



PRESS RELEASE

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Westgate Fund celebrates £14k in grants made to local charities

One year on from the opening of the new Westgate shopping centre in 2017, Oxfordshire Community Foundation is celebrating grants given to five different local charities from the charitable fund established by John Lewis and Partners.

The Westgate Fund was established with a generous donation from John Lewis and Partners, the flagship store in the brand-new Westgate centre. It has since received contributions from other city centre businesses, including leading law firm Royds Withy King.

Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) is using the fund to support charitable projects within Oxford City, demonstrating the Westgate's desire to be a good neighbour and to support the less advantaged in the local community. Since June 2018, five grants have been made totalling £13,818 – all of which have been matched with other funds from other OCF supporters.

Recent projects funded include Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground, which earlier this month received a total of £7,818, with 50% coming from The Westgate Fund. This funding enabled the charity to further develop a Junior Leaders programme at its activity centre for children, which serves one of the most deprived parts of Oxford. Blackbird Leys is an estate where, for children and young people, the neighbourhood is amongst the 20% most deprived in England.

Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground provides safe and fun activities for children between 8 and 13. The new funding will help young people aged 14+ become Junior Leaders, assisting with the running of activities and acting as role models for the younger children. The initiative is designed to empower young people and raise their personal aspirations, leading to greater success in all aspects of their lives.

The Parasol Project also received help from The Westgate Fund, which contributed 30% towards a grant of £8,311. This will fund a similar programme for Junior Role Models in the charity, which works with children with physical disabilities, autism, learning difficulties and challenging behaviour.

The Parasol Project was able to provide examples of young people who had already taken part in the programme, such as one participant with significant learning disabilities who, when first a Role Model, was unable to interact with his peers or be proactive generally. After training and support, he grew in confidence and self-belief and went on to find employment in a local supermarket, where he still works happily today. Another volunteer with physical impairments suffered low confidence and struggled academically, and was a young carer for his mother. He is now a senior volunteer, a member of his school council and has been working in a café for over two years. In July 2017, he won an award for most improved student and is now a shift supervisor. He describes his Parasol experience as "life changing".

Other grants made from The Westgate Fund in the past year have helped young people with learning disabilities campaign for more paid work for people affected by special educational needs; encouraged teenagers from vulnerable and chaotic family backgrounds to volunteer; and supported tutoring for children from deprived backgrounds.

OCF's Chief Executive Jayne Woodley comments: "One year on from the opening of Westgate Oxford, OCF is delighted to have been working alongside John Lewis and store manager Julie Blake to improve the lives of people in Oxford. We hope that other companies in the city will be inspired to follow the example of John Lewis and consider contributing towards the good work of The Westgate Fund."

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Notes for editors

About Oxfordshire Community Foundation

- Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) is an independent charity that connects people who care with causes that matter. We inspire local philanthropy, and develop community-based solutions to key social problems across Oxfordshire.
- We are one of 46 community foundations in the UK, and over 1,800 similar foundations around the world. Community foundations collaborate with private philanthropists, family trusts, businesses and the public sector to provide a permanent, flexible and growing source of local charitable funding. Community foundations across the UK have collectively made over £1 billion in charitable grants.

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