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# Evaluation of Heritage Buddies and Connectors Scheme

March 2024



Historic England

# Wavehill: Social and Economic Research

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Date of document: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024

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# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the individuals across both the Heritage Buddies and Connectors Schemes who gave their time to assist in the evaluation, all of whom were important in the writing of this report. This evaluation would not have been possible without all these contributions.

## List of abbreviations

CVS	Community and Voluntary Service
NASP	National Academy for Social Prescribing
PCNs	Primary Care Networks
VCSFE	Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise organisations

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# Executive Summary

Heritage Buddies and Heritage Connectors were innovative pilot schemes funded by Historic England to trial two approaches to delivering social prescribing and wellbeing through heritage in local settings. The schemes ran between April and November 2023. This report provides detail of the main research findings from the evaluation study.

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## Evaluation findings

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Overall, the Heritage Buddies and Heritage Connectors pilot schemes met their core objective of testing how the heritage sector can contribute to the development of social prescribing.

The evidence generated for ‘what works’ in terms of the Heritage Buddies and Heritage Connectors models provides an important contribution to both the heritage sector and future social prescribing programmes.

Both schemes have contributed valuable learning on the application of social prescribing in a heritage context and how similar schemes need to be designed and resourced in the future in recognition of the barriers to accessing heritage.

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## Process evaluation

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Both schemes took an iterative approach to delivery, benefited from experience in similar schemes, and created collaborative stakeholder groups.

A key legacy of the schemes is the production of a toolkit for each model, offering practical guidance for future implementation of the schemes.

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## Outcome evaluation

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The schemes have delivered against the target of training 50-100 community members across the two pilots, with 32 Buddies trained and 70 Connectors in total.

The two pilots demonstrated increased understanding of the links between heritage and wellbeing and indicate a potential to increase individual and community wellbeing, although further research is needed to understand the longer-term impacts.

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## Potential to scale up

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The two pilot schemes demonstrate the potential for scaling up both models, if developed in consideration of the lessons learned outlined.

There is potential for the Heritage Buddies model to be embedded in VCSFE organisations themselves, whilst the existence of heritage social prescription as an option offered for the first time by a social prescribing service hosted by a Primary Care Network (PCN) demonstrates how the Connectors model can be embedded in existing health and social prescribing structures.



# 1. Introduction

In January 2023, Wavehill were commissioned by Historic England to undertake an independent evaluation of two pilot schemes; Heritage Buddies and Heritage Connectors. This report provides detail of the main research findings from the evaluation study.

## 1.1 Overview

Heritage Buddies and Heritage Connectors are innovative pilot schemes funded by Historic England to test and trial two approaches to delivering social prescribing and wellbeing through heritage in local settings. The schemes were commissioned in January 2023 and were due to finish in August-September 2023, however both projects secured extensions to October 2023 (Connectors) and November 2023 (Buddies).

The schemes aimed to realise opportunities for the heritage sector to link existing wellbeing offers to local volunteering and community support networks in a 'place-based approach'. The two pilot schemes have been delivered separately:

- **Heritage Buddies** was delivered in Nottingham and was led by Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (Nottingham CVS);
- **Heritage Connectors** was delivered in Frome in Somerset, and was led by Health Connections Mendip Service, part of Frome Medical Practice.

Both Frome Medical Practice and Nottingham CVS were chosen for their unique expertise and experience in developing the **Buddies and Connector models** in different sectors, on which the Heritage Buddies and Heritage Connectors schemes aimed to build.

The aims and objectives of the pilot schemes were to:

- To test how the heritage sector contributes to the development of social prescribing;
- To gather evidence of wellbeing effects of heritage engagement through the models;
- To support diversity in connection to local heritage; and,
- To make a case for the public value of wellbeing interventions related to heritage and the historic environment.

These aims were to be addressed by through the following activities:

- Creating a network of heritage partners, who will contribute to the heritage social prescribing 'offer' in the area;
- The development and delivery of tailored training programmes for Heritage Connectors and Heritage Buddies; and,
- The production of toolkits and materials to support the training programmes.

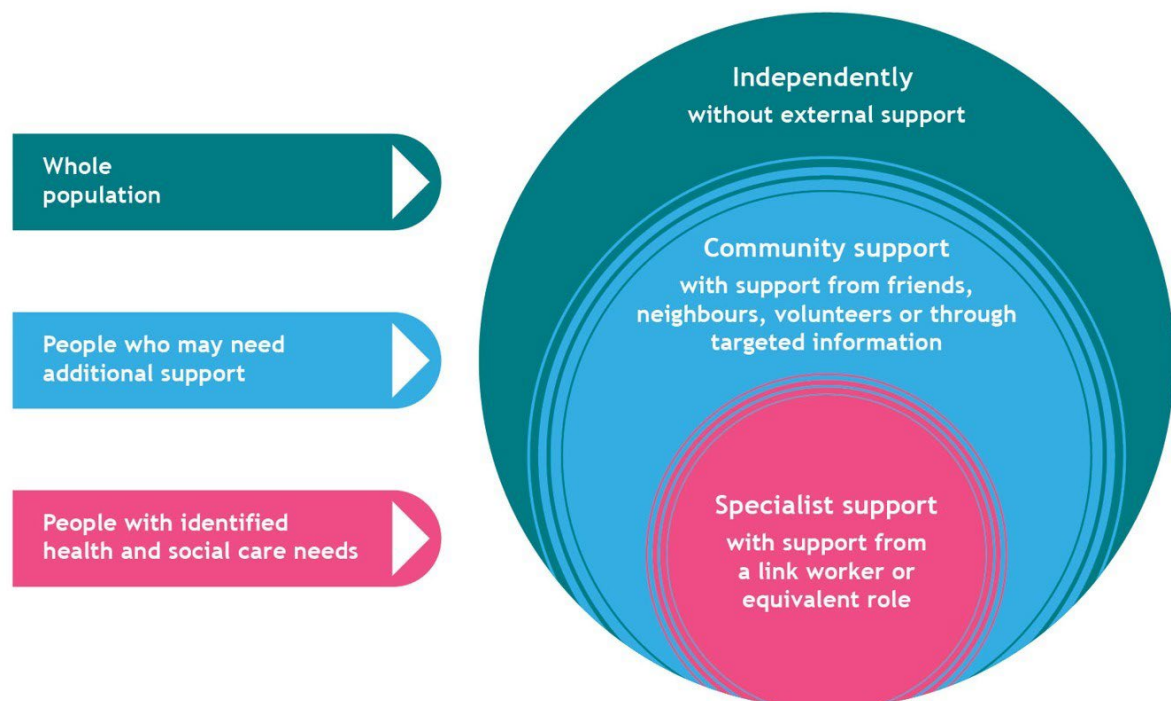
It was intended that these activities would be delivered with a view to training 50-100 community members as Connectors and Buddies, with 100 people signposted or referred to heritage activities. These targets were combined for both schemes and were not specific to either model. It was anticipated that the Connectors model had potential to training and engaging a higher volume of community members than the Buddies due to its design.

## 1.2 Social Prescribing and Heritage

The National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) defines social prescribing as an approach that aims to improve health and wellbeing by connecting people to practical support and social activities that matter to them.<sup>1</sup> With up to one in five GP appointments about wider social determinants of health rather than medical issues, social prescribing can play an important role in integrated care, supporting people with a range of health needs and reducing overprescribing.

Social prescribing connects people via different pathways, including link workers or community-based referrals, to activities, groups and services in their community and beyond to meet practical, social and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing. The below ecosystem illustrates the role that social prescribing can play in engaging and supporting different groups within the community and emphasise the importance of this being regarded as one system.

Figure 1.1: Social Prescribing Ecosystem



Source: National Academy for Social Prescribing

<sup>1</sup> [What is Social Prescribing?](#), NASP, 2023.



The model recognises that many people connect to social activities, services and opportunities independently, whilst others need support to make these connections. For people with more complex needs, this support may come from a professional who gets to know the individual, learns about their unique circumstances and preferences, and helps them to access a service based on their individual needs and wishes.

