

An Even Better Arbournthorne: Learning Lessons Report

Schools as Community Infrastructure

September 2022





This report builds on material gathered through an independent learning programme, including document analysis, a desk-based review, two rounds of interviews, participant observation and collaborative workshops undertaken by Professor Beth Perry, Urban Institute, University of Sheffield, with support from Dr Lee Crookes (Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield) and Valeska Matziol. It also draws on data reported in quarterly reports and newsletters, collected by a team of dedicated staff and volunteers at Arbourthorne Community Primary School involved in the An Even Better Arbourthorne project. Particular thanks for the interviewees, who shall remain anonymous. Rachel Newman, Paige Liddle, Georgie Mitchell, Mandy Fenech and Caroline Nowill helped gather content. Vanessa Langley, Michael Norton and Rachel Newman also gave extended feedback on the report. Volunteer voices from an online showcase, organised as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science in November 2021, are also included throughout.

Produced by: KANDS Collective

Images provided by An Even Better Arbourthorne. All permissions received following school policies.

Report citation: Perry, B. (2022) An Even Better Arbourthorne: Learning Lessons Report. Schools as Community Infrastructure. Sheffield: KANDS Collective.

Contact: b.perry@sheffield.ac.uk @TheUrbanBeth

Contents

Forewords	4	List of Figures:	
1. Introduction	6	1. Arbourthorne Community Primary School in Numbers	9
2. Background	10	2. Phase 1 Staffing	12
3. An Even Better Arbourthorne: A Model for Community Change?	12	3. How AEBA Will Make a Difference	13
4. Activities Overview	16	4. The Community Fridge, by Della Oakes and Sonia Cooling	18
Food and Nutrition	16	5. Action Stations! By the AEBA Team	28
Environment and Growing	22	6. AEBA: "A Lockdown Lifeline"	33
Skills for the Future	26	7. Volunteer Numbers	36
Catalyst Projects	30	8. Where Are the Volunteers From?	37
Pandemic Projects	32	9. Volunteer Hours	37
5. Pillars for Success	34	10. The Funding Jigsaw	39
A Family School	34	11. Innovative Partnerships	40
The Volunteering Programme	36	12. Participant Learning	42
The Funding Jigsaw	39	13. Counting Success	45
Innovative Partnerships and Exchanges	40	14. Why Do People Volunteer?	46
Participant Learning	42	15. Volunteering Outcomes	47
6. Understanding What Counts	44	16. Mobilising the School as Community Infrastructure	49
7. Learning Lessons	52	17. How AEBA Will Make a Difference 2.0	53
8. Schools as Community Infrastructure	58	18. Towards Co-producing AEBA	54
References	60	List of Boxes	
Roll of Honour	61	1. About Arbourthorne	6
		2. Arbourthorne Community Primary School	7
		3. Family Feast, by Faye Harris	19
		4. Books, books, books, by Lucy Boldy	26
		5. School-University Partnerships for An Even Better Arbourthorne	41
		6. About the Volunteers	47
		7. Schools Blazing the Trail	56

Forewords

Michael Norton

Director, Centre for Innovation in Voluntary Action

We got started through a chain of connections. A friend was collecting books, toys, clothes, kitchen equipment and more to distribute to parents at Arbourthorne Community Primary School, realising that he had more than enough and wanting to do good. I congratulated him on his generosity and compassion, but said that giving things did not solve the underlying problem. This was the birth of An Even Better Arbourthorne, an attempt to work with a primary school to address needs, provide opportunities, build skills and confidence, and encourage volunteering and mutual aid. The big idea is that a primary school is an ideal location for such an initiative, with up to 250 parents coming twice a day to drop off and collect their children, with facilities and grounds available outside the school day. Supporting the wellbeing of parents and the community should lead to better educational outcomes.

Vanessa Langley

Headteacher, Arbourthorne Community Primary School

I'm a firm believer that our job as a community school is to create the best conditions for children to grow academically and socially through a 'co-parenting' partnership between home, school and community. My mantra is 'Every Child, Everyone's Responsibility'. We all have a part to play in creating these conditions for growth. Building on these long-standing and firm foundations, and our innovative approach at Arbourthorne Community Primary School, we have embraced the potential of An Even Better Arbourthorne to extend our philosophy and activities. We have been able to develop fresh ways of empowering the community to enhance their own, their children's and their collective lives by playing an active part in changing their own futures. The timing of the project was perfect!



Watering the beds at Red Robin House.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the roles of schools in supporting communities in areas of low income into sharp relief, as they have addressed food poverty, overcome digital exclusion and sought to support mental health and well-being in neighbourhoods in distress.

Yet these roles are not new. Innovative schools up and down the UK and internationally have long sought ways to ensure they contribute to their neighbourhoods and improve the lives of residents. Beyond addressing immediate need, what contributions can a school make to addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality?

This is the question that one school set out to answer. Arbourthorne Community Primary School, in South East Sheffield, UK has always had a strong reputation as a 'family school', extending its ethos of care and support to the wider community. In 2019 the school had the opportunity to build on these foundations through the 'An Even Better Arbourthorne' project, led by the Centre for Innovation in Voluntary Action and funded by a number of organisations including the National Lottery Community Fund.

