

Spark (Burntwood) CIO

Annual report for year ending 31st August 2023

Spark (Burntwood) is a CIO established in July 2019, charity registration number 1184253. Its address is Spark Springhill, Mossbank Avenue, Burntwood, WS7 4UN.

It has a **Board of Trustees** who are its only members:

Linda Hood (Chair)

Stephanie Edwards

Suzanne Kirk

Sarah Lucas

Andrew Twyman

Debbie Nash

Spark has a **Senior Management Team** comprising a Chief Executive Officer, a Chief Operating Officer, and a Chief Financial Officer, all employed on a part-time basis, plus a small part-time **Staff Team** of Volunteer Co-ordinator and part time Family Support workers and Administrator employed to do specific group-leading and administrative tasks. Spark also has a fantastic large team of **volunteers** who develop and lead activities, administrative tasks, community and fundraising support and much more. There are approximately 60 regular volunteers as at August 31st 2023 and 5 regular helpers. Volunteers provide on average approximately 155 hours a week of volunteer time which equates to around 2.6 hours per volunteer.

Through having a dedicated volunteer coordinator role Spark are able to support volunteers with a range of needs to access volunteering opportunities and develop their confidence and skills. This may be students on placement, those who are retired or parents/carers who wish to upskill to return to work.

New volunteers that have joined Spark during this period have taken on roles:

Dads Support Session Support

Administration Support Session

Website development

Cooking after school tea club

Event Support

Garden maintenance

Events and fundraising

Session and admin support

Baby Bank Support

Toy Library Support

Grandparents Group Support

Young Parent Support

Sparks **charitable purposes** are:

- To enhance the development and education of children in Burntwood and the surrounding areas
- To advance education and training for children, carers and residents, to promote volunteering and to relieve unemployment
- To advance education of parents, families and local organisations in relation to childcare, play, education and early learning services and activities

In order to achieve these purposes, Spark set its **objectives** for the year ending August 2023: *to provide a setting and staffing (paid or voluntary) for groups aimed mainly, but not exclusively, at supporting families with pre-school children.*

It has achieved these through:

- Midday Mayhem (Young Parents' Support)
- Breastfeeding Support
- Sparky's Den (After-School Tea Club)
- World Wide Women International Women's Group
- Dads and Male Carers Group
- Chasewater Strollers (Buggy/Sling walk)
- Grandparents' Group (for Grandparents caring for Pre-School Children)
- Art Groups (for Children and Adults)
- Baby Bank (Supporting families and children of all ages with donated clothing and equipment)
- Use of the newly-developed garden area for outdoor play i.e. mud kitchens, physical development, nature sessions
- Provision of a Community fridge and freezer

In partnership with West Chadsmoor Family Centre, Spark also ran the **Bright Beginnings Project** (funded by the Big Lottery Fund) which employed two part-time family support workers and an Intervention Worker, together with administration and management staff.

This Project (which ran for three years from September 2020 to August 2023) added more opportunities such as:

- Baby Peep
- Toddler Peep
- Toddle Waddle
- New baby support group
- Supportive play session

- A crèche to allow parents to undertake courses and attend support groups
- Early intervention work with families needing additional support

The aims of the project were to:

1. Strengthen parenting
2. Improve opportunities for children
3. Reduce isolation and increase access to support
4. Improve mental health and wellbeing of families

578 families accessed Bright Beginnings sessions and activities at Spark to improve a child's opportunity to learn and reach their full potential. 108 families accessed parenting support. 82 families engaged in peer-to-peer support to improve mental health, confidence and reduce isolation. 51 families were referred into Family Community Worker/Early Intervention Service.

External evaluation took place with SCVYS Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services. Highlights from this report include:

“The Bright Beginnings project was framed around the delivery of four key outcomes and an ambitious delivery framework derived from comprehensive consultation with parents and local stakeholders, coupled with the centre’s own knowledge and experience of the emerging needs of local families in their surrounding community.”

“Through offering a comprehensive programme of free activities and support, parental demand to access Bright Beginnings has been significant. Both centres have attracted previously unknown families locally, in addition to attracting families from a wider geographical area than seen before. This improved access is inextricably linked to the isolation felt during the pandemic coupled with the withdrawal/reduction of some local statutory services i.e. Health visitors, Children Centre’s. Isolation has been reduced at the different stages of parenthood, comprising activities specifically aimed at parents with new babies (Baby Buddies) through to more structured sessions for parents with toddlers (Toddler PEEP) encouraging regular engagement with other parents over a 10-week period. Through this ongoing engagement friendships are formed, parental confidence and resilience is built and access to additional support can be facilitated.” SCVYS Report Bright Beginnings 2022

The Bright Beginnings Project at Spark will continue to be delivered by two family support workers from Autumn 2023 onwards. To ensure the continuation and lasting legacy of Bright Beginnings Project such as:

- co-ordinating roles to oversee and support volunteers
- continuing to deliver a broad and balanced range of activities that prioritises those most in need of support

- continuing to ensure there are smooth and efficient pathways into and out of services
- breaking down any barriers to attendance
- continue to work in partnership wherever possible with other local agencies, professionals and organisations
- building up volunteers and volunteering opportunities to enable ownership and sustainability
- utilising more skills of the local community to support delivery
- expanding on community venue use and community support through partnership working
- community engagement and ownership of the project
- working through the feedback surveys, suggestions and areas for development
- building up staff development to keep improving and evolving with the changing needs of the community
- continuing to engage with trustees, service users and stakeholder engagement to ensure the project continues to be successful
- identify opportunities and threats for the project moving forward after September with outside mentoring support from professionals
- succession planning and sustainability

Grow and Thrive Project

In October 2021 Spark was awarded a grant from the National Lottery to run the **Grow and Thrive Project**, for 3 years to September 2024, which extends the reach of activities through wellbeing, financial resilience, volunteering and community connections support.

The aims of Grow and Thrive are:

People Aims

To enable those in greatest need in our community to both grow and thrive in their lives despite the difficulties they may be facing, through:

- establishing routes to help service users grow in independence
- improving accessibility and removing barriers
- enabling peer support relationships, enabling people to help themselves and others
- improving wellbeing and enabling people to live healthy and active lives

Organisational Aims :

- continue to facilitate joined-up working between charities locally to strengthen our community offer and organisational resilience
- secure and strengthen delivery from Spark
- build capacity to strengthen long term volunteering to have greatest impact

This allowed Spark to:

- Link up with local organisations to visit the Spark centre and provide drop-ins to help the local community
- Expand and develop forms of family support
- Develop our volunteering offer
- Expand and develop new sessions

- Signpost, advocate and join up services more effectively to support families

Other Spark Services

Spark also provides a setting for external providers to run activities and support services for families:

- Health Visitor clinics etc.
- Music and foreign language classes
- Adult evening groups such as sign language
- Advice on energy/money/wellbeing issues through other provider sessions
- In addition, Spark has been a partner with Burntwood Be A Friend (set up in response to Covid), offering practical support to local families and signposting them to other providers
- Throughout Autumn/ Winter 2022, Spark opened the centre each Saturday morning as part of the local Warmer Welcome initiative, in conjunction with Burntwood Town Council, and provided volunteers to staff this as well as running weekly sessions at the local Fire Station and Community Hall. As well as providing a warm and safe space with hot drinks and refreshments this was also recognised as an important social opportunity for isolated members of the community. This was attended by a wide range of people and provided information, advice and guidance about a range of support available to those on a low income.
- During the school summer holidays in July/ August 2023, Spark partnered with Burntwood Town Council in providing play activities and refreshments for two Play in the Park sessions, attended over the two days by around 1400 people.

Highlights from September 22 to August 23

- Spark provided 68 summer holiday sessions in 2023.
- Groups of volunteers came together during this period to form sub-groups i.e. planning events.
- A range of fundraising events were held which were possible again after covid. Spark also developed platforms for raising more funds internally such as Give a Little and a donation station in the centre.
- Greater partnerships were made with local businesses who have been able to support Spark with professional expertise, storage and fundraising.
- Spark started a weekly newsletter to keep service users better informed, share good news and important information which was available in paper and online.
- Increased partnership working with a range of venues and VCSE groups.
- Spark were on BBC Midlands today on an article with how Fareshare and Spark supports families through the summer holidays with food provision.

- Spark were accredited with being dementia friendly and a member of the Safe Space Alliance.
- Greater partnerships with local organisations and venues including Burntwood Library where Spark set up a toy bank facility.

Service User Feedback included:

“An organisation like Spark should be available in every community because it has been such a great, welcoming, non-judgmental and wise source of support to both me and my baby.”

“Supportive, friendly, informative.”

“Spark is a big part of Burntwood community.”

“Spark meets the needs of lots of local families, in a warm and friendly way.”

“Really friendly, helpful safe space.”

“It's a vital service for Burntwood's community. It was and still is a huge help for my family. I hope other towns will manage to create something as excellent as this.”

“Nurturing, informative, inspiring, together.”

“Spark gives & keeps giving, thinks of everyone by listening & creating groups to accommodate all needs.”

“Lovely supportive people helping the community and their children in many ways.”

“Amazing service that benefits so many people on a range of things.”

Volunteers

Spark thanked and recognised volunteers through a range of activities during the year including family fun events, volunteers week thank you event and social evenings. Spark volunteers were also recognised by Support Staffordshire awards.

