

Goodtrees looking for a leg up from the council to access other funding sources

During this pandemic I have had the privilege of 'meeting' the boys and girls from Goodtrees Neighbourhood Community Centre on several occasions.

They are working from the Tron Kirk in Moredun, rather than just meeting up in groups in their usual way.

The minister there, Cammy, has allowed them free access to the kirk where they pack bags of supplies and packed lunches. The church possibly works better for them than the community centre as it is open to them whenever they need it, and there is good access for deliveries. The reason I have been to see them is to drop off some of our newspapers for them to deliver with the bags of food and meals which they are distributing.

Each time I have been impressed with their manners, their eagerness to help and the way they are all taking their volunteering very seriously. I had already met or heard some of them speaking at the council meeting earlier this year when the fate of their application for funding was heard. That day there were so many people in the Dean of Guild Room at the City Chambers that you could hardly move.

The decision on funding the Third Party Community Grants was deferred to the end of May, and will now be heard by the Policy and Sustainability Committee when it meets next Thursday 28 May 2020.

The councillors have a hard decision to make then. Goodtrees will be just one of many applicants looking for good news. Here is their story. If you are an applicant group and would like your story told then get in touch with us editor@theedinburghreporter.co.uk



They have a good leader of course. John Beatson is the Youth Service Manager at Goodtrees running different groups focussing on a variety of problems that the young people may encounter. For example they have issue-based groups tackling matters of health and mental wellbeing, family and children groups, groups which combat holiday hunger during school holidays and also groups to deal with social isolation among young people.

John said: “We are working with young people from a variety of different backgrounds. Some of them need help with confidence, or they have issues at home, or indeed they may just come to the youth club to meet their friends and try new things.”

Now John says: “Our doors may be closed but our work continues.”

He explains how things usually work. He said: “One of our main focuses is dealing with children and young people who are affected by poverty. As a result of that our groups are free of charge and we always provide food at each of them. We see the effects that poverty has on families. It is demonstrated in mental health issues and that impacts the children and young people and the choices that they make as well.”

Who are the Goodtrees volunteers? John Beatson leads the group with a small team supported by the young people from the two senior groups – one for males and the other for girls at Goodtrees.

What are these young people doing during the pandemic? They are distributing food to people in south east Edinburgh who are shielding or self-isolating as they are perhaps vulnerable or at risk of coronavirus.

They are supporting by unloading delivery vans, packing the food, delivering to families. What that does is it gives them the opportunity to meet some of the elderly people who live in the area. John said: "They get a lot out of that, and they are getting some positive recognition here which young people don't always get. The work they are doing here is a testament to their character and how good they are.

"We have issues between young people with a bit of gang rivalry here between the two different areas of Moredun and Gracemount. There's been a lot of violence, and by that I mean serious violence. We have been looking to address that – I think gangs are more about territorialism. We are all about early intervention.

"What we find is that when we speak to the young people none of them want to be involved in it, but they have got to a point where they have to save face. What that has meant is a great deal of fighting between them.

"Just before lockdown we had started working with our colleagues at Valley Park Dunedin Canmore and looked at ways of dealing with it. Of course lockdown put paid to some of that, but we have been using our digital conversations with the young people to have a chat separately first and then together on a Zoom call.

"There are young people here who have previously been on opposing sides who are now working together. I think it has given them a different perspective on what is important – and shown them that they can actually work together. That is something that we can build on too, along with the stuff they are learning here and the skills they are picking up. They are

so keen to come here that we have had to put a rota in place because there are so many and we want to make it as fair as we can.”

How is it all funded? John explained that he took over at Goodtrees about a year or eighteen months ago. He said: “There was one group per week then, on one evening, with fairly low numbers but now we have five groups per week. We have a volunteer programme for our young people which some of our staff have come through.

“A lot of that has been funded by pockets of money, smaller amounts of funding whilst we established a need as part of the different grant applications that we are going to be making. We are looking to get some grant funding from The City of Edinburgh Council, and that would open up other opportunities like the Lottery, if they can part fund us. But the situation that we are in, if we don’t get council funding then it is a lot harder to find.”

John continued: “In terms of the service that we are already providing it probably costs around £100,000 to run each year. We were going to build on that but at the moment we have a team of people reaching hundreds of young people per week on very little funding. For me that means that I am being paid for 20 hours per week, but we have built things up and we now have a relationship with the young people in the area. We need to build on that a bit more and we have to get the resources that we need.

“We work in Liberton and Gilmerton where there is a real lack of services. When you go to other areas they have lots of different services. Now there are opportunities to partner up with citywide projects, but services on the ground here for young people are pretty scarce.”

John is using the pandemic to build further relationships with the young people already involved in the groups. He has

marshalled them into packing bags and doing door to door deliveries.