This report tells the story of 'An Even Better Arbourthorne' (AEBA). It shares the lessons learnt from the first phase of the work (2019-2022) as the basis for future development in Arbourthorne and for dialogue with other schools. It is not a traditional 'evaluation' report, but has been compiled as part of a learning process, led by academics at the University of Sheffield. This has included formative moments of reflection and collaborative analysis, independent interviews, collective celebration and forward planning. The intention of the learning process has been to support participants' development and embed learning to contribute to longer-term ownership and sustainability.

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns which ensued early into the project, AEBA had to adapt and innovate in ways unanticipated at the outset. This meant stopping some activities, changing others and starting new initiatives. As such, the aim is not to assess progress against intended metrics, but to tell a story of what worked and what can be improved in the future.

BOX 1:

About Arbourthorne

Arbourthorne Community Primary School is part of the Park and Arbourthorne Ward in the City of Sheffield. Participants in AEBA described Arbourthorne as a community where people have traditionally looked out for each other. However, since 2010, austerity policies have had a huge impact on the neighbourhood. People spoke of the community 'pulling apart' leading to high levels of social isolation and loneliness, and a weakening of social ties between groups and different organisations. The reluctance of this proud community to accept charity has had to be overcome, as people have been left little choice but to accept outside help. At the beginning of AEBA, people reflected on how some families were so stretched that they had little time for each other or the community.

Key statistics paint a picture of a community struggling to make ends meet. According to IMD data, the ward is the 5th poorest in the city and has had a high percentage of economically inactive residents, with low indicators on health and wellbeing (% obesity/eating 5-a-day/not exercising) and high levels of crime compared with other areas of the city. Life expectancy for men is up to 20 years lower than elsewhere in Sheffield, and 26% of residents have no qualifications.

SHEFFIELD



BOX 2:
Arbourthorne Community
Primary School

Despite low starting points for children and a challenging environment (see Figure 1), Arbourthorne Community Primary School has been rated consistently Good in Ofsted inspections. Over recent years Arbourthorne has emerged as a mixed ethnic community, with over 20 mother tongue languages now being spoken at the school.

The headteacher, Vanessa Langley, is in her fourteenth year at the school. She and her team are passionate about improving life chances and wider outcomes for families living in challenging circumstances - through innovative partnerships and by growing a culture of high ambition, resilience, enthusiasm and ensuring a focus on family and community engagement in learning.

Key investments before AEBA included the development of Red Robin House, a converted caretaker's house used by families and the community to improve their life skills within a home environment and an artist-in-residence to work with children and families.

Arbourthorne
Community Primary
School

The report is structured in the following sections. Following this Introduction, the report provides a short background of key ideas around school-community engagement and identifies different models that have been developed to date (Section 2). This is followed by an overview of the AEBA project, its organisation and key partners and the project's theory of change (Section 3). A summary of key activities is provided (Section 4) and analysis of the key pillars that have been important foundations for the project (Section 5). Section 6 examines what difference AEBA has made, drawing together data and key statistics that have been gathered by the team and volunteer stories captured

in interviews. The impact of AEBA on building community infrastructure is also assessed. The report considers what has been learnt by reviewing progress against the theory of change and identifying wider learning lessons (Section 7). Finally, the report reflects back on what makes AEBA distinctive and how it extends and challenges existing ideas around school-community engagement (Section 8).

The story of AEBA is remarkable, all the more so for what has been achieved during a global pandemic. It is a testament to the volunteers, staff, families and children in Arbourthorne and all the supporters who made it happen.

AEBA notice board.



FIGURE 1:
Arbourthorne Community Primary School in numbers.

STARTING POINTS



Children's language skills on entry to Nursery show a decline over time

78% of children on entry to Foundation Stage 1 are below 20th centile on the British Picture Vocabulary Scale

35%

Black and Minority Ethnic pupils on roll

22%

speak English as an additional language

KEY STATISTICS

466 children on roll

69% of pupil body eligible for pupil premium payments



65%

of children are in receipt of free school meals

SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND)

171

SEND pupils

37%

SEND support (twice locality average)

25 with Education, Health and Care Plan (10 in mainstream)

Arbourthorne ward is high on the indices for multiple deprivation



OUTCOMES

Our inclusive approach, focusing on the best interests of each individual through both in-house and external provision, enables children with a high number of ACEs and complex lives to build positive relationships and readiness for the next stage of their education. We celebrate achievement and progress in all areas.

Outstanding attainment for children with low Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) above national average.



2 Background

The relationship between schools and their wider communities and environments has been subject to academic and practical analysis (Dyson and Raffo 2007). A desk-based review of the literature reveals a number of key trends.

There is a clear link between educational outcomes and place-based inequalities

Researchers have evidenced the link between educational outcomes and place-based inequalities (Dyson et al. 2013). There is a complex ecosystem of factors and inter-relationships between school, home and community that shape individuals' life chances and determine socio-economic outcomes (Kerr et al 2014). Social and economic change means that the traditional, inward-looking model of schooling is no longer sufficient. In low-income areas, many schools struggle to fulfil their core teaching remit effectively because their pupils face several disadvantages which act as a barrier to their capacity to learn. Educationalists have been increasingly concerned with how

schools and other services can work more closely together, so that the barriers to learning faced by children can be tackled at source, through early family and community interventions.

“Closing the gap in outcomes between those from more and less advantaged backgrounds will only happen when what happens to children outside as well as inside the school changes. This means changing how families and communities work and enriching what they offer to children.”

