

Clay Stories:

Stories behind our community clay collaboration with Philip Hardaker



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Foreword

I can't think of a more fitting way for BJB to commemorate its 50 years existence than by matching the blue plaque in honour of our founder Beth Johnson with the creation of a special ceramic mosaic by so many of our people including our volunteers. Crafted under the expert guidance of local ceramicist Philip Hardaker, this prized artwork is now showcased in our HQ for all to see. This is how I look at it. We wanted to mark a historic occasion and look forward to our future. A future where we can carry on making a difference for older people here in North Staffordshire in a way that cherishes the lives they have lived.

Many had livelihoods in the pottery industries, working with their hands to craft the ceramic wares that graced our tables, built our industries and decorated our homes. We can't all aspire to a blue plaque but we can take equal delight in modelling a ceramic tile that captures the hope, values and passions we have for who we are and where we live. After all, it is the clay and coal of the landscape here that shaped and developed our local economy and gave rise to all the innovation and creativity that spelt success. We too can have a hand in creating a mosaic made up of so many parts that reflects who we are and the difference we hope to make.

From what I saw, everyone had great fun modelling the clay and designing their tile in Philip's workshops. Mine was a dandelion – chosen on account of its early association with BJB. It symbolises the return of life, the rebirth of growth and green after a harsh winter and a display of abundant strength and power. As we face our next fifty years in a time of unprecedented challenge, I hope that the sum of our individual tiles will rekindle our strength to carry on making a difference to the lives of older people here.

**Joan Walley, Deputy Lieutenant (DL),
Patron, BJB**



Introduction: The tile project, capturing our ethos and embedding it into our future

As CEO of the Beth Johnson Foundation, I have always been struck by the passion, dedication and commitment of its staff; the compassion of its volunteers; and the overall determination to embed quality throughout all that we do here as we seek to support and amplify the voices of our older members. Whether this be through direct support (e.g. dementia advocacy, carers support, social prescribing or bereavement support) through learning (e.g. supporting digital technology, promoting literacy, intergenerational activities and volunteer development) or the physical environment in which we work and welcome our members (e.g. our new Community Hub).

The ambitious idea of developing a mosaic was to create a piece of artwork that echoed individual sentiment in a way that was personal, (not necessarily perfect) and that gave testament to the varied experiences that everyone had when being involved at the BJB. To develop a unique representation that captured all that we do and indeed informs our future direction over the next 50 years. Since joining the BJB, and obviously as I have grown older, I have learned much about the support needs of older members, and my tile was a very simple (but to me profound) statement 'Never too old ... Never too young'.

It just captures the essence of what we are about here at the BJB. We have seen older members write poetry, draw and paint for the first time in their long lives.

We have heard how doing different creative activities has given people a sense of pride, purpose and confidence in themselves, and to try other things. How working alongside younger people across the ages demonstrates how much we can learn from each other so that life experiences can be captured and not lost. Such simple acts can reap such huge personal rewards and benefits.

The mosaic has exceeded my expectations. Working with Philip Hardaker made the process so much easier; he worked his magic and stirred the creative juices amongst everyone. He waved his magic, creative wand and brought individual tiles together so wonderfully that the finished mosaic captivates the viewer in a mysterious way. The mosaic represents so many individual aspects of the work at the Foundation over the years; it draws viewers to touch and feel its surfaces as you physically engage with this unique piece of artwork.



The process of engaging with everyone on this creative journey was as important as the end product. There was an air of busyness; of laughter and tears; of noise; of reminiscence; of pride. The Foundation came alive again after so many months of silence through the pandemic. Although few of us were artists, tile makers became embroiled in the detail of their work. It became a cherished piece that warranted as much skill as they could muster. It had to be as good as it could be to honour the memory that they were making.

So many threads run through this tile project that underpin our ethos here at the Foundation. No individual tile will ever be lost; yet collectively the mosaic becomes a metaphor to illustrate the power of how working together can strengthen our messages, enhance our voices, and inform our futures. A future where we can all enjoy a greater later life.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make this possible.

Emireta Professor Sue Read, CEO, BJJ



Celebrating 50 years of BJJ in clay: The artist, the people, and the legacy

In celebration of 50 years of Beth Johnson Foundation, we asked renowned artist Philip Hardaker to work with us to create a lasting ceramic artwork. We are lucky to have worked with Philip to create a large mosaic of tiles, each tile made by people connected to BJJ through the years. The mosaic features a framed picture of Beth Johnson at the heart of the artwork, surrounded by quotes, images, symbols and motifs, crafted with love and care.

We invited people who work with us, people who have worked with us over the years, and people with a strong connection to BJJ, to join our clay workshops, led by Philip Hardaker. We were joined by volunteers, staff, trustees, patron, BJJ group members, children and teachers from a local school, and friends who contributed their time, energy, and creative talents.

Working together across communities and generations, we have thoroughly enjoyed collaborating and seeing this artwork evolve from clay into the final stunning mosaic, which hangs above the fireplace at Parkfield House. Working alongside Phil Hardaker gave us a unique opportunity to design and create an individual tile for the mosaic and to learn skills and processes of the pottery industry. Together we contributed to a unique piece of local art which takes pride of place in our community living room at Parkfield House. This important artwork commemorates 50 years of BJJ championing the voices of older people.

Each person designed, created, and painted their own tile to represent Beth Johnson Foundation. Where people were unable to complete each stage of the tile making and painting process, other people kindly stepped in to help, completing each tile with true regard for the maker. Each tile represents a story or symbol connecting the maker to BJJ through the artwork. By creating tiles individually and joining them together in a mosaic, the artwork symbolises the work of many people, coming together to make Beth Johnson Foundation work for everyone. The clay project has been a truly collaborative initiative, people helping each other to take part and to complete the tile making process together. Though not every single tile story is shared here, this wide selection of clay stories beautifully represents people, histories, and connections. Each tile reflects the experiences of our BJJ community and documents the difference we all make together.

It has been wonderful to discover and collect these unique stories from the individual tile makers, learning what each tile represents, hearing people's experiences and getting to know the BJJ community a little more. My contribution to the mosaic is a seahorse motif (it appears in a few places on the mosaic). The seahorse represents my curiosity and my love of new discoveries. It reminds me of the beauty in difference, as one tiles says "we are all equally different".



Patsy Corcoran, Volunteer Development Manager, BJJ

In conversation with Ceramic Artist Philip Hardaker

I'm predominantly a ceramic artist, I've worked since 1980 doing projects with people and also doing my own practice, making my own work. The collaborative work is a celebration of people and of process. So what I do is I go into situations and deliver a talk about what the ethos of the work is going to be about and in your case, the Beth Johnson Foundation, it was about working with the staff and your clients and producing a piece of work which celebrated Beth Johnson in a positive way. Nobody really knows what is going to happen because it's just an abstract concept isn't it? But when people start working together and talking about ideas, the ideas come out and eventually go onto the tiles which are then fired and brought back to the same person to decorate, so the process is about celebrating people.

I knew that because you do so much work with older people and people with Alzheimer's and blind people and people of all sorts of different nationalities as well, I knew it was going to be a very interesting piece of work to work on. That's what made it so special, that variety of people, all inputting into the idea. Then the final concept is produced and then I walk away. What you're left with is a true celebration of what you do as a Trust and as a Foundation. I think that is so important.

Working this way is not something you can look up in a book, it's an abstract concept really. It starts with a process and listening to people. So I go into a school and I talk to the children first. I always say, right I've had a look at the front of your school, what do you think about the front of your school? And the children say, "it's dull, it's boring, it's uninviting". I say well we're going to change that, we're going to produce a piece of work which celebrates your school in a very positive way. I want you to all make tiles and then those tiles will go on the front of the building and it will change the concept of the building. That's what the process is about with all people of all ages, listening to what they want and producing work which changes environment and changes the concept of environment.



