

IT'S NEVER JUST A BLAZER

WHY POVERTY IN WEALTHY COMMUNITIES
IS IGNORED, AND HOW TO CHANGE IT

THE FORGOTTEN FAMILIES

RIGHT NOW, OVER 20,000 CHILDREN ARE LIVING IN POVERTY AND HARSHSHIP IN WOKINGHAM, BRACKNELL AND READING

At First Days Children's Charity we work in areas that are often ranked among the most affluent in England. To the outside world, these are places with good schools, leafy streets and thriving families. But beneath the surface, thousands of children are missing out on the essentials they need to thrive and parents don't feel able to ask for help.

For so many families in poverty, living in affluent areas is isolating. Families pay higher living costs, face fewer local safety nets, and are more likely to be judged than supported. Anti-Poverty funding from Central Government and Grants & Trusts rarely reaches areas like ours, meaning that **20,000 children** living in hardship in Wokingham, Bracknell and Reading are left hidden in **plain sight**. The Government's Child Poverty Strategy, launched in December 2025, is clear: **areas that are seen as wealthy will not receive funding** to support children in poverty, as this will be targeted towards the areas that 'need it most'. The consequences are devastating: thousands of children in these areas simply do not matter.

We cannot allow thousands of children to go unseen - This report is for funders, partners and decision-makers who want to understand invisible poverty and invest in solutions that end it.

Wokingham features in top 5 best places to live and work

by Staff Writer — August 26, 2025 in Featured, Wokingham



Reading named one of the Best Places to Live by The Sunday Times

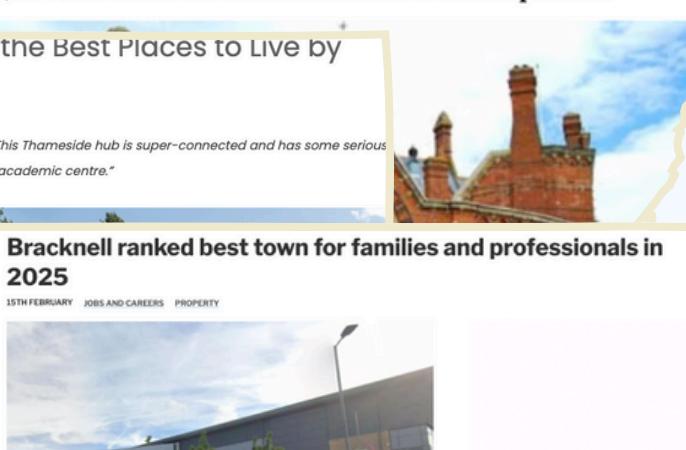
28th March 2025

The Sunday Times has this to say about Reading: "This Thameside hub is super-connected and has some serious schooling, earning Reading its reputation as a top academic centre."



