



Supporting positive social change through
Whole Person Learning approaches

TOWARDS 2025

Annual Review 2021-22





When searching for a cover image for this review, I wanted something that would resonate with the Foundation’s purpose. A beautiful wildflower meadow came to mind because wildflowers grow where nature has been left to its own devices, where the soil is poor, where land has been abandoned or neglected. Within a few months grasses and flowers grow, with no human interference, providing diverse habitats for a myriad of bees, other insects, birds, hedgehogs and bats. Wildflower meadows are evidence of resilience and regeneration, which is at the core of the Foundation’s work today and into the future. Enjoy.

Mary Godfrey

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Foreword – Sam Anderson | 4 |
| Chairs Message – Mary Godfrey | 5 |
| Review of Progress – Chris Taylor | 6 |
| • Possible Futures | |
| • Learning from Women | |
| • Prefigurative Social Action Inquiry | |
| • Supporting Social Change | |
| • Levels for Change | |
| Prefigurative Social Action Inquiry | 9 |
| • The Structure of the Residential | |
| • New Approaches, New Questions | |
| • Next Steps | |
| Developing Strategic Thinking at Migrant Action | 10 |
| What’s New and Emergent in 2022 | 11 |
| • Courageous Conversations | |
| • Learning with Uncertainty | |
| • Reinventing Rites of Passage | |
| 2021 in Numbers | 13 |
| Our Purpose | 14 |
| Our People | 14 |

Forward – Sam Anderson

Co-Chair of Social Action Inquiry Scotland

My experience of The Oasis Foundation is of a foundation in harmony with its purpose...

This is not because it dodges the complex or avoids the shadow side, rather it actively explores radical ways of working, meeting wholeheartedly and learning with social change organisations and individuals involved in change. You can see clearly from the work supported by the Foundation described in this report its commitment to doing what it says it will in promoting and encouraging positive social change and social justice through applied whole person learning approaches.

I first came across the Oasis Foundation as a tired founder of www.the-junction.org, a young person's health and wellbeing organisation exploring collaborative, sustainable ways of working. The Foundation invested in The Junction in relation to offering a bespoke development process to support peer working which would not have been resourced otherwise. Alongside this it connected us with other social change organisations in this realm and together we were supported through PEERworks to gather and share our learnings between ourselves and more widely through our creation of the publication PEERworks. These investments mean there are now practical frameworks and examples of sustainable, whole person learning peer-based social change organisations available for others interested in alternative ways of operating to draw from.

These opportunities created by the Foundation supported me in stepping into the role of the Co-Chair of the Social Action Inquiry for Scotland (SAI) where we are endeavouring to inquire into what helps and hinders Social Action in Scotland. A huge question, social action shapes our lives and continues to be stimulated by influences like Covid19, climate emergency, the increasing social divide and the wellbeing crisis.

Rather than focus on how to fix the trouble within the current paradigm, here at the SAI we have chosen to focus our exploration on the radical end of the Social Action spectrum, where the energy is on imagining what our possible collective future with connected people and planet might look like. From my 30+ years of lived experience a desire for this kind of inquiry, which asks people to step out of our known paradigms, isn't often welcomed. With the current context of uncertainty and people in deep immediate need this is truer than ever. So how then to inquire beyond the Social Action which is working to meet current survival needs?

The Prefigurative Social Action Inquiry (PSAI), supported by the Oasis Foundation, is a core element of addressing this question of 'how'. It means we benefit from a rhythmical process of engaging others in the wider system as critical friends to engender reflection and learning from our on-going experimental practice in the realm of prefigurative social action. We are developing an informal learning community and contributing to the wider system by sharing what is being learnt. This element is crucial in sustaining this stretching work which is helping to create and nurture all our potential futures

It will be wonderful to be able to share further updates in future years on what is emerging from the Prefigurative Social Action Inquiry. In the meantime, I propose taking a moment to explore and savour this report including a description of the first PSAI residential and the other life-affirming work the Oasis Foundation makes possible.