I don't think I'm the most important part of that process. I think it's the people who work as a team around that idea that produces the work. I'm just there to create the magic that makes that process work. It's like any human process, listening is the most important thing isn't it? It's important that you listen to what people want and then you know you achieve what you want because you've listened really well to the people you're working with. You know they'll ask you what the colour is and what the shape is and that sort of stuff. How you respond to that is empowering them.

Every single person who works with me doesn't think their piece of work is important, but when the piece of work is put in the finished piece of work, it then makes sense because it's surrounded by lots of other people who think their pieces aren't important either. But they are, and the process is magical because when all that work comes together it celebrates those people in a really positive way. I never really know what's going to happen in the process, it's a bit magical in the sense that when somebody comes into the room you never know what they're going to make but you know it's going to be really important. Like the woman with the guide dog. I said to her you can use the guide dog's paw to press into the piece to clay to make the work. Then I did the drawing of a dog from an image that you gave me, and it's so important that process of really listening to what people want to do and then just letting them get on with it and do it.

It was like the other blind lady who I worked with, she was amazing. I saw her walking to Beth Johnson before I met her, because she was coming to the workshop, and she travels around Stoke on a bus. It's amazing that she can do what she does as a blind person and then when she came into the room and she said "I've got these ideas". She'd drawn a lot of ideas out for me, and then I looked at them and thought these are fantastic things, celebrating Beth Johnson in a very positive way. They are only little things but they all go together to make the final thing. So she sat down and she had to work that close to the piece of work to produce it. I'm talking about inches away from the tile when she really concentrated on doing that piece of work. But when the piece of work is finished and in the final piece of work she went up to it and again she had to look really really close to see what she'd done.

That sense of pride and satisfaction of producing work that's potentially going to last forever, it'll outlive us all that piece of work... you know that don't you? That's what makes it so special. I feel very humbled by that because you know I've produced work with 50,000 people. I've worked in communities and particularly with children. I've been doing it so long now the children are now adults. I've recently worked on two pieces of work in schools with teachers who were children 20 years ago that I worked with. They thought the experience of working was so magical that when they became qualified teachers they asked me to come into their new schools to do a piece of work with their children. You know. I must be doing something right. I feel very humble that I'm allowed to do it and it works. Listening to people and allowing them to do exactly what they want to do for their piece of work, that's what creates the magic in the final work that's produced.

Philip Hardaker, Sculptor, Ceramicist & Mosaic Artist, Arts Consultant for Community, Education & Public Arts

Adrian Leek

After retiring from a career in Engineering and recovering from colon cancer I wanted to volunteer with a cancer related charity. I was accepted into the Cancer Advocacy Support Project (CASP) with BJJ and after training, I engaged with a variety of clients. I was able to utilise listening skills, helped by training, to the extent that all my clients received assistance previously denied to them. Alas five of my clients eventually passed away, but I am happy that we were able to help in their hour of need. After the end of CASP funding I was glad to assist on the Bereavement Project. We were able to provide a bespoke service to clients who, as well as suffering loss, had to cope with Covid restrictions. Clients have expressed gratitude for our help at the most difficult of times. None of this would have been possible without the support of BJJ staff who have been so supportive in my seven years with The Foundation.

I was delighted to be asked to make a practical contribution to the project in spite of being "Artistically Challenged". The range of designs and thought by all concerned is a testimony to the focus BJJ has of the needs of our service users. The notion of a mosaic is brilliant and is a visual portrayal of what we are about. Phil was an excellent mentor and very patient with my basic skills.

Amina Pangarkar

I joined BJJ three years ago, I found a leaflet in the surgery, I kept thinking about it. Eventually I phoned and joined the Healthy Generations Project, it was just one or two months before lockdown. BJJ, they help me a lot. They push me, I can do it, I wrote some poems. Meeting all these people, you feel like you want to go on the Zoom meetings. It was challenging, I enjoyed it though. Back then I was very shy, and they lifted me up, made me confident. I don't think we could have done it without Zoom, they made me feel welcome. It made a lot of difference, otherwise people would be depressed, we made new friends through BJJ groups.

The inspiration for my tile is a camera - everyone needs to smile some time. I think people haven't got much time, so much worry, in lock down everything was going downhill. At times shops are busy, people always feeling like we gotta go, taking a photo, a camera makes us stop suddenly and take a moment to smile.



The lightbulb lights up, everyone can see the lightbulb, it is quite exciting. I wish it was there before, when I was growing up. Things that you hoped for when you are younger, and looking back I can see the difference it would have made in my life...After 50 years BJJ is still lit up and going strong. It is an inspiration for me



In one of the BJJ Zoom art sessions, we were asked to draw a lighthouse. I liked the lighthouse and looked up more information to learn more about lighthouses. It can be a beacon of hope... It makes me think of inspiration, happiness, and hope... I am inspired by artworks that people have shared. I used a ruler to draw my first lighthouse, I can draw straight lines now.

My grandchildren mean the world to me, I look forward to seeing them every week. I'm looking forward to being old, now I look forward to having my own time, knowing my son, knowing who I am. You've spent time with parents, husband raising children, now it's time to find out who you are. You need to know yourself, the kids are grown, now it's time to do.

I have carried on with the art, embroidery, I watch YouTube, I get inspiration from YouTube, watching how to make things step by step. I've never done any kind of pottery, I used to be very shy, now I feel confident trying new things. I love embroidery and knitting... I'm trying to learn Maths. I had confidence from Zoom and last year I went to Stoke-on-Trent College for one year, so I was the only one in my sixties with people in their twenties. Now I want to carry on learning with my English. I had a lot of encouragement from friends at BJJ to join college. I enjoy it, they are all younger, it's never too late. They help you out the young lads and girls if you need it.

I thought the clay project was fascinating, I feel lifted, I liked it. It was nice meeting everyone face to face especially after Covid. Everyone had stories to tell, it was good. It was amazing how people were making things up, and interesting listening to what people were saying, I will talk to anyone now. I just want to say thank you to Beth Johnson and volunteers and everyone helping each other, thank you very much.



Andrew Colclough

I was born into a world where being a gay man was illegal though by the time I was old enough to have any sense of my gay identity the law had been changed to decriminalise sex between men over the age of 21. Growing up with an identity that was considered by many to be undesirable, and stigmatising has made me passionate about supporting marginalised communities. I have worked in the voluntary sector for over thirty years, mostly in roles related to HIV prevention and care including two years volunteering overseas in Namibia. More recently I have worked in a local children's hospice and for the last two years I have worked for BJJ initially as part of a project supporting people affected by cancer and more recently with a service for people affected by bereavement. Both these projects had to adapt to the challenges of the Covid pandemic. I am now a BJJ volunteer and also a trustee for a partner organisation that supports older LGBT+ people

Over the last three decades I have come to learn the value of diversity when working in teams and community groups. Sometimes the greatest opportunities to learn are not with the people who we are most familiar with but come from getting to know the world from the perspective of those who are different from ourselves. I made my tile as a celebration of diversity. The rainbow is a longstanding symbol of LGBT+ Pride but is also a symbol of diversity more generally. The phrase "stronger together" reflects my belief that we can achieve more in relationships with others than we can ever achieve working individually. The stars are the people who work together, the pot of gold symbolises the rewards.

I suffered a bout of Covid in April 2022 which left me with lingering poor health. I was glad to be fit enough to make this clay tile but sadly was too ill to turn up on the day that tiles were being painted. In my absence I asked another volunteer, Jon, to paint the tile for me. I have only recently got to know Jon as both a BJJ volunteer and a member of the LGBT community. Jon is a younger gay man growing up in a world where despite the advances in LGBT+ rights, issues of prejudice and stigma persist. It feels appropriate to me that the tile has been completed by someone from the next generation who will continue to champion diversity in BJJ and in our local community.



