

January to March 2021: Growing Minds springs back into action!

As we start the year, the Growing Minds Team has continued to respond to the changing needs of our families, building in progressive support and a home learning focus as the relationships develop.

Progress

As we come out of lockdown nationally, our partner services are continually adapting to the increased freedom by planning new outdoor activities and different initiatives that are appropriately COVID-safe, whilst taking the opportunity to increase contact with families where we can.

Here are our headlines for the first quarter of this year:



144 families are now receiving support from Growing Minds

99 of our Growing Minds families signed up with babies, 45 with toddlers

89 of our families live in Littlemore and 55 in Berinsfield

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

During the spring months the partnership has worked on linking families up with available learning and support opportunities, to help everyone through what will hopefully be the last phases of lockdown. The support provided by Growing Minds in this period includes:

- Ongoing phone contact from trusted practitioners
- Online Peep group sessions
- Referral and liaison with wrap around services (health services, faith groups, community groups and many others)
- Continued deliveries of monthly Imagination Library books to families
- A new spring Activity Pack to inspire parents to engage in fun learning activities with their child(ren)
- A continuation of the Play:Full food session by a parent volunteer – parents are provided with ingredients and cook alongside their child
- Imaginative stories sent to families by WhatsApp
- Families linked with a range of opportunities, including online theatre tickets
- Clothing and baby supplies through Oxford Baby Bank and other local initiatives
- Regular newsletters, including home learning activities.

GROWING MINDS IN ACTION

Partnership example:

A dad in Littlemore has been attending weekly online Peep groups with his second child, a little boy.

Peep groups have helped them stay connected to other families. He says:

“We have learned how to stimulate a mind at a young age. We’ve learned how to take every opportunity to teach them words, language, maths. It’s really helped us to teach them at the level they are at.”

Of one Peep session he said: “We weren’t aware of just how much learning can be involved with fruit: the colours and the sizes!”.

The Growing Minds Partnership:

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

Learning and evaluation

As the delivery environment begins to stabilise and services are starting to open up again, Growing Minds has conducted a review of the impact we have had over the first year of delivery (full report to follow at the end of May). This involved a look at our data, including qualitative themes and a full discussion with the Growing Minds team about the impact we have had. Here's what has gone well:

- 1) The team felt that Growing Minds has successfully forged relationships with the families we're working with in the majority of cases.
- 2) The partnership has managed to collaborate and formulate robust systems and processes, and adapt these remarkably well given the impact of COVID.
- 3) Given the circumstances, the support provided to families has been good and has been holistic – we have listened to families and responded to their needs at a time when understanding changing needs has been of utmost importance.

Here's what we have learned:

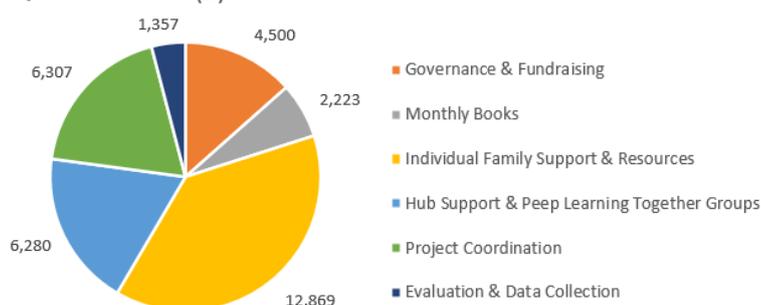
- 1) There is no substitute for face-to-face engagement with families.
- 2) Collaboration is key to ensuring families get the best of the resources on offer.

Lockdown has undoubtedly resulted in fewer families being taken onto the project (referral services have been closed or running partial services). It has also resulted in huge changes to the way we have delivered interventions during the last year. We cannot therefore use our first year as a baseline for evaluation, and may need to review the measures we originally hoped to employ and refocus our efforts on how best to measure impact in more innovative ways.

However, we do know that we are on the right track. There is now an even greater need to close the disadvantage gap, and we continue to believe in the Growing Minds approach as one of the most effective ways of doing this in the long term.

Deliverables and funding

Quarter 1 Costs (£)



Expenditure so far this year (Q1) comes to £33,535, slightly less than the last quarterly expenditure, due to several small reductions in delivery costs, including the charge for the OCF Project Manager time.

We remain grateful for those who have helped secure existing funds, and continue to raise funds for the remainder of year two and beyond, to support as many families in the best way we can.

A single mum of two young children in Littlemore has been working with our Home-Start practitioner, Lucy, through a variety of issues, including substance misuse and poor mental health.

Lucy has worked with the mum on a weekly basis, arranging for delivery of provisions (nappies etc), and supporting the family to engage with help from other specialist services, such as for substance misuse and Health Visiting. This has been challenging due to the level of anxiety the mum had around working with services.

As a result of the good relationship with our Growing Minds Practitioner, the family is now working with a range of providers, including the school, to access support for their needs. These services are now more aware of the family's situation, and are in a better position to safeguard the children and support the family in a range of ways.

In addition to this, our practitioner continues to provide positive support, ideas and inspiring activities for home learning with the children.

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