–AINSCOW 2012: 307

A number of different models and initiatives have developed over the years

Across the world, ideas have developed about how to embed schools within their communities and extend their impact beyond the school walls.

Extended service schools provide a range of services and activities beyond the school to help meet the needs of pupils their families and the wider community. The school may work with local providers, agencies and other schools to provide access to a core offer of integrated services.

Community-oriented schools are not isolated educational institutions, but see themselves as part of a network of other schools and community agencies supporting each other and pooling their resources in a sustained effort. Partnerships with local agencies are seen to

multiply the impacts of each other's efforts (Dyson and Raffo 2007; Ainscow 2012).

Community hub schools are a form of community-oriented school that focuses on the co-location or collaborative provision of a range of social services within the school setting itself (Simons 2011; Haig 2014); whilst **school-community learning centres** emphasise lifelong learning provisions for adults and families as well as children.

A Children's Zone brings together all the resources in a local area to support the educational and broader development of children and young people. One international example is the Harlem Children's Zone established in 1990 in response to high levels of poverty in New York's Harlem district. The

focus is on addressing a wide range of family and community factors that limit the ability of children to do well.

Traditions of community-oriented schooling tend to be stronger outside the UK context, for instance, in the US (Lubell 2011) or Australia

(Cleveland 2020). The language may differ but at its heart is the idea of partnership with a range of agencies to improve service delivery and offer wrap around or extended education to children and their families (Cummings, Todd and Dyson 2007).

There are strengths and limitations of these initiatives

One criticism of these initiatives is that they tend to be largely ameliorative rather than transformative, focussing on addressing need over structural inequality (Lubell 2011). Put simply, this means schools may seek to alleviate symptoms of poverty without tackling root causes (Cummings et al. 2007). Furthermore, studies have tended to focus on how community

relationships can improve pupils' attainment, rather than on how schools can contribute to addressing place-based inequality. This unidirectional focus is a significant limitation in understanding the roles of schools in urban areas of high deprivation, particularly where schools may be the only remaining form of community infrastructure.

The context for schools to play a wider role in England is challenging

In the early 2000s there were a number of initiatives that sought to address the nexus between place-based inequality and educational outcomes, by extending the roles of school in the community. The Labour Government's Every Child Matters programme aimed for extended schools to offer a varied menu of activities, with increased childcare, parenting support, family access to services at the school and community access to school facilities. Other initiatives included Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, Behaviour and Education Support Teams and the Healthy Schools Programme, for instance (Raffo and Dyson 2007).

There has however been less focus since 2010 (Diss and Jarvie 2016), accompanied by a reduction in school and local government funding (National Audit Office 2016).

This has been described as a drift from stable and statutory to piecemeal funding with a reliance on charitable sources (Haddad et al. 2018). It has been left to the discretion of individual schools to decide whether to engage 'beyond their walls'(Partridge and Bath 2019: 24).

"The drive to achieve top results under the current accountability regime incentivises some schools to build the walls between the institution and the community higher and higher... it is an idea based on a deficit model; viewing "deprived" communities as environments with little to contribute to a child's development and from which the child must be 'saved' to be reformed in school."

-LUKE BILLINGHAM, REACH ACADEMY FELTHAM, PARAPHRASED IN PARTRIDGE AND BATH 2019:24

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on how schools can support their communities

COVID-19 has brought the actual and potential roles of schools in areas of low income, such as Arbourthorne, into sharp relief. Before the pandemic, some schools were already describing themselves as the 'fourth emergency service' (Guardian 2019); however, media coverage of COVID-19 has largely been limited to key issues, such as the adaptation to - and inequalities in - remote learning, and impacts on educational outcomes, rather than the wider roles schools have played during the pandemic. Government support was focused on catch-up tutoring, a centrally-determined one-size fits all solution.

Nursery, primary and secondary schools have been filling gaps in welfare provision through food parcels, clothes bundles and tech support (Hoskins et al. 2021).

This suggests an urgent need to revisit practice, theory and policy, to ask **how might we re-imagine the school-community relationships in light of COVID-19?**

The story of An Even Better Arbourthorne holds some clues.

3 AEBA: A model for community change?

An Even Better Arbourthorne is an initiative based at Arbourthorne Community Primary School, which aims to “address the root causes of hardship by bringing new ideas and solutions into our community” (ACPS 2020). The approach of AEBA is to support community capacity-building and poverty reduction through engaging with families and community organisations through the school. The focus to date has been on volunteering through school-based initiatives to encourage active citizenship and entrepreneurship to make Arbourthorne *even better* whilst celebrating what already exists.

The initiative received funding for three years from a number of organisations (see p.39) anchored by a grant from the National Lottery Communities Fund for the period 2019-2022. The staffing team for Phase 1 (see Figure 2) brought partners together from three main organisations:

- **Arbourthorne Community Primary School** is the host organisation. AEBA builds on a long tradition of parent-school engagement and the culture of the school as a ‘family school’. School staff have

supported the initiative and been involved in the Steering Group and strategic oversight.

