

Foundation Impact Report

2023-2024



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Chris Murray,
Group Chair



Dave Neilson,
Group Chief Executive

Welcome

from our Chair and Chief Executive

In 2023-24 Fusion21 marked its 21st anniversary and we are proud of what our team of procurement and social value specialists have achieved through work with our members, suppliers and partners.

To date, we have delivered more than £200 million in social impact value and created more than 13,550 employment outcomes. Last year alone, we completed £550 million worth of projects and we already have £1.2 billion worth of projects committed over the next four years.

We have more than 1,100 members, with projects spanning the UK, it's clear that our collective impact is only set to grow. Since 2002, we have secured £380 million efficiency savings and completed more than 7,000 procurement projects.

We now work in sectors outside of housing including education and health. But we started in housing, and we're immensely proud of the work we're continuing to deliver with our members. Over the years, we have worked closely with the government and been involved in initiatives that have led to policy change and regulation, linking procurement to social value in a way that hasn't been done before.

We will continue to grow, evolve and innovate. Our mission remains the same: to procure solutions that not only save money but create jobs and training opportunities and have a positive impact on society. The Fusion21 Foundation is becoming a force that will help us to continue to make a difference for our members through our grant funded programmes and social investment work.

So, to our people, and that's our staff, our members, our suppliers and our partners - we say congratulations on our achievements to date. Together, we have truly set the standard for delivering 'Procurement with Purpose' and creating social value you can see. We look forward to seeing what the future holds for us.

2023 - 2024 headlines

£1m

Cost-of-Living Hardship Fund launched benefiting **70** Fusion21 members and their communities



£339,330

fuel vouchers distributed to **1,568** households



2,105

meals were redistributed to **840** people



17

community researchers recruited and trained



16

furnished tenancies created



23

organisations received social investment



9

adults' mental wellbeing improved



445

young people's mental health improved



250

young people's physical health improved



232

young people reported improved understanding of their emotions



243

young people reported improved confidence




101


VCSE organisation received capacity building support with **47** of them also receiving core cost funding




31 housing associations have engaged in the Age Friendly in Social Housing programme with **146** organisations participating in local working groups and **19** community events held with **1236** older people engaged 

1 online training platform developed to support women who have experienced domestic abuse 

30 young people and **17** adults completed skills sessions around healthy relationships 

27 people completed family coaching or counselling programmes 


86 people supported on financial resilience projects 


12 adults reported their confidence has increased and they are feeling less depressed and anxious 


1 research project launched to integrate housing and health data to better support people 

422 people participated in employability programmes 

63 young people started a job or apprenticeship 

57 adults started a job 

76 adults started training 

172 families supplied with essential items for children and babies, supporting **259** children under 5 yrs 



1.

Achievements and performance

It's been a record-breaking year for the Foundation in terms of spend and impact, with £1,431,671 of grants distributed and £1,228,571 in social investments.

Grants programme

We spent £727,851 through our mainstream grants programme, covering our priority areas as follows:



6%

Employment and Skills



36%

Health and Wellbeing



58%

Financial Inclusion and Resilience

The geographical spread of our mainstream grants provision looks like this:

UK-wide	2%
England-wide	63%
North West England	14%
London	10%
South East England	2%
South	>1%
West Midlands	6%
South West England	3%

Additional grant investment

In addition, the Fusion21 Ltd board, in recognition of the severe and enduring impact of the cost-of-living crisis, donated an additional £1m to create the 'Cost of Living Hardship Fund'. £703,820 of that fund was spent in grants this year to create England-wide impact under our 'financial inclusion and resilience' priority, with the remainder committed for 2024-25.

Best practice

Driving best practice as a funder is really important to us. So, we were delighted to be welcomed into Institute For Voluntary Action Research's (IVAR) community of open, trusting and flexible funders in February. IVAR and London Funders, in collaboration with a small group of UK foundations and charities, are calling for funders to sign up to eight commitments for open and trusting grant-making. We're one of over 100 funders who have already signed up and joined a community of funders and charities working to improve together.



2.

Employment and skills

Health and social care

This was the final year of our three-year partnership with The Prince's Trust to support young people to enter employment in the health and social care sector. Our £150,000 funding over three years has helped The Prince's Trust to access match funding of £450,000 from the public sector. Our financial support has meant 600 young people have been engaged in the Health and Social Care programme with over 180 young people starting a job in the sector.

