

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2022-05-YC03	Bridges Project
Visit Date	Visited By
22 nd August 2022	Victoria Southwell
Overall aim of the funding	
To further develop an existing young carers service enabling an increase in capacity to support young carers and young adult carers to improve their education outcomes and continue in further education and training.	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>Bridges Project (BP) is a Scottish registered charity that was established in 1987 as part of Lothian Homes Trust. It was originally focused on homelessness and based in Edinburgh. BP employs 17 staff. A board of 9 Trustees meet four times a year and have a range of skills that includes finance, legal, journalism and communications, fundraising, brand and marketing, local authority, and HE education. Two Trustees have to be on the Lothian Homes Trust board. In between meetings a practice report from the CEO is circulated to Trustees. A Finance sub-committee (made up of 4 Trustees) meets monthly and other sub-committees are formed as required.</p> <p>A Strategic Plan is in place for 2022-27 setting out the vision and strategic aims for the organisation. This covers 9 themes that include beneficiaries, staff, funding, sustainability, Covid learning, students, volunteers and apprentices, young ambassadors, profile raising and organisational structure. Each theme is reviewed quarterly by the CEO. The strategy was developed with lots of consultation with staff and other stakeholders and discussed at board meetings over the course of nearly 12 months. The CEO and Chair also had lots of ongoing engagement about the development of the strategy.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>At the assessment I met with Emma Scarcliffe (CEO), Simen Holm (Fundraising and Communications Manager), Dr Karen Aitchison (Chair of Trustees) and Marie Prior (Coordinator of East Lothian's statutory Young Carers Service).</p> <p>Emma joined BP in 2012 as Practice Manager and became CEO in 2018. Her background is in addiction services, young offenders, mental health, and physical disability. She describes herself as an inclusive, transparent, and fair leader who is focused on staff wellbeing. She prioritises encouraging staff to be flexible and creative and bring their own unique skills to their role.</p> <p>Karen has been a Trustee for six years and has been Chair for four of those. She has a background in psychology and education.</p> <p>Simen has been with BP for two years and has a background in youth work and the third sector.</p>	
Aims and Activities	
Bridges Project aims to inspire young people to build a confident future, enabling them to reach their potential as individuals and participate fully in the life of their communities. They work across East and Mid Lothian. They seek to achieve their aims through providing a number of key services;	

Homemaker service – supporting young people aged 15-25 to develop independent living skills and maintain and sustain tenancies, Tutor service – supporting young people aged 13-21 with improving basic literacy and numeracy skills, Inclusion support service – for S3 and S4 students not engaging with mainstream school, Transitions support service – supporting young people aged 13-18 access accredited training and learning to increase employability and employment options (this includes a specific schools and a young carers project).

In 2021 BP provided one-to-one support to 228 young people and between 400-500 young people accessed their services to some degree.

Safeguarding

BP has a comprehensive safeguarding policy that is underpinned by a statement that is shared widely across the organisation. All staff receive mandatory training on safeguarding and vulnerable children which is renewed annually. The CEO is the Designated Safeguarding Officer and has undertaken Safeguarding Lead training. The policy is reviewed by Trustees every year.

BP works closely with partner agencies and schools to identify and share concerns. A safeguarding concern that needs to be raised externally occurs approximately once a week. Monthly team meetings of support staff discuss issues and support plans and on top of monthly one-to one supervision, external clinical supervision is also provided where these issues can be discussed.

Finances

Audited accounts for the year ending 31st March 2021 show income of £575,707 against expenditure of £499,262 resulting in a surplus of £73,445 for the year of which all but £6,419 was unrestricted.

The balance sheet shows net current assets of £493,098 of which £378,207 is unrestricted, £36,852 of which is designated for a Skills 2 Work programme. The reserves policy is to maintain sufficient level of reserves to enable normal operating activities to continue over a period of up to 6 months should a shortfall in income occur. The current levels of unrestricted reserves exceed this amount currently and it is the Trustees' wish that levels that exceed the set amount should be used where possible to take forward new and specific pieces of work in their practice or development. This is currently being undertaken by funding the Skills 2 Work programme. Trustees annually review this situation.

Main funding comes from Lothian Homes Trust, East Lothian Council via Housing, Inclusion, Community Partnership and Health & Social Care contracts. Trust and Foundation funding includes Children in Need and The Robertson Trust. Income and expenditure for the period of the proposed grant will remain relatively stable and for the coming financial year the majority of funding has been secured.

Clear financial systems are in place and there is strong oversight from the Board via the Treasurer and the Finance Sub-Committee. A Finance and Admin Manager undertakes day to day financial management with the support of a Finance Administrator.

Current Situation and need

There are around 15,000 carers in East Lothian with between 1,500 and 3,000 of these estimated to be young carers. These young carers face many barriers and have a range of needs they require assistance with. Most of these are linked to the need for support to improve education outcomes and to continue in higher and further education

and training. Some are struggling with the dual role of being a student and a carer and feel conflicted about leaving home to study away from the persons they care for. Others have fallen behind with their learning due to their caring responsibilities and the impact of the pandemic and need support to avoid lower exam results than their peers and reduce the amount of missed time in school.

