



Regenerator Stories

Hilary Cox Condron Artist and Imaginarium Creative Producer

“ Making space and taking the time to nurture our imaginations and the creativity that is inherent in all of us is regenerative. It rebalances us and opens our heart and minds to the world around us. ”



Hilary is a community artist, activist, storyteller, former politician and provocateur.

In her participatory arts practice, Hilary provokes creativity and playful exploration to reimagine the communities and places we live in. Her work builds and deepens connections to ourselves, each other, the natural environment and a hopeful vision of the future. Hilary often thinks of mycellium and how - as we share stories and weave connections - we are like these underground fungal networks that support the forests so that a new generation of trees can survive.

“ The arts inspire love, empathy and a longing for something better... ”

Hilary creates with communities to find wonder, strength and the seeds of new ideas in the edges, where lives collide: whether that is in the natural spaces between buildings or amongst marginalised communities. Together, they celebrate the wondrously diverse, quirky, queer and fabulous communities we live in. They make spaces where we can move away from binary and polemic conversations and learn to be fluid, adaptable and interconnected. The arts inspire love, empathy and a longing for something better as we recognise the awe on our doorsteps, share stories, and support each other – like the nature we are all a part of – to flex, adapt and collaborate to reimagine and create a balanced and thriving future.

Reimagine



Read more
about Hilary and
other Cambridge
Regenerators.

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Regenerator Stories

Alice Willits On the Verge

“We just decided to look at the world around us differently. And once you put that filter on and look at the world around you with an insect’s eyes, you immediately begin to make changes to the way that you live in that space. We can all do that, we can all imagine ourselves into a different future.”



Alice is a poet, gardener, meadow-maker, soil-cultivator and advocate with On the Verge.

Alice plants for pollinators along with a small group of committed people. They transform urban infrastructure like verges, parks, schools and roundabouts to increase biodiversity and make sure pollinating insects can access nectar-rich flowers across our city. On the Verge started with a text message from a friend, Ben, who was asking if anyone else was anxious about the desperate drop in pollinators because he wanted to do something. Alice and Jo instinctively responded and together they decided to take action. Their bold vision was to

plant nectar-rich meadows throughout the city and they’ve been learning every step of the way.

Some of this work is strikingly simple, like replacing the mown grass on a roundabout with a rich variety of wildflowers. Or spending a morning clearing a city verge of overgrowth to allow the seed bank that’s already there to germinate. Through small, simple actions they advocate successfully on the part of nature.

On The Verge want anyone to have a go. They encourage people to try a 1m Meadow at home or join them for seasonal maintenance to learn what to do. More often it’s what to do less of — like less mowing for a start! And you don’t need to be an expert to take the first step, Alice says, everyone’s a beginner at the start. The friends’ inclusive approach has enabled them to make and maintain flower meadows with schools, parents, young people, neighbourhood groups, residents and local councils.

Alice says they’re just ordinary, working people getting on with making a change in a way that gives them hope for a greener and fairer future: a future where plants, rivers, animals and insects have the same rights as corporations enjoy now.

“We can tune in to our bodies and ask, ‘what could I change in this space that would make me feel better?’ Because what’s better for us is better for insects, is better for other animals and is better for health outcomes generally.”



Read more about Alice and other Cambridge Regenerators.

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Regenerator Stories

Clara Todd Water Sensitive Cambridge

“How can we change our relationship to water?
How can we build little pockets and corridors for nature and
water to move through the city?”



Clara is a regenerative economist, water advocate and permaculturist with Water Sensitive Cambridge.

Clara co-founded Water Sensitive Cambridge with three other Cambridge residents after talking about how water could be managed differently. The group builds awareness and action to support the urban water cycle. For example, the group makes rain gardens using existing green spaces to put water into the ground instead of the drain. This supports trees, reduces surface flooding, and cleans the water when it does find its way to the river. Clara takes inspiration from many groups and individuals who bring the arts, sciences and economics together for restorative projects around water.

“Don't be too critical of yourself or of others. There are multiple
ways of being, we cannot be a monoculture.”

