

Oasis Hub Hobmoor Evaluation - August 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Oasis Hub Hobmoor opened in 2015 as a community centre serving the people of Yardley and the surrounding areas. The site comprises both Oasis Hub Hobmoor and Oasis Academy Hobmoor – an academy which provides education for 3- to 11-year-olds. The school and community centre were built in 2009 on an allotment site on the corner of Oaklands Recreation Ground, replacing Hobmoor Primary School but, after only 3 months of being open, the community centre had to be closed and the school went into special measures. Oasis took ownership of the school on the condition that they could reopen the community centre and in 2015 Oasis Hub Hobmoor was opened.

Oasis Hub Hobmoor and the school, Oasis Academy Hobmoor, are separate legal entities which work in partnership and share a site and some facilities. Many of the families of children which go to the school attend classes at the hub and make use of the facilities there.

There are numerous activities which happen at Oasis Hub Hobmoor including training courses, English language courses for speakers of other languages, youth clubs and activities, creative classes, and community activities such as coffee mornings and their warm welcome space. Below is an example of an average week of activities at Oasis Hub. (see page 5)

Oasis Hub Hobmoor is run by the Hub Leader who also acts as centre manager along with three paid members of staff. There are also a number of stakeholders which the Hub partners with to deliver activities including the staff at Lionheart Football School of Excellence, the church minister at South Yardley Methodist Church, and the Headteacher and staff at Oasis Academy Hobmoor.

In the following report, we will present data from a series of interviews to evaluate the impact of Oasis Hub Hobmoor for the local community. We will also highlight challenges and areas for development. The Hub provides a wide variety of services and activities. For the purposes of this report, we have opted to spotlight a selection of these core activities, with the intention of providing in-depth snapshots of specific activities provided by Oasis Hub Hobmoor.

2023	COMMUNITY ROOM	BOARD ROOM
MONDAY	T.A. Course L2 (BMET) 12.30-2.30pm Oasis Living Room 3.30-4.45pm	T.A. Course L3 (BMET) 9.00 – 10.30am Fear No Maths (BAES) 12.30 - 2.30pm Job Club 1.00 - 3.00pm
TUESDAY	Oasis Stay & Play (Parent & Toddler group) 9.30 – 11.00am Academy Use 12.00 – 3.30pm Oasis Living Room 3.30 - 4.45pm	ESOL Entry Level (BAES) 9.30 – 11.30am ESOL Entry Level (BAES) 12.30 - 2.30pm
WEDNESDAY	Creative English (ESOL) 9.30 - 11.30am Academy Use 1.30 – 3.00pm Oasis Living Room 3.30 - 4.45pm	Functional Skills (BMET) 10.00am - 12.00 Noon Preparing to Work in Schools L1 (BMET) 12.30-2.30pm
THURSDAY	Coffee Morning 9.00-10.30am Oasis Living Room 3.30 - 4.45pm	Digital Skills (BAES) 9.30 - 11.30am IT Course (BAES) 12.30-2.30pm Oasis Café 12.30pm + Oasis Pantry Hobmoor @ South Yardley Methodist Church 1.00 - 3.00pm
FRIDAY	ESOL (BMET) 10.00am - 12.00 Noon Oasis Living Room 3.30 - 4.45pm	Sewing Class 9.15 - 11.15am



2. METHODOLOGY

For this report we conducted four in-depth semi-structured interviews with staff at Oasis Hub Hobmoor. We also spoke to four stakeholders from partner organisations who deliver some of the projects Oasis provide. We interviewed 13 citizens and 12 volunteers who work at the Hub and its partnered activities. These were shorter semi-structured interviews. Interviews took place online, at BVSC's offices, or in person at the Oasis Hub site or partner sites.

All interviewees were fully informed of the purpose of the report and gave either written or verbal consent to participate and to have their interviews recorded. These recordings were then anonymised and transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were analysed by two researchers to draw out views and common themes.

Data Sources

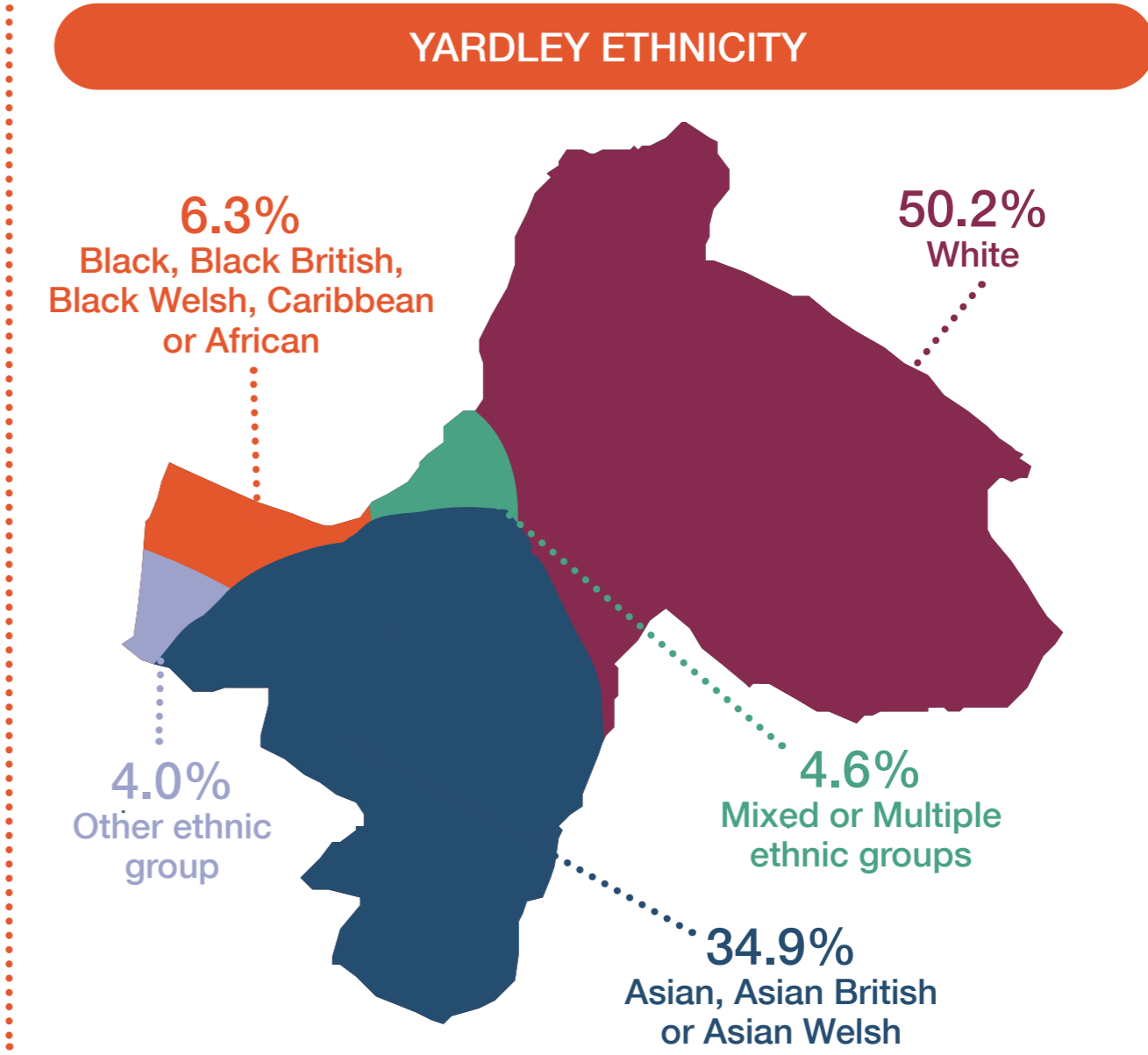
All data on Oasis Hub Hobmoor participants is based on data collected when participants booked to attend activities (and some of whom did not then attend the session) provided by Oasis Hub Hobmoor.

All other data is based on the 2021 Census, provided by the Office for National Statistics, accessed using the Custom Profile Tool on the 19th of June 2023.