In 2023-24:



200

young people participated in the programme, with 63 starting a job/apprenticeship



48

jobs and apprenticeships were sustained

These figures are set to increase over time, as it can take up to a year from the young person engaging with the programme to sustaining a job outcome, due to the complexities of recruitment and onboarding in the sector.

In the whole programme so far, 47% of participants have identified themselves as from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and 24% live in areas with the highest levels of deprivation (IMD1 postcodes).

Community based provision

The Fusion21 Foundation is delighted to have co-funded a new employability and finance initiative called the Future Focus Project, on behalf of Fusion21 member Torus. Torus wanted to develop a programme which was responsive to the needs of its community in South Liverpool, and so it was specifically designed to support those where English is not their first language.

Aiming to improve the financial situation of those living in the area, the programme is helping people to build their skills and find work, improve their health and wellbeing, and get access to money advice. **The impact so far has been fantastic:**



222

participants have received support and advice from the programme, with 165 of those people from black and racially minoritised communities



57

people started a job



76

people started training



3.

Health and wellbeing

Young people

Our £145,000, three-year commitment to New Horizon Youth Centre (NHYC) continues to be impactful, helping 16–24 year olds across London who are experiencing homelessness to access to wide-ranging health support. The number of young people accessing NHYC who were sleeping rough, has increased from a third to 50%. This is in part due to Home Office changes to the notice period for newly recognised refugees to be evicted from National Asylum Support Service (NASS) hotels, brought into force in August 2023, and the decision to fast track asylum decisions through the Streamlined Asylum Process (SAP).



The young refugees NHYC support are more likely to have been homeless for over a month. The longer someone spends on the streets, the more likely they are to have multiple, and complex needs due to trauma. Of the refugees NHYC supported in 2023-24, 30% declared a mental health need and 15% a physical health need, requiring the Health Team to adapt their work, such as using translation services, to better support all young people in need.

The Health Team has had a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of hundreds of young people supported by New Horizon.



The Clinical Lead has successfully embedded trauma informed practice across the organisation to help young people work through and heal the impact of traumatic life experiences, which in turn supports them to develop the skills they need to build and sustain positive changes in their lives.

The resident nurse supported young people to improve their physical health through interventions such as minor wound treatments for young people who have been sleeping on the streets, contraception and referrals into NHS services. The Clinical Practitioner (Health Services Manager) has supported young people with their general health needs, for example attending appointments for health assessments and visiting young people who have been admitted into hospital to ensure they continue to feel supported by New Horizon throughout.

The creation of a centralised Health Team which is equipped with the capacity and resources to foster trust and psychological safety among young people navigating the healthcare system has made a significant difference. This approach has enabled NHYC to address the often disjointed nature of existing processes, providing young people with support throughout, free from judgment.

The Clinical Lead has laid strong foundations with local services who can offer interventions that NHYC cannot provide. Having a dedicated person to focus on partnership working has been hugely beneficial in bridging the gap between voluntary and statutory services. In addition, advocacy work across the Health Team has been vital in helping the young people they work with to understand their healthcare rights. As part of this, a significant piece of work has been to support young people to improve their communication skills, so they have the tools available to voice their health needs and navigate the system effectively.

Older people

Our partnership with HACT, the National Lottery Community Fund, Clarion Futures and South Yorkshire Housing – the ‘Age Friendly’ Social Housing Programme – continued this year. The programme aims to improve outcomes for older people in communities, including social isolation and loneliness. 31 housing associations have engaged in the programme and 146 organisations have participated in local working groups. The second year of the programme has continued to focus and develop on the work in Bradford; Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP); and Southwark.

As part of the programme, the Make it Happen micro grant has helped unlock new conversations with local residents and galvanize energy around a wide range of social connection activities. £4500 of grants have been allocated to each area. The provision of micro-grants has encouraged staff teams in the pilot areas to have new conversations with residents about what they like to do or would like to try. So far, nine micro grants have been allocated with an estimated 115 individuals have benefitted from the funded projects.

The programme has also seen the powerful impact of in person gatherings, for both residents and partners locally and how this goes a long way to building important bonds and trust that strengthen feelings of community.



