

Clapton Park URC

Round Chapel

Old School Rooms



2020
Annual Review

Foreword - a vision for change

I write these words at a time when people in our community will be seeking to overcome many struggles, whether fear from food poverty, the mental and physical impacts of lockdown or unemployment. Covid has forced us to change and adapt the ways in which we work, but has also renewed my commitment and belief that community matters. Spaces for people to gather, particularly in times of crisis, are critical to building connections.

Over the past seven months, throughout the pandemic, I have been inspired by how our dedicated and committed staff, trustees and members of the congregation, motivated by shared values and a common purpose, have worked with volunteers and partners to help and support our most vulnerable neighbours.

This has been a difficult and challenging year for everyone. While 2020 will be remembered for the huge disruption to our normal lives, we cannot and should not ignore that in the middle of the pandemic, the killing of George Floyd in the US sparked a summer of protests from the Black Lives Matter movement. It activated people around the world to highlight that the long-fought battles for justice and equality, here in Hackney and beyond, are far from over.

We shouldn't remain silent. It should wake us up to the responsibilities

that we all have in our communities, workplaces, places of worship and institutions of learning. It should wake us up to acknowledge that white privilege and structural racism continues to shape our lives. As a church and community anchor in Hackney, it challenges us to confront these issues and forces us to ask ourselves difficult and sometimes uncomfortable questions. This should be where we start.

For almost 150 years, our nonconformist roots and dissenting traditions show a legacy in this neighbourhood in Hackney in standing in solidarity with marginalised communities. This should continue to shape and inform our response today to the inequalities that



continue to impact the lives of so many of our neighbours.

What this pandemic has also taught me is that we cannot bring about change alone. In the context of the Covid environment and limited resources, this year we have found common cause through partnership and collaboration with other community organisations to form the North Hackney Neighbourhood Alliance. Working together and our ability to be organised will further develop our long-held mission to promote the voices, stories and lived experiences of local people, many of whom have been disproportionately impacted by the virus. This review captures how our community programmes, delivered by our creative and innovative staff and volunteers, seek to support and respond to the needs of those who continue to struggle in our neighbourhood.

In the words of Dr Martin Luther King: "We shall overcome. We shall overcome. Deep in my heart I do believe we shall overcome. And I believe it because somehow the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." This inspires our mission and our collective endeavour to reinforce the value of neighbourhood and a shared vision of change.

**Joe Walker – Centre Manager
September 2020**

“The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the vital work of a community hub like the Old School Rooms in developing an emergency programme to tackle food poverty and support and advise some of our most vulnerable residents. Their engagement with the local community, mobilisation of volunteers and partnership with the Council and other community organisations embodies the Hackney spirit.”

**Philip Glanville,
Mayor of Hackney**

Fundraising

We have received incredible support from our community and from London funders including the London Borough of Hackney and Thames North Synod this year.

The London Borough of Hackney and the National Lottery worked with compassion and understanding when we were unable to deliver projects as agreed in our grant applications. Funders continued to support our work as we developed a whole new programme of support, organising logistics, recruiting volunteers and collaborating with other local providers to ensure our most vulnerable service users would not be forgotten as the world around us locked down.

When the crisis broke, we appealed to the local community for donations and were amazed and moved by the response: a local appeal using social media and WhatsApp raised just over £6,000 in a couple of weeks. This immediate and unrestricted funding enabled us to keep going when faced with the loss of so much income when activities in the building had to stop and fundraising events were unable to go ahead.

These incredible, tireless, thoughtful and professional efforts were also recognised in successful funding applications to the London Community Response Fund and East London Community Response Fund, enabling us to deliver our Emergency Response programme of meals and support to the most vulnerable in our community.

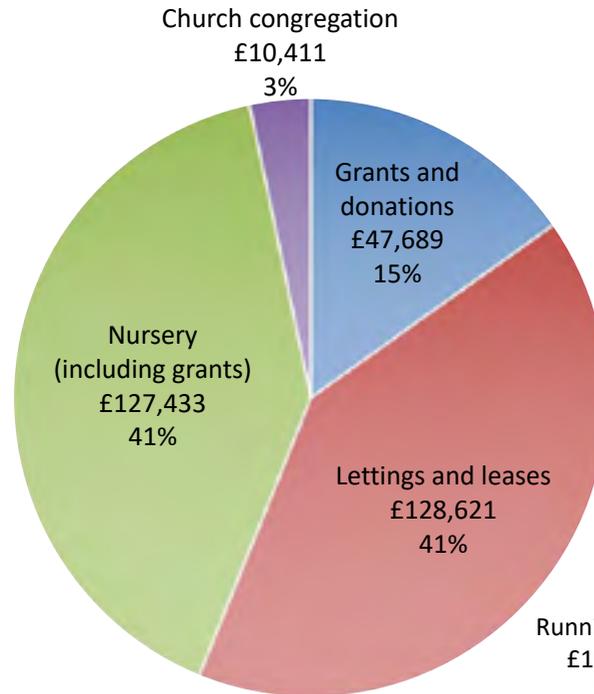
“The Round Chapel Old School Rooms is an anchor institution for the community in Clapton. During the pandemic they have been a lifeline for so many local people coordinating food deliveries and other support.”

