

Case study

Families of Rotherham East (F.O.R.E)

“The recession is impacting on us just as much as, maybe more than, the bigger organisations; but we seem to be getting left behind.”

About the Organisation:

F.O.R.E has supported families in Rotherham for nearly 13 years, providing toddler groups, toy libraries, holiday schemes for children, and a variety of training courses for parents. The organisation is based in St James' Church, but operates at centres in Eastwood, Clifton, East Dene, Herringthorpe and Springwell Gardens.

F.O.R.E has just one full-time paid member of staff: the Manager, Celia Ogle. However, there are six part-time paid staff, who work in the office and run the crèche and holiday facilities, and the organisation also makes use of around 15 volunteers.

Feeling the impacts of the recession...

on the organisation itself:

Firstly, F.O.R.E has seen a huge increase in demand that Celia feels sure is down to the recession. “We’ve had a lot more people come in,” she says, “and we had more people on our trips this summer than ever before. Parents who’ve been made unemployed are desperate for something positive to do.”

F.O.R.E has had to expand its services to meet these people’s needs: “Our leaders were having to turn people away from toddler groups, so we’ve had to add an extra session to our timetable,” Celia recounts. However, of course this places an increasing strain on Celia’s already tight budget (F.O.R.E’s income was just £62,990 in 2007-8, and its reserves at the end of 2008 just £36,112; compared to expenditure for that year of £79,741). “We’ve actually started four extra groups in total,” she adds, “Another one is a parents’ group, which was funded by Rotherham Learning Communities at first but now has to be sustained by what we’ve got. To be honest, it looks like we’ve no money to run it at the moment.”

The second big problem is that F.O.R.E’s pot of funding is getting smaller, not bigger. Celia is struggling to find funding for F.O.R.E’s NVQ training programme, and her South Yorkshire partner organisations cannot help because their own budgets have been capped. Worse still, if F.O.R.E fails to meet its NVQ targets then it risks having its core funding grant (supplied by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust) taken away: “Our core grant is conditional on our NVQ performance,” Celia explains, “and so I fear we’re going to have to pay some of the money back. And if we lose a lot of our core funding then, in the worst case scenario, we’d have to close. I don’t know what would happen to all the people that we work with then.”

Added to this is the third problem that F.O.R.E's costs are going up. Since the recession hit, St James' Church has seen a significant drop in the donations it receives; thus it is about to increase the amount it charges organisations like F.O.R.E for using its premises. "It's all just sort of happened in the last few months, and now some of the other groups here are facing closure," says Celia, "We ourselves are having a trustee meeting about it next week, because our resources will only stretch so far. We're going to have to reduce hours, which will leave the families with nowhere to go for longer."

on individuals and local communities:

According to Celia, the recession has been felt quite deeply in the Rotherham area. "It's definitely on people's minds," she says, "there's been lots of redundancies and quite a few of the parents have been out of work for a while now." Celia is also noticing that some families are having to change their lifestyle dramatically: "some mums of very young children are feeling desperate after their husbands' redundancies, and are asking to use our internet facilities to look for jobs themselves. I'm not passing any judgements at all on whether mothers should work, but it's definitely a big change for those families; and one they're making under pressure rather than out of free choice."

Moreover, the staff at F.O.R.E have been put under a lot of stress. Celia herself is finding the situation difficult: "If I have to concentrate on fundraising then I have a lot less time to spend on everything else," she laments, "When I was applying for the Coalfields Grant I was getting up at 6am, just to get everything done."

Looking to the future:

However, in her own words Celia "never gives up." She would just like to see some more support coming through from government and local authorities.

Celia has received some assistance: for example, she attended a sustainable funding workshop run by Voluntary Action Sheffield and Charity Bank, which gave her helpful advice on generating and diversifying funds. However, what she really wants is more grant funding for small organisations like hers:

"I couldn't apply to the Hardship Fund," she explains, "because you had to have an annual income of at least £200,000. Schemes like that just can't reach small, local organisations like ours. The problem is, the recession is impacting on us just as much as, maybe more than, the bigger organisations; but we seem to be getting left behind."

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