19

community events
have taken place



1236

older people engaged in these
events and wider outreach activity
across the local pilot area

In addition to the coordinators’ activity across the three pilot areas, they were able to secure additional funds for a Financial Resilience Officer, funded by Independent Age, to further support older residents in Southwark. **This additional resource has:**



engaged

286

people



and provided

68

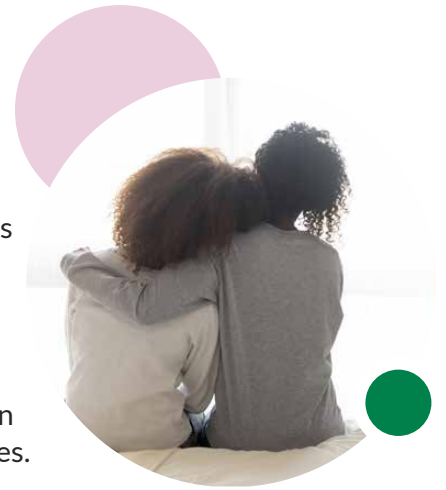
people with 121 support

In all three pilot areas, residents’ voices have informed and guided the work. Their insights have been shared with the wider sector to help show what how diverse the older resident population is and what they feel will help them to age well in their local communities and society at large. [As a team and a partnership, the programme has reflected on the wider learning and developed an overview of the systems and practice learning that has emerged from this pilot.](#)



Healthy relationships

Through our member Magenta Living, we were introduced to Tomorrow's Women, a charity for women, run by women, offering support with a range of issues including domestic abuse, mental health, substance misuse, wellbeing & confidence, and social isolation. Magenta had identified a rise in domestic abuse across their communities and were keen for Fusion21 Foundation to support the organisation as they work in partnership with them, and it meets their community investment priorities.



Tomorrow's Women wanted to create an online platform to house a six-week holistic and creative intervention that can help individuals affected by domestic abuse feel better supported, have greater understanding, feel less alone and more empowered. This programme will enable them to offer their support to women further afield and who may not be able to come and access on site services, to ensure domestic abuse support and awareness is available to all. The platform is currently under development, and we look forward to its launch in 2024.

In addition, we are supporting Southern Housing Group's charity, Fresh Visions, with their pilot project 'Respect' – a test bed for domestic abuse prevention in social housing. This specialist area of work is exploring how best to support, educate and build skills that prevent domestic violence and abuse cycles.

The project is working with families and young people in Sussex and London. It is testing and developing preventative educational work alongside more in-depth one to one support over 12 months. The project works with targeted 'at risk' households, parents, young people and includes whole family support, linking to community partners such as Police, local NHS health and social services.

Key themes of the work include promoting healthy relationships, managing mental wellbeing and anger in young people, adult behaviour patterns and identifying 'reg flag' behaviour. The Respect project will develop best practice and produce a practical prevention 'toolkit' for wider use within the social housing sector.

So far:



30

young people and 17 adults have completed skills sessions



27

completed family coaching or counselling programmes



9

adults have said their mental wellbeing has improved




12

reported their confidence has increased and they are feeling less depressed and anxious



37

young people reported that their confidence has increased



“Housing associations have a key role in reaching groups facing some of the biggest health inequalities and providing preventative support services to people in their homes. When we get this right, we see tenants maximise their independence and reduce demand on the health service. This exciting collaboration will help us do more of this, pre-empting when customers need changes made to their home and ensuring resources are targeted where they make the most impact, prioritising property interventions around preventative health management. “

- John Ghader,
Chief Executive of Prima Group

Health data

Prima Group has embarked on an exciting project that could significantly enhance the quality of healthcare and support services available to their tenants. A collaboration with Prima Group and Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, supported by our Foundation, has launched a project seeking to transform how Prima support customers by leveraging the power of data integration.

At its core, this project aims to securely integrate social housing data, encompassing living conditions, accessibility, and locality, into NHS health records. By doing so, they can identify patterns linking social housing conditions to various health outcomes. This integration will not only facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of tenants' health needs but also enable them to offer proactive support services tailored to individual circumstances.

The rationale behind this initiative is clear: the health of individuals is intricately linked to their living conditions. By proactively addressing potential health risks and concerns, we can create a healthier and more supportive community for all tenants. Examples of where data sharing can help could include, alerting social landlords when minor adaptations are needed for frail residents or where respiratory conditions may mean prioritising tenants' homes for energy efficiency upgrades to reduce the risk of damp and mould.



