School of Education.

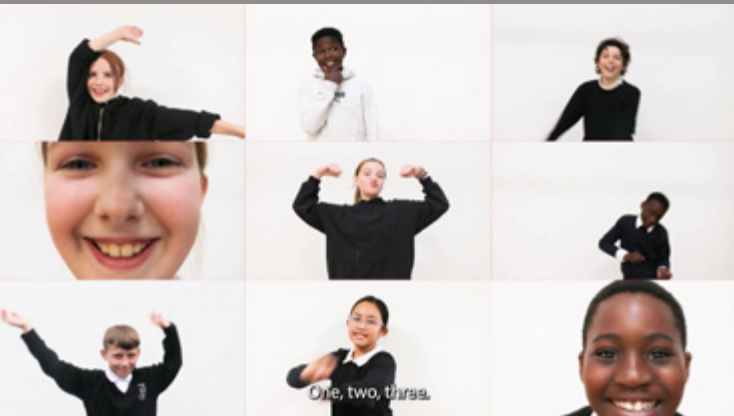
The girls delivered an engaging training session that drew upon their own experiences of diversity in school and the curriculum, followed by a Q&A panel. Their aim was to help teachers identify ways to overcome unconscious bias and improve the curriculum.

Jess Bray said: "I'm always so impressed with the confidence and tenacity that MHS students show in using the power of their voices to influence change. The girls who are a part of the TDT group are an absolute credit to MHS and most importantly to themselves. They came away from this latest presentation at the University feeling positive and excited about what they could do next."



The TDT group from MHS.

Young filmmakers from Merchants' Academy Primary.



## Young filmmakers

Pupils from Merchants' Academy Primary had an exciting opportunity to attend a red-carpet premiere for a short film they made with Bristol-based social enterprise Unique Voice. In the film, the children share powerful messages about celebrating diversity and making their community a better place for everyone through change.

The film, Let's Stop Discrimination Together, was made as part of a Safer Streets initiative project for Crimestoppers in the West Country, supported by Bristol City Council. Over the course of several months, pupils in Year 5 had an opportunity to work on the community film, with eight pupils taking a role in front of the camera: Rupert, Lennie, Japheth, Bella, Isaac, Sophie, Jinxi and Layla.

*"The film has a really important message about standing up to discrimination and treating everyone equally, so I hope a lot of people watch it."* **Lennie**

*"It was really interesting to work on this project and learn all about how films are made."* **Sophie**

*"If we were all the same, life would be boring. Our film sends everyone a message about celebrating diversity."* **Japheth**

## My teacher competes for Team GB!

For many children, meeting a top international athlete would be an exciting opportunity, but for Year 6 pupils at the [Dolphin School](#) in Montpelier, Bristol, this is an everyday occurrence! Their teacher, Elaina Gard, has represented her country twice this year already, competing for Team GB at the World Triathlon Championships in

Ibiza in May and again at the European Triathlon Championships in Belgium in August, where she finished just off the podium and achieved automatic selection for the European Championships in 2024 by finishing third in the GB team.

A member of Kingswood Triathlon Club and Bristol & West Athletics Club, Elaina trains six days a week, often twice a day, before and after work. "I've always aspired to represent my country and although training takes up most of my free time, it's all worth it," said Elaina. "The children in my class think my GB kit is pretty cool, they ask a lot of questions and were particularly excited about the World Championships. I hope I will inspire some of my pupils to become passionate about sport."

Elaina was the guest speaker at the Governors and Prefects Dinner held at Merchants' Hall in September, where she spoke to students about the importance of never giving up on your dream and making sure that you take time to appreciate the people who support you: "Sometimes that dream will feel impossible and the dream may change a little along the way, but always chase it because it's so worthwhile when you finally achieve your goal."



Elaina with pupils from the Dolphin School.

## Triangular Sports Tournament

An annual event brimming with team spirit, the Triangular Sports Tournament brings together young athletes from three Bristol-based secondary schools for a series of friendly sports matches.

Held in June at Merchants' Academy (MA) in Withywood, over 100 students from MA, Montpelier High School (MHS) and [Collegiate](#) brought their A-game, with all three schools scoring at least two victories each.

MA triumphed in Girls Netball and Badminton; MHS took home the gold in Girls Rounders and Basketball; while Collegiate secured the top spot in Boys Softball, Basketball, Badminton and Mixed Badminton, with a clean sweep in the Tug of War contest.

During the evening, 68 students attended a celebratory event held at [Merchants' Hall](#) where the winning teams were presented with trophies and warmly congratulated on their achievements.