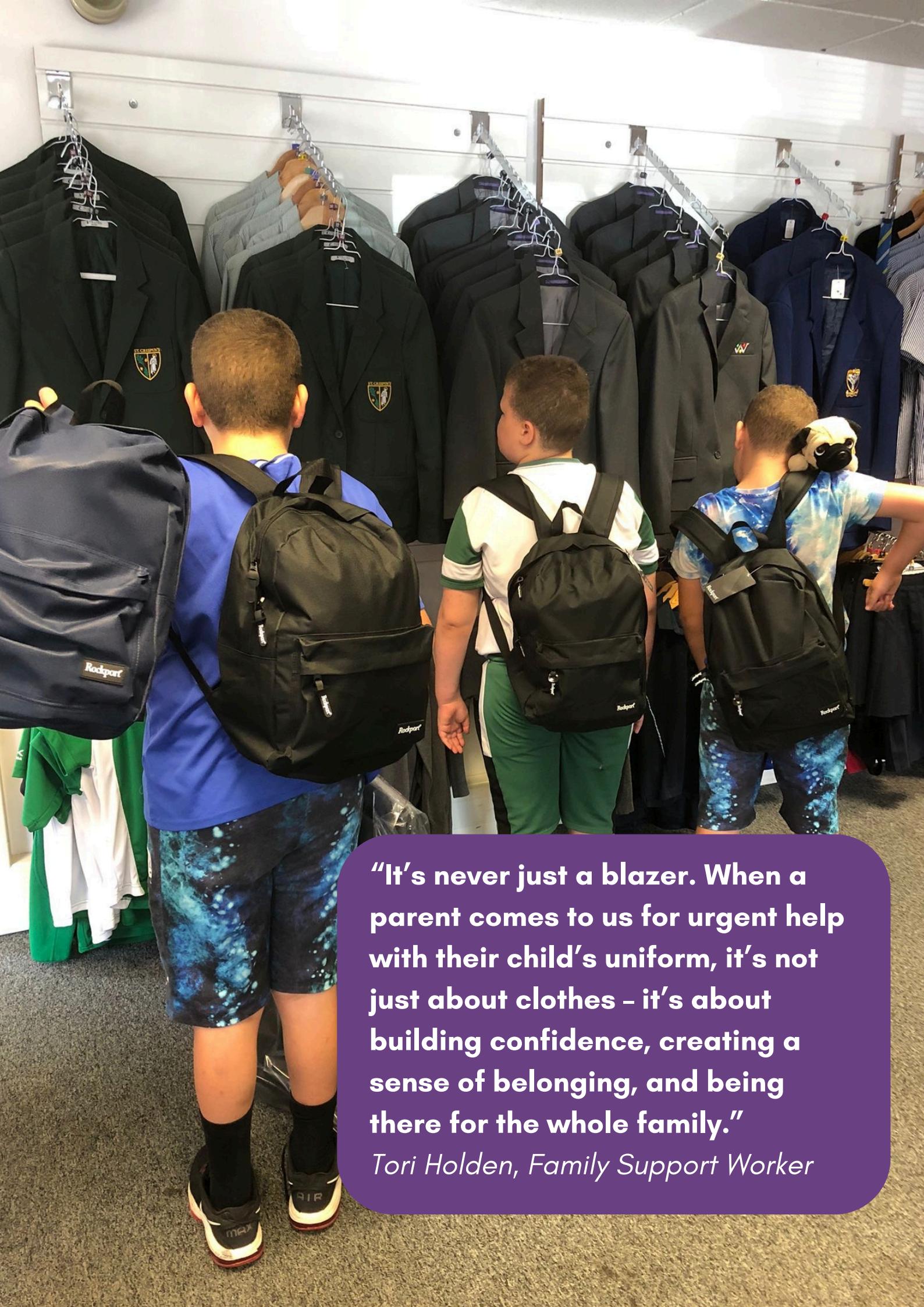
What makes Wokingham England's healthiest place to live?

The Berkshire town keeps coming top in quality-of-life reports, so what is its secret? Residents offer their opinions



Bracknell ranked best town for families and professionals in 2025

15TH FEBRUARY JOBS AND CAREERS PROPERTY



“It’s never just a blazer. When a parent comes to us for urgent help with their child’s uniform, it’s not just about clothes – it’s about building confidence, creating a sense of belonging, and being there for the whole family.”

Tori Holden, Family Support Worker

THE REALITY:

“IT’S EXPENSIVE TO BE POOR HERE”

“I have struggled for so long that I don’t know who I am anymore. I keep being told I have to get a job ... how can I do that when I don’t even know if I have any skills at all?”

84%

OF FAMILIES WHO NEEDED SUPPORT LAST YEAR HAVE UNAFFORDABLE DEBT

“MY SELF CONFIDENCE HAS GONE. I CAN’T SLEEP AT NIGHT. I FEEL LIKE A S*** MUM BECAUSE I CAN’T AFFORD THE BASICS”

“I CAN’T TAKE MY CHILDREN PAST A SHOP ANYMORE. I USED TO BE ABLE TO BUY THEM SWEETS ONCE A MONTH, NOW I JUST CAN’T”

“I never open my post. I opened one from the council which I was told said I had to sign it and send it back. I signed it and prayed I did the right thing”

“I LOOK AT MY KIDS AND THINK ‘DO I FEED YOU PROPERLY TONIGHT, OR DO I KEEP YOU WARM?’”

“IT BREAKS MY HEART TO HEAR MY 11 YEAR OLD ASK ‘ARE WE POOR?’”

71%

OF FAMILIES WE SUPPORT ARE LONE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS: 45% HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE

“It costs money to have friends. I don’t have the money so I don’t have friends. I can’t take the kids anywhere with other families or go for a coffee. I can’t even afford the baby group”

“Sometimes it’s warmer outside than in my house. The windows are broken and i’m too scared to tell the landlord in case he puts the rent up and we have to leave. I’d never find anything else and i’d be at the council because i’m homeless. I just put my dressing gown on and bought the kids hot water bottles”

56%

OF FAMILIES WHO COME TO US FOR HELP HAVE NO EMPLOYED ADULTS IN THE HOUSEHOLD; 89% OF THOSE WANT TO WORK, BUT CAN’T FIND THE RIGHT JOB

THE REALITY: “NOTHING WILL EVER CHANGE FOR US”

THE UNACCEPTABLE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY:

	Children in Absolute Poverty	Children in Relative Poverty	Total
Wokingham	2,308	2,733	5,041
Reading	4,920	5,760	10,680
Bracknell	2,495	2,123	4,615

Absolute Poverty: Households living on income below 60% of median income in a baseline year (2010/11, adjusted for inflation). This means that families are living on a maximum of £15,660 (**including** all benefits) to cover ALL their costs.