Currently NASP is advocating for the adoption of a “whole community approach”<sup>2</sup> to social prescribing. As such, Historic England is working towards gathering further evidence for the wellbeing impact of heritage and facilitating the development of national and regional social prescribing infrastructure in the heritage sector.<sup>3</sup>

Widening participation with heritage is a priority for the sector given the importance of heritage to people’s mental health wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> It is well established that participation in heritage varies, with people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people living in more disadvantaged areas underrepresented in the visitor profile.<sup>5</sup> Research outlines that there are several key barriers to accessing heritage, including;

- **Proximity and access:** both historic buildings and landscapes may present considerable accessibility challenges, including but not limited to provision of appropriate toilet, rest, or prayer facilities, clear and accurate information both ahead of time and on site, and physical access for wheelchair users or those with reduced mobility;
- **Cost and affordability:** the high cost associated with engaging with heritage sites includes both challenges around the lack of public transport and cost thereof and admission fees to sites;
- **Awareness and perceptions:** a lack of awareness of heritage, assumptions about typical audiences for heritage and perceived cultural irrelevance of heritage are understood to be important factors which may influence participation gaps.<sup>6</sup>

This highlights the important contribution that place-based schemes that focus on increasing individual motivation and capacity to engage in arts and cultural activities can play in reaching underrepresented groups, especially in areas of disadvantage.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [Whole Community Approach](#), NASP, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> [Heritage and Social Prescribing Evidence Report](#), Historic England, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> [The impact of historic places and assets on community wellbeing - a scoping review](#), Pennington A, Jones R, Bagnall A-M, South J, Corcoran R, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> [Heritage Counts](#), Historic England, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> [Barriers to Engagement in Heritage by Currently Under-Represented Groups](#), Rahim, N. and Mavra, L., 2009.

<sup>7</sup> [Associations between neighbourhood deprivation and engagement in arts, culture and heritage: evidence from two nationally-representative samples](#), Mak, H.W., Coulter, R., Fancourt, D., 2021.

Both schemes delivered through this programme of funding were based on pre-existing models of utilising local volunteering and community support networks to connect people to wellbeing and social prescribing services locally. These two models are set out below.

### 1.2.1 Buddies Model

The Heritage Buddies Model was based on the Nature Buddies programme, which was a green social prescribing test and learn project delivered by Nottingham CVS, funded by NASP and Natural England. The model is based on working with a range of third sector organisations to train Buddies to connect and support individuals with wellbeing and social prescribing services through heritage provision.

At the point of designing the Heritage Buddies scheme, the final Nature Buddies evaluation had not been completed. As such the impact evidence for this scheme did not inform the Heritage Buddies model, however there was continuity through the staff team at Nottingham CVS which contributed to the design and implementation of the pilot.

A Heritage Buddy is a specially trained volunteer who helps a person, on a one-to-one basis or as part of a small group, to overcome barriers to taking part in activities they want to do. The Buddies act as facilitators or enablers to support those who may not have the confidence or who may face additional barriers to visiting heritage sites or connecting with local heritage activities.

Several approaches were piloted to implement this model based on engaging with Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise organisations (VCSFE) and sector-specific organisations, with the final model including two core strands:

- **A 'site specific' Buddy role within heritage organisations:** through engagement with volunteer coordinators at heritage sites with pre-existing volunteer schemes, the coordinator would deliver Heritage Buddy training to these volunteers to allow them to facilitate visits to the site;
- **A 'Heritage Informed' Buddy within befriending and community support organisations:** where organisations were provided with information to signpost to heritage events. This included the development of an online directory of the heritage offer in Nottingham.

More detail about how the model developed over the course of the scheme can be found in [Section 3.1.1](#).

### 1.2.2 Connector Model

The Connector Model, developed by Frome Medical Practice in 2013,<sup>8</sup> is based on training everyday community members to signpost people to social prescribing access points in the town. Trained 'Connectors' are community members who act as living notice boards; anyone can be a connector, from shop owners and hairdressers to taxi drivers and homeless people.

This approach strives to engage the whole community in a non-intrusive and proactive way, which helps reach isolated members of the community and lift pressure on GPs and NHS-employed social prescribing link workers. The existing evidence associated with the Community Connectors suggests that it can be part of a model which can be associated with reductions in unplanned admissions to hospital and an associated decrease in healthcare costs across the whole population of Frome over time.<sup>9</sup>

To date, this has been piloted through Community Connectors, providing a bridge between local people and other services, and Health Connectors, who work one-to-one with patients in Mendip General Practices and in patients' homes. The Frome's Connector model requires the existence of three information access points, namely an online directory, a dedicated telephone line and a person that you can speak to, covering all different ways of referral that people may find useful and appropriate to locate social prescribing services or wellbeing activities.

**Heritage Connectors** sought to adopt a similar approach, testing the potential of heritage to support local health needs via the emerging social prescribing infrastructure. More detail on how the model was delivered in practice can be found in [Section 3.1.2](#).

## 1.3 Evaluation Context

In January 2023, Wavehill were commissioned by Historic England to undertake an evaluation of the operation. The aim of this review is threefold:

- Firstly, a **process review** looked at both models holistically to explore successes, challenges and learning around engagement, partnership working and inclusion;
- Secondly, a detailed review of both pilots was undertaken to understand **the impact** they have had on the health and wellbeing of referred individuals, trained Buddies and Connectors, delivery organisations, the heritage sector and wider stakeholders; and

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<sup>8</sup> Our Model, Health Connections Mendip. Available at: <https://healthconnectionsmandip.org/our-model/>

<sup>9</sup> [Reducing emergency hospital admissions: a population health complex intervention of an enhanced model of primary care and compassionate communities](#), Julian Abel, Helen Kingston, Andrew Scally, Jenny Hartnoll, Gareth Hannam, Alexandra Thomson-Moore and Allan Kellehear, 2018.

- Finally, the process and impact aspects of the evaluation have been drawn together to identify the specific areas of good practice and make key recommendations for **upscaling the models** and transferring to other locations.

A more detailed description of the evaluation process is included in [Section 2: Methodology](#).

## 1.4 Navigating this Report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- [Section 2](#) sets out the methodology and data collection methods employed by the evaluation;
- [Section 3](#) reviews the process of the two pilot schemes, including the design, the delivery and the management and governance;
- [Section 4](#) provides detail on the outputs and outcomes associated with the schemes, including the number of Buddies and Connectors training, the outcomes for these individuals and the wider communities in Nottingham and Frome;
- [Section 5](#) considers the lessons learned generated by the schemes relating to applying social prescribing to a heritage context and the potential to scale up the schemes to other locations; and,
- [Section 6](#) provides conclusions and recommendations based on all aspects of the evaluation.

## 2. Methodology

This section sets out the research methods and analysis approach that informed this report.

### 2.1 Data Collection Methods

The information used to inform this evaluation has been drawn from:



#### **Scoping interviews with key staff (n=5)**

These were conducted on a one-to-one basis via video call in February 2022.



#### **Interviews with management and delivery staff (n=6)**

These were conducted via video call on a one-to-one basis in November 2022.



#### **Interviews with stakeholders (n=9)**

These were conducted via video call on a one-to-one basis in November 2022.



#### **Engagement forms (monitoring information) (Buddies, n=23)**

Following the training, Buddies and Connectors were asked to fill in an engagement form. Due to personnel challenges, the Connectors were unable to share the final forms.



#### **Survey of trained Buddies (n=17)**

An online survey was shared with trained Buddies, between one and two months after the training session.



#### **Online focus group with trained Buddies (n=2)**

The focus group was undertaken to understand the perspectives of those trained to be Buddies, and the impact it may have had on them.



#### **Site visits to Frome and Nottingham**

The evaluation team conducted two site visits, one to each project, to meet with the project teams and understand the approaches taken to project activities, promotion, and training in practice.



#### **Attendance at Steering Group meetings**

Wavehill attended several Steering Group meetings for both schemes throughout the programme to identify informal lessons learned. This informed the lines of enquiry developed throughout the evaluation.

## 2.2 Evaluation Questions

The table below outlines the key evaluation questions and the main sources of data supporting the assessment of the pilot schemes.

Table: 2.1: Evaluation questions and corresponding research approaches

Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions	Measure	Data Source
<b>How were the projects delivered in practice?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were they implemented as intended/any adaptations?</li> <li>• What factors enabled implementation?</li> <li>• What worked well and what could be improved with regards to the project design and delivery?</li> <li>• What was the projects' reach and engagement?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff interviews</li> <li>• Stakeholder interviews including heritage providers</li> <li>• Review of project documentation</li> <li>• Attendance at steering group meeting</li> </ul>
<b>What was the impact on participants?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have they noticed a difference in the feelings of belonging, purpose, pride of place, community cohesion?</li> <li>• Have people increased their knowledge about the wellbeing effects of engaging with local heritage?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of people signposted or referred to heritage activities</li> <li>• Number of sessions held with individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups with Buddies/Connectors</li> <li>• Review of participant monitoring data</li> <li>• Participant interviews<sup>10</sup></li> </ul>
<b>What was the impact on Buddies and Connectors?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have people increased their knowledge about the wellbeing effects of engaging with local heritage?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of trained buddies and connectors</li> <li>• Demographic profile of buddies and connectors trained</li> <li>• Nature of training delivered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of participant monitoring data</li> <li>• Staff interviews</li> <li>• Focus group with Buddies and Connectors</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> This data collection activity did not take place – please see [Section 2.4](#) for limitations.

Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions	Measure	Data Source
<b>What was the impact on the social prescribing landscape?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have social prescribers (both within and outside the NHS) started to refer people more often to heritage activities?</li> <li>• Were there any unintended outcomes (positive or negative)?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of heritage activities</li> <li>• Is there an increased knowledge about the wellbeing effects of engaging with local heritage?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Site visits</li> </ul>
<b>How could the model(s) be scaled up?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What needs to be considered for this to happen?</li> <li>• What lessons have been learned that could be applied to this model in the future?</li> <li>• Could these models be implemented in other localities?</li> <li>• What are the necessary elements of the models to be successfully established and delivered elsewhere?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff interviews</li> <li>• Stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Site visits</li> </ul>

## 2.3 Analysis Approach

Qualitative and quantitative data has been triangulated to form the evidence for the findings of this evaluation. The approach to analysing this data includes:

- **Desk based research** – reviews of Heritage Buddies and Heritage Connectors project documentation and a review of the logic model was undertaken to test the rationale of the project and inform the evaluation framework. The desk review considered resources developed including training resources and promotional material;
- **Facilitation of project monitoring information collection** – the evaluation team supported both projects in the creation of data collection tools. Engagement tools were developed to be delivered by project coordinators during the Buddies/Connectors training sessions as part of the ‘sign up’ process collating information on demographic profile of those trained;

- **Qualitative analysis of interviews with staff and stakeholders** was carried out in recognition of the specific models and context of both projects. A thematic analysis allowed consideration of each scheme individually and where findings were consistent across both schemes; and
- **Quantitative and qualitative analysis of survey of trained Heritage Buddies** was carried out as well as qualitative coding of open response questions, drawing out quotes where relevant.

## 2.4 Limitations

Several limitations should be noted for the evaluation across both schemes. Initially, the evaluation planned to conduct a pre- and post-survey with trained Heritage Buddies and Connectors, designed to collect data on their background, views, skills and experience prior to engaging with the scheme and three months after. However, the design and implementation of the two schemes took longer than anticipated and it was decided that two waves of a survey would not be feasible within the timeframes for the evaluation.

Equally, considering the light touch approach of the Heritage Connectors model, the evaluation was conscious that participation in the evaluation should be proportionate to engagement with the scheme itself. Without a longitudinal survey, it was felt that capturing individual-level wellbeing measures would not be useful or appropriate. As such, self-reported improvement measures were incorporated into a survey, and focus groups used to explore the wider impacts on Buddies/Connectors.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to collect data relating to the experiences and outcomes for participants. The limited timeframes for delivery during the pilot phase meant that Buddies/Connectors had insufficient time to engage and deliver support to participants.

Due to staff absence leading to challenges sharing data, it was not possible to distribute a survey to Heritage Connectors, which was partially remedied by using interim reports shared by the project coordinator. As such, there is considerably more data for the Heritage Buddies pilot than the Connectors pilot. This has limited the ability to undertake a comparative analysis across the schemes. The evaluation focus within Connectors therefore draws on qualitative evidence collated from feedback and interviews of staff, stakeholders and partners and drew comparisons with other Connectors schemes.

Despite best efforts to recruit Heritage Buddies for focus group, there was limited uptake with only one focus group was conducted with two participants. This can be partially attributed to the poor timing of the focus groups just before the Christmas period.

The timelines of the pilot schemes did not always run in parallel, which added complexity to delivering data collection activities. More broadly there are limitations around the extent to which any short-term pilot can capture and evidence medium and longer-term outcomes relating to wellbeing. Combined these challenges provide learning points to inform the design of any future schemes with similar objectives.



## 3. Process Review

This section draws on data from the interviews with staff and stakeholders to explore successes, challenges and learning from the design and delivery of the projects. This first considers the commonalities between schemes and then reviews scheme-specific insights.

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### Summary

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- Both schemes took an iterative approach to fully implementing the models, prioritising the development of the models in practice over delivering activities to participants. There was still considerable upfront resource needed to establish the projects themselves and apply them in a heritage context and additional staffing resource was required for both schemes and was provided in-kind by the project teams.
- Designing the scheme in collaboration with stakeholders was a key enabler of success of the early phase of the scheme for Heritage Buddies, whilst for Heritage Connectors, the Connectors model was well established in Frome, where the branding/terminology used by the project would be likely to resonate with local people.
- For Buddies, a key strength lay in the role of Nottingham CVS as an organisation that had strong networks with volunteering and community groups. They successfully collaborated with a range of leading local heritage organisations as well as community organisations who didn't traditionally engage with the heritage sector showing positive steps to address the barriers outlined in [Section 2.1](#).
- For Connectors, involving staff who were well embedded into the heritage sector provided important sector-specific and local understanding, as well as pre-existing relationships with stakeholders and organisations. However, this demonstrates the challenges of widening access to individuals and organisations who are less likely to access heritage and moving beyond traditional heritage audiences.

### 3.1 Design

The aim behind funding the schemes was to test and trial two approaches to delivering social prescribing and wellbeing through heritage in local settings. The schemes were funded in full by Historic England, initially for nine months from January to August 2023. The projects were delivered separately, with both overseen by a Project Assurance Officer at Historic England, who provided strategic and operational support.

Nottingham CVS and Frome Medical Practice were chosen to deliver the pilots due to the existing evidence for the Buddies model and Connectors models which had already been trialled previously in different contexts or sectors. Whilst developing pre-existing models may have gone a certain way to creating the foundation for the heritage schemes, **there was still considerable upfront resource needed to establish the projects themselves and apply them in a heritage context.**

The schemes were managed by existing members of staff in Nottingham CVS and Frome Medical Practice but recruited new staff into project coordinator roles. Both project coordinators were employed in part time roles (0.4 FTE or two days a week).

This reflected the size and budget of the schemes. **However, additional staffing resource was required for both schemes and was provided in-kind by the project teams.**

Due to delays in recruitment for the Heritage Buddies coordinator, the Buddies scheme started in April 2023. Heritage Connectors also experienced personnel challenges during the delivery period, which led to some delays in activities commencing. **This demonstrates a well-known challenge in short-term project-based work, where the delivery is heavily reliant on a single individual. This can lead to single points of failure in the skills, knowledge, stakeholder relationships, or data if these individuals are not available.**

Staff and stakeholders responded overwhelmingly that the timeline for the scheme was too short to fully implement the projects as intended; neither scheme was able to pilot delivery to participants over a large enough scale to collect meaningful evaluation data. As pilot projects, there was a recognition that there were many aspects of the design and delivery that were not fully understood at the outset, and **both schemes took an iterative approach to fully implementing the models in collaboration with stakeholders.** However, this took considerably more time than anticipated or allowed in the timeline. This is explored in more detail in [Section 3.1.1](#) and [Section 3.1.2](#) relating to each schemes specific context.

Both projects **took a place-based approach** to developing their schemes, designing their approaches in recognition of the specific needs and characteristics of the local area in which they delivered activity. As such, whilst some of the learning generated by projects is specific to the two models developed and different activities delivered, **the findings should be understood in the context of the two locations in which activity was delivered. This includes, but is not limited to, the respective demographic profile of each place, the health context, and the heritage provision on offer.**

The following sections will explain the models in more detail and how they evolved over the course of the project, including how this developed with stakeholder input or in response to challenges.

### 3.1.1 Heritage Buddies

**Designing the scheme in collaboration with stakeholders was a key enabler of success of the early phase of the scheme.** From the outset, the project staff identified individuals who were well established in the heritage sector in Nottingham who were invited to sit on the monthly Steering Group who contributed on a strategic level to the design of the scheme.

Project staff, along with support from the steering group, also established a list of relevant organisations, including heritage sites, community groups, and befriending organisations who they approach to gauge interest and capacity to participate.

This also generated valuable feedback relating to how best to ‘pitch’ the project to prospective participants. **Staff noted that whilst there was strong interest in being involved in the scheme, those organisations who responded to decline involvement said this was due to capacity reasons.**

There was strong engagement with a broad range of heritage organisations, including Nottingham City Council provision, both local and national charities, and other national organisations with local provision. There was good commitment from project staff to actively target community organisations which worked to support individuals or communities who were less likely to engage with heritage.

