



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership

16.08.2023

**Headline:** Gloucestershire and Severnside Community Rail Partnerships empower under-represented youth to access nature by train through a national pilot funded by the Department for Transport.

Gloucestershire and Severnside Community Rail Partnerships are proud to announce the successful engagement of 160 young people aged 14-25 from under-represented and disadvantaged backgrounds in Gloucester and Bristol through their 'Movement' project, a series of enriching train trips to access natural environments.

Through funding from the Department for Transport as part of a national pilot scheme, the initiative aimed to address social isolation and empower young people facing various challenges through transport. With 40% of 16-24 year olds in the UK reporting feeling lonely 'often or always', and many people from underrepresented backgrounds feeling unwelcome in rural environments, the project was developed to improve access to nature for those who may feel most excluded from the health and wellbeing benefits it offers.

Over the course of 23 days outs by rail between October 2022 and May 2023, participants co-designed and joined in on captivating journeys, gaining experience using public transport to access healthy leisure and recreation. On these trips, young people gained experience navigating a train station environment, following a journey itinerary, and building confidence in new social settings.

The young adventurers explored 10 destinations, including the shores of Weston-Super-Mare, Strawberry Line Cycle Project, and Batsford Arboretum in Moreton-in-Marsh, where they were able to decompress, explore, and create amongst their peers.

A staggering 70% of young people who took part reported feeling more confident about travelling by train following their trip, highlighting the positive impact it has had for young people with limited travel experience. Many said that they felt inspired to start travelling more by train, and some even conquered fears that were limiting access to wider life opportunities:

**'I was terrified of being on a train platform for ages, and because it was a rational fear, I didn't think I'd get over it, but today I did. Incredible..'**

These trips also empowered young people to forge valuable social connections, with 83% expressing that they enjoyed spending time with others and forming new friendships.

**'It was great to get away from home life and to experience new things. It made me realise there's more out there than we know'** said one young person from Gloucestershire who visited Weston-super-Mare

Another participant said they **'loved spending time with other people and learning new social skills.'**

A young person from Bristol even told us, **'This is the best day of my life'.**

Youth workers, who supported on the day of the trips, also shared their insights on the profound impact that enhanced rail access can have on empowering young people and expanding opportunities.

**'One of my favourite observations of these trips is the transition from awkward and quiet individuals when they first arrive at the station to developing their confidence, being in new environments, and connecting with new friends. Then, we see them as having merged socially and returning with confidence and excitement.'**

Another youth worker said **'the young people really benefited as it gave them a chance to be themselves and have conversations and a laugh with their peers.'**

Hannah MacDonnell, Executive Director for Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership said **'Committed to empowering and supporting young people through our access to nature programmes, we welcomed the opportunity to participate in this pilot, funded by the Department for Transport and delivered in collaboration with other members of the national Community Rail Network. We are proud to have contributed to building evidence regarding the important role transport and connectivity plays in stimulating positive outcomes for communities.'**

Heather Cullimore of Severnside Community Rail Partnership said ‘Movement is a great example of how Community Rail Partnerships create opportunities to support local people to try rail travel, experience local destinations and build confidence through doing so as part of their community group. Feedback from the young people who took part confirms how projects of this nature bring about a wide range of positive wellbeing outcomes. Severnside Community Rail Partnership will be using learning from this scheme and the wider national pilot to help shape similar projects in the future.’

The Movement pilot project was delivered with support from the Community Rail Network. Jools Townsend, Chief Executive of Community Rail Network, said: “We are proud to have supported Gloucestershire and Severnside Community Rail Partnerships to deliver this empowering project, involving young people with rail and sustainable transport. Community rail strives to widen access to opportunity, build travel confidence, and create a sense of connectedness within communities, while giving people a voice on transport. We are delighted to hear of the positive impact it’s had, building new friendships, offering culturally diverse experiences, and enabling young people to have the confidence and skills to travel independently.”

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### **Contact Information**

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### **Notes to Editors**

#### **About Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership CIC**

GCRP takes a strategic and proactive role in improving access to public transport through projects that empower and engage the communities served by Gloucestershire’s 9 railway stations. GCRP is a bridging organisation connecting communities and community organisations in Gloucestershire with rail and sustainable transport in a relevant and inclusive context. This includes working in partnership

with train operating companies, community organisations, planning departments and destination management organisations.

Visit <https://www.gloucestershirecommunityrail.org/about-us> or contact us for more information.