

Community Foundation for Surrey

My visit to meet Director of Philanthropy Joe Crome and Victoria Kear, their Communications Officer, at the Community Foundation's offices in Guildford was intended to help me learn more about how they are 'transforming local communities' as their slogan clearly states. Probably in common with many Surrey residents, I wasn't really aware of exactly what the charity was set up to achieve – and I certainly wasn't prepared for some of the hard facts I was to face which makes their work literally life-changing.

Launched in 2005, the Community Foundation for Surrey, which forms part of a network of 46 community foundations across the UK, has undoubtedly made a real difference having granted over £9 million to worthy Surrey causes since it was founded.

"Essentially we were set up by a group of people who believed that Surrey does have needs, it does have issues, and we have charities that need to be resourced and supported," Joe explained. "So we're part of a national movement for philanthropy and we are one of the newer foundations."

"A lot of people don't know there is so much need in Surrey which is seen as quite an affluent area and it wasn't until I started working here that I really started to learn about the pockets of deprivation within the county," added Victoria.

The foundation provides a lot of resources online that clearly explain the depth and breadth of their activities, but it wasn't until I was to learn first hand how they engage with communities and groups across the county that I realised just what a big difference they are making on the ground. And I found some of the key reasons for their funding support for local groups quite disturbing.

“We have wards in the county that have a 30% or more child poverty rate which is really staggeringly high, and it compares to any national deprivation figure,” said Joe. “We estimate that there are over 22,000 children living in poverty in Surrey. These pockets of deprivation need extra resources so we help groups in those areas to do what they do best.”

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There are a number of groups being supported that work with disadvantaged children including Change of Scene that provides a tranquil environment for the children to experience nature on a one-to-one basis. They learn to care for a wide range of animals and grow and cook with fresh produce planted on site. Another, The Surrey Young People’s Fund, supports disadvantaged young people to gain access to training and employment.

Joe’s next highlight as to why the foundation is so passionate in what they are doing delivered a shocking statistic. “We have a very high rate of domestic abuse in Surrey. It is estimated that around 24,000 women and girls in Surrey aged 16 to 59 have been the victim of domestic abuse. Nationally that is one of the highest rates.” I could feel the raw emotion in the room as we talked through the background to this exceptionally harsh statistic. One of the groups supported by the foundation is yourSanctuary, which runs therapeutic groups for women who have suffered abuse, and who also provide support through their ‘Freedom Programme’ to help the abused gain confidence to improve the quality of their lives and keep themselves and their children safer.

“Surrey also has a really high number of young carers with an estimated 40,000 in the county. As an example of what groups

do that we support, The Mayor of Guildford is currently working on an initiative in the town to try and find young carers that go under the radar. They do lots of caring duties in their everyday life that are not recognised. There are lots of them. It is really shocking.” Supported groups working in this sector include Crossroads Care Surrey and Surrey Young Carers.

We could very easily have sat together over multiple coffees covering groups in every sector that the foundation is involved in – including the recently launched Surrey Mental Health Fund which initially is focused on young people. Action has been triggered by recent statistics that found 50% of mental health problems are established by the time a child reaches the age of 14, and that 70% of people who have mental health problems said that they had no early intervention support. Both Joe and Victoria are extremely confident that they will beat their fund-raising targets – and having been privileged to witness the passion both of them share in what they do I don't doubt it.

So how does fundraising and funding work? And again I was to be impressed with the way the Foundation operates.



Above: Joe Crome, Director of Philanthropy / Victoria Kear, Marketing and Communications Officer

“Fundraising is primarily through word-of-mouth and referrals,” Joe explained. “What we offer is a really good bespoke service for donors who are looking to give their money effectively in a tax efficient way, and without all the hassle that can come with giving and running your own charitable trusts. We have lots of individual families that come and start their own funds with us. So it’s very similar to them having their own charitable trust but it’s without the need for them having an accountant and all of the other formalities you will need.



Above: The Maltings in Farnham.

These donors have autonomy over where their money goes. We are just helping them make it happen.” The foundation also works closely with lots of businesses who are keen to engage with local communities and to help make a difference. One example is Gatwick Airport that supports Surrey projects local to them, and another is this very magazine – when VantagePoint ran a free profile of the Community Foundation a couple of years ago, they received a substantial donation from one of our readers.

One key element around which the foundation is built is encompassed in their slogan ‘Transforming local communities with the power of philanthropy’.

Below: Epson and Ewell Arts (Kobbie Boafo).



“Philanthropy is all about giving,” said Joe. “And it’s not necessarily just giving money, it’s also giving your time and your resources. I think the lens that I see philanthropy through is about helping connect people in a meaningful way to groups they might not otherwise know about, and then helping to make sure that they know that their money will be used effectively and make a real difference.”

It would be totally impossible for me to encompass every aspect of the combined scope of all of the groups the foundation supports as it is truly all embracing. I featured some of the groups that Joe and Victoria highlighted primarily because of the sheer emotional impact I had experienced when discussing them. But there are of course a great many more that are doing equally outstanding things in communities all across the county – and a visit to the Community Foundation for Surrey’s website or social media pages will give you a very good idea. But above all be sure to spread the word about this very important charity which is there to help everyone throughout the county. They deserve our support.

And the last word should be left to Victoria when I asked how much she enjoys working at the Foundation, hinted at by her

endless enthusiasm during our discussions. "It's great! You get out to meet the people we have funded and worked with, and also our lovely donors. Reading through feedback forms we have online really brings home the positive impact we are making. It's lovely to see the difference we are making."

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