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‘But it was really interesting to have those discussions, early doors about what it could look like and how we can be more inclusive and what the benefits of that are.’ **Stakeholder**

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Following this initial engagement with organisations, the project team ran a series of co-design workshops to develop the induction training for Heritage Buddies. These co-design workshops took place with volunteer leads from heritage organisations, befriending organisations, and community organisations. **These workshops provided the opportunity to test the proposed models and understand how they may add value to each organisation and the wider sector.**

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‘You have to communicate with each heritage organisation who all have different structure, different ways of working. I think the way we worked around this was by being as flexible as possible and letting the project be very much led by the individual organisations and trying to respond to aligning this project with their actual needs.’ **Heritage Buddies Staff**

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The adoption of a **co-production approach** with stakeholders both through the Steering Group and the co-design workshop was important aspect of securing buy-in and commitment from heritage organisations, demonstrating the ways in which the pilot could align with their own objectives (such as growing their visitor numbers, diversifying their visitor profile, and supporting place objectives). This approach ensured the scheme was responsive to the needs and capacity to participate of organisations but within the remit and scope of the scheme:

- **For heritage organisations**, the initial Buddy role providing one-to-one support for an individual was not suitable due to concerns around safeguarding and lone-working policies and practices. Equally, interviews with stakeholders highlighted challenges with this approach associated with repeated engagement to build ongoing relationships, where it could not be guaranteed that the same person would be on a volunteering shift

The core heritage organisations which contributed volunteers to the final Heritage Buddies training included Newstead Abbey, Nottingham Castle, the National Justice Museum and York Archaeology;

- **For community and befriending organisations**, this led to learning around how the role could fit within their existing activities and provide additional capacity to their services. Feedback included that training a Heritage Buddy as an exclusive role was too ‘niche’ for many of their services, and the considerable barriers around perception of heritage and the accessibility of heritage sites. The community and befriending organisations included: Refugee Roots, Nottingham Women’s Centre, Improving Lives, and the Chinese Welfare Association.

Considerable effort was made to find an approach that was appropriate for each organisation to facilitate participation, with a focus on a few key organisations in order to progress the delivery of the training. However, one stakeholder noted that whilst a flexible approach was important for developing pilot interventions, there is a risk of trying to adapt the scheme for every organisation, which would not be sustainable in the long term.

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‘I suppose the double-edged sword is every organisation is different and you’re always going to end up with a bespoke package. That eventually makes it the best thing about it.’ **Heritage Buddies Stakeholder**

‘I think people prefer being presented with a role rather than presented as a loose idea. We do obviously want people’s input, but I think people wanted more structured guidance.’ **Heritage Buddies Stakeholder**

‘In the end to save time and resource we decided to focus down on a few key organisations with a strong volunteering ethos rather than spread the net too wide.’ **Heritage Buddies Staff**

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### 3.1.2 Heritage Connectors

Heritage Connectors was designed and delivered through the Health Connections Mendip service, which is the social prescribing and health coaching team at Frome Medical Practice. **Stakeholders suggested that the ‘Connectors’ model was well established in Frome, where the branding/terminology used by the project would be likely to resonate with local people.**

The Heritage Connectors model is built on the original Community Connectors model, which was subsequently piloted through the Green Community Connector project which focussed on the connection between health and the local environment. Since, there has been a range of Connector types, including Digital Connectors, Hearing Connectors, Planning Ahead Connectors and Fire Safety Connectors<sup>11</sup>. Crucially, anyone can be a Connector; the approach is premised on not about being a volunteer but someone in the community who knows that there is support out there and can signpost others.

The design of the scheme was well-focused, with precision around key messages important in communicating the role and purpose of the Heritage Connectors. This is particularly important considering the Connector role is light-touch, and in practice is related to small interactions. **Stakeholders suggested that whilst this light touch role may be effective at reaching those who might not otherwise engage with either social prescribing services or with heritage, this presents challenges in terms of identifying the target individuals and understanding and monitoring both individual and community-level impacts.**

Staff highlighted that a key aspect of the design of the programme was to **establish what the local needs are and how the scheme could address these needs**. This included understanding the specific health and wellbeing needs, as well as mapping areas of deprivation or demographic groups who may not traditionally engage with heritage. As part of this process, staff experienced challenges finding the necessary local health and health inequalities data. The national datasets such as the data available from the Office for Health Improvements and Disparities<sup>12</sup> and NHS Healthcare Inequalities Improvement Dashboard<sup>13</sup> were found to be challenging to navigate and use at a local level and as a result, not practical to inform the pilot. **Ultimately, the approach taken was to rely on the PCN staff and their knowledge and local experience to flag the main issues and inequalities in Frome.**

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‘It also makes sense for Frome as an area to offer this kind of support, as there is already quite a strong presence of heritage-related community groups, including those ran by volunteers.’ **Heritage Connectors Stakeholder**

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During the initial design phase of the project, staff conducted a review of the heritage provision in Frome to map out the ‘heritage offer’ to be added to the key access points, including a stakeholder analysis.

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<sup>11</sup> [Training](#), Health Connections Mendip, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> [Office for Health Improvements and Disparities](#), UK Government, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> [Healthcare Inequalities Improvement Dashboard](#), NHS England, 2023.

Whilst several stakeholders highlighted the rich heritage offer in Frome, some also noted challenges in moving beyond the traditional organisations and heritage activities in the town. **This is a difficult balance to strike; being well embedded into the heritage sector may provide important sector-specific and local understanding, as well as pre-existing relationships with stakeholders and organisations. However, it may also lead to challenges in widening access to individuals and organisations who are less likely to access heritage.**

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‘Even if you’re already part of a heritage group we’re often going off of what we know in our little bubbles, signposting can help to plug any gaps in knowledge.’ **Heritage Connectors Stakeholder**

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## 3.2 Delivery

This section will set out what was delivered by the pilots, including the engagement strategy with relevant partners and Buddies and the nature of the training delivered. It will consider what worked well and what worked less well for project delivery.

### 3.2.1 Heritage Buddies

#### Engagement approach

For heritage organisations, targeted communications through volunteer coordinators facilitated engagement with volunteers. Staff noted that organisations were generally very positive about the initiative, but many did not have the capacity to get involved. Through this engagement process are several lessons learned about volunteer engagement:

- One heritage provider did not have a pre-existing cohort of volunteers, and the volunteer coordinator was new in post. Staff identified an **opportunity to embed the Heritage Buddies training into the volunteer induction process**, which would have included DBS checks, however the volunteer coordinator felt this may introduce hesitancy on the part of volunteers to be involved;
- Another heritage provider with an existing volunteer base found that interest and uptake was strong from volunteers who primarily volunteered to support the indoor aspect of the heritage site, whilst there was limited interest from those who focussed their volunteering on the grounds or estate of the site;
- Volunteer coordinators and responses from the survey for trained Heritage Buddies suggested that **clarity of the role was an important aspect of engaging with volunteers**. Whilst it’s recognised that the role was being developed through the pilot, this will be important for future delivery of this model.

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‘We had an email out originally about what it was about and assumed it was volunteers assisting other volunteers, so we signed up thinking we'd be buddies for people who were already volunteers, and it was totally different to that so needs to be made clear.’ **Heritage Buddies Survey Response**

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In addition, staff suggested that whilst engaging with the befriending and community groups was a crucial aspect of the community social prescribing element of the project, engaging with these groups considerable time.

### Training

Two types of training approaches were taken for the two core strands of the programme, which required different resources and tools.

For volunteers within heritage organisations the training was intended to be delivered over two sessions. These sessions explored the concept and rationale of the project, explained the potential benefits of being a Buddy and what the role entailed, informed them of the heritage assets and activities on offer, and how to reduce feelings and isolation and enhance feelings of belonging.

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We talked to them about potential cultural and language barriers and how to meet them, active listening, and how to engage with participants in an empathetic way...Also how to set emotional and physical boundaries, and safeguarding. **Heritage Buddies Staff**

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Stakeholders were positive about the format and the content of the training, noting that the sessions were facilitated in a way which encouraged discussion and put volunteers at ease. One volunteer coordinator noted that considering the limited capacity of volunteer coordinators, who predominantly worked part-time roles, the training added considerable value to the support and training they were able to offer their volunteers.

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‘The session was really good, and the presentation was really visual and at a really good pace.’ **Heritage Buddies Stakeholder**

‘It felt really informal in a good way that it encouraged discussion.’  
**Heritage Buddies Stakeholder**

‘My volunteer felt really excited about what she could do with that information.’ **Heritage Buddies Stakeholder**

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For community and befriending organisations, a heritage directory was hosted on the Nottingham CVS website, alongside a 'Heritage in Nottingham resource' which was presented in workshop style both online and in person at a Heritage site. These resources were effective in responding to the needs of befriending and community organisations.

