

End of Year Report 2023

The Thomas Project

About us

The Thomas Project is a Christian charity in Walsall that serves our local community, helping those in hardship, need and distress. From our community hub in Aldridge, we work alongside other local charities and community partners, to offer a range of activities and support services to everyone in our community, regardless of faith, and bring people together. The THOMAS Project began in 2013 by becoming the working name for the charity Family Welfare and Community Guidance, established in 1985 by Jan Coleman and volunteers from St Thomas Church in Aldridge to serve the residents of the Leighswood estate and surrounding areas, with the aims of relieving hardship, need and distress and for the advancement of the Christian religion.

In 2000, the organisation became a registered charity and in 2022 formally changed its name to The Thomas Project. The Thomas Project is well known and trusted because of our long-standing relationship with the community, and we have a long standing good reputation for providing help and support to people in need. We are currently already working in the community, reaching people in food and economic poverty and have success stories of people who have made the journey of life transition from food poverty to become financially stable and able to provide for their families. Our premises are in the heart of a community of shops and local businesses which is easy to access with bus stops just outside. The building is a neutral location which creates no barriers, has disability access and is open to everyone from all parts of the community.

The Thomas Project is located in Aldridge which is a borough of Walsall, and according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation report of September 2019 which measures levels of multiple deprivation, Walsall as a whole is ranked as the 25th most deprived area in England out of 317 and Aldridge sits at level 4 within the borough, on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the most deprived and 10 being the least deprived. The English Indices of Deprivation 2019, produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), identify small areas of England which are experiencing multiple aspects of deprivation. The figures are based on the concept that deprivation consists of more than just poverty; so while poverty is related to not having enough money to live on, deprivation refers to a much broader lack of resources and opportunities.

A high percentage of the people we provide services to are in a state of food poverty and need urgent help with essential food supplies and other basic household items. Many of these people are in families so need help for the whole family not just themselves. Many are in long term unemployment and need help and support to find pathways back into work. Most of these people lack the ability to change their circumstances without support and assistance. There is also a high population of people over age 65 in Aldridge who have a need for local services so they don't have to travel far. Often they have experienced bereavement, experience loneliness and need a place where they can meet with others and find friendship, support and activities to stimulate them. Some lack the skills or have equipment to connect via the internet so need access to computers and internet and practical help with IT for form filling and connecting with family.

Our strategy (2021-2023)

Our strategy for 2021-2023 is to increase our support and services, and grow our charity, enabling us to meet diverse needs, help more people and reduce the impact of poverty on people's lives. Our current strategic plan was developed through consulting staff, volunteers, trustees and service users in late 2021 and commenced in January 2022. In this plan, we identified 4 key workstreams for the charity over the coming years. The aims of these workstreams are:

For our community

- We will provide a safe and welcoming community hub
- We will deliver a range of community activities
- We will bring people together to prevent isolation and loneliness

For those in need

- We will deliver pastoral support to those in need
- We will work with partners to provide information, advice and guidance services
- We will continue to provide our weekly foodbank

For people who want spiritual support

- We will provide an opportunity, for people who are interested, to learn more about the Christian Faith
- We will support our local churches and fellow Christian organisations
- We will live our values, and our activities and services will reflect these

For our future

- We will ensure trustees, staff and volunteers are supported to deliver our charitable aims
- We will increase our income, growing our financial independence and financial security
- We will increase our impact, diversifying what we do and increasing the number of people we help
- We will raise our profile in our community and beyond and build strong relationships with key stakeholders and partners

How we started 2023

In 2023 we, as an organisation, the people we were supporting, and the people we wanted to support, were dealing with the cost of living crisis and inflation. As a charity, this meant that the costs of running our charity were increasing and our income from donations were decreasing, whilst the need for our services and support was growing. Additionally, due to the instability of funding and income streams in the wider charity and voluntary sector, we were facing increased competition for grants and trust funding.

In January 2022 we launched our two-year strategy which continued through 2023, rebuilding the foundations of our charity to ensure our future sustainability. Supporting our Charity Manager role was our committed volunteering team of 20 active volunteers, and one-off volunteers. They volunteered 2496.02 hours during 2023, equivalent to £26,008.53. We acknowledged once again that without our volunteers none of what we deliver would be possible. We reflected on this, and reframed how we thought about our service delivery. Our delivery model now better reflects this. We are delivered by the community, for the community, and we have a key role in bringing together people who need help with people who want to help. This enables us to engage with people in our community so they are able

to have a greater impact than we could ever have with a delivery model which was wholly staff delivered.