The Society of Merchant Venturers is helping to educate over 4,500 pupils within the following family of Bristol-based schools:

**Bannerman Road Community Academy**  
Easton



**Headteacher:** Oliver Laken  
402 pupils, age 3-11

**Barton Hill Academy**  
Barton Hill



**Headteacher:** Matthew Poulson  
329 pupils, age 3-11

**Collegiate School**  
Stapleton



**Head:** Jeremy McCullough  
748 pupils, age 3-18

**The Dolphin School**  
Montpelier



**Headteacher:** Kate Wells  
224 pupils, age 4-11

**Fairlawn Primary School**  
Montpelier



**Headteacher:**  
Siobhan Lennox-Brown  
260 pupils, age 4-11

**The Kingfisher School**  
St Anne's Park



**Principal:** Kirsteen Craig  
149 pupils, age 3-11

**Merchants' Academy**  
Withywood



**Head of Primary:** Geeta Verrell  
382 pupils, age 3-11  
**Acting Head of Secondary and Director of Education**  
Brendan Hesketh  
906 students, age 11-18

**Montpelier High School**  
Cheltenham Road



**Headteacher:** Vanetta Spence  
930 students, age 11-18

**Venturers' Academy**  
Withywood and St Anne's Park



**Headteacher and Director of Primary and Special:**  
Stuart Woodburn  
**Head of Primary:** Rob Holbeche  
**Head of Secondary:** Julia Chapman  
241 pupils, age 4-19

## Venturers Trust Endowment Fund

As the joint sponsor of [Venturers Trust](#), SMV uses the endowment fund to provide additional opportunities for young people in schools.

Originally derived from member donations and trusts, the fund today is worth approximately £2.4 million, generating around £105,000 each year, made up from its investments, various trusts and ongoing donations made by SMV's members. Funds are allocated to schools equally based on student numbers. The Venturers Trust Endowment 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 187 individual grants to schools totalling £146,537.

Trevor Smallwood OBE DL has been a member of the Endowment Fund Committee since 2008 and Chair since 2021. "The Fund makes it possible for schools to ensure that every child has access to the same opportunities," he said. "Over the past year, we've been able to support a huge range of activities across each school, including memorable trips, immersive experiences, fascinating visitors and workshops, as well as providing learning resources such as laptops and books.

"Schools often request support for initiatives that will help children to build confidence and self-esteem, expand their horizons and raise aspirations. Two of the projects funded this year that really stand out for me are the Venturers Trust Music Concert and the 12ft climbing frame at Venturers' Academy.

"Leading up to the music concert, many children learnt to play an instrument for the first time and, thanks to the generosity of Bristol University, the venue for the concert was the awe-inspiring Great Hall on Park Street. Families from across Venturers Trust gathered together for an incredible programme of music and song in a wonderfully acoustic venue, delivered by children, many of whom were performing in public for the first time. Their confidence shone through in every performance and the children were clearly thrilled by the rapturous applause from the audience of over 230 who enjoyed every moment.

"The climbing frame at Venturers' Academy has not only provided a stimulating piece of play equipment in the outdoor space, it also helps to bring children together who, in other circumstances, find it difficult to interact. The climbing frame has helped students to grow in confidence, attempting and overcoming a challenge which provides a great sense of achievement.

"The schools make excellent use of the funds, ensuring that every penny goes towards creating positive experiences for young people."

## More than just a mural

Students and staff at Montpelier High School (MHS) are thrilled with the striking new mural that has been painted inside the school by mural artist [Rory McCann](#), with all costs covered by the Endowment Fund. Rory collaborated with the Student Parliament team to design a mural that would represent what it means to be a part of the MHS community.

Students felt strongly that the imagery should reflect the school's values, the many languages spoken in school and the range of religious beliefs, set against a backdrop of Bristol.



Rory, front centre, with students from MHS.

Rory said: "This has been a really enjoyable project to work on. The students were brimming with ideas of how they imagined the mural bringing their sense of belonging to life. They strongly influenced the overall design. We've incorporated the four elements of the school emblem – the phoenix, a butterfly, a tree and a water wheel – interwoven with many different elements that students identified as representing their sense of belonging. The design is filled with hope and determination, with the phoenix blazing a trail over new horizons."



*"I love the aspect of inclusivity, the school is a community working together to move forward."* Danitor, Year 9

*"The mural is so inspirational and captures the sense of belonging at our school."* Daria, Year 7

*"Our mural looks incredible, so vibrant and it encapsulates perfectly the key values of MHS and what belonging means to our students."* Vicky Fraser, School Business Manager





## Putting the fun in Fund!

At [Bannerman Road Community Academy](#) in Easton, Headteacher Oliver Laken has been putting the Endowment Fund through its paces! “We use the Fund to offer a wide range of experiences and curriculum enhancements to our pupils. In the last year alone, we’ve delivered theatre workshops, Mid-Somerset Festival coaching, group and 1:1 drama lessons to prepare for school productions, a community feast working



An exciting visit to Bristol Zoo Project.



African drumming lessons were a big hit with pupils in Reception class.

with Travelling Kitchen who cooked and shared food from around the world, visits to the Roman Baths and the Bristol Zoo Project, multiple science, planetarium and workshop visits, African drumming lessons, brass instrument sessions and more, but there are just too many to mention! We make the generous donation go an extremely long way and every one of our 400 children, who all come from one of the most deprived communities in the city, has had their lives enriched in some way by the Fund”.

## Wow moments at Fairlawn

[Fairlawn Primary School](#) in Montpelier has used the Endowment Fund to support a whole range of exciting activities for pupils this year, including residential trips to the River Wye Activity Centre for Year 5 children and Grittleton House Adventure Centre in Chippenham for Year 6, a life skills workshop for Year 6, an animal visit for Years 1 and 6, a visit to Bristol Harbour and a tour of The Matthew for Years 3 and 4, a visit to Bristol Aerospace for Years 3 and 4, and a daytrip to the beach in Weston-super-Mare for Reception children.