For community and befriending organisations, a guided visit was held at a heritage site (the William Booth Museum) to gather feedback from both volunteers and participants. The event was attended by a combination of volunteer coordinators, volunteers and service users (participants), including a social prescribing link worker and patient who had approached the project coordinator. This demonstrated the value of the site-specific supportive Buddy, who facilitate engagement with the heritage site for participants. Key learning included:

- The importance of the facilitator role; several attendees suggested they didn't know particular sites existed and wouldn't have visited without the support;
- Heritage sites can be a good opportunity for facilitated visits for social prescribing patients, however the presence of the social prescribing link work was still required throughout;
- For both the Chinese Welfare Association and Refugee Roots, the role of Buddies as facilitators of reducing language barriers was evident.

### 3.2.2 Heritage Connectors

#### Engagement approach

Whilst there are some examples of outreach work and needs-based approach to recruiting Heritage Connectors being adopted when trying to expand the offer, the nature of the scheme means that it does not have a formal engagement strategy. Staff noted that for previous Connector models there was greater resource to allow staff to promote the scheme and training within the town.

#### Training

The Heritage Connectors training session was designed to last 30-45 mins in person, and usually comprised of a Powerpoint presentation, delivered to a group of participants, followed by discussions and Q&A session. The project coordinator led the sessions which took part in rooms provided freely by either Frome City Council or Frome Medical Practice.

The three key messages are about signposting others to the three main points of information for accessing heritage wellbeing activities locally;

#### **Three key messages:**

- What is heritage and how can it benefit our health and wellbeing?
- How does the Heritage Connectors scheme work?
- What do the Heritage Connectors do/say to people (the three key messages)?



### Three access points:

- The online directory (on Discover Frome and on the Health Connections websites in Frome);
- The phone line (at Discover Frome);
- The physical place (the Heritage Café in Frome), welcoming anyone at the specified location, day and time every month.



An example of a postcard showing the three access points

### The establishment of these access points at pace is a key success of the scheme,

demonstrating the way in which these access points can be embedded into existing structures which will exist beyond the lifetime of the scheme.

Staff suggested that **the production of postcards and leaflets were an important factor as part of the Heritage Connectors training development, as they help the Heritage Connectors retain the key messages and further distribute those in the community.** This learning came directly from previous experience delivering similar training for Community Connectors.

Staff suggested five Heritage Connectors training sessions were run at the Heritage Café itself. The intention was to provide the opportunity to learn about the heritage activities in the town, without the need to be in a heritage setting, as well as having the opportunity to benefit from the social aspect of these sessions. This approach is similar to Talking Cafés delivered as part of the wide work of Health Connections. In-person delivery is an important aspect of ensuring the delivery is engaging and accessible to all. More could have been done to promote these sessions and align them with meaningful, facilitated engagement for those who may face barriers to participating in heritage activities.



Stalls at Frome Local History Day

## 3.3 Project Management and Governance

Nottingham CVS and Frome Medical Practice were chosen for the pilot schemes due to their experience delivering similar projects. The sector and purpose of these organisations also contributes to understanding of how the schemes were designed and delivered. The Health Connections team at Frome Medical Practice approach the scheme with experience of delivering social prescribing services across Frome, Mendip and West Mendip Primary Care Networks (PCN)s, whilst Nottingham CVS play an important role for the VCSFE sector in Nottingham.

Moreover, the presence of a dedicated point of contact was highlighted by stakeholders from the Heritage Buddies scheme as a key driver of success, which played a crucial role in maintaining clarity, responsiveness, and overall project cohesion. However, as noted above, Heritage Connectors experienced personnel challenges towards the end of the delivery period, which presented challenges around the final reporting and data collection stage of the evaluation. This demonstrates a well-known challenge in short-term project-based work, where the delivery is heavily reliant on a single individual. This can lead to single points of failure in the skills, knowledge, stakeholder relationships, or data if these individuals are not available.

### 3.3.1 Heritage Buddies

The project was governed by a monthly Steering Group held online with both members of staff delivering the project as well as wider stakeholders. This included strong representation both within and outside Nottingham CVS, including individuals with experience delivering work relating to social prescribing, volunteering, and heritage in Nottingham. There was a strong commitment to attendance and engagement from stakeholders attending these meetings, which may have been **enabled by the effort made by project staff to follow good practice for delivering effective meetings**, including provide agendas ahead of time and action logs following meetings.

**Stakeholders were incredibly positive about the remit and scope of the steering group meetings**, including the contributions of staff from Historic England as the funding body with oversight over the scheme. The steering group also provided informal opportunity for networking and coordination, which demonstrated the wider impact of having a coordinated, local approach.

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It felt like it was an equal partnership, that people we're all committed to and there was that level of like mutual respect for people to listen to learning and reflections. **Heritage Buddies Stakeholder**

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Another strength of project governance lies in the role of Nottingham CVS as an organisation that already had **strong networks with volunteering and community groups**.

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Considering that the delivery period had been quite short, I think having an already embedded organisation with a knowledge of local organisations and services was important. It meant that more time and resource can be spent on developing heritage and wellbeing offer to participants. **Heritage Buddies Stakeholder**

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### 3.3.2 Heritage Connectors

In line with the approach for previous Connectors schemes, the Heritage Connectors scheme did not initially have a steering group or wider advisory group providing input into the operational or strategic decisions made throughout the pilot. Weekly meetings with the Project Coordinator, Project Manager and Project Assurance Officer provided the governance function for the project. During the project, a wider range of stakeholders were engaged as necessary to contribute to the design of the scheme, however these engagements weren't formalised.

**Staff reflected that creating a formalised stakeholder engagement group, with opportunity for broader range of partners to contribute and participate in shaping the programme and the training would have helped produce a richer and more relevant scheme with wider reach.** This may have also addressed challenges associated with moving beyond the traditional groups engaging with heritage in Frome.

## 4. Output and Outcome Review

This section of the report summarises the impact of project delivery across both projects, including on trained Buddies and Connectors, participants, and organisations involved. This will be contextualised by the challenges encountered around identifying impact for the projects.

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### Summary

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- At the point of the evaluation, 32 Heritage Buddies had been trained, and 70 Heritage Connectors, suggesting the schemes have delivered against the target of training 50-100 community members across the two pilots.
- For Buddies, the greatest outcomes of the training were an improvement in knowledge of the link between heritage and wellbeing, and a subsequent increase in confidence in communicating this to others. Participating in the Heritage Buddies project has also brought benefits to wellbeing and social belonging to the Buddies themselves.
- For Connectors, the data suggests that the training improved their knowledge of heritage available in their local community and increased the understanding of heritage's potential for positive effects on wellbeing. Further research is needed to understand the longer-term impacts on individual-level wellbeing and sense of social connection.
- The strongest outcome for the wider community in Nottingham is progress related to networking and relationship building within heritage and community organisations across the city. The staff and stakeholders interviewed stated that there was strong interest from organisations wanting to continue the scheme, which will continue with four heritage organisations beyond the end of the funding period.
- Staff and stakeholders denoted that there was some increased interest in heritage activities in the local area, and the signposting website will be able to be utilised even after the Heritage Connectors pilot ends. Some also mentioned that they had seen examples of people in the local community connecting because of the scheme and the Heritage Café. However, longer-term research looking at community-level health and wellbeing outcomes is needed.
- A key legacy of the schemes is the production of a toolkit for each model which will bring together the lessons learned through the pilot and focus on the practical steps and considerations needed to apply the schemes elsewhere.

## 4.1 Number of Buddies and Connectors Trained

The scheme was designed with the aim of training 50-100 community members as Connectors and Buddies, and 100 people signposted or referred to heritage activities. These targets were combined for both schemes and were not specific to either model. It was anticipated that the Connectors model would be more disposed to training and engaging a higher volume of community members than the Buddies due to the nature of the models.

At the point of the evaluation, 32 Heritage Buddies had been trained, and 70 Heritage Connectors, suggesting the schemes have delivered against the target of training 50-100 community members across the two pilots.

At this stage, we cannot be confident how many people have been signposted or referred to heritage activities through the scheme. For the Connectors, providing an accurate estimation of this is challenging due to the light-touch nature of the Connectors role, and for the Heritage Buddies, the priority was piloting different types of engagement with participants.

### 4.1.1 Heritage Buddies

At the point of the evaluation, 32 Heritage Buddies had been trained as part of the scheme. Most of these (22 out of 32) were engaged from heritage organisations, with the remaining 10 coming from community or befriending groups. Out of the total 32 trained Buddies, 22 Buddies completed the sign-up form providing demographic data and consent to follow up with a survey.<sup>14</sup>

#### Demographics

Almost three quarters (16 out of 22) of those responding to the form were female, with the remaining male. The majority (86 per cent or 19 out of 22) of Buddies were of a white ethnic background, with the remaining 3 out of 22 being Asian or Asian British. It's recognised that considerable effort was made by project staff to pilot approaches to engaging with more diverse audiences, with around a third of Nottingham's population belonging to an ethnic group other than white<sup>15</sup>.