“We have a really good relationship with the young people and they always want to get involved with things. It’s been really quite good. They get involved, they like to help, they like to support other people, and they can get experience of life skills and chances and opportunities to see things from a different perspective.”

At the moment Goodtrees are organising lots of sessions online for each of their groups. They use Zoom to keep in touch with everyone and find out what they all need.

They have also set up on Snapchat and Instagram as a way keeping in touch with all their young people who know they can contact the leaders of the organisation at any time if they have any issues. John explained: “We found pre-lockdown that there were lots of different things we were supporting our members with, and these issues don’t go away because of the lockdown. If anything, these issues can become worse so it is important that they all know they can get in touch with us whenever they need to.”

Local MP Ian Murray has written a letter to the council supporting the project’s application for funding. He writes: “Goodtrees Neighbourhood Centre plays an extremely important role within the local community. An example of this would be the widely reported youth antisocial behaviour in Moredun last year. Goodtrees was one of the organisations that played a pivotal role in getting young people off the street and into more productive activities.”

Local ward councillor Lezley Marion Cameron is a supporter of Goodtrees. She told The Edinburgh Reporter: “Practical support in the way of daily provision of fresh, nourishing meals by the Goodtrees Neighbourhood Centre team, Cyrenians, Social

Bite, Tron Kirk Gilmerton & Moredun Church and our local Morrisons store has been an absolute godsend for countless people and communities within Liberton Gilmerton Ward.

“Likewise, Helping Hands, Gilmerton Miners Welfare & Social Club, Diced and Gracemount Primary School, working in collaboration, are providing and delivering home cooked food to numerous people and families in the local area.

“The Bridgend Farmhouse team, donors and volunteers are also facilitating the preparation and distribution of home cooked meals for people. Bridgend is also operating a free Bicycle Loan, Repair and Accessories scheme for key workers, helping people travel to and from work safely and sustainably.

“The extent to which all this community led support has been clearly needed, welcomed, and appreciated by people illustrates the impact of Covid-19 on residents, especially those who are shielding, have young children, are socially isolated, and cannot easily access local shops. People are having to adhere to Covid-19 social distancing guidelines as well as cope with the ongoing impact of food poverty and many other forms of poverty. All this has an impact on mental and physical wellbeing.”



Lennon

Lennon Blues told The Edinburgh Reporter: “I think it’s good for me because I enjoy helping people in the community. That’s why I like doing it because I know that I’ve helped some people, especially during Covid-19. Some families really need this so packing the bags is a big thing for me, because some of them actually need the food in order to survive. They really need it as they were already in poverty as it was.

“My family is coping really well, especially my Nana who just turned 92 a week or so ago. I wished her Happy Birthday from a distance and on Facebook!

“I am learning new skills here. I’ve always been a confident guy but I think it’s made me more confident. I think the Zoom

calls are really good because we can all interact with our friends. Some people's parents don't want them to come and help with the deliveries because they might be a bit vulnerable. We played Bingo on the Zoom call the other night.

"I have never been in a gang but some people were – just for protection. Now the fact that all the groups have come together there are not so many fights."



Shane

Shane Hoffmann (12) has been involved with Goodtrees for about a month. He said: "I have been helping people in the community who are in need. I have been helping the elderly who can't leave their house because of quarantine, and helping those who just don't want to leave their house.

"I have lived here for about seven years. We lived in Oxfords before that. It's good to help people and I have met some people who I would never have met.

"I've met some people here who are really funny. If I was just at home I would probably be on my phone all the time talking to my friends. I miss school a lot, and so this is a good alternative. I am on some of the Zoom chats. Some of the people on those calls haven't actually been out anywhere so it's good to interact with them.

"It's good to get off the streets. If you're in Goodtrees you can get away from all the things like gangs. I also go to Valley Park in Burdighouse. It is with different community workers."



Hamad

We asked Hamad (13) if he had enjoyed his day. For the time being he is observing Ramadan, but he insisted that it takes his mind off fasting to be busy volunteering at Goodtrees. He said: "We have been working for quite a long time now, but we

have to help all of the people in our community. We start at 9am and finish about 3 or 4 o'clock. We are helping to pack bags for the elderly and vulnerable people in the community, and we then bring them to their doors. Loads of these people feel a bit lonely. When we come past they really like it.

“There’s a man who, even before the lockdown, was a bit lonely. He used to walk past me loads of times, so I like to have a wee talk with him. I look forward to seeing him. I was born in Sudan, then we moved to Scotland about one and a half years ago from Holland. I have been coming to Goodtrees for about a year now, and I started helping out last summer with the activities for younger people. I really enjoy coming to Goodtrees, it’s given me confidence to come out and meet people.

“It has helped loads of people, and it is a very important place for me.”

You can follow Goodtrees on Facebook [here](#).