Sam Anderson

Chairs Message – Mary Godfrey



At the beginning of last year the Trustees of the Oasis Foundation agreed a new 5 year strategy to focus on supporting people and organisations working in the realm of social change through building individual and community resilience. We published it in **'Towards 2025'**, our annual review of 2020.

Looking back over the year I can now see how much this has helped the Trustees to decide which bids and initiatives to support and enabled us to get 2021 off to a flying start.

For an overview of all that's been happening, Chris's report eloquently captures the highlights from last year. Considering that we were still coping with Covid restrictions for most of the year, this is an impressive achievement and demonstrates the passion and commitment of all those involved, but especially Chris, who adds huge value to the Foundation every year.

During the 3rd quarter of the year the Middlesbrough project in Gresham came to a close as we had expected it would. To mark the moment and celebrate a photo album was created by the community to capture the story of the past five years. Entitled **'Hidden Treasure – What's alive in the heart of the Boro?'**, it is an inspiring assembly of photos and uplifting accounts from people in the community about the difference the project has made to their lives and what has been learnt. It shows what can be achieved when people are given the kind of support that enables them to be self-directive and take action. The Foundation has now stepped away, but the Community Associates have remained active on their own account and are continuing their work on community-led projects.

The Coaching Forward initiative provided free 1-1 coaching to a handful of socially responsible entrepreneurs and their feedback was highly positive feedback. However, despite concerted efforts, the initiative struggled to find new clients, so the scheme is now on hold while next steps are considered. Thanks go to Sarah for her valuable contribution.

In July 2021 we said goodbye to Fiona Rockett-Taylor who stepped down as a Trustee and Treasurer to focus on her growing business. We are extremely grateful to Fiona for her support and commitment as Treasurer and Trustee over the last seven years. In her place the Trustees were delighted to appoint and welcome Helen Southwell, the Finance Director of Taylors, as a Trustee and our new Treasurer. She has seamlessly slipped into the role and we are already benefitting from her experience.

Followers of the Oasis School blog may have recently spotted the name Laurie Spafford. Over the past year Laurie has been attending a number of events on behalf of both the School and Foundation to record his reflections. He has now been appointed 'Social Change Narrator' at the Oasis Foundation to help us to convey more of what the Foundation is about. Look out for his blogs and posts on LinkedIn in the coming months.

For the second year running we held our Foundation's AGM in May on Zoom. We had to cancel the wider in-person event that we'd hoped for but this was more than made up for by the warm reception the Foundation received at the Oasis Practitioner Community event in October where we shared the new strategy and the emerging projects for 2021 and onwards.

We are ever grateful to the Oasis School who continues to donate funds to the Foundation. In addition they have always provided a significant amount of donations-in-kind, which, for the first time, we are able to show in our Financial Statement for 2021.

Finally I want to say a special thank you to my fellow Board Trustees, all of whom devoted their time and effort to the Foundation in 2021, and continue to in the coming period as we strive to make the best use of our resources, financial and otherwise.

Mary

Review of Progress – Chris Taylor

Project Director



2021 was a year of endings and the preparation for new beginnings. Globally the spread of vaccines promised at least the beginning of the end of the COVID pandemic.

Donald Trump left office, as did Angela Merkel. For the Foundation too it was a year of endings and time to consider new directions and opportunities.

Our work in Middlesbrough was drawn to a close with the production of the photobook “Hidden Treasure”. This beautifully summarised our three year involvement with a range of street-level initiatives in the heart of the town. All these initiatives continue under their own steam adding to the richness and resilience of life in one of Britain’s most economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

At one level the work was about supporting people we had come to know and love, to bring their dreams to fruition. At another level it was a learning exercise in grassroots community organising. We gained so much from the experience, learning about patience, resilience and how momentum builds.

Overall our Community Associates organised over 400 community events comprising around 4,000 interactions with the public.

We are immensely grateful for all their work and for the generous support of our partners: Northstar Housing, Emergence Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Middlesbrough Council and Neighbourly.

The Foundation’s support for Ballet Black also wound down and was replaced with low-cost support from the Oasis School. We are proud to have had the opportunity to support this inspirational professional ballet troop, which describes itself as “making a fundamental change in the diversity of classical ballet in Britain – on stage, behind the scenes and among audiences and dance students.”