In June 2023 we employed an Activities Coordinator for 10 hours per week to support the work and the growing activities schedule. Their role is to coordinate, develop and plan relevant activities to meet the needs of our community. This involves helping to coordinate the volunteers and supporting the Charity Manager. The person we appointed was previously a trustee with us and was already helping in practical ways, had good relationships with stakeholders and had all the skills required for the position. She felt she could have more impact by becoming a staff member which meant that she had to resign from her role as Trustee.

We also have our board of Trustees. Together they contribute a wide range of skills, experience and connections that will help us to deliver these plans. Among our Trustees we have people who have worked in nursing, social work, senior level charity work, and in business and many of our board and our team have lived experience of the issues we are addressing as a charity. These skills and experience mean there is good understanding of the needs and issues as well as of how to help and to manage this project. We recruited three new Trustees in 2023. A summary of our Trustee Board during 2023 is below.

Name	Position	Status changes	Joined
Nikki-Dee Haddleton	Chair	None	
Pete Brentall	Secretary	None	
Sanja Kalik	Treasurer	New recruit	15.4.23 (resigned 11.6.24)
Marlene Bradburn	Trustee	Resigned - 4.6.23	
Paul Bradburn	Trustee	None	
Kehinde Olajuwon	Trustee	New recruit	15.4.23
Crystina Woolley	Trustee	New recruit	15.4.23

We took on a new Trustee Treasurer in 2023, Sanja Kalik, who was a great addition to the board, however she has had to resign in 2024 due to health issues and work commitments.

In 2024 we aim to increase the size and skills of our Trustee Board.

What we delivered in 2023

For our community...

For our community...

For our community, our aim is to reduce loneliness and we are trying to provide a community for them where they will feel welcome, safe and ultimately feel that they are a functioning part of that community. In order to reduce loneliness in people and get them together and help them to network and socialise with others we were able to offer:

- **A Place of Welcome serving free refreshments**

Our Place of Welcome is open each week and has been a welcoming place for people from all walks of life. We have some regular attenders and some who are drop ins. There has always been someone available to sit and chat with attenders and we have had some occasions where we have got them involved with doing crafts such as making Christmas and Easter decorations.

- **IT Café serving free refreshments and providing free internet access and help and support with basic IT**

We spoke to regular attenders of our IT café to find out their needs. They were mainly attending to carry out job searches (although some came for other reasons) so we developed the afternoon to include help and support with finding work by inviting a representative of Walsall Works to have a session running during the IT café so that anyone attending could access the help. This was very successful as it worked for both us and Walsall Works and has brought an increase in the numbers attending.

- **Arts and Crafts projects and activities**

We have had craft activities for people to do when attending the place of welcome. They made decorations for our Christmas tree at the Aldridge Christmas Tree Festival and for our Easter activities. We plan to run some specific Arts and Crafts Projects later in 2024 as this was popular and helped some people to feel more relaxed and less anxious.

- **Plant to Plate Project**

We ran a 12 week gardening project commencing in June 2023 in response to needs identified by speaking to people who attended our foodbank. The needs we identified were that people needed to include more fresh fruit and vegetables in their diet. We understood that items included in a food parcel from the food bank were items with a long shelf life such as tinned and packet food. We also knew that as well as fresh fruit and vegetables, learning new skills and fresh air and exercise have a positive impact on health and wellbeing so we developed a project where people could learn to grow their own fruit and vegetables and actively participate in doing what they learned. We secured the use of a garden in the community which was overgrown, and the participants learned everything from preparing the ground, planting seeds, tending seedlings and plants and eventually harvesting them. Each week the participants had the opportunity to do what they were capable of and also to sit down for refreshments and a chat before we finished. Each participant was offered a slow cooker and recipes on how to cook the vegetables they had grown. Excess vegetables were donated to our foodbank. At the end of the project attendees were invited to take part in a harvest celebration at the church where the garden was provided from and also at The Hawthorns residential home from where a few of the residents had attended. This project was a great success with people asking for it to be run again so we plan to run a second Plant to Plate project in 2024. People have benefitted in their physical and mental health through this and we received an email on behalf of two attendees stating *'I would also like to say a massive thank you from Sr. Anne and Margaret who thoroughly enjoyed themselves on Friday and really enjoyed the afternoon. Margaret was particularly impressed at how organised the project is being run and how knowledgeable the leader is. They had a really great time. Thank you.'*

- **A walking group, games afternoons**

We held a Health Walk each month for people to join in where people could walk at their own pace, chat and improve their health and wellbeing.

