

Beard in the City CIC

Social Impact Report for 2025

Headlines:

- We saw a record number of visitors for 2025 – **14792** visitors!
- **£10,658.00** gifted / discounted entries in 2025
- BitC has **13** different areas that contribute to its success.
- Our Organised Play (OP) listed **373 activities** in 2025
- In 2025, we ran **7+ OP systems** (including some guest systems)
- **80+ active volunteers** in 2025
- Number of work experience students we supported were **14**
- We have donated **£2,940** of our time to run the **STEP** program
- **352 recorded hours** donated by all STEP programs.
- Collaborations with University of Southampton **increase** throughout 2025
- **Over 100+ extra activities** engaging beyond our day-to-day activities.

Introduction

Hayley here again – and how lovely to be able to write that! I returned to work in February and was very grateful to be able to, as it felt like coming home 😊

This is a roundup of our 9th Year, with our decade just around the corner...

What an amazing, miraculous year – with the community pooling together to support BitC coming out of COVID debt at long last with the successful GoFundMe!

Our Organised Play sessions went through the roof, speaking of which – we also had to have the upper area's roof replaced.

Our fundraising efforts saw the emergence of a side team who ran fund raising events out of hours – the grants had been quite non-existent in 2025. We were able to use funds for replacing tables and fire extinguishers to name some of the good outcomes.

Much work was done with the University of Southampton, which was excellent.

We ended 2025 with securing gifts for the team for the festive season.

Hope you enjoy our roundup of 2025 as much as we enjoyed our part in it!

Visitors

Just like the previous year, 2025 saw a slightly increased record number of visitors, during trading hours, to the café! We have had an increase in the numbers recorded at the last impact report.

Month	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Jan		1123	1179	0	857	1061	1306	1087
Feb		1472	1302	0	879	1183	1231	1399
Mar		1289	730	0	848	1447	1411	1333
Apr		1010	0	0	914	1239	1251	1153
May	97	1366	0	236	929	1164	1244	1112
Jun	923	1119	0	394	810	1048	1085	1257
Jul	821	1039	0	561	908	1229	1299	1112
Aug	927	1233	0	710	767	1333	1151	1211
Sep	840	1078	119	720	1131	1303	1267	1213
Oct	1125	1280	465	835	1246	1306	1163	1332
Nov	1244	1155	70	834	1031	1227	1343	1506
Dec	822	797	0	453	704	906	903	1077
	6799	13961	3865	4743	11024	14446	14654	14792

The orange and green show if we were up or down compared to 2024 data on visitor numbers. Overall, we had a **0.94 %** increase recorded on the app for our visitors.

We have also been delighted in welcoming a couple of out-of-hour regular groups of visitors, who are not recorded here. This is a Book Club, and the Beyond Reflections Organization. On the bright side – we have not gone down in visitor numbers, and there have been quite a few incidents where we were at full capacity and could not actually accept any extra visitors.

Value of gifted / discounts entries 2025	# of People	savings
Boulder Shack reduced entry	3	£6.00
Carer on Duty	39	£195.00
Crafternooners / Kids club	22	£66.00
Loyalty entries	549	£2,745.00
People's Pride	164	£328.00
Picture House	160	£800.00
Prepaid entries / group entries	569	£1,138.00
Staff entries	610	£3,050.00
Student Thursdays	90	£180.00
Visitors	421	£2,150
		£10,658.00

BitC's different areas for success

In 2025 we recorded 13 different elements that make up what is needed to run BitC. In 2025, the Organised Play team was bigger and busier than ever before, so they are sorted as their own element rather than in with Community. Right at the end of 2025, we gained another gaming system, that will launch in 2026 – it is an honor to support such a diverse community.



