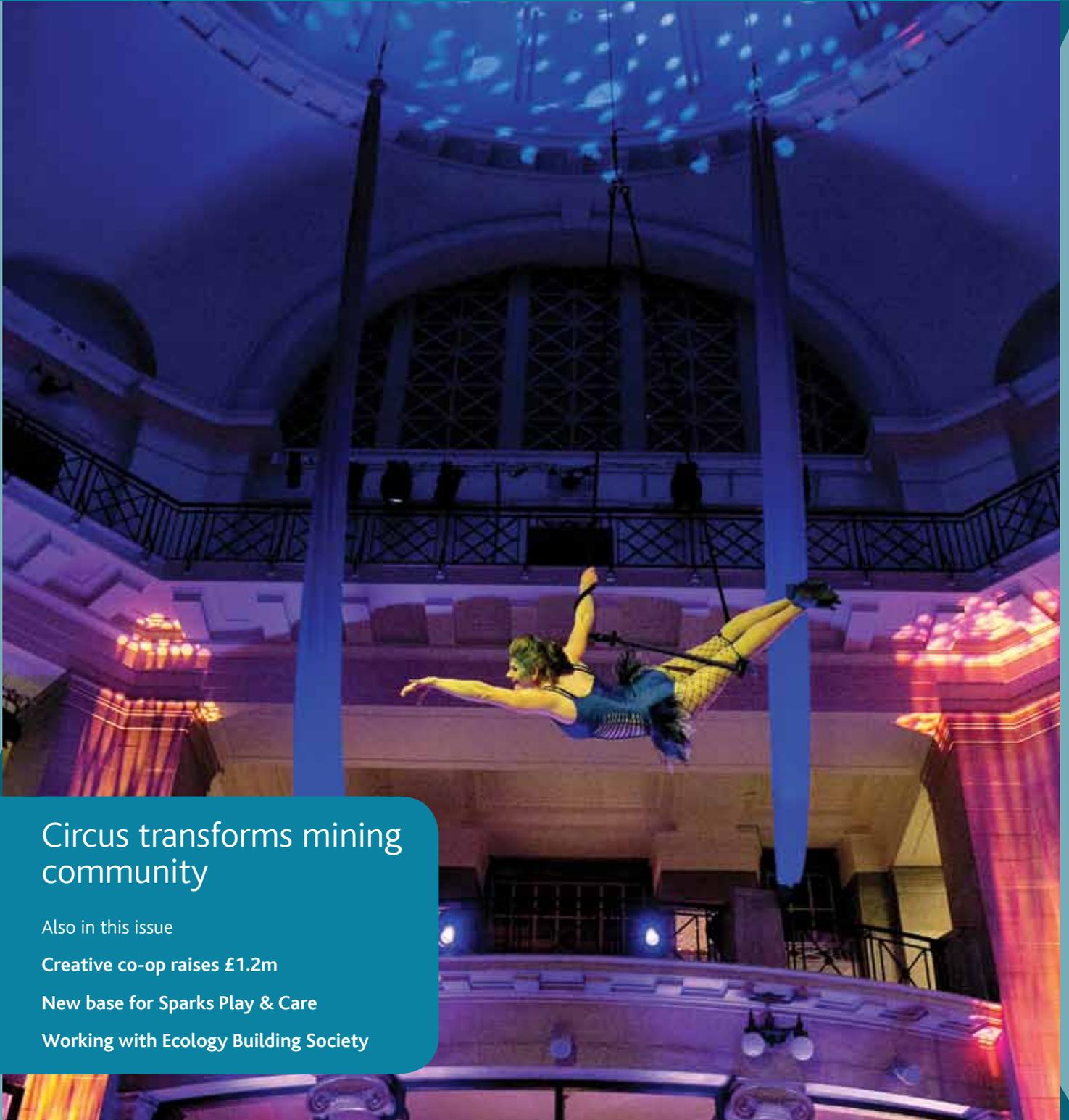




**CO-OPERATIVE &  
COMMUNITY FINANCE**  
supportive lending since 1973



## Circus transforms mining community

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Organised Kaos Youth Circus performing at 65th anniversary celebration of multinational company Bergstrom (photo © Nick Treharne)