3. LOCAL CONTEXT

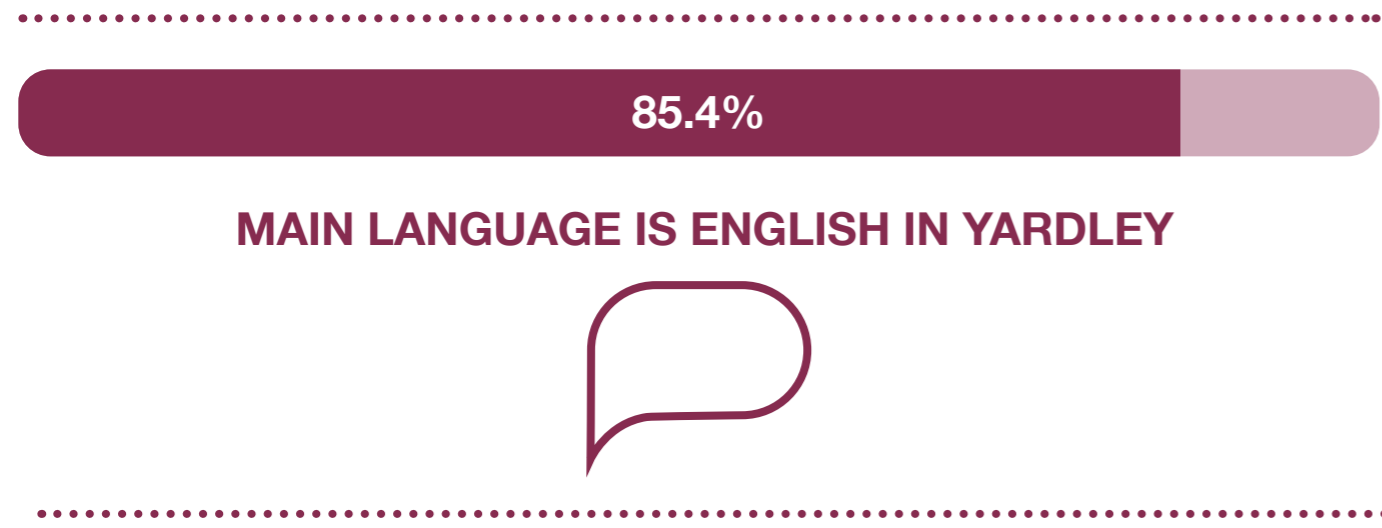
Oasis Hub Hobmoor primarily serves the people of Yardley. However, in conversation, one staff member described their primary focus as being, for the most part, the local ward of South Yardley, rather than the broader constituency. That being said, they don't turn people away who come from neighbouring wards or constituencies. The Hub provides services for people of all ages with activities specifically targeting different age groups and demographics within the area.

Overall, the ethnicity of Yardley matches that of Birmingham as a whole, with approximately half the population being white, and approximately a third of the population being Asian. The largest difference is in the black population, which only makes up 6% of the Yardley population, but 11% of the Birmingham population. This differs substantially from the country as a whole, which is over 80% white.



The level of English proficiency is fairly similar in Yardley to the Birmingham as a whole, although on average still slightly lower than for England as a whole. South Yardley ward however is somewhere between the constituency and the national average.

A fairly similar proportion of Yardley's citizens have disabilities, as in Birmingham and England more broadly, although the figure in South Yardley is slightly lower.

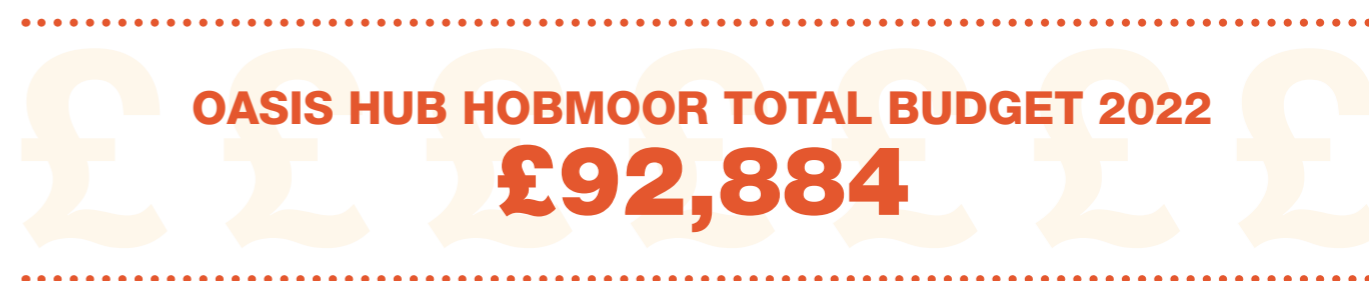


The ward of South Yardley is 51% female and 49% male, which is the same as the Yardley constituency, Birmingham more broadly, and England as a whole.

4. FUNDING & STRUCTURE

In the year 2021, due to receiving additional money from the Covid Recovery Fund, Oasis Hub Hobmoor had a large carry forward from Reaching Communities funding. They therefore paused payments from Reaching Communities, so that they could spend the carry forward of £46,471 between January and June 2022. In July 2022 they began receiving payments again and Reaching Communities paid them £46,413. This provided a total budget of £92,884 across 2022.

There are four paid members of staff at Oasis Hub Hobmoor - the Hub Leader and three Community Development Workers. There are also 100 volunteers who work across the different projects and activities, and paid workers in partner agencies who work with the Hub.



5. FINDINGS



“

How would I describe it? I'd describe it as the place to be. It's safe, it's secure. You can speak in confidence. If we can help, we will. If we can't, we'll find somebody that can.

”



Staff Member

In 2015, the Community Centre, run by Oasis Hub Hobmoor opened its doors, breathing life into a purpose-built facility in the heart of Yardley, Birmingham. The facility was built 14 years ago on the grounds of the former Hobmoor Primary School, alongside a new primary school.

The community negotiated a deal with the council that the plans for the primary school would include a new community centre on the site. The centre then opened for 3 months and people were welcomed in. However, a turn of events led to its closure, leaving the once-thriving community without a vital space for seven years. During that time, the school went into special measures. Oasis Community Learning, a multi-academy trust, took over the struggling school under one condition: the reopening of this community centre. Political campaigning and hard work by stakeholders finally got the Hub building open again in November 2015.

The Reaching Communities Grant from the National Lottery Communities Fund has allowed the project to deliver against three main strands: Empower, Equip, and Enjoy.

EMPOWER

Empowerment involves facilitating the neighbourhood to create positive change, fostering community leaders who can address local challenges. *“If you can get 20 community leaders in the neighbourhood doing what they want to do in a small location within a mile of here then that will really create change – this is what has happened”*. Supporting the Scouts, local entrepreneurs like the Lionheart Football Club manager, and other youth activities have all emerged from this approach.

EQUIP

Equip focuses on providing opportunities for skills development and employment, emphasising empowerment as a means to alleviate child poverty. The Hub's services span from early education to adulthood, with a wide range of courses and support to meet the diverse needs of the community.

ENJOY

Enjoy underscores the significance of relationships and social cohesion. Oasis Hub Hobmoor serves as a gathering place, where people come together to socialise, share experiences, and build a stronger sense of community. Activities like the warm space (The Living Room), highlight this commitment to fostering connections.

From its inception, Oasis Hub Hobmoor has embodied a philosophy of empowerment, engagement, and community-driven progress. The entire approach revolves around consultation, asking one fundamental question:

“WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY WANT?”

It's an asset-based community development approach, recognising that strengths within the community itself can be harnessed to create positive change. v

Many people initially come to the site for their children's education at Oasis Academy Hobmoor. However, they then hear about the Hub from other parents, teachers, neighbours or community members. Others have no connection to the school at all but live in the local area. *“A typical story would be a person who is very isolated or a family who don't speak English coming from elsewhere nationally/internationally but generally we have 2nd/3rd generation migrants come. They bring their child to the school and that's their reason for coming. Then go on a whole journey.”* The Hub also uses social media, their website and flyers in local businesses to advertise their activities. Other people taking part in activities come from further afield: *“people come from Shirley, from Sutton Coldfield to do courses, because they haven't found anything where they live.”* - Staff Member

The Hub Leader and Headteacher work together on what the Hub can offer the academy and what the academy can offer the Hub. The Hub plays a significant role in the academy, offering services that enhance the educational experience of the students. It also collaborates with other schools and runs a holiday club, emphasising its role as a central community hub that goes beyond school boundaries. Innovatively structured as an independent charity, and not funded by the Academy (apart from for specific services offered to the school), the Hub collaborates closely with the academy while maintaining its own distinct identity. The Hub buys services and governance from Oasis Community Partnerships. The Hub is able to take advantage of its partnership with the Academy and being on shared premises by leasing their minibuses and using the school hall after hours.

“

The Academy is there for transformation of education and ours is transformation of the neighbourhood, and sometimes the things the hub do, benefit the academy.

”



Staff Member

Whilst this unique arrangement ensures that services benefit both the school and the broader community, it can make it challenging at times for traditional funders to comprehend.

5.1 CHALLENGES & NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY & THE LOCAL AREA

“

First and foremost financially, it's an area with an extremely high level of deprivation. When you talk about a financial crisis, we're living it here.

”



Staff Member

It is borne out in the data shown in section 3, that South Yardley ward, although not one of the most deprived wards in the city, is in the top 30% of most deprived wards nationally. Furthermore, 43% of the neighbourhoods in the Yardley constituency are in the top ten percent most deprived neighbourhoods in the country.

Staff highlighted that they felt that the mental health and wellbeing of the community is a big challenge. In a diverse community, issues such as domestic violence and language barriers may be concealed, making it vital to address these issues with sensitivity and support.

Despite these challenges, Oasis Hub Hobmoor serves as a sanctuary for the community;

“

The community would say that the hub is their sanctuary. I know people who would say that the hub has saved their lives and we have saved lives and we are saving lives and even lives that haven't happened yet.

”



Headteacher

Beyond financial struggles, it's about instilling a sense of place and pride in the community, emphasising that despite material poverty, the richness of this community lies in the connections and opportunities it provides for its residents.

“

We're not a desert here – we might be poor materially but we're quite rich with each other and we are rich with each other because we have those opportunities.

”



Staff Member



Staff also identified a lack of infrastructure in the local area, which meant that there was a need for “more spaces - there aren’t enough to do stuff. Arts In the Yard would love an arts hub but there isn’t anywhere, a building that people can afford.” This lack of community spaces means that potential proactivity is being stifled.