Our Organised Play systems include the following:



Some Organised Play photos from 2025

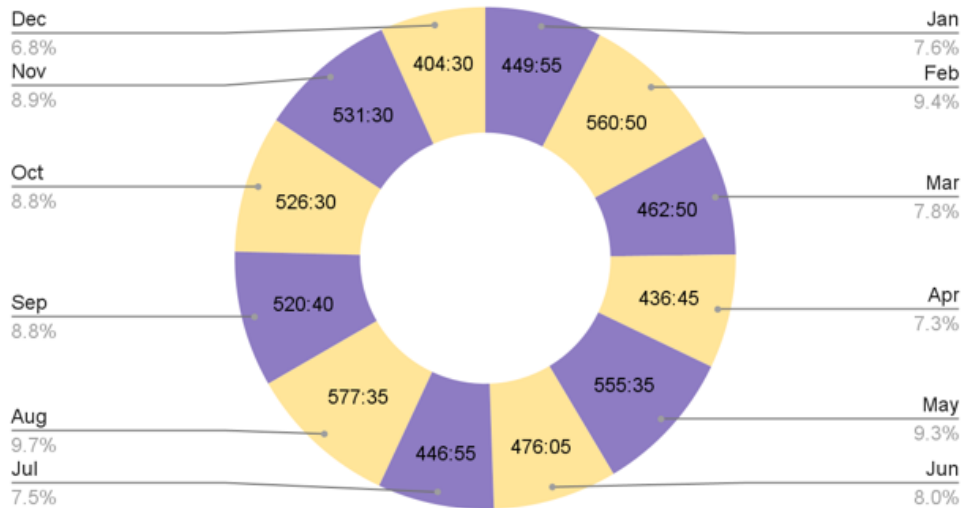


Our BitC Team

Total number of active volunteers: **83**

Total number of volunteer hours: 5978:40 (or 249 days, 2 hours, 40 minutes) = **£72,996.26** in gifted wages

Hours Volunteered (By Month)



Volunteer Vouchers

£1 Meal Vouchers used: **498**

Average Menu price of meal: £7.99
= **£3481.02** in savings for the team

Loyalty Cards

Loyalty cards completed/traded in for entry: **576**
= **£2880.00 in saved entry fees for the community**

The heart and soul of the BitC experience is gifted via our incredible team, which is a mixture of a small number of paid members and the majority are volunteers. BitC is a huge operation to keep running and especially in this trying economic time, we are ever so lucky to be gifted so much by so many.

In exchange, the experience, training and occasional qualifications they gain impacts them in the wider community to go on and find paid employment, for those that want to look for paid work.

Tucked right in the middle of all this is the Directors who we estimated have donated in saved wages for the various areas that they run and support, around **£67,515.20** (at minimum wage), in saved earnings on top of what the team also donated.

We are also very proud and privileged to still be recognised as Leaders in the Field of Disability Confident Employers. We hope to renew this award in the start of 2026. We have a wide variety of our team who come to us with a physical or mental impairment – and they are the majority of the superstars of our wonderful team.





Drum roll please!
In 2025...



The total that the whole team saved in wages & gifted to the BitC community is:

£140,511.46*

The total the whole team donated in hours & gifted to the BitC community is:

11,508*

This is a total of 479.5 whole days (24 hours) days' worth of work that goes into running BitC over a trading year!

** Rounded up and includes:*

- *Increase in team member numbers*
- *The inclusion of the Director hours at the rate of minimum wage ph*
- *This does NOT include the Work Experience / Supported placements hours.*

Step Programme 2025

2025 has yet again seen people using BitC as a stepping stone to have work experience.

We have again, helped 14 young people from the following 9 other organisations:

- Bitterne Park 1
- Cantell 1
- Chichester College 1
- Eastleigh College 1
- Great Oakes 1
- Itchen college 2
- Mountbatten 1
- Other 2
- St Georges 1
- The Polygon 1
- Thornden School 2

