

Impact 20 Report 20

halifax
opportunities
trust

Working to make a vibrant, self-sustaining
and multicultural community

children & families

community & wellbeing

employment

enterprise

inclusive integration

learning

Our Organisation

Welcome to Halifax Opportunities Trust. We are a regeneration charity working to make vibrant, self-sustaining and multicultural communities across Calderdale.

In each of the areas that we work: children and families, community and wellbeing, enterprise, employment, inclusive integration and learning, we take a holistic, whole person approach to working with members of the local community.

We are driven by 4 core values:

we are enterprising, we are committed, we collaborate and we care.



we are enterprising

we collaborate

we care

we are committed

For many reasons, 2020 has been a difficult year for the Trust - not least due to the impact of coronavirus on the communities in which we are based.

The challenges brought by lockdown in March and prolonged periods of local restrictions have forced the Trust to evaluate everything; from how we deliver services to how we work as a staff team and how we balance our duty of care to both our community and our employees.

However, through it all, it has been team members from across the Trust that have lived and breathed our values and gone over and above day in and day out to provide continuity of services and respond to the unique challenges that arose from the pandemic whether that be in the form of our food parcel delivery service or carrying out thousands of individual welfare calls to families and individuals registered with us. They really have shown the power of community.



Welcome

As I reflect on the past year, I'm struck by the fact that 2020 – in many ways – has been the most challenging year for the Trust that we've ever had. Like many individuals and families across Calderdale and beyond, we started the year full of hope, anticipating celebrating our 20th year as a charity and looking forward to all it had to bring.

By the time Spring came, it was clear that 2020 was going to be a very different year to that which we had planned, not just for us, but for everyone. The spread of coronavirus and the national lockdown rapidly and fundamentally changed the way that we operate as a community organisation. Our work is built on nurturing close relationships both with the people we work with and the partner organisations that work alongside us and lockdown proved a time when we reaped the benefits of years spent building those relationships.

Our staff teams across the Trust were able to quickly shift from business as usual to identifying new ways in which we could work with the communities in which we are based. This manifested as rolling out a food parcel delivery service from scratch to our most vulnerable community members, carrying out thousands of welfare calls to families and individuals across the borough and moving much of our training and advice to remote means such as video, telephone calls and social media, all the while maintaining continuity of care in our nurseries for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

The very fact that we, as a Trust, were able to rise to these challenges is ultimately a testament to the resilience and dedication of our staff across the Trust and the reason we have chosen to celebrate them in this year's Impact Report. Each and every member of staff went over and above during 2020 and the collective effect of this is that Halifax Opportunities Trust remains one of the most valued community assets in Calderdale ... well done everyone!

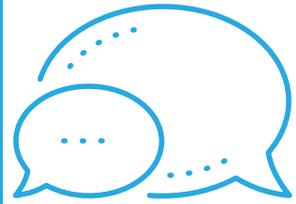
The Revd Canon Hilary Barber,
Chair of Trustees

Our Response

During the first 6 weeks of lockdown teams across the Trust achieved the following outcomes:

2200

Befriending & welfare calls made by our project delivery teams.



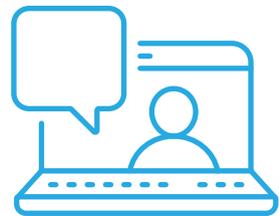
740

Employment & training advice calls made.



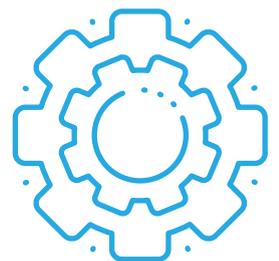
50

Learners per week accessing online English language classes.



34

Local organisations we worked in partnership with during lockdown.



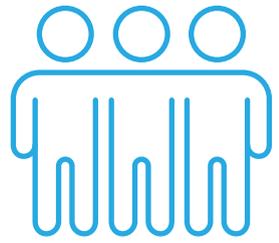
5400

Weekly calls made to offer support to families registered with our Children's Centres.



26

Vulnerable children and children of key workers attending our nurseries.



155

Signposts to specialist providers.



1050

Food parcels provided.



44

Apprentices were supported through their qualifaction remotely.



59

Families supported with their child's speech and language development.



£170,000

Claimed by companies we have assisted in grant applications.

children & families

Children and Families are the heart of thriving communities because when we create an environment that people want to raise their family in we boost the local economy, attract inward investment and raise the aspirations of the next generation.

