

Case study: The Purple Elephant Project

August 2021

The Purple Elephant Project is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) launched in 2019. It supports children, young people and their families affected by traumatic life experiences, attachment or developmental trauma. Its trained therapists offer Play Therapy* for children aged 4-16 and it also provides training for parents and post adoption support. It runs a therapeutic Hub in South West London, designed to be inviting, with a full range of resources on hand for therapists

The Purple Elephant Project received £38,455 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?

The Purple Elephant Project used the CCSF funding to deliver a six-month Play Therapy programme to children whose emotional and mental health had been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as offering support for their parents. With lockdowns and school closures impacting children and families, there was an increase in demand for the Purple Elephant Project's services. At the same time, NHS mental health services were stretched and waiting lists for support got longer.



We've seen a big increase in children with anxiety, low mood, becoming angry or agitated and not coping because of not being in school or the changes in the school set up. So, they have been badly impacted from that point of view. – Grantholder

Play Therapy is a form of child psychotherapy which allows children to express their thoughts and emotions through play, rather than talking. For a child, the toys become their words and Play Therapists work to help children explore their feelings and process their experiences through play. Initially support was offered at the charity's Hub but then moved online during the second lockdown.

The Purple Elephant Project used the CCSF grant to

support eight families that would not otherwise have been possible. The grant was used to cover therapists' wages and core costs like running the Centre and salaries of the CEO and COO (which covered increased therapist supervision, adapting services for online delivery, project management, and safeguarding).

Quick facts:

Grant period: July 2020-February 2021

8 families supported

144 individual play therapy sessions

Three key messages:

- ① The six-month programme was longer than usual programmes. This provided children with much needed consistency at an uncertain time, and helped therapists tackle complex cases and deepen the impact of interventions.
- ② During lockdown, therapists switched to remote delivery and play resources had to be adapted, for example supplying individual kits and only sharing resources that could be easily cleaned.
- ③ Covering core costs as well as interventions helped this new charity survive the pandemic.

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What difference did the CCSF grant make?

For people and communities

Eight children each received 18 Play Therapy sessions, two review meetings and an assessment over the six-month grant period.

The therapy was tailored to each child's needs. For example, they worked with a young person suffering from anxiety who was struggling to leave the house. When The Purple Elephant Project discovered the young person enjoyed art, they sent photos of the Hub and the art materials that would be available to use there. Gradually therapists were able to build a trusting relationship and the young person felt able to come to the Hub. The young person enjoyed the sessions and looked forward to them, and the therapist's non-judgmental approach allowed the young person to "be who s/he is". During lockdowns, the Purple Elephant therapist was able to continue working with the young person remotely, which provided consistency despite changing circumstances. As a result of the therapy, the young person has become more confident in leaving the house, visiting local shops as well as going to the Hub, which represents a big step forward for the young person.



The difference the Purple Elephant Project has made is that I can get my [child] out of the house to a happy place. [S/he] comes out of here very positive and then we're often able to do more.

– Parent

The charity's therapists and volunteers have also offered informal support to parents at the Hub when possible as well as by email or text. Parents appreciated this support at a time when they were isolated from the usual sources of support, such as school. For example, the parent of the young person above was given emotional support and help with filling in forms relating to their child. The charity believes this approach supports parents and puts them in a better position to support their child longer-term.

Key legacy of the experience:

The Purple Elephant Project learned that providing light touch support to parents was greatly valued and needed. This is being taken into account in planning future support and training for parents.

For volunteers

The charity has four volunteers who welcome families when they come to the Hub, fulfil COVID-19 safety measures, and offer refreshments to parents while their child is in their therapy session. Volunteers also offer a listening ear to parents, if they would like to talk. When needed, they also help with administrative tasks. One volunteer, who is retired and lives alone, appreciated the opportunity to do something useful and get out and have social contact during the lockdown periods.



I have felt useful and it's given me a sense of purpose. It's lovely to meet new people, because once you retire that doesn't really happen.

– Volunteer

For the organisation and its staff

The CCSF grant meant that the charity could offer additional work to its self-employed therapists, which helped to sustain them during the pandemic. This was particularly important for therapists who were recently qualified and therefore could not access Government support for the self-employed.

The charity's normal funding was disrupted by the pandemic, for example, the charity missed out on some expected grant awards. Therefore it was particularly appreciated that the grant covered core costs and it also funded extra senior staff time to support, supervise and adapt services. As a new charity, receiving CCSF funding also helped raise the charity's profile and made it more attractive to other funders.



I think having access to core costs was hugely helpful at such a difficult time and really made the difference for us surviving the lockdowns and coming out as a strong charity, as opposed to a struggling charity. – Grantholder

Want to know more?

Website: www.thepurpleelephantproject.org

Twitter: https://www.twitter.com/thepurple_ele/

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/thepurpleelephantprojectlondon/>

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