**Josh:** Hello and welcome to ‘Third Sector Insights’, the knowledge and learning podcast from The National Lottery Community Fund. I’m Josh Coles-Riley, and I work for the Fund in the Knowledge and Learning team.

We’ve created ‘Third Sector Insights’ to give a platform to organisations funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, to share the knowledge and insight they’ve gained through their projects. Each episode, you’ll hear directly from third sector leaders, project staff, volunteers, and the people and communities they support. We’ll talk to them about their projects and the difference our funding makes, and about key lessons, challenges, mistakes and successes – basically any learning that might be helpful to other groups and organisations seeking to make a difference in their communities.

Each episode will focus on a different topic – an area of special or topical interest, or maybe a challenge or experience that lots of third sector organisations have in common. We don’t want this podcast to be about us as a Funder giving our position or saying, “this is the view of The National Lottery Community Fund on x”. Instead, Third Sector Insight (the clue’s in the name!) is about drawing out the wealth of insights, wisdom and experience third sector organisations are gaining through the projects we fund.

On this episode we’ll be speaking with a project that received £1 million of National Lottery funding through our Community Asset Transfer 2 programme, which provided revenue and capital funding to support the transfer of assets such as land or building into community ownership. We’ll speak with the project about how they’re engaging with their local community to create a truly people-led community asset.

On this episode today we’re sheltering under a bandstand in Grange Gardens in Grangetown in Cardiff. Behind us is quite a substantial building site. Whatever it may look like at first glance, the building taking shape here Is very different from the commercial development which increasingly seeing around the city. Part of that difference is that the development happening here is led by the community, which is what we’re really interested in hearing about. Today I’m here speaking with Lynne, Deborah, Ash and Ali, who are all from the Grange Pavilion Project. Could you each introduce yourselves?

**Lynne:** I’m Lynne Thomas and I work for Cardiff University as the Community Gateway Project Manager. I joined the [Cardiff Community Gateway] project in 2015 and very quickly became involved in the Grange Pavilion Project.

**Deborah:** I’m Deborah Jones and I’m a resident in a nearby street. I’m on the board and doing some activities with the community around the building site.

**Ash:** I’m Ash Lister. I’m one of the three local councillors in the area and I’m co-chair of Grangetown Community Action which is a partner in the Grange Pavilion Project.

**Ali:** I’m Ali Abdi and I’m the Community Gateway Facilities and Partnerships Manager, employed by Cardiff University, and I live in Grangetown.

**Josh:** In a nutshell, what’s the Grange Pavilion Project all about?

**Ash:** The project is the redevelopment of an old bowls pavilion which unfortunately become disused, after the bowls club fought for a number of years to keep it going, but eventually folded. A couple of residents were looking for a space where you could have a cup of coffee and a space that could be used by the community for educational sessions and can be used by community groups. Initially the community looked at the old caretaker’s house on Grange Primary School, but that was then sold for development. Then we moved onto the bowls pavilion. It was a community asset transfer from the Council as part of their strategy of divesting assets.

When we opened it up temporarily in 2014 for the Grangetown Festival, the community sparked a love for it and they saw absolute potential in the space and wanted to get involved. That’s when Grange Pavilion started working with Cardiff University’s Community Gateway Project, Grange Community Action and other partners to look at what we could do with the building, and that’s when we decided to make the massive jump and applied for National Lottery funding to redevelop the whole site. I kind of with today that we still had part of a building so that we weren’t all stood under the bandstand in case it rains, but it’s coming along and is an absolute mammoth compared to what it used to be, but extremely exciting.

**Josh:** Just to rewind a little bit, I know that the redevelopment that’s happening here has been quite a long time in the making. When I was reading about the project, I was really struck by a line about how the idea grew from a chat in a bus stop. Could someone tell me a bit more about that?

**Lynne:** The Academic Leader of Community Gateway, Mhairi McVicar is a former resident of Grangetown. In 2012 Mhairi had a conversation with local resident Richard Powell who used to live within sight of the Grange Pavilion. They were chatting about Richard’s idea of having somewhere close to the park where people could go have a cup of coffee and continue their discussions. What was happening was that all these great discussions were taking place and brilliant ideas were sparking, and then the heavens would open, and everyone would have to go home. Or somebody would need the loo or someone’s child would be thirsty and so they would need to go and get a drink somewhere. The whole idea was having somewhere in the park where these conversations could continue, and that’s how it started!

