

October to December 2020: What works in lockdown

After an easing of restrictions, national lockdown returned in early November... but our Growing Minds team was quick to adapt! Having learnt valuable lessons about what works best to support families at arms' length, our practitioners have focused on building relationships and providing lots of practical support for families with young children.

Progress



By the end of our first, tumultuous year of delivery we have learnt to adapt at great speed to continually changing circumstances. We've brought new parties to the partnership, and delivered a wide range of responsive interventions to improve home learning and support families to cope. The project reaches more families each month and we look forward to working with them and many more in the years to come. Here are our headlines for the year:

128 families are now receiving support from Growing Minds

89 of our Growing Minds families have babies, 39 have toddlers

17 local professionals across the two communities have been trained in the Peep Learning Together Programme through Growing Minds

We now have insight into the impact of lockdown on families, through Oxford University's evaluation of Growing Minds

During the autumn and winter months the partnership has trialled a range of new core activities and interventions to meet the changing needs of families. These have included:

- Provision of food and online cooking sessions via a pilot project known as "Play:Full"
- Activity packs delivered online and to the doorstep
- Outdoor buggy walks and other activities
- Regular newsletters including home-learning activities
- Ongoing phone contact from trusted practitioners
- Online Peep group sessions, run in smaller groups in response to feedback
- Continued deliveries of monthly Imagination Library books to families

GROWING MINDS IN ACTION

Partnership example:

In a pilot with Good Food Oxford, Growing Minds practitioners (Home-Start Oxford) provided ingredients and online cooking workshops to 10 families over six weeks. Twenty-seven children benefited from the project. Here are some quotes from participants.

"I really look forward to the group every week – it has been a real confidence boost."

"Before joining Play:Full, I had never made a Zoom call; I can now video call my friends and family."

"I have really enjoyed cooking all the meals, even the ones we were not that keen on – it's been good to try new things."

"It been great getting the kids involved in household jobs, never thought of doing that before, we've really enjoyed it."

"My confidence has really increased being part of the group. I look forward to it every week."

"The slow cookers we received have been great. I've tried loads of new recipes and my older kids have said my cooking's improved."

The Growing Minds Partnership:

The Berin Centre, John Henry Newman Academy, Abbey Woods Academy, Oxfordshire Health Trust, Oxfordshire Birth Registration Service, Peep, Home-Start Southern Oxfordshire, Home-Start Oxford, Oxfordshire Community Foundation



Learning and evaluation

At the end of October Oxford University began an intensive evaluation of the Growing Minds Project, to help us to identify, using qualitative methods, the real impact of lockdown on our families. Through a process of 13 interviews and evaluation, the research has provided an insight into what works best for families in lockdown. It has also lays the groundwork for further qualitative evaluation of the impact of the project on families. Key findings from the evaluation include:

- 1) Families appreciated opportunities to have direct, personalised contact with Growing Minds agencies via phone calls and doorstep deliveries.
- 2) Moving group activities online presents a huge challenge to both practitioners and beneficiaries.

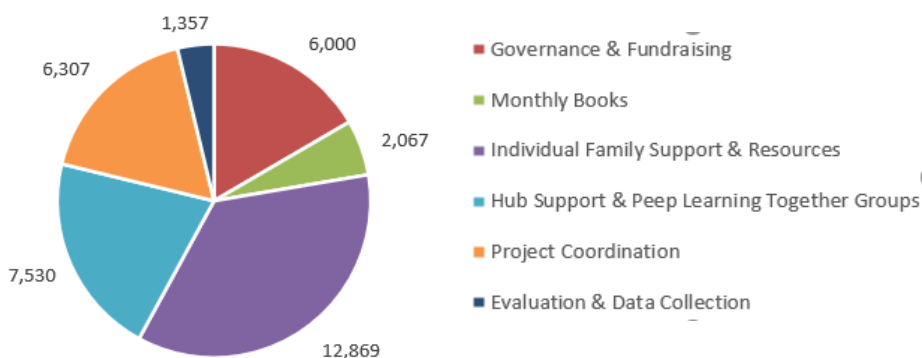
The implications of these findings led to several recommendations for Growing Minds, which we are already working to deliver, when conditions allow:

- 1) Use every opportunity to build good relations with families including in-person contact, specifically making use of outside spaces.
- 2) To prepare for the inevitable increased reliance on digital technology, continuing to learn about what works, using smaller online groups to build relationships and exploring opportunities to help families (and practitioners) with digital skills and connectivity.

The full evaluation report can be found at oxfordshire.org/gm-evaluation.

Deliverables and funding

Quarter 4 Costs (£)



Expenditure across the year totals £152,345, which is slightly lower than originally forecasted due to the impact of lockdowns on the recruitment of new families. We anticipate that many of these families will access the project in the coming years. The fixed costs to the project, such as staffing, are included under project coordination, governance and fundraising, which ensure that partner agencies remain stable and focused on the project.

We remain grateful for those who have helped secure the funds needed to deliver our initial year of Growing Minds. We are now raising funds for the remainder of year two and beyond, and look forward to working with you and others to support the project through many further years, reaching as many families as we can.

“A single mum in Berinsfield has been receiving support from our Home-Start team in conjunction with several other agencies. As a result, the family is accessing training around the additional needs of their child, and has been supported to implement a bedtime and toileting routine. They have also worked on road safety to better facilitate trips outdoors. Mum’s confidence has improved, and practical help has been given around Christmas and provision of activities for the child.”

Home-Start Family Practitioner, Berinsfield.

“A single mum in Littlemore is working with our Home-Start Practitioner. With limited mobility and a two-year-old son, she has suffered from low mood and isolation. Through the activities provided by our practitioner (online stories, regular contact, and participation in the Play:Full pilot), she has started to cook more and eat more with the family. She reports improved confidence and regularly shares stories with her son.”

Home-Start Family Practitioner, Littlemore

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