We commenced Thursday afternoon games afternoons as this was something which was requested by people when we surveyed them. We now have a regular group attending and one attendee stated that they love coming and have a lot of fun, especially when they win!

- **Various community events to bring people together**

We have organised several community events which have been well attended by people from the community, where people have been able to connect and make friends. At one of our events two ladies who hadn't seen each other since school over 50 years ago and who are both widowed, met and reconnected an old friendship. They both became regular attenders at some of our activities.

Events we organised:

An afternoon tea
Summer Greek BBQ
A quiz and fish and chips night
Christmas Concert
A family games day

For those in need...

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in October 2023 4.8 million (41%) of low income households were in arrears with the average amount owed by families who are in arrears being £1600. 37% of those in arrears were behind on 4 or more bills. In order to reduce the impact of economic, fuel and food poverty in people's lives we have offered practical help by providing various types of support including, but not limited to:

- A warm space where people come to save on fuel costs;
Our Place of Welcome is open each week and has been a welcoming place for people from all walks of life. To develop the support we can give with regards to people suffering from fuel poverty we connected with H.E.A.T. an advisory service and part of the Wise group. We made literature available and were able to make referrals to them or signpost people to them for advice and support to access eligible hardship funding, to apply for warm home discount etc, to control household energy usage and access support for any energy related issue. We arranged a few information sessions during our place of welcome.
- Free food, toiletries and cleaning products via a foodbank as well as providing food and refreshments in our premises;
Our Food bank continued to be busy and we offered each person who attends, the opportunity to sit down and have free refreshments and snacks while volunteers spent time chatting to them and making them feel welcome. This was an opportunity for us to find out any other needs we can help with. We have taken these opportunities to listen to them and have increased the support services we have by partnering with H.E.A.T., Walsall Works, Walsall Connected, by running Plant to Plate Project and by supporting terminally ill people with telephone calls, texts and hospital visits as well as food.

According to the Trussell Trust in the year up to March 2023 almost 3 million emergency food parcels were distributed to people who were unable to afford the essentials. This is half a million more than the previous year. The Black Country Foodbank also saw increases in those accessing help with numbers of food vouchers presented up by 18.3%. Our foodbank alone gave out 12,700kg of food and essential items in 2023.

- Free internet access and support helping unemployed people find employment and access benefits information;
We spoke to regular attenders of our IT café to find out their needs. They were mainly attending to carry out job searches (although some came for other reasons) so we developed the afternoon to include help and support with finding work by inviting a representative of Walsall Works to have a session running during the IT café so that anyone attending could access the help. This was very successful as it worked for both us and Walsall Works and has brought an increase in the numbers attending

We also became a part of Walsall Connected and were given a supply of Chromebooks and Dongles to distribute to people who fell into the categories of need according to Walsall Connected. We were able to arrange for 5 people to have them. We also helped people with form filling and we referred people to a centre providing advice when the need arose. We have been exploring the potential of offering advice and guidance and have someone who is interested in being trained in this. We also plan to have other groups come to offer advice and guidance sessions from our premises.

For people who want spiritual support...

According to the Church of England's statistics for attendance at services in 2023 average weekly attendance rose by almost five per cent in 2023. One of our core charity aims is to promote the Christian faith and direct people towards joining a local church and introducing them or taking them to a local service. We ran our first Alpha course in 2022, which was an opportunity for people to explore Christianity. After it's success we ran another Alpha course in 2023 and had another group of people attend with two of them going on to complete the 8 week discipleship course we subsequently ran to help them consolidate their faith. Both are now attending local churches which has contributed to the increase shown in the Church of England's figures.

For our future...

In 2023 we had a team of 20 dedicated volunteers who, together provided 2496.02 hours of service to the work of The Thomas Project. This equates to an approximate value of £26,008.53 going by the national living wage in 2023 of £10.42. In June 2023 we held a Volunteers Meal to recognise and thank our faithful volunteers for the work they had done. We provided a meal at a local restaurant and gave out thank you gifts. This also gave them the opportunity to get together as a group, as many of them volunteer on different shifts so don't always get to see all of the other volunteers. In 2023 we provided Food Hygiene training and first aid training to increase the skills of our volunteer workforce. We cannot

deliver our services without the support of our volunteers and we want to increase the ways in which they can volunteer and the skills they can both offer and learn.