**Margaret Gordon,
Lea Bridge
Councillor**

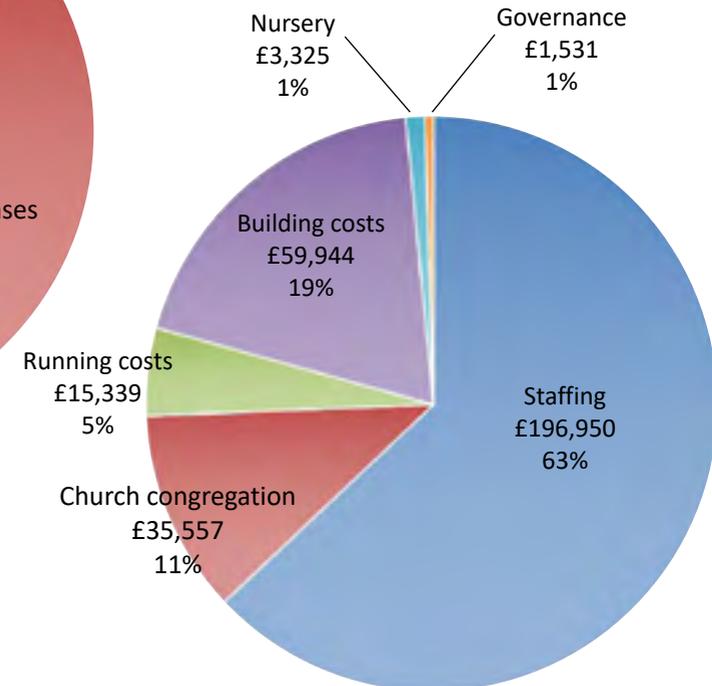
Where our income comes from and what we spend it on

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	2019	2018
Total income	182,854	131,300	314,154	302,951
Total expenditure	183,445	129,202	312,646	298,303

Income



Expenditure



Emergency response and volunteers

At the peak of lockdown there were 250 people on the call list receiving tailored support, food parcels and cooked meals, and simple befriending during this period of isolation. Staff and volunteers refocused efforts to completely change our service to respond to the emergency.

Our work with families continued during lockdown with 40 families supported by experienced volunteers. Each volunteer had a caseload of families they stayed in regular phone contact with, providing a dependable supportive ear as well as issuing food bank vouchers, co-ordinating delivery of the parcels and topping these up with nappies, clothes and toys as needed.

Many of the families were single mums living with young children with little support, in inadequate accommodation, particularly vulnerable to the effects of isolation, anxiety and stress. To some, these calls were a lifeline.

As well as practical and emotional support, we continued to provide social support to all our regular users with many activities moving online.

As the world came to grips with WhatsApp groups and Zoom calls, we had online dance classes, yoga and laughter yoga, cooking together



and YouTube messy play guides, plus a weekly story time with Emma for our nursery children.

As lockdown eased, we worked in partnership with Parent Club to phase back a return to a more normal life with two in-person sessions when our families could get together in our Covid-secure space to talk about their



