Annual Review 2020-21
Welcome to our latest review – looking back on a year of challenges, growth, learning, and flourishing. This report is a celebration of what we have achieved this year, an affirmation of why we do this work, and an invitation to you to be a part of it.

Throughout this review, you’ll find lots of references to our partners. We’re proud to be one of many organisations working to build and strengthen community relationships in Oxford and beyond. We rarely work alone – instead, we bring about change in collaboration with others, including local residents, university students, partner organisations, public sector partners and funders.

As an Oxford-based charity, we are deeply committed to Oxford and our vision of how it can be. We are proud to be part of a thriving movement for social change in Oxford. Come and join us in this vital and exciting work!

Sara Fernandez
Chief Executive Officer
Our Vision and Strategy

We believe in a better Oxford.

Oxford is a beautiful, diverse and dynamic city, a unique place where we’re proud to live and work. But it also has some of the highest levels of inequality and intergenerational disadvantage in the UK, and these have been exacerbated by social disconnection between individuals and communities.

Our approach to tackling entrenched inequalities is to work as part of an ecosystem of local organisations, all contributing different parts of the jigsaw. Our contribution focuses on enabling, building and nurturing relationships between people, communities and organisations.

We believe that meaningful relationships are key to a happier, healthier, more integrated and more equal society. When we have positive relationships with the people around us, who might be from different classes, backgrounds, or cultures to ourselves, we feel connected to our local communities, we create the possibility for positive change, and together we thrive.
**Oxford Hub** supports people to build relationships that enable them to thrive. We make time and space for relationships, **facilitating opportunities** for people to take action, and work together to drive change. Through our programmes, we:

- introduce people to their neighbours
- create opportunities for local people to help one another
- support people to set up their own community initiatives

At **Oxford Hub**, we are working towards three key, interconnected objectives to build an Oxford that is **better for everyone**:

**Thriving individuals**

We support individuals to thrive, working to improve people’s **mental** and **physical wellbeing**

**Community participation**

We enable everyone to **actively connect with their community** – this promotes people’s sense of **belonging** and supports **participation** in their community

**Systemic change**

Our work **tackles systemic inequality** to make Oxford a better place for everyone – providing **opportunities** for people to realise their own **power to make change** in their lives, their neighbourhoods, and our city.
Thriving Individuals

We all need social connection. Whether you need someone to help you with your grocery shop, a friend to support your child with homework, or just someone to chat to when you’re feeling low, we thrive as human beings when we build connections with the people around us.

Oxford Hub provides a range of social action programmes and community opportunities to spark and nurture relationships in an increasingly online, remote and disconnected world.

Where possible, it’s the individuals themselves who make this positive change happen, often in relationship with someone else. Oxford Hub plays a facilitating, rather than delivering, role.

We believe in relationships as the agent of change – find out more about how this is happening all across the city through spotlights on some of our amazing programmes.
Spotlight: Schools Plus

Oxford has some of the lowest rates of social mobility in the country, with 64% of pupils on free school meals failing to attain the expected standards in reading, writing and maths. That’s where Schools Plus comes in, matching local children with volunteer tutors. Through regular tutoring sessions, our tutor-tutee pairs work together to help children to achieve their full potential.

Over the past year, 145 children from 26 schools across Oxfordshire received tutoring support from a University of Oxford student or alum, or a qualified teacher. Together they tackled educational disadvantage by completing 2,200 tutoring sessions over the past year.

97% of tutees said that they enjoy their tutoring sessions

91% of tutees said that taking part has improved their academic attainment

[My daughters’ tutor] is a very punctual, hard working, energetic and most importantly kind tutor. She has been teaching my girls for the past 8 months [...] Her help brought a great difference in our life. My daughters were really shy and the most important thing is that she built up their confidence — Parent

My tutor is very helpful, positive and creative. I can always understand her and if I ever have questions, she tries to describe it in every possible way that I could get it. I am so glad she is my tutor! — Tutee

I think this programme is absolutely brilliant, and it has been such a rewarding experience for me. My tutee has really shone the past few months, despite the circumstances, and it has been a real pleasure tutoring her. It has also made me feel far more connected to the community, which I think can be difficult for students sometimes — Tutor
In March 2021 we marked a whole year of running Oxford Together, the city's community response to the pandemic. Since we started this work, we've processed over 13,000 requests for support, working with a network of 1,200 people who have taken time to connect with and support their neighbours.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have:

- listened to over 3,000 people and worked out a way forward together to meet their needs
- supported 8,717 phone calls between Oxford residents to build connection and friendship
- coordinated over 1,000 neighbours to help each other – including collecting 1,003 prescriptions
- matched 14 pairs of walking buddies

This would not have been possible without five key organisations that enabled Oxford Together to develop and offer support across the city: Arts at the Old Fire Station, Lankelly Chase, Oxford City Council, Oxford Code Lab and Oxfordshire Community Foundation.

