



For 10 years Places of Welcome have been creating spaces where all people feel safe to connect, belong and get involved.

Impact Report 2024

10th anniversary edition



At Places of Welcome we’ve seen the difference that community can make in people’s lives. We are dedicated to building a broad network of inclusive and accessible venues throughout England and Wales, opening their doors weekly as Places of Welcome. Each venue is supported by passionate leaders and volunteers who are committed to fostering welcoming spaces for everyone in their local areas. In this year’s snapshot report, we’ve taken the opportunity to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Places of Welcome. We share highlights from stories of impact in 2024 and share the ways participants and volunteers have strengthened the network over the years.

A Growing Network

Each autumn our annual snapshot report has provided an opportunity to listen to the network and understand more of the ways in which venues are developing. Our four previous surveys (conducted in 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023) give us a robust basis for comparison across years. Our learning from these, and case studies and stories from this year, have shaped this impact report as a fifth edition.

2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
370 venues	475 venues	610 venues	681 venues	821 venues

Over the last 10 years the Places of Welcome network has grown to include over 800 venues. This growth continues to diversify the network through different venue types and contexts and has increased reach and access for participants. Our Places of Welcome area coordinators play a key role in establishing and supporting venues in their areas, and links with social prescribers have encouraged engagement from participants looking for new opportunities and connections.



The 5 Ps are the core values of Places of Welcome and are adopted by every venue. Many venues also incorporate a range of activities that reflect the skills interests and personalities of those who run and participate in them and the needs of communities.

Place

An accessible and hospitable building, open at the same time every week.

People

Open to everyone regardless of their circumstances or situation, and staffed by volunteers.

Provision

Offering free refreshments (at least a cup of tea and a biscuit) and basic local information.

Participation

Recognises that every person coming to a Place of Welcome will bring talents, experiences and skills that they might be willing to share locally.

Presence

A place where people actively listen to one another.

In 2024 the Places of Welcome network grew to now include over 800 venues

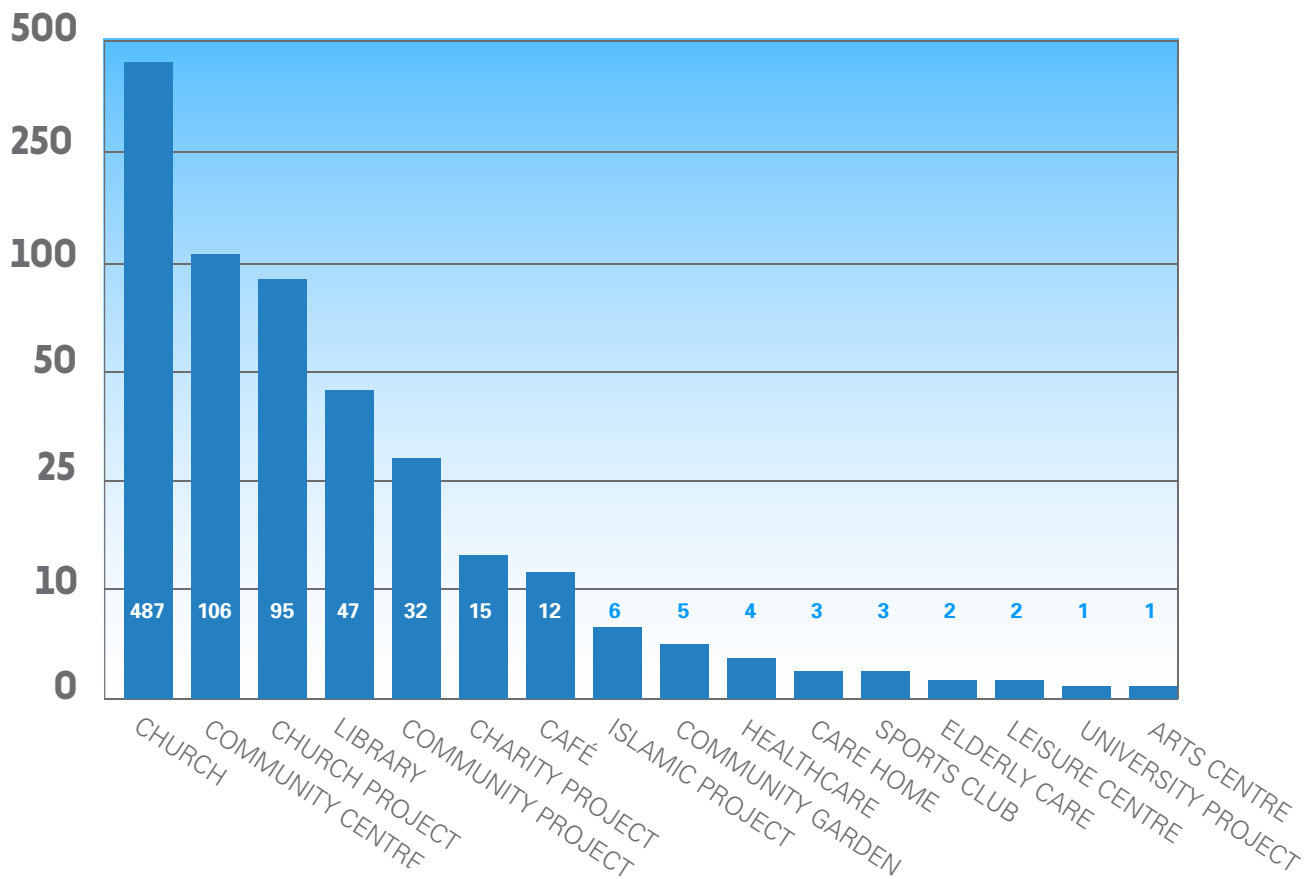
Venues have grown in depth and diversity, including people of different backgrounds

