



DINGY BUTTERFLIES CIC

10 year report and beyond



PREPARED BY DINGY BUTTERFLIES CIC

Dingy Butterflies CIC works with residents, communities and organisations in Gateshead to explore the key issues that affect our community and supports them to make a change. Through creative ideas, art and nature-based activities we engage local people and work with them to share knowledge and skills, and give them the opportunity to have their voices heard in our community.

INTRODUCTION



I came to live in the North East in 2001 and moved to Bensham & Saltwell in Gateshead in 2005. In 2015, I founded Dingy Butterflies CIC as a response to the research questions from my then recently completed PhD.

- How could I, as an artist and curator, work within the community I live in, Bensham & Saltwell.
- Are there opportunities for creative social engagement around the issues affecting the community?’
- How could creative activity support people’s health and wellbeing?
- How could we be guided by the communities and in partnership with the community organisations that work in the area?
- What could it look like to live, work and play in Bensham & Saltwell?

Now, ten years later, we are looking back on the work we have undertaken with residents and artists, and in partnership with the many fantastic organisations working in the community. It also gives us an opportunity to look to the future and consider where we are going and what we want to be. How can we continue working in Gateshead but look wider and support others on their journey? We are planning new creative community projects and want to continue working with others in Gateshead and beyond. We would love to hear from you.

Dr Ben Jones, Founder and Director, Dingy Butterflies CIC

Board Members



Andrea Carter



Dr Hannah Marsden



Dr Rebecca Prescott



Christine Frazer



Dr Suzy O'Hara

COMMUNITY

Gateshead has a number of challenges, as do many other communities across the North East and the UK. The area suffers from socio-economic deprivation through the continuing effects of austerity and cuts to services. Statistics taken from Gateshead Borough Council's ward profiles show 29% of the area's population are in the 10% most deprived circumstances nationally, for children this figure is 24%, and that 43% of households are within the 20% most deprived. Food poverty is a major concern, with one in four Gateshead children growing up in poverty.*

Conversations we have had with residents and community organisations indicate that there is concern with the increasing reliance on food banks within the community, and the lack of opportunities to grow and learn about food. This relates to the low connection with and access to creativity and nature in the community and is seen as a factor that impacts mental health. This need has been identified, through conversations with our community and partner organisations.

The benefit of access to both creative opportunities as well as green and natural spaces for mental and physical health has been widely acknowledged. Most recently through the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing report 'Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing' and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) 'Preventing and Tackling Mental Ill Health through Green Social Prescribing'.

Dingy Butterflies is part of a movement that is challenging lack of access to creativity and nature and tackling food poverty and waste. There is a strong creative and community spirit that we want to support, creating new opportunities for the people and communities that live in Bensham & Saltwell and the wider Gateshead borough. We believe that creative opportunities, access to nature and good food, and connections to others, will improve mental health and wellbeing, prevent illness and reliance on dwindling resources, and encourage our community to thrive.



*Statistics taken from <https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/26349/Introduction-inequalities-in-Gateshead>

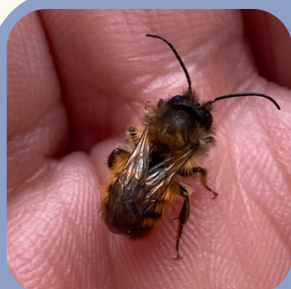
RESIDENT GROUP AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

We work with a group of residents and freelancers, formed from the communities we engage. They come together to co-create projects with us and act as leaders and volunteers on projects. They are integral to our future direction through devolution of decision making, taking a lead on projects and the organisation as a whole, where all are on an equal footing and learn together. We do this by:

- ***Engaging people from diverse backgrounds and abilities to participate in the arts.*** This includes The Comfrey Project (for people resettling as refugees and seeking asylum), Bensham Court (an older person's tower block), Rawling Road Medical Centre (a GP surgery), St Chad's Community Project (a family support organisation), and The Chev (an Orthodox Jewish group for young women with learning needs).
- ***Understanding the health and wellbeing benefits of being creative and engaging with communities.*** Through community led and co-created projects we aim to increase creative engagement and participation, develop and improve creative skills, and increase active engagement in local decision-making. Through creativity we support confidence building, a sense of ownership and help people's wellbeing.
- ***Supporting social interaction and engagement through creativity to combat isolation.*** Our structure and methodology allows all involved to learn from each other and is considerate and understanding of each other's experiences, knowledge and skills. Through building new networks and encouraging creative participation and engagement, people of all ages can benefit and learn from taking part in the arts and in their community.

Our vision is that through participation in the arts people of all ages and backgrounds can benefit through learning about where they live, be active in decision making, and that creativity can become part of everyday life. This will help towards creating solutions for the challenges we face in our community.

