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Better
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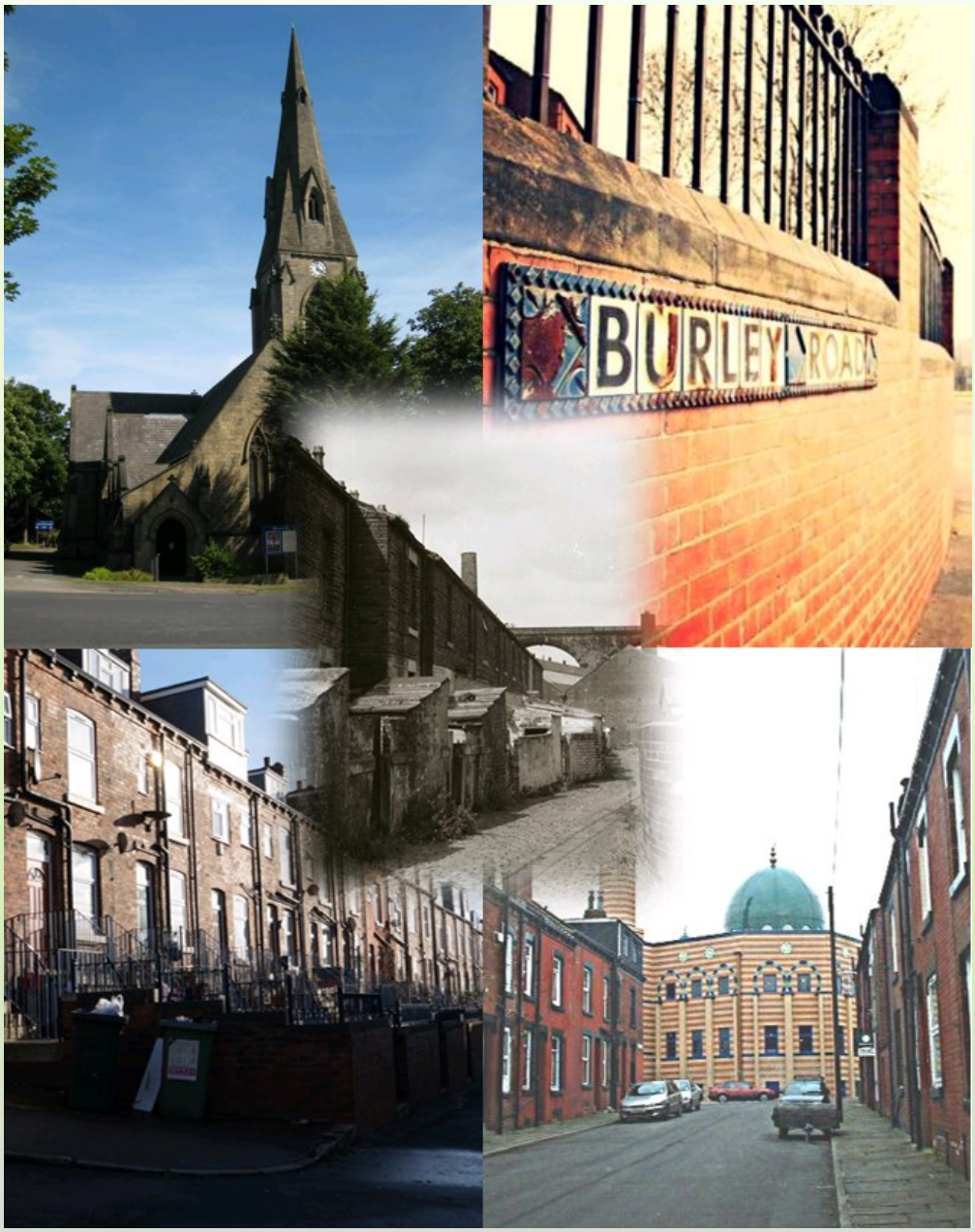
Communities



Annual Report 2018-2019

Better Leeds Communities

Chair's

Report

I am pleased to introduce Better Leeds Communities' Annual Report 2018 - 2019 which sets out for our clients, supporters, funders and the public our work and achievements during the year and our future plans. I would like to thank the Directors/ Trustees, the Senior Management team and all of our staff for their hard work during a challenging period.