The thing you say about the park Ash, you wish we had a building and were stood in it – this bandstand is the central point of this park, and this park is a crossroads. People walk through the park to take their kids to school, they walk through the park to get to the Taff Embarkment and they walk up Taff trail into work, they walk across the park to see their friends, they walk their dogs in the park, kids play in the park. It’s such a community hub and a community focus and a natural convergence point and meeting point. What do you do when you meet someone in the park? You have a chat! People would be in the park having chats.

**Josh**: From that initial conversation and idea seven years ago, how did we get from there to where we are today?

**Deborah:** I moved here quite recently so don’t know the history as well as everyone else, but that might be an advantage! My sense of it was that there was a small cluster of people that came together to create Grange Pavilion Project, and that was a group of people taking about what they could do if they got the pavilion, and what might people want here. Over a period of time, that group combined with Cardiff University and Grangetown Community Action, so eventually grew to have these partnerships and continuously having conversations about what the community want, what can it be and how can we do that?

**Lynne**: Very fortuitously, and it was synergy I think, Community Gateway launched in 2014 as one of Cardiff University’s flagship engagement projects, focused specifically on the geographical ward of Grangetown. Just when Grange Pavilion Project was assembled and started to be able to move the project forward, Community Gateway launched. The university has a lot of resource, and you have to remember that people on the board are volunteers, they have full time jobs. This is a community led projects, led by volunteers, and for the university to be able to come in as asset guardians, as partners, as an administrative resource is hugely significant. I take my hat off to any community group who does this purely through their volunteers.

In that time Community Gateway launched, the Grange Pavilion Project got rolling, the two converged and a partnership agreement was signed. We suddenly had substance, we had people, we had skills, we had resource and capacity and the dialog between the council and The National Lottery Community Fund started to happen and everyone was really encouraging. Richard Powell if he was here now would say the reason this is happening now is because no one said no. Nobody stopped us – we just kept going and we keep going!

**Ash:** One of the important things was that everyone got behind that vision of having somewhere central in the park where you could come and have a cup of coffee and do other activities. We trailed the coffee shop for two years, we saw so many different faces coming in and asking what was happening and asking how they could get involved or how to book the space out. It was great to see so many people that had never engaged with us as a project, using the project and them saying that it’s something they could use in the future, and that’s been really special.

**Deborah:** It feels like lots of different experiments were received positively by people. Another key aspect of this place has been the old bowling green. It was a square of grass with a surrounding area of grass which was used regularly by dog walkers and by people who were looking for an area of the park that was a bit quieter. It was used as a test bed for doing community allotments which was positively received. It’s a convergence of different things, but each being received positively.

**Josh:** Can I ask each of you what your involvement in the project has been?

**Ali:** When I first got involved with the project I wasn’t employed by the university, I was a local resident and very active working in other roles, particularly working with young people. I was excited to hear about the university coming to Grangetown, but I was also sceptical because Grangetown has had a lot of organisations and institutions come who don’t really embed themselves or do much here, who then get their outcomes and often leave, which is really short term.

An opportunity then came up to be employed by the university doing a lot of partnership working and get wider communities involved. I went for that opportunity and was glad to be successful. It’s been fantastic to really have the university embedded in the community. Young people can now resonate with the university and feel like the university is for them whereas before they may have seen it as some ivory tower. It’s made such a difference and I’m really glad to be part of it.

**Lynne:** We had a two-year pilot where we spent some money renovation the building, we opened the shutters and would try to keep the building open as much as possible. Me and Ali used to run an open day on a Friday. It was incredible. Just by having the shutters up, magical things that happened in that building. By having a physical hub, that is for everyone, not for Community Gateway, not for Grangetown Community Action, but for everyone in the community – it means it’s theirs. And that’s the great thing about this project, there’s no political affiliation, there’s no religious affiliation, it’s going to be accessible for all. Everyone feels like it’s theirs. It’s the opposite of an ivory tower, it’s something that belongs in Grangetown and to Grangetown. The open days were beautiful, funny but sometimes stressful because of the amount of people walking through the door, which is why we’ve now hired a full-time manager which is National Lottery funded. Sophie started on Monday – hello Sophie!

It was a joy to see how the people of Grangetown embraced having this building as somewhere where they recognised could be theirs to use for the wider community benefit.