CURRENT PROJECTS



Bees of Bensham (since 2022) - an arts and citizen science project led by artist Barbara Keating, working with Gateshead residents, environmentalists, community and climate organisations. We mapped and monitored the natural habitats in our community, learnt about the types of bees we have, and how climate is affecting where we live. We worked in collaboration with Climate Action North, Northumbria University, Natural History Society of Northumbria, Royal Horticultural Society, Wild Intrigue, local organisations and our resident group. The project was initially funded by a National Lottery Community Foundation grant, and was the winner of Gateshead Council's Tackling Climate Change Award 2024. We are looking for further funding to continue this work, exploring land use and developing into other areas of Gateshead. www.dingybutterflies.org/bees-of-bensham-2/



Bensham Bites (since 2024) - bringing various growing projects in the community of Bensham & Saltwell together, we share knowledge and skills to explore ideas around food growing, preservation and distribution to combat food poverty. Activities have included developing healthy and nutritious dehydrated foods from food waste and bi-products, learning about the wellbeing benefits of herbs and the different ways we can compost. We worked in collaboration with artist Barbara Keating, Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), Herb Hub, Big Local Gateshead, The Comfrey Project, The Chev, Gateshead Food Partnership and residents of Gateshead. The project is funded by the RHS and Gateshead Food Partnership. www.dingybutterflies.org/bensham-bites



Dingy Butterflies @ Dunston Staiths (since 2025) - in partnership with Tyne Derwent Way this nine-week programme of creative workshops took place in their new space at Dunston Staiths. The project welcomed communities from the Dunston and Teams areas to be creative, engage with us and each other and talk about what else they would like to see happen in their community. We worked in collaboration with Tyne Derwent Way, Tyne and Wear Preservation Society, National Trust and Gateshead Council. The project was commissioned by Tyne Derwent Way. www.dingybutterflies.org/tynederwentway/

ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS - APRIL 2022 to APRIL 2025

Research Visits	Public Walks	Workshop Sessions	Public Events	Community Organisations
4	32	53	15	25
ENGAGEMENTS	FREELANCERS		VOLUNTEERS	
1593	26		14	

In April 2024 we received an email from one of our resident group members. In it they expressed their gratitude about how working with us on this project has affected them and their family. They wanted *'the people who have inspired me to know the impact they have had on this corner of the world.'*

They were a single parent who had just moved to the area and had no local connections, families or friendships in the community and felt alone and isolated. They had previously gone through trauma and had needed therapy. During the lockdown they had quit their job and decided that one of the things they needed to heal had to come from *'caring about Mother Earth alongside people who could pass on joy and enthusiasm for soil, air, plants and creatures in my own community. I needed to seek them out.'* This is when they found Bees of Bensham.

'After my first Bees of Bensham workshop I recognised that, there were REAL LIFE PEOPLE who care about the environment as much as I did and had knowledge and skills that I wanted to learn... that Bensham contains activists and scientists and residents who passionately nurture and thrive together on the subject of the environment. Moving to Bensham has transformed my entire trajectory.'

After becoming involved in Bees of Bensham they completed an Access course in Science at Gateshead College studying biology, biochemistry, chemistry and advanced maths. They received a distinction and secured a place at Northumbria University to study a degree in Environmental Science.

'I want to tell you all that as a rootsy organisation, you have been integral to transforming my life. These connections, learnings and encouragements have not only pushed me to study environmentalism full time but are seeping into the lives of my children and everyone they interact with. You've been part of my healing journey, because you've persistently and gently worked in my community and never restricted access. You've all been inspiring, passionate, understanding, and while I've been over here navigating parenthood, studies and work, I've never felt excluded. As long as you continue creative connections with this community, we are here, we hear you. You are making a huge impact.'





Bensham Bites – Food Network

Our shared purpose

Work Together to Provide Healthy Nutritious Accessible Food for Bensham

BEWILDING



FUTURE PLANS

Over the last ten years our work has concentrated on exploring issues around community, creativity and wellbeing, working with local organisations and the people they support. We have always had an interest in how space and place can be used for the benefit of the communities that live in them. This includes both physical and digital spaces, such as buildings, facilities, parks, underused land, social media and digital mapping. This connects to how we create cultural experiences and human engagement to create a sense of place for the benefit of the community.

Since 2022 our work has concentrated on biodiversity, climate change, environmental issues and food security and how they all are part of the same systems that we need to survive and be healthy. We have considered how we can use land and space for the benefit of the community and explore the policies that affect how it is used, developed and maintained. We have explored how community wealth building can support communities and improve economic and social opportunities and give people a say in local decision making, and how knowledge of nature, biodiversity and food can support peoples health and wellbeing and help them to gain an understanding of where they live. This is all with creativity and community as a central point to engage people with where they live.

Our future plans are to continue the work we do in Bensham & Saltwell, developing as a community-focused business and supporting others in their journey. We also wish to expand into other areas bringing what we have learnt to new communities in Gateshead.

Working with Dingy Butterflies to programme the first nine weeks of our new community space by Dunston Staiths has been brilliant. Each of the artists working in the space has brought something new and exciting to get local folk engaged in celebrating the Tyne Derwent Way. To see folk of all ages and backgrounds getting together to make and create has been a joy. Dingy Butterflies have a particular gift for creating a welcoming, inclusive and accessible environment.

Lucy Zwolinska, Community and Participation Consultant, National Trust.