**NEWSLETTER 35**

**DECEMBER 2015**

# Circus transforms mining community

**Co-operative & Community Finance has received some unusual loan requests over the last 40 years, but never before has it funded equipment for aerial performance artists.**

Our loan was used to buy a new aerial rig for Organised Kaos Youth Circus, an extraordinary social enterprise based in a former mining village in south Wales. Operating from the old church hall, that was disused and derelict, Organised Kaos has helped to revive the local community by teaching circus skills to children and young adults.

**“This young and exciting group is going from strength to strength and we’re delighted to help them grow.”**

Over the last seven years the company has built a national reputation for excellence and has staged high profile performances for major events including the 2012 Olympics.

Organised Kaos was started in 2008 by Nicola Hemsley and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee in 2010. Nicola, who is now the managing director, said: “We are a social enterprise, not a charity, and that’s very important. Circus is a serious business; we charge for our services and reinvest the surplus to help achieve our social aims.”

Those aims include encouraging young people and adults to get involved in their community, participate in the arts and realise their potential.

Nicola was brought up in Gwaun Cae Gurwen and when she returned to the village after many years she was dismayed to see the church hall, that had once been the centre of social activity, standing empty and the young people facing a future with limited prospects. So she decided to do something about it.

Organised Kaos has taken a 25-year lease on the building and is gradually improving it (“our surveyor said it couldn’t be much worse” said Nicola). Now it is open six days a week running circus skills training and development sessions for a range of abilities and ages. Between 150 and 200 people aged 8 to 25 participate every week. The organisation has over 1,000 members who pay an annual £5 subscription and has a board elected from the local community.

“We are planning to extend the age range and provide sessions for toddlers next year,” said Nicola.

“We’ve just received a grant that will allow us to install new heaters and do other works to make the building more suitable for younger children.”

The building may be in need of renovation but the equipment and health and safety features are excellent. The new aerial rig bought

with our loan can support up to 10 people safely suspended from hoops, silks or trapezes.

The social enterprise derives most of its income from putting on performances. These include parades and community events, private parties, festivals and commercial events. Organised Kaos has done special performances for Google and the Chinese government. They have performed at the O2 Arena in London and at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff (this was together with a circus group from South Africa during the 2012 Olympics).

At first many people were sceptical, then surprised and then delighted by the success and popularity of Organised Kaos. Now it is seen as a shining example of the power of community-based social enterprise to engage and improve.

And the name? It stands for Keeping Adolescents Off the Streets.

Ian Taylor from Co-operative & Community Finance said: “This young and exciting group is going from strength to strength and we’re delighted to help them grow.”

[organisedkaos.org.uk](http://organisedkaos.org.uk)

(photo © Nick Treharne)



# £1.2m creative co-op opens in Sheffield

**A major new community-owned centre for artists, designers and makers opened in central Sheffield on 21 November. This was the culmination of a three-year project that had raised £1.2m to transform a row of seven empty Georgian houses into the biggest co-operative venture in the city.**

The Grade II listed buildings have been substantially redesigned to house galleries, workshops, studios, offices, events space, café/bar, terrace and roof garden. This is Sheffield's first large-scale community-owned development. Roco Creative Co-op is set up as a community benefit society and has secured a 125-year lease on the 17,000 square foot premises.

Co-operative & Community Finance and the Co-operative Loan Fund have both provided substantial loans, as have other social lenders. Roco is also being financed by the sale of investment shares in the society. So far £100,000 has been invested by 48 members and the share offer is still open.



The conversion of the buildings from 200-year old homes to a creative business centre is impressive and sympathetic. Much of the layout of the Georgian houses has been redesigned to make better use of the space but many of the heritage features have been retained. A new extension at the back houses the café/bar, events space and roof garden.

On the opening weekend at Roco the galleries and retail areas on the ground floor were packed with hundreds of visitors. In other parts of the building artists, designers and makers are using the facilities. There are currently 11 studio/office units completed and a further 15 are due to be added in the next phase.