- **The Centre for Innovation in Voluntary Action (CIVA)** is the project lead and funder. They receive and manage the external funding for the initiative, and are the primary accountable and responsible body for the initiative. They bring ideas, networks and funding to the project. CIVA was founded as a charitable trust in 1995 and reorganised in 2007 as a charitable Company Limited by Guarantee.
- **Growtheatre CIC** is a creative organisation contracted by CIVA for the day to day delivery of the programme. Growtheatre constituted the AEBA team who organised and ran the volunteer programme, and delivered the different activities. The team comprised a part-time project coordinator, administrative assistant and volunteer coordinator.

The Urban Institute at the University of Sheffield was appointed by CIVA as the learning partner, participant evaluator and ‘critical friend’ to the project.

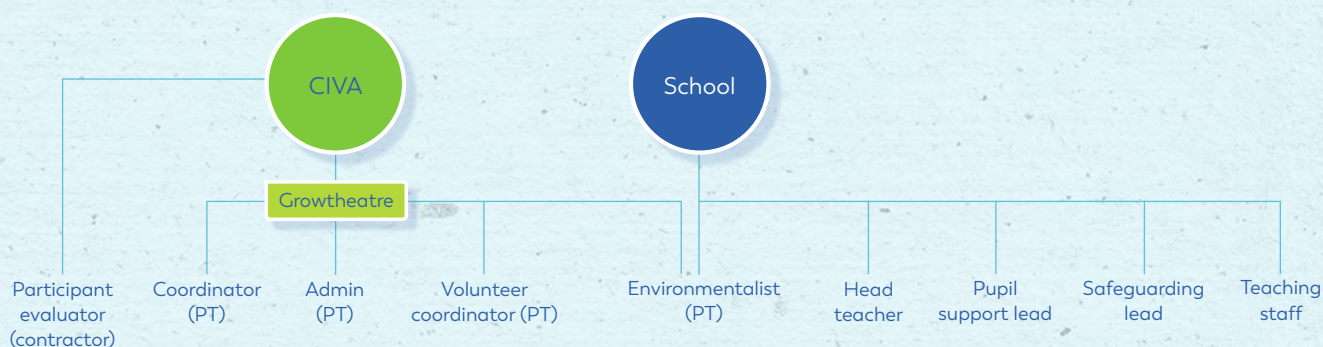
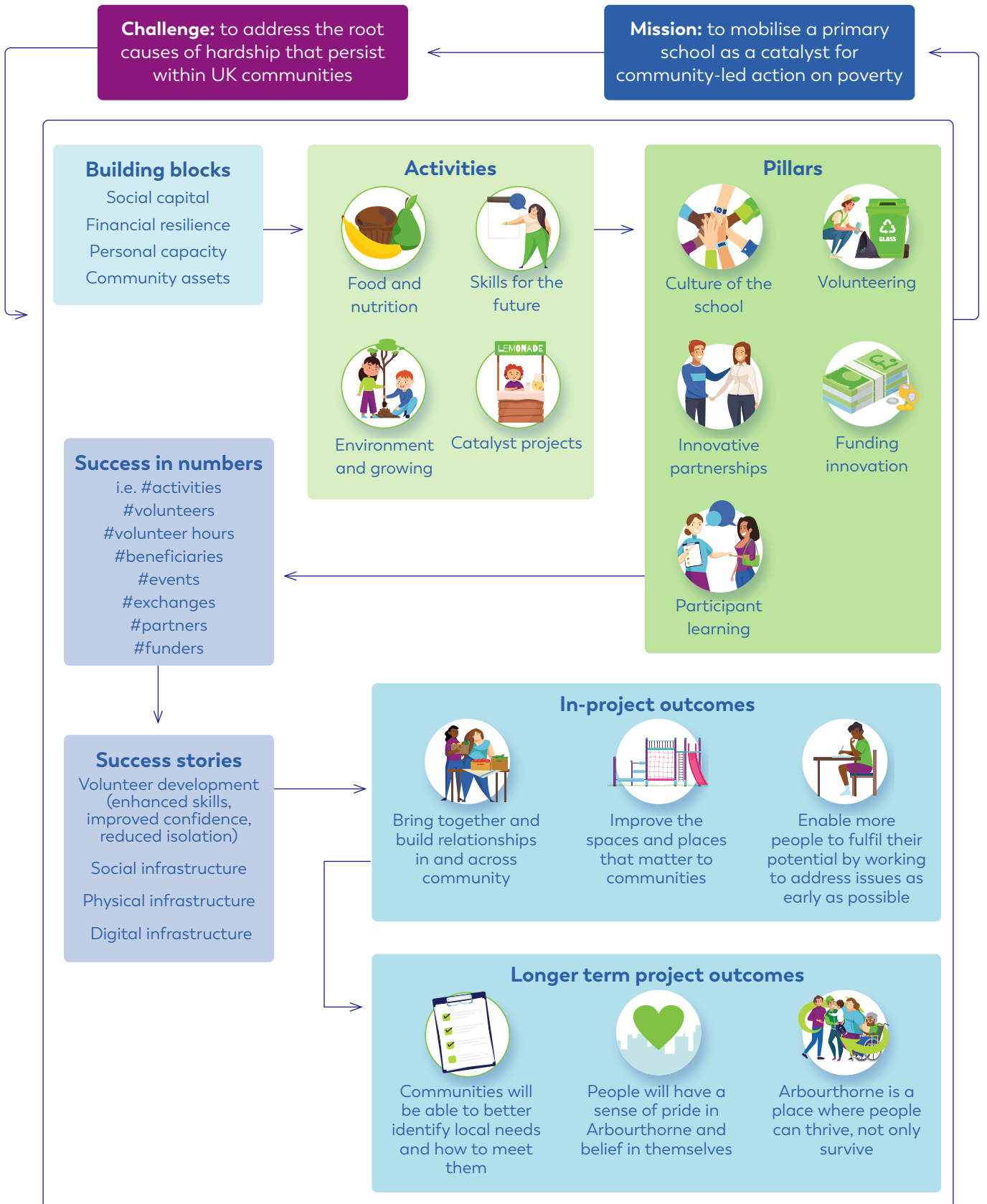


FIGURE 2: Phase 1 Staffing.