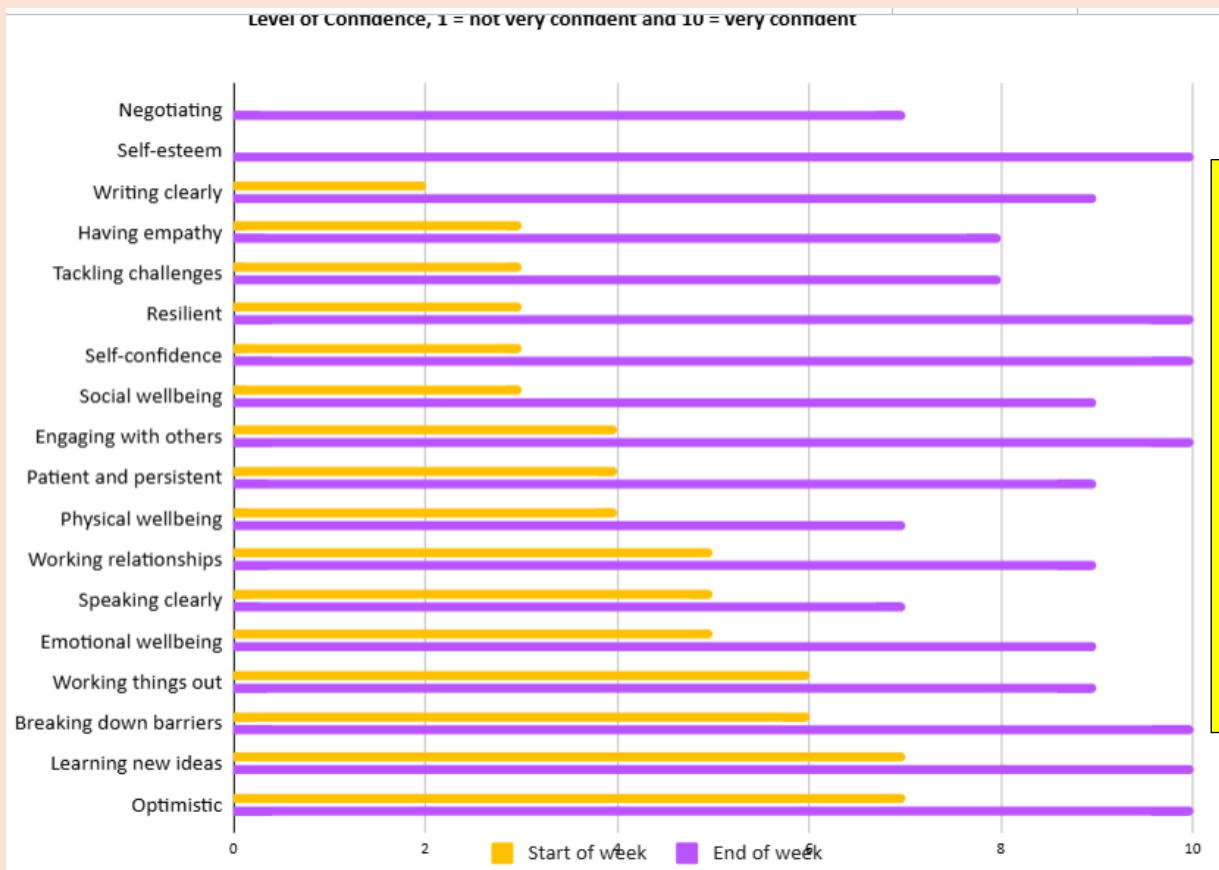
How BitC benefitted was with each person gifting us an average 34.75 hours (1 person doing 2 weeks) x minimum wage of £12.21ph

Thus, meaning they saved us a total of **£6,364.46**

As well as donating of **528.75 hours** approximately.

All who completed their STEP program whilst with us, **100%** recorded that they had developed in some way on a professional level & personal level because of working with us at BitC!

We calculate that it would cost us in administration of each **STEP**: £210 pp. Therefore, we have donated **£2,940** of our time, just running the program this year.



Self-evaluation graph
Yellow = before placement
Purple = at the end of the placement.
This young person, was in paid employment by December 2025

Collaborations with the University of Southampton.

