



*IT'S
ALL ABOUT
TRUST*

**Making a difference
by supporting
women with a
community direct
grants fund**

SMALLWOODTRUST

+ together women





At Together Women, our vision is a world where all women and girls are safe, valued and in control of their own lives. In our women's centres and through support, advice and practical help, we enable women and girls to make their own choices.

Over the past three years we have embarked on a transformative journey, working in collaboration to test Smallwood Trust's community fund by directly granting funds to women. This empowering approach enabled women to determine how best to utilize small individual grants.

THE IMPACT OF THIS FUND ON THE LIVES OF WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES WAS NOTHING SHORT OF REMARKABLE.

These grants provided vital support in achieving financial stability, employment, addressing housing needs and improving mental health and wellbeing. Often, it's the smallest hurdles that can tip individuals into crisis, and this initiative has unequivocally demonstrated that entrusting women with decision-making power has real impact.

In sharing our insights, we shed light on why we believe this initiative has been exceptionally successful and offer recommendations for its future.

The Smallwood Trust direct grant is one of many 'tools' that our Together Women team use to support women in taking control of their lives, and we firmly believe that the key to success lies in a single word: trust.

Rokaiya Khan, CEO, Together Women

IMPROVED FINANCIAL STABILITY AND RELIEVED HARDSHIP

This fund helped women on the road to financial stability and in starting a new life, relieving hardship for themselves and their children.

- Women and families fleeing domestic abuse and having to start over.
- Women leaving prison with nothing more than the clothes they are stood up in.
- Women just keeping their “heads above water” facing an unexpected cost that could tip them into crisis.

I fled a really abusive relationship where my husband controlled everything I did.

He didn't know about my time at Together Women where I was able to talk to a domestic abuse practitioner and plan my escape.

*The accommodation that I was given with my two children had no cooker. The Smallwood Trust grant for the cooker, delivery and installation, **made a huge difference to us starting afresh.***

I went into prison with an horrendous addiction.

The addiction had taken its toll on my health and I was seriously underweight. Whilst inside I was given help to overcome the addiction which resulted in me putting weight on, but on leaving prison I had only two sets of clothes, including those that I was wearing

*My keyworker helped me apply for a Smallwood Trust grant and after it was approved we went shopping together. **This made me feel human again and I am looking forward to the future.***

FACT:

208 applications
and 175 grants made in a
three year period

FACT:

£60k
administered
to women
in that three
year period





SECURING EMPLOYMENT

This fund has supported women to get closer to paid employment, through education, training and volunteering, as well as helping them directly to get a job.

- In some cases being in employment can be a pathway to other positive changes, including securing a home and strengthening relationships with children who are living in the care system.
- Securing employment is particularly difficult for women carrying the stigma of being involved in the criminal justice system, especially if they are leaving prison to start again.

FACT:

Around
10%
of applicants
(20 women)
were lone
parents with
children

FACT:

93 women
supported from
this fund have
experience of the
criminal justice
system

My keyworker helped me get some basic furniture when I left prison after serving eight years. I left prison with nothing and had to start again.

Eventually I got the chance of a job but needed to sit some exams. The nearest organisation who delivered the training was miles away and out of my grasp.

My keyworker suggested an online course and applied to Smallwood Trust for a laptop, which was approved.

This was a massive step forward for me and gave my confidence a huge boost.

Social services decided I could not give my children a safe and secure upbringing and they were removed from my care. Fortunately I could still have regular contact with them. I wanted to get my own life back on track, so that as my children grew up they would be proud of what I had achieved and would see me as a positive influence in their life.

*Together Women worked with me to rebuild my confidence and I applied to College to do a hair and beauty course. Although I could afford most of the kit and uniform, some of it was out of my reach. My keyworker suggested we apply to the Smallwood Trust and **now it feels as though I have a future.***

HOUSING NEEDS

This fund has been vital in helping women to get settled in their own home.

- Purchasing housing items that most people take for granted.
- Securing basic accommodation for women who have been homeless.
- Accessing benefits and clearing financial obstacles (like rent arrears) and the need to find a deposit.

Applying for benefits can be very frustrating and not having a bank account can stop someone accessing housing benefits, which is part of universal credit.