**Deborah:** I first got involved with doing some gardening. There was a regular session for a while which was led by Ellen Roberts, a previous resident. For about two summers we did some fairly good vegetable growing done on a principal of plant it and then help yourself when it’s ready. I’m an artist and do community arts projects, so I’ve currently been doing things around the hoardings while the building site is up because we to find ways to continue the conversations.

**Josh:** I noticed some really beautiful portraits all around the hoardings.

**Deborah:** I organised two local artists, Jane Hubbard and Paul Edwards to do portraits of local residents, construction site workers and anyone else we came across in the park over two days. They’ve been put up on the hoarding as a way of keeping conversations going.

**Ash:** I first got involved when Richard Powell came to me as secretary of Grangetown Community Action and said they want to open up the old bowls pavilion as part of Grangetown festival and asked for our help. We organise an annual festival in this park and by adding the pavilion to it meant that we were able to have toilet facilities at the event which we haven’t been able to before. Richard told me about the project, and I felt this was something Grangetown Community Action could get involved with. We became partners and when my grandad was chair of Grangetown Community Action, he signed the partnership agreement, and when I became chair after he passed away, I carried on. And I’ve done as much as I can as a local councillor to support the project going forward. It’s been quite a journey over the last five years for me.

**Josh**: I’ve heard quite a lot from what you’ve been saying about convergence, things coming together, fortuitous, and you’ve used the word experiments. Over the last seven years of this evolving project, you must have all learnt so much. How are you keeping track of that and can you give me some examples of the things you’ve learnt?

**Deborah:** One is that there’s a real danger of volunteers and board members experiencing burnout. It’s really easy to get to that danger place where you’ve put so much in, and it’s really demanding. It gives a lot back and I get really excited by it, but it’s really demanding. Particularly somehow for me, because it’s where I actually live, it feels it affects me more. I do a lot of community work with different people in different places, but this somehow is magnified because it’s where I live and so is more personal.

As a board we try to do as much as we can to be sociable and friendly with each other. I have appointed myself on the board to be in especially responsible for being friendly to each other. I don’t know how much time we actually get to do that, it’s really easy for it to slip off the agenda. Because we are and will be facing all sorts of stresses, it’s important for us to stay as people and friends with each other so we deal with the stresses when they occur.

The other thing is that any situation like this, there is going to be decent and people are going to be cross and react to change and react to anything that involves money and power – which is what a building is in a way. We have had some people letting us know if it feels like it’s being not involving them or excluding people. There’s no way we’re going to avoid that absolutely, but it’s important that our response to that so far has been “please come in and talk to us about that”, rather than trying to defend ourselves or explain the whole story.

It’s been a long history and it feels important not to forget that history, which is something we’ve started to do. Finding a way of tracking the history so that we can record. So including the grit feels really important, although it’s not easy and will be quite difficult, and having as many voices around the table as possible.

**Ash:** One thing I’ve learnt is that no matter how much information you put our there, there’s always someone who doesn’t know. Over the years where for example we’ve suddenly had a new 3G pitch and people are blaming Cardiff University, when it was actually a gift from UEFA. Those little myth busters have been really difficult. Last year the council put the part in trust so nothing could happen to the park outside of this development, straight away there were rumours that the council were selling the park for houses. That’s what led us to thinking about how we can do myth busting. We did doors to doors, we created leaflets and flyers, we’ve had open events asking people to come in, loads online. Grangetown News has and article of Grange Pavilion in every edition for the last three years. But some people still don’t know, so communication is key to making a project like this a success, but I don’t think you can ever inform everyone.

**Ali:** I’m always learning. Before working for the university. I had lots of relationships with lots of organisations and leaders of those communities. I’ve learnt that the key is to always keep them informed. Build those relationships, strengthen those relationships, invite them to events and activities and even if they can’t come, ask them to recommend somebody else to come. We us social media and are constantly sharing our activities, big and small.

Like Ash said, you’re always going to miss somebody out, but we try to evaluate that and look at who we’ve missed out, which part of Grangetown have are missing and try to do some cohered advertising in those areas. I think we’ve done fantastically well as a group and a community.

We have an advisory panel which local schools sit on and we constantly ask them how they would like to benefit from the project, and we bring the university into the community so that they can see how they can utilise those relationships.

**Josh:** What is the long-term vision for the building and what role do you expect it to play in the community life of Grangetown?