Headteacher, Siobhan Lennox-Brown said: “Immersive learning experiences help to bring the curriculum to life and the additional funding means that we can offer our pupils a range of truly exciting and memorable ‘wow’ moments”.

Year 5 pupils at the River Wye Activity Centre.



# Social Enterprise



Dr Andrew Garrad CBE

**A**mazingly, the official UK government energy policy is to discourage onshore wind farm applications. The Ambition Community Energy (ACE) wind turbine project, to which SMV's Social Enterprise Committee (SEC) has contributed very actively, is therefore the exception rather than the rule. Despite this negative policy, we are thrilled that this huge turbine is now operating full blast.

Six years from concept to launch, the wind turbine was finally commissioned in May 2023. 100% owned by the local

community of Lawrence Weston, it is England's biggest onshore turbine. As a community interest company limited by guarantee, there are no shareholders. This means that after loan repayment and operational expenses, all the proceeds go straight back into the community. The wind turbine will generate electricity equivalent to the needs of all 3,000 households in Lawrence Weston. The SEC is very proud of the part that it has played in helping to realise this remarkable project.

As we look to the future, our focus is on inclusivity and zero carbon projects. We would love to hear of any other appropriate, entrepreneurial ideas which would benefit from our support.

**Dr Andrew Garrad CBE**  
**Chair of SMV Social Enterprise Committee**

## Responsible homes

Bristol & Bath Regional Capital (BBRC) has been committed since the start to tackling the housing crisis and we have been building our portfolio of properties consisting of co-living, key worker-prioritised, refugee resettlement and ethical market rent housing.

This summer, we have seen the first key worker tenants moving into the new flats at Elderberry Walk in Southmead. This innovative development comprises a total of 161 homes, has sustainable and ethical principles at its core and aims to foster a diverse and vibrant community with six distinct housing tenures. So far, we have successfully leased 11 properties under the Rent-to-Buy scheme and are in the process of letting out 27 flats. In addition, we have 21 flats exclusively for key workers, offering them a 10% reduction from the market rent, and we have established a partnership with the NHS to provide temporary accommodation for nurses on placements from overseas.



Ed Rowberry



**B**As the first local home-grown, place-based impact investor, we are focused on unlocking investment and support for purposeful businesses, charities, housing and social enterprise. The past 12 months has seen significant progress in our mission to improve the lives of people and communities in the region.

We have now brokered or placed more than £50m of investment in businesses and projects that deliver positive social and environmental benefits.



Elderberry Walk.





Emma Hinton, Director of The Park.

## Community and wellbeing

We currently have £12m of blended investment through our impact investment fund, [City Funds](#), and the [Bristol Local Access Programme](#) for investment in Bristol-based organisations.

This includes £1m investment in [The Park Centre](#) in Knowle West, a vital hub in the local community since the 1970s, supporting local people to learn, gain employment, keep fit and get to know each other. The hub was in a poor state of repair so the investment has enabled a new purpose-built community centre. Local residents were involved in the design of the new centre, which includes classrooms, conference rooms, a dance studio, gym and café.

Meanwhile, a half a million-pound capital investment from [City Funds](#) into specialist creative and digital training provider [Boomsatsuma](#) is helping the organisation to double its education capacity, increase its higher education programme and create more than 20 new jobs this year.

## Net zero

The largest onshore wind turbine in England was officially launched in Lawrence Weston earlier this year by [Ambition Community Energy](#) – part of a community group charged with the regeneration of the area. The new 4.2MW community-owned turbine will save almost 87,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions over its lifetime, enough to power 3,000 homes and sell energy to the grid, bringing in valuable surplus for community use.

The springboard funding of £900k was raised through BBRC, with £750k from [City Funds](#) and a further £150k from charitable trust [Power to Change](#), which in turn leveraged £5m from others including the [West of England Combined Authority](#) and several members of SMV.

Looking ahead to the coming year, we are working on setting up two new funds that focus on addressing the housing and climate crises, as well as continuing to back projects that contribute to community wellbeing across the region.

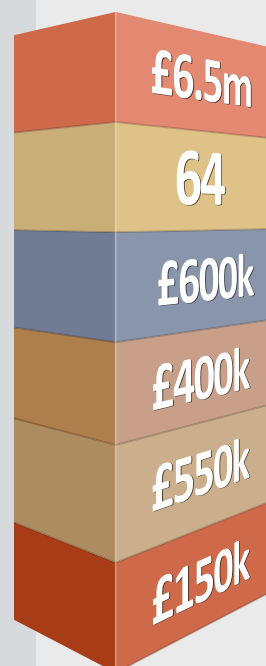


## Ed Rowberry, Chief Executive of BBRC

Dr Charles Gamble, Ambition Community Energy.



## Impact in numbers





Robert Bourns DL

## Charitable Giving

**F**or many people, this year has been a time of extreme anxiety and hardship, with rapidly increasing living costs impacting harshly on household finances.

SMV's members responded promptly to the Winter Crisis Appeal, enabling the [Charity Committee](#) to make grants quickly to local groups across the region that were working so hard to meet basic needs within their communities.