Clara believes the community has a central role in making more places for nature in our neighbourhoods. Taking action can start with just observing what's happening nearby, and accepting that we are all part of the ecosystem. We can all contribute to making our city a better place to live, with a better relationship with water. For example, each of our waterways that thread their way through Cambridge have their own name and story. Clara has found just following a waterway to find where it goes will lead to special places. And just like these waterways, we each have our own paths, and our unique ways of contributing to what's around us. We are all learning, and we are all in it together. Despite all the challenges, life persists. We can still find these beautiful clear springs and brooks, and that gives Clara hope, to see life continuing and adapting. Across the world, others are restoring groundwater, reducing flood risk and bringing more nature into cities. It's possible there, so why not here?

Adapt



Read more
about Clara and
other Cambridge
Regenerators.

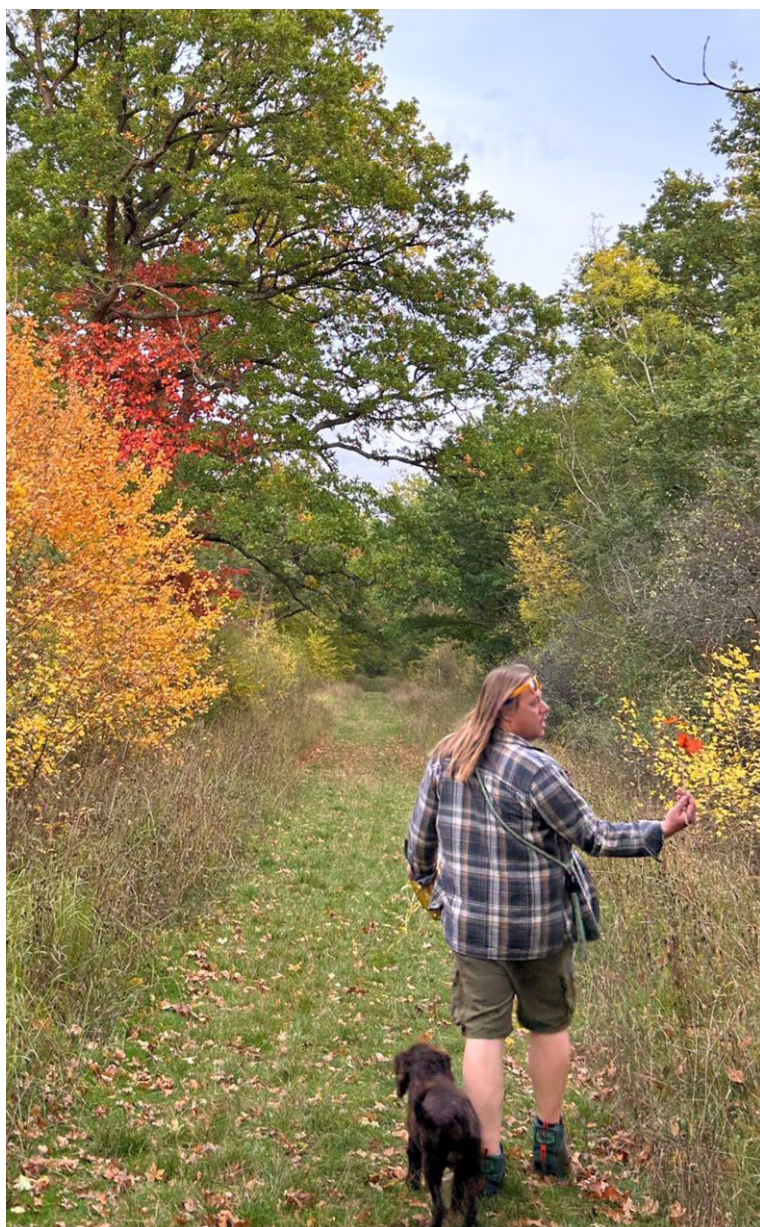
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Regenerator Stories

Kenny McGregor Arboricultural Officer, Cambridge City Council

“Just being in the forest as a child... nothing else really interested me. I just wanted to be working outside in the trees. I didn't know what that was. But that was what I wanted to do. And I damn well stuck to it.”



Kenny is an arboricultural officer, biodiversity officer, educator, advocate, urban planter, and hippy horticulturist with Cambridge City Council.