It was very full on this year, from being included in research with a few different departments of the University, to being honoured with a visit to the café, from Professor Mark E. Smith who has been President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Southampton since 2019. In other examples of our collaborations, Ben and I helped with a presentation at the Impact Southeast AHRC IAA Conference on Creative Practice, being some guest speakers with Dr Wanick, to Berry and I joining the Public Health Research Ethics committee.

We are delighted to present to you some feedback from our friends at the Uni. The first is events where, working with us, aligned with some of the University's 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development Goals. From Dr Jessica Spurell:

PCE (Public & Community Engagement) Hubs | Learning from Southampton Communities

Category: Operations (also Education & Engagement) Case Study

*We are so privileged in Southampton to have such a wealth of expertise in our city. **Board in the City CIC** not only has an immense social impact but are experts in recording this, so PCE Hubs have worked with them to shape our own impact measurement. Through joint events, exhibits and other activities the partnership has developed, aligning with SDGs 1-5, 8-12 and 16. We Make Southampton Community Media worked in partnership with UoS staff to produce short films both promoting the aims of the Future Cities PCE Hub, and aligning with SDGs 10, 11 and 16. We have also benefitted from their expertise when planning our refreshed programme of activity, run joint events, and showcased each other's work.*

Most Aligned SDG: 10

Future Cities PCE Hub

Category: Engagement Case Study

*The Future Cities PCE Hub brings together over 100 individuals and organisations continuing to make Southampton a vibrant, people-oriented city that promotes healthy, sustainable living. It champions citizen-led city-design and empowering residents to create the city they want to live in. Events in 2024 included a Film Night as part of the Southampton Arts & Humanities Festival – 3 local short films were showcased with introductions from the makers (We Make Southampton, Southampton National Park City, HIWWT) followed by discussions & networking attended by over 50 people - and Games Nights at **Board in the City** with the other PCE Hubs at which games created by PCE Hubs friends/members were available to play alongside specially curated games Board in the City's extensive collection, encouraging friendly & open discussions about what matters to people about their city.*

Most Aligned SDG: 11

Next up is a reflective view from Doctor Vanissa Wanick who is a Senior Lecturer in Interaction Design at the University of Southampton.

Why we chose Board in the City as a University partner

Board in the City was chosen as a partner because it is a civic, inclusive, and community-embedded space where play functions as a social connector. As a university with a strong focus on civic engagement and social impact, we recognised Board in the City as an ideal partner for situating learning and research in real-world contexts. Its commitment to accessibility, community building, and informal learning through play aligned closely with our teaching philosophy and research priorities in games design, participatory methods, and civic imagination, at the heart of Southampton.

What we have done together

The collaboration began over three years ago through the BA Games Design programme, where Board in the City became a regular site for student field trips and experiential learning. Students engaged directly with board game culture, observed player communities, and reflected on games as cultural artefacts within a public setting.

From 2024 onwards, the partnership expanded through funded projects and strategic collaborations. Board in the City acted as an active co-creative partner in workshop design and playtesting activities involving researchers and local communities. They also contributed to the SRI-funded CivicMAGIC project, supporting civic imagination workshops and gameplay activities (e.g., Dungeons & Dragons sessions).

In June 2025, Board in the City presented alongside the university at the Impact South East Conference (18 June 2025), sharing reflections on the partnership and demonstrating how long-term collaboration between independent cultural spaces and universities can generate meaningful impact.

The impact of working together

The impact of this collaboration has been sustained and multi-dimensional. For students, it has provided authentic learning experiences, exposure to real audiences, and insight into how games operate as social systems beyond the classroom. For research, the partnership has enabled practice-based methods to be tested in lived contexts, strengthened knowledge exchange, and contributed to projects with national visibility.

The CivicMAGIC project achieved national recognition, including a mention on BBC Solent Radio, demonstrating the broader public resonance of the work. For Board in the City, the collaboration has supported new forms of programming, expanded audiences, and reinforced its role as a civic space for learning, dialogue, and creative experimentation.

Overall, the partnership illustrates how sustained collaboration between universities and community-based organisations can create long-term impact, embedding research and teaching within local cultural ecosystems while reaching audiences beyond academia.