The high number of grant applications that we have received over the past 12 months demonstrates the strain that many charitable and community groups are under. We have endeavoured to meet demand by working with others, for example, [Quartet Community Foundation](#), to match fund specific grant applications; and we've also supported capital projects, where funding is distributed over a number of years.

Increasingly, our approach is to support communities to help themselves, recognising the capacity and capability 'on the ground' to identify and meet their needs. This place-based funding puts communities at the heart of the solution which achieves a far greater impact.

The funds available for distribution come from the income generated by SMV's charitable endowment and the members' response to an annual appeal. It is worth noting that the Charity Committee represents something of the tip of the iceberg of the total charitable activity undertaken by SMV's members, who give so much time as well as financial support to charitable activities across the region.

We recognise the incredible work undertaken by so many individuals and groups to meet the needs of their neighbours and the collective whole. Over the next few pages, I hope you will enjoy reading about just a few of the organisations that we've had the privilege to work with over the last year.

**Robert Bourns DL**  
Chair of SMV Charity Committee

## South Bristol Youth

South Bristol Youth (SBY) responds to the needs of young people and empowers them to prepare for successful futures.

With funding from SMV of £75,000 over three years, SBY has been able to deliver targeted programmes designed to help children value and make better use of their personal qualities, build skills and gain knowledge that will open up pathways to further education or employment.

SBY's work is underpinned by its close partnership with seven South Bristol schools, the [University of Bristol](#) and the [University of the West of England](#). In the past year alone, SBY has delivered a total of 420 activities for 1,500 young people in collaboration with 23 schools, local colleges and universities; 57 employers; and several other delivery partners.

**Discover Maths** is just one of these activities, which aims to increase children's interest, confidence and engagement with maths, in readiness for their GCSEs and life after school.

118 children in Year 8 from seven schools took part in 56 activities across a range of STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) learning areas, including visits to the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the Harry Potter Studio.

**As a result:**

**95%**

of parents said their child has grown in confidence

**90%**

of participants achieved GCSE Maths Grade 4 and above, 20% higher than the national average\*

**85%**

of parents said their child's interest in maths has increased

\*Study of GCSE results from students who took part in the SBY Discover Maths pilot programme in 2019.





The children visited Police HQ.

**Learning to Lead** involved 144 children from five schools who took part in a range of activities, such as visits to local employers, Avon and Somerset Police HQ and Avon Fire and Rescue, BMX coaching and drama workshop days.

As a  
result:

**98%**

of parents said their child  
has grown in confidence

School attendance  
has improved among

**75%**

of participants

**84%**

of parents said their child's  
enjoyment of school has  
increased

**Insight into Apprenticeships** 11 young people in Years 9 and 10 from eight schools took part in a series of activities designed to maximise their chances of getting better paid local jobs and apprenticeships after they leave school. Activities included communication workshops, visits to local colleges and universities, team building activities run by the Royal Navy, and visits to employers who offer apprenticeships across a range of industries, including PYTCH Creative agency, the Bristol Port Company, KPMG and Burges Salmon.

As a  
result:

**96%**

of parents said their child has  
a better understanding of their  
options for the future

**87%**

of parents said their child now  
understands the pathways to  
apprenticeships and the skills  
that employers look for

**98%**

of participants from the  
2022 programme secured  
a post-16 destination

## XTND

XTND is a charity in Weston-super-Mare that provides out-of-school-hours clubs offering fun activities for children where they can feel safe, relaxed and valued. A grant of £5,000 from SMV meant that XTND could continue to run Bournville Tots, a weekly toddler group, and Together Time, a group of 16 families at risk of social isolation. Both groups are delivered by a family worker and two local adults, who are supported by the charity to develop their employability skills towards gaining further employment.

*I'm really pleased to have found a group that I'm happy in and that doesn't judge me. Sometimes I find everything too much and it's nice to come somewhere to talk to other mums.*

*Mum who attends Bournville Tots.*



A Together Time get together.

## Women's Work Lab CIC

Supporting mothers to build a financially secure future for themselves and their children is the aim of [Women's Work Lab](#) (WWL). The social enterprise runs twelve-month programmes in Bristol, Bath, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, with a combination of classroom-based training and work experience with local employers, all during school hours.

In 2023, 120 mums were supported and already over 50% have found permanent employment, a figure that is expected to rise.



Single parent Kayleigh, from Bristol, had not worked since the birth of her son 10 years ago. Barriers included childcare and lack of self-confidence. She joined a group of 15 mums on a WWL programme.

*From the minute I first walked into the classroom, I felt so positive and realised that there were opportunities out there for me.*

**Kayleigh**

Through WWL, Kayleigh applied for a return-to-work programme with Hargreaves Lansdown, a pathway that offers entry level roles into financial services, alongside six months of tailored support from WWL.

"I was really nervous about applying, but the WWL training taught me that I had so much to offer and I was thrilled to be offered a job with the helpdesk team. Before WWL I wouldn't have had the confidence to even apply, but my new role is a perfect fit for me, combining my keen attention to detail with my strong people skills. The icing on the cake is the part-time hours which means that I can be there for my son after school, which is really important to me. Thanks to the support I've received from WWL, I'm so excited about my professional future."