The services that we provide continue to be much needed by our clients and our staff deliver them with great professionalism and empathy.

During the course of the year we experienced significant economic challenges. Our initial plans were to expand our services and to that end we commenced the year with a staffing structure which had the capacity to manage growth. However, due to financial pressures on our funders, this was not possible in-year. This led us to make some difficult decisions at the beginning of the calendar year 2019 including restructuring of our staffing in order to safeguard the ongoing stability of the charity. Regrettably this lead to the loss of some valued staff members.

In parallel with our financial pressures we also experienced high levels of staff turnover, reflecting uncertainty in the sector generally. This turnover created significant workloads for our Senior Management team as new staff were recruited and inducted. I am very grateful to all of our staff and our Senior Management team for coping with these challenges whilst still delivering excellent client service.

On behalf of Better Leeds Communities I would like to thank all our funders and partners for their support.

During the course of the year we were very fortunate that John O'Dwyer, a senior executive at Lloyds Banking Group joined us as a Trustee, and in the last few months we have been successful in recruiting two additional Trustees, Chris Eatwell and Raj Saggu, both of whom bring very valuable experience to our Board. I remain grateful to all of the Directors/Trustees for their continued energy and commitment to our mission.

Neil Canwell

Chair of Trustees

Chief Executives

Report

As a locally focused charity, Better Leeds Communities holds a unique position within our communities: we use our well-established and far-reaching networks to support individuals and families at a time of difficulty or crisis. We are often described as the 'glue' that holds people within communities together. People tell us they cope better, feel more confident and are able to deal with their difficulties after receiving support from our organisation.

We are committed to ensuring that we continue to work holistically with individuals and families in order to achieve long-lasting and effective outcomes through sustained relationships. Despite a continuing challenge to meet the increasing needs of our beneficiaries in an increasingly competitive funding environment, we have much to be positive about as we celebrate 36 years of developing and delivering services in the city.

We are developing a strong ethos and culture around self-generated unrestricted income through our room hire bookings. The proportion of our overall income from this activity has increased over the last year and we hope to continue on an upward trajectory, recognising the value this activity not only provides to local people through access to services but also the financial value contributing to investment in infrastructure and service delivery. We have accordingly set an ambitious financial target for the coming year.

We have restructured both individual teams and the organisation as a whole in order to ensure that we are able to deliver quality services both now and in the future; and we hope this will enable us to build on our strong track record of delivering relevant, innovative services and activities within local communities across Leeds.

Next year, we will be reassessed for the Advice Quality Standard (AQS) with Casework in both Debt and Housing and the MASDAP Peer Review external assessment will also be undertaken. We have developed and highly regarded Advice and Support service and we look forward to demonstrating our achievements in quality and impact.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our funders and partners for their support and encouragement. I am extremely grateful to our committed and hardworking staff team who have supported the organisation's mission and enabled our goals to be achieved. We continue to rely on their sterling work and service and thank them all wholeheartedly for all their work. I am also extremely grateful to the Directors/Trustees for their enduring energy, commitment and leadership.

Taira Kayani Chief Executive Officer

Advice Services

MASDAP

The Money Advice Service's Debt Advice Project (MASDAP) delivers debt advice sessions to Leeds residents and is funded by Citizen Advice.

The service provides detailed 'Debt Casework', where necessary, and a wide range of support including negotiations with creditors, agreement to 'debt write offs', assistance with court proceedings, discussions with enforcement agents, advice on the full range of statutory debt solutions, plus help with income maximisation and financial capability.

Referrals are received from a wide variety of agencies and organisations including other Leeds charities, Housing Support Workers, GP surgeries and self-referral.

The projects Specialist Debt Advisors deliver advice on a range of debt issues including credit and store cards, mortgage and utilities; and are qualified to act as approved intermediaries for 'Debt Relief Orders' when they are appropriate to client situations. As with previous years the complexity of client's debt problems have increased and our Advisors have spent increased time supporting clients.

The contract requires staff to engage in rigorous continuing professional development which has meant that we continue to delivery up to date and appropriate advice; and a continued emphasis on quality as well as quantity of deliver required.

