

Phoenix Farm Open Door Project

Annual Report 2022



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Registered Charity: 1098333

Chair of Trustees Report

The past year has seen continued growth in the range and depth of support offered by The Ark as it responds to cost of living and health challenges. Successful grant applications have enabled an increase in advice, job coaching and mentoring sessions. We are delighted to be working in association with our friends at Hope Nottingham, sharing expertise, personnel, and spiritual gifts in order to help provide even greater opportunities for the financial security and care of our community. Currently, we are planning to develop our services in order to better provide a more integrated approach to someone's overall wellbeing through an expansion of our job coach and mentoring role. This will help provide easier access for individual support through our own and wide network of excellent supporting agencies and contacts – which we greatly appreciate. We also have plans to expand opportunities for volunteer training in order to enable a greater role in direct advice support.

Without our dedicated and enthusiastic team of volunteers and trustees The Ark would not exist, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank them all for their contributions throughout the past year. We are delighted to welcome Cath Crane as a trustee representing All Hallows Church and look forward to the return of Esther Maggs from her sabbatical later in the year. Volunteering takes on many forms and provides countless opportunities to make a difference, both to one's own life and the lives of others – every hour counts, so please ask if you're interested...



Our Project Manager / Senior Advisor Joel and Job Coach and Mentor Jenni's devotion to the mission and ministry of The Ark provides an inspiration to all of us and on behalf of the trustees and wider community, I thank them for their hard work over the past year.

The support of The Ark Fellowship of Churches and their members is invaluable – thanks to each and every one of you. We are delighted to welcome Southwell Minister to our fellowship and look forward to working with you.

1 Peter 4:8-11

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

John Tattersfield - Chair of Trustees

LOCAL CHURCHES THAT SUPPORT THE ARK

Phoenix Farm Methodist
Church, Wollaton Avenue,

Gedling Road Methodist Church,
Gedling Road, Carlton

Westdale Lane Baptist Church,
368 Westdale Lane

All Hallows Church
of England, Rectory
Drive, Gedling

St James' Church of England,
Marshall Hill Drive,
Mapperley

Southwell minster, Church street,
Southwell

Project Manager's Report



The Ark's charitable aims are to relieve hardship, poverty, and distress. The charity has been accomplishing these aims for 20 years. In that time, we have responded to a variety of societal challenges that have pushed people into poverty, such as the banking crisis of 2008, the high unemployment of early 2010's, the Covid-19 pandemic and currently the "cost of living crisis". But what is poverty?

According to Peter Townsend, "Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong." In Townsend's view, poverty is relative and is different to destitution which is the complete lack of life's essentials such as food, warmth, and shelter.

The ongoing "cost of living crisis" clearly demonstrates this relative dimension to poverty. With this crisis the "low water mark" of where people are facing poverty has changed. Wages have not kept up with inflation, and consequently the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is predicting that "real household disposable income" (which is a measure of living standards) will fall by 5.7% this year. Meanwhile absolute low income will increase to 18.3% of the population, leading to over 11 million people in the UK being in poverty.

Household finances are being stretched further than ever, and this is reflected in enquiries we are receiving. More than ever, we are receiving enquiries from people in work, but above that are enquiries from people receiving the state pension. Alongside those two groups are people who have been using savings to supplement monthly incomes but can no longer afford to do so.

Disabled people are also disproportionately affected by financial crisis, as households with someone with a disability can have increased monthly costs of ~£500. Advice on disability benefits remains the largest share of the appointments we offer. The government's assessment for disability can be very challenging, and distressing for anyone attempting to navigate it. Every day, we meet with people who are overwhelmed and bewildered by this system. We provide a service that supports people from making a claim, all the way through to appeal. Over the course of a 12-month period our data shows that in excess £150,000 of income has been awarded to claimants through this support. One claimant was paid over £12,000 in disability support that was owed to them after they had undergone a flawed assessment.

Alongside the disability support, we have expanded the advice we provide on Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax reduction, which is now available across two locations in the borough. These appointments accrue thousands of pounds of entitlement to eligible claimants and help ease their household finances, heat their homes, and put food on the table.

Nevertheless, we know that wherever possible, employment is the most direct route out of financial hardship, and we continue to offer employment coaching and mentoring. This service has supported over 60 job seekers with 29 of those finding employment, 7 signed up for training and education, a handful have moved into volunteering, while others continue to look for work with our support.

Financial gains are not all the Ark exists for. There are many ways to improve a life beyond financial support. Community and friendship are even more important to a good quality of life and we are running two very popular art groups, a friendship group, a telephone befriending service and offering countless numbers of hot drinks and friendly chats with our amazing café host volunteers.

We are grateful for another year completed, and the opportunities we've had to use our service to the benefit of others. I express my thanks to all those who have given time, energy, money and prayers to our work this year. We look forward to continuing our work this year and beyond. Thank you for your continued support.

Yours,

Joel Baldry

Project Manager

The Ark's 2022 Activities

Welfare rights service, disability benefit support, Universal credit and energy awareness support

We are able to give advice on a variety of social issues, including employment related benefits like universal credit or disability benefits such as Disability Living Allowance or PIP. These services help to protect the people who are unemployed, or likely to become unemployed and those on the lowest income (or no income at all) from the most severe financial hardships. Frequently people contact The Ark enquiring about disability benefits. An enquiry could be a new claim, an appeal against a benefit decision or just general advice around entitlement and how to manage a claim. Local GP surgeries and mental health teams refer many people to The Ark, although people are free to self-refer. We have also trained 3 of our team in a City and guilds level 3 energy awareness qualification to provide high quality energy crisis advice.

Our advice is available both at the Ark, but also at the Hope Community Hub on Main Street at what was Main Street Methodist Church, Carlton.