Andrea Burns, co-founder and chief executive of Roco said: "We do three things for our tenants: we provide a home to set up and run a business, we provide them with tools

to make their wares - whether that be physical objects or creative ideas - and we provide a route to market through our retail spaces and our gallery and project spaces.



"In addition to this, we will be providing inspiration and brain food in the form of workshops, events, and exhibitions hosted in our gallery, through our humanities focused bookshop and, of course, opportunities through our business development programme."

The other co-founder is social property developer Chris Hill who was also the driving force behind a similar development in Wakefield, Unity Works, which Co-operative & Community Finance also supported (via the Co-operative Community Shares Fund).

Chris said: "For me the exciting thing about Roco is that it brings together so much creativity - galleries, studios, workshops, meeting space, bookshop, deli, cafe, bar - under one beautiful roof. There's nowhere like it in Sheffield. And it's open six days a week from early till late."

[theroco.org](http://theroco.org)



## New base for Sparks Play & Care

**A popular child care co-operative in Bristol has moved premises, bought new play equipment and improved its financial resilience with the help of a loan from Co-operative & Community Finance.**

Sparks Play & Care, which provides high quality and convenient out-of-school childcare for some 150 families in the Ashley Down area of north Bristol, reopened for the new school year at new premises within Sefton Park School. The building, known affectionately as the Green Terrapin, can provide care for up to 70 children aged 3-14. There is immediate access to outdoor play and exercise space.

The new premises is only a very short distance from the Youth Centre where the after school club had been based for 25 years. Despite the proximity, the move, and the uncertainty leading up to it, was very disruptive to the business.

Carole Theyer, chief executive of Sparks, said: "Co-operative & Community Finance were very understanding. The loan helped with the inevitable extra costs of moving and with managing our cash flow."

Carole helped to set up Sparks Play & Care as a workers co-operative in 2005 (it had previously been run by volunteers) and register it with



OFSTED. She believes that the co-operative structure makes for a better working environment, higher quality child care and more satisfied parents.

Carole said: "We offer membership to our employees whether they are full time or part time, but do require that they are with us for at least six months initially in order to get a feel for the business and the way we operate."

Sparks runs a breakfast club (7.30-8.45am) and an after-school club (3.15-6.00pm) during term time and a holiday club (8.15am-5.45pm) during school holidays.

The play workers aim to provide an environment that facilitates children's freely chosen play with a large range of open access materials (art and crafts, books, dressing up, den-building materials, toys and games and computers). They plan daily activities, consulting with the children for ideas, and also try to extend their experiences culturally and awareness of the wider world.

Ian Rothwell of Co-operative & Community Finance said: "It's so clear that Sparks provides excellent child care and that the parents love them.

So we were very happy to help them with a loan to see them through the difficulty and disruption of moving premises.

**"Sparks was the first child care co-op to be set up in Avon and Bristol."**

"For this particular loan we used money from the Avon and Bristol Co-operative Loan Fund that had been bequeathed to Co-operative & Community Finance in 2007. It is very appropriate because Sparks was the first child care co-operative to be set up in Avon and Bristol."

Ed Mayo, secretary general of Co-operatives UK, visited Sparks on his tour of coops in Bristol during the New Economy Summit in October. He said: "It is a worker co-operative, owned by members, so every penny in the business and every child in their hands is their responsibility and theirs alone."

[sparks-inc.org](http://sparks-inc.org)

# Working with Ecology Building Society

**We have agreed new arrangements with Ecology Building Society that will make more money available to democratic enterprises in disadvantaged communities.**

Ecology Building Society has lent £500,000 to Co-operative & Community Finance, and under the terms of the government Community Investment Tax Relief (CITR) scheme this money will be used to stimulate enterprise in deprived parts of the UK.

This is a good news story about two long-established ethical finance organisations working together. Co-operative & Community Finance, established in 1973, is the oldest Community Development Finance Institution in the UK and one of the few that is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in the conduct of investment business. We have around £4m to lend to member-owned enterprises but following a record year of lending in 2014 we decided more funds were needed to meet the increasing demand.