The project dealt with over 700 individual cases over the course of the year. Over 20% of clients had five or more and a small number had over twenty.

Children's Centres

The Children's Centre service is funded by Citizen Advice Leeds and is aimed at anyone responsible for (or expecting) a child under 5 years of age in Leeds. Referrals are received from multiple sources, including Citizen Advice Leeds, Family Support Workers, and self-referrals.

Our Generalist Advice Workers deliver advice from 5 Children's Centres in inner Leeds and at The Burley Lodge Centre; they offer advice on Welfare Benefits, housing, debt, and immigration. The Advice Workers also assist clients with form filling, benefit appeals and mandatory reconsideration; and signpost to other services provided by Better Leeds Communities and those of appropriate external organisations who provide advice at 'Casework Level'.

Continued …..

Advice Services

Children's Centres—continued

The service also provides Housing Advice to 'Case Work' level at The Burley Lodge Centre.

During the year there has been an increased effort on service promotion from both the Advice Service, First Contact Team and through social media to ensure that those in need of the service are aware of how to make contact in order to seek support.

During the year the Advice Workers delivered approximately 1200 appointments which supported 650 children

Henry Smith

The Debt Outreach Service is funded by the Henry Smith Charity which aims to bring about lasting change to people's lives through reducing social and economic disadvantage; the service is client-focused and works with individuals to plan and identify routes forward to improve their health and wellbeing at their own pace. Clients for the service are identified through the Patient Empowerment (PEP) Service delivered in the west of Leeds.

Clients have a wide range of needs including substance misuse, homelessness, mental ill health, long term health conditions, and disabilities which impact on their ability to engage with services. The project offers a flexible and person centred model of delivery with appointments arranged as required to accommodate the complexity of clients' life circumstances - flexibility around location allows clients to engage and reduces barriers such as transport and childcare costs which can prevent people from accessing mainstream advice services.

Demand for the service continues whilst client feedback is evidencing the excellent outcomes achieved. Clients report that the support they have received has resulted in them feeling more optimistic about themselves and their lives going forward; that they have an improved sense of how to deal with their problems; feel more relaxed and can think more clearly; have improved financial stability; and are more likely to avoid homelessness

When additional issues are identified clients are supported to access Better Leeds Communities' wider services or partners to ensure a holistic plan to address their financial exclusion.

The service aims to support to 120 clients per year. Work in year has resulted in debt management, the writing off of debt and income maximisation.

Advice Services

Stronger Families

Stronger Families is funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) via the Big Lottery and is managed by the DWP - locally the fund is managed by Leeds City Council – and supports parents to access training, start job searching and find employment.

Better Leeds Communities is one of a number of partners providing service delivery.

To be eligible for support people must:

- have a dependent child
- have the right to work in the UK
- not be in paid work

Clients are allocated a Key Worker who helps them access specialists who can help with:

- Health and wellbeing;
- Debt issues, housing advice, budgeting, and benefits advice;
- Preparation for work

During the year Better Leeds Communities has delivered Debt and Specialist Housing Advice for families struggling with unemployment, low school attendance, physical health, social emotional and mental health issues, and financial exclusion.

Although during the previous financial year referrals were lower than expected there was a significant in-year increase during 2018/2019. The service staff team have reported that those accessing the service are presenting with complex issues and are being supported for longer periods of time than originally envisaged as a result of the multiple issues experienced including health and debt problems.

At the end of the financial year we were informed that this two year project has been enhanced and extended to September 2021.

STRONGER FAMILIES Building a future together | COMMUNITY FUND | European Union European Social Fund

Advice Services

Horizons

Horizons is a five year project funded by the Big Lottery and delivered in partnership with Leeds Mind and Age UK Leeds. During the financial year 2018-2019 the project started its third year of delivery and in September 2018 Better Leeds Communities took in house the provision of support to older people

The project works to reduce the immediate and medium term impacts of severe financial hardship and to reduce the level of hardship-related crisis for Leeds residents; and aims to better equip people to manage and exit hardship-related crisis through peer support, advice, and advocacy. It seeks to do so by:

- Improving the circumstances of people experiencing financial hardship and/or destitution
- Developing crisis management skills; and
- Providing a safe space and increased opportunities for those experiencing hardship crisis to shape policy.