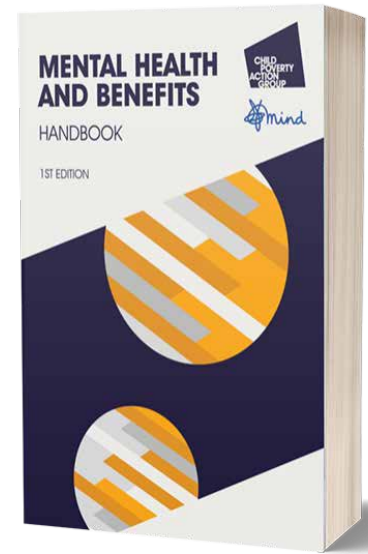
4.

Financial inclusion and resilience

Welfare rights

In 2022/23, we worked with the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) to co-fund a free online resource with The Riverside Group and the Northwick Trust. CPAG collaborated with mental health charity Mind to produce the which provides practical advice and guidance for the different stages of benefit claims and health assessments and the problems that might be encountered during the process.

Since its launch in February 2023 the handbook has been viewed over 57,000 times and is used often by organisations such as; Citizens Advice branches, charities, law centres, housing associations, local authorities and NHS staff.

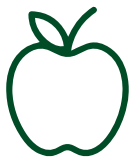


Food insecurity

We funded FareShare Midlands to expand their Community Meals Service pilot into the West Midlands. FareShare Midlands are the region's largest food redistribution charity, sourcing good quality food that's surplus to requirements from 360 food industry partners to redistribute to over 550 frontline charities and community groups.

The project was based in a commercial kitchen in Nottingham, where two chefs and a team of 25 volunteers create healthy, nutritious and delicious meals using surplus food. Meals were distributed to local charities, including social eating spaces and community cafes, to help feed people experiencing food insecurity, financial hardship and social isolation.

A total of:



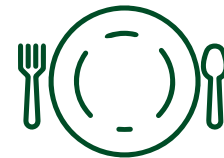
2,105

meals were redistributed in Birmingham city, made from 736KG of difficult-to-use surplus



17

local charitable partners benefitted from the service



840

people were supported with hot, nutritious meals

Healthy eating

We have continued to work with the Food Foundation this year to look at the impact that financial insecurity has on nutrition, particularly on children. The cost-of-living crisis, with food prices remain at their highest levels for decades, is impacting on dietary quality, especially for lower income families with just under half of households experiencing food insecurity reportedly buying less fruit and vegetables, dairy and oily fish.

As a response to the crisis, The Food Foundation launched the Kids Food Guarantee (KFG) a set of actions which they think retailers (and manufacturers) should have in place as a minimum to support low income families to access and afford healthy staples. This includes the following areas: multibuy and price promotion deals, fruit and vegetables, staple carbohydrates, first infant formula, children's lunchboxes, and cereals, and the Healthy Start scheme.



As part of the work, the Food Foundation launched the [Kids Food Guarantee Dashboard](#) on their website to publish the tracking of retailer progress. Their findings over the period were shared with Food Standards Agency, Food Standards Scotland, Defra and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and their work on particular areas (eg. [children's packed lunches](#)) received a range of press coverage.

There have been several successes in terms of retailer's commitments, demonstrating that the data is a powerful tool for holding retailers to account and driving action:

- ✓ Iceland: reduced the price of formula
- ✓ Morrisons: introducing a children's packed lunch meal deal
- ✓ Co-op: moving to ensure all their formula is priced consistently regardless of online/offline or geographical location.
- ✓ Co-op and Morrisons: planning store promotion and signage to promote Healthy Start

The Food Foundation will be releasing a briefing in May 2024 to summarise their findings, looking at retailer progress and performance.

Fuel poverty

Last year, Clarion launched a responsive retrofit pilot project in a co-ordinated response to the challenges their residents are facing with fuel poverty. They are clear that to have meaningful impact on fuel poverty they need to simultaneously tackle the underlying issues that cause it: stock condition, poverty, and behaviour.

Through their Responsive Retrofit pilot, Clarion made outbound calls to:



354

households in the Midlands who are at risk of fuel poverty due to living energy inefficient properties



85%

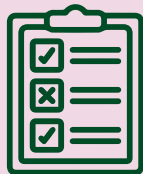
of those who they made contact with engaged in basic guidance



99

households took up the offer of an in-home assessment

By the end of 2023/24:



46

assessments completed



276

energy efficiency measures installed

Our funding has supported National Energy Action (NEA) to independently evaluate the project in order to influence the longer-term implementation of Clarion's Fuel Poverty Strategy. We look forward to receiving the final report in 2024.