Possible Futures

At the same time as some things came to a natural end, we began to shift consciously to develop new initiatives reflecting our future strategy. The theme was building the future now, supporting pockets of a new world amongst the turbulence of global shifts.

Learning From Women went live as the year started. 21 videos were launched on our very own Youtube Channel to highlight the lives and work of women of colour who are building a better future now. They make fascinating and inspiring viewing and definitely provide a sense that a different world is not only possible but also already in motion.

Learning From Women

“A collaborative virtual process designed to bring to life a mosaic of experiences of amazing women who are creating pockets of a future where people and planet really matter, pursuing a fair society in balance with planetary boundaries.”

We believe that things change when those who are unheard or who have been marginalised finally get a voice. This is why we decided to learn from women around the world whose experiences are not being shared.”

Laura Somoggi & Isabela Souza



Social Action Inquiry,
Haybergill Centre, 2021



Prefigurative Social Action Inquiry

Two other new initiatives fed into this exploration of possible futures. The first was the launch of our Prefigurative Social Action Inquiry. This brought together change-makers from across the UK to consider how social action can foreshadow the world it is trying to create. The underlying notion is to eliminate the difference between means and ends and instead to embody the future now.

The Inquiry started at the Haybergill retreat centre in November bringing together some of the core team of the Scottish Social Action Inquiry with Oasis practitioners. It proved to be a remarkable process in a number of ways – not least because it became apparent to all involved that in shaping the future we have to come to terms with and heal many of the wounds of the past.

The other initiative that focuses our work on the coming future is Navigating the Unimaginable. This is the culmination of three years research into the prospects of global systemic collapse. The research was completed in 2021 and made ready for publication and launch in early 2022. This left us pondering “So what?”. If it’s at all possible that there might be large scale social breakdown in the face of the climate and ecological emergency, what could we at Oasis offer? It was a question we would take into the coming year.

Oikos members attending
Reinventing Rites of Passage



Supporting Social Change

Throughout the year our work to support social change organisations continued. We supported the ongoing leadership development of people in Migrant Action through scholarship places on our flagship programme Skills For Change. New enterprises also received support through the **Coaching Forward** process which provided one-to-one coaching in the start-up phase. This is bread and butter work for Oasis, well-trodden ground which feels like it provides much needed developmental opportunities for folks on the frontline of social change.

Leaders For Change

And finally, two initiatives about leadership. This is a topic that continues to raise its head as the world spins ever onwards into chaos. What kinds of leaders do we need in turbulent times? Are our current models (and leaders) serving us? Are there other ways to think about how we organise ourselves and make decisions? We deepened our work with oikos, the global student movement for sustainability. This is a truly inspiring organisation full of self-managing, thoughtful and forward-looking individuals. It has a culture of learning, fun and personal growth – all of which makes it a perfect partner for us.

A planned residential retreat in the summer had to be cancelled due to COVID travel restrictions but work started on the planning and preparation for a new event in April 2022. This will take the form of a rite of passage – a coming of age ceremony both for oikos itself and for the students who run and manage its global infrastructure.

The Windsor Leadership Dialogue has been exploring models of leadership for many years. Established as an inquiry amongst leaders from all sectors it runs annually as a safe space to share challenges and dilemmas. This year's dialogue was held online due to COVID and was facilitated by Susan Ralphs and myself. There were themes around the changing nature of work, managing in virtual spaces and other topics directly inspired by the context of the pandemic. And there was a question from one participant that brought many of us, myself included, up short: "Is what you're doing worth dying on your sword for?" If as leaders we're not doing what feels most essential, most important in the current moment, then what are we actually there for? As the year unfolded it felt like this question appeared around just about every corner.



Prefigurative Social Action Inquiry

Laurie Spafford – Social Action Narrator

In November 13th and 14th 2021, supported by the Oasis Foundation and Social Action Inquiry Scotland, 8 of us gathered - each engaged in the world of Social Action in our own way - and brought together a rich diversity of experience and energies for the first residential gathering of the Prefigurative Social Action Inquiry.

