



**EASTSIDE
COMMUNITY
TRUST**

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY TRUST EVALUATION

**EVALUATION
2020 - 2024**

Eastside Community Trust (Eastside) is a community anchor organisation working in Easton and Lawrence Hill. We were formed in 2020 following the merger of three existing charities; Easton Community Centre, Felix Road Adventure Playground and Up Our Street.

In December 2024 we commissioned an independent evaluation of the organisation to measure our impact since the merger, identify successes and areas for improvement and measure progress against our three key long-term outcomes.

The evaluation combined a range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, that prioritised participant voice and community conversations and included desk-top research, interviews and focus groups with over 70 people including residents, service users, staff, trustees, partners and online surveys with over 50 internal and external stakeholders.

KEY FINDINGS

- The merger of three charities into one community anchor organisation was a good decision
- The merger has resulted in an organisation that is resilient, relevant and responsive to needs
- The services that Eastside provides and facilitates are of a good quality for local people
- Eastside staff reported high levels of satisfaction and there was good feedback on staff from participants
- Partners were full of praise for Eastside and said we were a good organisation to partner with



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Our three key long-term outcomes:

Children have the freedom to play, be healthy and feel part of the local community.

Residents will be informed, have agency to participate, feel a sense of belonging and take pride in where they live.

Eastside runs inclusive, accessible and sustainable projects and places, which play a part in people's lives and improve their wellbeing.

THE MERGER

The merger was unanimously seen as a huge success by participants, importantly ensuring the survival of the three original charities. The organisation was seen to be thriving with high satisfaction ratings, strong governance, stable finances and was in a healthy position to develop, increasing its long-term impact in Easton and Lawrence Hill.

- Participants repeatedly said Eastside's two buildings, Felix Road Adventure Playground and Easton Community Centre had been transformed by the merger and were safe and welcoming.
- Good leadership meant the organisation was trusted and responsive to local issues and was now more resilient and efficient than it had been before the merger.
- There was clear feedback that equity, diversity and inclusion were at the core of what Eastside does well.
- Staff were widely praised and respected by respondents and staff said they had flourished in a supportive and stable working environment.
- A key participant feedback in the evaluation was that Eastside was providing or facilitating a wide range of activities, for all needs and ages, and that these were having a real impact on people's health, wellbeing, sense of belonging and connection.
- Distributing digital and non-digital community information to residents through the Up Our Street magazine, ebulletins, community notice boards and displays at the community centre was also highly valued.
- Respondents particularly praised our work during the Covid pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis and that the organisation had formed many impactful partnerships around advice, guidance and referrals.

“Eastside Community Trust is a fantastic anchor organisation for Easton. I often hold it up as an exemplar when talking to partners across Bristol about what local organisations can achieve for and with their communities. It manages two community assets extremely well. I've seen the Trust transform Easton Community Centre over recent years and respond to successive challenges, first as a vital space for promoting public health and helping people access vital support during the Covid pandemic, and latterly as a buzzy, welcoming place of safety, warmth and trust for a community buffeted by economic crisis and austerity.”

Partner

EASTON COMMUNITY CENTRE

Easton Community Centre was seen as much more welcoming and safe place by respondents and that the merger had saved the centre from financial difficulty. People said that the centre was really focused on promoting Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and was now a 'community living room' for everyone with plants and comfortable chairs. Reception staff were particularly praised for the welcome and support they gave to marginalised groups. The centre hosting partner organisations and projects i.e. BCfm radio, Somali Kitchen, Repair Cafe was seen as a real asset and resulted in wider impact beyond our work.

FELIX ROAD ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

Felix Road Adventure Playground came across in the evaluation as highly respected and loved with strong relationships with multiple local communities over many generations. Similar to the community centre respondents felt the merger had saved the playground from funding challenges and made it more sustainable long term – a rarity for adventure playgrounds nationally. There was the sense that post-merger there were more playworkers, more sessions and activities and more trips for children. Felix has flourished as a space that is safe and inclusive, where children were free and everyone was equal resulting in positive health, wellbeing and development outcomes for children and young people. Other outcomes included; separate sessions for girls, parents socialising and connecting, Freedom Kids Podcast and proactive engagement with Roma, Somali, Afghan and Senegalese communities. Playworkers were praised for the trusting caring relationships they had with children and young people often acting as 'surrogate parents'. Feedback showed that the high quality free food offer for all children cooked fresh every day was addressing food poverty and promoting healthy eating.

“ Eastside Community Trust do what they say on the tin. The team are hugely dedicated and constantly seeking to refine their work which helps to ensure they stay relevant and responsive to communities' needs and interests. They're the best!”

“ The community centre offers so much - affordable classes and acupuncture, a friendly welcome at any time, a great place for a neighbourhood meeting. I've been to films and parties there as well. It's good to know it's always there.”