Furniture poverty



Curo, a housing association based in Bath, were keen to test the idea of furnished tenancy provision with their tenants through a 12-month pilot in Bath and North East Somerset. We match funded the project, following a successful application by Curo to a local charitable foundation. The pilot offered furnished tenancies to new customers in one- or two-bedroom properties, targeting single people and care leavers moving into general needs from temporary accommodation or homelessness.

In total, **16** furnished tenancies were set up, with all of the tenancies sustained and no tenant falling into rent arrears. Six customers completed an evaluation – the overall satisfaction rate was 4.5 out of 5 and all of them reported feeling safer and settled in their environment due to the additional provision.

Appliance poverty

The report we co-funded with the Association of Charitable Organisations (ACO) was launched in June. [‘More than making do: understanding the economic impact of essential household appliances’](#) highlighted the scale of appliance poverty while shining a spotlight on the UK’s network of benevolent charities which provide vital funds to help plug the gap in support for those unable to gain access to local authority support.

The report, which included analysis from Pro Bono Economics, had considerable media coverage, including The Times and ITV. It was shortlisted for the ‘Best Collaboration’ award at the ACO conference and received a special commendation from the judges.



“We’re proud to be connected with this report. It reflects a strong collaboration between a group of organisations that play an active role in supporting individuals and families in financial crisis. The end product is a set of tangible findings that will contribute not just to how charities effectively measure the impact of their activities, but also make an important broader contribution to the debate around how we work to reduce the prevalence of appliance poverty in the UK. “

- Donal Watkin,
Chief Executive of the Association
of Charitable Organisations



Children and babies

The Hackney Family Centre was launched last year to provide a 'Baby Bank' facility next to a Guinness housing estate. In partnership with The Guinness Partnership, it is a collaboration of three charities: Little Village which runs a network of baby banks across London; Boiler House Spaces which manages community spaces in Hackney; and Sal's Shoes, which provides good quality second-hand shoes and other essentials to those who need them.

This year, the centre supported:



172

families, including
259 children under five

Young people

The 'Hometruths House' pilot with Clarion Housing Group supported 206 young people this year. The early intervention project supports new young tenants to effectively navigate and sustain their first tenancy, reducing rent arrears and eviction rates amongst 18–30 year old residents. The project will deliver a virtual training session and an interactive website, alongside additional follow-up support and advice available for those who need it.

The programme covers topics including rights and responsibilities, setting up bills and managing money, getting involved in community activities, damp and mould prevention, cooking on a budget and simple DIY. Broadband access is provided through a three month MiFi subscription to ensure digital exclusion does not affect participation. Upon completion of the programme, young residents receive a £70 supermarket voucher to get them off to a flying start. Since July 2023, Clarion have introduced free bi-monthly cook-along sessions with their partner Cracking Good Food to enable young people to learn to cook nutritious, delicious, yet affordable meals.



206

participants reported improved
mental health, confidence and
control of their lives



Financial resilience in communities

We have collaborated with Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) on two projects to support their priority of financial resilience in communities.

Firstly, we co-funded RBKC to work in partnership with St Giles Trust to create a food pantry in RBKC's Kensal Resource Centre (KRC). The holistic community support 'hub' was launched in March and includes food poverty support, financial inclusion support and advice, digital inclusion and digital skills training, and other educational services – such as cooking classes.

Secondly, we are supporting RBKC to improve financial resilience in the Lancaster West estate. The Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team (LWNT) was formally established in April 2018, in response to the Grenfell Tower Tragedy. The LWNT wanted to work with local service providers to research and create pathways for residents to improve financial resilience by reducing debt, rent arrears, additional financial pressure whilst simultaneously increasing education and independence, ultimately preventing the risk of homelessness.

As such, we have co-funded an extended pilot within LWNT, to inform their longer-term approach, building a new model of integrated, holistic local housing services, informing process, systems and outputs that could support residents to reduce financial instability and prevent homelessness.

Although in its early stages, the project has had:



19

residents referred onto the project



13

of those residents being supported



2

residents have been helped with decreased rent arrears / lower debts



11

residents provided with support with households' costs/savings (eg. grant applications, energy bills, changing providers)

Money mentoring

In partnership with Southern Housing, we co-funded a new Money and Wellbeing Project in London, trialling a holistic combination of money mentoring and health and wellbeing interventions to improve the financial resilience and general health of social housing tenants.