COVID-19 brought new challenges for our Children & Families team as we moved from face-to-face activities to working remotely with families - some of whom were severely impacted negatively by the effects of lockdown. Here's how we rose to the challenge:

Our Experience - Children's Centre Receptionist

I work 25 hours as a receptionist at Todmorden Children's Centre, as a vulnerable member of staff I was asked to isolate from 20th March, I was very worried and anxious about coronavirus and felt relieved when I got the phone call to say I could work from home.

As soon as I got my list of families and my work mobile phone I started to make welfare calls to service users weekly (if they wanted me to) to check they were ok, were managing shopping/cooking/budgets etc and checking their details on our system. I made around 400 phone calls in total and arrangements of weekly food packages to struggling families.

"I made around 400 phone calls in total and arrangements of weekly food packages to struggling families."

More people started to return to work in June but I still felt anxious and too vulnerable to return, the doctor advised that I shield. Shielding advice ended and I came back on site in early August, I felt anxious about returning but the Children's Centre had been made as safe as possible, one way systems, bubbles of staff and lots of support from everyone, I think I settled back well.

"HOT have been really supportive in enabling me to have those 4 months working from home."

HOT have been really supportive in enabling me to have those 4 months working from home and implementing new ways of working to enable me to do my job from home and stay safe.



Family support teams across the Trust had to completely change how they worked with families.

Our Experience - Family Support Worker

Working from home had many frustrations in the beginning, not having a computer was the main issue. The first couple of weeks were stressful with feelings that I was not being productive enough, not typing notes, or completing assessments on time, however everyone was in the same situation and parents were so happy to be contacted that the phone calls became essential to the families. This became the focus for me - engaging with parents and children and letting them know they were not alone.

The parents understood that I would not be visiting them at home but I let them know they could contact me and that I would ring them twice a week. This was an easy process with the families I was already working with and had a good relationship however during the last five months I was allocated new families but despite my reservations this was also a positive experience.

As far as possible I tried to be flexible, understanding that children were at home and that some calls would be upsetting or the content inappropriate for young ears. I offered early evening calls to help complete assessments. One family had a regular Monday evening appointment 6.30 until 8.00 and I also helped a dad who was working and arranged calls between 5.30 and 6.30.

I was surprised how easily children talked on the phone, particularly the ones who had never met me. I have had some very meaningful conversations with children. Whilst I am not confident with technology (Zoom and FaceTime is not really for me!) I don't believe this has prevented me from supporting families.

Depression and poor mental health has been a major factor for many of the mums. Contacting doctors and services like Healthy Minds and Vita Health on parent's behalf has played a big part of my role. The main difficulties for me has been hand writing notes and finding somewhere comfortable to write.

The support from my team has been amazing. My manager phoned every day to ensure I had everything I needed. Gloves, sanitiser, masks and necessary paperwork were delivered to my door and we even had a Whatsapp group for staff to keep in touch. My manager also started a 'tea and chat' meeting once a week where we could Facetime the team and keep in touch.

employment

Our Employment Services Team is based at Hanson Lane Enterprise Centre. Helping people to find employment is an important part of the Trust's commitment to the local community. Our team of experienced Employment Advisors work with job seekers to help them move forward, overcome their barriers and get good quality jobs. The onset of the pandemic and subsequent lockdown changed the way this service works overnight and our adaptation continues to this day.

Our Experience - Lisa Connelly, Programme Lead

2020 has been a challenging year for the Employment Services team. When the full lockdown was announced back in March, we found ourselves having to adapt our delivery model overnight. Our main priority was to meet the immediate needs of the community which included delivery of food parcels and essential items. Staff were asked to completely adapt their roles to accommodate this and they gladly rose to the challenge! During this period, the team were involved in providing over 1000 food parcels whilst also providing over 700 employment and training advice calls. We continued to help people find work, albeit on a smaller scale and all while adapting to the new normal of working from home ourselves.

To ensure we were still reaching people who needed help with finding work, we developed a weekly online 'job club' on our Facebook page, listing the latest quality vacancies available for people to apply to and gain help from our Advisors. In addition to the employment support, we also offered weekly Mindfulness sessions for people to learn coping mechanisms to get them through the lockdown, utilising those video platforms that have become so popular now. These projects have been a really positive experience for both participants and the team, allowing us to introduce and continue with a more innovative & varied package of support therefore increasing our reach.

"Our main priority was to meet the immediate needs of the community which included delivery of food parcels and essential items."

Looking ahead, we are evaluating the employment landscape and are keen to engage with people who have found themselves unemployed due to Covid19, using our holistic approach by providing early intervention to create opportunities for people to get back into work quickly. We are keeping a close eye on the changing trends in employment levels and reacting accordingly, and our offices are open for face to face support while we still provide the online options as a blended delivery model.