The service delivers independent, professional, and impartial advice through attendance at Foodbanks and through one to one ongoing support - the services' Support & Engagement Workers support clients to access services and assist with relevant paperwork.

Horizons also runs Peer Support workshops and courses to share knowledge and learn life skills to prevent future crisis.

During the financial year Horizons has supported 180 new clients; 33 clients from year two continued to receive support; 33 clients were aged over 55 years of age; and 71 people attended workshops and courses.

> I will never forget all the things you did for me and my children. Thank you so much

> More places like Horizons project, the world would be a better place

> The help I got gave me a sense there is help out there, my Support Worker showed me that. She was very helpful, very professional and caring towards my needs, the best help when I needed help. Thank you Better Leeds Communities

Communities & Families

Building a Stronger Burley

The Building a Stronger Burley project, funded by the Home Office, commenced in January 2018, and started its second and final year in January 2019. The project aims to integrate the local community and build local capacity through an asset based community development approach.

The project, run by a Community Enabler, has continually exceeded targets by engaging with members of the local community through a series of promotional work and the development of multi-agency links.

The first community event was held in April 2018, a Visioning Day, which resulted in a collective vision for Burley and a lasting visual mural which includes drawings from local children.

Volunteer Community Leader recruitment was successful and in excess of the project target - 16 individuals started the bespoke training package at the start of the financial year and have gone on to develop and deliver a number of community days, events and classes including street play, circus school, food sharing, craft groups and a Halloween party.

The Community Enabler holds regular Volunteer meetings and provides individual support to the Volunteer Community Leaders and recruitment of new individuals is in progress to help widen participation. The Volunteers have been vital in shaping the project by using an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to widen community participation.

My Place

Funded by Lloyds Foundation, My Place provides a 'Specialist Housing Support' service to run alongside our existing Housing Advice provision. The service commenced in September 2018 and is initially funded for three years.

My Place works with people experiencing multiple disadvantage at a critical point in their life such as those living in the private rented sector struggling to pay high rent costs due to low incomes, reducing housing benefit, the introduction of Universal Credit and the benefits cap which are causing many vulnerable people to become homeless, on the verge of homelessness or vulnerably housed; similar patterns are also appearing for those living in social housing.

The aim of My Place is to transition people from a position of no accommodation or being vulnerably housed to managing a tenancy/accommodation; our project will also

Continued …..

Communities & Families

My Place—continued

address a range of other transition and progression outcomes that are linked to participants being able to manage a tenancy/accommodation.

The project is delivered face to face; the staff member attends appointments with the participant and where appropriate undertakes interventions on their behalf; and will periodically deliver group sessions and short courses.

My Place supports people to feel safer, build resilience, be independent and able to make positive choices; be more able to manage mental health issues; have improved self-esteem/confidence, physical and mental health, budgeting/money management skills; have reduced isolation and stress/anxiety; and increased support networks.

As part of the offer provided by Lloyds Foundation, Better Leeds Communities has received senior management training and support; and their corporate support with recruitment of a Director/Trustee.

Money Matters

The Money Matters project is funded by NatWest Skills & Opportunities Fund for 18 months and commenced in November 2018.

Money Matters supports parents to better manage their finances and financial priorities, improve income levels and build skills to help prevent financial difficulties; aims to alleviate high levels of child poverty experienced by children when their parent's income is lower than average household incomes; and to improve their mental and physical wellbeing.

Money Matters is delivered by Money Matters Mentors who deliver:

- Budgeting Surgeries - the Mentor will undertake income and benefit checks; give basic support with budgeting; identify parents who would benefit from taking part in workshops on Budgeting Skills; and/or signpost to services appropriate to their needs.
- Budgeting Skills Workshops - content will include 'why budgets are important', 'practical budgeting tips', how to obtain the best utility tariffs, and the co-production of a personal budget.

The project supports parents experiencing a range of issues that impact on their financial situation including low incomes, unemployment/underemployment, reducing benefits, and the Benefit Cap forcing many to use high-interest lenders/Payday Loans to pay for daily living costs. Many also experience vulnerabilities resulting from Domestic Abuse, alcohol and drugs that can disempowered them financially.