We have been very lucky to have been

- included as part of effective partnerships presentation
- for hosting community conversations
- to attending events
- to being part of the curriculum for Winchester School of Art
- being invited to attend the Vice Chancellor's celebration meal
- having the Vice Chancellor come and visit us
- have research done including our Dungeon Masters
- being invited to join the Public Health Research Ethics committee

Our year with the University of Southampton – in photos!



Events for 2025

January

- Southampton Forward - hosted for their Art Project
- Launch of Go Fund Me
- Appeared in the Echo & In Common
- Attended celebration of home theatre project
- Hayley voted as one of 30 Southampton Forward Legends
- Dr Debbie Chase - Rotary
- Smashed Window / robbery

February

- Winchester School of Art Visit
- Appear in a blog of one of the authors
- Channel 4 contact us to help with casting
- 1st Week back after surgery

March

- University of Southampton Science & Engineering day
- Kanes Primary School to talk about games
- South Hants College Gp about work placements
- Spoke at University of Southampton event
- Attend SBR
- Baycroft school visits
- Community Conversation Periods & Menopause
- Tia speaks in the Mayors Chamber about EzTzmeals at internation women's day
- 9th Birthday & Non-Christmas party for the team
- Donation of games to St Annes School
- Easter Egg Raffle for Rotary

April

- Helped Wessex heartbeat give out leaflets at marathon
- Community Pantry have their last session
- BitC book launches on Amazon
- Action Hampshire feature BitC in a fund raiser drive for their safe & warm communities projects
- Go Fund Me hits target
- 3 team members become level 3 first aiders
- Well Being Centre Journey restarts
- Meet with University of Southampton, cabinet members & NHS
- Donate some rucksacks to two saints
- Damaged Ceiling in Upper

May

- BitC feature at Whos got game at JHG
- Southampton Forward meeting
- BitC (Hayley) facilitator at University of Southampton event
- Aaron goes to Richard Tauntons Meantl Wellbeing event
- St Denys Carnival
- We launch our community event collaboration co-op cause
- 2 team members become public health research ethic committee members
- Lizard Qualifies her level 3 apprenticeship

- Attend the Big Difference fund raiser
- Abby Heros Potential Project
- Games donated to the Acute Mental Health ward in Stevenage

June

- A team member attended University of Southampton generations of Regeneration
- Games with some mature peeps at YMCA with Saints foundation
- Aaron Cross Culture shared lunch
- BR & Bournemouth uni private hire
- Peoples Pride start holding their weekly socials
- University of Southampton AI games night
- Private Event by Southampton Forward
- Summer Solstice all nighter
- Grant from ASDA foundation
- Pride Commander Event
- Hire a University of Southampton researcher
- Managing Peri menopause with lost & found therapies
- Lilymay displays at GHT
- Celebration event for youth options
- Ben & Hayley help present an impact southeast conference (using our DMs for research)
- Donated Clothes to Two saints/ General Hospital & rotary of Southampton Magna

July

- Aaron attends integrated working NHS group
- Paul & Hayley helped BR set up at Bournemouth Pride
- Helen & Hayley support at the tapestry festival with S.Forward
- Offered Summer Kids club gaming free
- Fingagolf British Open 2025
- Exter University Reach out to our D&D players for a study
- First time ever having 3 young people on Work Experience
- Hayley speaker for SF in a Leaders conversation session
- Tia & Hayley attend University of Southampton VC celebration dinner
- Donate Games to Townhill Junior School
- Donate from a student clear out to SCRATCH
- Arrival of new tablets

August

- Hayley & Berry meet Caroline Tizer from NHS about us helping with a mental health related project
- Aaron & team attend St James Park life / Rotary for a children's party
- Wedding reception 2nd ever
- Hosted a wake
- Start the shoe box appeal
- Nexus Podcast based in London Feature us in their vlog
- Fire Training from Phoenix Fire
- Newly community designed menu holders
- Lorcana players create their own tournament jackets
- Ellen takes over the social media weekly roundups
- Survey for wellbeing centre feedback - 71% liking the idea