In the words of the late Jo Cox MP "we have far more in common with each other than the things that divide us". And we will always be better and stronger together.

Angela Deaville

I have been involved with BJJ as a volunteer since April 2022. I have also done other volunteer roles in the past few years. During my time with BJJ I have met many interesting people and made many wonderful friends. The inspiration to my tile: 'Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud' comes from personal experiences and with working with others sharing their experiences. It is important to have a positive attitude and outlook to show people that there is a silver lining in every dark moment and that things can get better. Also bringing a smile to someone's face makes my day.

BJJ value and promote older people and challenges ageist attitudes and procedures and promotes human rights. I feel that the clay project has been a huge success as it has brought many people together in many ways and it is also a wonderful piece of art commemorating 50 years of wonderful work. Everyone's tile is personal to them and means so much to each individual.



Angela Tunnicliffe

I am Angela, the Office Manager at the Beth Johnson Foundation, and have worked here since 2005. During that time, I have seen many changes with people coming and going, projects changing. One thing during all that time has been constant, and that is the building. Even though Beth Johnson did not live here, she lived a few doors away, it has always felt as though she did, as our work has always felt to me that we were doing it for her.

So, when I was asked to join in with the clay sessions, it seemed appropriate to style mine around Parkfield House, to me it has all of the history encased in its shell, memories of people who have worked so hard to uphold the name and ethos of Beth Johnson.

It is not 'just a house,' it represents the organisation, it holds our voices and inspiration, it is the home of the Foundation.



Like Beth, we want to make a difference, and we do by supporting those who come to us through our various projects. We touch their lives and strive to give them a voice, give them confidence to achieve a task, advise them to take a path to enrich their outlook, and for the time they are with us, they feel a part of the Foundation.

Anna Thomas

I'm married, in my 40s living locally to BJF with my husband and dog. I am creative, I enjoy painting for fun. I embrace having a go at things and not worrying too much about how it's going to turn out, I dabble in pottery courses now and then and I jumped at the chance to get involved with this clay project, it really appealed to me. I don't want life to be all about work, I want to feel like I am contributing to my local community. I run my own business and in March 2020 when we had the first lockdown I became a BJF volunteer telephone buddy. I supported a person who was isolated and lonely, living with a diagnosis of cancer that they would not recover from. Our connection was based on sharing conversations twice a week for 18 months. We spent time chatting and enjoying stories that they shared with me, they led such an interesting life. Sometimes we had difficult conversations too, when they were struggling with loneliness and isolation, with the cancer and the prospect of end of life.

One of the things that was always a happy subject for us to talk about was the fox that visited their garden. My tile says, 'has the fox been?' because whenever I asked that question the conversation turned to what food they had prepared and left out for the fox and that the food had always gone the next day. This was something we could always talk about that cheered them up following a difficult conversation. We'd go there and have that difficult conversation, but we always ended up talking about the fox.

They often felt that things were happening to them, life was all about medical appointments. The fox represented the point in our conversations that came back to positive times and their love of animals and nature. In contrast to other things in their life this was something in their control. It was about enjoying nature in their back garden, caring for the fox remained an important reminder of self-care. It was important to me to make sure my tile represented our conversations, and the fox was the most symbolic and meaningful representation from those many conversations. For me, my tile is a tribute, a memorial that will last.

BJF provides support that is personalised, so depending on what each person needs, we respond and are guided by the person. As a BJF volunteer we receive support, training, and ongoing guidance. The support I received as a volunteer was outstanding. There were times when I phoned my Volunteer Coordinator to pour my heart out, I needed someone to be positive and protective for me to enable me to be there for the other person. I'd never volunteered before, there is a lot of coaching and support and positivity, to give volunteers the support to be the best volunteer you can be.



This clay project is a really nice initiative to celebrate BJF. I love the fact it brought together staff, volunteers and people who use the services, as we all came together to make tiles. It was really inclusive. When you walked into the room you didn't know who everyone was, you just sat down and started to chat to one another. We may not have all known each other but we had BJF in common. I had been a BJF volunteer for two years, there were lot of volunteers and staff I'd met over Zoom I had never met in person before because of Covid.

Phil was brilliant, I've seen some of his artwork before in the community and it was really nice to be part of one of his art projects. I enjoy creativity anyway; some people get intimidated by thinking you have to be good at art. The joy of it is just doing something and see how it turns out and when you put everyone's pieces together it makes something beautiful that everybody has contributed to.

Anne Smith

I joined the Beth Johnson Foundation in June 2001 as Finance Officer, maintaining the accounts for BJF and another charity, Older Peoples' Advocacy Alliance (OPAAL UK), which had begun within the realms of BJF around the time I joined the Foundation. I had held this position for ten years when I decided to retire. However, I was asked to continue maintaining the accounts for OPAAL (UK) which I did until June 2018. This was great really as I enjoyed the company of the BJF staff so much and would have missed doing some figure work! I had been inspired by the many projects for which I had maintained the funding records. It was all so interesting and so different maintaining charity accounts from company accounts.

The projects covered so many unique needs and it awakened me to the strife and disadvantages of so many people in Staffordshire and, importantly, England and Wales. I was in awe of the CEO, Alan Hatton-Yeo, the project staff, and the work they were doing. It was all so interesting that I couldn't help but feel involved and, just as importantly, wanting to be involved. I'm still extremely interested in what is going on and it's lovely being welcomed into Parkfield House whenever I turn up like the proverbial bad penny to do some on-going OPAAL (UK) work!

Over the years there have been so many different projects and OPAAL (UK) was instrumental in the Foundation's successful Cancer Advocacy work through being one of OPAAL's pilot delivery charities. BJF went on to secure their own substantial funding for this Cancer Advocacy research whilst OPAAL (UK) secured their next substantial funding with the Big Lottery and Macmillan Cancer Support to continue this work.

A couple of months after I joined, we had a staff away day. I remember being asked what the Foundation's 'Objectives' was saying to me! My response was, "I'll be eligible in a month's time!" as I would be fifty! However, I soon discovered that the Foundation engaged in Dementia Advocacy, Health Improvement, and Intergenerational projects.

Outside interest under these themes, led to years of impressive, successful funding applications enabling the original projects to expand and reach many people over fifty years of age, plus the interaction with school children within the intergenerational projects. It enabled me to have an insight into all the projects (there were around a dozen at any one time) and to realise what BJF was achieving. It also led to some substantial European funding, the financial control of which was very tiresome, demanding and time consuming. But it was much needed funding.

When I first started at the Foundation the Beth Johnson Senior Activities Centre was actively used by older people and held at the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in Jasper Street, Hanley. Many older people met there to attend the groups being held, for classes such as dancing, yoga, general keep fit, crocheting (run by my mother-in-law, Joan Potts) to name a few activities. It was for older people to socialise during the weekdays.

There was also the Beth Johnson Leisure Association which included the art group on Tuesdays, the ladies craft group on Wednesdays and my father-in-law's, (Charles Potts), operatic/classical music group on Thursdays.

There was also the Ramblers' group (Charles involved in that too) who still meet at Parkfield House. I used to love the groups coming in; the art group was the most sedate as there was always high-pitched laughter coming from the craft ladies and quite loud operatic music from Charlie's music group which used to drift up the stairs, and beyond! Most times it was good, and I enjoyed it, but there were occasions when I had to shut my door because it was so loud and maudlin! We weren't keen on that noise! But it was amusing nevertheless! We had many a chuckle.

The Foundation also had young people on secondment to gain work experience. We had a lovely German girl who was funded initially by EU Erasmus, working with the CEO and then worked a brief time afterwards of her secondment as a member of staff. I am still in touch with her.

We also had a lovely Canadian girl working on the Intergenerational projects with the CEO. BJF part funded her PhD before she worked as a permanent member of staff.

And then there was a New Zealander who was on secondment from Manchester City Council. I used to call him Tigger as he always bounced everywhere! Especially up and down the stairs. Lovely, lively guy.