Figure 3 sets out the theory of change for the project which has been compiled as a result of the learning process.

FIGURE 3:

HOW AEBA WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

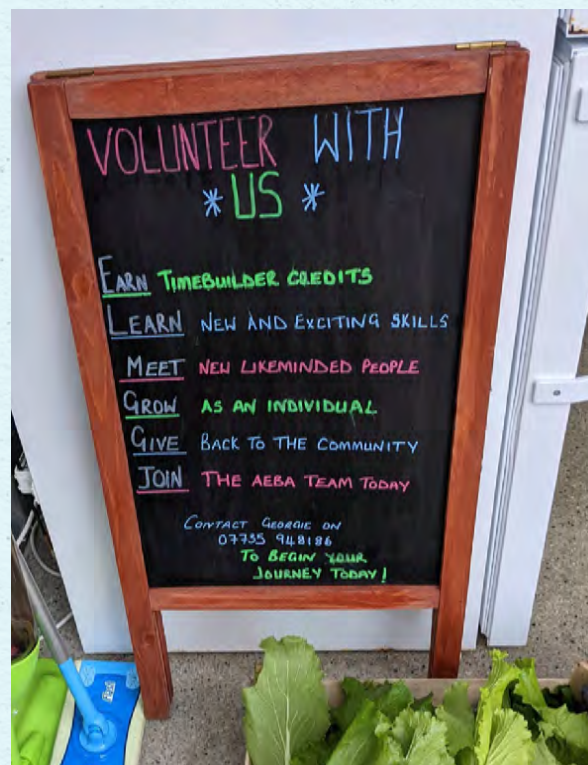


AEBA was intended to mobilise the school as a catalyst for community-led action on poverty to address the root causes of hardship in Arbourthorne. Reflecting current evidence, it was seen as important to focus on the primary school as a central point for a community-wide initiative for five reasons:

- it is a well-established body at the heart of the community;
- its catchment area is a manageable scale;
- most parents and carers come to the school during term-time twice a day;
- children are most at risk if poverty is not addressed; and
- educational attainment will be enhanced if poverty issues are addressed which is important for the school and how it manages its resources.

The building blocks underpinning this approach were to find ways of helping people and communities to: increase their incomes and enhance their wellbeing through enterprise, mutual aid and volunteering (social capital); reduce their expenditure through sharing, cooperation and local independence (financial resilience); increase personal capacity (including leadership skills and social entrepreneurship) building on the skills and talents of local people; and develop community assets and opportunities.

With these ideas in mind, AEBA developed a wide range of activities that became consolidated within four strands, following collaborative workshops run as part of the learning process in 2020. These were Food and Nutrition, Environment and Growing, Skills for the Future and Catalyst Projects. Underpinning these activities were a number of pillars for success: the school's culture and approach; the volunteering programme; strong partnerships; a co-funding model and a participant learning programme to help shift ownership to the community.



Recruitment board.

At an early meeting of the Steering Group in 2019 the long-term nature of the process of change was emphasised. AEBA was intended to be based on trial, error and experimentation, underpinned by a belief and faith in the journey.

With that in mind, what matters is how well the programme and individual initiatives were able to encourage engagement and collaboration, build skills and confidence and lay the ground for a more positive future. Some success can be counted in numbers, though not according to pre-intended metrics. The heart of the matter lies in the changing narratives around people's lives, the use of the school as community infrastructure and the seeds that are sown for changing outcomes for Arbourthorne and its residents.

“IT IS NOT ABOUT MEASURING STUFF, SO LONG AS WE ARE GETTING SOMEWHERE.”

—MICHAEL NORTON, CIVA



Community engagement activities in Red Robin House. Photo taken by Michelle Keens.

4 Activities overview



Food and nutrition

1 Arbourthorne Community Fridge

What?

One of the most popular aspects of AEBA and widely cited as a success is the installation of the Community Fridge, which developed a supply chain for accessing free food from supermarkets, FareShare and other sources. The aim was to address food waste and provide free food to those in need. The Community Fridge Membership scheme requires families to sign up, pay a one off payment of £1.00 each year and in return they receive a bag of food once a week and a Community Fridge Tote Bag.

How?

The project initially received guidance and support from a local organisation called Food Works Sheffield (formerly the Real Junk Food Project Sheffield). This involved a Real Junk Market Stall, assemblies and training for children in Year 5 to cook surplus food.