Kenny's job is to look after the city council tree stock - 33,000 trees and counting - and keep them in a safe condition, monitor their health, replacement/succession planting and deliver public engagement. In a lifetime of loving and working with trees, Kenny has found you just have to get hands on, there's only so much you can learn from a book. But the moment Kenny talks about trees, or takes them on a tree tour, peoples' eyes light up.

Kenny is fascinated by trees. There are so many ways to teach others about trees, even a complaint can be an opportunity to explain how valuable a tree is. Just dropping an old dead hawthorn to its side, pegging the bottom so it doesn't roll around, helps people to slow down, sit and look around at the woods. Each

species has its quirks and their own strategy for survival that works holistically with their environment. Even in really poor environments and incredibly tough conditions, some trees find a way to grow, have a capability to avoid death, and to allow themselves to collapse, in order to re root and regrow from the ground again. Kenny emphasises we are still learning to understand trees better, to understand their interactions with their environment for example, or the importance of balance in landscapes.

Kenny believes being drawn to trees is a human thing - it's in us. Trees are always a focal point, as a shelter, or shade or as a mark in the landscape. Trees have been doing what they're doing for hundreds of thousands of years, and humans are just a fraction of that. We can learn so much from trees, so Kenny recommends visiting any old veteran tree. He can show you where to go or you can discover for yourself. Go on to the ancient tree Forum website, find an old tree and just stand and have a think about it. You'll be a better person walking away.

Balance



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Regenerator Stories

Steve Coghill King's College Head Gardener

“Creativity is a sort of a touchstone for me within the landscape. The landscape is an astonishing thing. It's dynamic. It's exciting. It's rewarding. If you mistreat it, it can bite you really hard. What I am doing is attempting to be the steward of something that's a living, dynamic thing.”



Steve is a teacher, lecturer, gardener, landscape designer, horticulturist, conservationist and a steward of nature at King's College.

In his work as head gardener of King's College, Steve's best days are when the weather is good, the sun is up, and he can just get out there and enjoy the spectacular landscape. These are the days when Steve gets a chance to reflect, both on the space around him and on his team who work 'blooming hard' to support and sustain King's stunning landscapes. For Steve, gardening is consulting the genius of place and recognising that our landscapes have been here before us, are here for us now, and will continue long after us. There is a great deal of being humble in the presence of nature.

Steve learnt as a youngster to try and work with nature, with the landscape and gardens, rather than try to oppose them. He advises that we should not be afraid to embrace the new in our natural environments. But we should also always respect where we are and to work with nature in deep relationship. Rather than managing land, he says you become a part of it. And working with and respecting landscapes also requires working with and respecting teams and networks of people. Steve says nature can heal, but you need to give nature a chance. Connecting and working with others who have different skills can help maintain the balancing act of habitat management. Steve hopes that, together, we all can appreciate and love the landscapes around us, tread lightly on the world and try to put a little back in our Cambridge community.

“Nature will heal, if you give nature a chance to heal. But in order for nature to heal, you have to make sure that the tools are there. You don't manage landscapes, we become part of them...”

Repair

Shared with artist-writer Gabby Arengé, 2024, in response to themes from the Imaginarium



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Regenerator Stories

Guy Jones Repairer

“ I’d like people to really reimagine what they think of as broken and not repairable and what they think of as repairable. Because a lot of stuff that gets thrown away is just the easiest stuff that we would love to fix. And we don’t get to because people think it’s too broken.”



Guy is a chemist, repairer, fixer, manufacturer, tinkerer, collector, seller, and restorer, with the Repair Cafe.

Guy’s got the repairing bug. In his view, you have nothing to lose when you find something that’s been thrown out. Even if you destroy it completely, it doesn’t matter, and that can be very freeing. That makes it a valuable learning tool to develop your investigative skills. If Guy finds he can repair something at the end of that, it’s an extra treat. Guy feels a responsibility to find what he repairs a new owner, somebody who will really value it and use it. That journey is enjoyable, and every fix is different, from LED candles, bluetooth headphones, and fairy lights, to kettles and toasters. He takes something seen as broken and worthless, and in a half hour or less, can often make it work again, giving it a new life.

