

Trustees' Annual Report 1/1/24 to 31/12/24

Charity name: Help Close By

Charity registration number: 1190642

Objective and Activities

Charitable objects

1. THE PREVENTION OR RELIEF OF POVERTY IN THE UK BY PROVIDING TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS AND TECHNOLOGY SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS IN NEED AND/OR CHARITIES; WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH STATUTORY AND OTHER RELEVANT ORGANISATIONS AS APPROPRIATE.

2. THE RELIEF OF FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AMONG PEOPLE LIVING OR WORKING IN THE UK BY PROVIDING TECHNOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS FREE OF CHARGE TO SUCH PERSONS AS WOULD BENEFIT FROM BEING CONNECTED WITH LOCAL CHARITABLE SERVICE PROVIDERS TO OBTAIN HELP WHICH THEY COULD NOT OTHERWISE AFFORD THROUGH LACK OF MEANS.

Summary of main activities / Achievements and Performance.

Overview

2024 was a really important year in the history of our organisation. The year had a mixture of successes and hard lessons, but the latter is now propelling us towards our long held national aims.

We started the year well funded on local projects as well as having in-kind funding on our food bank storage (Swan House) and a range of aspects of technology. We had received funding at the end of 2023 for the Winter Food Grant from Birmingham city council, meaning that into March we had a very well stocked food supply, geared towards long shelf life items, which would prove a sound decision. We also received our first national lottery grant at the end of 2023 which was aimed at supporting our local volunteer group and our wider links to other areas, both in growing this and by having a freelance community engagement office one day a week for 9 months of the year.

As a result of the National Lottery funding our local group greatly increased, going from a hardcore of 6 volunteers on deliveries to a peak of 30, allowing us to expand to other areas in Birmingham, notably Bordesley Green which is currently the area with the highest level of need we operate in.

At the end of 2023 a large number of organisations had signed up to use our app from across Birmingham, and we were hopeful to see some impact as we linked up a wide range of services, making specific changes to the system to accommodate so of the needs of these organisations. Unfortunately even with support from our community engagement officer and training run by trustees with launch films created, many of these services failed to show up. In the main this appears to be due to a lack of funding, a lack of volunteers at other organisations and in one isolated case, failure of leadership with one organisation that had promised services that could not be delivered by its staff. While some other organisations continued to use the app, it wasn't the highly connected network we wanted to see for our service users. As difficult as this experience was, this would be the situation that lead to a major positive change to how we could grow as an organisation.

We needed to find a way to become less dependent on a model of signing up other organisations. Our model had always been one where other organisations could sign up for our app, and we'd intended to grow out from Birmingham. Given the high maintenance of process of getting organisations onboarded, with so many that ran out of funds or just burned out, this approach wasn't proving scalable. We had resisted a directory based approach as we didn't feel maps with lots of pins or large listing websites were easy to navigate and didn't take time to understand the needs of people facing poverty. These sites and apps put the onus on the service users to know what a solution for a given need was, and in some senses parts of our app also had that expectation. Services like advocacy were under used as it was framed as a solution without being specifically matched to a need.

The solution was clear - a version of the app that matched up needs. Service users know their needs when asked, and at this point having a directory approach would become more viable. Not only would this allow us to have far more services in the app, but not onboarding every organisation then open us up to go national once we had data on a sufficient number of services, obviously backed up with appropriate funding and outreach. The concept of these listed services ran parallel to existing services, requiring us to refer to in-direct and direct services (our food delivery service being one). We had always envisioned a situation where we could become a national organisation and in doing so have real-time oversight on poverty as it is being felt in the UK.

A four phase plan came together where we would 1. Build the new app & directory, 2. Rollout around the UK to areas of most need, 3. Start using our data as means to support grant funding of services performing well in the app based on user feedback rather than self-reported data and 4. Embed our organisation as an anchor or institution with a sustainable and extremely long term funding base.

The board approved the four phase plan for the national roadmap in early summer, with volunteers recruited to start working on national projects in late August and September, across tech, marketing (to be focused on outreach using marketing methods) and data analysis. Over 100 people signed up to take part, and to start with the data teams had to be divided into four teams just to make them more manageable. Volunteer team leads emerged from within these groups, making our sudden increase in scale more manageable. By the end of the year projects

were well underway to serve the national plans, with an aim to build towards something that could be put in front of grant funders. Notably the UX on the new service user interface was complete by December and moving into a documentation phase.

Statement confirming whether the trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit

All Trustees have read the Charity Commission guidance on public benefit and have confirmed that they have done so

Financial Review

Review of charity's financial position at end of the period

Financial

Early 2024 spending on food purchases, with a huge amount of long shelf life food proving to be vital. The was funded mainly from Birmingham City Council's Winter Food Fund up to the end of March.

Most of the year project spending was covered by the National Lottery Community Fund grant of £10,000, with a grant for core costs coming in from the Heart of England managed Harry Payne fund in April for £1000 - slightly less than a £1300 requested. Donations were extremely small but regular. Unlike 2023 there hasn't been as big a push on fundraising, although with a volunteer marketing team this picture is likely to shift in the longer term.

As mentioned above, many of the grants are no longer funding food and this is a problem for our local food bank, especially with the disappearance of grants specifically for food. We did apply to a number of grants for food funding, with it taking until 2025 for just one of these to come through. It does put us in a position where food provision cannot by a focus and generally most grants want to fund long term solutions. Whilst we want to look at long term support for people that need our help as well, this doesn't get away from the fact that many people are struggling with food poverty whilst awaiting any longer term solutions.

Reserves

At present we do not hold reserves as we are not in a position to do so. All funds are committed to costs of delivering our services, running our various volunteer teams and our core costs and activities committed to are funded for the period within which they are expected to run.



CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Receipts and Payments accounts Help Close By

From 01/01/24

To 31/12/24

Charity No. 1190642

CC16a

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
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Receipts

Donations	465		465	2346
Deposit refunds	300		300	
Grants		1000	1000	19800
Total receipts	765	1000	1765	22146

Payments

Support Costs				
Finance	2		2	0
Insurance	33	132	165	158
			0	
Charitable Activities			0	
Food purchases	76	4984	5060	4816
Operations costs	848	244	1092	1307
Promotion and engagement	1919	8614	10533	545
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	
			0	
Total payments	2878	13974	16852	6826
Net of receipts/(payments)	-2113	-12974	-15087	15320
Cash funds last year end	2563	12974	15537	
Cash funds this year end	450	0	450	

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

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Total to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Current	450	0	450
	Savings			0
	Cash			0
	Total cash funds	450	0	450

	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	
B2 Other monetary assets		0	0	0
		0	0	0

	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B3 Investment assets			0	0
			0	0

	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use			0	0
			0	0

	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
B5 Liabilities				
			0	

Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees

Signature	Print Name	Date of approval

2024 Movements in Funds

	Opening Balance	In	Transfers	Out	Closing Balance
Unrestricted Funds	2563	765	0	2878	450
Restricted funds					
BCC Winter Food Fund	4984	0	0	4984	0
Nat Lot Ladywood Connect	7990	0	0	7990	0
Heart of England	0	1000	0	1000	0
					0
Total Restricted Funds	12974	1000	0	13974	0
Total Funds	15537	1765	0	16852	450

The charity accounts have been prepared using the Receipts and Payments system, consequently donated goods and services are not included in the accounts Due regard to Charity SORP section 6 fair value – basis of the value of the gift to the charity (6.13 to 6.19).