Employment Coach + Job Club

Our employment coach provides advice and assistance with CV writing, job searches, applications and interview skills. Our employment coach has also developed good contacts with a network of agencies so she is often amongst the first to hear about opportunities in the area. We are delighted to say that this role has seen many job seekers find employment and training opportunities. We also run a weekly job club where direct advice is provided as well as computers with internet access.

Linking Lives

The Ark is a member of the 'Linking Lives - Two's Company' telephone befriending scheme. This scheme is a support for people who are lonely, isolated or housebound. The scheme also takes referrals from social prescribers easing pressure on statutory services whilst maintaining support for the individuals who need it.

Foodbank

If a person comes to us in state of emergency and will not be able to provide their next meal. We are a referring agent for all the local foodbanks (as well as those further across Nottingham) and through this avenue we can meet their immediate need and we can then help them find more stability in the long term. We also have an advisor based at the Carlton foodbank for 2 sessions a week.

ACTS435

Acts 435 is an online giving charity, directly connecting those who want to give with those who are in genuine need of their help, through a network of local churches and charities. In the last year through this initiative we have been able to provide cookers, beds, washing machines, fridge freezers and other essential items to people who due to unfortunate circumstances could not afford them otherwise.

Wayfinder

Wayfinder is a volunteer-led programme supporting people affected by homelessness by building long-term relationships and connection. We are proud to be a referral agent and community contact point for this programme.

Member of

advice UK



The Ark's 2022 activities



Community Café

We provide a community café, staffed by volunteers which provides hot beverages and biscuits free of charge. The main aim is to provide a warm and welcoming environment and by encouraging people to use the café we have a significant impact in overcoming social isolation for people. The Café is part of a national initiative known as "places of welcome" (www.placesofwelcome.org).

Friendship Group

We have a group that meets every Monday afternoon for friendship, games, laughter and learning. During these times the café area is a hive of activity and liveliness with many cakes and biscuits consumed as well as plenty of thoughtful conversation topics discussed and debated. From time to time specialists in their field come to enlighten and inform the group. At other times the group will arrange for somebody to come and teach them a specific skill. It is open to all and everyone is welcome.

Art Group

On a Thursday afternoon we are host to an art group. Open to anybody the group provides an outlet for people's creativity and an opportunity to experiment with different artistic approaches. This group attracts total novices to experienced painters for what is a relaxing and therapeutic afternoon. Examples of the art produced are proudly on display in the Ark.

Art Workshop

In this group an artist provides training and direction to anyone who is looking to explore the finer points of art. Sign up is required but it is free to attend.

Community Garden

The community garden is a reflective space in which people can enjoy a spot of tranquility and peace. It is maintained by volunteers.

Away From it All - Mothers Union Holidays

A Holiday scheme primarily funded by members of Mothers' Union, to help people who wouldn't otherwise be able to have a holiday. The Ark has been able to refer a number of local families for their first holiday in years.



The Activities at the Ark

Provide an advice service open to all.

Provide basic skills training.

Provide a meeting place with café facilities with a safe friendly environment.

The Aims of the Ark

To prevent hardship and distress.

To increase the feeling of community in the area and decrease social isolation.

Enable people to take more control of their lives.

Donations

By bank transfer—Phoenix Farm Open Door Project

Account Number: 20453378 Sort Code: 608301

Or by scanning the QR code with your mobile phone >>>



Finance



Treasurer Report

I would like to express my gratitude to all of the people who have brought such life to The Ark in 2022. We have some wonderful volunteers – thank you for your varied contributions: they are greatly valued and we would be much poorer without you. We have also had some great financial support from a number of donors, trusts, churches and local authorities which have enabled us to run our services: thank you all. A collection of grant making trusts and bodies that have supported this year is below. We the Trustees remain grateful for contributions of every size and kind: we get there together!

I am pleased to say that our banking services are now provided almost exclusively by Unity Trust Bank: an ethical bank whose values are in alignment with those we hold as an organisation. This is a significant part of what we are achieving, what we are about. The bank are investing our funds in investment projects we believe in and making a positive difference to the World in addition to how we at The Ark are investing [spending] the funds. I remain grateful to Denise Mear for her ongoing support with the online banking.

I record my grateful thanks to M Paula Powditch ACA for her Independent Examination of the Accounts for 2022. Turning to these Accounts we can see that this has been a period in which our receipts (£47,883.04) haven't kept pace with our costs (£59,768.35; a 25% expansion on the previous year). This is a reversal of the previous two 'bumper' years of 2021 (£12,340 surplus) and 2020 (£32,507 surplus) and on the face of it looks discouraging. However there is a large mitigating factor: we secured a service level agreement with Hope Nottingham which provides a total of (up to) £24,000 income only £1,984 of which appears in these figures as the Accounts record money only as and when it is received/spent.

Speaking generally, there are just some years where the funding environment doesn't provide opportunity to build up what we can offer and this was such a year. At the year-end (31st December 2022) we carried forward a healthy balance of £49,934.08 which - given the Hope Nottingham service level agreement - meant we held enough funds to cover around 13/14 months' running costs: a good position but no room for complacency. The current financial position (1st April 2023) is some £8,000 better than that at the end of December 2022 and the temporary increased hours for both of our wonderful staff (thank you so much) shows that we are investing in the project. One gets a lot of 'bang for your buck' by donating to this project. I confidently say that we are in a stronger strategic position than at any time in recent history: there's only so much a financial report can do to express that.

We completed and submitted a claim for Gift Aid covering the applicable donations received in the 2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years in February 2023 hence the funds 'do not show' in this year's [2022] figures.

A very good year all things considered. Onwards and upwards. Praise God!

Adam Corbett—Treasurer

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The Thomas Farr Charity

