



WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Youth Services Grant

APPLICATION FORM

(PLEASE COMPLETE ELECTRONICALLY)

Organisation			
Name of Organisation	Home-Start Oxford		
Registered Address (including Post Code)	OFFICE: Blackbird Leys Youth and Community Centre Blackbird Leys Road, Oxford OX4 6HW WITNEY BASE: High Street Methodist Church 40 High St, Witney OX28 6HG		
Website	https://homestartoxford.org.uk/	Telephone	Office: 01865 779991
Facebook/Twitter	https://m.facebook.com/HomestartWitney/	Email	admin@homestartoxford.org.uk
Contact Name	Katharine Barber		
Position in Organisation	Chief Executive (i.e. Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary)		
Registered Charity	YES	Registration Number	1108612

What are the activities and/or aims of the organisation?

For over 30 years Home-Start Oxford has been providing a vital befriending service to vulnerable families with children under 5. Our children and their families struggle for all sorts of reasons – many are dealing with illness, social/rural isolation, disability, mental health issues, domestic abuse, addiction, debt, trauma or poverty. Our unique and holistic service offers different levels of support to meet different levels of need. For some families that means 1:1 support. We recruit and train volunteers who visit children and their families at home every week, giving non-judgemental, confidential support. Children and families with more complex and multiple needs are supported by a Family Support Worker. We also run groups - most are universal and open access; others are smaller and by-invitation for more vulnerable children and families. All our support is driven by the knowledge that the earliest years make the biggest impact and that making up lost ground in later life is difficult, expensive and often just doesn't happen. We are there because childhood can't wait.

In Summer 2018 Home-Start Oxford was invited by a group of Witney residents to take the lead role in re-starting family groups at the old Children's Centre in Witney Methodist Church. We re-opened the doors in October 2018 and are now an established and valued part of Witney family and community life. Our groups support children's development, attachment and happiness and help reduce isolation, provide peer support, and deliver expert help with parenting and mental health. Pre-Covid, alongside two weekly open-access Stay-and-Play groups, we were running invitation-only groups that helped vulnerable families to gain confidence to take the first steps towards engaging in their local community with their under 5s.

In March 2020, our position at the heart of the community allowed us to adapt swiftly and effectively to the Covid-19 crisis. Our groups moved online providing much needed support and activities for young children and a lifeline for families facing increased anxiety and loneliness. With Health Visitors redeployed and under strain families could no longer rely on getting basic advice so we brought expert speakers to our groups (eg infant feeding, breastfeeding support, dental health, sleep, parenting) and ran an online First Aid For Parents course. These proved extremely popular and useful. Online groups have been attended by 62 Witney and West Oxfordshire children and their families. In addition, 18 local families with young children have received our confidential, skilled one-to-one practical and emotional support. 14 of them also received regular hardship support through deliveries of food, clothing, nappies, activity/learning packs - staff provided a friendly face and listening ear on the doorstep at a time when contact was limited. Many other families with under 5s have stayed connected and informed through our active Facebook page specifically for Home-Start Oxford in Witney and West Oxfordshire which now has 559 followers. Digitally, one-to-one and in groups we've supported mental health, reduced isolation, and provided activities and home-learning support. We have kept our Early Years community together over the last difficult year.

As restrictions ease, we continue to adapt. Many parents are not quite ready to return to indoor groups, so we are currently running Buggy Walks which are extremely popular. In line with regulations, and after risk assessments have been completed, some volunteers and families are having socially distanced outside meetings. Over the coming months we will continue to respond with agility and speed. We will listen to our users and work within the regulations to meet the needs of young children and their families in this ever-changing situation.

What we do works. Of families who came to the end of their support in 2019-20, 100% reported more confidence in being involved with their children's learning, 93% said they felt less isolated and 100% said their children's emotional health and well-being had improved.

Case study: Eli's story

Eli's mum Lizzie suffers from neurological conditions that mean she has trouble walking, balancing and swallowing. "When I found out I was pregnant I was elated, but at the same time I felt a deep sense of anxiety about how I was going to cope as a disabled mum. I hit so many dead ends and it

felt like I didn't fall under anyone's remit. I felt pretty defeated, and we pretty much stayed in the house. Eli's Dad would take him for a walk sometimes to see the outside world but other than that we were stuck indoors."

When Eli was 4 months old, he and his family moved to Witney and accessed Home-Start support. Initially support was given through our Family Support Coordinator, but then the family was matched with Silvia, one of our amazing volunteers. Silvia's skills as a life coach were a perfect fit for Lizzie and Eli's needs.