Communities & Families

Patient Empowerment Project

The Patient Empowerment Project (PEP) is a Social Prescribing Service commissioned by the NHS West Leeds Clinical Commissioning Group and delivered in partnership by BARCA Leeds, Better Leeds Communities and Leeds Mind.

September 2018 saw the commencement of the fifth and final year of the current contract.

The ethos of Social Prescribing is that it provides GPs with a non-medical intervention option to improve the wider health and wellbeing of their patients. The service allows the 37 GP member practices, in the former NHS Leeds West CCG geographical area, to refer patients into the service; they can also be referred by health care professionals in primary care; and individuals can self-refer. On referral a patient is assigned a PEP Link Worker who visits them in their own home, or a suitable alternative venue, depending on the individual's needs and preferences.

The service uses 'Motivational Interviewing' techniques to enable clients to self-assess their needs and develop a 'Personal Action Plan' focused on their priorities. PEP Link Workers ensure clients access appropriate statutory, voluntary, community and faith sector services, groups, and activities to assist in the development of their skills, knowledge, and confidence to self-manage their condition and/or situation.

The Project received over 995 referrals in year and worked with over 1000 individuals.

Connect 4 Health

Connect for Health is the Social Prescribing service for people living in South & East Leeds and is commissioned by NHS Leeds South & NHS East Clinical Commissioning Group. The service is delivered by Leeds Mind, in partnership with BARCA, Better Leeds Communities, Hamara, Leeds Irish Health & Homes and Touchstone.

In October 2018 the fourth and final year of the current contract commenced.

The service serves 42 GP practices – arranged into clusters with each is allocated a Wellbeing Coordinator. The service is for those aged over 14 years of age.

In addition to GP referrals the service takes referrals from other professional agencies and self-referrals. As in the previous year's referrals have increased during the year.

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Families & Communities

Connect 4 Health—continued

Wellbeing Coordinators have continued to work closely with key stakeholders and local community groups to enhance the experience of people using the service; the service has continued to deliver 'Social Prescribing Clinics' at GP surgeries; and provide 'drop-in' sessions at Community Hubs in the south and east of the city.

The service supports people to make positive changes and access a range of services and support in the local community including:

- Debt, Welfare Benefits and Housing advice
- To become active through walking, exercise and dance groups or gardening
- Promoted healthy living and wellbeing
- Supported people to join social groups; and
- Manage physical and emotional health needs.

Since the service launched in November in 2015 the service has received over 5000 referrals.

In January 2019 Better Leeds Communities were informed that the consortium, that Better Leeds Communities was part of, had been successful in securing the new city wide Social Prescribing contract from the merged clinical commissioning group NHS Leeds CCG. The contract which will replace Patient Empowerment Project and Connect for Health will run for three years from September 2019

Services and Room Hire

First Contact Service

The First Contact Team, which includes our evening and weekend staff team, is the welcoming face of the organisation and is the first point of contact for all clients, customers, contractors, and funders coming into Better Leeds Communities services and facility.

The increased cover for Reception and Advice enquiries has seen an improvement to the client journey for referrals coming in to the organisation – telephone calls were answered more efficiently and the team were able to deal with clients efficiently and effectively; the team have continuously hit the target of 96% of calls answered each month. The team also assist new and existing clients when they visit the Burley Lodge Centre and work closely with the Advice and Support & Engagement teams to support their client journey.

Room Hire

The First Contact Team are the face of the organisations Room Hire offer and have continued to offer a high level of service seven days a week.

Our purpose designed building is just two miles from Leeds city centre and train station and a ten minute walk from Burley Park train station. Served by excellent bus links on street parking is also available.

The Burley Lodge Centre is a vibrant and modern community space for meetings, exhibitions, training, outreach work, exercise classes and one-to-one work; our facility is accessible has a lift. We offer good-quality facilities; a simple booking system, a welcoming environment, and a staffed reception; facilities are available seven days a week including evenings.