Some of the challenges for the local area come from outside of the community, rather than within it. The political landscape adds a level of complexity which has put Hobmoor “at the centre of a political turf war between neighbouring wards. Everyone wants a piece of the action. We have labour on one side, then lib dems on the other, and conservative not too far the other. So managing the political turf war is really difficult because some people want a piece of the action because they want us to succeed, some do not want us to succeed.” - Headteacher.

Key aims & objectives of Oasis Hub Hobmoor

The primary aims and objectives of Oasis Hub Hobmoor are deeply rooted in the philosophy of inclusivity and community empowerment. The staff at the project have drawn inspiration from Steve Chalke, founder of Oasis Charitable Trust, whose philosophy is to never say no to people.

“ We don’t shut doors to people, we have an open-door policy, people are welcome to come and question you, ask you anything, and here, our kettle is always on! People feel comfortable coming in, approaching us, the welcoming environment and how we deal with people. ”



Founder of Oasis Charitable Trust

The Hub’s approach involves treating every individual with kindness and listening without judgement.

“ We give them time, respect, and we try our best. If we can’t help, we signpost them to people who we know can help them. ”



Staff Member

Since their inception in 2015, staff feel that they’ve witnessed the transformation of Yardley from what the council once described as a “community desert” into a thriving community movement. Regular meetings with various stakeholders, including community members, statutory services and early help organisations, have solidified this movement, and also widened the referral network available to staff.

“ There’s a whole range of people that work in Yardley doing different things but are all working towards the common goal of enriching and building a stronger community in Yardley. Sometimes we work together or we’re independent – we can call on each other to help. Where there was nothing, we can now say there’s quite an enriched sense of community in Yardley that there wasn’t before. ”



Staff Member

This collaborative effort has not only resulted in an enriched sense of community but has also empowered individuals to take on leadership roles and make a significant impact. The project has become an essential part of the community, with many individuals branching out to initiate projects, such as the creation of a community arts organisation, and the launch of the food pantry in the methodist church. “We are 50% of what goes on, and others have gone from here and gone on to do their own thing.” However, a significant challenge remains in the scarcity of trusted and safe community spaces.

5.2 WHAT ACTIVITIES & PROJECTS DOES THE HUB PROVIDE & SUPPORT?

The Hub activities grow from many different sources, and for different reasons.

“

People are saying [to Hub staff] we can't stop providing food after covid, we need to sort out this domestic violence, we need a group. And then we discover things by accident – the living room – it's funded by warm spaces, but what's come out of it is lots of isolated mums with kids just come and play and kids go out in the backyard and play. And more recently people in temporary accommodation and they've told us more about that, so we've installed a washing machine and made sure they get a place on the holiday club.

”



Staff Member

Activities

Starting small, the Hub has grown into a registered charity, and on average, 1200 people use the Hub every week. The Hub reaches out to the community through various initiatives. These include a range of educational programmes, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), digital skills, and essential subjects like mathematics and English. The Hub is not just about education; in engaging with the Hub, people are also able to participate in creative courses in art, Arabic calligraphy, and dance. These initiatives bring people together, enabling them to express themselves and connect with their cultural heritage.

The Hub also offers activities like coffee mornings (aimed at those needing wellbeing support or help with a domestic abuse situation) and a sewing group that the community formed itself and leads. There is a stay and play session which is run purely by volunteers - *“it gives power back to the community. It's not for the toddlers, it's for the mums. They might be going through post-natal depression, so it's important that they have the opportunity to share”*.

At this session, one of the volunteers is a dietician, so mums can get vital advice from them too. There is also always information advice and guidance available to all who need it. ESOL classes, for instance, are not just about language but also a space for interaction and building relationships. They are also a place for building confidence to access services outside of the Hub, like a GP or library. The Hub's coffee mornings offer a place for conversations and provide support for mental well-being. The Hub has also provided workshops on topics like anxiety, stress, diabetes and healthy eating empower individuals to take control of their health.

The holiday club runs throughout the holidays and is open to all children from the community. This is a vital resource for parents, giving children a safe place to go during the holidays, and young people an opportunity to volunteer and learn. *“We've had kids who come from 9 years old, part of holiday club, and now looking to be employed as coaches for it.”*



“

It's warm and welcoming they have the baby group on a Tuesday morning – if I've had a stressful morning with my eldest, and I've said it's like family – I know my son is happy and it's kind of like that relief. And if you need help with anything, I know I can go to someone – if I'm struggling with food, I can go to [Hub staff]. If I need support with filling out forms, sometimes when you go to certain places it's too formal, too established. Everyone is warm and welcoming. Even though it's next to a school which is a formal building, it's got that chilled feel, almost like a second home.

”



Volunteer and service user

The Living Room, which opened as one of the Council's Warm Welcome Spaces in the winter of 2022, welcomes anyone on every weekday from 3.30pm. The majority who use the Living Room are Academy pupils but it is open to the wider community. The Headteacher explained: *“The majority of our families go home to houses which they cannot afford to heat, maybe they cannot wash clothes or even put the microwave on for a microwave meal. We allow the families to come and sit down in a heated environment for a time and we provide washing facilities so people can wash clothes.”*

Citizens also take part in learning around childcare programmes, or teaching assistant (TA) courses. Having taken part in the courses, some of the citizens become volunteers, supporting the Hub, or volunteering in the Academy. Many of the volunteers transition into employment, whether in nurseries, as teaching assistants, sports coaches and more. This process not only empowers individuals but also alleviates poverty for families.

An integral part of the Hub's Theory of Change is that the best way to relieve child poverty is to empower people and get women into work. And to give them opportunities that they wouldn't otherwise have. The activities offered mean that these objectives are being met. Moreover, the Hub has noticed that teaching parents to be Teaching Assistants, or parents taking part in ESOL impacts positively on the academic achievement of those who have children at the Academy.

Projects

The Hub's holistic approach spans a broad spectrum, offering support from to all age groups - *“we support people from zero to when they die.”* Initiatives like the 50+ project, in collaboration with the Neighbourhood Network Scheme (NNS) and collaborative work with the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) demonstrate this commitment.

The Oasis Pantry Hobmoor, another community-driven initiative, is a testament to the Hub's approach. Volunteers play a pivotal role in its operation, and during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, they delivered over 5000 food parcels, emphasising the community's ability to take the lead in addressing its own needs.

Working with the Lionheart Football Club is another example of the collaborative approach taken by Oasis Hub Hobmoor. The Hub runs the football club while working in partnership with Lionheart, which also happens to share a passion for the community. *“They're a training school, a third party provider. But they're not any third party provider – they have a passion for their community, they're a partner we want to work with.”* The collaboration ensures that the club thrives while allowing Lionheart Football Club to generate income through training, as well as providing an activity for young people to access training. Taking part in the central Warwickshire leagues means that the young people are given the opportunity to travel to other parts of the city. For some this is the first time they have left their neighbourhood, so giving this window into a world beyond the local community is inspiring for many.



5.3 HOW DOES OASIS HUB HOBMOOR SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS?

“ People want an opportunity to be in a safe and trusted space where they can make a difference. A needs analysis would say they need food, clothes, activities. And then a service comes along that can provide that – that’s the traditional model. We’ve thrown that out of the window! ”



Staff Member

While traditional approaches often focus on addressing immediate needs like food and clothing, this project takes a different approach by actively engaging with individuals to uncover their hidden strengths and aspirations. By fostering a sense of community through activities like Stay and Play and English classes, and by encouraging volunteering and peer support, this project helps individuals tap into their strengths, and effectively address their underlying needs. For example, providing access to a washing machine helps families in temporary accommodation maintain their dignity. Conversations that are fostered through the activities offered, provide a platform for sharing experiences and finding commonalities, creating a support network where people are able to assist each other. This project is at the heart of a diverse community, supporting newcomers to the city with language barriers and helping homeless individuals access vital services. With its open-door policy, it ensures that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, can find support and opportunities for growth within the community.

One of the key goals of the Hub is to break the cycle of the issues facing the local community:

“Unemployment is another way of us breaking the cycle. So the Hub, right from it’s inception has had a job session where you can get support in writing CVs. So I’ll give you an example, we’ll call him Mr K. Mr K is unemployed, has a child who comes to the school, is looking for work however doesn’t have the references to get into employment. So the academy offered him a position volunteering as a sports coach at the school. He has been with us 8 months now and we’ve provided each other a service and now he’s in a position to enter employment. I am hoping that by September he will be in employment in education.”

Hub staff said that 90% of the people who’ve left their courses with qualifications like Teaching Assistant qualifications, are now in employment. “So that’s broken the cycle of being on benefits, they have become role models for their children. They’re working now, they’re providing for their families – they’ve got a better quality of life.” Those who are felt to be too advanced for the courses that are offered, are signposted to careers advice. Those attending the ESOL classes have found that learning a new language and spelling has meant that they are now able to help their kids with their homework.

Staff mentioned that they had been working with a person with high anxiety who had been housebound for years. The person had been spending time at the pantry, and it was suggested that they might want to volunteer at the pantry. This helped them to gradually gain confidence and ultimately enabled them to secure a job. Another individual, a victim of domestic abuse, had moved into the area and was living with her daughter, but was lonely and depressed. She joined the sewing class, and the creative English class. Attending these classes gave her the confidence to deal with the issues she had been facing at home. The Hub signposted her to different services, and provided her with a solicitor to sort out finances with her husband. “It gave her the confidence to sort out her life. We saw her grow, she’d given up. She came, she’s in all our WhatsApp groups - it just changed her life.”

