CRG Chair's Report 2025

November 2025

1. Summary

Every year I start this report with something like "*It has been another remarkable year for CRG*". And this one will be no different!

More than 5% of our village (over 200 people) continue to give their time and volunteer with us. Around 750 people every week use our services at The Bank and the Regeneration Shop. Our staff, trustees and volunteers work together so tirelessly to achieve the impacts you'll read about in this report. Working together, sharing skills, making friends.

When we first formed as a group, residents told us they wanted more opportunities for skills and employment here in Chopwell. This year shows just how far we have come in realising that. An average of one person every month moves from a placement with us into employment. Others have gained qualifications including apprenticeships, food hygiene qualifications, AQAs in PAT testing. In some cases the first vocational qualification they have ever achieved. These can be life-changing steps.

We can't ignore the fact the world outside often feels difficult, divided and unwelcoming for many. But what continues to set Chopwell apart is our unwavering belief that everyone is welcome. That opportunity, dignity and community should be for everyone.

I want to reflect just how exceptional this work is. *It's not the norm*. The wider region and country often look to Chopwell as an example of what real community-led regeneration can achieve. We regularly host delegations from funders, councils and partner organisations who come to learn from our model. Recently we even appeared on the BBC One Show! What happens here is something special, and it belongs to everyone who has contributed their time, skills and belief.

I hope this AGM gives us the chance not only to celebrate the year's successes, but to shape, together, what we do next.

Thank you for being part of CRG.

John Coburn, Chair
November 2025

2. Trustees

CRG trustees are -

- Adrien Bischoff-Dyson
- Barnie Andrews
- Jacqueline Quincey
- Jodie Barwick-Bell
- John Coburn
- Laura Ferrie
- Marie Imlach
- Mark Bell
- Robert Donaldson
- Stacey Forster
- Tom Brazier

9 of our 11 trustees live or work in Chopwell, bringing together a wide mix of lived experience and professional skills. We are especially proud of involving trustees who bring community expertise without formal governance backgrounds. Supporting trustees to develop their skills not only strengthens CRG, but ensures the Board continues to represent the village it serves.

3. Staff

This year saw the continued success of our apprenticeship programme and the consolidation of roles at both The Bank and The Regeneration Shop. Our team now includes:

- Senior Programmes Manager
- Senior Finance & Commercial Manager
- Operations Manager
- Operations & Admin Assistant
- Café & Events Manager
- Chef
- Regeneration Shop Manager
- Deputy Café Manager
- Apprentice
- Cleaner

Our staff provide an exceptional service while supporting a wide mix of public, including residents facing complex challenges, including poor mental health, unemployment and social isolation. They work regularly with external partners - from schools to the NHS - to deliver programmes that are genuinely life-changing.

4. Volunteers

Volunteering continues to be the heartbeat of CRG.

This year over 200 volunteers contributed their time-an extraordinary proportion of our village population. Volunteers range from teenagers seeking work experience, to adults struggling with confidence or loneliness, to retirees who want to give back.

Many tell us that volunteering has changed their lives. For some, it is the only place they feel welcomed. For others, it has led to employment or training. For many, it has offered new friendships and renewed purpose.

Our volunteers support every aspect of CRG's work: from cooking, serving and sorting food, to repairing household goods, staffing events, supporting learning activities, and sharing skills with children and young people. CRG simply could not exist without them.

"I had never valued my skills as something important but having seen the relief or even amazement in others when a job has gone positively, I feel that I now have some importance to other people"

5. Updates & Achievements

5a. Food Poverty and Cost of Living Support

The need in Chopwell remains acute, and demand for affordable food support has increased significantly.

The Bank Café and Community Market now operate four days a week, offering:

- Pay-as-you-feel hot meals and drinks
- A growing Pay-It-Forward scheme (donated meals and drinks)
- Affordable take-home frozen meals
- A community fridge/freezer
- "Kids eat free" during school holidays

We have maintained our commitment to ensuring no one is turned away.
Key highlights include:

- A *700% increase* in use of the Community Market through 2024
- A 50% increase in Pay-it-Forward donations since 2023
- 3,154 people engaged in 405 events and activities between June 2023 and March 2025

Holiday clubs, uniform exchanges, cooking on a budget, and winter warm hub activities continue to provide support to families.