## Stepping Out Theatre

Formed in Bristol in 1997, [Stepping Out Theatre](#) is the UK's leading mental health theatre group.

A grant of £2,000 from SMV enabled the charity to deliver an ambitious project supporting Ukrainian theatre artists, including a live online event in February attended by four Ukrainian playwrights, including the Artistic Director of the Playwrights Theatre of Kyiv.

A full production of 'Refugee Cats' soon followed, written by two Ukrainian playwrights to help children come to terms with the experience of being a refugee. In May the play was enthusiastically received in Clevedon and Bristol, and at a mental health theatre festival in Vichy, France.



Stepping Out Theatre perform Refugee Cats.



Already suffering from the impact of the pandemic, many families were plunged into abject poverty with the onset of the cost-of-living crisis. Basic needs came under pressure, such as putting food on the table and keeping money aside for electricity and heating.

Past Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers (SMV) David Freed and this year's Master, Patrick Despard, wasted no time in launching the Winter Crisis Appeal, asking SMV's members to contribute towards a fund that could be distributed without delay and where it was needed most.

*I thought I would never have to come and collect a food parcel, but I have no choice. This has taken a huge weight off my shoulders.*

The fund focused on supporting young people under 25, including providing help for families with children. Reaching out to community organisations that SMV already had a relationship with, David and Patrick asked directly – “tell us what you need”. Requests for help immediately starting coming in, including for food vouchers, bus passes, money to pay utility bills and Halal food to support families fasting during Ramadan.

Thanks to the excellent links that groups such as the Easton Jamia Masjid, South Bristol Youth, the Matthew Tree Project and Southmead Development Trust already have with their communities, and thanks to the robust response from SMV's members, over £131,000 was distributed to communities across Greater Bristol during last winter, helping to support over 2,300 young people.

## Winter Crisis Appeal

Ambition Lawrence Weston <a href="#">↗</a>	£2,500
Ashley Community Housing Refugee Integration Services (ACH) <a href="#">↗</a>	£8,000
Bath Islamic Centre <a href="#">↗</a>	£5,000
Bristol Horn Youth Concern <a href="#">↗</a>	£14,400
Creative Youth Network – The Station <a href="#">↗</a>	£7,500
Easton Jamia Masjid CIO <a href="#">↗</a>	£5,000
Imayla CIC <a href="#">↗</a>	£13,072
The Matthew Tree Project <a href="#">↗</a>	£10,000
The Park <a href="#">↗</a>	£5,979
South Bristol Youth <a href="#">↗</a>	£10,165
Southmead Development Trust <a href="#">↗</a>	£10,175
Trinity Community Arts <a href="#">↗</a>	£10,000
Venturers Trust Hardship Fund <a href="#">↗</a>	£29,708

*It has made so much difference having the cooker, everything seems so much easier now. You've also helped me to get some children's clothes, a pushchair, toys, mother and baby toiletries, and having the food is a weight lifted off my shoulders.*

*I've changed my bills to a pay-as-you-go meter to keep on top of it, it has really helped with the weekly budgeting, but it's still a struggle; and the heated blanket is a Godsend.*

over  
**£131,000**  
raised

**13**  
grants made

over  
**2,383**  
beneficiaries

# Merchant Venturer Spotlight

The Society of Merchant Venturers (SMV) has been part of Bristol's story for more than 450 years, with its focus and purpose evolving immeasurably over almost five centuries. The work of SMV at any moment in its more recent history is determined by its members of the time, so to find out more about who and what SMV is today, let's shine a spotlight on a few of our members.



## Gail Bragg

A magistrate for over 28 years, Gail joined SMV because she believes that when people bring their skills and resources together, the impact is far greater than one person acting alone. With a determination to support young people to achieve their full potential, Gail immediately stepped up when the position of Chair of Trustees for [Venturers Trust](#) became available in 2019.

Co-sponsored by [SMV](#) and the [University of Bristol](#), Venturers Trust is responsible for eight schools, 3,500 students and 700 members of staff. An organisation of this size needs a strong, supportive board, which in turn needs an experienced and resilient chair. This is no small task and takes up a significant amount of time, which is a lot to ask of a volunteer, but certainly didn't deter Gail from taking on the role with gusto.

From reviewing and improving safeguarding measures, finding innovative ways to address attendance and behaviour issues, to supporting schools to achieve excellent academic and pastoral results, there is never a dull moment.

"It's a full-on job, but I love doing it and I feel so inspired by the school communities that I have the privilege to work with. Nothing is more rewarding than striving to make a difference to young people's lives and addressing societal issues through education".

Beyond her role with Venturers Trust, Gail has also contributed her time and efforts to the [SMV Charity Committee](#) where she helps to ensure that charitable organisations and communities across Greater Bristol receive financial support when and where it's needed most. Gail also actively fundraises for specific projects, such as the Hardship Fund which continues to provide a financial bridge for families from the schools supported by SMV.

In the limited spare time that Gail has outside her voluntary work with SMV, she has been involved for many years with the [South West Ambulance Services Trust](#). Stepping up from Vice Chair to Interim Chair at a time when demands on the charity were greater than ever, Gail has helped the trust to navigate an incredibly challenging winter. With a permanent chair now in post, Gail has stood down and finds herself considering 'what next?'. With SMV's charitable objectives across Greater Bristol becoming increasingly more ambitious, we're certain that Gail won't be asking that question for long!