Guy is committed to regenerating. Our society extracts raw materials into new parts, parts are then turned into goods that are then used for a while but then ultimately so much value is destroyed as it is shredded to recover the materials to start again. By repairing these things instead of simply ‘recycling’ them in this destructive way, we can restore, rebalance and tip the scales a little bit to stop the rapid degradation of value and reduce the raw materials consumed in this cycle.

For Guy, repairing is about teaching yourself. Just think about what’s gone wrong, get interested in unbreaking things, and start fixing bits and bobs of your own. Repair isn’t as hard as people might think it is. Guy recommends just giving it a try, looking up simple information online (there’s a lot of guidance out there!) and you’ll be surprised at what you can do.

Repair



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Regenerator Stories

Gina Barber Repairer

“Fixing things makes people happy...
And usually you get some really good cake.”



Gina is a home dressmaker, weaver, knitter, maker, grower, composter, gardener, banker, business owner, teacher as well as a repairer with the Repair Cafe.

Gina has always thought of repairing as an extension of a lifelong hobby working with textiles. Gina started making things when she was five. Growing up after the war, clothes were hard to come by and everyone had to make do and mend. Things had to last. Fabric was firmer and most textiles were woven. Nowadays, many of our clothes are machine knitted, requiring new techniques and materials to fix them. Before television, people knitted by hand which meant you could just unpick and re-knit things.

When repairing, Gina tries to help people learn about the care and repair of textiles. She also enjoys working with other textile repairers, as you can share hints, tips and borrow haberdashery. There is community in working with other people who share an interest in saving stuff and working with their hands. Repairers come from the same sort of place and share a general attitude to life.

Gina finds working with nature is really efficient, you don't end up with things you don't need, and you can minimise your use of resources. She has learnt how it is possible to exist without freezers and to grow all the vegetables you might ever need. Gina thinks more people could learn from the principles of nature. Like young children, be inquisitive and curious. Ask why something is not working, ask how it could work better. Keep trying, you could learn a lot by failing the first, or subsequent times, but it can lead to a better result in the end.

“You shouldn't be afraid to fail. You can learn a lot from an initial failure. The thing is, don't give up. Just keep going. And you'll become an expert.”

Repair



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other Cambridge
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Regenerator Stories

Pushpanath Krishnamurthy Activist Walker

“When I walk I sing a Tamil revolutionary song, by Poet Bharathi, it says ‘even if the big blue sky falls on your forehead, be fearless, fearless, fearless’. I’m this old fragile guy walking and telling stories. If I can do that, then you can do even better. Be fearless. Seek truth, speak truth, speak truth to power. Take a step, step forward and step up.”



Pushpanath (Push) is a long distance walker, storyteller, singer, grandfather, global campaigner, fair trade promoter and lifetime anti-poverty activist.

Push walks for global climate justice. Push’s first climate walk was 15 years ago, when he walked to the COP 15 Climate Summit in Copenhagen. Since then, he has taken over 40 million steps as a walking activist, walked across Europe, in South and Western India and in Africa, to Glasgow and beyond. While walking, he amplifies the stories of poor communities who are severely affected by climate change but constantly adapt and peacefully resist unequal power structures. He believes it is essential to seek and speak truth to power.

Walking has been a lifetime practice for Push. As a young boy in Bangalore - known as India’s IT capital and the ‘Garden City’ - Push walked across the city selling food, coffee, and more. South Bangalore’s social literature and progressive theatre scene, as well as Mahatma Ghandi’s wisdom, fed Push’s hunger for truth and justice. These ideas have inspired his 30+ years of work with Oxfam and his activism.

Push often sings in Tamil and Kannada and other Indian languages while walking and strikes up conversation with folks he meets along the way. Especially women and communities feeling the impact of climate change. Amazingly, Push completes all his walks with no corporate sponsorship or mass fundraising. He finds support, hospitality and warmth from local communities, usually in places he has never been and with people he has never met. Push is continuously heartened – but not at all surprised – to see that a normal guy like him can be welcomed into new communities without fear. Push sees that essential goodness in humans as an incredible story. He finds great hope and inspiration in young people and in older generations, like the Grannies he has met in Uganda, who continue to reimagine and adapt to climate challenges. If they bounce back with hope, who are we not to feel hope?



