



PRESS RELEASE

Oxfordshire Community Foundation's Growing Minds programme chooses [#GivingTuesday](#) and The Good Exchange platform to launch match-funding initiative to help close the education gap

Every pound donated up to £30,000 will be doubled to help disadvantaged communities improve children's school readiness

1st December 2020 – Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) has today announced a new fundraising campaign for its Growing Minds initiative, an innovative and ground-breaking programme to improve school readiness in disadvantaged communities (many of which have been impacted severely by the COVID-19 pandemic).

OCF will match up to £30,000 of donations made to the appeal via fundraising platform The Good Exchange. Every £1 donated will be matched, with the capability to raise £60,000 for Growing Minds to provide books, in-home support and targeted group sessions for disadvantaged children from birth to five years old. The project promotes home learning, aiming to improve the life chances of babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers.

While Oxfordshire's educational excellence is world renowned, children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the region suffer from a larger gap in their education than the average English disadvantaged child. When they start school, these children are typically 5.5 months behind their classmates – and because this deficit affects the rate at which they learn, the gap continues to grow to more than 21.5 months by the time they are 16 (wider than in England as a whole (19 months)).

The Growing Minds initiative brings education and early years charities together with local Oxfordshire delivery partners to help close this education gap. The programme identifies families that require support; sends them free books; and trains front-line early years practitioners in the [Peep Learning Together](#) programme. They engage these local families in meaningful interactions and support, so that children can become school ready by the time they reach age five.

This project is increasingly significant, as the financial impact of COVID-19 has affected Oxfordshire excessively – an [OCF report](#) has found that the number of recipients of unemployment benefit increased by 165% from March to September 2020, exceeding the England average of 116%. Of the Oxfordshire districts, South Oxfordshire has been one of the worst affected with slightly more than a trebling (or 202% increase) of unemployment benefit claimants.

“This year, we've seen troubling figures showing that financial hardship in Oxfordshire could contribute to a widening of the already disproportionate education gap,” said Adrian Sell, Chief Executive at OCF. “Growing Minds is focused on practical and results-based steps that can change the life outcomes of disadvantaged babies and toddlers. This funding will ensure we continue to deliver on the four key pillars of the initiative – preventative measures; a collaborative approach; evidence-based interventions; and a place-based focus on key communities with needs. We hope to replicate the model across Oxfordshire and beyond to help close the education disparity in the UK.”



Adrian Sell at OCF continues “Please give generously to the appeal and we will match every £1 that you donate with £1 from one of our generous donors.”

In its first year of delivery, the project has engaged with families of newborn babies and children of one and two years of age, and aims to help more than 800 children in the local areas of Berinsfield and Littlemore over the seven-year lifetime of the project. As of Q3 2020, 102 families are now receiving support from Growing Minds, while 17 local professionals have been trained through the programme. Once the project has been proven in these areas, the goal is to replicate the model in other areas of Oxfordshire and beyond.

Growing Minds case study:

A single mother and her two young children (5 and 2) were referred into Growing Minds by John Henry Newman Academy. Coping with family breakdown and trying to get support in another language was proving difficult, and mum reported both children had language delays. The family are now engaging with Peeples in one-to-one sessions with a practitioner who speaks their first language, Urdu, and the youngest child is receiving Imagination Library books on a regular basis.

Mum reports that her own emotional wellbeing has improved as a result of this support, and after receiving advice on everyday activities to improve communications for the children, has started to sing to them regularly.

You can find the full OCF report forecasting the regional economic fallout of COVID-19 [here](#).

Make your donation [here](#).

About The Good Exchange

The Good Exchange is a transformational not-for-profit, charity-owned cloud platform specifically designed to match those organisations and individuals who have money to give to good causes with those who need it most. As the only platform that brings together local grant-making and crowdfunding via donations and fundraising activities for charitable projects, the automated matching system with its simple single on-line application form has revolutionised charitable giving, making it more accessible, transparent and collaborative.

<https://thegoodexchange.com/>

About Oxfordshire Community Foundation

Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) works to improve lives by addressing social and economic disadvantage. We tackle the most pressing problems locally: homelessness, educational inequality and loneliness and isolation.

Our work is all about collaboration and consensus-building. We make the best ideas happen – solutions to the problems, not sticking plasters. This leads to sustained and meaningful improvements to people’s lives.

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