There was also an Associate Professor who came on a sabbatical from the Pennsylvania State University; he took a year out and worked part of his time with BJF. I found accommodation for the year for him, his wife and his two young sons. He always called me 'The Landlady', with which I had no problem.

The Foundation has impacted on so many people, giving so much help and assistance to vulnerable older people and making younger people aware of what older people have going on in their lives. It has been a privilege to have been involved with BJF and I enjoyed so much doing my tile (Finance, Best Job Ever 2001 – 2018) and my husband did one each for his parents – Joan Potts for the crochet at BJSAC and Charles Potts for the BJLA music and rambling groups!

It truly was the 'Best Job Ever'!

Brian Davison

I am interested in music, football, mountains, books, cinema, and cats. I have worked in the voluntary sector since 2001 and I now work as Finance Director with BJF. I am like the ship's navigator keeping BJF on course.

My tile was made by a skilled craftsperson and colleague Clare Dawson and is based on a photograph of Joni Mitchel of her cat Bootsy. My tile has a picture of Joni and Bootsy, with my name on it. It represents the continuing artistic excellence, beyond societal expectations for an artist of her age. Joni is an inspiration to me and to us all, for a creative, and productive older age.



Our BJF health and wellbeing activities focus on the potential artist in us all. We have assisted local people to engage in painting, writing, poetry, and researching local and personal histories.

The clay collaboration represents and is part of BJF's holistic interpretation of the ageing process, keeping people active, engaged, and connected in older age. The finished mosaic is stunning.

Clare Dawson

I've worked for the Beth Johnson Foundation for three years and hope I can continue for many more years to come. Working for the Beth Johnson Foundation means that I can work with clients in a reflective and person-centred way. It resonates with my own way of being, not least because working for the Beth Johnson Foundation means that creativity for wellbeing is intertwined in our approach to positive ageing. So, when I heard about the Clay Story project and the opportunity to create a tile for a commissioned piece of artwork by Philp Hardaker, I thought it was a perfect idea!

I created two tiles for the final piece of artwork. My first tile was quite an elaborate and detailed image of Joni Mitchel with her cat. I was asked by our Finance Director Brian to complete this because he couldn't attend the workshops and so he sent me a photo "of my old penpal Joni (long story) and her cat Bootsy" with the link as "communication with older folk as JM is now 78!".

My second tile is very simple...flowers emerging from a grassy bank with 'positivity' stamped underneath. During lockdown, I remember one particular client, whose resilience and positive outlook made me feel very humbled. She reflected one day that "you know what I think, no matter what...Spring will always come" and so the flowers on my tile represent Spring, a season of hope and reinvigoration in the face of adversity.

I included the word positivity because for me working with colleagues, volunteers and clients at the Beth Johnson Foundation is a very positive and enriching experience.



David Lightfoot

I was born in Madeley. I have worked as a gardener and a groundsman for schools. I've worked as part of the maintenance team and support worker for people with learning disabilities. I was a Red Cross volunteer at the Garden Festival in 1985 and BJF was close to the Festival Park. I was with the Red Cross for 24 years as a first aider. I saw the BJF office on the corner, I went in and asked if there were any vacancies at the BJF care home (now Sanctuary Housing). I worked at McDonalds, then applied and got a job at a care home working with people with learning disabilities. I started with small steps, I applied, then started working, then I achieved NVQ Level 2.

I came onto the courses with BJF, the amazing thing is I did all this with the help of a volunteer tech buddy and all the staff. I was able to transfer all my photos to my tablet.

With BJF tech support, I was able to get involved in Zoom groups. Sometimes there is more pressure coming to a room full of people, to say things, to move round the table. I didn't feel comfortable in a room full of people. BJF supported everyone when Covid 19 invaded the world with infection, the Centre was all closed. The situation was different. Clare from the BJF team phoned. BJF kept me sane. I had a chat with Clare, working out how to use Zoom, I got it sorted. Clare phoned up, she said, people would like to meet me. I was able to meet all these people without leaving the house. There were five or six men talking together in a men's group on a Friday. After that I joined different groups, all the Zoom groups. I felt more relaxed. I painted a view of Port Issac and sent my artwork to Clare. She said it was vibrant! No-one had ever said that. That was my first step. I just continued, practicing basic things, then I filled three albums with my artwork. Stephen my son said "we are proud of you dad".

Now painting is my full time hobby. Everyone does their own thing, I can go to Arthur Clive's garden, quiet, sat and did artwork, then carried on at home. I learned the basics and carried on building more steps. Seeing different people encourages me to believe 'I can do that'. It builds my confidence. BJF has become part of our lives and helped us get through lockdown.

The inspiration for my tile is based on the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme area. There are fishes in the sea, and an octopus, like the mother, with eight arms, supporting everyone through bereavement, dementia, healthy generations, all the groups support. I came to Parkfield House with a drawing, then felt bit nervous coming in but it was a great feeling being part of it. He (Philip Hardaker) says "carry on, you're doing alright there." It has given me confidence.

I have been involved in Ages and Stages at the theatre, I talked about my first painting, one of a lighthouse. People have listened to me talk about my artwork. I've even joined Ages and Stages. If it hadn't been for the BJF staff, I'd have been very depressed, now I'm more confident and more sure of myself.

Before I was worried about making mistakes. Before it seemed like I had no purpose and was worried about my physical health. I felt very lonely in myself. I joined Young at Heart, part of Father Hudson's Care and stood at the front and done quizzes and charades. I wouldn't have done this before. Now I have a lot more self worth. Before I didn't push myself but now I feel a lot more confident and feel as important as everyone else.



David Wozny

My name is David - as of October 2022, I'm a 53 year old retired IT security consultant. I'm an enthusiastic volunteer with the Beth Johnson Foundation, and would like to tell a little story of how I became part of the BJB community.

At the age of 45 in July 2015, I suffered a severe head injury in a bicycle accident which required brain surgery, followed by four weeks in a coma. After four months of fantastic hospital care and support by the NHS, I was well enough to be discharged home. I looked like me, but I no longer felt like me - my brain simply didn't feel like my own anymore. After six months of doing relatively little with myself at home, I recognised that I desperately needed a daily purpose. Returning to my previous career, or indeed any type of job, felt like an impossible goal. Regardless, I knew that I needed a reason to get out of the house, engaging with people, and giving me a purposeful feeling.

I started on my volunteering journey by helping out in the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity shop storeroom in Newcastle. I also worked with the Royal Voluntary Service, where I took on a befriending role. This entailed me visiting lonely folk and engaging in conversation, as well as consuming lashings of tea and biscuits! I then found a role which I fell in love with, as an "IT buddy" on the shared computers at Newcastle library. The confidence and self-worth I gained through volunteering, indirectly led to me resume my professional career with the Met Police in London in July 2017, who I'd been working for at the time of my injury two years previous. I continued for two further years as an IT professional, however, a residual outcome of my brain injury has been the inability to retain any new technology skills I've attempted to learn - this meant it was time for me to retire.

Before describing my involvement with BJB, I'll rewind a little. I spent my childhood / schooling years in Penkull, so it's always felt like my home town. I recall throwing sticks at conker trees in the backs of Parkfield House - between Princes Road and Yoxhall Avenue. I was always aware of Beth Johnson in terms of providing housing, and was delighted to learn it had a charitable foundation.

Following my retirement, I wanted to retain a vocational purpose in my life. I made an enquiry to BJB, and I learned that the Healthy Generations project had a perfectly shaped tech buddy / digital friend slot for me to fit into. A sample of the tasks I'd assist people with on their phones / tablets / laptops, either at Parkfield house or in care homes, are:

- Creating new email accounts
- Explaining good practice search and browsing techniques
- Installing weather and free newspaper apps
- Organising photos taken on mobile phones
- Explaining practical ways to organise and manage passwords - my sweet spot.