In our strategic plan we aimed to recruit four new trustees between 2021 and 2023 in order to provide increased skill sets within the board, and a greater diversity of experiences, knowledge and perspectives and increase our innovation and resilience. In 2022 we recruited one new Trustee and in 2023 we recruited three new Trustees, Kehinde Olajuwon, Crystina Woolley and Sanja Kalik.

We continued to increase our impact, diversifying what we do and increased the number of people we help. We raised our profile in our community and beyond and built strong relationships with key stakeholders and partners. We updated our social media and website and have more actively promoted who we are and what we offer, and defined our key messages and communication routes which support our Strategic Plan. Our Charity Manager has been crucial in identifying stakeholders and other interested parties, and connecting with them.

Regular activities

We delivered the following activities:

Activity name: Place of Welcome

Number of sessions: **43** Number of visitors: **189**

Description of service: Providing a warm welcome and a warm space, serving refreshments and light snacks. Tackles loneliness and isolation and fuel poverty where people can make new friends, chat, relax and keep warm.

Quote: *I really enjoy coming to The Thomas Project Place of Welcome. The people always have time for me to chat and listen to me. I've made some new friends here.*

Activity name: IT Cafe

Number of sessions: **43** Number of visitors: **113**

Description of service: Providing a warm, welcoming space for internet access with gentle guidance from an IT expert. IT equipment, printing and internet access provided.

Quote: *It's been very helpful in giving me time and space to do job searches and complete job applications. And I've had help with any problems or errors in online applying.*

Activity name: Plant to Plate

Number of sessions: 12 Number of visitors: 55

Description of service: Teaching people how to grow fresh fruit and vegetables and cook healthy meals in order to bring the community together, teach them new skills and improve their physical and mental health.

Quote: *I really enjoy the time outdoors meeting new people and I have learned so much.*

Activity name: Games afternoons

Number of sessions: 2 Number of visitors: 27

Description of service: Bringing the community together to enjoy fun and make friends in a warm, welcoming space which helps them save on fuel costs.

Quote: *I have enjoyed the fun and had a good time.*

Activity name: Alpha

Number of sessions: 13 Number of visitors: 51

Description of service: Alpha is for anyone who is curious or would like answers to some of life's biggest questions. Breakfast together followed by an opportunity to explore and discuss the basics of the Christian faith.

Quote: *There was so much I didn't know about God. This has helped me to find out more about Him.*

Activity name: Discipleship Course

Number of sessions: 15 Number of visitors: 42

An interactive Christian discipleship course equipping people with tools to live free and stay free and developing their relationship with God.

Quote: *I suffer with anxiety and low self worth. This course helped me to deal with some of my issues.*

Activity name: Foodbank

Number of adults: **778** Number of children: **610**

Description of service: Providing food for those in crisis. An opportunity to lend a listening ear and signpost clients to agencies providing long-term solutions.

Quote: *Thank you so much, I didn't know how I was going to feed my kids and you have helped us so much.*

Where we ended 2023

2023 overall was a great year for our charity and we have been blessed to have such wonderful support throughout the year from our community and the communities we support. Financially, we were able to keep our income and expenditure stable, generating sufficient income to cover our financial costs, whilst ensuring our reserves remained static. We have steady staff and volunteer resources to enable us to deliver our charitable aims, and have a strong board of Trustees after recruiting more in 2023. We have a strong team, and detailed plans in place to ensure 2024 is a successful and impactful year.

Financial Review

Our financial period runs from 1st January to 31st December each year. At the beginning of 2023 we held £23,873 in reserves. At the end of 2023 our income of £49,143 was more than our outgoings (£40,737). The end of year balance was £32,239. The trustees aim to maintain cash reserves at no less than the equivalent of 3 months average expenditure and this was met. The income received in 2023 is 24% higher than the previous year. In our 2024-2026 Strategic Plan we will review our reserves policy and plan to invest monies above our reserve amount into necessary resources for the charity.

As a charity we raise funds from the public to enable us to deliver our charitable aims. The main source of income for the charity during 2023 was through personal and corporate donations. During 2023 our focus was on increasing our financial stability, exploring new income sources and increasing our engagement with our supporters and stakeholders. In 2023, volunteers from the fundraising committee made up of interested volunteers, planned fundraising activities. We have not worked with any professional fundraisers, nor paid for work delivered by professional fundraisers. Our volunteer fundraising committee worked together to plan and deliver fundraising events throughout the year.

