Young Gloucestershire
Case study

The charity, Young Gloucestershire, has been helping young people in various guises since the 1940's when it was originally embedded in youth work and youth clubs. As funding cuts saw those community spaces begin to dwindle, the charity began to pivot away from working at ground level. For the past five years Young Gloucestershire has been providing wellbeing and mental health support for young people not in education, as well as training and skills to build confidence and increase employability. The charity also works alongside agencies such as the police and social services, supporting young people who are considered at risk. Post COVID-19, the charity is now two thirds bigger than it was five years ago.

"The need never stops," said Tom Jones, Head of Income Generation and Communications. "We're very much a youth focused organisation led by what we see happening on the ground in Gloucestershire."

Biggest challenges

As for most charities COVID-19 was a huge challenge but saw Young Gloucestershire return to its roots, into the community to engage with those who were isolated. During the pandemic the charity offered more virtual support too, and the introduction of low level intervention programmes which they still deliver today. Funding however wasn't a problem during COVID-19. It was easier to access and there was plenty of it. Today funding is more difficult to source and statutory rules and regulations are tighter. The cost of living crisis has not just seen funding streams become more challenging, which in itself has a massive impact upon recruiting and retaining staff, but an upsurge in service users, particularly in deprived, isolated, rural areas means the delivery of services needs to be more efficient.

The cost of living crisis has most definitely had an impact on donations and other funding streams. Some of the trusts the charity approaches for grant funding should have grown but haven't. The biggest concerns over the next two years will be around how they continue to expand across the county as much as possible and maintain their quality of service. Managing growth and scale in an environment of financial instability will be a challenge.

What changes is the charity adopting to combat the cost of living crisis?

Having come from a corporate background, Tom Jones is a great believer in charities 'working smarter'. Young Gloucestershire has adopted project management technology to improve the efficiency of its internal processes and to track and evaluate outcomes which supports fundraising bids.

Being confident in the brand is also key. Brand identity, style guide, tone of voice are all important as charities look more towards forming corporate partnerships. Thinking outside the box when it comes to choosing funding partners and considering the types of project potential partners need to be looking at to hit their environmental, social, governance and CSR strategies.

The charity has used ChatGPT for research and writing fundraising bids but, says Tom, funders want to see an impact, they need to see outcomes and output. Building relationships is really important. However, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has come into its own in supporting the charity's growth. With more than 100 referrals a week, AI will soon play an important role in helping the charity with decision making, sorting through data

to support staff with rigorous assessment processes. Whilst it's disheartening to reject any young person, AI helps Young Gloucestershire build a case for support with evidence and demographics that suggests providing funding for a certain individual will really make a difference.

The company has increased its use of social media to engage potential donors on a more personal level, setting up fundraisers on Facebook and installing donation links on Instagram. As a regional charity they know who their audience is but would love to be able to invest more time into digital communications.

Innovative fundraising events that don't always include a sporting element is something the charity is focusing on. "Not everyone wants a physical challenge," says Tom. With the emphasis on corporate partnerships Young Gloucestershire has introduced a number of team building events such as a corporate sleepover in the most haunted prison in the country and a retro gaming tournament in a museum.

"We see a lot of these kind of homeless sleepovers in public spaces. But take our idea, inviting people to sleep in a prison and fundraise, and actually that fundraising is going to go towards our intervention work with young people who are at risk of criminal exploitation? There's some really great storytelling around that."

"The reality is, when you've got a need on the ground, which is really evident, really prominently growing, not going anywhere, your charity has to think more like a business and adapt some corporate processes, adapt some of that mentality around growth that a lot of the charity sector isn't used to." says Tom.