42 venues were awarded a Near Neighbours Micro Grant in 2024 to support their activities

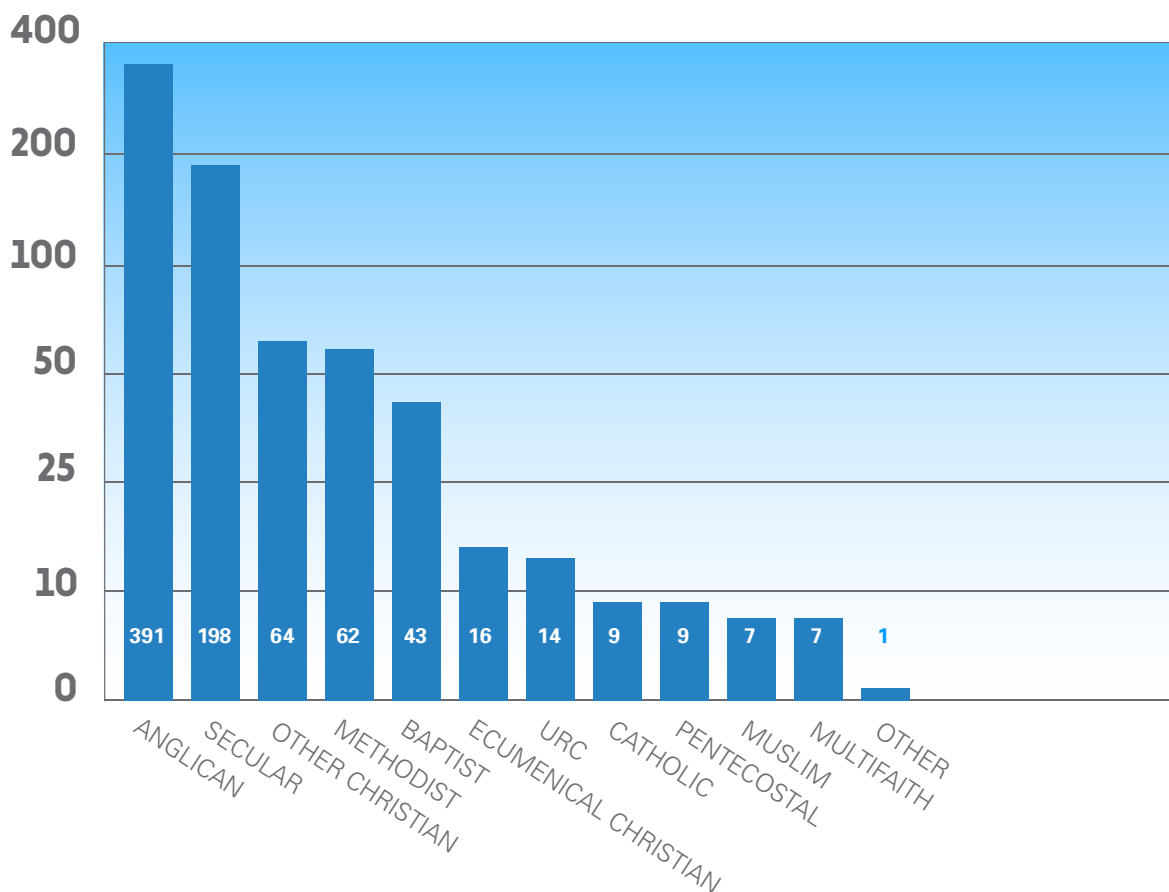
Partnerships with social prescribers, local authority staff and charities have been strengthened