This will in turn reduce residents' chances of falling into an acute financial crisis and avoid them having to rely on emergency financial inclusion and hardship support from their landlord and/or other agencies. The purpose of the project will be to effect long term and sustainable change and reduce participant reliance on short-term emergency support.

A Money Mentor and Wellbeing Coach are working together to build resilience among residents to increase the chances of them dealing more effectively with financial crises. The project offers 1-2-1 and group activities to cover a wide range of topics based on money and wellbeing. Volunteers within the community will be recruited and trained as Mental Health First Aiders and Money Champions, so they can cascade what they have learned to others who may not directly access the service provided.

So far:



67

people have been supported on the programme



14

group sessions run

Evaluation of cost-of-living interventions

Sovereign created a £1.5m per annum Customer Support Fund (CSF) programme in 2022 running over two years until Spring 2024. The CSF comprises a range of programmes and interventions that will improve the financial wellbeing of Sovereign residents. It was developed in response to the cost-of-living crisis and the disproportionate effect it was having on vulnerable residents. The CSF is made up of a range of both new and existing interventions and services, split into crisis or proactive support.

The Foundation has supported Sovereign to comprehensively evaluate the impact of the cost of living interventions from the CSF. It will be carried out by a reputable external organisation who specialise in financial inclusion and tenancy support initiatives, along with evaluating programmes that tackle poverty and help people to sustain tenancies. The evaluation report is due in early 2025.



5.

Cost of living hardship fund



This year, the Foundation dedicated £1 million to a Cost-of-Living Hardship Fund, benefiting 70 Fusion21 members and their communities so far in 2023-24, with investment set to continue into 2024-25.

Our housing association members tell us that the cost-of-living challenges in communities will continue to have a considerable impact for years to come. The resilience of individuals, communities, and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector is low with austerity, the pandemic, inflation, and changes to the funding landscape having had a deep impact.

Our members also tell us that their support services (particularly financial inclusion services) are seeing a significant increase in demand. New customers, many of whom are in employment, are tipping into poverty and needing additional support (for example, food banks) for the first time due to in-work poverty.

Based on feedback from our members and wider research, our response has been twofold to directly impact the challenges facing our members in their communities. We have worked with partners to assist individuals needing financial support as well as VCSE organisations within their communities that needed strategy support.

VCSE Sector Resilience Programme

We teamed up with Clarion Futures and Places for People to co-fund a new programme providing strategy support and core cost grants to VCSE organisations in communities across England.

This programme supports community based VCSE services through targeted funding and capacity building. These services are key partners to housing associations as they provide vital support to individuals and families in their local neighbourhoods – from financial advice to sports activities, mental health and wellbeing and youth services and skills development. The programme also delivers strategic business advice so that the VCSE organisations are equipped to face current and future challenges, ensuring viability for the longer term.

We initially pledged £500,000 and have made another £300,000 available to help fund an extension to the project.

To date, 101 VCSE organisations have been referred for specialist charity consultant support on income generation, business and strategic planning, and governance. 47 of those organisations have also received funding to support their core costs.



100+

Partners

Geography:

- South East - 20%
- Greater London - 20%
- North West - 18%
- East - 16%



269

Days

Primarily focused on:

- Business planning
- Governance
- Fundraising



47

Core grants

Circa £500k core cost grants awarded for continued capacity building and resilience

The programme is undergoing an external evaluation by Rocket Science. Interim findings show the programme has positively impacted governance structures, leadership, networking, and the efficiency of the organisations. Participation has led to empowerment and confidence in organisations, and there are early examples of significant wins from other funders, meaning that capacity building support has contributed to making them more attractive to funders.