Over two days together, we shared our deepest learning, took a step back from the day-to-day, and found the space and slowness necessary to take a long-view of what is shifting in the world. Waking up, eating, walking, and talking in the peaceful Cumbrian surroundings, our relatively simple daily routine enabled something which felt unique - a way to deeply learn and reflect together on the world of Social Action and on our relationship to it.

"We are a small group of activists, funders, facilitators and researchers who care deeply about the future of social action. We have a sense that there is much to learn and much to share about what's emerging."
- Chris Taylor

The Structure of the Residential

What does a residential 'prefigurative' inquiry look like? Part of the joy and edge of the process was precisely that we did not initially know. At first, the co-facilitators - Nick Ellerby, Chris Taylor, and Sam Anderson - held the group with more structure, but as it continued, the participants were enabled to inquire in unexpected directions, structured flexibly by the needs of the entire group.

The process also challenged us to approach Social Action from more unconventional angles, allowing our whole selves to become engaged beyond our roles as Social

"The residential nature of the process meant that we were able to go deeper together - more able to play, experiment, and trust the process... to lean into tomorrow and stay with complexity and the undefined - where the most difficult and important insights are found."
- Sam Anderson

Action activists, funders, facilitators, or researchers; our imaginations, diverse identities, emotional and personal lives were an essential part of the questions we asked, and how we asked them.

This more open, trusting, and self-directed whole-person process was 'prefigurative' in the way that we hoped that the spirit of our inquiry would embody something of the future we envision. The inquiry, in the unique form that it took, sought to prefigure the ways we might wish to learn together and from each other, in an age of vast social change and uncertainty.

New Approaches, New Questions

Participants' conversations ranged from the raw and personal to the vast and structural, often interlinking the two. With care, we investigated what our particular motivations are in relation to Social Action - where are our individual wounds and fears reside, but also where our loftiest hopes and dreams reach for.

Asking new questions and building new relationships together - as critical friends - participants asked themselves how they might differently meet and approach both the future and the past - locating themselves together in an interconnected present, with inheritance from a complex past, before an unknowable future.

In going deeper together, with the time and space that they had, the participants could discover and follow questions that felt full of life - ones which felt essential to questions of Social Action and Justice, but which also felt deeply relevant to the burning questions of participants' life and work, whether as an activist or a new mother.

By Laurie Spafford

Next Steps

The PSAI will continue to meet rhythmically, once a year, inviting in others who also wish to be engaged with this radical and challenging prefigurative inquiry.

The next Prefigurative Social Inquiry residential is due to take place on the 22nd and 23rd November 2022. If you're interested in joining for the next chapter of the inquiry, please contact Charlotte Ellerby at Charlotte@oasishumanrelations.org.uk for more details.

Developing Strategic Thinking at Migrant Action

Laurie Spafford

Now more than ever, migration – and how it can be more humane – is in our hearts and minds.

“This is work that is integral to Migrant Action’s growth... The time and space to dive deeply and reflect, to ask ourselves challenging questions - it’s essential. Instead of just working to keep going, we’re looking in detail at our values and principles from so many different perspectives; we’re creating a strategic plan that supports and aligns with our vision, a plan that we can really feel ownership of.”

- Fidelis Chebe

This year, we are glad to continue working with Fidelis Chebe, Founder and Director of Migrant Action. As part of our latest collaboration, we are working together to create a strategic plan that enables the organisation to build long-lasting resilience, so it can continue to thrive in ongoing change.

Based in Leeds, Migrant Action is a rights-and-justice-based organisation, deeply rooted in the lived experience of migration as well as migrant communities; this underpins its values, mission, vision and purpose. As Fidelis says, migrants are so rarely met with whole-person compassion and care. Migrant Action seeks to meet these needs, and help migrants find concrete “access to justice”.

The organisation’s grassroots perspective also allows it a unique viewpoint to challenge injustice at its roots; their direct support for individual migrants underpins their continued activism for transformational structural and policy change.