I don't view my contribution as singularly making a major difference to anyone, but feel that lots of small things, when considered in totality, make it a very worthwhile exercise. When reflecting upon how volunteering has benefited me personally, I can see that it's helped me to develop listening skills. During my IT career, where I was often training and presenting, I was regarded as having strong communication skills. It's only since becoming a volunteer that I've recognised how my supposed skills were only half-baked. I've come to appreciate the enjoyment and value from listening and absorbing what's being conveyed in conversation, rather than paying little more than lip-service. I think of BJB as a community, where there's been the opportunity to meet lots of new folk.

A little insight into my tile. It has Beth Johnson emblazoned on a replica of a London Tube station sign. It represents a junction in my life, where I changed line (track). I went from my professional career, largely in London (hence the Tube), to my volunteering vocation with Beth Johnson.

The tile making itself was a lovely event, where we each shared a little of the stories behind our tiles and learned of how Beth Johnson Foundation had individually touched our lives. Given the common refrain about the tile mosaic being around after most of us staff / volunteer / participants have long gone, it was nice that there were some family children involved.

I thought that Phil Hardaker did a marvellous job of taking all of our singular tiles and weaving them into a beautiful mosaic. Given our potteries heritage, it feels appropriate that this 50th BJB anniversary is celebrated in clay.

Whenever I consider the difference which BJB makes, I don't think of any particular project or engagement. I typically ponder the evolving relationships between the BJB staff, volunteers and participants - and the shared goals which we strive to achieve together. I think of us all being underneath the same BJB umbrella - it feels like being part of a lovely community



Dianne Davies

I was born blind and had operations to give me some sight, which meant I was sent away to boarding school in Berkshire against my family's wishes, three of the worst years of my life until I was moved to another school in Coventry. I married and had one daughter who unfortunately inherited my eye condition, I fought for her to be taught locally.

I had various jobs including 14 years as a telephonist with an insurance company, made redundant. I worked for RNIB as the only visually impaired telephone appeals co-ordinator. I then did six months at the outpatient eye clinic until I joined Stoke-on-Trent City Council. I then took a long distance learning course at University of Central England and achieved a DipSW in rehabilitation work with visually impaired people and communicator guide with Deafblind people at SENSE charity. After 14 years I took voluntary redundancy due to my role being discontinued. I have done charity fundraising work for as far back as the mid '80s.

After redundancy I decided to find voluntary work, I did not want to become a couch potato. A friend recommended BJF to me and I have now volunteered for BJF for 8 years. I started as cancer advocate then telephone befriending through lockdown. I also gave visual impairment training to staff and volunteers over Zoom. Now I am on the bereavement friendship project.

My tiles reflect my work with BJF and myself; The first is two clasped hands with the word "befriending" and my crucifix pressed into the clay. My second reflects the visually impairment training with the RNIB stock person and the word training. My third reflects me as a person with severe sight loss showing the visual impairment symbol of an eye partly shaded, with my initials DD in the corner. I didn't think I could manage the painting and I am very proud that I managed it having to look very close but I did it.



I find volunteering with BJF very rewarding with the various strands to it, luckily with my past experience I can move from one role to another. My husband has various medical conditions including Alzheimer's dementia, my work with BJF gives me an outlet and the support of staff and other volunteers is immeasurable.

Dorothy Lightfoot

I'm Dorothy married to David and I live in Newcastle, I was born in Manchester and married in 1974. I'm now retired but I was a nursery nurse (now called a childcare practitioner). I've been a supervisor of play groups, worked with children till I retired in 2008. I have two sons and two grandchildren.

I had done some workshops and courses with BJF after my retirement. I first was connected to BJF when I first did a fitness course. I was trained to do the exercises course and did some training to be an instructor. In 2012/13 as part of my work being on the committee for Tea at Two (a local social group), they ran an exercise class, to help wellbeing. I was asked to train on a course called Active in Age with BJF. I did IT courses and joined the Healthy Generations courses. We'd started getting close to the staff then Covid hit. We got to use zoom, we had a meeting on Zoom and didn't know how to end the meeting, so I said "I've got a poem, shall I read it?" Later, someone in the group said why don't you write a poem. Someone else in the group shared what she'd learnt at a poetry course and then we all got started.

Because BJF put on all these different activities, some of us had never ever painted before but are coming on a treat now. We all got into the art, health and well being, relaxation on a Monday, chuckles and challenges (jokes and quizzes) on a Tuesday, poetry on a Wednesday, then art on a Thursday and history on a Friday. We did a cook book, shared recipes, did a poetry book, one about reflections, memories down memory lane.

Then we came to do the tiles, (my tile shows us all branching out on Zoom). Working with BJF on Zoom during the pandemic, It saved our sanity, it was our salvation. The tree shows BJF branching out to the different activities and branching out to support the community to bring us together under Zoom. People came to the Zoom groups from different areas of North Staffordshire. Some came from other areas, because of lockdown some members were staying out of the area. BJF reached people in their homes and brought everyone together, like branches reach out.



We found skills we never know we had. My mother could paint, my sister could paint, but I never had. Because you were in your home painting, you could do it without pressure. Clare saw the positives. At an art class someone said the teacher at school brought everyone to look and laugh at her painting so she never painted again. I never thought I was an artist, but my sister now says 'mam would be proper proud of that'.

BJF has given me a more positive attitude to myself, given me more confidence. I've always lacked confidence, it's made the difference, made me realise I can do things. I was quite surprised my tile turned out as good as it did and part of such a lovely project.

Such an honour to be included in it. I think the staff at BJF are absolutely wonderful, very kind, very encouraging, the best!

Hazel Wilson and Tillie

Me and Tillie have been partners for nine years and she's taught me everything about the outside world, how to stay safe outside. Tillie is my guide dog, because I can't see past the end of my nose. I have light perception, I use that. I'm still learning new routes with Tillie now. I'm truthful and to the point. I am a positive person, bubbly and love a joke.

A friend Dianne told me she did volunteering for BJF as a buddy for people going through cancer. I had just gone through breast cancer myself and wanted to support people going through cancer and treatment... knowing that I could confidently talk and understand what they were going through having gone through it myself. So I joined BJF as a volunteer buddy.

I have two tiles, one is Tillie's paw print and one is a picture of Tillie, with her name and her age, she was 11 years old when the tile was made. Just after the tile was made Tillie retired and is now a family pet dog, we still go out and Tillie still keeps me safe. The paw print represents my life is in her paws.

The tile of Tillie's paw represents everything. Tillie has given me back everything in my life that sight loss took. I have freedom, free to go around everywhere knowing I'm safe and my husband feels reassured too.



I love that the tiles are so tactile that I can feel everything, I can feel Tillie's character through the tile, Philip Hardaker captured it, her broad smile. When I feel that tile, I know she's happy, not stressed and it's wonderful, I don't know how he's captured that.



Absolutely a-ma-zing! It meant everything to be part of the clay project, not many blind people get the opportunity to do something as wonderful as that, a lot of the time blind people get excluded, the world disables us. I love BJF and I don't feel disabled when I am here. I feel accepted, I feel abled. I sit with people at BJF and feel on an equal level, I feel heard and understand. Some people assume what I can do and what I can't do. BJF don't assume, they listen and find ways I can get involved. I am not judged by my disability.

Philip Hardaker blew me away, the way he's captured Tillie in clay he is so talented. He talked me through each and every step he was doing. A total descriptive run down, I could touch Tillie's paw in the clay so I could feel what he was doing. He totally involved me, asking for my opinion and talked me through step by step.

Absolutely a-ma-zing, every time I touch the mosaic there's something new on there new information, different every time I run my fingers along it. I find Tillie then move from there. Each tile, I can pick up different characters of the person that made the tile and insight into what they are saying through their tile. It's like reading a book, a biography of the members of the BJF community. Each tile is done with love and care, each one is individual. That's my book of who we are.