Relative Poverty: Households living on an income below 60% of median income in the current year. In this context, households would be living on an income of between £15,660 and £23,423 (**including** all benefits) to cover ALL their costs.

“IF IT WASN’T
FOR MY KIDS,
I WOULDN’T
BE HERE. I
WOULD HAVE
ENDED IT ALL”

Kerri lives with her two children in Wokingham. She grew up in the town and has support from family and friends. She is a carer for her son who is autistic and they live in a two bedroom Housing Association flat in the town. They are officially ‘overcrowded’ in that flat, but there is nowhere for them to move to. Before she had a disabled son, she worked in a school, however, her caring responsibilities have made it impossible to work. The children’s Dad hasn’t paid maintenance payments for 6 years, now owing tens of thousands of pounds.

After the cost of her housing, utilities and council tax she has **just £227 a month** for food, clothes, transport, technology and birthday presents. She can’t make ends meet, ever. There is always something: a lost school jumper, ingredients for cooking class, a broken kettle or a birthday party to buy a gift for.

THE REALITY: “WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO”

“Inequality is the thing that is doing the most harm here in Wokingham and other similar areas.

When children grow up feeling ‘less than’ their peers because they don’t have the similar housing, possessions or experiences it has a huge negative effect on their mental health and self worth.

Unlike areas with high levels of deprivation there is no ‘ready made’ community of people in similar situations, instead, people who are struggling feel alone and that is because, often, due to a lack of services and support they are *actually* alone.

Alongside supporting families we must create connections and relationships that long out-live the support that charities provide.”

Emma Cantrell, First Days CEO

“A good childhood gives you fight when you’re an adult. I’m not naive, I know my child will probably be poor too. But I hope I’m teaching him how to have some fight”

“We have nothing to look forward to. If you’re depressed your children know. I’m worried it will put them down the wrong path”

“YESTERDAY, I HAD TO GO TO TOWN TO SIGN UP FOR A CONTRACT PHONE, SO I COULD TAKE IT NEXT DOOR TO PAWN IT. I GOT £400 FOR A BRAND NEW IPHONE. IT’LL KEEP THE HEAT ON”

CHARITIES LIKE OURS HAVE BECOME THE SAFETY NET FOR FAMILIES IN OUR AREA. LACK OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING MEANS WE ARE AT REAL RISK OF NOT BEING ABLE TO CONTINUE SUPPORTING FAMILIES

“I used to be able to put money away for blankets and shoes and things my kids needed. Now there’s nothing, if they bust up their shoes, they can’t go to school until I find a way to get more”

“I’VE STOPPED CARING. I’M IN DEBT NOW, I’LL GET IN MORE DEBT AND I’LL BE IN DEBT THE DAY I DIE.”



"We do not want to be part of systems that are hurting families. That is why offering families choice, treating parents with dignity and empowering them to change their lives is at the core of our work"

Emma Cantrell MBE, CEO

OUR APPROACH: EARLY, DIGNIFIED, PREVENTATIVE

START WITH ESSENTIALS



END WITH INDEPENDANCE

Families come to us because their child needs something: a school uniform, equipment and clothes for a new baby, a safe space to sleep, a referral to the foodbank or a grant for a new bed.

We provide these items, but what families really receive is dignity, hope and the chance to rebuild. Our interventions prevent crisis from escalating and open doors to long term support.

- **No handouts:** parents choose the items they need, restoring choice and giving them dignity.
- **Universal Services:** Low cost school uniform and baby equipment as well as peer support groups are available to all.
- **Early Intervention:** We reach families before statutory services do, when things are difficult but not yet at breaking point.
- **Building Community Power:** Our buildings, outreach and events connect families into networks of support and opportunities to give back.

Every £1 invested avoids £6.20 of future public spending – yet no central government funding is directed here

**4,000
CHILDREN SUPPORTED
EACH YEAR
FROM 1,200 HOUSEHOLDS**

We don't want to see families coming back to us, or any other charity, year after year. We run the risk of becoming part of the problem if we create reliance on our support.

This is why the support we offer, alongside essential items, is vital. Our Family Support Workers and Coaches empower parents to change their lives for good. To further this aim we are launching a skills based volunteering programme, resulting in qualifications and experience to put on a CV, meaning that more parents can get into work and become independent of charity support, for good.