Ecology Building Society was set up in 1981 with the aim of using members' savings to provide mortgages and loans to properties and projects that have a positive impact on the environment and communities. It has over 9,000 members with a total of £138m savings.



We were featured at length in an article on Ethical Finance in Co-operative News



The Drive Housing Co-operative in North London, made possible by Co-operative & Community Finance working with Ecology Building Society

The two organisations had worked together before in the joint funding of housing co-operatives and community-owned shops, so a closer partnership which benefited them both and helped them deliver their objectives made sense.

Ian Rothwell, Development Manager at Co-operative & Community Finance, said: "When we realised that we may need additional funds to meet the demand for our ethical finance it made sense to approach Ecology Building Society. We share similar values and are keen to invest in the same projects and enterprises."

Paul Ellis, Chief Executive of Ecology Building Society, said: "We are pleased to be strengthening our links with Co-operative & Community Finance who have an excellent track record in working with start-ups in the community sector. We strongly

believe in finance organisations pooling their respective skill-sets for the common good, enabling us to amplify our impact. This collaborative approach is something that our members welcome."

In a further display of the growing closeness between the two ethical finance organisations, Ian Rothwell was invited to address Ecology Building Society's well attended AGM in Liverpool.

The CITR scheme, launched in 2002 and revised in 2012, was devised to stimulate the flow of private finance to support enterprise in the UK's deprived communities. This rare case of two member-owned enterprises using the scheme for mutual benefit is a pragmatic example of the co-operative value of self-help.

[ecology.co.uk](http://ecology.co.uk)

# Introducing Tim Coomer

**Tim Coomer will be joining our staff team in January 2016 as Business Development Manager.**

For the last 10 years Tim has been working in various roles at Community First helping to improve the quality of life and economic well being of people and local communities throughout Wiltshire and Swindon.

He is an experienced project manager and social enterprise adviser, with particular knowledge of community-owned shops, pubs and other facilities. He recently achieved a Level 5 Certificate in Social Enterprise Support from the Institute of Leadership and Management.

Speaking of his new job, Tim said: "I'm passionate about working with enterprises that trade for social good. I will relish this new opportunity to support co-operatives and social enterprises start up and grow. I am excited about developing into



new markets and creating new partnerships."

Outside work, Tim (aged 40) is active in his local community in Devizes with a project to develop a church as an arts centre. He says he doesn't have much spare time because he's kept busy by his boys, aged 3 and 6.

Following Tim's appointment, Ian Rothwell is taking over the role of Investment Manager from Ian Taylor, who is due to retire in 2016. This is part of carefully managed transfer of responsibility, knowledge and experience.

## New website

We have a new website.

The new design makes it much easier to view on tablets and phones.

It all looks cleaner and more contemporary and there have been important changes behind the screen. The site is protected by an SSL certificate which means that the connection from each user to the web server is private and secure.

Take a look: [coopfinance.coop](http://coopfinance.coop)



## Supportive loan finance to help people take control of their economic lives and create social benefit

If you need accessible, ethical finance to make your enterprising goals a reality, we may be able to help. Loans from £10,000 to £75,000 are readily available, and we are able to lend up to £150,000 using other funds. We do not require personal guarantees, and our profits are reinvested to enable us to continue our work.

We are the oldest community development finance institution (CDFI) in the UK and, we believe, one of the most successful and sustainable. We are also one of the very few CDFIs that is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in the conduct of investment business.

We've been lending to co-operatives, employee owned businesses and social enterprises for over 40 years. We manage a range of loan funds throughout the UK, and currently have around £4m available to lend.

We raise money primarily by public share issue, and we lend it for social purpose and collective benefit.

Our staff will be glad to advise on the availability of specific funds and the most suitable forms of finance for your business.

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Co-operative & Community Finance is the trading name of Industrial Common Ownership Finance Limited, which is authorised and regulated by the FCA in the conduct of investment business.