## Mark Burchfield

Mark is a co-founder of [Carbon Kind](#), a regulated carbon offset business that through carbon finance helps to build sustainable and scalable locally led projects in West Africa. 2023 saw the business launch the project 'Clean Cook Stoves', which are given to families for a nominal sum to not only enhance their lives and health but are also better for the environment. The cookstoves use less than half the wood of an open fire that families traditionally cook on, and also reduce deforestation and emit fewer carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Crucially, a manufacturing unit for the stoves has been set up in Togo this year, providing the huge benefit of regular employment for 50 people.

Mark's vision for Carbon Kind is to have a direct link from West Africa back to organisations and projects in Bristol that support ethnically minoritised communities, using money raised via carbon credits. One such organisation is [Black South West Network](#), where Mark has been a hands-on participant of the mentoring programme that sees individual SMV members matched with Black and Minoritised entrepreneurs to help their businesses flourish.

Working with John Aguirre of healthy eating fruit and veg box scheme [Green Melon](#), Mark describes John as "a truly inspirational entrepreneur who is definitely going places".

Also a trustee for [Deki](#), Mark's focus is again on West Africa. Deki is a Bristol-based charity that supports communities in Togo to become resilient to poverty and the effects of climate change with a range of initiatives. The charity provides grants, loans and training to families and communities in Togo to set up cooperatives and businesses that enable them to become self-sufficient and move out of abject poverty.

Through [SMV](#), Mark is a trustee of [Venturers Trust](#) and a governor at [Collegiate School](#), with his interest in supporting young people in education illustrated further by his role as a non-exec director and chair for two companies in the higher education sector. Mark also sits on the [Downs Committee](#) and he's a member of SMV's Standing Committee, much like a board of directors.

Looking to the year ahead, Mark is keen to volunteer even more of his time to help drive forward SMV's new Sustainability Committee.



## Laura Marshall

Helping people to tell stories that illuminate important issues has been one of Laura's passions for many years. Her professional career has centred on the media world, where she is the co-founder and CEO of Bristol-based [Icon Films](#). She is also the chair of [Wildscreen](#), the Bristol based charity that strives to raise awareness of issues facing fragile ecosystems, endangered species and indigenous communities across the globe, bringing together filmmakers, conservationists and scientists to tell stories to inspire us to repair and protect our world. The biennial Wildscreen festival takes place in Bristol with international events on an annual basis, last year in Nairobi. The charity is at the forefront of advocating for the wildlife film industry to become more inclusive and representative of cultures, nationalities and viewpoints.

In addition, Laura is a member of the [Dolphin Society](#), one of Bristol's oldest philanthropic organisations that supports older adults to live independently, and a past chair of [Bristol Old Vic](#).

A member of [SMV](#) since 2011, Laura has been involved in many of SMV's core activities over the years, including as a long-standing governor of [Merchants' Academy](#). In 2017 she became the first chair of the newly formed Communications Committee, tasked with improving communications both inside and outside SMV. Laura introduced a real step change, increasing the transparency of SMV's activities, launching an informative new website, welcoming increased media engagement and sending SMV's first tweet!

Laura has also worked to improve partnerships in many forms. She has encouraged SMV's members to facilitate work experience and internship opportunities for young people by matching businesses with schools, including her own company Icon Films. As the current chair of the Collections and Heritage Committee, Laura has established a partnership with the [Royal West of England Academy](#), utilising their 'Art in the Workplace' scheme, working with the RWA's curator Tristan Pollard to select and hang pictures from their collection at [Merchants' Hall](#) reflecting the city and its artists.



### Bevis Watts

Widely known for his passion and expertise in matters relating to sustainability and protecting the environment, Bevis is determined to show how interconnected nature and business really are. As well as being the CEO of [Triodos Bank UK](#), Bevis is a trustee of [Project Seagrass](#) and also collaborated with [WWF](#), [RSPB](#), the [National Trust](#) and Bristol's [Silverback Films](#) on a series of films that are part of the 'Save our Wild Isles' campaign that shine a light on the devastating impact that business-as-usual is having on the natural world.

When he's not busy working or volunteering, Bevis continues to track the activities of beavers on the banks of the river Avon and is delighted to report that more kits have been born this year. Profits from sales of his book 'River Journey' about the beavers go directly to support wildlife conservation charities.

As a member of the [Downs Committee](#), Bevis' track record of achieving viable positive outcomes for local landscape spaces, for example, turning the old Bristol & West sports ground on the edge of the Portway into a wildlife haven during his time as CEO of the [Avon Wildlife Trust](#), is already proving to be invaluable. He hopes to work closely with the newly created Downs Advisory Panel to promote initiatives that will enhance and protect the natural environment of the beautiful Avon Gorge and Downs.

Having joined [SMV](#) only last year, Bevis is keen to see environmental sustainability feature more prominently across all of [SMV's](#) activities. As a national trustee of [Citizens Advice](#), he sees the importance of ensuring that the transition to a low carbon economy is fair and inclusive. Bevis also supports the active work that's well underway to diversify [SMV's](#) membership.