WE EMPOWER FAMILIES TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES

We give families choices in all we do, from choosing school uniform to deciding their goals for their lives. This restoration of dignity is life changing.

We give parents opportunities to gain skills and qualifications so that they grow in confidence and can live a more fulfilled life.

We build meaningful relationships with parents, enabling us to support them to fulfil their own goals, ambitions and dreams.

We give children opportunities to thrive, experiences they've not had before and chances to do things that will inspire them to live their best life.

“I lost all hope that my life could change, First Days helped me see I could change my life for good”

“Coaching has helped me be more optimistic about the future and feel more positive about what I have overcome”

“I saw a Mum on the estate and thought she looked lonely. I thought about how you (First Days) had helped me when I was lonely and I invited her to come along to (First Days) Coffee Club with me. I can pay it forward now”

“I have someone to support me at First Days, as a single mum with no family in this country or friends who can really support me I know I can come to First Days and there is no judgement there. I feel empowered and strong with the support that First Days has given me. My life has been changed ... but they didn't do it for me, they helped me do it myself. They didn't wave a magic wand, but helped me learn how to use my own”

“Coaching helped me feel more confident at work and believe in what I do. I've learned to trust myself more, recognise that I'm good enough, appreciate how much I've achieved, and feel proud”

“You have made me feel like this world is not such a bad place. Every Wednesday I come to help and feel less alone”



Donate now to invest in families changing their lives, for good: firstdays.net or : fundraising@firstdays.net

For more information or further discussion about our work **get in touch with Emma Cantrell**: emma@firstdays.net

HOW TO APPROACH TACKLING POVERTY IN AFFLUENT AREAS

START

Talking about **affordability**
in **YOUR area**

The 'Low Income' narrative doesn't work here. In areas of affluence we have an **affordability crisis** – many families who earn more than 60% of median income (the measure for relative poverty) still simply cannot afford the basics for their children due to the incredibly high cost of living in these areas. If we can truly understand what an affordable basic cost of living is and begin to support those who are struggling more effectively.

STOP

Comparing our poverty
rates to other areas

Every person living in poverty deserves a better life. Whether there are 4,000 children or 40,000, each one is a human being with one precious life. When we minimise hardship because "other areas have it worse," we dehumanise our own neighbours and let ourselves off the hook. No child should grow up in poverty – not here, not anywhere. And if our numbers are lower, that's not an excuse; it's a reason to act faster. We can end poverty here, and sooner than we think.

CHANGE

The way the
whole community
sees itself

Poverty in affluent areas is often hidden, and stigma keeps it that way. When a community believes "people like us don't struggle," families who are struggling become invisible – ashamed to ask for help, judged when they do, and pushed further into crisis as a result. If we want to reduce inequality, we have to dismantle the myth that hardship only happens elsewhere.

When we create a culture where it's safe to say "I'm finding it tough," we open the door to earlier support, stronger connections, and real change. A community that sees itself honestly – including the challenges behind closed doors – is a community that can look after all of its own.



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INVEST

Each year we provide over 4,000 children with school uniforms, baby equipment, laptops, winter coats and opportunities to be inspired and motivated; whilst supporting 400 parents to change their lives for good. This support, which improves family life, prevents further issues from developing and gives children the best chance in life costs £350k per year.

We are more than confident that the return on your investment is clear: lower child poverty rates, more families thriving – not just surviving, and reduced demand in the future on the welfare state.

The Government's Child Poverty Strategy will not help many of the children we support. Central government funding is being targeted in areas with the most deprivation - which leaves behind the areas where we work.

We cannot allow a generation of children to be forgotten, because their classmates are wealthy

Your opportunity to change lives and improve our community:

- Become a multi-year funding partner
- Sponsor a service area
- Fund a Family facing worker
- Invest in our Skills Programme

**We need your investment in the future for families, today.
We cannot continue to change lives without you.**



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12 Staff Members (6.9 FTE) + 45 Volunteers deliver:

- **Essential items including school uniforms, baby equipment and winter coats to 4,000 children**
- **Emotional Support to 1,000 parents**
- **Specialist Support including life changing coaching to 150 parents**
- **Inspirational and fun experiences to 150 children**
- **Fun community events for over 3,000 people**
- **Volunteering opportunities and qualifications for parents looking to get back into work**
- **Outreach in our specially equipped van to more than 2,000 families in their own community**
- **A safe community space where parents feel welcome, included and accepted for who they are.**

Our services cost £350k per year to deliver. We do not receive any multi-year funding, central government funding or core service commissioning from any Local Authority. Every penny is raised by our CEO and small team.