- Meeting with the NHS peer team to start supporting
- SFC invite us to game with their men's mental health group

September

- Hayley & Kay game at SFC
- Aaron attends ReMinds 10th Birthday
- Big difference donates tinned sweets for all sorts of Xmas events
- Some actors from Mary Poppins crew came & gamed
- Younger Team members attend JHG Alens for conversation
- SCC deliver making community safer to the team
- Harry plays at the music in the city event
- Mat our KP completed Dash in the Dark 5k & came 3rd
- Tour of SFC
- Lorcana attends Cardiff
- Tom gets employed at Portsmouth Guildhall
- University of Southampton CV visits
- Get a bigger chip fryer

October

- Hayley attended the NHS working with people and communities 5 year plan
- Shake battle & Roll again
- Aaron has an exclusive stall at University of Southampton library
- We attend Taroball convention
- We help rotary sort through over 1000 shoe boxes
- Halloween Party
- Aaron accepted award from SMHN about our positive and kind approach to mental health stars for stars

November

- Game at the University of Southampton science & engineering day
- BitC is featured in an article by ITV meridian
- Robin becomes kitchen manager
- Team social night
- SCC deliver contextual safeguarding
- BitC becomes a project by some students from University of Southampton around improving our appeal to students
- SCC senior public health practitioner visit
- Hayley attends systems leadership training on building better relationship working with NHS
- University of Southampton hold community conversations with members from BitC community about extreme effects of the weather

December

- Meeple Market
- We support EzTz meals at an event organised by rotary of Southampton Magna, Christmas meal
- Peoples Pride do a fully booked Christmas meal on Christmas day
- We calculate 77 team members ending 2025
- Zac secures paid employment
- Tash Performs
- Donated games to SCRATCH
- Deep Clean and Decorations

Some community and impact updates...

Our impact comes in many forms – from supporting where we can in our community and with our team members, to attending and hosting events to the supported work experience placements that we offer.

In the spotlight – we are delighted to explain about our Disability Confident Level 3 Leaders work.



Disability inclusion is not an add-on to our work – it is central to our purpose. A significant proportion of our staff, volunteers and work experience participants are disabled or neurodivergent, including people with complex needs. Because of our reputation locally, disabled people actively seek out opportunities with us, and many schools, colleges and support organisations refer individuals specifically because of our inclusive environment.

A core strength of our approach is providing **supported entry level opportunities into employment**. Through volunteering, work experience, supported placements, apprenticeships and paid roles, we offer people a safe, flexible and realistic introduction to the world of work. Our STEP programme is central to this, combining practical workplace experience with tailored support, flexible expectations, alternative communication methods and confidence building. Importantly, success for us is not only retention: we are proud when individuals move on from Board in the City into sustained employment elsewhere, having gained skills, confidence and independence through their time with us.

Our recruitment and assessment processes are deliberately flexible and inclusive. We prioritise practical, hands-on tasks and informal conversations over traditional written applications or formal interviews, recognising that these can be barriers for many disabled people. Where required, we offer verbal applications, alternative formats, additional time, carers present, adjusted hours and trial periods. Reasonable adjustments are discussed openly and proactively, based on individual need rather than rigid policy.

Because a high proportion of applicants are disabled, traditional schemes such as guaranteed interviews are not always practical or meaningful in our context. Instead, we focus on making our disability inclusive approach explicit in how we advertise opportunities, how we assess people, and how we support them throughout their time with us. Our environment is physically accessible, sensory aware, and designed with flexibility in mind, informed directly by feedback from disabled staff, volunteers and community members.

We are very proud to be considered Leaders in Disability Confident Employers!