Recruiting and retaining staff has always been a challenge for third sector organisations with lower salaries and often unsocial working hours. In an effort to attract new talent and keep existing staff happy, Young Gloucestershire understands the importance of company culture. The organisation has introduced regular culture conversations, has an extensive induction plan and maintains regularly updated HR policies. Personal development training is also key to their staff's happiness, helping them develop leadership skills, increase their knowledge or become specialists in certain areas.
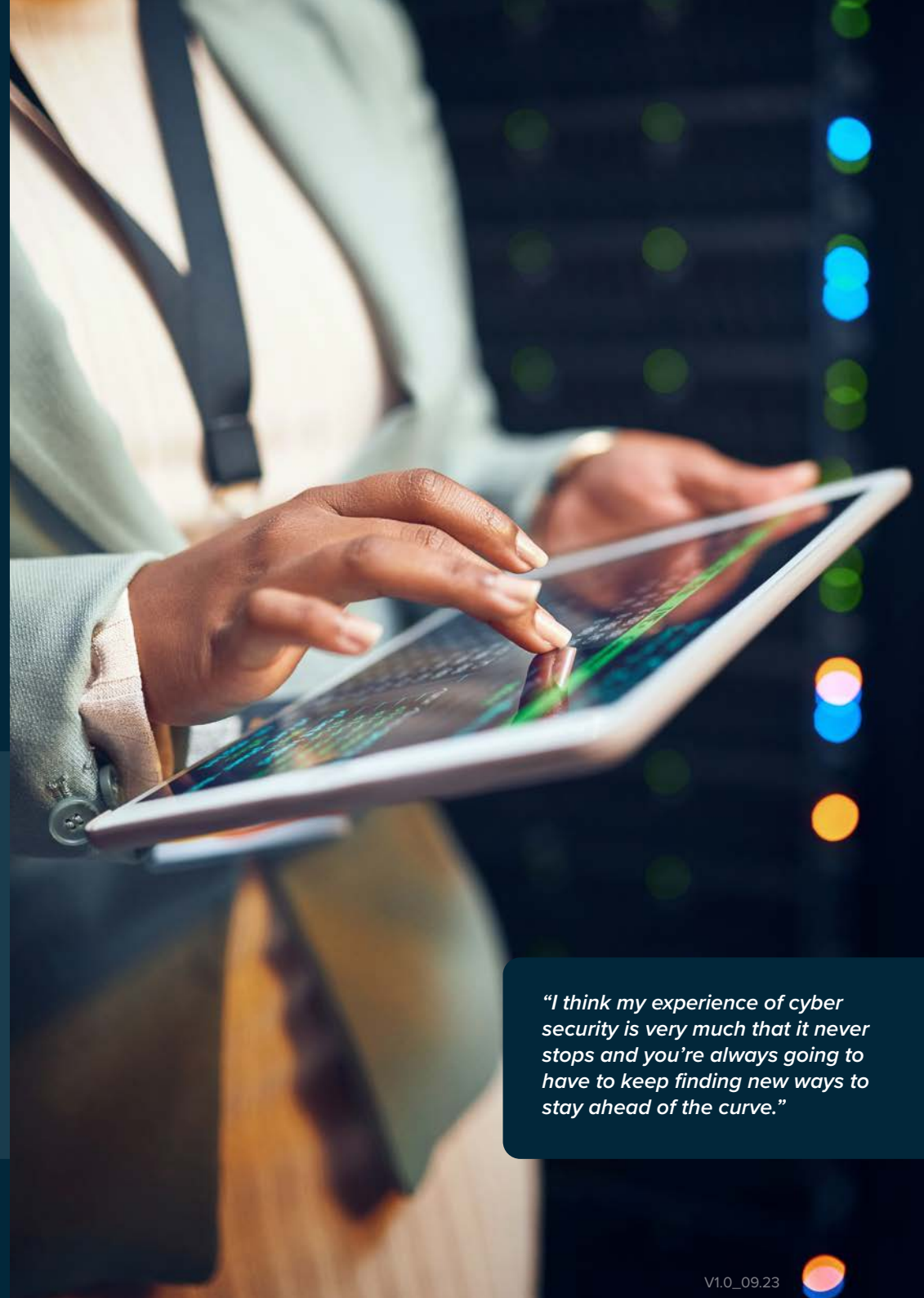
Cyber security

Charities are just as open to cyber fraud as any other business so Young Gloucestershire has invested heavily in their IT team to become Cyber Essential Plus certified – a government backed scheme that helps protect organisations against a range of common cyber-attacks. Being cyber savvy is imperative as it's linked to statutory funding regulations.

They've also introduced a number of other initiatives such as migrating away from WhatsApp which was being extensively used during the pandemic and for which they had no messaging policies or control over content, to using Microsoft Teams chat.

More rigorous policies have been introduced over mobile communications with the introduction of staff mobiles so the charity now has more control over what's mandated on each device, with the ability to remotely wipe phones or track them if lost.

"We run culture conversations internally because half of our workforce under 30 and half are 40 or over and that's actually created a bit of a generational divide around people's opinions on how we operate regarding traditional fundraising and modern fundraising. So we actually do a really good job of inviting people in to contribute to the culture."

"I think my experience of cyber security is very much that it never stops and you're always going to have to keep finding new ways to stay ahead of the curve."