The Heritage Buddies scheme has mostly engaged older demographics when training Buddies. Over half (12 out of 21) of those trained as Buddies were 65 years old or older, with another quarter (5 out of 21) 45-64 years old. Only four Buddies in total were reported as below 45, with two being 18-24 years old and another two being 35-44.

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<sup>14</sup> One additional respondent did agree to the sign-up form, but subsequently left all responses blank apart from their name and e-mail address. As prefer not to say options were offered, this will be treated as a non-response.

<sup>15</sup> Census, ONS, 2021

### 4.1.2 Heritage Connectors

In August 2023, the Project Coordinator reported the completion of 10 Heritage Connector training sessions and that more than 70 people had been trained as Heritage Connectors, with each session therefore drawing a varied attendance ranging from 6 to 15 participants. However, these figures have not been validated by wider staff or the evaluation team.

#### Demographics

The gender representation among those trained and responding to the questionnaire was relatively equal, with 56 per cent (18 out of 32) females and 44 per cent (14 out of 32) males. All the attendees (32 out of 32) were of white ethnicity.

This is largely rationalised by the wider demographics of Frome and the surrounding area, where only around three per cent of the population belongs to an ethnic group other than white.<sup>16</sup> Only 27 participants have given their age while answering the questionnaire. While there was limited engagement from the younger groups in Frome, with no one aged 18-25 attending the sessions, there was some variation in ages amongst the attendees. However, there was still a tendency for older demographic being trained with nearly two thirds (64 per cent, or 17 out of 27) being over 45.

## 4.2 Outcomes for Buddies and Connectors

This section draws insights on short-term outcomes for both Buddies and Connectors in recognition of the challenges attributing long-term impacts to the schemes. For Heritage Buddies, this considers the survey responses and the focus group, both of which were carried out at least a month after the training session. Meanwhile, data on the outcomes for Heritage Connectors includes an interim summary of monitoring data collected by 32 of the over 70 Connectors trained based on immediate feedback following the training and draws on qualitative evidence from staff and stakeholder interviews.

### 4.2.1 Heritage Buddies

#### Improved knowledge of heritage and its wellbeing effects

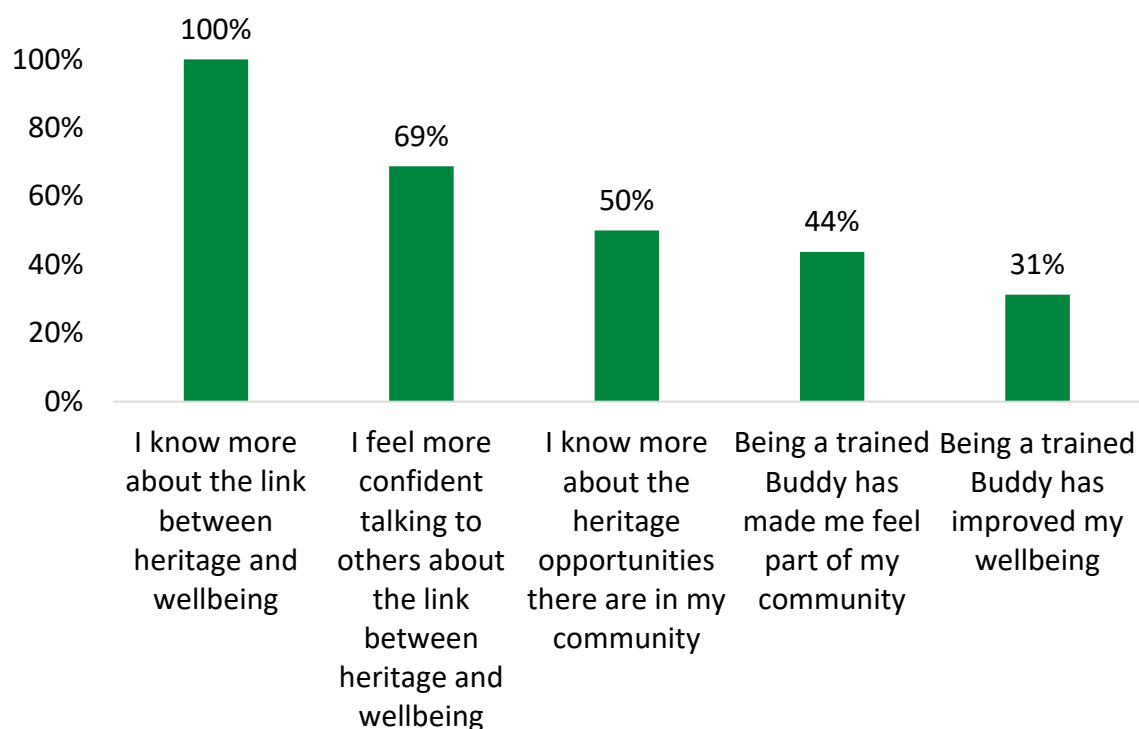
Several key outcomes for Buddies can be seen over page in Figure 4.1.<sup>17</sup> This shows a clear improvement in knowledge of the link between heritage and wellbeing, and an increase in confidence in communicating this to others.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Percentage of respondents answering '5 - Strongly Agree' or '4 - Agree' to statements on a scale of 1 to 5'.

Figure 4.1: Impact on the programme of knowledge around the benefits of heritage



Source: Wavehill, Heritage Buddies Survey (n=16)

Half of Buddies responding (8 out of 16) agreed that ‘I know more about the heritage opportunities there are in my community’. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of those engaged as Buddies were already involved as volunteers at heritage organisations, with many of these contributing a significant amount of their time to this volunteering (once a week or more). As such, it is likely they started with a high baseline knowledge of Heritage in Nottingham.

All Buddies responding (16 out of 16) agreed that they knew more about the link between heritage and wellbeing. Similarly, over three fifths of respondents (11 out of 16) either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident talking about others about the link between heritage and wellbeing.

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‘It was great to be reminded of the amazing history and places to visit in Nottingham [...] The training has made me think about how to look outward at the spaces around us and consider how experiencing these can increase wellbeing and a bigger sense of belonging.’ **Heritage Buddies Survey Response**

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These outcomes were additionally verified by stakeholders and staff, who received positive feedback from people participating in the Buddies training also stating that it had opened their mind to the benefits of engaging in heritage and how to help others to engage more in local heritage. The information available implies that the Buddies scheme was successful in its aim of increasing people's knowledge about the wellbeing effects of engaging with local heritage.

### Wellbeing and social belonging

**Participating in the Heritage Buddies project has also brought benefits to wellbeing and social belonging to the Buddies themselves.** Volunteers engaging in the Buddy training regularly expressed that they enjoyed meeting fellow volunteers and engaging in discussions about heritage at the training. Over half of the Buddies surveyed mentioned the interactive nature of the training as one of the most enjoyable aspects. Another theme in some participants' feedback was also a satisfaction derived from the knowledge of being able to help others:

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'I think my volunteering will be more focused and enjoyable. I will feel useful, which makes me happy.' **Heritage Buddies Survey Response**

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Moreover, nearly half of those surveyed (7 out of 16) agreed that being a trained Buddy had made them feel part of their community, and approximately a third of respondents thought that being a trained Buddy had improved their wellbeing.

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'When you realise you have helped somebody, and it can be in a very simple way, it makes you feel better [...] There's a lot of wellbeing coming from helping other people.' **Heritage Buddies focus group participant**

'It's extra special as a volunteer when you feel you've had an impact because you've gone out of your way to help people visit a site.' **Heritage Buddies stakeholder**

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The wellbeing benefits to the Buddies were echoed by staff and stakeholders, who suggested that Buddies showcased great enthusiasm for the project and there was development of relationships, peer-to-peer connection between those trained, and subsequently a feeling of social cohesion in the local community. Just over half (12 out of 22) of those taking part in Buddies training were aged 65+, and local social cohesion is a particularly important aspect for the wellbeing of older adults, which can imply that these benefits are especially important for those attending the training.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> [The Importance of Neighbourhood Social Cohesion and Social Capital for the Well Being of Older Adults in the Community](#), Cramm et al., 2012.



It is important to account for the fact that majority of these people were already engaged in volunteering and benefits cannot be attributed to the Buddies project. Interviews with staff highlighted the important wellbeing impacts of volunteering, noting that during the training some Buddies shared how volunteering had a considerable impact on their own mental health and wellbeing. The relationship between wellbeing and volunteering associated with heritage activities is well evidenced in wider research, including University of Lincoln's Heritage at Risk and Wellbeing project.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the information available suggests that the Heritage Buddies project has contributed to positive outcomes relating to wellbeing and improved sense of community and social cohesion for its Buddies.