### Karl Tucker

Alongside a busy day job as the chair of [Yeo Valley Farms](#), Karl is the chair of South Bristol Youth and a governor at [Merchants' Academy](#). He is particularly focused on helping young people to understand and access the range of rewarding career pathway opportunities that exist post-education. With poor attendance an increasingly prevalent issue at many schools post-pandemic, Karl launched 'Inspiration Week' at [Merchants' Academy](#). Facing up to the question 'what's the point of school?', Karl helped to deliver an action-packed week of inspiring workshops and presentations last year. Students engaged with business people from a huge range of sectors including space, cyber security, renewable energy, electric vehicles, live events, film and TV, equine veterinary science, farming, hospitality, utilities, construction, manufacturing and healthcare, to name just a few. Plans for this year's Inspiration Week are well underway.

As a commissioner for the [South West Social Mobility Commission](#), Karl's extensive and ongoing work with [Merchants' Academy](#) and [South Bristol Youth](#) demonstrate his belief that actions speak louder than words. The Commission was established in response to the 2022 report [Social Mobility in the South West](#), which revealed that this area has the lowest educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils of any English region.

Karl is also the chair of [Heart of the South West](#) Local Enterprise Partnership and chair of the [Great South West Partnership](#). Both of these pan-regional organisations are focused on establishing the South West as the UK's 'natural powerhouse' developing and delivering a larger and more productive economy, with ambitions to drive regional growth through its green and blue economies. (The green economy focuses on energy, transport, agriculture and forestry; and the blue economy targets the sustainability of fishery, marine and coastal resources.)

For [SMV](#), Karl is a member of the Standing Committee and the [Charity Committee](#), helping to steer [SMV](#) through the 21st century so that the impact of our activities continues to make a positive difference to communities in Greater Bristol.



# New Members



## Rob Crews

A chartered accountant by profession, Rob is a founding partner of [Momentum Corporate Finance](#), an advisory firm that guides entrepreneurs on driving growth in their businesses.

Since joining [SMV](#), Rob has been putting his 25 years of commercial and financial experience to good use, building stronger ties with the [St Pauls Carnival](#), where he has been asked to provide strategic commercial input in a non-exec capacity.

Keen to support young people as they prepare to transition from education into the world of work, Rob also participated in the recent careers development programme at [Montpelier High School](#), joining other [SMV](#) members to deliver mock interviews for students in Years 10 and 12. His belief that young people should be given the support and encouragement to achieve aspirational goals will certainly help [SMV](#) to deliver ambitious objectives in this area.



## Margot Day

Margot leads the global legal team for [Arup](#), a multinational professional services firm, where she is Global General Counsel. In her professional role, Margot works across legal, risk management, data governance and ethical conduct in the global organisation. Margot strives to ensure an inclusive and equitable approach is prevalent both inside and outside work; and she is passionate about helping to shape a better world in a more sustainable way.

Margot, in her voluntary roles as a business board member for [WECA](#) LEP and in her prior role as a director and chair of the legal and commercial forum for the Association for Consultancy and Engineering ([ACE](#)), was passionate about the role business has to play in closing the gap and ensuring legal and regulatory issues align with what is best for engagement and empowerment across communities.

Margot previously worked as the vice-chair of governors at a local primary school, a role she held for five years. Margot hopes to build on the support she currently gives to young people by getting involved in [SMV's](#) work focused on helping students to raise their aspirations, prepare for life after education and reach their full potential.

Care for older people is another area where Margot wishes to support [SMV's](#) activities. She believes that there are many benefits to be gained by different communities and generations interacting, connecting and working together. These beliefs align perfectly with [SMV's](#) core objectives and Margot will certainly add significant value to the positive impact of our activities in the Greater Bristol region.



### Nick Lee

Nick is the founder of [Paragon Costs Solutions](#), a legal firm ranked as a Leading Law Firm in 2023 by Legal 500. Paragon Costs sits under the umbrella of Thrings LLP where Nick is one of the youngest partners ever appointed by the company.

Since joining [SMV](#), Nick has become the safeguarding governor at [Montpelier High School](#) and also a trustee on the board of directors at the [Bristol Old Vic](#).

Nick feels strongly about championing opportunities for the next generation, particularly when it comes to making positive changes that embrace diversity and inclusion.

From his own experience, he knows the importance of developing strong personal values, including ‘work hard and always be respectful’, combined with steely grit and determination. Nick was raised by a single parent who worked hard and made sure that he understood his true potential. Even though he didn’t follow the traditional route of university, Nick went on to become a successful lawyer with his own business, demonstrating exactly what young people can achieve when they believe in themselves.



### Lucio Mesquita

Lucio’s professional background is in journalism and media, where he has worked for the BBC and more recently for his own consultancy, in the UK and internationally. He has a keen interest in diversity and inclusion, and he wants to help make Bristol a better place for everyone by improving opportunities that are accessible to all.

Since joining [SMV](#), Lucio has become the SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) governor at the [Dolphin School](#), where he’s been impressed by the strength of leadership, the level of parental engagement and, most of all, by the energy and enthusiasm of the pupils.