Staff and volunteers at these organisations worked tirelessly to set things up from scratch, and mobilise resources to create the infrastructure and support systems needed to coordinate the incredible city-wide response.
Oxford Together is at the heart of what we are doing as an organisation — building relationships in communities that help us all to live our best lives. We believe that local support networks can have an incredibly positive impact on health, wellbeing, education and job prospects.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we are continuing to develop this work, moving from crisis response to longer-term community building. This is urgent and essential: we have seen widening inequalities across the City, but we have also seen what is possible when people come together and support each other. Our Together Neighbours programmes focus on building agency through local connections — supporting people to reconnect to their networks, get to know their neighbours better, and regain confidence to enjoy being out in their city again. We will continue to work to bring Oxford together in all that we do.

I was so relieved, I cannot tell you. That was the moment I felt somebody out there was actually listening to me, genuinely from their hearts. For the first time in a very long time, somebody was actually doing something to help me.

The heavens opened and I felt like, ‘Thank you, somebody’s coming to my rescue.’ The simple act of taking my dog out was magnified by these events — resident supported by Practical Taskers.

Part of what I hope will come from the pandemic is that people will live more in their communities and kind of give their time and their money to those places that they live in. I’ve seen parts of Oxford I would never have gone to otherwise. I think I’m learning a little bit more about other people’s lives in a way that I hadn’t expected.

It’s a period of such isolation, and yet I feel like I have a far better sense of how a lot of people in this country live. I’m not a very patient person, and I think this has made me a lot more patient and forgiving — Practical Tasker.
Community Participation

When people feel part of the community, they meet others and learn how to negotiate across differences, collaborate, and together achieve their goals. This kind of community involvement helps to increase democratic participation, which is fundamental to tackling inequality and creating systemic change. This kind of participation includes voting, but also means wider civic engagement – building the social fabric of the world around you.

We want everyone in Oxford to have a stake in society that goes beyond their own self-interest. You don’t need to have a child attending the local school in order to support its work, you don’t need to be in food poverty in order to help create more affordable local options. This kind of stake is created through community participation: people connect with each other, build empathy and a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood. Our work supports people to take a leadership role in their community, organise with others to make things happen, and build local networks of support.

The community spirit we encourage at the Hub has been very different from my background in case management. I’ve realised that community social work, community participation, is the backbone, it’s fundamental.

The day-to-day work really counts, we don’t need to be tackling a crisis to make a difference. I’ve learned not to underestimate how people’s participation in their community can create sustainable change — Social work placement student
Spotlight: Scholar Support

We work closely with the University of Oxford to support students to connect with communities across the city, step outside of the college ‘bubble’ and feel like they belong in the city. They bring their energy and enthusiasm to different communities and they tell us that this helps them feel connected with Oxford.

As part of this, we provide dedicated support to Crankstart and Lloyds Scholars at the University of Oxford. This is part of a programme supporting low-income students with financial and one-to-one support to make the most of the university experience. This year, over 200 Scholars were placed on our programmes and our other volunteering opportunities.

We also provided a bespoke volunteering support service. With exclusive events, personalised one-to-one support sessions and weekly newsletters outlining new opportunities, Scholars know they have someone to go to if they need volunteering support. With volunteering opportunities sometimes harder to find due to Covid lockdowns, one-to-one bespoke support has been more important than ever. Over the 2020-21 academic year, we supported Crankstart Scholars with 212 online one-to-one sessions, and 28 Scholar-exclusive events, which were attended by a total of 274 Scholars.

For me personally, Oxford Hub has been fantastic... Not only have they succeeded in adapting our volunteering projects to a cyberspace world but they have managed to do so in a way that’s accommodating to the stressed student and which also adds value to the CV as well as life itself. The sense of fulfilment that achieving social change and making a real impact brings is profound, and Oxford Hub is the perfect vessel to obtain it. — Yasmin Jackson, fourth-year Crankstart Scholar who has volunteered on our FELLOW programme and received volunteering support through Oxford Hub

I’ve spoken to real people in Oxford who aren’t connected to the Uni in ways I never could have otherwise; I think all students should do this and I’m so grateful for the help offered by the Hub to do this! — Crankstart Scholar

Student engagement is part of our roots as an organisation. We were set up by University of Oxford students 14 years ago, and we are proud to continue to enable them to participate across the city and its communities.
Spotlight: Active Reach

Sport and physical activity have plenty of benefits for people’s mental and physical health. They also provide opportunities to bring people together – and building communities of people moving together also supports them to stay active in the long term.

Over the past two years we have been working closely with Active Oxfordshire to get more people moving, and as we emerge from lockdown, this is something we are prioritising in order to support greater community participation.

Fitness sessions for families, cycling support and football skills for women are just some of the opportunities that have grown out of our community outreach and support. We focus on building local leadership as part of this work. The conversations we have opened up include the best way of making cycling inclusive for people wearing religious clothing, or the specific barriers facing a family with children of different ages doing the school run on their bikes. When promoting physical activity, we enable peer-to-peer support and bring people who have first-hand experience of things to encourage others to get moving.