#### Improved awareness of barriers to engaging with heritage

An important aspect of the Heritage Buddies project was also to improve understanding amongst volunteers and heritage organisations of the barriers some groups might face when attempting to participate in local heritage, or why certain groups choose not to engage in the first place.

Both focus group participants and survey respondents stated that they had benefited from the training in making them more aware of what is needed for different people with potentially different needs to access heritage and enjoy its benefits. Multiple different access needs were covered, such as physical visible disabilities, hidden physical disabilities, mental disabilities, and other things such as financial barriers.

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'The focus of the training for volunteers was mainly to raise awareness of local heritage and assets. We have been able to communicate to the community leads to trickle down to groups such as ethnic minorities, and refugees.' **Stakeholder Interview**

'It has opened my eyes that there is a potential for assisting people who don't normally have the access to heritage and that the [organisation] could have a wider reach than it has.' **Heritage Buddies Survey Response**

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#### 4.2.2 Heritage Connectors

As noted in [Section 2.4.2](#), personnel challenges complicated the evaluation's data collection process, and the absence of contact information prevented the contacting Connectors to conduct surveys and focus groups. Reported breakdowns of descriptive data was available for those Connectors at an interim stage, however this is limited and does not fully represent all Connectors trained on the pilot. Thus, many outcomes are drawn from qualitative accounts made by staff and stakeholders, alongside some Connectors trained amongst Frome Medical Practice staff.

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<sup>19</sup> [Heritage at Risk, Volunteering and Wellbeing](#), Historic England, 2022.

### Improved knowledge of heritage and its wellbeing effects

Project staff and stakeholders reported that Connectors trained in the project had remarked on outcomes such as improved knowledge of local heritage and opportunities to engage in heritage, and an enhanced understanding of the wellbeing benefits associated with participating in heritage activities.

This was especially true for those healthcare professionals that attended, who reported an increased familiarity with the local heritage offerings following having attended the Heritage Connectors training. Healthcare staff also reported a positive change in their perception on what benefits engaging in heritage could bring to people:

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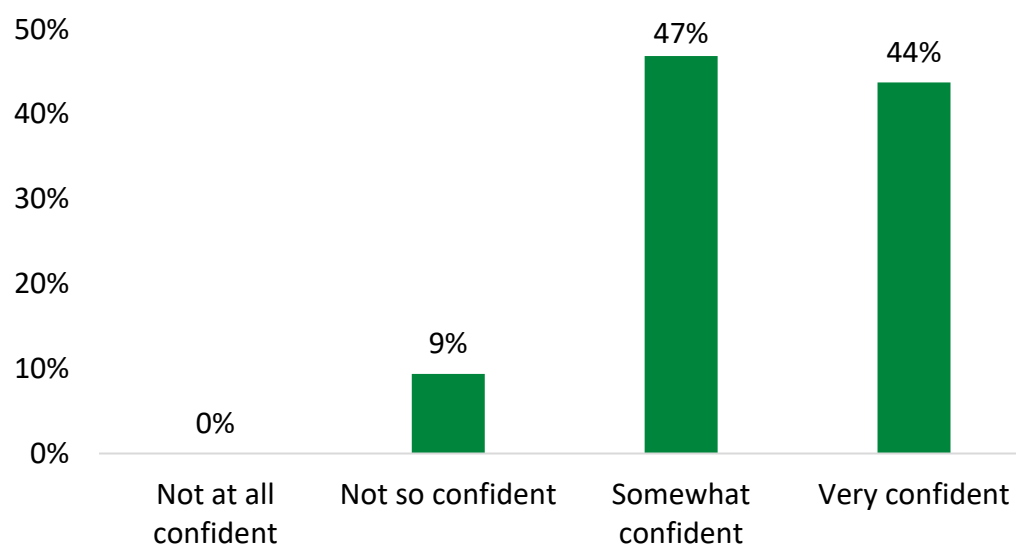
‘As a team we have definitely noticed [an increased knowledge about wellbeing effects of engaging in heritage]. We now know how to support it, some were a bit cynical about it to start with, but when we went along and saw how people can benefit from it and what is available it really changed our views about it’. **Stakeholder Interview**

‘I think from my point of view, initially me and the team were a bit hesitant to if [heritage] would have any impacts – maybe to do with people’s perception of heritage and what it would bring to them. Once we attended the training ourselves it helped a lot’. **Stakeholder Interview**

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Figure 4.2 below showcases answers to the question ‘How confident do you feel passing the message on to others’ responded to by some Connectors post-training. Most Connectors (29 out of 32) reported that they were generally confident passing the message on to others.

Figure 4.2: Confidence of Heritage Connectors in cascading messaging to others



Source: Data collected by Heritage Connector trainer post-training completion (n=32)

The data shows that the Heritage Connectors model successfully improved the Connectors' knowledge of heritage available in their local community and increased the understanding of heritage's potential for positive effects on wellbeing.

## 4.3 Wider Community Outcomes

This section considers any additional wider outcomes identified by staff and stakeholders in interviews because of the pilots. This may include outcomes for any partner organisations and the wider community in Nottingham and Frome.

A key legacy of the schemes is the production of a toolkit for each model which will bring together the lessons learned through the pilot and focus on the practical steps and considerations needed to apply the schemes elsewhere. For Heritage Buddies this is a scheme-specific toolkit focussed on the heritage sector, whilst for Connectors this collates detail from across previous Connector schemes and includes a Heritage Connectors case study to demonstrate the sector-specific approach.

### 4.3.1 Nottingham

**The strongest outcome for the wider community is progress related to networking and relationship building within heritage and community organisations across the city.** From attendance at project steering group meetings, there was clear progress relating to intangible outcomes relating to improved connectedness and coordination across the city.

As for the partner organisations involved, stakeholders spoke of the benefits of increased awareness and knowledge about both accessibility needs, and the wellbeing effects of heritage, and networking with other heritage organisations across the city.

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**'We've not had much of an impact on individuals so far. It's given us connections to other organisations.'** **Heritage Buddies Stakeholder**

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The online resource detailing the heritage and wellbeing services available in Nottingham developed by NCVS during the project will continue to assist both organisations and individuals after the project ends, although will need to continue to be hosted on the NCVS website and kept up to date.

The staff and stakeholders interviewed stated that there was strong interest from organisations wanting to continue the scheme, which will continue with four heritage organisations beyond the end of the funding period. This demonstrates how the scheme can be embedded into volunteering pathways in heritage organisations in the sector. Equally, those individuals who have been training as Buddies will continue to operate within heritage organisations and will increase the opportunities for befriending and supporting people to access heritage sites. Alongside this, Nottingham CVS are exploring further how a social prescribing referral pathway to Heritage Buddies can practically work in the future.

### 4.3.2 Frome

The staff at Frome Medical Practice who were trained as Heritage Connectors conveyed that they had held conversations and signposted others to heritage opportunities following the training. Staff and stakeholders suggested that there was some increased interest in heritage activities in the local area. Some also mentioned that they had seen examples of people in the local community connecting because of the scheme and the Heritage Café. However, longer-term research looking at community-level health and wellbeing outcomes is needed.

The establishment of the access points of information are a key legacy of the Connectors model, with the online directory, the telephone line and website at Discover Frome continuing to exist beyond the funding period. Equally, the existence of heritage social prescription as an option offered for the first time by a social prescribing service hosted by a Primary Care Network (PCN) demonstrates how these schemes can be embedded in existing health and social prescribing structures in the future.

## 5. Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Potential to Scale-up

This section considers the key lessons learned and suggests what resources would be needed sustain or embed the approaches trialled by others in the future.

### 5.1 Conclusions

Overall, the two pilot schemes met their core objective of testing how the heritage sector can contribute to the development of social prescribing. Whilst it wasn't possible to establish long term wellbeing effects of heritage within the four to six months participant engagement pilots, there is indication for the potential of the schemes to deliver wellbeing for people and communities.

Both schemes have generated learning around supporting diversity in connection to local heritage and how social prescribing programmes need to be resourced and delivered in recognition of the barriers to accessing heritage. The evidence generated for 'what works' in terms of the Heritage Buddies and Heritage Connectors models provides an important contribution to both the heritage sector and future social prescribing programmes.