The project’s Young Leaders Programme empowers young people with valuable skills and leadership opportunities, offering a lifeline during holidays and helping parents facing child poverty to continue working. Parents don’t need to take time off work and lose money by doing this, or finance or find childcare and their children escape “*spending the summer on the PlayStation*”. We have young people who literally live here – they come after school, they never go home, during the holidays. Holiday provision is a big part of what we’ve done”. The holiday provision runs from 9am – 9pm in the summer, and a young leaders programme has been developed where young people are trained as sports coaches, gaining sports leaders qualifications. In the holidays, 12-18 year olds deliver the club under supervision of leaders and coaches. This provision helps parents to stay in work, and gives the children and young people a very different summer holiday than the one they may otherwise have had. It also gives the young volunteers valuable skills that they can take forward into the future.

“Young volunteers that have come up that used to attend, and then they kind of get to 12 or 13, and it’s not cool to hang around with the kids. So we recruit them as young volunteers. So when they get to 14 or 15, we’ll put them on a sports leaders coaching course. When they get to 16, they’ve got the qualifications already that some adults are aspiring to get. And they can have expenses paid and things like that. So it kind of keeps them in the loop, keeps them off the street, keeps them in education, and they don’t even know it!” - Staff Member

5.4 THE STAFF

The majority of the people who have come together to make up the Hub team is sourced from the community. All of the paid members of staff, and indeed the volunteers, are extremely committed to the work that they do.

One of the staff members told us how they had come to work at Oasis Hub Hobmoor, and how her story inspires other members of the community:

“

I'm one of the typical stories – born and brought up in Pakistan, husband came to find a wife. No immediate family here. I could read and write English but didn't speak any at all. I started by going to an ESOL class, and then secured a job - I've now been working for 20 years. These ladies see me as a role model. When they see me – 'this lady has come from back home, she's learnt the language, she's gone to work' so they can relate to me – if she can do it, we can do it. So it gives them confidence. When I was learning initially and I had young children it was very difficult managing family and work. When I got this job, I tried to make it comfortable and convenient for ladies, by arranging courses here. So they didn't have to travel to the city; they didn't have the confidence to do that. Because of that, some of them are sitting at home for 10 years - 'I'll do it when my kids go to school'. They didn't have any way of starting. So when they saw there were courses on their doorstep – they could drop their children off at the school, and come here.

”



Staff Member

Oasis Hub Hobmoor sits within a very diverse community, and occasionally it can be hard for staff to communicate, but a solution is always found: *“sometimes languages are difficult but the volunteers, who speak three or four languages help – we can solve it like that – if we can't communicate with someone, we can call somebody in.”*

All of the staff have undertaken training around health and safety, compliance and safeguarding. Other training that staff have completed includes training on helping parents to better relate to their children, and training around domestic violence. Those involved with sporting activity have undertaken coaching, refereeing, and sports leadership OFQAUL qualifications. However, all staff said that the majority of the work they do involves trying to problem solve on the job, for which the only training is time!

It's clear that working at Oasis Hub Hobmoor is, for the staff, a vocation. The Hub Leader was described as being someone who almost 'lives' at Hobmoor. Another described their role as akin to the role of a chaplain. One staff member described their role very enthusiastically:

“

I'm very passionate about this job. I love doing what I do – I am one of those lucky people who get up to go to a job they enjoy. With my experience now, I could go to get another job and earn more money but the satisfaction I get here, the respect and the love I get here from the community – I wouldn't get from anywhere else. One lady who can't fill in an application form for a secondary school place for her daughter – helping her to do this gives me more satisfaction than getting a designer bag!”

”



Staff Member

5.5 THE VOLUNTEERS

“

“I was just sitting outside in the car, my son was in nursery, I was waiting for him. I saw those ladies going inside, and thought ‘what are those ladies doing?’ One day I decided to go inside to see what they were doing. I came here - you can do this and that – it was a big opening for me, I can spend more time doing good things.”

”



Staff Member

Volunteers at Oasis Hub Hobmoor have roles at all levels from Trustees, committee members, supporting paid staff and running their own activities, to coming once a week to serve the tea and coffee. In 2022, there were 100 volunteers working across Oasis Hub Hobmoor’s projects and activities. Staff felt that the volunteers an integral part of what they do at the Hub. Indeed, the Hub relies heavily on its volunteers to run sessions, support service users and create opportunities and ideas for the future of the Hub. In return, the volunteers gain valuable skills and experience at the Hub, which enhances their career prospects. *“I want to work as a teaching assistant, so this is work experience, helping in the ESOL class.”* Another volunteer began at the Hub helping as an Arabic interpreter, *“to help other ladies from different countries. I’m now working as a dinner lady at the school.”* As a result of volunteering, one person who said they hadn’t worked for 25 years, now has a job at WHSmith at the weekends. A member of staff helped her with her interview.

Volunteers get a great deal of ‘job satisfaction’ from working at the Hub - *“We have a lady before she came here, she couldn’t write, she couldn’t recognise the letters. She can now get days in the college. She began from zero. She can speak now, she’s better than before, she can speak, she can understand what they say”*. Another volunteer said that helping with applications for the Council’s Household Support Fund was one of her main roles at the Hub. She made corrections on forms for those who had been refused elsewhere. *“People came from Hodge Hill, Smethwick, Sheldon, Handsworth. People are comfortable to come here, if they have confusion they can come here to discuss. Someone is there to listen to them.”* The support being offered by these volunteers spreads much more widely than the local community.

Some volunteers have qualifications that they use to help some of the service users attending the Hub: *“I’m a dietician. They (service users) have to wait even though they’re in need of help for a professional. Whatever phase of life they’re going through, diet can boost mood, it might give them a nudge towards a better diet.”* This level of expertise is incredibly valuable to the Hub, and the experience of those attending.

Others have managed to use their lived experience to advocate for others, and help to create more positive futures for them: *“When I’m stable in my situation, then I want to help these women. You need to apply funding, I want to be part of that. I really want to help someone. Because of me, somebody survived. They got out of a bad situation. (There was a person who was) 23 years a DV victim – she came in and learnt English, I’ve helped her to start to apply for British citizenship. Her daughter will start at the school in September, so she will then be able to start the ESOL class in September.”*

Volunteers were keen to highlight that in attending the Hub, they had made friends from many different cultures, something they saw as a really positive benefit of the Hub. *“Year by year I get more friends from different countries, and now I have a lot of friends. This place is helping people to make new communities.”* This atmosphere has helped those volunteering to feel part of the community, and to grow a new ‘family’ - *“I moved from London to Birmingham and I had no friends here, and this has given me a social network.”*

Many of the volunteers reported increased confidence as a result of their work at the Hub: *“I’m really happy with the way you can feel comfortable – before you do things it feels daunting – “will I be able to help people?” and then you see how other people are doing it, it helps you, and empowers you.”* Another volunteer said: *“At an HIV/Aids charity in Pakistan, I was the administrator. You come here and feel useless, my life was kids, cooking that’s it. I saw friends on Facebook, I had nothing to say. (This is) something to do for yourself for your own mental health. It’s a good start for me. My confidence level was zero, and they’re really high now – you can’t stop me!”*

Not all volunteers are there to gain new skills though, some just want to ‘give something back’ - *“I have volunteered before. Both my kids benefit from the place – the baby group, the pantry, my son plays football here, so I volunteer because it goes hand in hand, I come here a lot, so it’s my way of giving back, and I do enjoy it.”*

All of the volunteers we spoke to really valued the time they spend at the Hub, and the feeling that they are really valued. *“They ask our opinions on what’s lacking in the community. To be shaping the service: It’s amazing that they value our opinion, and it’s nice to be valued as a volunteer – to me it’s a job, people ask my opinion and I love it. I wouldn’t give it up.”*

6. SPOTLIGHT ON...



6.1 THE PANTRY & CAFÉ

Your Local Pantry Oasis Hobmoor opened in December 2020 to help relieve food poverty in the local community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Oasis Hub Hobmoor provided a food parcel service serving thousands of hot meals every week. When the Academy reopened, there was no longer the space needed to run this food service and Oasis approached South Yardley Methodist Church to establish a partnership with the aim to continue food provision for the community. After some research, a Your Local Pantry model was decided upon as the best way to move forwards. The pantry runs every Thursday, and for a weekly subscription of £4, members are able to have access to food with the value of around £28. The food available at the pantry changes every week based on what donations the church receives including fresh fruit and vegetables and store cupboard favourites. The church also runs a pay as you feel café which gives members a place to get a hot meal and socialise whilst they wait for their turn to shop at the pantry. The volunteers and staff very much see these activities as a partnership between the church and Oasis Hub Hobmoor, and part of one project.

“

Oasis are responsible for the pantry and shop side of things, and the church partners in that. The café and kitchen are our [The church] responsibility and Oasis partners with us. It's seen as one big project with two arms.