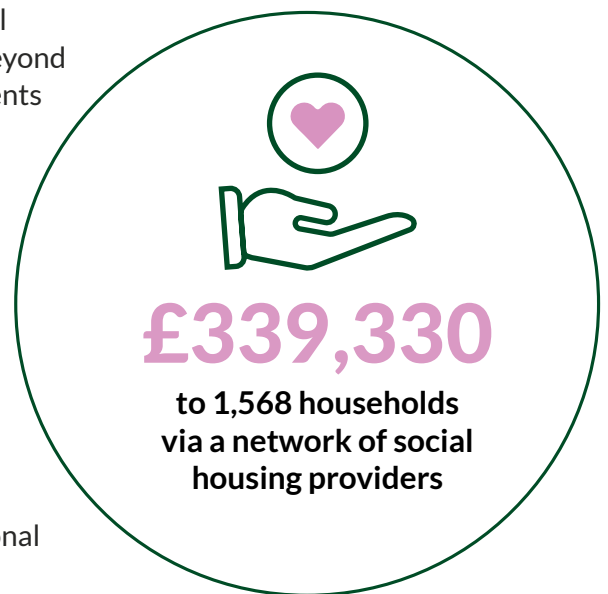


HACT 2023 Fuel Fund

We co-funded the HACT 2023 Fuel Fund, a new wave of fuel vouchers providing social housing residents with support beyond the cold winters. We provided £200,000 to a fund for residents of Housing Associations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which allowed housing associations to access fuel vouchers for residents who are struggling to pay their energy bills currently.

Over a six week period between May and June 2023 the fund distributed over £339,330 to 1,568 households via a network of social housing providers. The average value of support received by household was just over £216.

The scheme was so successful that we committed an additional £300,000 from our mainstream budget this year to support a new Fuel Fund that will launch in April 2024.





6.

Community voices

Tenants' voices

We were sad to be informed that the TAROE Trust had to take the tough decision to close the charity in December. A combination of factors, including the unfavourable operating conditions which many VCSE organisations are currently facing, led to this decision.

Fusion21 Foundation remains committed to supporting the fantastic legacy of the TAROE Trust. In the spirit of this, we are working with representatives across the housing sector through their steering group 'A Voice for Tenants' and have agreed to co-fund research into how tenants can have greater influence on national policymaking and how this could be funded over the long term.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

The need for social housing providers to truly understand who their tenants are has never been more important, with the Social Housing Act 2023 adding emphasis to this. Understanding the needs, challenges and issues faced by tenants means that landlords can deliver services that address those needs and improve their quality of life as well as playing a significant positive role in their communities.

With this in mind, we co-funded a detailed ABCD mapping exercise with ForHousing, specifically focussing on their local communities within Salford, Oldham and Knowsley. The project supported ForHousing to understand who their tenants are, the communities they live in and how best to work alongside communities and tenants.

Key outputs included a detailed report of the findings ('What Matters to Us') and an asset map for each area that reflected what tenants said meant most to them in terms of both the strengths and assets but also the issues that generated the most passion. These outputs were shared with project steering groups, Community Voice groups and ForHousing's Customer Committee for their feedback, which was incorporated into a final report.

"We are really excited about the 'understanding our communities' research. By using asset based approaches we have engaged with people who we don't normally hear from, and are now working towards developing new relationships and co-producing solutions that we wouldn't have ever thought of on our own. Thank you to the Fusion21 Foundation for supporting us to kickstart this essential piece of work. "

- Toria Buzza,
Head of Communities and Tenant
Involvement at ForHousing



Community researchers

We have funded Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) to develop a bank of community researchers. They have co-created a comprehensive course and have recruited and trained 17 researchers from the community. This work will help the infrastructure organisation to achieve their aim of developing a 'Community Research Hub' in Birmingham, alongside the longer-term ambition for BVSC to develop a wider training offer to the sector.



The co-creation of accredited training provides a range of exciting opportunities for people from communities across Birmingham to develop skills and expertise in community research, opening new opportunities for employment in the future as paid freelance community researchers. A wider accredited training offer will provide opportunities for skills development in a range of topics for the VCFSE workforce. This will make affordable training opportunities available to small-grass roots organisations, and will also target organisations led by, and supporting, people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and other marginalised communities.

The trainees will be mentored through their fieldwork and will be creating two research report on two topics:

1. Children and families' services, parental support and links into education and information.
2. Growing old in the West Midlands. What are people's experiences so far? What ideas do they have to make the city a better place to grow old?

Community Researchers are often ideally placed to explore issues that are happening in their local communities, and many of the projects involving community researchers are focused on broad issues of health and wellbeing. BVSC's links with Public Health, the Local Authority and wider health partners means that they are extremely well placed to facilitate activity in this area; building capacity within communities, to elevate their collective voice, and be active partners in addressing challenges.



7.