Regional coordinators continue to play a crucial role offering local support

Places of Welcome venue types total 821



Places of Welcome venue by faith total 821



Reach Estimates

Our findings from previous snapshot surveys, suggest an average of 5 volunteers participating weekly at Places of Welcome venues. Considering the average number of weekly participants/visitors reported in the last two snapshot surveys we can draw an estimate of 27 individuals per venue. Based on this we can estimate that in 2024:

Places of Welcome are reaching approximately
22,167 people and **4,105** mobilising
volunteers, who participate in weekly activities

2024 Highlight Near Neighbours Micro Grants

This year Near Neighbours awarded micro-grants of £300-500 to 42 venues to support them in more effectively engaging diverse participants.

In end of grant surveys project leads reflected on the ways they had engaged with individuals from diverse backgrounds and worked to remove any perceived barriers to ensure a welcome for all.

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The Create and Calm Cafe, Nottingham, shared “we find that word searches help to support people whose first language is not English. We had a lady from Iraq that was supporting others with crocheting. We are also mindful of those who are fasting during Ramadan and encourage people to speak and have conversations about each other’s backgrounds and country of birth. Social prescribers are on site each session and link anyone attending into support.”

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Feel Good Factor, Leeds, shared “a participant came along to FGF activities after attending an exercise class at her local Doctors surgery. She had recently suffered a bereavement and had become isolated, her friend encouraged her to get out and take part in a class to help her health, both physical and mental. After talking to our staff over a number of weeks she volunteered her time and agreed to support the group by sharing her skills and running a craft session as part of it. She designed a number of projects including card making and small pieces of jewellery. She spent time with people sharing her skills and showing them how to make the items enabling them to learn and produce handmade items to take home. The classes were really busy and everyone enjoyed meeting new people in a relaxed environment.”

Micro grants were also used to provide refreshments, including a new coffee machine, mugs and large pots and pans to better support activities like cooking demonstrations. Project leads shared how grant awards had expanded reach though investing in advertising materials including flyers, posters and banners and enabled capacity building in some cases with the offer of a meal.



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Holy Apostles, Leicester, shared “encouraging conversation and food is a key part of what we do and we have decided as a result of our work, and ongoing commitment to our community, to extend our day and remain open until 2pm to include a free lunch and other community facilities to reach the poorest people in our community.”

Through story gathering, observations and survey returns from micro grant Places of Welcome in 2024 we have gained an insight into how Places of Welcome are engaging with diverse communities and encouraging participants to get involved. Most notable are the ways in which venues have developed an acute understanding of the needs in their communities by making themselves available and listening, then looking for ways they can respond. Resulting activities and resources include crafts, jigsaws, opportunities for exercise, gardening and a meal or access to food pantries. Over the last 10 years as the Places of Welcome network has grown, types of venues, activities and people engaging have become more diverse. In our conversations at micro grant venues this year participants most commonly shared it was the people that kept them coming back weekly and the friendships they had made.

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Summarising her experience in 2024, Lancashire Places of Welcome Coordinator Salma Begum shared “the highlight for me as the Near Neighbours Places of Welcome Coordinator has been witnessing the profound positive impact these Places of Welcome have had on individuals and communities. Seeing how they’ve fostered inclusivity and support, addressing inequalities, and providing essential services like food provision, mental health support, and assistance with addiction, has been truly inspiring. Moreover, being able to assist in establishing partnerships, facilitating local recognition, and promoting sustainability for these Places of Welcome has been immensely fulfilling. These experiences have reinforced my belief in the power of community and the importance of working together to create positive change.”

