

Mayor's Small Grants Fund 2019-20 Review

Case Studies of Successful Projects

Case Study 1:

19-003 The Living Room

The Living Room provides treatment for adults living with the illness of addiction in deprived areas of Hertfordshire and supports their family members.

The organisation requested funding to set up a Family and Carers Group in Watford so that family members and carers could also receive support at the same time as the adult with the illness of addiction.

Quote from The Living Room – Rita Cooper, Operations Manager

In 2019, following a successful grant application from Hertfordshire County Council, we were able to expand their service delivery to a venue in Watford. We identified the need to open a centre in this geographical area from local and professional statistics.

The Living Room provides treatment for adults with the illness of addiction across Hertfordshire. By 'addiction' we mean any addiction; substance (e.g. alcohol; illicit and non-illicit drugs) and behavioural addictions (e.g. disordered eating, gambling, hoarding, self-harm to name but a few). Importantly in our efforts to break the generational cycle of additions, we also support the family and carers of those that the addiction effects.

We applied for a grant from the Mayor's Small Grants Fund to enable us to facilitate a weekly Family and Carers group for the residents of Watford. Funding was required to rent additional premises, produce flyers, attend professional and local meetings to publicise the opportunity for family members to take back control of their lives. During the workshops and sessions, the attendees learnt how to set boundaries, acknowledge the daily frustrations and to understand the complexity that addiction brings. It also provided an opportunity for participants to form friendship with others that understood the issues and could provide ongoing support outside of group sessions.

Over the period that this group has been in operation, we have seen 10 clients. 1 person graduated and 9 are still attending sessions regularly. Of the participants, 9 clients identified as female and 1 as male. The age of the clients; 18 to 24 – 10%, 25 to 34 – 20%, 45 to 54 – 40%, 55 to 64 – 10% and 65 plus – 20%.

Nothing can convey the importance of this group better than the words of one of the participants.

Testimonial;

When my partner of 16 years' spending addiction came to light I reached out to The Living Room for support and joined the Family and Carers group. Although it was obvious to me that I needed help I had no idea what it was I needed to do or how to deal with this situation. Everything I'd tried over the previous years had only made the situation worse and I knew I was at a crossroads, I had no more resilience or hope of change left in me and I was going downhill.

My mental and emotional wellbeing were suffering, I was anxious, not sleeping well, becoming consumed with trying to find out what was happening in my relationship, by checking my partners phone and emails, rummaging through any paper work I could lay my hands on, and constantly trying

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to catch him out in explanations he gave me for his behaviour and financial position. I could hardly recognise myself and the way I was behaving which was so out of character for me.

What I found in the group of women and facilitators I met at The Living Room was a sense of belonging, a place where we were 'all in it together' all suffering with the same problems. Our stories might on the surface appear to differ but what it came down to was a very common thread – the effects of living with or in close contact with someone in active addiction. Resulting in broken trust, deception, heartbreak, secrets and separation. For when someone is covering their tracks to hide their addiction it doesn't make for a 'close' or loving relationship.

Week after week as I sat in group it gradually became clear to me that I didn't know my partner at all, that I had swallowed an awful lot of lies to the point I no longer believed a word he said, not the basis for a long term relationship.

The members of the group fostered such a deep bond between us and I felt able to share really honestly and receive such a huge amount of support and caring and as the veils of my illusion fell away, the women were there to hold me up and the facilitators were there to offer the way forward. One week when things came to a head and so much came to light about what had been going on with my partner and I realised that was it, no way back for this relationship now. I was in shock and cried and cried, literally falling apart, and the women and facilitators in the room held me in their love and caring in a way I've never experienced before. I started off wanting to rip my partners head off and ended up, once I'd cried it all out, feeling calm and still, which I can only describe as a miracle. As I looked around the circle and everyone's eyes showed understanding, deep sorrow, empathy and unconditional love, it was something I'll never forget.

So this group offered me so much and we shared a hard road together, buoyed on by love and support and getting answers that made the way forward clear and obvious. My whole life was affected in different ways by the work I was doing in the group. My boundaries were becoming clearer and I became more assertive and able to stand my ground more and say what I wanted more than before and I was regaining my confidence.

Not long after joining the group I realised my relationship probably wasn't going to survive and I was filled with fear and couldn't imagine how I'd survive on my own, the thought was unbearable. Yet, incredibly only 3 months later I asked him to leave and now I've faced many of the worst fears I had and feel so very different. I've achieved more than I could have ever imagined and I'm building a new life for myself. Through all my worst times and fears everyone in the group believed and supported me, they held me up, when I fell down and encouraged and spurred me on when I was flailing. They were my rock and my anchor until I could find the strength and courage to stand by myself and I know that each one of them are there for me now if I need them.

One of the best things I did was going to this group and I got the clarity I needed to make wise choices and decisions and the support to carry them out. If I hadn't joined this group I can't imagine what would have become of me because living with someone in active addiction draws you in, little by little, to a blindness and fog, it has to so you can stay in denial of all that you can't face and accept. With the strength of the group you have the confidence and shared strength to face all your fears and make a stand for your own highest good.