Through our active programmes, we have:

- **distributed** 103 bikes to local families
- **run more than** 17 different weekly activities, from Walking Netball to Online Pilates, attended by a total of over 120 people a week
“It’s changed my health, my fitness, both physically and mentally. Just my outlook in life is totally different – I see it in a different way, totally. [...] I’m more positive, more open-minded about stuff. I’ve built a support network up as well. And now I’m growing, the more I deal with stuff I’m growing. Like I couldn’t use a laptop when I first took this role on, and now I’m typing with two hands. And I’m using Zoom! Just connecting with people better. Thinking more before I talk to someone. My family, my kids, my partner.”

“The funny thing about this role is I’m one of the people who they were helping, now the roles are reversed and I’m on the other side helping the people who I was. My mood has changed. I’m happier, because I’m passionate about helping people. My confidence has changed and grown.”

“It’s just been brilliant. I’ve found it’s benefited my mental health hugely. And I think it is that wonderful combination of having the exercise and then having a chat about mental health afterwards that does it. The exercise is a bit of an icebreaker. Because we’re all on camera kind of sweating and jumping around the room, it breaks down the barriers. If we just had a wellbeing session to chat each week, it wouldn’t do quite the same thing. The combination of exercise and wellbeing together go so well, and really allow people to open up about how they’re feeling.”

— quotes from Active Reach storytelling

Our approach focuses on nurturing local potential and building opportunities for community participation, and this work would not be possible without all the individuals willing to lead in their neighbourhood, community partners on the ground and larger third sector partners such as Active Oxfordshire who bring resources and support to make it happen!
Systemic Change

We work in partnership with local authorities, third sector partners and other agencies to bring more grassroots participation into services. This helps organisations to design services that directly respond to the needs of communities and challenge approaches that perpetuate inequality.

We do this because we believe that when people are at the heart of public services, they realise their own power and agency, which is essential to their ability to improve their own lives. This is more likely to be achieved when services are designed and delivered in partnership with residents and voluntary groups who are at the heart of communities.

This work is directly informed by the learning arising from our work supporting individuals to thrive and participate in communities. It also helps us to improve our delivery of activities, driving improvements to our programmes.
Spotlight: Starting Participatory Grant-Making

A key aspect of putting people in the lead is to give them control of the money that makes things happen. Across the world, participatory grant-making has been used to shift power from funders to communities, and we have been inspired to test this approach locally.

With support from Lankelly Chase and local residents in Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys, we have done the groundwork to launch a £40,000 fund. This will support local activities that tackle intergenerational disadvantage across the four wards most affected by poor social mobility.

By devolving power to residents and communities in this way, grant-making can be much more effective and informed. Residents will often know what their community needs and can listen to find out when they don’t quite know. They can get people the support that they need quickly and efficiently. We are looking forward to working with other local partners to shift power in funding decisions to communities. We will be sharing our learnings from the programme as it evolves.
Spotlight: Oxfordshire All In EDI Framework

Over the past year we have co-led the work of Oxfordshire All In, a network set up to facilitate a joined-up response to the covid-19 pandemic for people and communities in Oxfordshire, alongside KEEN and Active Oxfordshire, and supported by independent chair Helen Baker. This collaboration has harnessed the social energy generated across communities during the pandemic and worked to sustain this. In particular, we have supported local community groups to develop and run nine information sessions about key issues in the sector.

We are particularly interested in reaching more diverse communities by improving equity, diversity and inclusion in our work. We know that it is essential to make sure that our work, and the decision-making around it, includes, represents and supports equitable outcomes for a wide range of people, particularly those whose voices and experiences are heard less often.

We have launched an Equality Framework for Oxfordshire, with expert input from EDI professionals. This has been the result of a collaborative process, working with volunteers, staff and trustees from over 40 different charities across Oxfordshire. The objective is to make faster progress in equity, diversity and inclusion, by working collaboratively across the County.

The Framework is just a starting point to drive discussion, prioritisation and action within Oxfordshire’s organisations and community groups. To make this document more accessible we have also launched a companion website with resources and information.

edi.oxfordshireallin.org
Spotlight: Parent Peer Supporters

Many charities and organisations (Oxford Hub included!) work to improve outcomes for children and young people by offering youth clubs, mentoring or tutoring programmes. But all too often, we fail to work with the people who actually have the most power and skin in the game when it comes to breaking this cycle and improving outcomes for children. This is of course their parents!

When parents hit hard times, they are often supported by professionals such as teachers, social workers or health visitors. But what if those providing the support were actually their peers, other parents, who they can often better relate to? We believe that for parents, their peers – other parents like them – are the best people to support them to realise their aspirations and dreams for their children. Working in partnership with African Families in the UK, we have trained and employed a group of parent peer supporters.

This work is new and experimental. We will be learning from its delivery over the next year, and sharing our findings with local partners. We hope this can help build more opportunities for parent leadership and parent power across the wider children and family sector.

This is a role in which parents can learn new skills, grow their confidence and try new things. So far our parent peer supporters have been supporting families at the school food bank, accompanying other parents to meetings at school, building English language learning groups and helping families to access swimming lessons. Parent peer supporters also organise events and opportunities for people to connect, including a Netball Family Day to get families active and having fun together. One of the parent peer supporters also went on to coordinate one of our Fit, Fed and Read Summer Schools.
Thank Yous

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Be part of what we do!

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