Lucio also volunteers his time as chair of trustees for the [Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice](#); he’s a trustee of the [Park Centre](#) in Knowle West; and a member of the [Anchor Society](#). Lucio is also non-executive director for the [St Pauls Carnival](#) CIC and he is keen to explore how SMV’s members could further apply their expertise, skills and knowledge in practical ways beyond traditional funding to support community-based organisations such as the Carnival.



# Emeritus

**E**meritus 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 significant contribution to SMV's work over a sustained period of time.

## John Pontin OBE

A member of SMV since 1985, John has made a significant contribution to SMV's community-focused activities over the past 38 years. As well as being a member of the Standing Committee 1994-1997, John has served on the Membership Committee and the [Social Enterprise Committee](#). He is also a former member of the [Court of the University of Bristol](#).

With a keen focus on international environmental and social projects, John's own charitable trust, the John Pontin Trust, has been supporting low carbon energy generation since 2008. A range of innovative projects have enabled the installation of solar power technology and wind turbines across the UK and India, with surplus revenues being reinvested back into the community.

John was awarded an OBE in the 2003 Honours List for charitable services in Bristol.

## Anthony Brown

Anthony joined SMV in 2000 and served as Master in 2013, when he introduced Emeritus as a new category of membership. He spent 12 years as a member of the Standing Committee and has served on almost all of SMV's sub-committees.

Anthony was closely involved in the conversion of [Montpelier High School](#) (then CGS) from private status to an academy and he oversaw the £14m programme of building works to accommodate the increase in student numbers from 350 to 950.

As a member of the [Downs Committee](#), Anthony played a pivotal role in bringing to fruition a number of important developments, including the introduction of Kashmiri goats into the Gully, the creation of the wooden playground at Observatory Hill and the negotiation of the first music festival at Sea Walls.

In addition to Anthony's extensive voluntary work for SMV, he spent six years as Lay Canon on the Chapter at [Bristol Cathedral](#), he was the High Sheriff of the City and County of Bristol in 2017, he is a former trustee of [Avon Wildlife Trust](#) and he is a current vice president of the [National Churches Trust](#).

## Andrew Yates

Andrew joined SMV in 2005 and served as a member of the Standing Committee between 2010 and 2013.

Andrew has been actively involved in SMV's work in [Education](#) for many years. He was a governor of the now [Montpelier High School](#) when it became an academy, having previously been in the private schools sector. He has also served on several school governing bodies, including two years as the LGB chair of the [Kingfisher School](#) in St Anne's Park, where he oversaw the development of a new, state of the art school building which pupils and staff moved in to shortly after Andrew's tenure as chair ended.

As well as being a former member of the [Downs Committee](#), Andrew has also served on SMV's Audit and Membership Committees and he is a former member of the Council of [St Monica Trust](#), where he served for nine years and latterly chaired the charity's Finance Committee.

## Looking Ahead

The incoming leader and the person who will be driving forward SMV's charitable objectives with purpose in 2023-24 is Mike Bothamley. A member since 2010, Mike is a former High Sheriff of Bristol who has ploughed his time and energy into SMV's work for well over a decade.

Mike believes that the year ahead presents an opportunity for SMV to deliver a pivotal change in the support that it provides to young people. "With [Venturers Trust](#) approaching a merger with a larger multi-academy trust, we have the opportunity to recalibrate the support that we provide to young people," says Mike. "More than 15 years ago, we said yes when the Government asked us to be a joint sponsor of [Merchants' Academy](#) because our members felt that we had something to offer families in South Bristol to help young people achieve their goals.

"Today, the Government wants larger academy chains with greater school improvement capacity, so it's right that the schools for which we are responsible should move to a new Trust which can offer that. But our members still want to help young people succeed, and in particular to transition from education into the workplace with ambitious career goals, armed with the knowledge, skills and confidence to be successful.

"We know that we don't have all the answers and that's why we're asking, 'what do young people need and how can we help?' and we're listening carefully to communities across Bristol, to parents, teachers, leaders and to the Department for Education."



Mike with Sally, a resident of Katherine & Griffiths House.

Mike is also closely involved with SMV's work supporting older people in the region, both through the organisation's own activities and through his longstanding connection to the [St Monica Trust](#). "I recently attended the [Katherine & Griffiths House](#) summer party, and it's the happiest home for older people that I've ever visited. It's a lovely place with fantastic residents, but its greatest asset is the staff. They are kind, patient, dedicated, and most of all, they are always in good spirits. Many of them are incredibly long-serving members of the team and that alone speaks volumes about the kind of place it is to live and work. I'm looking forward to visiting more in the year ahead."

Mike describes the inequalities that exist across Bristol as vast. "Our members share a determination to help close the gap by volunteering their time, expertise and resources to make a difference. SMV has been around for a long time, but the modern-day organisation is defined by its members and not by its past.

"The work that we've been doing to diversify our membership continues to be a keen focus for SMV. While we're still a membership organisation established by Royal Charter more than 450 years ago, by increasing our transparency, especially about our history, we've been able to attract new members who are dynamic, forward looking and collaborative, and who are already making a significant contribution to our social purpose across the region. I hope that even more like-minded change-makers will choose to join us in the year ahead."



Over the past year, we're privileged to have worked with many inspiring organisations, including...





[merchantventurers.com](http://merchantventurers.com)