Read more
about Push and
other Cambridge
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Regenerator Stories

Sarah Stepney Headteacher, Mayfield Primary School

“ We don’t mind what learning activities adults and children choose to do outside, we just want them to go outside and be in nature and use the resources around them, and not feel that all learning has to be contained to the classroom. It’s just really good for lots of pupils, that physical activity and being outside. I mean, everyone knows just being around green makes you feel better.”



Sarah is a teacher, nature enthusiast, amateur artist, educational leader and innovator, and Headteacher at Mayfield Primary School.

Sarah and her former co-head, Paula, pioneered a schoolwide initiative called Out and About. Out and About is a rather simple but powerful practice. Once a week, each class spends part of the day learning outside no matter the weather, rain or shine (splashing in puddles is not off limits!). Sometimes classes use Out and About time to play games, to go for ‘wellie walks’ to the school’s conservation area and pond, or even to climb a tree. Other times they study for SATs but in a more relaxed and green environment. Often, learning becomes more physical and rooted in the surrounding natural landscapes: children can construct a story or build a model of circulation

of the heart with ‘bits and pieces’ like pegs and pebbles, sticks and stones, or whatever they can find while wandering through the school grounds.

Out and About was inspired by pupils’ experiences in Artscapers, an arts-in-nature approach led by Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination. Wanting to sustain the spirit of Artscaping, Sarah and Paula first trialled Out and About with their Year One classes. They found how even a simple walk across the school grounds each week, noticing what had stayed the same and what changed, created fruitful learning opportunities. When Sarah and Paula became co-heads at Mayfield, they introduced Out and About schoolwide, which has been transformative for children and staff.

Children learn differently outside beyond the limits of the classroom. They can walk, talk, make connections with peers and express themselves more freely without the pressure of a classroom. Teachers also benefit from spending sustained time alongside pupils outside - they make new connections and discover children’s diverse capabilities. Time pressures and a full curriculum can make it hard to get outside each week, but Mayfield teachers do it. Sarah advises, if it’s important enough, you’ll find the time and you’ll do it. You can always find the time.



Read more
about Sarah and
other Cambridge
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Regenerator Stories

Naomi Forster Kinnerz

“Life is gonna be scary. And new experiences are tough, but you, kind of, just have to throw yourself into it... soon you'll realise things are up to you as yourself. And so within Cambridge as a young person, just try new things. And it might not work the first time, but you need to just keep trying. And then hopefully, that will just show you how you can start to build on yourself and that gives you hope for the rest of your life.”

Naomi is a student mentor, a Kinnerz sports leader, a St John's Ambulance sergeant, a hockey player, a footballer, a goalkeeper, first aid trainer, and an explorer who has volunteered in Kenya.

Naomi has learnt that in giving to her community, she is giving something back to herself. Whether Naomi is helping younger students with their work, leading football and multisport sessions after school, communicating with her hockey team or running first aid training, Naomi has the confidence to support anyone who is new or who needs help. There are so many different ways to help. And helping in the community is, for Naomi, not just about structured learning, but also about finding a way to relax and learn as you go. Naomi has found that it's refreshing to approach learning like this, and it has helped Naomi grow as a person.

When you help in the community, you are building on yourself. Wherever you start from, if you throw yourself into experiences, you can learn a lot. Naomi recommends putting yourself out there and just starting volunteering. Volunteering in the community can help connect us all, make new friendships, and build new relationships within your life. Helping others, you start to feel more connected, together. Life is scary, and when you're throwing yourself into new experiences, it can be embarrassing when you don't know one thing or another, especially when other kids have more opportunities than you and receive more praise. But if you keep trying and keep trying and put in the practice, and learn from others in your own community, you can show yourself that you can do it. Putting yourself in your community, you can just connect to your whole world. By just starting wherever you are, finding those connections will lead you to further connections. Just start somewhere, you'll find your way, and your path.

“When we are helping, it just helps us all grow as people. I feel like that's the most important lesson in life: learning out in the community and teaching and experiencing all these situations yourself is a much better way to learn.”

Connect



Read more about Naomi and other Cambridge Regenerators.

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Regenerator Stories

Social Action Group Students from Parkside Community College

“It is an odd job, because the people in power aren’t doing enough to help our planet. So it’s down to us. I mean, it shouldn’t be down to us, but it’s, like, who else is going to do it?”