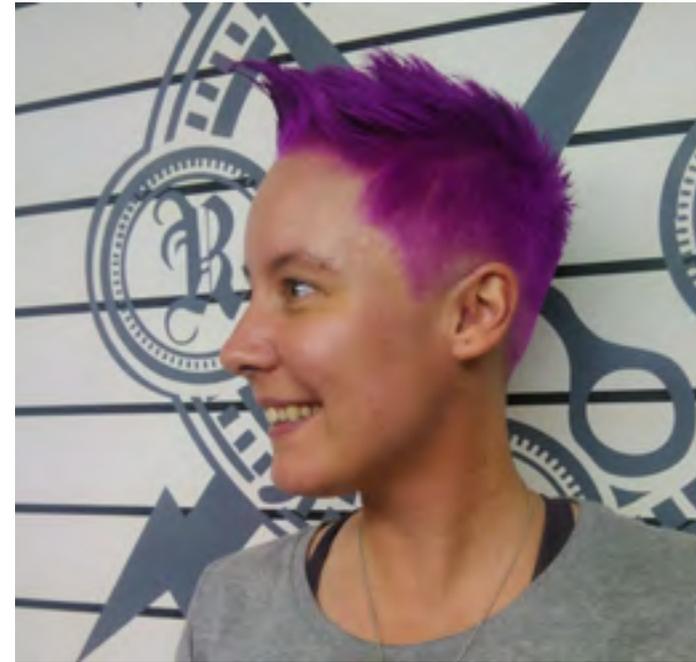
experience of lockdown.

We continue to be mindful of the impacts of the pandemic on people's social, emotional and financial wellbeing and are working hard to develop projects to address these issues and to reinstate classes and groups in a Covid-secure environment while assisting with Test and Trace.

1,920 food parcels

4,200 Urban Table meals

3,360 Made in Hackney meals



A volunteer's lockdown story

I began volunteering as a delivery cyclist for the Covid Emergency Programme at the start of lockdown, hauling cooked meals and Food Bank parcels through Hackney's eerily empty streets on my old touring bicycle.

I'd heard about the programme from other volunteers at Urban Table, the Sunday meal that has taken place at the Round Chapel Old School Rooms for 15 years. As social distancing kicked in, we scrambled to collect the details of our regular guests, sketching out an ambitious meal delivery service to take its place.

Lockdown hit the people we served

hardest of all: gone were the street kitchens where many went for their only meal of the day; gone were drop-in centres, the opportunity for a shower and a warm drink. Most of our guests lost access to the internet, and with it, the ability to apply for benefits and basic support. Workers on precarious contracts found themselves suddenly in poverty. What started as an extension of our Sunday kitchen soon became a daily service. Community kitchen Made in Hackney provided the food: we provided the cyclists, walkers and drivers. At our peak we were delivering more than 300 meals a week, plus 80 foodbank parcels,

which lined the walls of the main hall in tall, green columns. We'd blast music as we prepped and sorted donations, sliced bread donated by a local bakery, counted satsumas, and stretched to the limit how much food a cyclist can fit into a pannier.

I took on a coordinating role, managing the labyrinth of needs and addresses, vehicles and volunteers on a sprawling spreadsheet. It meant I could see the whole arc of the programme: from the morning WhatsApp callout for enough volunteers to match the day's delivery list, to the bustling bag packing, to the moment when you hand food to

a young mum and she thanks you in a whisper so as not to wake the baby on her hip.

These daily encounters - with the kids who know you always sneak extra cake into the bag for them, with the blind man whose microwave we fitted with braille stickers so he could reheat his meals - lifted the fog of lockdown for me. It's strange to think, as we stumble back into some kind of normality and reshape the programme to meet new needs, that it took social distancing to bring me closer to my community.

Liz Dodd



Events and campaigning

Our Christmas market in 2019 was the busiest ever. Choirs from Millfields and Daubeney schools came to sing, bringing family and friends. We love supporting talented local makers to sell their work and value their support as they help us to raise funds for our projects.

The Burns Night Community Meal in January was prepared by about 20 cooks from young to old helping with the neeps, tatties and haggis. Lashings of gravy were served in giant tea pots! All ages dancers, nursery families, church members, staff and friends came along together and speeches and poems flowed like the whisky, while the kids ran around at our feet.

International Women's Day in early March brought together more than 100 women. They rested, socialised and discussed what a future where all

work is valued and shared would look like. Food was provided by a local co-op and experienced male childminders looked after the kids. The impact of the Covid pandemic on the lives of women has been particularly severe and it is widely accepted that the additional childcare and home-schooling work fell predominantly on women's shoulders. Equality still has a long way to go.

In 2019 and into 2020 Extinction Rebellion Hackney and Extinction Rebellion Hackney Families used our space each week to grow the movement and develop their work protesting for action to tackle the climate emergency.

London Renters Union regularly use our building to organise with renters to support each other, stand up to landlords and win lower rents, longer tenancies and better housing for everyone.

Working in partnership

We work with partners across Hackney to support and develop our work. These include London Catholic Worker, Hackney Food Bank, RCCG, Adrenaline Dance, Five Points Brewery, Real Nappy Network and Plastic Free Hackney.

