A Covid-19 Experience

A tribute to the sector and how we responded
Introduction from Foundation Director, Philippa Charles

This brief document is a tribute to the voluntary sector. The past 18 months have been extraordinary with the coronavirus pandemic impacting every area of our daily lives. However, one thing is clear – the voluntary sector’s response to the crisis has been inspiring. While vulnerable people were forced into greater isolation and need, the vital charities that support them have found innovative ways to remain connected against a backdrop of financial instability, furloughed staff, home working challenges and, at times, illness and the loss of loved ones.

Our Trustees and staff have worked incredibly hard to ensure that the Foundation was able to grant well over £100 million over the course of the pandemic during 2020 and 2021 (over £98 million in financial year to 5 April 2021). Thank you to all those who gave us feedback and encouraged us; I hope this overview of our response offers an insight into our approach to support a sector we admire greatly.

Foundation themes during Covid-19

- **Swift action** – within weeks of the first lockdown, we contacted all pending applicants to see if they needed to change their proposals in light of Covid-19. We adapted our processes to give flexibility to grantees wishing to change the use and/or timing of grants.

- **Accelerated decisions** – our Trustees held an unprecedented number of emergency Board meetings in response to funding requests from organisations supporting vulnerable people whose situations had become even more acute under lockdown.

- **Communication** – we conducted social media campaigns to reassure the sector that we were ‘open for business’. We responded to enquiries promptly, including 24-hour email coverage and relayed the outcome of applications via email to ensure a quicker response.

- **Phased and strategic funding** – we managed expenditure carefully to ensure the Foundation could support organisations needing immediate help as well as provide ongoing funding as the pandemic developed and society’s needs evolved. In addition to grants to frontline organisations, the Trustees made strategic grants to support the resilience of the voluntary sector, including Charity Bank and Social & Sustainable Capital.

- **Partnerships** – just as we witnessed an increase in collaboration across the voluntary sector, we too increased our partnership working. The Foundation donated funds at the earliest stage of the National Emergencies Trust and The Fore to help vulnerable communities and strengthened our capacity building programmes with Pilotlight, Jerwood Charitable Foundation and The Media Trust.

Thank you

As I write this, the pandemic is far from over and yet the voluntary sector continues to battle the most challenging of circumstances to ensure it is able to support our communities. All of us at the Foundation are thankful for the thousands of excellent organisations we have the privilege of working with and greatly appreciate the amazing work you do.
Two Trustee meetings, grants included Age UK, Buttle Trust, FareShare, SafeLives and Onside Youth Zones.

Board meeting, grants included DePaul, Place2Be, Sense, Cruse and St Mungo’s.

Trustee meeting, grants included Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, The Brilliant Club, Smart Works and Hubbub Foundation.

First emergency Trustee meeting, pre-launch grant of £1m to National Emergencies Trust distributed by Community Foundations to frontline organisations working with the most vulnerable.

12th – GWF office closes and staff switch to remote working.

7th year of Weston Charity Awards – 19 frontline charities from the North, Midlands and Wales announced as winners. Collectively the winners provide services to over 62,000 people a year.

Communications campaign to ensure charities and previous applicants know the Foundation is very much open for business and continuing to support core costs.

For young people it is a very difficult time and we are desperate to help, this grant will help us to do more, both now and as we come out of the lockdown.

Kathryn Morely, CEO, OnSide Youth Zones

As you know, there are so many heart-breaking stories of loss during the pandemic and our incredible volunteers are working hard to support as many people as possible when they need it most. The support of the Garfield Weston family means a huge amount to all of us at Cruse.

Steven Wibberley, CEO, Cruse

www.garfieldweston.org
Launched of Weston Communicating Climate partnership with Media Trust with a programme to help environment charities build capability in communications, messaging and profile-raising. Applications open.

Two Weston Culture Fund Trustee meetings £30.2m in 106 grants to cultural organisations across the UK. Grants range from £100,000 to £1.5m covering theatre, arts centres, visual arts, dance, music and touring organisations.

Trustee meeting, grants included British Heart Foundation, St John Ambulance and Bookmark Reading Charity.

Weston Culture Fund closes with 351 applications totalling £182m.

Trustee meeting, grants included Dorset County Museum, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Spring Housing Association.

Our thanks to the Trustees, not least for their instinctive understanding of what terrible fear women and children are experiencing at the moment, and for how fast they’ve acted to do something about it. These are really hard times, but being supported like this makes a huge, huge difference.

Suzanne Jacob, CEO, Safe Lives

5th – close financial year with record £99.6m in 2,131 grants across the UK.

Launch of Weston Culture Fund to support arts organisations to restart, recover and re-engage with audiences.

Launch of ‘Prioritising Our Planet’ report to understand the issues being faced by charities working across the environment sector. The report highlights that environmental organisations struggle to communicate the sheer scale and complexity of the climate crisis to the public and funders.

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Suzanne Jacob, CEO, Safe Lives

The whole SASC team is delighted and excited to report on the additional impact that this commitment will generate at this difficult time for vulnerable homeless people.

Ben Rick, CEO & Founder – Social & Sustainable Capital

Trustee meeting, grants included BEAT, Birdlife International, SafeLives and Welsh Refugee Council.

Trustee meeting, grants included green Match Fund at The Big Give and Prison Advice & Care Trust.

Trustee meeting, grants included British Heart Foundation, St John Ambulance and Bookmark Reading Charity.

Weston Communicating Climate programme starts with 30 successful charities selected from 81 applicants.