

Community fund application – community assessment

June 2019

Applicant: Home Start (Witney & West Oxfordshire)

Grant requested: £2,500



Cottsway
Community Fund

Name of applicant	Home-Start Oxford (Witney and West Oxfordshire)
Web site address	http://www.home-startoxford.org.uk/

Name of your project	Family Well-Being Groups in Witney
Why are you applying for the grant? (in no more than 50 words)	We need support to run three Family Groups weekly from Witney Methodist Church. Two of the groups will be open-access Stay & Plays. One will be an invitation-only group that provides a vital first step to community engagement for socially isolated families referred to us by health/social care professionals.
How much will your total project cost?	£21,946
How much have you raised so far?	£16,250
How much are you applying for from Cottsway?	£2,500
Have you received a grant from Cottsway previously?	No.

Please indicate the funding aims your project will meet:

Yes	Services and activities for young people and/or older people.
Yes	Services and activities that address rural issues and tackle rural exclusion and social isolation.
	Services and activities that will benefit the environment.
	Services and activities that help prevent debt, provide financial advice and reduce poverty.
	Services and activities that contribute towards getting people online and reduce digital exclusion.
Yes	Services and activities that contribute to an inclusive and active community.

Please tell us how your project meets the funding aims

Services and activities for young people and/or older people

Under-Fives: The project provides much needed group sessions for under-fives in Witney and surrounding areas. Groups will be informed by the PEEP Learning Together Programme, using books, singing, role-play and games to encourage parents as their children's first educators. We are responding to concerns raised to us about the school readiness and socialisation of children. In a safe, friendly and supportive environment, children will develop learning skills, improve attachment, build social networks and have positive experiences.

Young mums: Health Visitor referrals to us are often struggling younger mums under 25. Isolated young mums will build friendships and improve attachment and mental/emotional well-being.

Older People: We offer fulfilling volunteering opportunities and training and find that often our wonderful volunteers are retired people.

Tackling rural exclusion and social isolation

Since October 2018, our open-access Stay and Play groups have become popular, attracting as many as 65, many of whom come from rural areas. Referrals from health visitors will link us with more isolated, disadvantaged families, including those affected by physical and mental illness, disability, domestic abuse, addiction, trauma and poverty. Once referred, we will connect with families through friendly phone calls and if necessary, home-visits. Our invitation-only groups will offer a vital first step to community engagement for families that lack the confidence to access larger, open access groups.

Services and activities that contribute to an inclusive and active community

Social networks will be built and strengthened for individual families, enriching and empowering the whole community and because we will be serving harder to reach families, the *whole* community's needs and aspirations will be met. As well as running groups, our FGC will also engage in community networking and family outreach throughout the wider community.

What activities will the project offer?

We are asking for £2,500 match funding that will fund our new programme of Family Well-Being Groups for the next year. Like the home-visiting support that we have offered for over thirty years, our new groups offer non-judgemental, skilled, friendly support. We are currently running three main groups and 127 families are attending:

1. Puddle Jumpers Stay and play (Wednesdays 9.30 -11.30)
2. Little Splashers – (Wednesdays 1.30-2.30) a range of group activities for babies under 1 year including; baby massage, sing and sign, treasure baskets, singing and story time. Little Splashers has been set up following two 4 week groups in baby massage and 'sing and sign'. The sessions were delivered by an external paid worker, who has subsequently become the group volunteer.
3. PEEP groups (Tuesdays 11 – 12.30) An invitation only group parents with children under 5 yrs - supporting parents with attachment and early learning. PEEP Learning Together Programme is an evidence-based framework that uses books,

stories, singing and role-modelling to support early learning and preparing for school.

We need funding that will allow our FGC to continue to run three sessions from Witney Methodist Church, assisted by local volunteers. Attendance will be free, though we will ask for donations.

Two open access groups will run weekly. They will be fun, varied and responsive to community ideas, skills and needs.

One invitation-only group will target socially isolated, vulnerable families who are referred to us by health/social care professionals. 8 invited families will participate in each group and there will be 3 groups run over the year. Again, provision will be informed by PEEP and support parents as their children's first educators using stories, songs and books to improve attachment, happiness and school readiness. These groups will target families who have not been accessing our open-access groups, providing a vital first step to community engagement.

How has the community and/or Cottsway residents been consulted in this proposal?

Consultations with local parents, health visitors and professionals as well as extensive research by our locally led steering group Witney Family and Children First (WFCF) have all highlighted that there are not enough family groups in Witney and those that do exist are not being accessed by the most vulnerable families. Our FGC, Lisa West, has also consulted with Cottsway staff who recognised the benefits to their residents of friendly, skilled, accessible group provision.

The need for groups has been evidenced through consultations with Witney parents through questionnaires and face to face interviews. We have also consulted with 27 professionals in touch with vulnerable parents. Local Health Visitors, who know and value Home-Start' are particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of an increased Home-Start presence in their area. The Witney HV Team told us, "There isn't a week that goes by, when we don't say 'we wish we had Home-Start here!'"

We spoke to 40 parents of young children at health visitor clinics who overwhelmingly felt that group sessions would be one of their preferred options for support. We also conducted a survey of mothers at the Methodist Church Health Visitor Clinic and every

mother present said they would use our service and identified another 13 families who would also benefit. They highlighted emotional support as a particular need.

Although our open-access stay and play groups attract as many as 65, our own observations and contact with professional referrers tells us that Witney's most vulnerable families are not accessing these groups and there is therefore a demonstrable need for invitation-only groups. Our referred, invited groups will uniquely reach out to the families who tend not to attend other groups.

How will you ensure promotion to Cottsway residents?

Promotion of open-access groups. We are experienced at promoting our groups through social media. We also put up posters in supermarkets and local shops, village halls, Witney Town Hall, the library, community noticeboards, churches, HV clinics, The Witney Hub and Witney Sports Centre. Lisa West will use her contacts with Cottsway to ensure that information reaches Cottsway residents through Cottsway's social media, newsletters and noticeboards. We benefit greatly from word of mouth recommendations. We have already secured coverage in the local press eg The Witney Gazette. Our established relationships with local health and social services mean that our groups are promoted widely. We have linked with local government and local officials including Deputy Lieutenants Brian Crossland and Rod Walker, Councillors Ted Fenton and Laura Price, and Community Co-ordinator Cheryl Huntbach in order to promote our work.

Invitation-only groups. Families will usually find out about our invitation-only groups through their Health Visitor or other health/social care professionals. We will welcome referrals directly from Cottsway staff in touch with residents.