“ Felix Road has actually changed my life because we live in a very small flat and don't have a garden, it's our second home”





WHAT CHILDREN SAID:

"Made me experiment with risks on the swings, and helped me get over my fear of heights by climbing a rope"

"It's the best playground you can be at. Everything's here and I enjoy everything when I'm here"

"If it wasn't for Ventures I would just be sitting at home, but I can come here and just chill"

"Would be 'trapping' [selling drugs] if I wasn't here"

UP OUR STREET + COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Up Our Street magazine and community development were also covered by the evaluation. Up Our Street magazine with its long history and quarterly distribution to 14,000 households was widely seen as an important source of 'community wisdom', what's happening in the community, events, activities and interesting articles. Several respondents said they looked forward to receiving and reading it. Similarly other non-digital information sharing - neighbourhood and community centre notice boards - with flyers and posters were valued by respondents. The Up Our Street radio show on BCfm's Community Hour was also seen as another positive local communication channel along with Eastside's regular ebulletin and social media. Our community development work was seen to be having a positive impact on a small and targeted scale i.e. Somali Women's Nights, Eastside Connect, Community Climate Action project. Collaborations with smaller groups like Somali Kitchen were seen as another example of our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. The championing of small groups and individuals at our annual Thank You Awards was described as a highlight in Easton's social calendar.

"Reading the local Up Our Street gives me such a sense of pride of the place we live and the people who live alongside us."

"I felt encouraged, hopeful and impressed by Eastside Community Trust taking leadership over environmental issues such as advice on energy efficiency."

"The annual Thank You Awards are an important, much anticipated and well-attended event and clearly demonstrate the role of Eastside Community Trust being a central hub for the area and a builder of networks across the community."

WHERE WE COULD IMPROVE

Things for us to consider four years into the merger included, reducing our geographical area and working in a smaller number of neighbourhoods. Further strategic clarity was needed around the role of members and maximising volunteering opportunities as well as improving diversity and representation at senior management level. Perceptions of the merger included Eastside becoming too grant dependent, and paradoxically also too business orientated and maybe expansionist at the expense of others. Some felt the current vision a place of possibility needed tightening while others felt the organisation was not necessarily community led but more responding to specific needs with a community focus.

FELIX ROAD ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

Suggestions for the playground included new structures with children's involvement in the design and build process, addressing the limited opportunities for young people aged 14-20 years, building closer links with youth partners to have early interventions on drugs and gangs, and a restart of Come Dine With Us for over 50's.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Suggestions for this work included more community outreach to areas in Eastside's Charitable Objectives e.g. St Judes, Newtown, The Dings or whether a more realistic and collaborative geographical area of priority was needed. Several respondents felt that Eastside had lost its campaigning role in the community, providing a forum to engage with statutory bodies or facilitating pressing community conversations.

EASTON COMMUNITY CENTRE

Easton Community Centre suggestions included longer opening hours in the evenings, music nights, activities for men and increased accessibility for wheelchair users.

“Eastside has navigated really well the merger of three separate organisations, but the demands of running community buildings are clear, and trying to juggle that with the community development strand looks hard from the outside.”

“More youth clubs for the 11-16 yr olds. It's a tricky age where you can get into trouble when bored. Give them stuff to do.”

“I think Easton Community Centre could be more accessible in the cafe area and the accessible toilet. I think it needs more sessions that include men.”

“Eastside should always have a listening ear and continue to offer activities that don't exclude local people by being too expensive.”



CONCLUSION

"This evaluation has confirmed a lot of the things we knew Eastside Community Trust was doing well as a relatively new community anchor organisation, as well as shining a light on areas where we can improve. We have made a strong start and already implemented significant changes since the merger in 2020.

Over the next three years we aim to maintain the high quality, consistent level of services and range of activity across our neighbourhood that is so valued by respondents of all ages in this evaluation.

We will continue to be relevant and responsive to identified need, and developing our equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives are key. We will always focus on maintaining and improving our well used and much-loved buildings namely Felix Road Adventure Playground and Easton Community Centre.

We need to consider our geographical priority areas and build meaningful partnerships across Easton and Lawrence Hill. We'll review the role of community development and explore how our residents can participate, belong and help bring about positive change for everyone.

The next three years are about developing further and stronger as a community anchor organisation. Building on the stability we have achieved since the merger by embedding a robust financial model, staffing structure and governance framework that we believe are the key to long term sustainability and measurable impact for people locally. We will be launching our new strategy in April 2025 and look forward to sharing this with the whole community."

We want to say a huge thank you to everyone who took part in our evaluation. We are really grateful for your time and consideration and giving your ideas and experiences. We are always keen to hear your ideas and feedback and you can do this any time on contact@upourstreet.org.uk or pop in and fill in a feedback form.





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