There is currently very little support for young carers aged 15-25 in East Lothian. This results in young people missing out on vital support at key transitional phases in their lives and potentially leading to these reduced education and employment opportunities.

BP currently delivers a young carers project in partnership with East Lothian Council that works with young carers aged between 12-18. This work aims to raise awareness of young carers and help schools to identify hidden carers and provide them with early support planning and complete Young Carers Statements. However, around 60% of young carers currently being worked with state that they would like more intensive one-to-one support after they have completed their Young Carers Statements. The current agreement with East Lothian Council does not provide funding for this additional element of support.

By extending the support that BP can offer young carers aged 15-25, bespoke one-to-one support can be provided to directly support their ability to continue in higher and further education and training. This will involve working with the young carer and also with their school/college to ensure that their needs are being met. Alongside this a range of different groups will be run to further develop skills and these will include college preparation groups, confidence building courses, social groups such as art and cooking groups alongside industry specific employability workshops. In addition, young carers will have the opportunity to gain accreditations such as the Tenancy Award and SCQF Level 4 qualifications.

A Young Carers Support Worker (28 hours per week) will be employed to deliver this expanded service and will work closely with both the existing Young Carer Support Workers and other colleagues at BP to ensure that young carers are also able to access other services run within BP.

Expected Key Achievements in Year 1

EKA 1

10 young carers/young adult carers will be better able to juggle the dual roles of being a carer and a student.

EKA 2

Increased number of young carers will avoid lower exam results than their peers, reduce the amount of time missed in school and improve their education outcomes.

EKA 3

21 young carers will bridge learning gaps linked to the pandemic.

Request and Budget

BP is requesting **£58,382** over 2 years to employ a part time Young Carers Support Worker and associated project costs.

£29,191 in year 1 - £20,414 (salary), £1,655 (NI), £2,041 (pension), £2,621 (management fees and utilities), £1,560 (travel), £600 (activities) and £300 (training).

£29,191 in year 2 - £20,414 (salary), £1,655 (NI), £2,041 (pension), £2,621 (management fees and utilities), £1,560 (travel), £600 (activities) and £300 (training).

Conclusion

BP is an important charity supporting young people in East and Mid Lothian. It is well run, and the staff team are effective at engaging with and supporting a wide range of young people who are struggling in their lives. Emma, the CEO, is a clear thinker with lots of passion and energy who has a strong vision for the future of the organisation. I was impressed by everyone that I met, and the description of how important BP clearly is locally. Despite being a seven-minute train ride from Edinburgh the areas that BP work in could well be hours away. The isolation and lack of confidence of many of the young people who access BP is a huge issue and makes the need for BP clear. They spoke about young people who had never been to Edinburgh and for who the prospect of getting a job or undertaking training in Edinburgh would be extremely challenging. With opportunities locally limited, this inward-looking approach acts as an additional barrier to the young carers they work with being able to succeed in life.

Whilst being an organisation that works with more than just young carers, the deep knowledge that BP has around this group was extremely evident at the assessment meeting. The statutory funding they receive to deliver work for young carers in High Schools makes them eligible for this funding and work with young carers is clearly embedded across the whole organisation and the wider range of services they provide. Whilst being able to access support through dedicated young carer workers, they can also be referred across multiple other services run by BP, and this adds a real strength to the project design.

The current work in High Schools that is funded by East Lothian Council makes a huge difference to the experience that young carers have within their school environment. It not only helps to highlight the issues that they are facing but also enables Young Carers Statements to be completed, which is the statutory responsibility that ELC is paying BP to do on their behalf. However, the funding from ELC doesn't extend to actually providing one-to-one support for those young carers – so much of what is identified in the actions plans that are informed by the Young Carer statements can't be actively addressed. Currently ELC doesn't have the capacity to extend the contract to provide this and as the current work meets their statutory obligations this project doesn't replace statutory provision. This is clearly a frustrating position though and one that limits the ability of the current workers to go beyond a certain point with many of the young carers they identify. There is a hope that this project would be able to deliver a really strong set of outcomes over the coming two years which will make a compelling case to ELC to expand the contract to cover this element. Therefore, this grant could in the long-term help BP secure a much better deal for young carers – as well as in the short-term providing direct support for them.

The support of the Cranfield Trust through the Spark Programme will also help BP to develop a piece of work which will help them with one of their key strategy aims around Youth Ambassadors and helping them to become more of a young person led organisation. This is a really exciting project which will root the organisation even more firmly into being led and defined by the needs of young people.

A grant to BP will add huge value to the work they currently do with young carers and will fill a clear gap in provision. This well-run organisation provides the only local support to young carers and I am confident that this funding would make a huge difference. Therefore, I would strongly recommend support with a grant as requested.

Recommended Priority Rating

Risk = Low

Difference to organisation = High

Priority = High