The expertise of an organisation called Hubbub was important in helping set up the Community Fridge which expanded to take food from 13 different supermarkets and other organisations, for instance the local Saint Mary's Church. Food also comes from the Growing Area in the school (see Activity 6). Around 15 volunteers have been involved with the Community Fridge at any one time. They have developed a range of skills through, for instance, training on hygiene (Level 2 Food Hygiene and Catering) and allergens, and through learning on the job, for instance, organisational and practical skills. Over time, the Community Fridge has



Community Fridge.

expanded through the purchase of freezers and had to take on a second Team Leader to deal with demand. Regular small grants have been received to support the development of the fridge: for instance, a small Action Stations grant (see Activity 8) to support running costs like maintenance, tote bags for membership scheme, artwork, awning and cleaning supplies.

A further Neighbourly Grant was received to support the fridge in receiving additional donations. St Mary's Church helped recruit drivers for food collections during COVID-19 and the Spires Community Centre became the location for the fridge temporarily during the pandemic.

“I AM NOT SURE WHAT I WOULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT THIS PROJECT – IT REALLY HELPS ME GET FROM WEEK TO WEEK.”

–COMMUNITY FRIDGE MEMBER



Top left: pupil volunteers help at the Community Fridge.
 Top right: vegetables from the polytunnel.
 Bottom right: member's totebag.



So what?

Key outcomes include addressing food insecurity through the provision of bags (200 in the first quarter alone), reduction in food waste and improved self-worth for volunteers. There have been around 80 fridge members at any one time. The Arbourthorne Community Fridge was the first community fridge supported by Hubbub in a school, and has been used as a good practice model many times, for instance in Soil Association research into Community Food Hubs. The fridge receives visitors to learn about how it works. It was a part of the school's application for achieving Food for Life Bronze award.

The Community Fridge is the most widely cited success story of AEBA, as it addresses basic needs whilst contributing to wider environmental outcomes and building community capacity. Food and nutrition have been seen as entry points for intervention. There has been a lot of practical learning about how to run a Community Fridge, and the time required for set up and management has been high. It is not a project that is ever really 'complete', as there are day-to-day logistics behind the scenes that could not easily be undertaken by volunteers.

There is some stigma associated with accepting food; an emphasis on reducing food waste has helped address this. During lockdown the wider benefits of the Community Fridge as a focal place for socialising and overcoming isolation were lost.

"WELL, I HAVE FOOD AT HOME, YEAH? I'M NOT STARVING, SO WHY SHOULD I TAKE THE BAGS? AND THEN AFTER I REALISED IF THEY HAD TO PUT IN THE BIN...IT'S BETTER TO SHARE OR GIVE OR FREEZE OR COOK FOR OTHER FAMILIES."

-COMMUNITY FRIDGE MEMBER

"The thing that changed during COVID was you were handed your bag at a distance and you left - all that kind of community, that kind of chat, the stuff that made volunteering look attractive was gone because it was all about keeping your distance."

-COMMUNITY FRIDGE MEMBER

- C** Community fridge was set up to help prevent food waste ending in landfill.
- O** On two days a week our volunteers run the Community Fridge at Arbourthorne Community Primary School.
- M** Many new members are continually being added.
- M** Members make our Community Fridge possible.
- U** Uniting people, the Community Fridge encourages them to support an ongoing cause.
- N** Now we have so many members, they have to collect their bags on their chosen day.
- I** Individual dietary requirements are being met.
- T** Time to help kickstart a younger generation into taking notice of our environment!
- Y** Young people and adults have the opportunity to try new foods.
- F** From vegetables to fruit, tins to boxes, we have such a variety of food delivered and collected.
- R** Ready to distribute bags our lovely volunteers have packed for parents and our wider community.
- I** Items of every different food group are donated by Fareshare Yorkshire, Tesco, Coop, Aldi, Asda, Lidl and the school.
- D** Dividing our food delivery equally between our members' bags is important.
- G** Getting prepared for delivery and distribution has changed since COVID; now it takes our volunteers more time.
- E** Ensuring every member has a wide range of produce, including items from the fridge and freezer.



FIGURE 4: Acronym by Della Oakes and Sonia Cooling.

2 Family Feast



Volunteers at Family Feast, with team leader Faye Harris.

What?

Family Feast brought families and the community together for a home-cooked meal every fortnight.

How?

Family Feast is organised by parent volunteers supported by school staff. The parents use the school kitchen to cook for families and members of the community.

So what?

The initiative strengthened community ties, with families being welcomed to spend time with one another whilst the meal was cooked and served. This encouraged the community to come together, and supported healthy eating and cooking on a budget. As well as making more open use of the school's resources, the social dimension of the Family Feast was the most important. It was disappointing to the community when Family Feast had to be postponed during lockdown. The University of Sheffield's Medical Students piloted a Virtual Family Feast with a small group of families during lockdown over the Christmas period to cook a full roast dinner with trimmings. Again, participants reflected that it was the social dimension of the virtual Family Feast that was most important. The Family Feast will be resumed in 2022 to welcome members of the community back to the school.

BOX 3:

Family Feast by Faye Harris

"Our Family Feast evenings allow our Community to enjoy a free hot meal in the company of other adults, children and staff. The meals are shopped for on a budget and then cooked by our volunteers. We provide a healthy main meal and dessert once a fortnight for any members of the community who would like to attend. Our evenings are based in the school hall.

Alongside our food we also provide entertainment for the adults and children, encouraging all to join in. These activities range from sports, board games, colouring sheets, reading books and occasionally a film on the big screen. These evenings provide a warm family feel and are a huge success with us providing on average 80 people a time with a hearty home cooked meal. We have had many positive responses from both parents and children."