- Expand our work into other areas of Gateshead in particular Teams and Dunston, developing creative projects supporting wellbeing and exploring biodiversity and food security.
- Develop projects working with local schools, nurseries, care providers and GP surgeries to support people's wellbeing.
- Increase income from commissions, consultation and mentoring, and other income generation.
- Increase the capacity of our staff team and find core funding to support and develop our work.
- Explore how our creative work around biodiversity, food systems and supporting people's wellbeing can support others in the community to develop social enterprises.
- Increase our resident group membership and improve strategies for them to have a say in the work we do.
- Support local people through employment and volunteering opportunities with us.
- Find a physical space in the community for us to work from and engage local people.

PROJECT CASE STUDY - THE CHEV

Bensham & Saltwell has one of the largest Orthodox Jewish communities in Europe, with over 600 families living in the area. The Chev, supports young Jewish women who have additional learning needs. The group had recently taken on an allotment with the intention of learning about nature and food growing. However, the allotment needed a lot of work, which the group leaders had little experience of.

Since 2023 they have been working with us as a partner on our project, Bensham Bites. Three group leaders attended workshop sessions, engaging with other network members and learnt about the wellbeing benefits of certain herbs and spices, different composting methods; and how to use a dehydrator to preserve food. In addition to the workshop sessions, they were able to learn from the experienced members of the group about hints and tips for growing food, and how to make the most of their allotment.

We bought them a small dehydrator and through sessions about dehydrating waste food, led by artist and beekeeper Barbara Keating, they created their own dried vegetable and rice pot. They designed a brand and label and are now looking to sell it and give it to people in need in the community.

The Chev is passionate about promoting and empowering young adults with learning disabilities. Offering them opportunities for employment, healthy wellbeing and lifestyle. We have developed a brand Fibe with Vibe. This promotes our service users and encourages cross-community interaction and integration.

Zivia Katz, group leader, The Chev



Did you know there are 270 species of bees in the UK? We're learning so much about pollinators today at Bees of Bensham with Dingy Butterflies! It's been wonderful hearing about how artists, scientists and communities can all come together to help pollinators.

Really interesting day, hearing all about the magic that can happen when arts, community, research, big ideas & activism come together.

Spent today with an amazing bunch of humans... all working to make a difference to their local community, wildlife & land. Nothing beats spending time with folk. Thank you SO much for inviting me. That was the best symposium ever!

A brilliant event yesterday at St Chad's with Bensham Bites: a room full of ideas, knowledge and enthusiasm for growing, storing, preserving and distributing food. Excited to see what's next.

This was SUCH a good project. I bumped into a few of the residents today... they were asking when it would be starting again... the children loved hanging out with new friends of different ages.

I would love to see more of this activity here. It has been such a lovely experience. The atmosphere has been so unique - very quiet, lots of concentration and enthusiasm and ideas. New experiences - a delightful mix of school children to right up the age range.

Continuing the art space would be wonderful. Its vital to connect the community to the monument and local landscape, bringing the stories of the workers to the wider area. The need to embrace our heritage is so important.

It seems to me that Bees of Bensham is a great group of local people all doing good things, and it has been a pleasure to work with some of you this year.

PREVIOUS PROJECTS



Gateshead Artist Walks (2022-23) - in collaboration with Gateshead Council's Art's Team and North East Cultural Freelancers, we organised a series of artist-led walks around Gateshead. Walks were around Saltwell Park, Gateshead Riverside, Derwent Walk Country Park,

Longacre Woods and Path Head Water Mill. They included a mental health walk, an ambulation walk, haiku walk, nature walk and a bee walk. The walks were to support people's wellbeing through creativity and movement and designed to encourage people to get back out and about after lockdown. Commissioned by Gateshead Council.

www.dingybutterflies.org/artist-walks/



10x10 Creative Gateshead (2020) - during lockdown in 2020, we successfully applied for funding to employ 11 Gateshead artists. They were invited to collaborate with 10 Gateshead community and creative organisations to co-create two booklets to support

people's mental health wellbeing through being creative. The booklets were co-designed with staff and participants of each organisation. One booklet was created for isolated and vulnerable adults and the other for isolated young people. The booklets showcased the diverse and varied creative practices of Gateshead artists as well as promoting the work of Gateshead-based community organisations. 10 x 10 Creative Gateshead was funded through an Arts Council Grant.

www.dingybutterflies.org/10x10-creative-gateshead/

THANK YOU

Thank you to the communities, residents, artists, partners, community organisations and all the other people we have worked with over the last ten years.

Thank you to our funders and stakeholders for supporting us to do the work we do.

Thank you to our past board members, Chris Wilson and Sophie Hope.

As an organisation with less than 1 full-time equivalent staff, the work we have achieved has been astonishing and demonstrates our ability to create opportunities for people, communities, artists and organisations to explore social issues through creativity. Just imagine if we could do more with more people!

We are always looking for new funders, partnerships, stakeholders, resident engagement to support our work and be involved in its realisation. If you want to support us or get involved in our work, get in touch. We are always happy to talk.

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