Learning from over the last 10 years, considering prominent themes and strands of work involved in Places of Welcome, has enabled us to draw out three key outcomes of the activities of the network. These are connect, belong and get involved. Below, we highlight impact stories from 2024 that demonstrate the difference the Places of Welcome network has made for individuals and also explore the motivations of project leads who are developing venues and encouraging participation.

1 Connect

Hamwattan Centre, West Yorkshire

Abdul Ghafoor Ratyal, Chairman of the Hamwattan Centre, has a vision for independence for the people who come to the Hamwattan Centre. Curating a programme of activities, English lessons, day trips and conversation, the team at the centre seek to create opportunities where this community can grow in confidence and connection.

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Abdul shared “a community that is independent, self-supporting and empowered is our aim. Gaining the confidence

to go to a hospital appointment and speak for yourself is so important. Not having to rely on younger family members or a translation allows for that independence which can make such a difference for an individual. We have seen the digital exclusion that many of our members face and we want to increase the digital literacy as a response to the exclusion we have seen. Whether that be booking an appointment or a train ticket we want our community to have access and as a result independence for longer.” He continued “we are on a journey of learning together, learning from other local organisations and examples that we see and sharing the knowledge that we have after running the sessions here. We provide signposting and listen to our members feedback looking at how they want to shape these sessions with activities or food. We want to encourage things that are useful and that the community will engage with. Our trips are an important part of our work and we have one coming up to the beach at Morecambe soon.

Providing that opportunity to be in nature is so important for mental health. As people start coming along they trust us and having that opportunity to be out in nature can really bring you out of yourself. The connection that we see at the centre is really important for people who come along.”

Community Cafe @ St Ambrose Barlow, Birmingham

The Community Cafe at St Ambrose Barlow is the first Roman Catholic Place of Welcome in Birmingham. Community Cafe Co-Ordinator, Hayley-Charlotte Haughton reflected on the ways the venue has encouraged connection “ultimately, inclusivity is what we want at our Community Cafe and we’ve always said there should be no barriers to accessing our venue. We have a nice, safe, airy space and you have the choice of chatting or sitting at a quiet table. This has been positive for some of our regulars who have additional needs and we make sure they feel included. Something as simple as having certain foods available for people can make a real difference.”

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Mandy, a participant at the cafe shared “I’ve been a carer

for nine years for my mum who has dementia and it’s been lovely

to see my mum engage with other people and feel comfortable at the cafe. She also helps out a little bit, with cleaning the tables and things like that, it makes her feel useful. She’s eighty seven now and to see her find that purpose here is so good, it’s a safe place for her to make friendships. Sometimes everyone will sit and sing songs and she really enjoys that. Mum met

2 Belong

Chase Aqua Rural Enterprise cic, Stafford

Chase Aqua Rural Enterprise cic (CARE) joined the Places of Welcome network in 2023 with an established ethos closely linked to the 5p's. The venue encourages belonging and community with opportunities to learn practical vocational and essential skills, to volunteer and be creative in a beautiful outdoor setting.

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Simon, a volunteer at CARE shared “I found out about CARE through the local Job Centre when I was looking for work,

they suggested accessing support from local community organisations including CARE, which helped me to build my confidence and explore volunteering opportunities. My experience here became a pathway to improving my life. I enjoyed interacting with people, and I realised how important being able to help others was to me. I attended a talk locally to find out more about how to care for people in the community and felt confident that I had the skills that were required. I know now I wouldn't have had the confidence to apply for these jobs without the experience I'd gained at CARE.”

He continued “I've been working as a Support Worker now for two and a half years and I really enjoy it. I still volunteer at CARE every couple of weeks to keep in touch with the friends I've made here. A lot of other people return and stay in touch too and I'll keep coming back for as long as I can. It's a calming place where they take time to get to know you, help support your wellbeing, skills and your next steps. Taking the first step into something like this is always the hardest thing- I would definitely encourage other people to come along and try it.”