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The service is incredibly popular, and people are regularly waiting in a queue outside the church at least two hours before it opens. At 12:30 the café opens and people are invited in to sit down in the church hall where they can have a hot meal, cake, tea and coffee. When individuals come in, they are given a number which, when the pantry shop opens at 1pm, holds their place in the pantry queue. The pantry accommodates those who have additional needs or specific access requirements which would make waiting in the hall challenging and they are allowed to shop in the pantry a bit earlier and on their own. The café and pantry stays open until 3pm. The church has also hosted drop-in support sessions from Birmingham City Council, community police, a local MP, Barnardo's, and arts projects as part of the Pantry and Café service.



Getting The Word Out

Initially an email was sent out to the people who were originally having food parcels provided by Oasis Hub Hobmoor which told them that the pantry would open in December 2020. Membership has grown massively since then. *“We thought that if 14 people come, we’d be happy, but the first day we had 24 and it’s snowballed – we have 700/800 people on the books... It now operates by word of mouth, not even a poster on the outside’s needed – they just find their way.”* Many of the citizens we spoke to confirmed how effective word of mouth has been for the pantry and said that they had heard about the service through neighbours or friends. The people who use the pantry and café are clearly very enthusiastic about inviting others from their community along.

The partnership between South Yardley Methodist Church and Oasis Hub Hobmoor is very positive. They support each other to provide an excellent service aligned with both the Church’s and the Hub’s principles. The Oasis Hub Leader regularly comes to the pantry to help manage the activities along with staff and volunteers.. The rest of the volunteers who run the pantry and café are people who have joined from the community, and people who use and have used the service. There is a sense that Oasis Hub Hobmoor and the church collaborate effectively together to manage any challenges that arise.

“From the word go, it was a partnership. Oasis sort food delivery every week and a group from church and Oasis partners meet and put all food on shelves, and then any problems at all - we have a funeral, we need to change the day - so, we sat down and how can we make it work with as little disruption to customers.”

The church minister told us that if it wasn’t for the partnership with Oasis, the pantry and café would not have been established. Furthermore, without this project, the church would likely have closed. This would have been incredibly detrimental to the local area as they would have lost that community space and all of the other services the church provides. The pantry has therefore been of enormous importance to the area, as it has kept vital services local.

“If the project wasn’t there, for the church community it would mean that it was likely we’d have closed by now. I came back from sabbatical in 2020, and thought it wouldn’t survive for another couple of years. So as church down in the community we do a lot in the community other than pantry – narcotics groups, art group, mums and toddlers – they wouldn’t have a place anymore. in the wider community – Andy wouldn’t have been able to continue with food parcels as they didn’t have space and nowhere else was able to accommodate him. There wouldn’t have been that listening space; we try to help people find support. Someone on the Yardley support WhatsApp group can usually help, but (we provide) that safe space for people to gather and just be, even without the food element.”



Impact for the community

There are a number of benefits to the individuals who use the pantry and café. The project supports people with the rising financial challenges of the cost-of-living crisis through food provision. Without this service, a number of the users would struggle to have enough money to buy food.

“I don’t get dole money of any description. And basically it’s because I get what I call a part pension which is only £230 a month. So, to me, you know, there’s like others in the same kind of boat as me, but it quite simply helps out. And as you can see, there’s children that benefit from the pantry in so far as getting a meal, getting something to eat. So, yeah, it’s actually does help beyond the privileged ones that are not actually getting, you know, getting help from the system, as much as they should.” - Citizen

“I’m originally from Ukraine. And we had to move. So our everything been, um, just, um, left apart behind us. So, uh, only a little backpack I had with me. So my daughter, my mom, my sister, and that’s-- we’re here. So I find this place really helpful inside hard times we are going through.” - Citizen

Another key benefit is that the pantry and café provides a sense of community. The pantry and café give people an opportunity to socialise, meet other members of their community and make new friends. This aspect very effectively combats the social isolation that a number of people feel, especially with the lingering hangover from the COVID pandemic. This is true for both staff and volunteers.

“It’s a good place. It’s like they try their best. Uh, I meet up with people here, have a laugh, have a-have a chat... It-it-it gets you out the house... It’s all about mixing with people and just enjoying it.”

“Well, it’s a community put-together kind of system that actually works for, um, families. It’s beneficial for the children, the parents and it’s a community thing for the time that they’re actually here. So, you know, so it works.”



CITIZENS

VOLUNTEERS

“I think they come and chat too... there’s a lot of lonely people that come in, and they’ve got people to chat with, and um, you know, because then it’s how, you know, they’re on their own, they’re lonely, so they come in here and they can talk to other people.”

“I think it’s like happiness in one ball. Because what it is, is you come here, you have some hot food, you make new friends. They used to even do bingo for the people that used to come, and give them a prize at the end. And I mean, even when I’m just stocking up the shelves, I’ve got all the volunteers up. They’re all talking, we are having a laugh, and we are just trying to help everybody, and we’re helping ourselves as well.”

“Um, I mean, we’ve got some who don’t perhaps need the food pantry. Group of old men come every week because they just - it’s a loneliness thing - and they can sit and have a chat. So it meets those things as well. that positive sense of commitment to community,”

Citizens and volunteers also spoke with enthusiasm about how welcoming the project is and that it is inclusive of people from all backgrounds. Many have enjoyed mixing with people that they wouldn’t normally have in their day to day lives.

The sense of community people feel at the pantry extends beyond just meeting people and being able to chat. Citizens and volunteers spoke about how helpful everyone is at the party and that everyone is actively looking out for and supporting each other.

“I mean, they will help you if you come here with a bad leg. Or like that lady come in, needed a form filling out, they will kind of put you in the direction of, you know, and that’s not because they’re trained, and that’s not because they’ve been told to do that. It’s because they’re human beings, and everyone will say, oh, we’re having trouble with that. Well, my aunt or my cousin did it this way. Like I say, it goes back to the networking again.”

VOLUNTEERS

“What makes it a good place to volunteer? I love the mixture of people, both amongst the volunteers and amongst the people we meet. And, uh, in the sense that the sort of the community of almost unlikely people is being built, I think.”

“I mean there’s mixture in the races and things, but - that’s not a particular challenge, I don’t think here. ‘Cause I think one of the glorious things is the way that that’s not an issue- that’s just not an issue at all.”

“I mean, it does a lot of things. I mean, it can help with maybe making like a few people in the community, like see each other’s differences. Like, you know, we have people from all different races like that come, but there’s never any like, separation. It’s always everyone’s joined together. So, it’s a nice congregation. Even though it’s a church, everyone still comes and respects no matter what your religion is.”

“

“So, you know, you’re not kind of - you’re not left out sort of thing, you know, you’re within your own little circle of people that you can understand and they can understand you. And so in turn it’s, it is a good thing. And plus the staff within the pantry are brilliant and understanding. So, I mean, you know, so that’s an added bonus, you know. That’s a bonus. We are really privileged to be able to come here. It’s amazing.”

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CITIZEN

One citizen we spoke to told us about her son who has mental health difficulties and that doing basic self-care activities is challenging for him but that coming to the church to use the pantry gives him a reason to get dressed, brush his teeth and get out of the house. This reflects one of the ways in which the pantry is indirectly benefiting individuals mental health.

“So, that was-even better than him getting a bunch of bananas! The fact that he got up that night, he got his shirt ready, and he got up this morning, and he got ready, and he said, we’re going to church, and we walked up... We’ve seen some of our friends, and it’s not just about the food, it’s about the embodiment, the community.”

Volunteering at the pantry is seen as an empowering experience for volunteers which provides people with opportunities to gain work experience which can help them get into employment, as explained by the Church minister.

“The café opened and we’ve had a lot more volunteers – it’s become an empowering exercise. Some volunteers are kids who’ve been expelled, or disabled volunteers and they’ll do whatever they can. One girl – she had mental health and anxiety issues and so we just said you just do whatever you want to do, go when you feel if you don’t want to be around people. Her confidence has now grown, she’d play her guitar for people occasionally. She’s now secured herself a job. For some people it’s a stepping stone into doing something else, and we’re more than happy to provide references.”

The impact for the community far exceeds just being a place where you can get food cheaply. The pantry and kitchen provides a community which tackles social isolation, gives people a sense of ownership and belonging, and provides a range of opportunities for those who get involved.

Getting The Community Involved

The church actively involves the community and citizens who use the service in the design and development of the activities that run at the pantry. The idea to have the number allocation system for holding people's places in the queue came from one of the individuals who shops at the pantry. One of the new ideas which the church minister and pantry manager are trying to get into action is to have a creche which runs alongside the pantry.

"One volunteer, she came when we had half term, (she was) a friend of a volunteer and asked to volunteer. She volunteers in the kitchen but she'd like to offer a creche in the holidays so we're now seeing how we can make that work. So she and her husband could run it – they're both teachers."

The church welcomes community ideas with open arms and this collaborative process of drawing on the skills of the community has benefited both the pantry and the people who use it. An example of this is in the food which the café provides. It started off as soup and over time people offered to make different dishes and the provision developed from there.

“

Kitchen staff are trained chefs so the food's got better, we started with soup! And then a customer will offer to make a curry, and then someone else offered to make something. A real collaborative process.

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Staff Member

Making a Bigger Impact

The volunteers and workers at South Yardley Methodist Church and the staff at Oasis are ambitious and have a lot of creative ideas around how to expand the service they provide and to offer different benefits to the community. This requires further funding and support from larger organisations and for everyone to get involved and get stuck in.