We are also involved in a partnership with Hackney Doorways to run a women's shelter. This provides support and accommodation for up to 10 women at any time. It was initially a 12-month pilot, part funded by the GLA Mayor's Rough Sleeping Innovation fund, but we're delighted that we are able to host this project for another year.

2020 highlighted the resourcefulness, determination and hard work of the amazing local organisations and businesses that work in the Old School Rooms.

Carry Me Bikes were incredibly busy. As lockdown eased, more people realised



that cycling and cargo bikes are a brilliant way to transport people and businesses! Our emergency response programme also used their fantastic cargo bikes for deliveries.

Growing Communities organised its veg scheme members at the Old School Rooms collection point to help each other out delivering bags if anyone needed to self-isolate.

ARTBASH adapted their format during lockdown delivering creative boxes full of activities and materials to their students' families. When lockdown eased, they worked hard to adapt to Covid-safe practice to run some of the first sessions to return to the Old School Rooms.

Ms Kari's Singstation moved to Zoom and the loyal crew of carers and babies kept their regular routine to meet up to sing, including across households when gran couldn't physically be together with mum and baby!

Hackney Winter Night Shelter worked tirelessly to make sure that no one was forgotten during lockdown: they liaised with the council to keep Hackney's homeless people safe when shelters and drop-in centres were forced to close.

I Love Chatsworth Road spent lockdown reporting on the experiences of local life with a weekly digest of what was going on in our neighbourhood.

Clapton Community Drop-In

At the end of 2019 and into 2020 the need for the drop-in showed no sign of slowing.

We secured a further two years' funding from Hackney Council to work with over 200 people a year, supporting them to resolve issues around housing and benefits at our Wednesday and Sunday sessions. Learning from the success of the more holistic peer support that had evolved in our sessions, we were about to include creative wellbeing activities and talks alongside practical support for guests when everything changed.

When it was no longer possible for volunteers and staff to work with guests in the building, we moved to doorstep consultations. We collected as many addresses and phone numbers as possible while handing out meals and foodbank vouchers to regular guests and many others.

As drop-in centres around the capital closed, people contacted us from across

the city as we did everything we could to provide food, support and help.

As lockdown came into full effect and many guests needed to shield due to complex health issues, we had to ask people to stop coming to the building. We appealed to our local mutual aid group and to Hackney Volunteer Centre to recruit a small army of volunteers to make phone calls to check on the health and wellbeing of as many people as we could and to deliver food parcels from Hackney Foodbank and hot meals from Urban Table and Made in Hackney to the most vulnerable in our community.

We continue to adapt to the ever-changing guidelines and laws, working hard to find the best way possible to support our community. We are grateful to Hackney for their continued support and understanding as we are unable to deliver the service as we had hoped to and to all our staff and volunteers who have worked so hard to make this support possible.



Round Chapel Community Nursery

Our wonderful nursery has a full roster of children and our fantastic team of long-standing staff continues to be led by our much-loved nursery manager Emma.

Urban Table

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the Urban Table. It has barely missed a Sunday in providing food, support and friendship to many adults who are either street homeless or living in vulnerable housing situations and often struggling with addictions or mental illness. Before lockdown, the number of guests had risen to 80 a week.

Up to 14 volunteers work each week to give the Urban Table a cafe feel. It has become a safe space for many regulars, who also see the weekly meal as a support network that they can connect to.

The project is a partnership with the London Catholic Worker and the RCCG church, who are based in our building.

During lockdown the efforts of Urban Table volunteers supported the Round Chapel Old School Rooms Emergency Response programme. Cooking increased as food was delivered to our usual guests and many more. As lockdown restrictions

are eased Urban Table is transitioning to a take-away service and we hope we will soon be able to open our doors fully again.

We are grateful to Mary Fagan and Joel Pullin who have worked tirelessly to support our volunteers and ensure the smooth running of the service week in week out.



As lockdown came into force, Emma worked with the local authority to find places for the children of two keyworkers in other nurseries before closing down between March and June. Emma stayed in touch with the children reading a story once a week on Zoom to make sure we all still felt connected.

As the first group to return to the building after lockdown, Emma carefully led the

way navigating guidelines and making sure that everyone felt safe and confident. The nursery made a slow and careful return with parents staying outside the building and the children spending much more time in the garden. The sense of community was incredible as parents and the nursery supported each other, enriching the children's day with lots of art and music and plants and outside play.

Families project

“The playgroup you have created is a lovely, fun and supportive group and there are always kind staff, volunteers and other families around to help.”