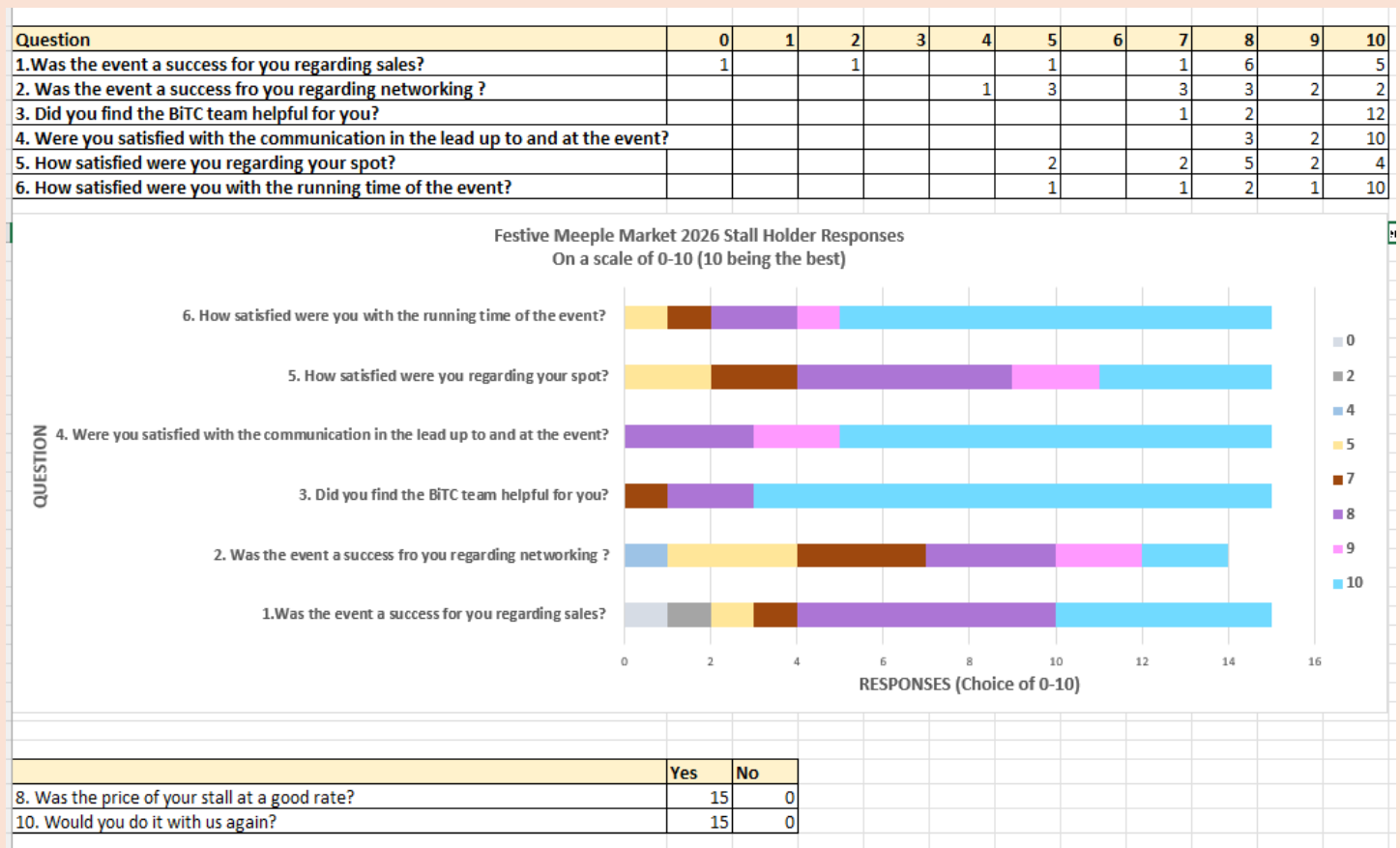


The Art House pop-up pantry ran 33 sessions at Board in the City, providing an estimated 400 bags of groceries, 330 soups and 450 hot drinks to people in need. The community we serve includes disabled people, unhoused and vulnerably housed people, refugees, immigrants and others facing food poverty for various reasons. The pantry provided not only food, but a warm space during the colder months, social contact and a safe space for folks who might feel unable to access social spaces. Our crew were able to signpost people to other local services in an informal setting. An estimated 140 crates of supermarket surplus were saved from going to waste and shared with the community, as well as

donated toiletries and menstrual hygiene products. They relocated to **Bitterne Station Community Hub, 113 Macnaghten Road, Southampton, SO18 1GG**. It still runs every Friday 11am-1pm. The location is just beautiful, and the service is as fabulous as ever!