The project couldn't run without its volunteers. The volunteers are a core strength of Your Local Pantry, and maintaining and expanding the volunteer base is something which staff and volunteers all cited as being key to the continuation and development of the project. The church and the community would love for the pantry and café to be able to open on another day, but the resourcing in terms of storage space and volunteers feels like a challenging barrier to cross.

"In ideal world, the community would like to open on another day but that's more volunteers which isn't impossible, but also extra storage space so whether we can accommodate that. That community needs to be fed more than once a week, but resource-wise whether we can do that..."

Another area which the church feels needs a bit of improvement is in the consistency of food donations especially from larger organisations as some week they have a lot of food, and others they don't have as much as they'd like to be able to provide. This is especially important as the popularity of the pantry and the number of people in need grows.

The minister told us that the building is in need of upkeep. There is a small body of volunteers who assist with this and some of the community have helped with the garden and maintenance. Currently the church is working on a building project to modernise the church and the Hub Leader has been supporting this planning. Also, the Church would like to use the grass verge which surrounds the building to be turned into a community growing space, they want to host more pop-up arts workshops and create a 'pocket park' where children can play whilst they wait for the bus which stops outside the church. All of these improvements to the facilities require volunteers and funding.

6.2 LIONHEART FOOTBALL SCHOOL

Lionheart football school is an activity partnered with Oasis Hub Hobmoor which runs from the Oasis Hub site. They offer football training sessions for children aged 4-16 on a Saturday, host games on a Sunday and throughout the week offer coaching training to young people as part of their sports leadership programme. The football school was established in the summer of 2019. After a hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been running again since the summer of 2021. The manager and technical advisor who run the football school have backgrounds in education and football coaching and in 2018 they met the Oasis Hub Leader on Oaklands Recreation Ground which is the park in which Oasis is situated. They were running a small football club with about 6 children in attendance in the park when the Hub Leader approached them and offered the facilities at Oasis to host the club. *“On that particular day I actually felt like I was scouted. So, it just gave us the foundation and a unique facility to prolong the project. We’ve had an excellent relationship with Oasis since.”*

Aims & Objectives

The core aim of the football school is to create an inclusive football school which provides quality training to people of all backgrounds and abilities. *“My thinking as I grew up, I wanted to create something especially in this time, where we’re giving something back, and I think our objective from the outset was to create something inclusive. It’s not just for the elites. It’s for those kids who have two left feet. So, we work with the majority of those kids who haven’t had the opportunity to join a club, a school.”* - Lionheart staff

Another key aim of the project is to provide children with the opportunity to develop, not only in terms of their technical football ability but also socially and psychologically. The school also aims to enable children to achieve football coaching qualifications and career opportunities that they otherwise may not have been able to access.

The manager and technical advisor very much feel that their aims and objectives align with that of the Oasis Hub. *“The philosophies are the same. It’s bringing things to people who otherwise wouldn’t have those things. So I do think in that sense we are linked... It’s a marriage.”*

“

In old money, we had a phrase in education 10, 15 years ago ‘Every child matters’. For me, from what I see from what Andy does it’s ‘Every family matters’. That’s the best accolade I can give to Andy it’s every family matters and within that the children and parents matter.

Oasis Lionheart and Oasis, our dreams are the same in what they’re achieving and what they’re doing. When I looked at their website and when I looked at their policies and so forth, it was identical to what our feelings were and how we wanted to give back.

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The Staff

All of the coaches who work for Lionheart Football School have to have a Disclosure and Barring Service certificate affiliated to the county football association and English football association. The coaches must complete 5 hours of continued professional development a year to maintain their football association licence. The opportunities to acquire these certifications are made available through the football school's training programme, and mandatory safeguarding and first aid training is facilitated through the club.

Relationship with The Hub

Lionheart Football School is a distinct entity from Oasis Hub Hobmoor. However, they see their relationship as a mutually beneficial one, practically, in terms of ethos, and how they can benefit the community together. Oasis provides the football school with safe and secure facilities which enables it to run effectively. Without Oasis, there wouldn't be the good quality football pitches on the park.

“

I think if Oasis wasn't there, yes we'd still have the park which is great but it offers the security to the children that they're in an enclosed area and safeguarding wise it's perfect because there's no outlet. There's entrances where you come in, you can monitor, you can see, whereas on a park you don't know who's walking round. Toilet facilities are an issue at the park as well. With Oasis, with the building, there's changing rooms that weren't in use before, showers, there's everything.

Part of the Tesco development was to put the pitches back in and we had 7 years where there were no football pitches for children to play. Now we've got 2 pitches back, you can see kids playing football on there. There's a cricket square on there. That wouldn't have happened if Oasis hadn't been pushing from behind the scenes. It was Oasis who pressed them to put the pitches in, predominantly Andy linking with the councillors.

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Technical Advisor for Lionheart

The technical advisor for Lionheart told us about how they work with Oasis to manage issues that arise, and lauded the relationship and trust between the two organisations.

“Once you've got a problem, if you've got the relationship you can come to a successful conclusion. That's a lot of trust as well. Andy respects our opinion, and we respect his opinion. We know that on that site, there's a school between 9 and 3, there's us Saturday and Sunday and sometimes in the week, there's also a youth project going on at the same time so there's lots of different stakeholders using the place and we've all got to get on together.” - Lionheart staff

Not only did Lionheart acknowledge the benefits of the relationship with Oasis for them, but they also expressed the impact that Oasis Hub Hobmoor has for the local community and that without them the local area would suffer greatly.

“If they decided that they were going to close it down, it would be a travesty and it would be like, close it down and then do what? All those children that are using it and coming and getting that relief from the world outside. What we try to encourage the children, is that when they come to the sessions they leave the baggage outside.”

The manager of Lionheart Football School thinks very highly of Oasis Hub Hobmoor and when asked what difference the Hub has made to the local area, said: *“That's an easy answer isn't it, think of a desert and think of an Oasis. It is an Oasis. I think if that wasn't there, it nullifies the area again.”*

Benefits for the Children

The football school provides a fun social activity for young people in the local area to take part in, filling one of the voids left by youth centres and youth activities closing down over the years. As well as helping the children develop a skill, the football school provides a safe environment for social development in which the children can foster friendships.

“You see a child develop don't you. We talk about the technical, the tactical, but the social is a big part. You see kids building relationships. They might live 20 streets apart but they look forward to meeting that kid on a Saturday morning. The other side is the psychological side. As we found out in covid, if kids are kept away from other kids it has a detrimental impact.”

The manager of Lionheart also spoke about the benefits that providing this fitness training and discipline can have for children's mental wellbeing and even mentioned feedback from parents that children are doing better in school thanks to the coaching at the football school.

“We teach them how to smile and enjoy themselves, and that’s important. The feedback we get from parents is how well the kids are doing at school after attending our sessions. So, we know that there’s a direct impact on the kids, having that little bit of discipline in the sense of organised training.”

Being a part of Lionheart Football School also provides children with a sense of pride and confidence.

“We’ve found that if kids are uniformed, they feel better. Fair enough if you can afford an arsenal top or whatever team you support that’s great. But if you play for a team, to wear their own thing [football kit] gives a sense of pride.”

The school has also provided coaching courses for young people as part of their sports leadership programme which give young people the opportunity to gain qualifications in football coaching, providing skills and employment opportunities. Lionheart welcomes graduates of these courses to work for the school on a voluntary basis to further their experience and some students come back in a paid capacity.



Making a Bigger Impact

The main challenge and area that Lionheart feel they would benefit from more support is in funding. The school has many running costs including paying coaches, site maintenance, and purchase of equipment and kits. Further funding would also allow for Lionheart to reinstate subsidised football qualifications making this more accessible to the young people in the area. The manager and technical advisor also spoke about how they want to expand the activities which they can provide to give young people more experiences and grow both the football school and Oasis Hub Hobmoor.

The manager of Lionheart said that they want to be able to offer sessions where parents can learn about nutrition and crime prevention sessions for parents so that whilst the children are at the club, the parents can benefit too. This type of activity used to be provided, but had to stop due to the COVID pandemic. Lionheart would very much like to work with Oasis to be able to offer this service again.

The staff at Lionheart have previously taken children on trips out of Birmingham. They spoke about the benefit that they see for the children from getting out of their known environment and being able to spend time in nature. They feel that being able to offer these kinds of trips would be incredibly enriching for the children of Yardley.

“I think one area they could look at is getting the children out into the natural environment because they don’t see a beach, they don’t see a hillside. We used to have to llamas there, covid again, and we had two sheep. Some of the kids don’t see live animals, they don’t see sea, they don’t see rivers moving.”

The manager also spoke about the desire to have Oasis host sports festivals, including other sports as well as football, which would provide the local area with a celebration event, bringing the community together. This would draw attention and support to not only Oasis but Yardley as a whole.

5.3 THE LIVING ROOM

The Living Room at Oasis Hub Hobmoor is a free warm space, opened in Winter of 2022/23, which runs from the hub Monday – Friday from 3:30 – 4:45pm. It is funded by Birmingham City Council through the Warm Welcome Spaces programme and provides a heated space for anyone to come and spend time in. People who come to The Living Room are able to use the kitchen facilities including microwave and kettle and hot drinks and biscuits are provided, and snacks and toys for children. There is free Wi-Fi and phone charging, and there is a washing machine which people are free to use whilst at The Living Room. There is a real sense at the Living Room that the space, staff, and volunteers truly deliver a warm, welcoming experience.



