



Newsletter Spring 2024



We have some great opportunities at the moment but like most charities are also facing challenges. We live in difficult times with more people in need and fewer resources available, the Charity Excellence Framework website predicts that the cost of living crisis has been both longer and deeper than Covid and the public sector funding cut risk they highlighted last year has now materialised. Cuts to public funding for charities are estimated at £1bn per annum.

With this in mind, at The Mustard Tree, we have made significant actions to reduce the running cost of the charity.

- An office move from London Street to Sackville Street which will provide a significant saving in rent and utilities of £15,300 per annum. However there have been costs involved in the move so the benefits will not be realised until the longer term.
- We have consolidated our operations. In 2023, the decision was made that the MTF would focus solely on Reading. During Covid we had piloted projects in Milton Keynes and Swindon. Working with local partners we handed over these projects so that the young people continued to be cared for.
- We have clarified our referral criteria to ensure we are taking that we are providing the most appropriate levels of support and having the best impact for service beneficiaries.
- We have streamlined the management of our projects and where employees have left, we have taken the decision not to replace them with an identical recruited position. Our different project teams are working closer and sharing resources more than before. This has made a difference but is not currently enough.

All of these things are enabling us to provide a better service as well as to save costs. However, it has not been enough and we are facing a deficit. We are seeking funding and would value your prayers for wisdom and favour in this.

Despite these challenges, our work has continued supporting those who face disadvantage in Reading. In this newsletter, we have included details on Engage Befriending's new programme supporting people in the diverse communities around Reading, the Rahab team have welcomed new volunteers as have the A&E Navigators (part of Starting Point).



Message from Katherine cont'd

All of our three projects have issued their Impact Statements for 2023. You can download them from each of the project websites.

In July, we will be celebrating over 20 years of The Mustard Tree and will be sharing some highlights from our history with you in the summer edition of our newsletter.

In the meantime, if you (or anyone you know) would like to volunteer with us, please get in touch at info@themustardtree.org. There are lots of opportunities to join the team to make an impact in our local Reading communities. Including befriending, mentoring, being on an outreach team, communications, fundraising, supporting administration, being a trustee, or collecting supplies for Rahab.

You can also make a donation to our Lent appeal by visiting our website www.themustardtree.org and clicking on the donate button on the main menu.

Thank you

Katherine Shepherd
CEO – The Mustard Tree Foundation (Reading)

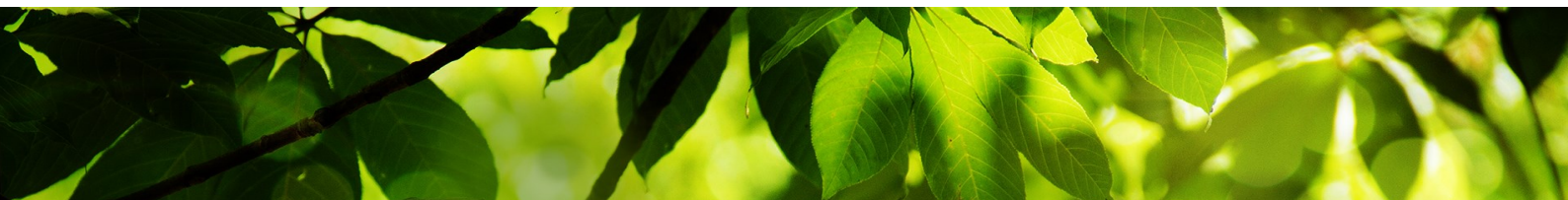
www.themustardtree.org

Starting Point

Starting Point Navigators has been gathering momentum as we have more volunteers and Team Leaders than ever before, which means more shifts in A&E – there are three weeks in April where we will be able to run five shifts a week as opposed to three!

The number of young people attending our drop-in sessions at the Hub is increasing further and we are looking into dividing this into groups to target more specific needs of those young people who attend. Under 16's will be more sociable for building confidence and making friends; 16-18's for young people at a transitional stage of their life, approaching exams and decision making towards next steps; and 18-25's for NEET young people working towards a job or training course.

As we countdown the days to The Reading Half Marathon on Sunday 14th April, we are grateful for the 20 runners who have signed up to run for Starting Point. You can join us on the day from 8:45am at our cheering point on Friar Street (between Sainsbury's and Greyfriars) to cheer them on as they pass, in their Starting Point running shirts.





Starting Point cont'd



Some of them have shared their giving pages with us too, so if you would like to sponsor them, you can do so by visiting www.startingpoint.org.uk/rgmarathon/

Starting Point are also proud to share – and celebrate - our 2023 Impact Report the full version of which can be found at www.startingpoint.org.uk/news/impact2023/.