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I shall be forever grateful for the opportunity the Living Room gave me and even more grateful for those beautiful souls who held my hand and offered their love and caring as we walked the path of recovery together.

The team at the Watford Mayor's Grant office have been very supportive throughout the whole process and readily available on the phone. The application form was uncomplicated and we received the news that our application had been successful in just a few days. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting this project which has changed lives and helped to break the generational cycle of addiction.

Case Study 2:

19-018 Watford Folk Club

The Watford Folk Club provide an opportunity for those with an interest in folk music to sing and perform at our gatherings and engage with professional folk artists.

This informal group requested funding to hire one of the leading folk musicians to perform for the group attracting a large audience.

Quote from Watford Folk Club – Pete Nutkins, Treasurer & Committee Member

Watford Folk Club meets weekly at the Pump House Theatre and Arts Centre and provides an opportunity for those interested in Folk Music to both listen and perform.

We also engage professional folk artists to perform, promoting both Traditional and Contemporary Folk Music in Watford and the surrounding areas.

Headline folk performers command high fees, but can attract large audiences, increasing the profile of the organiser(s), the venue and the locality. We wanted to book the well-known artist Martin Carthy for these reasons but needed to ensure that we could honour his fee for performing on 13th September 2019. After a discussion with Kim Bloomfield (Watford Council's Partnership and Funding Manager) at a Pump House event, we decided to apply for a Mayor's Small Grant.

The application process was very straightforward, and Kim was extremely helpful and co-operative, offering advice and support when needed, making what could have been a difficult task very easy.

The event achieved all our aims, bringing in new audience members, some from as far afield as the West Midlands. Our regular attendance has increased since this event and the cultural image of Watford has been enhanced.

We have plans to book more professional folk artists in the future and will have no hesitation in approaching the Council for a further grant if we feel it would be appropriate.

We are grateful to the Mayor and the Grants team for their help in enabling us to put on this event.

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Case Study 3:

19-026 Ganesh Chaturthi Utsavam Watford

Ganesh Utsavam aim is to create a spiritual significant environment for Ganesh Chaturthi celebration in Watford.

This informal group requested funding to have a community event where all members of the community are welcome to experience the culture and be united, bringing the community together and helping isolated people to join in.

Quote from Ganesh Chaturthi Utsavam Watford – Sooriyakumar Coimbatore Rajendran, Group Member

Ganesh Utsavam's aim is to create a spiritual significant environment for Ganesh Chaturthi celebration in Watford where invaluable spiritual benefits like the indescribable experience of the Deity's (Lord Ganesha's) presence, Inner peace (Shanti), Bliss (Anand) etc. are attained from the celebration. This event was an open event for the entire Watford residence. The event made everyone feel "We are together in Watford".

This initiative brought our community together, wellbeing, helped isolated people to join and created social harmony. The event provided free food for 600 plus people living in Watford.

This initiative was very helpful for the BAME community as they celebrate the Ganesh Utsavam the most and this celebration is originated from India. We had children's Pooja, children's cultural activities, children's Ganesh clay making, family dance.

We are very thankful to our Watford Mayor Peter Taylor.

Case Study 4:

19-033 Music 24

Music 24 provides a vast range of support services that utilise music therapy techniques in order to help people explore their creativity and feel heard. The group supports health and wellbeing by building confidence, reinforcing self-identity and building support networks.

The organisation requested funding to run a music therapy group with a focus on offering elderly/frail residents from BAME communities the opportunity to increase a wider social network.

Quote from Music 24 – Teela Hughes, CEO

Music24 saw a need in Watford for a music group that supported the health and wellbeing of the elderly/frail BAME community. Together with Caring Sharing Friends, a local day service based at Elim Pentecostal Church, Music24 embarked on creating an opportunity for people in the local area.

Music is an intrinsic part of our culture - in our community, faith and spirituality. It brings people together and that's exactly what we have done. In addition to this 'togetherness', music also has many other benefits. Music can support us mentally, emotionally and physically. In an ageing population, anything that keeps our minds and bodies active should be pursued and embraced.

Each session started with a light physical and vocal warm-up, followed by singing some songs that the group members had selected. No doubt at some point during the session, there would definitely be

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some dancing! It is safe to say that the people attending our group had a natural ability within music and this was a pleasant surprise. Everyone was so musical! We brought along lots of instruments for people to explore, microphones, a guitar, a keyboard and some drums. We provided structure to the sessions and that ultimate opportunity to be expressive. Then the beautiful music we made simply happened all by itself!

When we make music together, it gives people an outlet, an opening for the chance to be creative and feel heard. Our voices are a huge part of our identity. Providing this opportunity left people with huge smiles on their faces. The start of the session, when it is quiet and people are apprehensive, compared to the end of the session when people are walking out the door laughing and hugging everyone - well that's says it all. Music transforms people. It lifts their spirits and improves their confidence.

We are so pleased that the Watford Mayor's Small Grants Fund has been able to support this project, they have been wonderful to work with.