As with the previous year, the Burley Lodge Centre has continued to be a popular venue for external agencies, trainers, and community members. By keeping room hire prices competitive and offering a variety of multifunctional rooms the Burley Lodge Centre has continued to be a popular venue for commercial users, external agencies, trainers, and community members including: Annapurna, the Castle View Group, Leeds ABC, NCT Antenatal Group, The Place 2 Be, Ready Steady Cook, Vandan Charity; and have hosted the Capoeira Club Leeds weekly.

During the year room bookings increased due to new organisations starting to use the centre and from a number of long term bookings. However the room booking income target of £45,000 fell short by around 6% but income did see a 28% increase on the previous financial year.

During the financial year Better Leeds Communities was awarded a grant from Leeds City Council to purchase new tables and chairs for the Community Room.

Governance

Financial Review

Funding for the voluntary sector continued to be competitive during the last financial year. There continues to be a reduction of funding, and a requirement to do more for less from statutory body funders; and a reduction of funds available from trust and grant giving organisations. However, taking this into consideration Better Leeds Communities continued to bring in funds and has been able to attract new funding for the forthcoming financial year.

Income over the year increased £575,110 to £665,367, an increase of 13.5%. As would be expected there was a corresponding increase in costs from £622,215 in 2017/18 to £729,573 in 2018/19. This left an overall net deficit of £64,206 made up of £54,255 of unrestricted funds and a deficit of £9,951 of restricted funds

Funding came from a variety of statutory and non-statutory bodies and organisations and Better Leeds Communities is grateful to all these funders for helping the organisation to work towards its mission of creating opportunities that enable people in Leeds to achieve their potential by raising aspirations, removing barriers and developing abilities that lead to a better life.

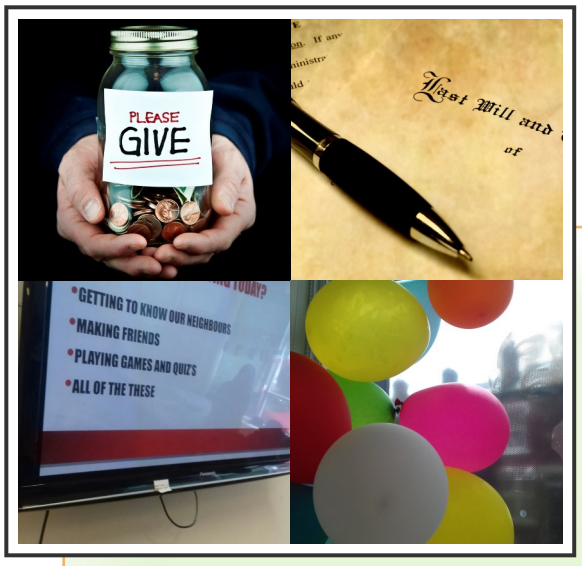
Reserves Policy

The trustees have established a policy whereby the unrestricted funds not committed or invested in tangible fixed assets (the free reserves) held by the charity should be adequate to ensure that current levels of activity could continue for at least six months during a period of unforeseen difficulty. At 31 March 2019 the total reserves were £443,918. Of this £56,667 are restricted and not available for general use and £210,217 are held as functional fixed assets. This leaves the level of free reserves amounting to £177,034. This provides adequate wind down costs should this be necessary. This reserve level, together with ongoing sources of income, give the trustees the confidence to consider that this reserve is sufficient to meet the above objective. The reserves policy is reviewed on an annual basis.

Plans for future periods

We will continue to explore how we can ensure the sustainability and expansion of services for our local community and beyond during the financial year 2019-2020. We will continue with a focus on the development of community assets and strong local partnerships; and of empowering our clients to make informed choices about their lives via the provision of quality services.

The financial year 2019-2020 will see the organisation undertaking a conciliation year where we review our services and income streams in an ever challenging environment.



Funders

Better Leeds Communities would like to thank its funders during the 2018-2019 financial year.

It is only with the continuation of funding being available that we have been able to continue to deliver the much needed services for Leeds residents.

BARCA Leeds

Big Lottery Fund

Citizens Advice Bureau

Citizens Advice Leeds

Henry Smith

Home Office

European Structural and Investment Funds/Leeds City Council

Leeds City Council

Leeds Mind

Lloyds Foundation

NatWest

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Charity Registration Number 514371

Company Registration Number 1754257

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Burley Lodge Centre | Support & Engagement | Advice | Families & Communities