



Case study: Portishead Youth Centre Ltd.

August 2021

Portishead Youth Centre Ltd. is a community centre that offers spaces and services for young people from pre-school up to young adults, as well as parents, senior citizens, and people with complex needs. The Centre normally provides a wide range of social in-person activities including preschool meets, after school activities, events, children’s parties, youth outreach programmes, clubs, a community café, and even a recording studio.

Portishead Youth Centre Ltd. received £10,000 through the Coronavirus Community Support Fund (CCSF). The CCSF is a funding programme supported by a grant of £200 million from Government, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, to help organisations in England respond to the COVID-19 crisis and increase community support to people affected by the pandemic.

How was the CCSF grant used?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Portishead Youth Centre noticed changes in the need for support within their community. Families that were previously financially stable were now struggling due to parents and caregivers being furloughed or made redundant. More young people were struggling with their mental wellbeing. Despite this increase in need, the pandemic and associated restrictions also disrupted Portishead Youth Centre’s main sources of income, such as its community café, room hires, and pre-school activities. Fundraising through the usual large-scale events and parties was also not possible.

The CCSF grant was used to cover building overheads and retain a core staff team, preventing seven staff members from being put on furlough. This helped the Centre to continue providing activities and support for their community. Their typical youth club activities, such as weekly crafts and baking sessions, moved from in-person to online as staff delivered materials and ingredients to peoples’ homes. Drop-in sessions for young people and activities to support parents with small children also continued online. Overall, the Centre led 35 online session per week.

With staff and building costs covered, the Centre was able to strengthen ties with a local food bank to deliver food parcels to those who needed it most and increase their support for young people struggling with their mental health. The CCSF grant also covered the costs for a new crèche for children aged twelve weeks to four years, ensuring it was safe when restrictions allowed them to open, to support families with childcare.



(Without the grant) potentially we would have had to make staff redundant and services wouldn’t have been able to continue. We were not able to generate any income whatsoever because we couldn’t have people in the building. Without that funding, a lot would’ve definitely been a lot more challenging.” – Staff

Quick facts:

- Grant period: **June-December 2020**
- 175** people supported by the CCSF grant
- 35** online sessions per week
- 15** families received a food box each week
- 7** staff prevented from being furloughed

Three key messages:

- ① The CCSF grant supported Portishead Youth Centre to continue providing support and meet additional needs and referrals, for example from schools. This was especially important because many other facilities in the area had closed down.
- ② The flexibility of staff and strengthened collaboration with the local foodbank meant more people were supported during the peaks-and-troughs of the pandemic.
- ③ The continuity of one-to-one mental health support was valued by young people, especially when other services and schools closed.

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What difference did the CCSF grant make?

For people and communities

The CCSF grant was vital for the Centre's ability to continue supporting young people and families, which helped 175 people over the six-month grant period. In addition to moving its usual activities online, the Centre stepped up support for those most in need. For example, the number of young people struggling with their mental health increased, in some cases this was as severe as having suicidal thoughts or self-harming. More referrals were also coming from schools. The Youth Centre provided consistent one-to-one support to 30 young people, meaning they had someone to turn to and felt listened to. Parents valued that their children had support outside the family, without which they would have struggled to cope.

53 children joined the new crèche, which helped families struggling with the circumstances brought by the pandemic. Having a childcare facility available for a couple of hours each day was especially important for some families who could no longer afford to send their children to nursery because they had been furloughed or lost their jobs. For others, it provided respite from juggling working from home and full-time childcare responsibilities, which supported their mental wellbeing.

Through a strengthened collaboration with the local food bank, staff delivered food parcels to 15 families facing financial hardship or who were unable to go to the supermarket. Each week, this supported 70-80 people from those households to access basic needs. Seemingly small gestures by staff also made a big difference, for example, when staff donated baby clothes and toys that parents could give their children at Christmas. Overall, people felt less isolated and alone.



For some families, it was literally a case of keeping food on the table... That's been a massive one. For others it's been somebody to talk to and feeling like they're not alone. – Staff

Key legacy from the experience:

Having remained operational through the pandemic, the Centre is now thinking about what new or different provision is needed in the community. Conversations have begun with local partners (e.g. Town Council, community groups) to make this a joint effort.

Want to know more?

Website: <https://portisheadyouthcentre.co.uk/>

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/portishead.youthcentre>

Instagram: http://instagram.com/portishead_youth_centre

For delivery partners

The relationship between the Centre and the local food bank strengthened during the pandemic, due to the need to support people to access basic needs. By working with the Centre, the food bank was able to reach people they would not have otherwise met. For example, those who are in work but often have just enough money to get to the end of the month may not consider accessing emergency food. This created a valuable new outreach opportunity for them. Other benefits included the opportunity to share emergency food and pool knowledge and resources. Future plans include using the Centre's building for food bank staff and volunteers to offer cookery and food education classes and community meals.



[Working with the Centre] brought different knowledge to us, for example of local support providers. We were able to just ask 'do you know so-and-so'. Gradually, we built up this web of connections... and dipped into each others' services. – Delivery partner

For the organisation and its staff

Without the CCSF grant, the Centre would have delivered significantly fewer services. Being able to retain a core staff team meant services continued uninterrupted with necessary adaptations. Support could be offered on the basis of what people needed. Existing youth club activities, such as weekly craft and baking sessions moved online, with craft packs and ingredients delivered to peoples' homes so they could join sessions virtually. Staff could use the virtual drop-in sessions for parents and young people to identify families likely to struggle with lockdown restrictions and follow-up with further support.

With most other facilities in the area closed due to the restrictions, because the Centre remained open, it became a key reference point for people who required support, and for other local organisations who could signpost to them, including schools and the food bank.

The Centre have launched online consultations with parents and young people and started conversations with local stakeholders (Town Council and local community groups) to jointly establish what services are needed as we recover from the pandemic.



The world has changed, people's interaction with services will be different. It's a great opportunity to critically assess what we do and make sure what we're delivering is relevant to our local community. – Staff