### 5.2 Lessons Learned

Interviews with staff and stakeholders identified several lessons learned associated with applying social prescribing to a heritage context:

- **Clearly defining and communicating the intended health and wellbeing outcomes of social prescribing in the heritage context was an important aspect** of both schemes. This included considering how heritage activities can contribute to mental health, social connectedness, and overall community wellbeing;
- **Embedding a targeted approach to engagement for those who don't traditionally engage with heritage but have higher need for accessing health and social services** either required excellent understanding of how to reduce barriers for marginalised communities, or a commitment to working in co-creation with organisations who already deliver activities or support to these groups;
- **Staff highlighted the importance of pre-empting fears within both partners and participants around medicalization or around the suitability of heritage sites;** building discussion of this into training packages was advised;
- Building relationships with relevant stakeholders and generating momentum for both projects took considerable time, in particular **with heritage organisations who didn't always have the organisational capacity to participate or contribute;**

- **Lack of awareness and negative perception of heritage persists as a barrier to engagement** including perceptions that heritage audiences are predominately white, older and middle class, or that sites are intimidating, confining, or contested;<sup>20</sup>
- **Stakeholders highlighted the unique role that heritage can play around understanding of identity.** This was raised in relation to the benefits of green space and nature in supporting health and wellbeing, but that heritage may provide another dimension in terms of community, identity, and sense of place;
- Consideration of seasonality was a lesson learned in a heritage context. It was intended that the core delivery period of the schemes would be during the summer months, when there was anticipated to be more provision of heritage activities and opportunities for engaging in and visiting heritage sites. However, **when organising training and workshops in the summer this posed scheduling challenges for both schemes, in particular for heritage organisations** who had their own programmes of activity to deliver during the summer months.

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‘It would have also helped to open up perceptions of heritage, instead of thinking of it being limited to the museum you can also look at local walking tour guides or family trees.’ **Heritage Connectors Stakeholder**

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Staff from both schemes highlighted challenges with the principle of applying heritage to social prescribing including:

- **Many individuals may face pressing issues such as cost of living, financial and food insecurity which may have overshadowed the appropriateness of heritage-based social prescribing.** Heritage Buddies staff suggested they may get more buy-in from community referrals rather than traditional social prescribing link-worker referrals for this reason;
- Stakeholders from a health context suggested that from a clinical perspective, there may have been **limited enthusiasm to get involved with the pilot due the perception it was a ‘single-issue topic’.** This hesitancy may have been due to challenges evidencing the expected outcomes for participants. The perception that the schemes were a ‘single issue topic’ could be improved if the scheme were offered as part of a multi-sector approach;

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<sup>20</sup> 'Contested heritage' refers to historic objects, buildings or places where the associated stories or meanings have become challenged in recognition that many representations of history can serve to erase, misrepresent, or marginalise groups of society.

- **Stakeholders suggested that whilst social prescribing link workers and wider staff teams are receptive to new ideas, they prioritise simplicity and intuitiveness in accessing information through their health systems,** making it challenging to build new social prescribing referral pathways

For Heritage Buddies, building heritage into social prescribing referral pathways was not the goal, but information on the programme was shared with individual social prescribers;

- **The accessibility and cost of heritage sites** continues to present challenges for social prescribing projects, including creating considerable barriers to participation for those who may be signposted to heritage activity, or for repeated engagements as part of a social prescribing referral.

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‘Community-based social prescribing operates easier than it does in a health context. With the latter, getting the information to link workers, having them suggest it to potential participants, and then making a referral is challenging.’ **Heritage Buddies Staff**

‘The Heritage Connectors have a more difficult job than other connectors as people might not be as interested in local history and may not feel that it's something they can throw themselves into wholeheartedly.’ **Heritage Connectors Stakeholder**

‘How does that stay on the forefront of their mind, and how does that become an option that's going to be competing with other options that are available for their patients.’ **Heritage Buddies Stakeholder**

‘I think we should not shy away from looking at more accessible, light-touch and sustainable heritage access points, like walks around cemeteries, allotments or anywhere where local heritage might be of interest. This ensures that heritage programmes can get participants involved in something they can sustain by themselves beyond the life of a project’. **Heritage Buddies Staff**

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Other lessons learned associated with the design, delivery and evaluation of pilot projects relating to heritage and social prescribing include:

- **Ensuring sufficient time to develop and deliver pilot scheme.** This recognises the time required to build relationships with individuals and partner organisations, develop and deliver training, and allow for outcomes to form;

- **The limitations around the extent to which any short-term pilot can capture and evidence medium and longer-term outcomes relating to wellbeing** despite the embedding of evaluation processes from the outset. Equally, the iterative nature of the evaluation process in response to the evolution of the projects themselves and the embedding of the evaluation from the outset has meant the evaluation process performed more of a ‘learning partner’ role than a traditional evaluation approach;
- **The importance of a flexible approach in developing the delivery model and resources.** Findings from the Heritage Buddies scheme emphasised that third sector organisations may be unable to accommodate projects that are too rigid and do not align with their resources and capacity. The flexible approach and co-production utilised in the project’s design was the key success of the Heritage Buddies model;
- **The need for wide stakeholder engagement and involvement in steering group** Stakeholder engagement played a substantial role in the success of the Heritage Buddies project, with less stakeholder engagement from the onset in Heritage Connectors. A wider representation in advisory groups can improve project progress, ensure the scheme is tailored to need and provide indirect networking benefits for the heritage and third sector.

### 5.3 Potential to Scale-up

**The two pilot schemes demonstrate the potential for scaling up both models, if developed in consideration of the lessons learned outlined.**

The evidence suggests that the Heritage Buddies model works well in an urban setting with several active heritage sites with well-established volunteering programmes. There is potential for the model to be embedded in heritage organisations themselves, however the aspect of the model working with community organisations to signpost to heritage sites would need facilitating by an external partner.

To some extent, the strand of the Heritage Buddies model which works with community and befriending organisations takes a similar approach to the Heritage Connectors model, responding to an information need and reducing barriers to accessing heritage sites.

When further implemented and developed, the Heritage Connectors model may be an effective way of improving community-level wellbeing, with the approach embedded as part of a multi-sector social prescribing offer. The success of the model in this application was facilitated by the awareness and success of previous Connectors models in Frome, which shows the value of heritage provision as part of a pluralistic social prescribing offer.



### 5.3.1 Local or contextual factors

Ensuring the success of future projects or scaling up initiatives requires careful consideration of local and contextual factors. This includes:

- **The character of the local heritage assets** including the number, the location, and the type of assets (e.g. scheduled monuments, listed buildings, parks and gardens, museums, etc.). This determines the feasibility of social prescribing activity;
- **The nature of the VCSE sector, heritage sector and the volunteering infrastructure** has a considerable influence on the success of any area-based social prescribing schemes. Nottingham benefitted from previous city-wide network for Heritage, which meant there was latent relationships built between organisations. Equally, those with well-established volunteering programmes with formal induction training and process will have enabled success. For Frome, an active third-sector organisations working in heritage facilitated engagement with the heritage sites and stakeholders;
- **The pre-existing social prescribing offer** including the relevant referral pathways, the specific activities on offer, and the scale of social prescribing provision. Frome benefitted from a well-established social prescribing offer which was well-perceived in the town;
- **Mapping and addressing specific barriers to accessing heritage:** it is necessary to identify any physical, socio-economic, or social barriers to engaging with local heritage places and put actions into place to reduce these before putting into place any social prescribing activities. Transport, financial considerations and how this can play into successfully creating wellbeing should all be factored into inclusive programming.
- **Identifying and collaborating with community organisations** as well as heritage organisations was important to engagement. The Heritage Buddies scheme demonstrated the benefits of having a comprehensive involvement of local community organisations, both heritage and other, in designing and implementing the project. Mapping out these organisations and how they might benefit from a scheme is necessary to ensure the model of delivery appropriate for the local setting.

### 5.3.2 Resources required

According to the insights of staff and stakeholders on both schemes, scaling up future projects requires a comprehensive set of resources to ensure success:

- **Staff and organisational capacity:**
  - A coordinator role was crucial to provide a single point of contact for engagement with stakeholders in designing the schemes, and through the engagement approach for Heritage Buddies;
  - The Heritage Buddies model required well-established volunteering provision in local heritage sites with a volunteer coordinator who could facilitate engaging volunteers for the coordinator to deliver training sessions.
- **Appropriate funding and resources:**
  - The models do not necessarily need specific project-based funding, but require some element of dedicated resource whether this be through pre-existing staff time or otherwise;
  - A minimum of two years of committed funding or resource to effectively establish and deliver a project and capture evidence of 'what works';
  - Dedicated budget for project expenses such as travel expenses, website maintenance, and room hire for training sessions should be considered;
  - An approach for addressing challenges around costs associated with accessing heritage sites including travel and entrance fees.
- **Monitoring and evaluation**
  - A 'learning partner' approach is most appropriate to generate evidence on what worked and why, rather than a traditional evaluation approach.

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