Cosy Cafe, Nottingham

The Cosy Cafe was developed as a response to the cost of living crisis in The Meadows. Project lead David Shaw shared “we were seeing folk who were really struggling, particularly to heat their homes and you know just needing somewhere warm to be. We built the Cosy Cafe as a skills cafe,



so we've got the knitting and the jigsaws, which great for starting conversations. We've also got the garden, you know, just to be out there and have the space to work with a few people growing some veg has been a really good experience.”

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Graham, a participant at the cafe, shared “I was out walking my dogs and two of the regulars that come in here invited me

to come in and join them. They spotted me passing by and we had a chat when they were fussing the dogs. I asked them what this place is all about, and they told me it's like a cafe where anyone can come in and get a coffee, and there's also a free lunchtime meal. They said you should come in and try it, so I took my two dog's home and I've been coming every week since!”

He added “I've only lived in this area for about seven months or eight months and that was the first time I'd ever came into the Methodist Church building. I've met new people here and because I live alone, I come here to chat to people, I mean you meet people from all the different walks of life who have different tales to tell. It's the friendship and companionship that keeps me coming back.”

3 Get involved

EKTA session- Belgrave Neighbourhood Housing Association, Leicester

the Belgrave Neighbourhood Tenants Cooperative Place of Welcome offers sewing classes for beginners (in partnership with Leicester City Council), a food hub, and money saving advice. In several cases, people who initially accessed this Place of Welcome for support have now become active volunteers. Rupal, project lead at EKTA shared “the idea behind the project is that it’s open to everybody, especially in this part of Leicester and the recent Leicester disorders, it was just our way of trying to bring people together. So it’s a space that is open to anybody, regardless of faith, religion or background.”

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A volunteer at the EKTA session shared

“I’ve been volunteering here now for over a year and I’ve found it to be a

really enjoyable experience. I want to give back something here and as I speak Hindi, Gujarati and English I have been able to help a lot of people here with form filling. I work at the local pharmacy now and I’ve scheduled it so I have Monday afternoons and I can come to the session here because I really love being

involved. I never thought I’d really be able to be as helpful as I have been to some of the guests here being able to serve the tea and coffee or help with the language. I feel more confident now and I’ve seen guests grow in confidence since their first session. I think there is something really special here and I will keep volunteering for as long as I can!”

Warm Welcome- Elim Church, Leicester

The Place of Welcome at Elim Church Leicester was developed as a response to the need for friendship, food security and signposting in the local community. Each Wednesday, a group of dedicated volunteers offers a welcoming space at the church where people can gather and enjoy a hot meal. The venue is making a meaningful difference for those struggling with homelessness, isolation, and mental health issues. Encouraging participants through volunteering opportunities was one of the highlights that those we spoke with shared.

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Christine, a volunteer at Warm Welcome, shared

“when I first came to Elim, the first person I met was Sharon

(project lead) she offered me a drink and a sandwich and then I found out there was also a food pantry here. I was able to sign up then and start using it and I’ve been coming here ever since. That was around 18 months ago. I’ve got to meet new people here every week and I’ve got involved now in volunteering with the food pantry.”

She continued “a highlight for me at Elim was Christmas! People didn’t know it at the time but all the volunteers were given a tub of chocolates as a surprise and it made you feel like they do really appreciate you. You know, with the time you help them out with. It’s a lovely welcome here whoever you are and on the rare occasion it is not on I really miss coming here. I have good day and bad days with my health but I just love coming here on a Wednesday.”



Conclusion

Over the past 10 years, since the vision for Places of Welcome was first realised in Birmingham in 2014, the network has expanded in both reach and diversity, deepening its impact along the way. The volunteers who run their local Places of Welcome are the key to making it all possible, encouraging people to connect, find community and become volunteers themselves, bringing their own experiences and skills. For many, visiting a Place of Welcome is a weekly highlight that has positively impacted their wellbeing and sense of belonging, something that is important to all of us. We look forward to continuing our efforts in building a supportive and welcoming network of Places of Welcome venues for everyone.



**PLACES OF
WELCOME**

03300 531940 | info@placesofwelcome.org.uk
www.placesofwelcome.org.uk

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**With thanks to all the people who shared
their experiences with us**