Mentoring forms the basis of all Starting Point activities with young people in Reading. If you are interested in finding out more about how you can join us as a volunteer mentor, please get in touch for an informal initial conversation – we would love to hear from you. Visit our website for more information.

www.startingpoint.org

Engage Befriending

Engage Befriending continues to reach out to the diverse communities in Reading where there are 150 different languages spoken. At the beginning of the year, the team (partnering with Reading Community Learning Centre (RCLC)), were sharing the need for befriending with a group of women, 11 of whom then signed up to become befriending volunteers!



Isolation and loneliness is a common challenge throughout all communities and through working in partnership with other, similar, organisations, we can share experiences, training resources and ideas to bring people together. We will keep you posted on this programme.

We recently asked our volunteers to share their experience of Engage Befriending; Margaret (in the photo on the right along with Jackie Curtis) told us:

"I am a voluntary befriender for three organisations including Engage Befriending and find in general very worthwhile and rewarding.

"Most of my contacts are by telephone and although inevitably a few have 'fallen by the wayside' there are some who love to chat and we enjoy our weekly calls. In fact, I feel that some are my friends although I have never met them.



Engage Befriending cont'd

"However, it's good to meet people at the coffee mornings and I feel that face to face contact is very beneficial for everyone and helps to combat isolation and loneliness. It's sometimes hard to know who are the volunteers and who the 'befriendeds'"

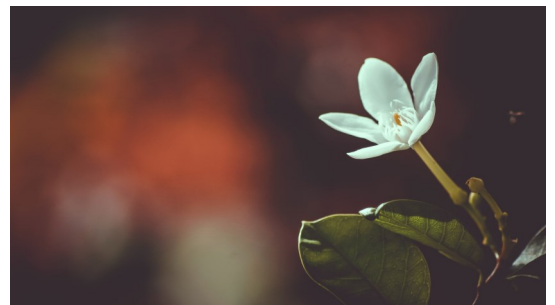
If you would like to know about volunteering as a befriender, please email engagebefriending@themustardtree.org , call us on 0118 995 2102 or visit our website.

www.engage-uk.org

Rahab

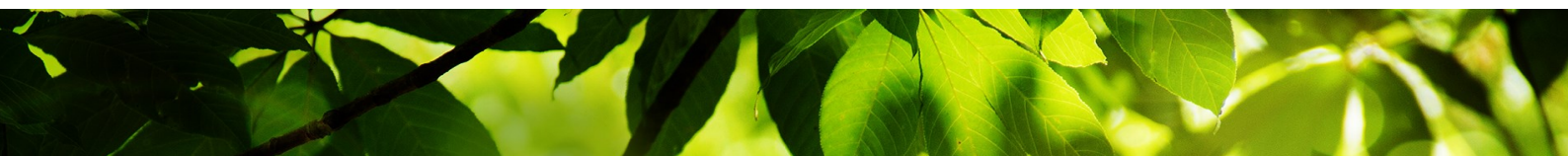
In the last three months, the Rahab team have welcomed two new volunteers and one volunteer has stood down. We remain grateful for all of the work the team do on the outreach evenings especially at this time of year when the weather is particularly cold. We have completed 33 outreach sessions on the year to date.

We continue to prayer with and for the women. J likes us to pray with her and she is hoping to go to a Christian rehab place soon but is waiting to hear. It takes a multi-agency approach for rehab places to be sourced and funded. If she is accepted to rehab, she will leave Reading and (if the rehab is successful) we will not see her again as she will be relocated in a new place so she can build a new life. This is hard for the team as we grow fond of the women but we know she will be where she needs to be to make positive life choices.



To keep up with our regular blog please click [here](#). We cover a different theme each time and the latest blog we shared a poem called 'You're a Bad Boy Mr White' written by one of the women about the impact of drug abuse. It was written a few years ago and we found that poem and others when archiving.

Our day-time outreach includes accompanying the women to appointments, most recently hospital appointments and we are grateful to organisations such as the Cowshed who provide much needed packages of clothes, towels and bedding.





Rahab cont'd

The team met to pray for the women at their first quarterly team meeting of the year. They also received an update on drug awareness which provided an update on the different trends in drug use. In February, John Davies hosted the 'Sexual Exploitation Awareness' course to new volunteers and members of the housing teams and Sex Worker Action Group (SWAG) and other from RBC with the aim of raising awareness of issues that surround exploitation.

www.rahab.co.uk

Central Services

We are putting the final tweaks to our Annual Report and Accounts ready for approval by our Trustees and for submission to the Charity Commission in July.

At the same time we will be celebrating 20 years of The Mustard Tree and would love to hear your stories and memories of our work through the years. Please send them to info@themustardtree.org

Central Services are key to our governance processes. Ensuring that The Mustard Tree is a charity which is governed well is an important factor in attracting funding, developing new projects and safeguards our reputation.

www.themustardtree.org

Providing feedback

We are always delighted to hear from our supporters and prayer partners. If you have something to share with us or would like prayer, then please do reach out to us. And as always, thank you for your support and prayers.



The Mustard Tree Foundation (Reading)

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