"I don't want other people to do everything for me. I want to be Eli's mum. I want to cook meals and all of that stuff. Together Silvia and I have come up with workable solutions. Silvia's also helped me think about 'safe spaces' to put Eli should I have an attack (which can be like a stroke or being really drunk) when home on my own."

Despite making huge progress in their home, Eli's family still faced the enormous challenge of getting out and about so that Eli could get the stimulation, interactions, and opportunities that he needed to thrive. Together, Lizzie and Silvia fundraised for a specially adapted lightweight mobility scooter that could pull a baby trailer.

"We were able to get the money together within a couple of months and in April Eli and I got our 'magic wheels'! We're now getting out of the house most days. We're also able to go on the Home-Start Buggy Walks . Just getting out has a huge positive impact on both of us."

"As Eli grows up I know that we will continue to face new challenges in relation to my mobility, and the adaptations we need to make will evolve, but I now have the confidence to deal with whatever comes our way. Home-Start support has been absolutely brilliant!"

Membership	
How many members do you have?	<p>We do not have an official membership however we do collect data on group users.</p> <p>FAMILIES: 62 families with children under 5 attended our online groups last year. We expect our upcoming in-person groups to be attended at pre-COVID levels when we were regularly full or oversubscribed. This year we expect to reach 156 beneficiaries through our toddler, baby and invitation groups.</p> <p>VOLUNTEERS: 5 trained volunteers support our group work in Witney.</p>
Approximately how many of your members live in Witney?	Witney groups, both online and off, are all targeted at families from Witney and its surrounding area.
Is membership restricted in any way?	<p>Open access groups are open to any family with a child under 5.</p> <p>Invitation groups are for referred families with a child under 5.</p>
What is your annual subscription, if any?	Our support is free. We ask for a voluntary donation of £1 per family at our baby and toddler groups when they are run at the Methodist Church.
Are you affiliated to Oxfordshire Youth or other similar umbrella organisation? If so, which one?	We work closely with Oxfordshire Youth, and are one of the key organisations for the early years, as part of the Children & Young People's Forum that they coordinate. We are an independent charity. Home-Start UK is our umbrella organisation. We are also part of a VCS Consultative Group for West Oxon convened by Heather McCulloch at WODC.
Local venue/meeting place (if applicable)	<p>High Street Methodist Church</p> <p>40, Hight Street, Witney</p> <p>OXON, OX28 6HG</p>
Grant-Funding	

Purpose for which the grant is required:

We want to continue providing all levels of our family support in Witney and West Oxfordshire. The continuity and holistic support we offer is unique, effective and inclusive. We have already secured funding for our one-to-one home-visiting service through £21K from The Henry Smith Charity. We now need your continued support to ensure and develop our vital group work in the area. We are asking for £12,000 match-funding for our toddler, baby and by-invitation groups.

Over the coming year our staff, assisted by group volunteers will deliver:

- **PEEP GROUPS (BY-INVITATION)** These groups ensure we reach the most vulnerable children and their families. We will run 3 x 6 weekly groups (either online or in person) of up to 6 families who need more support to engage. Activities are informed by the PEEP Learning Together Programme. There will be singing, stories, free play ideas and a discussion topic to support parents in their role as their child's first educator. Parents attending this group develop the confidence to attend other open access groups. This year we are working to increase accessibility even further by delivering these groups in new areas – e.g. Smith's Estate
- **LITTLE SPLASHERS** is our open access Under 1s group and provides a warm and friendly space where parents and babies enjoy stories, singing and sharing experiences and tips. Like all our groups, Little Splashers deploys PEEP activities to support children's development, attachment and happiness. This group will take place weekly, either online or in person. Attendance is between 16-32.
- **PUDDLE JUMPERS** is aimed at children over 1. Online there has been a fun Storytime focus. Capacity at the Church is 50 and this popular stay and play group was often full or oversubscribed. Having kept the group going online, we would expect similar numbers on our return to the church. Initially we may limit numbers so parents feel confident and risk is minimized – in order to meet demand, initially we plan to run two shorter sessions for 25 attendees rather than one long session for 50 attendees.
- **BABY MASSAGE ONLINE.** Last year we delivered 2 x 3 weekly taster sessions with a trained facilitator. Both groups were oversubscribed. More short courses are planned, including Sing & Sign. We will run these courses again, either online or in person.
- **BUGGY WALKS** will continue on a monthly basis as we transition back to indoors.
- We will provide digital support to a wider community of young families and volunteers through our Facebook and social media platforms and through regular email newsletters.

We are keen to learn lessons from our experience over the last difficult year.