**Deborah:** The really short answer is that this needs to be for everyone.

**Ali:** Absolutely. We have to recognise that Grangetown has some fantastic faith groups from the Hindu community, theirs are Christian churches, the Muslim faith is celebrated here and people of no faith, and to have a mutual building to bring all of these communities together has always been at the forefront of our conversations. Within your own spaces, whether it’s the pub or faith-based spaces, you only get those people who associate with those clubs or associations. However, with a neutral building, it really does say that everyone is welcome. When we open, our Centre Manager has a big job on their hand to really make sure that happens.

**Lynne:** It says on our lovely new information board in seven languages ‘Our new Grange Pavilion opening early 2020’ to reflect the diversity of Grangetown. We have Welsh, English, Polish, Czech, Urdu, Arabic and Somali.

**Josh:** When the building does open its doors in early 2020, what are the plans for keeping it going and sustainable once it’s opened its doors?

**Lynne:** We have a business plan. We have a projected revenue generated through room hire with different rates for private and charity hire and then a percentage of the hire will be absolutely free for members of the community who are developing ideas that will benefit community and not charging for it. Anyone with an idea where people from Grangetown can take part and benefit for free, they can have the room hire for free.

There will be a community focused café which will eventually start generating an income. We will continue to fundraise in the community, look for donations and apply for grants for project based activity. In the garden we’re looking at some horticulture and biodiversity training which could generate and income. We’re a bunch of very creative people who have spent the last three years knee deep in fundraising, and we’ve got the bug now!

We have a financial plan, we have a business plan, we have a projected revenue stream, but we are also very aware that we can’t rest on our laurels, we need to continue to fundraise and continue to be creative and maximise every opportunity the space gives us.

**Josh:** The focus of the episode is putting people in the lead, which is one of our priorities at The National Lottery Community Fund. That’s associated with a concept that you talk about called co-production. You talk about how you’re co-producing a community facility. What do you mean by co-production and how have you gone about doing it?

**Lynne:** Co-production is the bedrock of Community Gateway. Every project has to have a community lead and a university lead and projects should be for mutual benefit. They are the principles in which we abide when considering projects.

**Ash:** When I first got involved with Community Gateway back in 2014, there were nine themes that Community Gateway wanted to focus on from greener areas, cleaner streets and communication without barriers. The themes had been set but there were no projects there. For each project there will be that academic lead to make sure the university has some input and gets some benefit from it. Then there’s also the community lead to say what they think their community needs from the people they speak to. There must always be that mutual benefit, if it doesn’t benefit me as a local resident, we won’t do it and from the point of view of the university, if it doesn’t benefit them, we need to find a way that it can benefit them. There’s always been those conversations to see how things can work, there’s never been a no.

**Lynne:** A great example of co-production – we brought people together for our first ‘Love Grangetown’ event and a local resident said “I would really like to have a café where we can talk about deep things and have an ideas café where we can talk philosophy”, and sat next to him was a Grangetown resident who just so happens to be a Philosophy lecturer at Cardiff University. From there they both initiated the ‘Philosophy Café’ which has been held in various locations around Grangetown. Loads of people came to the philosophy café and had conversations they never imagined themselves having and thinking thoughts they never thought they would have. It was a beautiful synergistic thing to happen.

**Josh:** Co-production is a bit of a buzz word at the moment and it’s something that lots of public bodies are talking about. At The National Lottery Community Fund, we talk about a related idea which is the importance of putting people in the lead. We think that’s something that’s essential in projects, but we also know that it can be quite hard. How would you describe your experiences of working on a people-led project?

**Ash:** Deborah made a good point about the burnout element and over the last seven years, naturally we have seen people step away, either for personal reasons, moving out of the area or just struggling to keep up with the demand of trying to get a new charity up and running and trying to get a new building. It’s a big responsibility. The idea was completely born out of Grangetown residents and a lot of residents have stuck through it. Richard who came up with the original idea is still involved. There is a heavy commitment, but I don’t think there’s an expectation from the current board that you’re at every meeting and events, you give what you can give. One of the benefits of our board is how diverse it is and the makeup of it.

**Lynne:** There’s 18 members in total and you have representation of Cardiff and Vale College, Taff Housing, RSPB Cymru, Cardiff Bay Rotary Club and a number of Grangetown residents. It must be at least 60% residents, that’s written into our constitution, and Cardiff University representation too.