With unemployment rates increasing exponentially, the next few months will be challenging; however, our team is passionate about what we do and are working hard to support the people in our community who need it most.

community & wellbeing



Community Organiser, Alison, loading up our van ready to deliver for the food parcel delivery service.

Our Experience - Alison, Community Organiser

As a Community Organiser, my work is based on the relationships I forge within the community and supporting the development of community initiatives. At the start of lockdown in March I was involved, alongside other colleagues from HOT, with the food parcel delivery service. It was challenging and rewarding in equal measures.

Through my connections in the community I became aware of activists from our local Madni Mosque, who were interested in rolling out food provision through the mosque. They were planning to launch a community fridge to provide local residents experiencing poverty access to fresh food. I became involved in facilitating a network for local businesses and members of the mosque to coordinate the practical side of opening the fridge. This also involved work to engage women and children who would ordinarily not access mosque grounds unaccompanied. The community fridge launched at the start of August and has been a great success. I helped the team involved with it access guidance from local environmental health teams about safe food handling practices and basic food hygiene training.

I feel proud to have been involved with an initiative that came whole-heartedly from our community and being able to facilitate it becoming a reality.

enterprise

Halifax Opportunities Trust supports enterprise through our activities at Hanson Lane Enterprise Centre and Elsie Whiteley Innovation Centre. Both facilities offer business accommodation and meeting room hire along with access to a range of advice and events such as HOT Networking. The impact of coronavirus on our business centres has been significant this year, both for us and our tenants but we have endeavoured to rise to the challenges we faced and support our business community as best we could.

Our Experience - Paul Blackman, EWIC Director

"As the weeks went on, it quickly became apparent to us that life and business needs would be changed forever due to COVID-19, and that we would enter a new normal, not go back to how things were pre-COVID."

COVID-19 has and will continue to create many uncertainties and indeed some serious problems for many members of our business community at Elsie Whiteley Innovation Centre. However, as a Board of Directors, we are focussed on supporting our community and are clear in our vision to provide excellent safe and sustainable facilities, advice and overall support.

When lockdown was announced in late March, a decision was swiftly taken to financially support our tenants without hesitation. We took the decision to extend credit terms to all our tenants from 30 to 90 days interest free. In addition, as government grants and various types of support became available - we continued to assist our tenants by offering our assistance in sharing information, completing applications, offering advice and taking a flexible, individual approach to understanding our tenants unique situations during such stressful times.

As the weeks went on, it quickly became apparent to us that life and business needs would be changed forever due to COVID-19, and that we would enter a new normal, not go back to how things were pre-COVID. The Centre experienced a total loss of conferencing income during lockdown and even with the easing of restrictions, there was hesitation from our regular clients as to how and when to return. With this in mind, the decision taken was to evaluate future needs of the Centre to ensure and deliver the most relevant investment in sustainable facilities and technology.

Our brief to the Management team to update and improve all our meeting rooms and conferencing facilities was actioned swiftly and professionally to ensure our offer at Elsie Whiteley remains relevant, high quality and indeed safe going forward. The Innovation Centre will remain at the front of delivering premium facilities for all users. Watch this space as we push ourselves to remain innovative, sustainable and relevant.

children & families



Team member, Jason, responded to the challenges of lockdown by supporting colleagues with welfare calls.

Our Experience - Jason Walters, Dad's Worker

I have been a Cook at Todmorden Children's Centre for the past 5 years preparing meals for the children who attend nursery and crèche, and have really enjoyed this role.

However during the initial lockdown in March there wasn't much of an opportunity to work from home in the Cook role, so I started to work alongside the Family Support team contacting families by making welfare phone calls during this time. Speaking to the families also involved signposting them if they needed supporting during this difficult time so they could access available services that might be of value to them during the epidemic.

After making the welfare calls to families for a couple of months, and realising that I was having some great responses, really interesting conversations with families and work satisfaction, I decided to speak to Julie, the Children's Centre Area Manager, about changing roles and furthering my career within HOT if an opportunity became available. I wanted to continue to work for HOT knowing this is a valuable organisation.

When a post became available for the Family Outreach Worker working with male carers as a 'Dad's Worker' I applied and got the job! I started the post on 5th October and I am now in my induction period, and am very much looking forward to getting fully immersed in the role.

For all the negativity surrounding Coronavirus, fortunately for myself I was able to turn it into a positive and further my career within HOT.