3 Slow Cooker Library

What?

The Slow Cooker Library was an initiative inspired by a visit to Hartlepool Action Lab and involved making equipment available to encourage cooking at a low cost. It also involved the production of a recipe book, based on Family Feast favourite meals.

How?

A Slow Cooker Course runs over 6 weeks, each with 5-10 people. On completion of the course, participants are able to keep their slow cooker. Action Stations awards (see Activity 8) were used to support this initiative as well as the recipe book.

So what?

By the end of the courses, 45 slow cookers had been distributed. The slow cooker course built on the success of Family Feast to teach people how to prepare their own healthy meals. Key outcomes included learning new skills, improving nutrition and introducing children to new foods. Participants also noted that the course helped them overcome isolation and bond with their own children.

"I'VE STARTED COOKING WITH VEGETABLES AND MORE HEALTHILY SINCE STARTING THE COURSE AND VISITING THE COMMUNITY FRIDGE."

-SLOW COOKER COURSE PARTICIPANT



Top left and bottom right: slow cooker ingredients.
Top right: vegetable soup recipe video shared on Twitter.



An Even Better Arbourthorne

@AArbourthorne · Follow



Do we have any savvy slow cooker cooks out there? Are you following our videos? Here is our latest ... veg soup! A perfect winter warmer!

STEP 1

Continue watching on Twitter

DICE YOUR ONION



0:22 / 1:05



4 Little Cooks in Lockdown



Little Cooks in Lockdown.

What?

A cooking club set up for children and parents run throughout the first lockdown to teach children how to cook nutritious and fun meals.

How?

The cooking club was run over WhatsApp by the AEBA team and over 70 adults and children were involved, with support from University of Sheffield Medical Students.

So what?

Parents reported positive outcomes from their children participating in the club, such as asking to help in the kitchen, trying different foods and building a sense of community.

“MY CHILD REALLY ENJOYED LEARNING NEW COOKING SKILLS, HE LIKED THE FACT HE MADE IT HIMSELF. IT HAS REALLY BOOSTED HIS CONFIDENCE AND HAS SINCE EXPERIMENTED WITH OTHER RECIPES. HE WAS VERY EAGER FOR EVERYONE TO TRY THE FOOD HE MADE.”

-LITTLE COOKS IN LOCKDOWN PARENT



Environment and growing

6 Our Healthy Hideout

What?

Our Healthy Hideout is a transformed outdoor space on the school grounds, comprising a polytunnel, large outdoor growing areas, outdoor meeting and learning space (including a firepit and kitchen), and a sensory garden planted with beds and insect friendly plants. Since March 2022 it also includes a new composting system. It is maintained by the Get Growing team, whose labour also provides food for the Community Fridge. Parent-and-child sessions have been held in the polytunnel to encourage people to volunteer.

How?

The Get Growing team has put hours of volunteering and hard work into transforming the growing capacity at school, with the support of a part-time environmentalist working alongside them and the AEBA team. Financial support was boosted by the National Lottery's COVID Uplift grant. Students from the University of Sheffield School of Architecture helped design the outdoor structures, which were constructed with help from Handspring Designs.

Volunteers build the firepit.



“I LOVE COMING TO GET GROWING, I FEEL LIKE I AM LEARNING SOMETHING NEW EVERY WEEK.”

–GET GROWING TEAM MEMBER

“We’re gaining knowledge from the garden club, with new experiences, we’re learning how to do things...it’s also helping the children...we encourage them to grow their own fruit and vegetables.” -GET GROWING VOLUNTEER

So what?

The outdoor area has been completely transformed and was a vital resource during COVID-19 when school was closed to anyone except staff and pupils. Volunteers have learnt new skills through the Get Growing team and have the knowledge to plan for growing throughout the year, with two volunteers developing an annual manual detailing what they have learnt. The environmental benefits include developing strong habitats for bees and insects, and health benefits include learning about healthy eating.

There were many practical barriers to overcome in the redesign of the outdoor space and some concern about maintenance long-term, as well as the balance between short-term deliverables and longer-term outcomes. Foxes have also made their presence known and are regular if unwelcome visitors to the polytunnel. There are seasonal issues which have come to light – for instance, keeping volunteers motivated throughout the winter months, and ensuring continuity over the summer. Whilst working outside has benefits for mental health, it can also be hard labour and difficult for those with physical challenges.



Above: Fresh produce for the fridge. Top and bottom right: Members of the Get Growing team.

7 Red Robin Family Fun Club



What?

An outdoor family club to encourage children and their families to learn outdoor and growing skills and support families to find ways of having fun together outside.

How?

The club is run by volunteers to provide a social activity for the whole family, meeting every week after school. During lockdown the fun club operated virtually, via a WhatsApp group, and families were given growing kits, including seeds, compost pots and windmills. Red Robin Family Fun Club has also built on the existing afterschool club.

So what?

An average of 5 adults and 11 children participate in the club each week and have enjoyed learning new skills and socialising with each other. The closer relationship with the afterschool club also brought more school staff into contact with AEBA which led to stronger engagement in the Sensory Garden and Healthy Hideout. The landscape around Red Robin House has been much improved with environmental enhancements that contribute to the wider quality of life in the neighbourhood.



Top and bottom: Volunteers getting stuck in at Red Robin Family Fun Club.

8 Tree Champions

What?