Playgroup parent

Our Families Project goes from strength to strength. We increased drop-in sessions for parents/carers and their under-5s to every day of the week, and successfully secured funding to deliver short programmes to engage and enrich the lives of families in our local community. 2019 was a busy year of sessions and project work, while 2020 was dominated by our efforts to ensure that our most isolated families did not struggle alone.

Regular weekly drop-in sessions (until March 2020)

Monday Kitchen Club – cook & play (including free kids’ shop) delivered by the Parent Club team.

Wednesday Playgroup – stay & play including craft, free kids’ shop, snacks & singing. This is our busiest drop-in, averaging about 50 families every week.

Wednesday Lunch – In early 2019

we offered the slot to guest cooks – including local plastic-free business Dabba Drop. From spring onwards our in-house cooks made lunch for about 40 families a week.

All Ages Thursdays – Our intergenerational programme of activities funded by the National Lottery and delivered in partnership with Hackney Children’s Theatre started in September 2019, with Messy Play for parents/carers and under-5s, Dance for 50+ and a volunteer-run community café.

Friday Kitchen Club – cook & play (including free kids’ shop and additional support to parents and families facing housing struggles or who are living in temporary accommodation). Delivered in partnership with Parent Club team.

Singing Together – A singing group for families alongside residents with dementia at Acorn Lodge care home.

One-off Projects (2019/early 2020)

Feel Good Wednesdays – An informal drop-in organised and hosted by mums wanting to get together (with their kids) to dance and sew.

Get Dancing – Three months of dance and movement classes for mums on low income with funding from Active Londoners (GLA)

Peer Support Project – A three-month project funded by HCVS delivering a weekly peer support programme for families living in temporary accommodation to address issues

of stress and anxiety with mindful and healthy activities.

Summer Holiday Day Trips – A crowdfunded series of outings for low-income families during the summer holidays 2019. These included trips to Hackney City Farm and the Museum of Childhood.

Mums and Babes by Bikes – We worked in partnership with Carry Me Bikes in spring/summer to help mums on low income to gain access to bikes, bike seats and training in order to get around with their kids.

Collaborations

Peer Support Network – we hosted the first meeting comprising Hackney Playbus,

Bump Buddies, Birth Companions and Ivy Street Family Centre to share best practice and support each other’s work.

Hackney Real Nappy Network – We hosted six network events over 2019 (www.hackneyrealnappy.net).

Hackney Cycling Mobile Library – We worked with Carry Me Bikes to run a series of family sessions in the building on Fridays. The target audience was harder-to-reach and low-income families.

Hackney Gingerbread – Monthly meet-ups, led by single parents and for single parents, continued to run monthly in the nursery, supported by the Families Project. Caroline and then Andrew were the volunteer coordinators for the group in 2019 (www.gingerbread.org.uk).



None of what you read in this review would be possible without the commitment and dedication of our amazing staff and volunteers.

Our staff: Saada Adus, Julia Andrews, Edem Alorvor-Nunekpeku, Michelle Baker, Modina Begum, Sibebe Bulgarello, Alison Davy, Jane Elliott, Sheena Gleeson, Dalwinder Jagdish, Tomas Malinovsky, Fiona McAllister, Fazana Patel, Maria Smith, Emma Spinelli, Ayesha Sultana, Rob Truscott, Joe Walker

Our volunteers: this year we have had unprecedented support from volunteers too numerous to name. We must, however, thank some who went above and beyond: Mary Fagan, Laura Thomas-Hockey, Abi Kingston, Joel Pullin, Liz Dodd, Francis Ernstzen, Fi Wilson, Lynda MacInnes, Richard Banks, Karen Hamilton

Our trustees: Rev Dr John Campbell (Chair), Aniema Aaron, Annabelle Burns, Abi Kingston, Neil MacInnes, Lesley Trenkel

Our funders: Hackney Council, Hackney Parochial Charities, East London Community Foundation, London Community Response, Thames North Synod, National Lottery Awards for All, HCVS, John Laing Trust, John Dorsett Trust.

Who we are

We are a vibrant church and community centre committed to and driven by the values of social justice, inclusiveness, diversity, partnership, hospitality, creativity and hope.

What we do

We provide a space for local people to connect and build community, for families and vulnerable adults to receive care, support and practical help and to facilitate a positive environment for people to come together around common causes and issues the local community face.

How we do it

Create an open, welcoming, inclusive and distinctive space, committed to community building and social change and the involvement of people from all backgrounds, faith traditions and none.

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Registered charity number 1132114

www.theroundchapel.org.uk



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