- Guest speakers proved popular and will now be a permanent feature of our groups.
- Buggy Walks are hugely beneficial to mental wellbeing, combining connection with other people, physical activity and mindfulness – three of the NHS's 5 Steps To Mental Wellbeing. We often end the walks with parachute games, and outdoor storytelling and singing in the park which helped children have rich outdoor experiences. As a result we are working towards integrating an outdoor element into our service.
- An online offer allowed us to reach new families including those without transport or for whom disability or anxiety make in-person attendance difficult. We'll continue to use social media, our network of contacts and outreach to connect with these families where children will be particularly vulnerable.

Home-Start's service represents enormously good value for money primarily because our volunteers give so many hours. Groups in Witney are supported by a team of 5 volunteers. Overhead costs are also low because we receive a discounted rate from our supportive venue, Witney Methodist Church. Our biggest cost is therefore staff salaries.

Amount of grant applied for		£12,000	
Has your organisation previously applied to the Town Council for a grant?			YES
If YES, please give details	<p>In 2018/19 Witney Town Council supported the establishment of our Family Wellbeing Groups with a grant of £250</p> <p>In 2020/21 WTC ensured delivery of our groups through the pandemic with a grant of £11,700</p>		
Have you applied for a grant to any other body or organisation?			YES
If YES, please give details	<p>For 2021/22 we have already secured £5K from Children in Need, £5K from West Oxfordshire District Council and £1K from church and community donations.</p>		
Financial			
Please enclose a copy of your latest audited accounts, a financial projection for the period following the balance sheet or a Business Plan if a new organisation.			
Fundraising			

What fundraising events or activities will your organisation be holding this year?

We are reapplying to Witney County Councillor's CPF funds, although we are aware that this fund has been halved this year and has new restrictions.

We will re/apply to local trusts including The Jim Cousins Trust and The Bartlett Taylor Trust.

We will continue to nurture relationships with local corporates and churches.

We are growing our events fundraising and already have 2 Witney runners signed up and fundraising for the Oxford Half Marathon.

General

Please provide or attach any additional information which may assist the Council in reaching its decision.

ANALYSIS OF NEED: Only now are we beginning to understand the toll the pandemic has taken on young children and their families. A recent report ('Home Is Where We Start From', June 2021) from our umbrella charity Home-Start UK heard from 1,200 families, including families supported by Home-Start Oxford. The social development of children, mental health issues and poverty were found to be the three main concerns for parents of young families. These findings chime with our experience on the ground. Over the last year, we have identified needs for supported families in Witney and West Oxfordshire. These are: Mental health – 72%, Lone parent- 22%, Domestic abuse – 16%, Adult disability – 28%, Child disability – 33%, Forces family – 11%, Multiple birth – 11%

Nationally, the Royal Foundation is shining a light on the importance of the Early Years (see their two minute video: <https://centreforearlychildhood.org/>) and reports like 'Babies in Lockdown' (national report co-authored by umbrella charity Home-Start UK) reviewed the enormous body of evidence showing how Early Years support lays foundations for happy lives and long-term mental health. (<https://babiesinlockdown.info/>) Babies in Lockdown evidenced how the pandemic was disproportionately impacting lower income, young and BAME families. Throughout the pandemic our parents in Witney and West Oxfordshire have voiced anxieties about children's development, behaviour, lack of social interaction and mental wellbeing. There are anxieties around children's immune systems and the NHS predicts a huge rise in children's respiratory illnesses this year whilst access to primary care remains difficult.

Through our groups and digital support we give universal support that is cost-effective, preventative, proactive and fun.

OUTCOMES: In 2021/22 we will continue to promote the wellbeing of the youngest children in Witney and West Oxfordshire, supporting vulnerable families and keeping our community together either online or in person. We will provide:

- Group support to over 150 attendees (at least two open access groups, one by-invitation per week)
- Digital support for up to 300 families
- 70-100% of children will have improved emotional health and wellbeing
- 70-100% of parents will have improved mental and/or physical wellbeing
- 70-100% of parents will be more involved in their children's learning and development.
- 70-100% families will feel less isolated
- We will recruit, train and support 3 new volunteers to help deliver our group service.

I certify that the above information is true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that I am authorised to make this application for Grant-aid.

Signed: *Katharine Barber*

Date : 31/08/21

If posting, please return your completed application form to the address overleaf, for the attention of the TOWN CLERK

For office use only:

Previously Applied

Acknowledged

Chq No.

Grant Aid Awarded/Amount

Witney Town Council Youth Fund

August 2021

Version 2

Y / N