The Social Action Group at Parkside Community College started with a small group of students.

It didn’t start being about just sustainability, they started campaigning about toilets, fundraising for Ukraine, and campaigning about rights issues. But with climate change, the longer we leave it, the more urgent the issue becomes, and so, over time, the group has developed a greater focus on sustainability. There are now about 30 people involved.

By reducing waste and the negative impact of food in the canteen, reducing electricity consumption, recycling papers and pens, campaigning for solar panels, better insulation, and alternative sources of heating for the school, the group is campaigning to reduce Parkside’s carbon footprint. The students have organised a conference for 13 schools, for example, to discuss core issues with representatives from charities, direct action groups and political parties, and have led workshops for younger children to help them understand how they can set up their own societies.

‘If you grow up around nature, you’re much more likely to care about it because you know the benefits, and so if your local park is being shut down, you’re much more likely to oppose it.’ The students believe most people don’t really pay attention to climate change, and so things like the conference help people to remember climate change is still a big issue.

‘We need to all think about how to make our carbon footprints smaller, and how to do more to help the climate. People might not like what you’re doing at first, but stick to your belief that it’s the right thing to do, and then try to convince people to come round to your own point of view. Don’t apologise for the hassle, explain why you are acting to change things, and tell other students that it’s the right thing to do. Most of the time, people will understand with time why you’re doing it. They might even thank you later. The thing is, most people don’t think what they are doing makes a difference, but when you look at the global scale, there’s potentially 8 billion people doing 8 billion little things and so those small things could make a massive difference. So it’s time to stand up for yourself, and stand up for the planet..’

“Maybe in the past it wasn’t such a big issue. But things are changing so we need to change as well. And so that might be eating less meat or turning off the lights more, or recycling more. Maybe in the past it didn’t matter, but now it’s very important.”

Adapt



Read more about The Social Action Group and other Cambridge Regenerators.

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Regenerator Stories

Harry Jenkinson Right to Roam

“When you step over that barrier, and especially when there’s hundreds of people and you’re having a great time, you realise how much we’re missing out on, and you’re actively reclaiming, acting as if you’re already free. And that’s a wonderful thing, I think, for human beings; recognising that we are part of a wider ecosystem.”

Harry is a trespasser, activist, campaigner, public speaker, community organiser, lobbyist, educator and radical imager with Right to Roam.

Growing up in a village miles from Cambridge, in the East of England, Harry learnt that there was so little land that we can actually access. Our countryside has been so cultivated - ploughed and misused over the years - that today there are few places we can go legally. Trespassing has become a way to access nature, and get out beyond the country lanes. Through this, Harry has developed a really close connection with nature, and in turn realised that there is something deeply wrong and unfair with how excluded people are from nature.

Harry has learnt from indigenous wisdom across the world what it means to have incredibly close connections with nature. Indigenous people belong to the land that they inhabit, whether or not they own the legal rights to it. These experiences have taught Harry that we very much belong to nature, as part of nature. Taking inspiration from the mass trespass tradition in this country, campaigns are often more about celebrating the land than protesting. Having picnics, playing music, it is an honour and a privilege to go all over the country, network with so many people and just realise just how beautiful the countryside is. And that’s basically what Harry is working towards: a reimagined, new English countryside, with free, fair and informed access to nature for everyone. A utopian vision of the future where humans up and down the country can engage with nature and get along together. Harry emphasises that you don’t need to go far to see wide scale positive changes. Just across the border in Scotland, they have clean rivers, and people can access them. Harry believes imagination is incredibly important. You need to imagine a better world in order to get there. Anyone can imagine a dystopian world – we’ve always had those experiences – it’s far more interesting, radical, exciting and positive to imagine a better future. Harry sees in young people a yearning to be human and just play in nature, and with one another. It’s very much part of who we are, and action breeds action, that in turn breeds resilience, hope, optimism and eventually change. Yes it can be challenging, but Harry has been phenomenally delighted at how supportive people have been so far. To see people of all ages doing their best, encouraging one another, is delightful. Hope and solidarity with one another is something we can all share, across the lines that divide us.

Reimagine



Read more
about Harry and
other Cambridge
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