Hilary Stefanelli

I am married with a grown-up son, and I am in my 60's. I love travel, reading, current affairs and rugby league (not necessarily in that order!). I have worked in the voluntary sector for various charities all my working life and I now work as Project Development Manager with the Beth Johnson Foundation. I manage and support existing and new projects as well as taking a lead on engagement and involvement.

Why did I choose this design for my tile? Well, I believe in equality and justice for all, and I am proud to be a feminist. I wanted to show that we celebrate all women: women with disabilities, women of colour, trans women, gay women, bi women, young women and particularly for us, older women. As older women we have experienced love and loss, bereavement, illness, we are mothers, lovers, wives, partners, sisters. Our stories are fascinating, interesting, and powerful and we can learn so much from each other.



BJF gives us the space to hear each other's stories, learn from diverse experiences and offer support to each other, amplifying our voices and guarding our right to a great later life. It was lovely to sit with people from all across the BJJ community making and then painting the tiles, it was especially great to see the schoolchildren getting involved – I think it was a really enjoyable experience for everyone.

Jane Jervis

My name is Jane Jervis, I am a Lecturer at Keele University and I have been one of the Trustees since 2020. My tile represents the links and good work undertaken between BJJ and the university. There are many squirrels at Keele University, and they have become part of the community, their image being used on hoodies and society emblems.



Being involved in the clay project gave me a chance to meet many of the wonderful volunteers and members, to hear what BJJ means to them and to understand the stories behind their tiles. An inspiring few days.

John Tinsley

I am a sensitive person. I have been with BJJ since my dementia diagnosis and I was invited to join the Peer Support Group. My advocate came to visit me and made me feel like I'd known her for years. She made me feel very comfortable, she listens. I try and keep independent but it's knocked my confidence. All the advocates were very helpful, I appreciate BJJ helping me have the good support.

My nickname at home is Jolly John, when I struggle with my moods I just keep myself to myself until I feel better. Sometimes I couldn't follow meetings because I couldn't hear anything. I didn't say anything, even though I wanted to. My advocate helped, I'd look, and she understood when I wanted an explanation and if I didn't catch something. She sensed when I was going to lock down. My advocate explained things to me, it was very comforting to me to know she understood, my face lit up, I felt very relaxed.



The Peer Group, we are not just members, we are friends. Before I joined BJJ, everything was building up, I felt lost. I had lots of health problems, and dealing with bereavement. I appreciate all the help. Everyone has been very good to me.

I chose to make a flower tile for the mosaic, I was a bit worried, because of my confidence, it's gone down, but I enjoyed it. I used to do art, painting and making cards, lockdown meant that was all cancelled and I gradually lost interest. When I was making my sunflower, I worried but I finished it, and I enjoyed it. I would like to take it up again and give it a try, see if I can get into it.

Jon Cacia

I am Jon Cacia and have HSP, a condition that makes it hard to walk. I enjoy helping other people as part of the Beth Johnson Foundation team. I help people out with any IT problems they have and help them connect to other people that they weren't able to talk to before.



The reason for my tile is I want everyone to know that no matter what problems they face in life push through and lead a happy life. The Beth Johnson Foundation has made a huge difference in thousands of people's lives. The clay project was well organised and everyone had an incredible time creating and painting their tiles.

Kath Parson

My name is Kath Parson. I am married to Kent, we have seven children all themselves married or with partners around the world who have given us seven wonderful grandchildren.

OPAAL UK has been hosted by the Beth Johnson Foundation since it's foundation. This was around ten years before I joined OPAAL UK in June 2006. OPAAL was created to give the national strategic lead on the development of independent advocacy with older people. My connection with BJJ is a strong and enduring one as BJJ proved to be a consistent, supportive and reliable partner throughout my tenure with OPAAL UK.

OPAAL UK delivered a wide range of national projects. Each of these projects had a partnership board made up of member organisations including the Beth Johnson Foundation and national bodies with representatives from central, regional and local government, several large NGOs and other national organisations such as SCIE, BIHR and CQC with an interest in independent advocacy.

OPAAL UK became the first point of contact for advocacy providers, developing national policies and guidance for the delivery of quality advocacy services to older people alongside our national project work. During my time with OPAAL I was able to recruit a fabulous team of 12 trustees, five staff and a dozen Associates to work with us to make a real and in many cases lasting impact on the older people we served.

The project of which I am most proud involves working with 16 advocacy providers to deliver advocacy support to older people affected by cancer across 16 areas of England. BJJ was one of our partner organisations delivering this project. For this project which ran for five years I raised over £3 million from the Big Lottery, Department of Health, and Macmillan. Much of these funds were allocated to the partners to deliver cancer advocacy services.

The legacy of this work includes several publications detailing the impact and outcomes of independent advocacy support on the older people we helped. One of these publications was the first national Society Return on Investment SROI report produced in collaboration with Macmillan and Ernst & Young (EY). This report examined the social and financial return to society on investment of independent advocacy services for older people affected by cancer. The results were conclusive as for each £1 invested together with our partners we were able to show a return of £6.70 to the public purse.

I retired as OPAAL's Chief Executive in June 2018 and currently work part time for the National Development Team for Inclusion as an Independent Assessor for the National Quality Performance Mark.

My tile is a simple one depicting our name surrounded by flowers to demonstrate the growth and development of our work. This is a fantastic project enabling all of us in the BJJ family to celebrate our achievements together providing a lasting legacy and pictorial history for BJJ.

During the twelve years I was privileged to work with BJJ I became impressed by the very real improvements BJJ's projects make to the lives of older people, some of whom would simply not be with us today were it not for the interventions made by BJJ's staff.



Maggie Bradley

I enjoy art and being creative. A sense of community is really important, I enjoy bringing everybody out in the sessions, everyone gets involved. I enjoy facilitating conversations, helping people to take part so everyone gets the chance to get involved.

I've been a volunteer with BJJ since 2019, one of the first things I did was go to VAST and ask them about volunteering. I had some knowledge about IT and the Healthy Generations Project was just setting up. The idea was to use IT to encourage people to benefit their health in a number of ways. There were sessions to help people to use their equipment and the practical side of using tech. The course also guided them to use tech to benefit their health in a range of ways, for example guided meditation sessions. The course also helped people to find out about general health and wellbeing, health, diet and recipes.

I wasn't delivering the training but I was helping people to do what was suggested, working one to one with people in the groups. We went to Extra Care Villages and also facilitated sessions at Parkfield House.

Then lock down meant we couldn't go out to people's homes, so then I was asked if I would consider hosting a poetry session. I don't know much about poetry but I'm quite good at facilitating group work, so I thought I'd give it a go, ensuring everyone has a say and interacted.

I did a poetry course with WEA because of information links sent by BJJ. The course involved the bare bones of poetry. BJJ suggested the WEA courses on line because we were all getting fed up at home. I facilitated the poetry group and shared information about poems and at the time people felt they were learning about poetry and developing their own style. People were very talented, so we picked a subject every week. The poems were often biographical, so they showed what people's lives were like, how they lived and what they acquired in life.

I wanted to reflect the poetry sessions on the tile and on Zoom, as Zoom saved our lives. We made friends and gave each other company. I wanted to capture three figures chatting to each other. One of the figures in my tile is wearing a tiarra. Sue (one of the poetry group members) had a tiarra for the Golden Jubilee and was going to wear it for a dance. The rest of us were local but she moved away from Stoke and lives in Eastbourne, but joined us on Zoom.

I included words on my tile: 'friendship online' to try to convey what we've been through on Zoom. I spent a little time planning then painting it as well as I could. I thought it was worth celebrating what our group meant to each other and the difficulties you shared during lockdown. People wrote poems and stories about loneliness, one person lost three friends early on in Covid.