5b. Health & Wellbeing

The Bank and The Regeneration Shop are safe, trusted spaces for people experiencing loneliness, anxiety or poor mental health. NHS social prescribing link workers now refer residents to us weekly.

This year we delivered:

- Mental health drop-ins with trained practitioners
- Multiple craft groups, cooking sessions and a maths group
- Men's Pie Club for socially isolated men and young dads
- Intergenerational repair workshops where older residents teach young people skills
- Extensive social activities for parents, carers and young people

The impact has been profound. As one volunteer put it:
"I never used to go out and never saw anybody. Now The Bank is like my second home."

5c. Employment & Skills

Our work to tackle low employment and low skills in Chopwell continues to grow.

This year we delivered:

- 18-month apprenticeships (with all apprentices achieving Distinctions)
- 72 AQA certificates in skills development
- Formal and informal training in literacy, numeracy, food hygiene and PAT testing
- Business support for residents seeking self-employment
- Volunteering and work placements in partnership with DWP

In the past 20 months, 21 people moved into employment after volunteering or a placement with CRG. Several have returned afterwards as volunteers-closing the loop of community support.

5d. Children & Young People – Raising Aspirations

Low aspirations among young people remain a major challenge yet this year has seen inspiring progress.

Our work has included:

- Holiday clubs, museum trips and outdoor activities
- Weekly Kids Repair Club sessions
- STEM workshops focused on coding, electronics and digital making
- Fashion and tailoring projects with Northumbria University

Responding to urgent local need, we also launched our Alternative Education Programme in late 2024. Now a recognised AEP provider with Gateshead Council, we will support children

unable to access mainstream school by providing 121 learning and workshops tailored to their needs.

5e. Community Spaces, Infrastructure & Environment

In 2025 we secured over £55,000 to replace the roof at The Bank and install solar panels and double glazing-reducing running costs and our environmental footprint.

We also won regional and national recognition, including:

- Going Green Award at the 2024 Plunkett Foundation Awards
- Uniquely North East Charity (North East Charity Awards 2024)
- Rising Star Award for Poppy Brown (North East Charity Awards 2024)

Our work around the village included:

- Improvements at the Community Allotments (The Allotment group now have their own allotment and are in the process of developing it.)
- Growth of The Regeneration Shop and its intergenerational repair workshops
- Collaborations with 15+ groups to plan the Chopwell 1925 Miners' Lockout Centenary (delivered Summer 2025)

5f. Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Our EDI commitments remain central to our mission.

We continue to:

- Welcome all residents regardless of background, ethnicity, beliefs or needs
- Support volunteers with neurodivergence, mental health challenges or low confidence
- Ensure trustee recruitment reflects the diversity of our village
- Offer programmes tailored to those facing social isolation or mental health difficulties

Our Alternative Education programme will provide critical support for young people with SEND, anxiety or other barriers to schooling.

5g. Partnerships

Partnerships remain essential to our success. In 2025 we worked closely with:

- Gateshead Council
- Two local GP surgeries
- Chopwell Primary School
- Northumbria and Newcastle Universities
- Fareshare
- Chopwell Allotments Group
- Methodist Homes Association

- Over 15 local groups delivering Miners' Lockout centenary activities

These partnerships amplify our impact far beyond what we could achieve alone.

6. Support Received

We are deeply grateful to the many organisations who supported us throughout 2025, including major funders such as:

Gateshead Council
Community Foundation North East
Henry Smith Charity
The National Lottery Community Fund
Garfield Weston Foundation
Tudor Trust
Virgin Money Foundation
Royal Countryside Fund
Ballinger Charitable Trust
Guy Readman Fund
Tesco Community Fund
William Leech Foundation
The NHS
The Lennox Hannay Charitable Foundation
EDF Boundary Lane Wind Farm Fund
Barbour Foundation
Joicey Trust
Hadrian Trust
UK Shared Prosperity Fund
TK Maxx Foundation
Bernard Sunley Foundation
Groundwork
Karbon Homes
…and many others, along with hundreds of local donors.

Closing Remarks

2025 has been a year of immense achievement for CRG but also a year of rising need. The challenges our residents face are substantial and interconnected. Yet wherever we look-across food support, learning programmes, employment pathways, youth initiatives, mental health support, or simple acts of kindness-we see people growing in confidence, dignity and hope.

That is what regeneration truly looks like.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed this year-trustees, staff, volunteers, partners, funders and, above all, the people of Chopwell.