This grant has been used on numerous occasions to purchase birth certificates etc so women can then apply for the benefits that they are entitled to.

This then allows them to apply for housing.

We worked with a woman who had survived domestic abuse. She managed to break away from the perpetrator of the abuse.

She had a relatively small amount of rent arrears with the local authority. Her keyworker helped her apply for a grant which addressed the arrears and the local authority then moved her to a higher banding.

This then gave her eligibility for her own property, which she was able to secure.

FACT:

Around
1/4
out of all
applicants have
experienced
homelessness
(54 women)





MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Living conditions and basic gaps in the household budget can significantly impact on the mental health of women we support. This fund has been used imaginatively to support women in this position.

After I came out of prison I was desperate not to slip back into my old friendship circles but felt isolated and lonely.

My keyworker helped me apply for a grant to buy a small TV to help me get through the day.

This was a great help until I was able to find new things to do where I was living.

I had managed to secure my own tenancy after several months of sofa surfing and living on the streets. I slept on an old sofa but at least I had my own place.

*Unfortunately my health continued to deteriorate and **my keyworker encouraged me to apply to the Smallwood Trust for a bed and orthopaedic mattress.***

This has made a difference to both my physical and mental health.

I left prison to go to approved premises where I continued to receive support from my probation officer and Together Women keyworker. I progressed well and managed to stay off substances. My mental health was still quite fragile.

I knew I could not go back to where I had previously been living, as I would have gone straight back into my old ways. I needed the support of my family but they were hundreds of miles away and did not want me back under their roof. My family identified a private let near them. Close enough for them to support my recovery.

My keyworker applied to the Smallwood Trust for the deposit for the flat and I was able to move back to my home town.

FACT: Around **1/2** of women accessing this grant (101 women) have some issues with their mental health

WHY THIS WORKED AND WHAT WE LEARNED

We learned so many lessons from our partnership with Smallwood Trust which can help other charities and funders to start similar community grant initiatives.

These are three reasons we believe that this grant worked so well:

1. TRUST BETWEEN TOGETHER WOMEN AND SMALLWOOD TRUST

We worked together to understand each other's aims and values and this enabled Smallwood Trust to take a chance on us and to trust that our 'on the ground' team would administer the fund according to the needs that we identified with women.

2. TRUSTING WOMEN

Central to this form of direct giving is trust that the person with a need knows best how to meet it and should have the freedom to do that. Women we work with rarely have power to make choices about their lives and the empowerment of this grant often mattered as much to women as the practical solutions.

3. WOMEN TRUSTING THE SERVICES OF TOGETHER WOMEN

One unexpected lesson we learned is how this form of grant helped women to build trust with Together Women - initially and over the longer term.

The role of the key worker was vital – listening carefully to a woman's story and problems and working with her to establish how the grant could help.

This helped us to build relationships with women that has enabled 'wrap around' support over time.





WHAT NEXT? CALLING ALL FUNDERS AND COMMISSIONERS...

Our recommendations for what needs to happen now apply to funders, commissioners and specialist women's service providers:

FUNDERS AND COMMISSIONERS work in partnership with women's specialist providers to establish a community direct grant initiative in every women's centre and similar service.

WOMEN'S CENTRES AND OTHER SPECIALIST SERVICES work together to share good practice on grant administration, including minimising bureaucracy and collating stories about the difference such funding makes.

FUNDERS, COMMISSIONERS, WOMEN'S CENTRES AND OTHER SPECIALIST SERVICES work together to share knowledge on what works in direct grants which can be used by all services for people facing multiple disadvantage and those caught up in the criminal justice system, so that direct giving through individual grants becomes an established 'tool' for support across all communities.

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FUTURE."

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"MASSIVE STEP
FORWARD FOR ME AND
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A HUGE BOOST."

"MADE A HUGE
DIFFERENCE TO
US STARTING
AFRESH."

"MADE A DIFFERENCE
TO BOTH MY PHYSICAL AND
MENTAL HEALTH."

"I WAS ABLE TO
MOVE BACK TO MY
HOME TOWN."

We thank Smallwood Trust for trusting us with the opportunity to work on this brilliant initiative and thank you to all women and Together Women staff who shared stories about the impact the grants have had.



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For more information visit: togetherwomen.org