

Partnerships

To ensure we are really embedded in our community, partnerships have been at the heart of everything we have done, and have really been what has made the last 18 months such a success.

Partnerships for Learning:

- Angela and Andrew (*the one she's married to - so many Andrews!*) volunteered for over year at Hitchin repair Café to learn the ropes. As a result, Hitchin Repair café kindly lent us their repairers for our first few events (many are still volunteering with us), shared all their policies and how-to guides to get us started. We'd be very happy to host any trainee volunteers at the Shed for a shift to observe how we do things.

Partnerships for Things, not money:

- Our local Wickes donated things we knew we needed (like ladders) out of a community fund they run. Jewsons donated 'dead stock' (this is a good term to know) of items that had been on display and therefore couldn't be sold. Wates construction had our display unit manufactured, and one of their colleagues was so inspired she nominated us for the in-house 'suggest a place to donate to' scheme.

Partnerships for funding

Some of these are national, some of them are Hertfordshire-based, and some of them are very specific to our area. With a bit of digging and asking around, you'll find a similar buffet of options specific to your area.

- Letchworth Heritage Foundation (much more than money – helped us find the premises, have offered guidance, partnered to run today, run joint events – thermal imaging camera event at the brewery)
- Housing Associations – Settle, First Garden City Homes and The Heritage Foundation have funded memberships for their residents. In turn, the announcements in their comms to tenants created greater reach into our community.
- Clarion Housing Resilience Fund: funding for training and development, research trips, ladder training etc.
- Cory: just a recent find for us, Cory fund (<https://www.corygroup.co.uk/community/fund-application> . They open applications once a year, in Autumn, and fund environmental projects across London and the South East. We are thrilled to have recently secured a grant to buy more specialist-equipment and increase the reach and impact of our Big Fix events.

Partnerships to access the community

The connections we've made locally over cups of tea. There will be similar groups where you are - your Council's Community Engagement team, or local 'involved in everything' person might have a handy list for you.

- North Herts Ethnic Minority Forum, Up on Downs (a group of local parents of Downs Syndrome kids who get together for events and mutual support - we sourced a silent disco at their suggestion), Uni of Herts, Local colleges etc. to try to reach every part of our community. Don't think we've been super-successful at this from the get-go - more than half the groups we approached in the setting-up stage just never got back to us. However, now we're more established, groups are more responsive, and some have actually come to us. This will happen for you too.
- We ran a home maintenance course after talking to HK Connect, a local group of recent Letchworthers from Hong Kong. After a cup of tea, it turned out that what they most wanted was info about how to deal with their central heating systems. We ran a training event, with a hand-out and a hands-on demo from our manager Ben, bleeding a radiator. At the next repair café someone came back with an item to repair. They may not have done that if we hadn't made sure they knew about us.

Partnerships with local business

- Our policy of trying not to surprise anyone, or stepping on anyone's toes has worked for us (there will be, inevitably, someone who is outraged for the sake of it) We approached all the repair shops ahead of running the Big Fix so they knew it was happening, and to let them know that our goal is to increase awareness of, and the demand for, repair. They promoted us and we promote them. We want everyone to move towards having things repaired, so we need to work together.
- We are Running a tech repair and donate project ('laptops to the future' - we love a pun!) with our local computer repair company and then giving them to local college students.
- We are Working with our BID, 'Love Letchworth' – engaging with the town event schedule e.g. eco-friendly crafting for kids at the Xmas light display, Big Fix during Letchworth festival, eco bunting making for Wynd festival,
- We organised with our local coffee roaster to collect their old coffee bags to make aprons at a sewing session.
- We are mindful of the local economy, and ~~We~~ don't stock certain things for hire if there is a reasonably priced alternative. E.g. while people have asked for sets of glasses and mugs, we point them at a local business

called vintage tea party crockery hire. Instead, we fill in the gaps by stocking children's party packs.

- County Councillors have a locality budget to spend at their discretion. We took a couple of councillors for tea and cake, and happily they then funded our sofa nook, the silent disco for Up on Downs, and a really nice pop-up gazebo.

So, what have we learnt from all this partnership making?

- A conversation over a cup of tea does wonders. Try to set up a face-to-face meeting where you can, and go be your charming selves.
- Try to avoid saying anything that sounds like 'we'd like some money please'. If it's a sizeable company, in your first contact ask to talk to their CSR person. With all businesses, large and small, say something along the lines of 'we'd like to explore/ talk about partnering/ collaborating together'.
- Do your research. Map out who is in your local community that could be a great partner (charities, community groups, funders, businesses, schools, educational institutions etc.) This can be a bit daunting, but we found the best thing to do, whoever you start with, is to ask 'Who do you think we should be talking to?'. You may not know all the movers and shakers in your area, but they will know each other.
- Think creatively about how your aims match with those potential partners. Sometimes you can be seen as competition but if played right you can become collaborators. If they have a mission-statement online, mirror their aims and wording in your chat or presentation.
- Be open and transparent. They will have questions, and it's important that you look organised, reliable, transparent and responsive.
- Ask for advice, ask for their insights – most people love this, and it opens the door for further conversations.
- Think about what you have to offer and what they might be interested in. A lot of businesses have not only a CSR person looking for good ideas, but a social media lead who is desperate for content. We often say, 'we don't have anything to give you apart from love, but our love is quite good, actually - we have 3,400 followers across insta and facebook, a newsletter that goes out to our 900 members, and we love highlighting the support from companies on these platforms (if you have examples to pop in a presentation, or to send beforehand, this is golden).
- Get to know people before you make the ask but don't be scared to make the ask!
- Know when to say no. Not all partnerships or funding offers are right for your organisation or a good use of your time. You don't always know this at first, but you soon get a feel for which partnerships are worth pursuing. We were so excited about any offer that came our way, it took us a while to figure out that not every proposal was right for the Shed.