Our zoom groups are a place for people to reflect on their fears, express grief, trials and tribulations, at a time when everyone was only allowed out one hour a day. We were able to share experiences not just go through them alone.

Our poetry Zoom sessions were not just about poetry. Zoom is a powerful tool for the future. I facilitated the session and helped with structure, the power thing was discovered by accident. One person gained a lot of confidence, they were very shy and didn't feel great. It was lovely to see them grow in confidence, sharing stories with us. They didn't write poems, they wrote short stories. We agreed this was part of the poetry session as it was more inclusive. They wrote short stories about their life, they were very shy about reading them out and over time gained more confidence. Sometimes their stories were very funny and made us laugh. It was very rewarding seeing someone grow in confidence. It's great to see people and chat. Each poem led to some conversation.

It was about getting over loneliness and giving people company. The Intergeneration activities were great, everyone loved that, when we had the school along and they joined us on Zoom. That made us very happy, we shared poems and then they shared poems. I saw everyone lighting up and really enjoying them.

The clay project with Philip Hardaker is wonderful, he was very generous with his time and encouragement. The mosaic is fabulous, really amazing and beautiful. At the same time it is very specific and appropriate, it tells the story of BJJ in a very colourful visual way.



Malcolm Sullivan

I'm a 75 year old Christian and interested in all sorts of music up to 1982 because after 1982 you have to decipher what they say. I love pop music, Caribbean, and Flamenco. I expected to enjoy retirement with my wife. Unfortunately, she contracted cancer in 2019 and that brought me where I am now. What brought me to BJJ was a traffic accident 5 months after my wife died and I needed someone to talk to and Andrew was on the other end of the phone. I spoke to him about the accident, and he invited him to join the Zoom meetings so that's what I did. I found the meetings helpful it gave me connection with other people outside of which I wouldn't have known. Over the weeks and months, I've developed a deeper understanding of other people's issues who've arrived on this same journey.

I made two tiles, a heart and a butterfly. The heart one, I came in not knowing what I wanted to do and with no design, so Philip Hardaker gave me a tool to draw a heart using a pattern on the tile. I chose the heart because it was one of Dorne's favourite symbols. I included her name on the heart shape along with the date she was born and the day she died. Along the top I included the words from her funeral service card "she filled her world with love" because that's what she did.



The butterfly I designed that on the computer, I searched on the internet for an image of a butterfly and printed that off and brought it in. I lay the picture on the tile and traced over it to get the shape. Inscribed beauty within and without as well as "she filled her world with love" and her birth date and the date she died. Dorne liked butterflies, so hearts and butterflies remind me of her.

I think BJJ makes a big difference, it's made a bigger difference to my life than other groups because it's more flexible. You started out on Zoom because of the pandemic and gradually brought it away from my living room to the BJJ living room. I'm a person who doesn't like sitting down and staying in. I would rather go out than stay in, so I've found it easier to join in with BJJ. But for other people they've had a reason and purpose to go out because of BJJ. For others who find it difficult to go out of the house connecting with Zoom means they can connect with others. I found the clay project interesting in that you find yourself dropped into a situation in life that you've got no control over that takes you on a different path than you would have. I'm tempted to take it up as a hobby. I'm thankful for BJJ providing the opportunity to take part. I think the mosaic is brilliant.

MAQ

I joined Beth Johnson Foundation in 2011, I was diagnosed with Dementia in 2010 and I didn't have any formal organisations that I could actually turn to for help that I needed. The biggest concern, we are heard by professionals, but we are not listened to, that is the important point. I heard about BJJ Advocates and the help they can give you. At that time I was so down, I was really really down, I couldn't talk to strangers, it is so embarrassing talking about the condition, I was frightened in all honesty. When you are diagnosed with Dementia, because of this perception out there, one is scared to hear the word and think about having Dementia. My diagnosis came about because, I had major heart surgery, they did a brain scan. I was recovering from major heart surgery and told my heart was working ok but my brain ain't. I refused to accept it. I didn't have any problems. This is where BJJ advocacy came in, bringing me confidence, if it wasn't for BJJ I wouldn't be talking to you today.

I am a founder member of the Dementia Advocacy Peer Support Group. We started talking about it, we thought about it and we were picking up tips, what worked for one might work for another, and I had an idea that if we had more people it might help more people. The group started from a little group and became a big group. Peer means someone you have grown up with, someone you can relate to, went to school or college with, someone you can really trust. All these people we never met before, what connected us was Dementia. We really confide in each other, it was easy to understand each other, the trust was there. Main thing, people with this condition, you need to have a safe space, and that is provided by BJJ, an environment where you could talk, share, and get the support that is needed.

Prior to my diagnosis I was a reader, writer, translator, I speak 14 different languages and dialects, worked as interpreter with NHS, Police, I worked in the community, acted as liaison with community and authorities. I was an accountant by trade, my profession, bookkeeping and accountancy, no computers, just a word processor, pad and pen and lot of brain power, time to do things. What made me be so active with my peers was because I thought I could speak the language, To a certain extent I'm literate and can speak the language and do the research, what about people who can't... the platform provided by BJJ meant that I could say some of these things to help other people.

The other thing when bilingual, there are times when you think in another language, then translate back into the language you are using at that time and that takes time, and that time lapse is misunderstood by professionals. Communication is more than verbal communication, it is body language, it's smile and smile back, someone frowns, we think what's important? Everything matters. Gestures matter, sometimes we use gestures to emphasise a point.

The only thing why we don't have carers in our Peer Support Group, some things we don't want carers to know. At the same time, we don't want to be a burden. Dementia is a condition where sometimes you are struggling with it, coping with it, managing with it, living with it. A person may not be able to express what they are experiencing, doesn't mean they are not experiencing, feeling... if I'm cold and struggling, not able to express it, I'm still cold.

I think that my BJJ tile tells a story because the backbone to my recovery has been BJJ and DEEP (Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project). I tried to do it so someone looking at the tile will know what DEEP and BJJ mean to me, really close to my heart. They dug deep and pulled me out.

Look at the talent!!! I'm not an artist as such, but I saw some of them doing it, one blind lady looking so closely at her phone so she could see her picture, that's passion. The mosaic has named all of your connections, grouped together, a community.



My other tile is a flower, it is the Alzheimer's Society logo. When you really look at it, the flower on its own has a story to it. My story was a root, then stems, then leaves then the flower. All that is Dementia. The root is where it comes from, the stem is what causes it, the leaves are what issues we have with memory problems. The flower... even with all those issues, that flower is still there, you are still there, ready and able to bloom.

I have loved meeting people at BJJ, looking at the tiles, what they have done, what they are trying to say...it has been educational and informative. Being amongst people was an added bonus, meeting people I haven't met before.

BJJ scored once again, it was a platform that people can put their interest down in a manner that is going to be there forever, that tile will.

Everyone is individual but for me, my main hobby is meeting people, socialising, sharing ideas: Gandhi said 'Live today as if you were going to die tomorrow and learn today as if you were going to live forever'.



Phil Potts

Charlie & Joan Potts with Beth Johnson Leisure Association

My dad, Charlie, retired on his 65th birthday July 27, 1988. He'd been working since he left school at 14, with a few years 'interruption' serving as a Royal Marine during WWII. He'd had a number of clerical jobs in the pottery industry and 'on the railways' before the war. After the war, he got a job with the coop selling 'penny insurance' policies and, following that, a job with Stoke-on-Trent City Council as a rent collector which was a little better remunerated. Although devoid of any formal qualifications, he was exceptionally bright and started 'night school' to get some belated certification. He became active with WEA (Workers' Education Association) through his evening classes and became active in NALGO (National Association of Local Government Officers – the forerunner to UNISON) and soon became the equivalent to a shop steward. His intelligence, determination and sheer hard work got him sufficient qualifications to leave Rent Collecting and move into Social Work, still employed by SOTCC, he'd be in his late 30s by then and we three boys were all at school.