Grants are applied for when appropriate and required. We received £18,836 in funding from grants and trusts in 2023 of which there was zero income from government grants during 2023.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees for the Thomas Project I confirm that this report is accurate to the best of our knowledge and the financial statements accompanying this report is accurate and has been independently examined.

We did not receive any income from other countries and our charity does not operate outside England and Wales.

No trustees received any remuneration, payments or benefits from the charity other than refunds of legitimate trustee expenses. One Trustee resigned prior to taking up a paid position within the charity (see section 'How we started 2023').

None of our charity's staff receive total employee benefits of £60,000 or more.

We do not operate an employee benefits scheme.

We are a 'living wage employer' and our salaries exceed the minimum living wage requirements.

We contribute towards the employee pension scheme through payroll.

We had 20 regular volunteers, excluding trustees, during 2023.

We obtain the appropriate level DBS check on all trustees, employees and volunteers who are in roles that are eligible for these checks as defined by the guidelines for these checks.



CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Independent examiner's report on the accounts

Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees/
members of

The Thomas Project

On accounts for the year
ended

31st December 2023

Charity no
(if any)

1082423

Responsibilities and basis of report

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 31/12/2023, which are set out on the attached pages.

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

Independent examiner's statement

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:

Date: 24/09/2023

Name:

Mrs Joanne Hunt

Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):

FMAAT

Address:

184 Rugeley Road, Chase Terrace,

Burntwood, Staffs.

WS7 1NT



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

THE THOMAS PROJECT

1082423

CC16a

Receipts & Payments Accounts

For the period
from

01/01/2023

To

31/12/2023

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year 2022 to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
101 - Standing Order Donations	5,861.90	-	-	5,862	5,678
105 - One Off Donations	10,572.58	-	-	10,573	7,776
104 - Fund Raising Events	4,513.89	-	-	4,514	2,418
107 - Corporate Donations	3,794.20	-	-	3,794	680
108 - Community Donations	4,027.90	-	-	4,028	11,939
111 - Endowments	-	-	-	-	1,015
109 - Grants and Trust	5,000.00	13,836.00	-	18,836	4,750
103 - Room Hire	187.50	-	-	188	1,250
106 - Gift Aid Claims	143.38	-	-	143	1,815
110 - Sundry Income	1,205.38	-	-	1,205	223
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	35,307	13,836	-	49,143	37,545
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	35,307	13,836	-	49,143	37,545
A3 Payments					
201 - Salaries	21,885	-	-	21,885	19,950
202 - Rent	9,500	-	-	9,500	9,500
203 - Utilities	1,525	-	-	1,525	1,603
204 - Phone and Broadband	517	-	-	517	761
205 - Council Tax	400	-	-	400	555
206 - Cleaning	706	-	-	706	858
207 - Repairs and Maintenance	263	-	-	263	984
209 - Subscriptions	1,510	-	-	1,510	475
210 - Sundries	2,693	-	-	2,693	619
211 - Printing & Stationery	345	-	-	345	277
212 - Foodbank	21	-	-	21	26
213 - Pastoral	-	-	-	-	76
214 - Volunteer Costs	-	-	-	-	54
215 - Insurance	1,011	-	-	1,011	917
216 - Christian Outreach	-	-	-	-	163
217 - Training	169	-	-	169	210
Sub total	40,544	-	-	40,544	37,026
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
208 - Equipment	193	-	-	193	317
Sub total	193	-	-	193	317
Total payments	40,737	-	-	40,737	37,343
Net of receipts/(payments)	- 5,430	13,836	-	8,406	202
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	23,833	-	-	23,833	23,631
Cash funds this year end	18,403	13,836	-	32,239	23,833

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds				
	Reserves	18,403	13,836	-
	Cash At Hand	-	-	-
	Total cash funds	18,403	13,836	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))			
		Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B2 Other monetary assets		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
B3 Investment assets		Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use		Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B5 Liabilities		Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	

Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees	Signature	Print Name	Date of approval

Income in this return shows as £49,143. In the bank statements it shows £49,315.73. The variance on the bank statement is attributed to a bank error of £155 recorded on 17th February 2023 and a disclosure refund of £18 dated 14th June 2023, which was processed on 26th June 2023. This is a total of £173 i.e. (£155 + £18). Thus:

	Report Total Amount	Bank Statement Total Amount	DIFFERENCE
Total Amount In to date	49,143.00	49,315.73	173
Total Amount Out to date	40,737.00	40,910.06	173