Financial review

During the year we received funding from various sources. Some was fees paid by people attending groups and rent for use of the premises; some was donations from local councils; some through being a nominated charity for local stores/businesses which held collections. The largest amount was from the National Lottery Community Fund for the Bright Beginnings Project, and also the initial stages of the Grow and Thrive Project. These projects required the appointment of more staff, and this means that the largest demand on funds is for staff salaries and associated costs, paid through the grant funding, with some support from Lichfield District Council.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Spark acted as a support and holding account to emerging local charity Burntwood be a Friend which has now registered as a charity in its own right (fully completed in September 2023).

The main areas of expenditure were staff salaries (for the Senior Management Team, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Family Support & Session leaders, Administrator); the development of outdoor play areas; the provision of resource materials and costs of running the various groups.

Potential risks and uncertainties

Financial:

It is likely that grant-making bodies may re-assess their priorities, and local-authority bodies may face cutbacks in the availability of funds. However, because Spark draws on a mix of funding sources, statutory, charity, local and national. The Trustee board regularly checks exposure to different funding streams to ensure that there is not over-reliance on any individual source. We have a Reserves Policy which addresses various potential scenarios and in line with the policy we are building 3-6 months of unrestricted reserves.

Operational:

- Spark works closely with its landlord, Springhill Academy, to ensure that there are no issues over use of the premises.
- There are staff employed by Spark on part-time contracts, and also staff who provide services as freelancers; volunteers often apply for roles as paid staff, so there is continuity and it is not anticipated that future staffing changes will cause operational issues.
- The group leaders have worked extremely hard during covid to create new ways of working, taking sessions out of doors for example and using local parks and other community facilities. This means that even if the building should be unavailable for a time, we can continue to provide services.
- Because Spark works closely with other local groups and charities, it has good standing in the local community and there is little likelihood of its activities being curtailed, because it is clearly meeting local needs.

Future plans

- Bright Beginnings and Grow and Thrive Project, reaching more families each year
- The provision of new groups and services
- Developing links with more community groups and using local amenities
- Increasing the number of volunteers, offering training and development to build self-confidence and encourage volunteers to look at paid employment as a future goal

Independent examiner's report to the trustees of Spark (Burntwood) CIO ('the CIO')

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of the CIO for the year ended 31 August 2023.

Responsibilities and basis of report

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

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

Independent examiner's statement- matter of concern identified

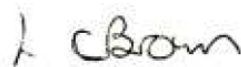
I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

In carrying out my examination I noted that the balance brought forward from 2022 was incorrect by £2,936. In response to this the finance officer explained that there had been an issue with recording transactions related to Burntwood Be A Friend in the 2020-21 accounts when the two organisations were working side by side, and that the previous independent examiner was aware of this and had factored in into their workings. This issue has now been corrected within the 2022-23 accounts.

I confirm that there are no other matters to which your attention should be drawn to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:



Name: Lucy Brown

Address: 179 Queen Street, Burntwood, Staffordshire WS7 4TN

Date: 9th June 2024

Spark (Burntwood) CIO
Income and Expenditure Account
For the year ended 31 August 2023

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total	2022
Income				
Sales	2,405	-	2,405	3,837
Business Room Hire	2,622	-	2,622	2,061
Party Hire	1,770	-	1,770	440
Interest Received	74	-	74	66
Donation	10,032	-	10,032	4,687
Grants	1,708	222,794	224,503	207,955
Sundry income	-	-	-	2,156
Total Receipts	18,610	222,794	241,405	221,202
Expenditure				
Accountancy costs	600	-	600	-
Business Rates	47	-	47	440
Centre Resources	274	3,059	3,333	4,530
Cleaning	1,757	4,904	6,661	4,381
Entertainment	141	770	911	3,148
Fundraising	413	-	413	-
Goods & Materials	4,242	-	4,242	3,142
Insurance	-	652	652	658
IT Costs	334	-	334	1,848
Marketing & Publicity	-	0	293	-
Payroll Service	-	701	701	488
Telephone Costs	230	1,033	1,262	1,619
Rent	-	7,853	7,853	7,988
Repairs & Renewals	2,973	149	3,121	2,904
Salary Costs, inc NI & pensions	3,900	171,131	175,030	150,627
Session Leader Payments	2,190	587	2,777	1,640
Staff Expenses	394	1,012	1,407	4,316
Stationery	-	2,646	2,646	1,524
Sundry Expenses	272	261	534	403
Training	-	1,889	1,889	3,158
Volunteer Co-ordinator	-	-	-	2,705
Volunteer Expenses	-	44	44	5,701
Website & Software	269	2,299	2,568	1,228
Total Payments	18,036	199,283	217,319	202,448
Net Income / (Payments)	574	23,511	24,086	18,754
Balance brought forward	18,509	27,111	45,620	26,866
Balance carried forward	19,083	50,622	69,706	45,620

Made up of:

Current Account	56,596
Savings Account	13,083
Petty cash	27

69,706

This Trustees' Annual Report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to CIOs. This report has been approved by the Trustees on 20th June 2024.

Signed:  Hood.