Partnering as a thought leader

Homes UK 2023

The Foundation hosted a panel at Homes UK 2023 to discuss 'Supporting tenants through the cost-of-living crisis'. We were delighted to be joined on stage by our partners from SNG, Peabody and HACT. The session was well attended, with the audience enjoying an informative, if stark, reflection on the impact of the crisis in communities and efforts of the housing sector to mitigate this.



Centre of Excellence in Community Investment (CECI) Conference

As joint funder of the Centre, we were delighted to be a sponsor of HACT's CECI conference in Birmingham in September. This was the Centre's first 'in person' event for some time and was warmly embraced by the participants in terms of attendance and enthusiasm.

Community investment experts from across the country came together to discuss 'Working in place: the opportunities, challenges and future of delivering excellence in community investment'. As part of the conference, action-based workshops were held around six topics to think how innovative collaboration can birth new impactful solutions. Topics included food insecurity, being an effective partner for Black and Minority Ethnic led community organisations; social action in intergenerational activities; collaboration in community centres; health inequalities; digital inclusion.





8.

Social investment

Recovery Loan Fund (RLF)

As a Founding Investor, we are delighted to report that since its inception in December 2023, 47 loans have been approved by Social Investment Business for the Recovery Loan Fund. By March 2024, grants had been approved to 14 Black and minority ethnicity led customers (alongside RLF loans) comprising £1.3m in unrestricted grants and a further £57,000 (to seven of the customers) of restricted grants, under the Flexible Finance programme. The proportion of Black and minoritised ethnicity led organisations funded by Recovery Loan Fund is 29% compared to just 4% for its predecessor fund (Resilience and Recovery Loan Fund), significantly above the 14% that was targeted.



47

loans have been approved by Social Investment Business for the Recovery Loan Fund



29%

The proportion of Black and minoritised ethnicity led organisations funded by Recovery Loan Fund

The fund is reaching a diverse range of organisations working with beneficiaries including people living in poverty or are financially excluded, those experiencing long term unemployment, vulnerable young people and children, and people with long-term health conditions. Many of these groups have been the hardest hit in society by the pandemic and cost of living crisis. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) based on delivery areas of the investees has an average of 3.34 with c. 66% of investments in the 30% most deprived geographies. The Index of Multiple Deprivation ranges from 1 being the 10% most deprived areas to 10 being the 10% least deprived areas in England.

Of the 23 organisations funded from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024:

More than



50%

of organisations plan to use the investment to grow through existing products and services, and 22% plan to use it to cover a shortfall in cash



39%

plan to use proceeds to support ongoing operating expenses

As the first phase of the RLF closed, a second funding round was launched. This secured a further £6.5m external capital including £2.5m from new funders Ceniarth and Clothworkers to enable the RLF to continue to support charities and social enterprises that are improving people's lives or the environment they live in.



9.

Ambitions for the future

We have been delighted by the trajectory the Foundation has taken in recent years, not just in terms of level of spend but also in the way it's responded swiftly to the various unprecedented national and global challenges that have come our way. These crises help inform our thinking and our future approaches. We want to be known as the funder of choice. One that is flexible, responsive and helps shape positive connections, ideas and networks as well as funds.

Being recognised as an IVAR 'Flexible Funder' this year is just the start. We are on a journey of continuous improvement and look forward to another year of connecting with other Foundations to share experiences and drive best practice.


The partnerships we created through our targeted Cost of Living Hardship Fund this year were significant, particularly in terms of the strong collaboration through the VCSE Sector Resilience Programme. As early indications from the external evaluation have been so positive, we will extend the programme into 2024/25 and hope to explore future funding opportunities with other partners to support its longer-term future. We will certainly be using the learning from this programme to form more strategic impactful investments for the future. We are particularly keen to understand more about the infrastructure of the VCSE sector across the country, and how we can best support this important work, which significantly contributes to the objectives of two of our key members; social housing providers and local government.

In addition, we want to continue to focus some investment on 'Tenant Voice' activities, to support the legacy of TAROE Trust's excellent work. We will use the research we have co-funded this year to plan our next steps in this area.

Our three funding priorities; health & wellbeing; employment & skills; financial inclusion & resilience, are now firmly established. It is becoming increasingly clear that we need to consider what role 'climate' could play in our investment portfolio. We will focus on this in 2024/25, to map the funding landscape in this area and shape our thinking so we understand what added value we can bring to this space in terms of grant provision and social investment.

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