We are working with Migrant Action to develop the purpose, legitimacy, and nature of Migrant Action’s services. To support this work, we are looking at:

- Key reference points. The purpose, values and long-term vision that provide a lode star for any work undertaken by Migrant Action.
- The current stakeholder landscape. Developing a whole-system awareness and understanding of the organisation’s interdependencies - the key relationships and networks which support the work.
- Key processes. Mapping core processes to ensure that the resources and processes are in place for a healthy organisation.
- Impact, and ability to change. Understanding the difference that Migrant Action makes – including the ability to learn from experience and take appropriate action.

This work aims to support the organisation in extending and re-imagining its vision for the future and helping to capture what emerges. It is extremely rewarding for us to support Migrant Action through such a vital part of its growth, and to be engaged in work that is so aligned with the Foundation’s purpose and priorities.



What’s new and emergent in 2022?

2022 is set to be the year that Oasis Foundation hones its offer to the world. With the launch of our micro-site Navigating the Unimaginable we begin to come to terms with a future that is so uncertain that it makes no sense to cling to anything from the past. The only thing that seems to make any sense at all is to strengthen the ability to cope with constant change and turbulence. Is that even possible? 2022 is to be the year we leant into this question.

The micro-site was the culmination of three years’ work commissioned by Oasis. It explores the possibility that the world we know is in danger of collapse due to social and environmental shifts. There is a thin line to tread here: between facing into extreme possibilities and taking the reader along with you, between preparing for the worst and building for the possibility of something better.

The site contains a wealth of resources: research papers into social and environmental change, the anthropology of civilization collapse and approaches to building personal, community and global resilience.

This is being followed up by three initiatives where the Foundation is directly involved in shaping and strengthening resilience for a turbulent future:

Courageous Conversations

In February around 50 academics and sustainability professionals gathered on zoom to delve into the topic of civilizational collapse. This was the first in a series of Courageous Conversation staged in collaboration with the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative under the title Hope in the Time of Collapse.

The focus of the session was a model developed by Margaret Wheatley to describe roles that are common and useful during times of systems change (see diagram). In times of radical change it can be useful to support some things to die while helping others to be born. By locating ourselves in this way (what are we birthing, what are we hospicing?) we can find ways to stay active and of service even as the system around us disintegrates.

Further Courageous Conversations over the spring and summer explored responses to collapse at the systems level, the organizational and the personal: how do we build systems that promote thriving life and regenerative approaches.

Leaning into Uncertainty

As a Foundation the things we get involved in are aligned to our sense of where we can be useful, where we can add something that is otherwise absent, where our Whole-Person, Whole-System approach can contribute. And we’re keen to continue learning. With over twenty years of social action under our belt we have a pretty good idea of where we can have impact.

But that’s only half the story. As the human species moves into uncharted territory we’re going to have to learn fast and deep, to think and act in new, agile and audacious ways. Supporting resilience in the face of turbulence, navigating shifting sands on a global level. These things will not be done entirely using tried and tested means. Hence our commitment to staying alive to our learning edge in everything we do.



What's new and emergent in 2022? – continued

Reinventing Rites of Passage

Imagine the scene. Twelve students huddled in the half-light of a candle-lit room. The walls behind them are earthen, the structure held up by green-oak beams. They are exhausted but content. They have been out on the land since before dusk, with nothing but a question and maybe a blanket and a water bottle. Six hours later and they are silently processing their own and each other's experiences.

This is the culmination of four days intensive reflection and dialogue. A process that took five years to bring to fruition and another six months to design. We have been working with oikos international, the global student organisation for sustainability since 2017. It's a wonderful organisation completely run by students who are deeply committed to a fairer, more environmentally responsible world.

Over recent years oikos has come of age. It has shed its Board of Trustees and developed a self-managing approach. And it has grown beyond its European origins into India and beyond. 2022 became the year to mark this transition with a Rite of Passage – for the organisation and for the individual students running it.

Such Rites are woven into the fabric of indigenous societies – they are how young people find a new role for themselves as adults within the community. So the question for us became: how would oikos show up in the world now? And what would each of these twelve become? What will be their role in a rapidly changing period of global transformation?