BitC's first ever Christmas Meeple Market – and we invited in local traders and authors and even a games designer!

We were thrilled by the turn out, the atmosphere was wonderful and we collected a great stash of games, that we donated to S.C.R.A.T.C.H. Here is the traders feedback (collated by Laura Cook).



Q7. Suggestions for improvements

- Food in kitchen
- Signs directing people to back room
- Info about event advertised earlier
- Summer fair
- Longer event
- Space to stand/sit behind the tables
- Starting event later in day
- Event earlier in the year

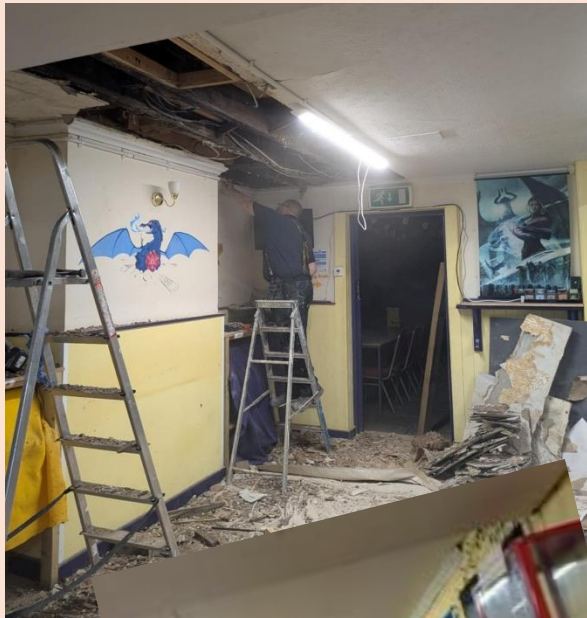
9. Further comments

- Event went well
- Fun and charming dynamic
- All staff and volunteers lovely
- Stall hidden from customers
- War room stalls hidden from customers
- Event could run more than once in festive period
- Really fun day



Some photos of 2025 – more can be found on our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/boardinthecity/photos>





ACCESS TOUR!





Lastly, a social impact story from one of our team – Zak Mason

My time at BitC

I volunteered at BitC for the most part of 2025, from May until December, and it was an extremely positive experience that I truly believe has helped me grow not just practically but also personally.

I started volunteering at BitC to help out a good cause and also found out that it counted towards my Duke of Edinburgh's award, which is extremely useful to me as it's highly regarded and was great for my CV.

During my tenure volunteering for BitC, my confidence in not just myself, but also stepping out of my comfort zone rose massively. I went from being a more shy, withdrawn person to really opening up and becoming much more positive. Originally in the BitC STEP program, at the start of my tenure, I scored myself a 3 on self-confidence, but at the end I was very comfortable with scoring myself a 10.

Unfortunately, I left BitC to pursue a Job, and I fully believe that the skills I developed during my time at BitC helped me greatly in being selected. Now I'm earning my own money!

I had the privilege of returning to BitC in February 2026 to host their first monthly quiz of the year, this was an amazing opportunity for me to fundraise some money for the World Scout Jamboree. In the end I raised £108, with an additional £42 as a kind donation from BitC itself to round the total up to **£150**. This has greatly helped me as I need to raise quite a lot, and this was definitely a big chunk of that.

Overall, my time at BitC was definitely one that I will never forget, the people I met and the skills I've learned are just amazing, and I really do think that I would not be the same person that I am today if I hadn't volunteered at BitC. Thank you.

