

Reach Community Solar Farm

Grant Application, June 2020



What we do, for who and how

The Red Hen Project has been supporting children and their families across north Cambridge for 22 years. In 'normal' times, 90% of our experienced family workers' time is working intensively one-to-one with individual families in their homes.

A range of criteria are used by our five primary schools to decide which children might benefit from working with Red Hen, but poverty is most often the underlying cause of the referral. The child could be struggling to concentrate, may not be dressed appropriately for the weather; they might be unwashed, hungry, anxious, overly demanding of a teacher's time.

Frequently the family has complex needs. We work closely with them, over several months, with the specific aim of supporting the child to thrive at home and school. Typically, this involves us helping parents understand and address their own physical and mental health needs. We also support the parents to access other help and services (e.g. financial, housing, furniture, household goods, food/cleaning/self-care products) and ultimately helping them to provide a more stable and secure environment for their child

COVID-19: Our current response

Since March 17th we have switched our service model to focus on being as responsive as possible to the needs of families in this difficult time. We are providing both practical help through deliveries of food and resources to more than 200 children, and an emotional lifeline to around 80 families.

As the inevitability of the lockdown approached, we realised that many of our families would struggle with food security. Many families, who have to buy food every few days, or even daily, found themselves unable to get basics in their local stores. The majority are too far away from supermarkets and are unable to have a stock of food in their cupboard. They often have small fridges and no space for a freezer.

We have been able to respond to need through our FareShare relationship with Tesco Milton, and by working with local businesses to galvanise support from the public. Most notably, we have delivered over 300 boxes of fresh fruit and vegetable from The Cambridge Fruit Company to date.

Equally, our families have limited or no resources at home to help entertain children - few books, games or craft materials. More often than not, a family is only able to access the internet via a parent's mobile phone, and in many cases, there is no IT available or internet access at all. Both mean their ability to support their child in home education is severely limited.

We have called upon our long-standing partnership with Kettle's Yard, Open House and worked together to devise, build and distribute activity packs for children. We have been able to use social media to gather donations of new and used games, toys, DVDs, craft materials and books at The Haymaker pub in Chesterton – our community hub.

We've ramped up our volunteer programme and have several people helping in this effort, sorting donations and building activity packs. Crucially, though, all deliveries to families are made by a small team of only 4 DBS enhanced checked and safeguarding trained individuals. This is particularly important for our families; it means there is continuity and trust. We can notice changes if a parent seems troubled, or things don't seem quite right.

Our family workers have adapted rapidly to the changing conditions and shifted to online and phone meetings. Where this is impossible or where concern for the family is high, they have maintained personal contact through socially distant visits. We have been able to work closely with our schools, sharing information and concerns. One way or another, we have rebuilt our service according to conditions.

Moving forward

We are now thinking beyond the lockdown - when the hard work really begins. Effectively supporting families, many in desperate financial need, to get their children re-engaged in education. This work will require a great deal of highly skilled one-to-one family work - compassionate, discrete, nurturing, the work on which we have built our reputation.

We have, where appropriate, begun linking families into broader food poverty support as it has become available. We need to rebuild our supplies of emergency care-packs and maintain our corporate partnerships and social media support to ensure continued support.

We now need to seek new funds and resources for those in particular trauma. This may be due to the death or illness of a family member, a breadwinner being made redundant, family break-up, a sudden change in benefit status, a domestic violence incident, a suicide attempt.

All this while continuing to work closely with all our families to build their resilience and help them to better, happier lives.

A grant from The Reach Community Solar Farm at this time, when demand is high, and sources of income are pitifully low, will help children from impoverished homes in north Cambridge to brighter futures.

Further information can be obtained from Sarah Crick, Project Lead (sarah.crick@redhenproject.org), or Miranda Gompers, Trustee (miranda@redhenproject.org)

Demonstrating the impact of the grant

Red Hen Project staff would be delighted to present to the RCSF community at any time, but specifically would propose at the end of the funding period to detail the help that the fund has been able to provide to those specific 'sponsored' families (while ensuring anonymity).

What could we do with this grant

While this period of crisis response is essential, we know that the worst is still to come. The long-term damage to our children and their families will be considerable.

Children will have had an extended period of time without the benefits of routine and social integration. Many will have had long periods without being able to access education due to the 'digital-divide' – many of our families have no laptop or computer at home to access online resources. Special needs will have gone unaddressed, and vulnerability will have increased.

Families may have disruption to their income or lost jobs, experienced bereavement or domestic abuse. Serious mental health issues will have emerged, or been exacerbated by, the situation.

Whilst the funds could be used to deliver a specific activity or project, resources or equipment - we know that the most valuable and effective resource your grant will fund at this critical time is our people. Experienced and highly skilled, they support individual families intensively and in highly practical ways to foster resilience, empowering them to make breakthroughs that will change the trajectory of a child's life.

It costs £140* a day to support three children and their families, intensively in their homes.

£4,000 will fund a family worker, to work with three vulnerable families at any one time, over 30 weeks.

£3,000 will support three families for 22.5 weeks and £2,000 will support three families for 15 weeks.

METRICS

On average

- we work with a family for just under six months
- we have twenty contacts/sessions with the family
- we have ten contacts with other services and professionals related to the family – eg teachers, health, housing - we signpost and refer, we accompany and advocate

Our Outcomes

- Children from disadvantaged families have improved life chances, through developing confidence and emotional resilience.
- Parents have improved family relationships, through developing effective, responsible parenting skills
- Families have improved engagement with the community, reduced isolation, and less reliance on outside intervention.

Our Indicators

- Supported children demonstrate increased confidence and emotional resilience
- Schools report improved engagement with education for supported children
- Supported parents demonstrate improved parenting skills and strategies as well as increased emotional and physical wellbeing
- Supported parents demonstrate an increase in positive family activities, feel less isolated and report improved peer support networks
- Supported families report having better coping strategies, are more able to manage in a crisis, and are able to access other services without support

**Basic costs of a family worker include that of employment, travel, phone and clinical supervision expenses.*