The Rite of Passage took place in Biofalu eco-village in Hungary. Participants worked on the land, and were guided through a structured yet emergent process of deep reflection. The Foundation is supporting oikos on a three-year basis to use this and other innovative approaches to find its mission in the world.



Participant Feedback

What do we want to celebrate?

*“Community, love and intimacy”
“Movement, time together, and
working with nature”
“Becoming our true self”*

What challenges did we face?

*“Searching for the right
balance that can support my
development”
“Surrendering myself to the
exercises and stepping outside
of my comfort”
“Opening more to my own self”*

What else did it represent?

*I reconnected to aspects of
my personality that had been
driven out of me”
“It was an opportunity for
me to explore vulnerability,
embodiment, and dancing.
These and other things were
possible because of the safe
space I felt”*

2021 in Numbers

Our financial year ended on 30th December 2021

| | 2021 |
|--|----------------|
| Opening balance | £37,678 |
| Income | <u>£10,844</u> |
| Financial donations from Oasis School of Human Relations | £3,000 |
| Donations in kind from Oasis School of Human Relations* | £7,828 |
| Interest income | £16 |
| Less Expenditure | <u>£19,700</u> |
| Coaching Forward | £1,000 |
| Leadership and Peer work | £823 |
| Gresham Community project | £3,400 |
| Project facilitation/consultancy | £1,934 |
| Learning from Women | £2,000 |
| Bursaries | £5,180 |
| Administration and comms | £2,648 |
| Annual Report | £1,056 |
| Accountancy and sundry | £1,659 |
| Closing balance | <u>£28,822</u> |

*In addition to annual financial donations generously provided by the Directors of the Oasis School, the Foundation also benefits from a significant amount of ‘in kind’ support in the form of office and communications support, printing and postage, food and rooms for meetings, and programme bursaries.

The Trustees have been very keen to recognise the value of this and we are very pleased that we can now show this in our Accounts for the first time.

Our Purpose

“To support the development of those engaged in positive social change towards building regenerative relationships between people and planet

The Foundation’s four key areas of focus:



Our People

Trustees



Mary Godfrey
Chair of the Board of Trustees



Marion Ragaliauskas
Company Secretary, Co-Director of the Oasis School of Human Relations



Helen Southwell
Treasurer



Nick Ellerby
Co-Director of the Oasis School of Human Relations



Rick Trask
Oasis Associate

Project Leads

Chris Taylor – Project Director
Sarah Bryson - Oasis Associate
Isabela de Souza

Social Action Narrator

Laurie Spafford

Advisory Board

Rob Bell – Social Justice
Johan Gunners – Entrapreneurship
Tim Morgan – Finance and Audit
Nick Dyson – Charity Law
Jill Cox – Mental Health

Our wider Network

As a small charity with limited resources we are extremely fortunate to have partnerships with a number of like-minded organisations and individuals. This enables us to extend our reach and be more effective. We say thank you to the GRLI, Oikos, Scottish Social Action, and Northstar Housing.

We are also grateful to the Oasis Associates and Community Associates who have given their time and energy to support the Foundation’s work.

Remembering Ian Barnett

On a sad note, we heard that Ian Barnett, a previous Chair of the Foundation had passed away on 1st August 2021. Ian was a successful business leader (tea and coffee) in Leeds and became a participant on the two year Oasis Diploma programme. He wanted to support us and our work. Ian helped the School on financial systems and later joined the Foundation as a trustee before becoming the Chair in 2012. We benefitted from his dedication and experience for many years until he stepped down in 2018.



Supporting positive social change through
Whole Person Learning approaches

The Oasis Foundation is a registered charity established by the Oasis School of Human Relations in 1999.

Our aim is to support positive social change through the use of Whole Person Learning approaches.

We are based in Yorkshire, UK and are proud of a global reach through our extensive network of partnerships.

We support practitioners and leaders of emergent social change initiatives, primarily through one-to-one support, peer-based learning and by offering sponsored approaches to learning and organisational development.

Contact us

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September 2022