Benefits

The Living Room combats the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis by providing a free space in which people can come and spend time in a heated environment, make use of the kitchen and washing machine. We spoke to a number of mothers who were at The Living Room with their children and they said that the best things about coming to The Living Room was that they had the opportunity to socialise with other parents and meet new people and that their children were able to play with other children and make new friends outside of school.

“

It's nice they get together with their friends. We get to meet new parents, so we sit, we talk, we like have nice cups of tea, we have snacks and everything. So it's a really nice idea for the community to do this.

”



Staff Member

“Just kids socialising mainly. [The children] get a chance to meet some new children that they're not used to being with every day in their classrooms, they get to see a new friend and then they go back to school and they stay in school.”

It is clear that the children who spend time at The Living Room enjoy spending time there and it is often them who are encouraging their parents to take them. *“They're [the children] always like, “Can we go to The Living room today?” And I'm like, ‘Today?’” I'm like, “No, not today.” So it's actually them that bug me more than me actually saying, “Let's go.””*

The Living Room provides an activity for the children to spend their time doing instead of spending time at home, away from friends, on technology, which many parents told us was a benefit. *“If they had gone home now, they're just straight on the iPad.”*



Citizens spoke about how The Living Room is a warm and welcoming space where they can relax and that the volunteers who work there are very friendly. Some of the volunteers who work at the Living Room also bring their children along and spoke about it being incredibly supportive to them giving them respite and care especially for single parents.

“

Living room helps young people, social aspect, being able to play freely with their friends, mothers just sit and chat we parent each other. For me as a single mum, it's really supportive and nurturing. There are things for kids to do, a safe space.

”



Staff Member

Parents also spoke about incidents which had happened in the local park which mean that it is not a safe environment for their children to play and that The Living Room is a great alternative which does feel safe due to the facilities and staff.

“It's somewhere safe for them to play. 'Cause we used to go to the park but there was an incident there with a man with a gun, so - You know, it's just a safe area to play.”

“

Their kids are in a safe place. They'll know they're gonna eat, they know they're gonna be looked after. And if they need to be disciplined, I'm happy to do that.

”



Staff Member

As well as the warm space, play and social space, citizens spoke about how great it is that there are the facilities to wash clothes and charge phones and they expressed how they feel that Oasis is really looking out for those who are finding the cost of living crisis difficult.

“

I mean, it's dead awesome to bring your washing and you can charge your phone. I mean, I haven't had to use all the facilities but there's that option. You've got the choice, you can do that.

”



Citizen

“

I think they're very considerate of maybe a lot of families that can't maybe afford to go out all the time, the whole day. So they do offer free activities for maybe families that haven't got in the community, the kids. I think that's really good as well how they consider everybody as a whole. Yeah, it's good.

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Staff Member

7. DELIVERING A SUCCESSFUL SERVICE

The Hub does not measure its success solely by outcomes, but also by the strength of the relationships it has built, its commitment to community driven solutions and its ability to harness the strengths of the community itself.

TRANSPARENCY & TRUST

Building strong relationships with the community is paramount. A culture of transparency ensures that the intentions and actions of the Hub are clear to the community, Oasis Academy, funders, partners and stakeholders. The Hub has gained trust as a result of its open and genuine interactions. *“(One of the) biggest things is we deliver what we say we’re going to do. There is a reputation of trust we’ve built which is easily lost but we always do what we say. That is key.”* - Staff Member The Academy’s Initial Community Engagement: When Oasis Academy first arrived at Hobmoor in 2013, the Headteacher found that the school was struggling, and the community was sceptical of the new approach. *“We understood the importance of being visible and approachable. It took weeks of standing at the gates, saying good morning, and persevering even when met with resistance. Success came when a parent, touched by our commitment, asked us not to leave.”* This moment marked a turning point, highlighting the power of genuine engagement with the community.

CONNECTION

There is a hub council made up of staff, volunteers and parents from the Academy from a wide cross section of the community. It meets once a term, and highlights what’s done well, what needs to be done and challenges that need to be faced. The Hub Council is still seen as a work in progress *“but we are trying to get a group who represent all of the different activities to see themselves as something bigger, so they can see they’re part of a wider movement of change in the neighbourhood.”* - Staff Member. Connecting local community members to each other is also seen as vitally important. *“Social capital for this area in particular, I’d say it’s community spirit. There’s not a lot of it. You can actually see the generational gap. You don’t see the older generation mixing with the younger and the younger unless it’s here. And at some point, the older person was a young person, and if-if one of our young volunteers could sit and listen to the lives that they’ve led, maybe they could have like a 40-year advantage from the experience that they’ve just been given. I make (those connections) happen. It’s a circle of life. You know, at some point, an older person had to look after a younger. So-you know, return the favour.”* - Staff Member

ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Hub's approach centres on asset-based community development, which is especially valuable in a diverse community often seen as needing external interventions. Instead of focusing solely on problems like knife crime and housing conditions, the Hub emphasises identifying the strengths within the community. People attending the Hub won't necessarily ask for a service, but *"they'll say I've got this that I can do, can I come and volunteer and do it?"* - Staff Member. By recognising and harnessing these strengths, individuals are empowered to take ownership and engage in positive change. Another factor that the Hub Leader identified as being key to success is to identify 'gate keepers' in the community. These are people who are well-connected to different parts of the community e.g. a local area, an ethnic minority community, sporting activity and so on. *"Those gatekeepers protect the rest of the community from those who want to fly in and fix things. There are organisations who've recently moved in and their model is fly in and fix – they don't get on too well around here as they don't get through gatekeepers."* It is also very important that the Hub is seen as a safe and trusted place for all. It isn't attached to a church or a mosque, which is rare for a community space in the local area, so it means that there is a sense that it belongs to everyone.

VISION & COLLABORATION

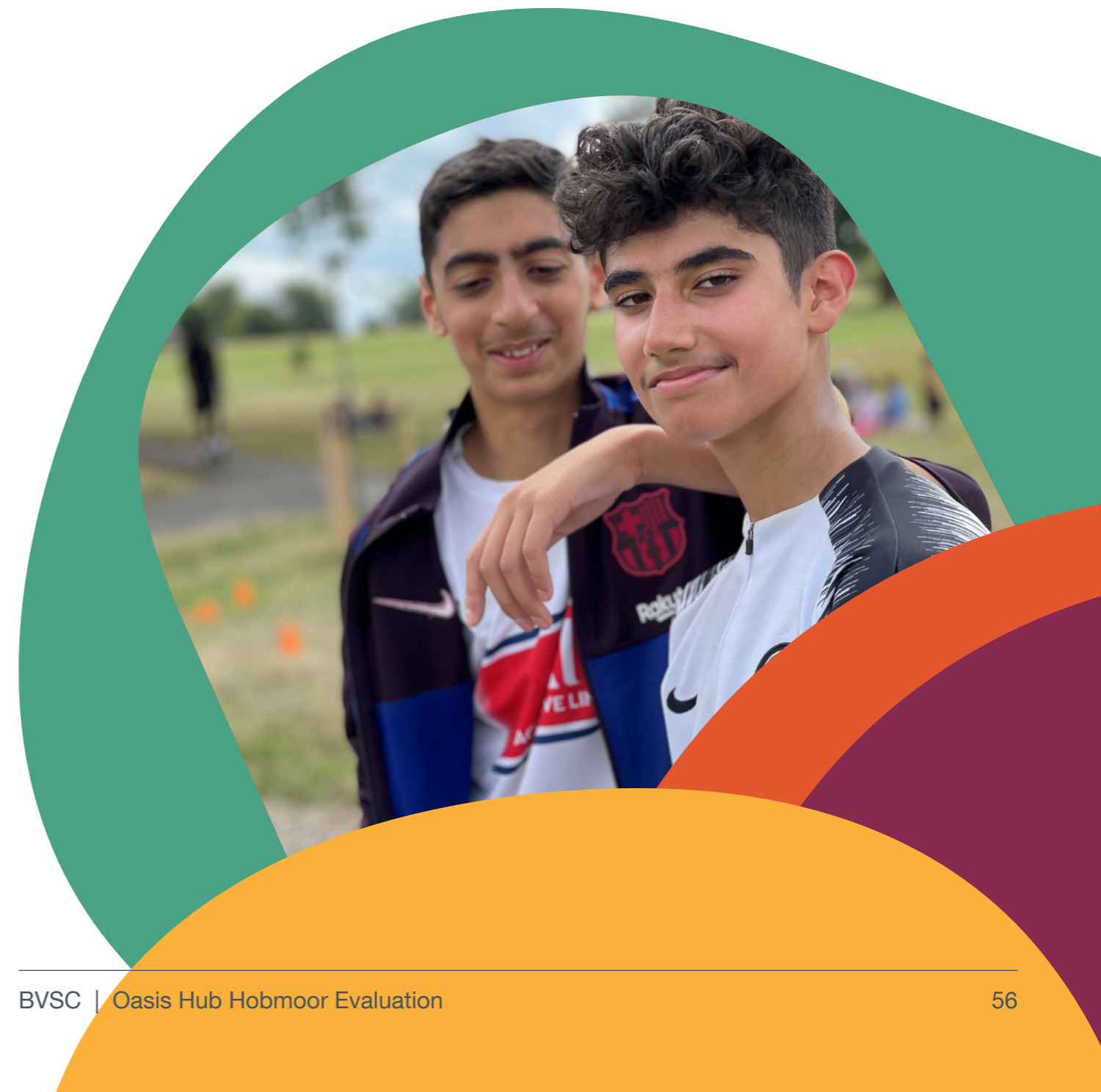
The Hub is deeply embedded in the community, where everything is relational. The Hub has a commitment to long-term engagement, equality, inclusion, and fostering healthy relationships. These relationships encourage social cohesion and a collective desire to make positive changes together.