**Ash:**  I believe the community-led element is really important. I was raised in Grangetown and the community I see in front of me today is a bit different to when I was raised, but it’s still a community that you do things with, you don’t things to this community. It’s a community that asks where’s their involvement and says if they don’t want something. That’s something I’m really proud of in this area, when it comes down to it people really do roll up their sleeves, get involved and get what they want.

**Deborah:** I think there’s something about all the different voices and all the different groups – existing ones and new ones. If I try to find an image of it in my head – it’s either something like holding water or herding cats! A place, a neighbourhood, where we live, is a thing that’s living and always changing. There’s no point trying to control everything in a way! We need a lot of checks and balances and really careful planning and consideration. But the bottom line is we can’t control each other or other people, so we have to do it in conversation and what people want.

**Ash:** Going back to Deborah’s point about checks and balances, that’s the benefit of having those organisations sitting on the board, they all offer and expertise of some kind. The representative from Taff Housing, Lynne, is the Head of Finance and has been brilliant in showing us how to do things. And there’s been a lot of challenge from them back to the community and university to ask if this is the best way to go forward – but it’s always done in a positive way of them offering advice based on their experience. I think we’re seriously benefiting from that.

**Lynne:** If we had sat down in 2012 or in 2014 when we rolled the shutters up or in 2016 when we opened the old pavilion properly, if somebody had flashed the vision of this building in front of us, we would have all run away screaming! But it’s been an incremental journey, and every step of that journey we’ve all stuck together, adapted and been flexible. But ultimately, it’s us doing it, and we all want it to succeed, and we absolutely have faith that this is going to work because of the way people reacted to the old building and the building going up now is phenomenal!

The fact that we’ve all taken this journey together and there’s a great mix of residents, organisational representation and the university involvement makes it a very tight group with the commitment, the capacity, the skills, the expertise and the desire that’s needed to deliver something of this magnitude.

**Josh:** I think you’ve been using some quite creative methods to make sure the project is successful and reaches all of the different communities of Grangetown, can you tell us a bit more about that?

**Ali:** I’m on the ground a lot as part of my role, visiting communities and engaging with leaders. I’ve developed the Youth Forum to listen and respond to the voices of young people. They put on activities that young people want to get involved with, raise awareness of activities happening at the university that could benefit them. That group is made up of diverse voices with people of different backgrounds and a good gender balance.

Again, when I’m reaching out to the community they come from various backgrounds and languages. If those groups need a space to meet, we’ve been able to facilitate that in the old building and have found alternative spaces during the construction and we’re really looking forward to bringing them into the new space.

I speak a community language which helps because there are some members of the community that can’t speak English and do struggle, so being bilingual is very important. If there’s a resident where I can’t speak their language, but I can see a young person from the forum that does, I’m able to call them over the help translate. Recently Grangetown was identified as the most diverse ward in Wales which is something amazing to celebrate.

**Lynn**: We’ve always championed that this is a space for all. It’s probably going to be our strapline – Grange Pavilion, a space for all! There’s nobody that’s not welcome, everyone should coexist in harmony and we work very hard to express that and enforce it. We’re always inviting people in and have had events like a community Eid, Iftars, winter fairs, loads of activities that are open for all.

**Josh:** What would your advice be to other organisations that are seeking to put people in the lead in the development of a community facility?

**Ash:** Go for it! If you’ve got a group of you who have a vision like Richard started up with a few residents here, just roll with it. Try and get other people involved. It doesn’t have to stay in the same format. We’ve looked at so many options for this building, from redeveloping the old building to adding onto it, to flattening it and building a whole new thing, which is what we’ve done. There was always that flexibility from us so that we could stick with our original idea of having a space where someone could have a cup of coffee, have a chat or get involved in an activity in this park, but it’s completely different to what I first envisaged. But in reality, as a group we’ve just rolled with it, and that’s the best thing we could have done.

**Lynne:** Also, test it. The two years pilot taught us so much about us as a group, the nature of opening a building in the park, the needs, desires and wants of the community and the uptake. At the end of those two years we were certain that we were doing the right thing. People used the building and wanted it.

And partnerships. Partnerships give you capacity, skills, faith and encouragement. You double your capacity by having a genuine partnership.

So go for it, invite people in, test your idea, carry on the conversations!

**End**

Grange Pavilion is one of 11.000 projects funded every year by The National Lottery Community Fund. To find out more about Grange Pavilion visit [www.grangepavilion.wales](http://www.grangepavilion.wales)