Wife, Joan, had left school at 16 with qualifications equivalent of 'O' levels/GCSEs. She was three years Charlie's junior and worked for British Aluminium during the war and up until getting married in 1950. Joan (and her mum) supported Charlie in his quest for improvement, the family all lived in Joan's mum's house so Charlie only had to provide food (which he always did, we had few luxuries but never went hungry). As we boys got older, Joan herself, turned to night school and took the A levels she needed to get into Teacher Training College. She qualified as a teacher in the mid 60s, she was about 40 and youngest son Philip would be about ten.

The family income rose considerably and, unsurprisingly, we three boys were left in absolutely no doubt about the importance of a good education! Charlie entered Social Work, becoming a Senior Child Care Officer then after maybe twenty years switched to the Probation Service, first in Longton and then onsite in Stafford Prison, he often joked that he's served his last seven years in Stafford 'nick'.

Joan specialised in what was then called Domestic Science (particularly cookery and needlework) which would be Food & Fabric Technology nowadays. She timed her retirement to coincide with Charlie's so that they could pursue interests together. They joined the Arnold Bennett Society (they were Chair and Secretary for some years) and attended activities run by the Beth Johnson Senior Activities Centre (BJSAC) based in Jasper Street, Hanley. The Beth Johnson Leisure Association (BJLA) was formed as a result of BJSAC and attendees formed groups to enjoy swimming, walking, music and art/painting. BJLA used the meeting room in Parkfield House to facilitate the art and music groups and the Ramblers held meetings to discuss and plan walks.

Charlie's passion was music, no, opera, particularly Italian 'bel canto' Opera. He'd collected recordings since childhood, and as his personal circumstances allowed, his collection grew.

After his death in 2005, I had to dispose of his collection of over 6,000 LPs and about 5,000 CDs. Whilst he was alive he loved nothing better than to share parts of his vast, encyclopaedic, knowledge of opera with anyone who showed an interest. BJLA gave him an opportunity to do this, his weekly (Thursdays) Music Appreciation Meetings ran for about 10 years at Parkfield House until his passing in 2005. He also ran Summer Schools in Spain for his BJLA class but also others as he advertised these schools in various publications (The Gramophone, Opera Monthly) and through the Donizetti Society and the like.

Charlie also liked to try and keep fit by walking. Through BJLA he helped run their Ramblers Group and would spend hours, planning routes, organising coaches (often cursing to himself as people inevitably failed to pay on time or changed their minds at the last minute) he did this for many years. Charlie's tile depicts a compass and some musical notation.



Joan put her phenomenal needlework skills (she could knit or crochet complex patterns whilst simultaneously watching TV, reading a book or holding a conversation) to good use.

Before her teaching career she would make items to sell at her church bazaar, I have memories of endless crinoline dollies, pincushions, aprons etc, to raise funds. Later she took the opportunity to share her knowledge and skillset through the BJLA. She held classes at the aforementioned Beth Johnson Senior Activities Centre for years, particularly in crochet as she would say 'well anyone can knit!'.



She was also passionate about local history and Stoke-on-Trent's most famous author son, Arnold Bennett. She arranged talks and provided illustrative material to augment them and had a collection of maps, drawings, literary excerpts that she would select and display. Quite often talks were held in the Senior Centre but she was a 'regular' in Burslem Town Hall and the library.

Her collection of local history books and other materials (quite a few ceramic plaques depicting local interest) was extensive (ie hundreds) and her Arnold Bennett collection included several first editions. Joan sadly stopped attending BJLA when Charlie passed away in 2005. Joan's tile depicts a ball of yarn, a crochet hook and an imprint of a piece of Joan's crochet.

Ruby Greene

The cocoa bearing Tree

Trinidadian saying: People who have cocoa in the sun, should not pray for rain.

Being from the Caribbean, I wanted to choose something which was both indigenous to the Caribbean, but was also a symbol of comfort and nourishment, replenishing our bodies and spirit, the same things I gained from our Beth Johnson's Healthy Generation Groups. I chose to make tile depicting a fruit bearing cocoa tree because I could identify various similarities between Cocoa and the Beth Johnson Foundation.

The cocoa fruit is aesthetically beautiful. It does not grow off branches or stems but in clusters from the bark of the cocoa tree. Its outside colour is reddish/yellow with a tinge of green. The inner fruit has a bright furry red lining together with brownish/black seeds which are really what is used to make Cocoa powder and other chocolate products. From this fruit we can derive both pleasure and comfort. We have products like confectionaries and warm and cold drinks which are tasty satisfying, and comforting. Lots of people still depend on their nightly drink of cocoa to ensure restful sleep at night. During this time their bodies are relaxed and their energy restored.

Beth Johnson Foundation, through their Healthy Generation project, was a beacon in the desolate time of the pandemic, when many of us were at our lowest ebb in need of comfort and support. During this period, these groups provided for me, a vital life line and something to wake up and look forward to. By sharing in our groups we comforted each other, renewed our spirits, derived a great deal of pleasure.

Cocoa was once a major source of income and enriched many people. Lots of hard work went into the production of this crop, and though vastly different, I am sure, so did the development of the Healthy Generations Programmes by Beth Johnson.



Steve Banbury

My name is Steve and I've been an active member of the Art for All, Poetry and History Groups at the Beth Johnson Foundation. My story behind the tile is very simple, it's my way of saying thank you, my way of showing appreciation for all that the Beth Johnson Foundation has helped me with during Covid. I didn't want the tile painted, just to keep my message simple, with maximum impact...thank you.



Sue Humphries

Prior to taking early retirement, I was employed at Keele University for almost 20 years. Whilst there I held a number of different administrative positions working with academics on their research projects relating to ageing, social inclusion and exclusion in later life. Following Covid I wanted to undertake voluntary work and looked at the BJJ website as I knew they operated in similar areas to those I had worked in. I was lucky enough to secure a voluntary position with BJJ and started a few months ago.

My idea for the ceramic tile was based upon something I transcribed from a research participant interview and it has never left me. The final question asked of the interview participant was along the lines of.... what would you like to happen in the next 12 months? One lady responded that she just wanted to die, that she never saw anyone and that a smile from someone would make her day. Something so simple and which costs nothing and yet she did not have this. This was one of the factors in me looking to volunteer with The Beth Johnson Foundation as their work helps to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of people in their later years. An example is their Discover Digital project.



Professor Ziv Amir, Chair, Beth Johnson Foundation Board of Directors

As part of our 50th celebrations, creating the mosaic of tiles brought together many people, young and old and from different ethnic backgrounds. I was lucky to take part in the painting of the clay tiles event. This was really a day to remember! The atmosphere in the room was amazing. To see these people working together with a sense of humour and enthusiasm was very reassuring. One of the participants sent me the following:

On Monday the 20th June 2022 I visited the Beth Johnson Foundation in Stoke for the first time. I was immediately struck by the quiet industry taking place in all of the rooms. The occasion was the painting of commemorative tiles designed and made by the BJF community. I was seamlessly absorbed into this wonderful group as if I were a regular visitor. When I asked if I could help in any way, tiles were found for me to work on, a brief lesson on application and off I went, part of the group. So relaxed and warm and welcoming, what a wonderful asset to have at the heart of the community. I left secure in the knowledge that the next time I am in Stoke I shall be able to call in and be absorbed as if I had never left, a truly lovely feeling.

I was moved to sketch the below humble watercolour after spending several hours in the company of the BJF community. They were painting tiles which they had designed and made as the centrepiece of their 50th anniversary celebrations. I was struck by the quiet dedication to the task and the diversity and quality of all their varied and beautiful designs. I wanted to record and hopefully capture some of that day. (Marilyn Gollom, Manchester, June 20th 2022).





Beth Johnson
23/03/1910 - 12/10/1971

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