Benefits for the community

Undoubtedly, the key benefits are around relationships. Big cities can be very lonely and isolating without a sense of community. Staff believe that it's about how the neighbourhood looks after one another. *"The biggest indicator is the reduction of crime is not how many police are on the street, but it's whether you know your neighbours or not. It's like becoming part of a big family – sometimes there are rows, but it is like that. If one old person is visited/does something once a week it halves their chance of dying the following year. No pill or medication is ever going to do that for you. Building stronger communities is the focus throughout. You've still got litter and problems, but you'd hope they'd say that when they're here (at the Hub) it's about being part of something relational"*.

It is hard to quantify all of the benefits that the Hub has brought to the community. It is clear that the Hub has impacted positively on child poverty and social cohesion - there are at least 15 minority ethnic groups attending the Hub. The holiday club also brings children and young people together to play throughout the holidays. Staff have not always found it easy to work in the park - *"that's a constant battle but if we fill it with people we don't have any trouble – when it's dark and empty that's when we get trouble"*. Therefore, the more the park is used, the safer it will feel both for the participants in Hub's activities, but also for the wider community.

The team recognise the challenges of measuring impact in a project like this. Their measure is in the sheer volume of people who attend on a weekly basis. *"We know how many do what, who comes along, but the 'so what' question is much harder to answer. All we know people keep coming back, they're in relationships and they have better lives and they tell us they like coming. We've got loads of stories."*



Activity that the team didn't expect to be delivering

When asked if there was anything that the Hub was doing now that they were not expecting to be delivering when the project began, the Headteacher said: *"I think everything, I genuinely think everything! I think it has surpassed all of our original expectations and dreams"*.

Indeed, unexpected activity has become a cornerstone of the project's success. Initially focused on the new community centre, supported by a National Lottery Community Fund Reaching Communities grant in 2017, the vision was clear: to equip people to venture out and create their own initiatives. This original Theory of Change has proved immensely successful, exceeding all expectations. *"In terms of the whole picture – what we hoped would happen has happened. I don't ever think that we would have believed that it would have. I'm surprised how much transformation has happened."* - Staff Member. The transformation has very much been driven by the community and their needs and aspirations, but also by other outside factors: *"You are driven in certain directions – some times its about money and match funding, and sometimes it's about what people want."* - Staff Member

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was a huge challenge and obviously unexpected. The Hub were concerned that their work up until that point could be lost. However, it appeared that their work was deeply rooted in the community, and the community returned with renewed vigour. Unexpectedly, the pantry initiative was born, addressing a crucial need. The Hub has delved into community activities, and the Commonwealth Games acted as a catalyst for new community activities.

Challenges faced by the project

"Our main challenge is capacity and it always is. We always over deliver and are doing far more than we should be doing as a small organisation." - Staff Member

The project has faced several significant challenges, with capacity being a constant concern. The organisation consistently goes above and beyond its capabilities, driven by an incredible team dedicated to their work. However, as the project nears its conclusion, sustainability will become an issue that needs to be addressed. Whilst sustainability has been woven into the project to an extent, there is now a need to evaluate the achievements and to find out which way to go next. The challenge of capacity persists, as the project's ethos is to rarely say no(!), resulting in a continuous juggling act to meet the community's ever-growing needs.

Another challenge is the underrepresentation of certain groups, notably Muslim men and children from the academy. Efforts have been made, such as initiating a football club to engage Muslim men, but the reasons behind this underrepresentation remain unclear. Children from the Academy only make up 10% of the young people attending the Hub, and although staff realise that this could be that the Academy meets their needs and they therefore don't need the Hub,

they would still like to engage more of the young people on the doorstep. The staff feel that as the Hub's population comes from at least 15 different ethnic groups, "it is a place for everyone. Trying to break people out of silos is a difficult task, but once people start to come along and get into the relationship that doesn't happen anymore."

In the past, the project encountered resistance from some men in the community who were initially opposed to the empowerment initiatives for women. *"There (was) a time where the men in the community didn't like what we were doing for the women in our community so there was a level of social control. It's about engagement, if people don't engage we can't really provide our service. I can't tell you of any examples of negative experiences that haven't worked out in the end."* - Staff Member.

Future possibilities for activity – making a bigger impact

Staff all had ideas about how they wanted the Hub to be able to create a bigger impact for its service users and the wider community. The pandemic had highlighted loneliness and isolation for the elderly and staff felt they would like to offer more to the over 50s: "we can learn so much from them, and they'll have somewhere to come". Staff were also keen to expand the youth provision they are offering. *"What we find is kids leave at 11 and disappear for 2 years and then come back at 14 when things aren't going so well and then come back to a place of safety. Youth work is the thing we're looking at most."*

Staff were also keen to be able to have the funding and resources to give more advice and advocacy around jobs and benefits, and provide a financial support service. They also recognised a desire for more creative courses alongside the ESOL and Teaching Assistant qualifications: *"we just did a calligraphy course which shows me they'd like to do more of this."* Staff felt that it would also be really beneficial for them to be able to run a financial support service with professionals readily available to service users who could help if they had run into debt, or needed help managing their bills.

One of the next projects for the Hub is to find their Oasis Hub Hobmoor alumni. *"We want to know where people who have come through Oasis Hobmoor are now. And not just in terms of what car do you have, what degree do you have, we want to know what impact you are having on your community."* - Staff Member.

Staff were keen to point out that central to all of this is core funding *"and if that's looked after you can concentrate on the people."*

8. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The engagement, reach and proven impact that Oasis Hub Hobmoor has on the local and wider community, shows that the project demonstrates extremely good value for money. Furthermore, it is clear that the aims and objectives laid out to funders of Oasis Hub Hobmoor have been met. The aims are, quite immediately, to ensure that people have that springboard to be able to stand on their own two feet. Aims are being achieved daily. *“It’s really interesting because we don’t put a finite cap on whether something has been achieved but we can measure sometimes quite accurately, in terms of whether people have gotten into employment.”* - Staff Member. However, it is those softer outcomes that are not so easily measured, which really shine through in this report.

Through transparency, trust, cultural sensitivity, asset-based community development, and collaborative vision, Oasis Hub Hobmoor have transformed a community once seen as needing external intervention into one that embraces hope, inclusivity, and social mobility and cohesion.

Recommendations

One of the strengths of Oasis Hub Hobmoor is the staff team. They are an extremely dedicated group of people, and regularly work over their contracted hours to make sure that the Hub runs as smoothly as possible. All of the staff bring a high level of skill and dedication to their roles, and it is imperative that these staff are monitored and supported appropriately, to ensure ‘burn out’ does not happen.

It is clear that a great deal of the success of the Hub is down to the Hub Leader’s dedication to their role. However, it is important that the Hub recognises that a succession plan needs to be developed.

There needs to be a flexible development plan for the Hub - needs are constantly evolving and part of the success of the Hub is that it changes to meet community demand. It is clear that continuing to make these changes is hard work, but this flexibility is important to retain, to keep the Hub ‘alive’ and relevant. None-the-less, a clear plan with specific outcomes and impact will help the organisation make a strong business case for further investment from funders. This should build on the identified areas of development (Section 5) based on current gaps.

It is noted that the majority of funding for Oasis Hub Hobmoor comes from the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund, but it could be important in the future to look at diversifying funding streams, to allow for more security. Continuing to develop the partnerships that have been created could help with this, but also local and regional businesses may well be interested in working with Oasis Hub Hobmoor as part of their CSR commitments.

The volunteer team are instrumental in making the Hub run in the way that it does. It is suggested that a volunteer recognition scheme is implemented, to make volunteers feel even more valued. There could be an awards ceremony, small tokens etc - the Hub needs its volunteers so it's important they are cherished. Could a formal volunteering pathway training package be created, to ensure everyone is given the same opportunities?

Restructuring to focus on developing youth and older people's programmes seems to be the direction that the staff feel things should go, with the community centre and adult education remaining at the core.

Several staff members said that they would like to do more for people who are suffering from domestic abuse, particularly since the pandemic, when people had to spend more time together indoors. *"I'd love to be running a housing association, there are so many people who need housing from domestic violence. Birmingham is in a housing emergency."* Another staff member said that they would love to get a group together to be advocates to stop people going into temporary accommodation. *"The biggest thing is that we'd love to have a number of houses that we own so that we can house our homeless people."*

Other staff members felt that they would really like to see the Hub running a good mental health programme. *"I'd love to have access to our own psychiatrists and psychologists. Maybe have our own mini health centre, out of hours service."*

The Hub staff mentioned that one of the gaps in their work is male participation. In order to improve this, it could be beneficial to employ more male staff, particularly from within groups who are not currently well represented, in particular Muslim men. This could be done by using case studies from their 'alumni' stories, the collection of which was suggested by one of the staff team.



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