New trees have been planted around school by young tree champions, who want to advocate for climate change and speak up for the trees.

How?

Tree Champions is a national scheme run by the Tree Council, in partnership with Learning through Landscapes, the Speakers Trust, the University of Derby and Ecoschools. The aim is to help young people connect, learn and share the power of trees as a means to improve mental health and well-being. Schools are given resources including trees, a tech kit, and tailored Speakers' Trust teacher training. Grants and support from the Tree Council have been critical in keeping the initiative going.

So what?

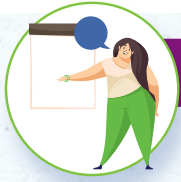
Staff reported that children had a stronger understanding of the impacts of climate change and their own ability to make a difference.

A new fruit orchard and 40 other trees around the school have been planted. As well as supporting the children to care for their environment, these trees provide a key contribution to greening Arbourthorne, and, in the long run, improving air quality and quality of life.



Top: Planting trees. Bottom: A view from Red Robin House up to the polytunnel, before the Healthy Hideout had been built.





Skills for the future

8 Action Stations

What?

Action Stations is an initiative which gives small awards to adults, children and staff to develop their own ideas for making Arbourthorne even better.

How?

Action Stations awards have been made possible by donations from Ascot Lloyd and the Centre for Innovation in Voluntary Action.

Initially the call for applications was entirely open; later in the programme, as the strands around Food and Nutrition and Environment and Growing became more developed, applicants were encouraged to apply for Action Stations to bolster these areas. Active support was made available for applicants who required encouragement and patience to get their ideas off the ground.

BOX 4:

Books, books, books by Lucy Boldy

"I applied for an Action Station to run an online Book Club for like-minded people in the community. Our Book Club has helped keep people in touch with reality through the heart of the pandemic. When seeing each other wasn't an option, our zoom meetings filled in that void and we made new friendships.

The Book Club is a safe haven and an absolute joy to run. Not everyone enjoys the same books, but we all feel comfortable knowing that we can have our own opinions. We read around 12 different books as a group per year and we have become a really independent group of mums that socialise over our love of reading.

After spending the money from Action Stations, as a group, we brainstormed some ideas to become self-sufficient and we have all donated small amounts of money to support our love of reading over the next 12 months. We love reading old and new books and we love hearing about different genres through peoples' differences of opinions.

Being a Team Leader has given me the opportunity to develop my leadership skills, self-confidence and passion for leading a group of people who all share the same interest as me. Now I have ventured into taking my love for reading deeper within the school by starting a Children's Book Club alongside running the Little Library two nights a week where we redistribute second-hand books."



Top: Little Library.
Bottom: Little Library flyer.

“THANKS TO ACTION STATIONS I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PURCHASE ITEMS I NEEDED TO BETTER MY BUSINESS AND EXPAND THE VARIETY OF PRODUCTS I CAN OFFER THE COMMUNITY.” –ACTION STATIONS AWARD RECIPIENT

So what?

A total of 47 Action Stations were funded. Some awards supported parents to develop their own enterprise activity – such as sharing second hand clothes (“Trendy Treasures”), or developing ideas for party planning, online traybake or personalised gifts businesses. A number of awards by adults and children focused on overcoming social isolation through setting up clubs for reading, or art, installing a ‘friendship bench’ or doing random acts of kindness in the community (handing out seeds with messages and cards). Ideas aligned with the key strands including litter picking and the Slow Cooker Library and recipe book (see Activity 3). Some funds were used to catalyse other projects (see Activity 10, 11).

These activities developed key skills, such as reading, cooking, business and activity planning and addressed needs in the community at the same time. They sought to build social connections and greater skills and resource sharing. More widely they encouraged people to believe that their ideas were worth supporting. Participants in the clubs, such as the Book Club, reported that several ideas led to new permanent teams and positions being created, such as for the Book Club and Little Library.

The time required to support and run Action Stations was underestimated at the start. Some ideas were quick to develop and deliver; whilst others took longer to come to fruition, especially where volunteers lacked confidence initially. A balance between gentle encouragement and hard deadlines needs to be carefully managed so that volunteers do not lose control of their own ideas, or get deterred from taking them forward. Some awards required greater logistical support than originally imagined – for instance, where to store clothes or books and unexpected tasks took time, for instance, washing clothes, or sourcing and collecting books.

“I have been volunteering with AEBA for nearly two years and I have gained more confidence in talking in groups which I usually would shy away from. The team is amazing and supportive, especially with my Action Station as I am still gaining confidence to run it by myself. My confidence is slowly growing but they give me something to strive for – personal belief in myself that I can do things.”

–ACTION STATIONS AWARD RECIPIENT



Craft Club.

FIGURE 5: *Action Stations!* By the AEBA Team

BUSINESS SUPPORT

Donna, a parent of Arbourthorne Community Primary School, applied for an Action Station to build her business 'Pattisons Designs Event Dressing'. Donna had an already established business and with the help of Action Stations, Donna was able to buy materials and supplies that she can use for her events. Once Donna had completed her Action Station, she took up the opportunity to work further with a member of the AEBA team to have some training on social media to help gain followers and hopefully attract more business through Social Media. Donna also had help creating some new designs for her business to build up her portfolio.

SWEETCRAFT CREATIONS

Sweetcraft Creations is a local small business run by a parent of Arbourthorne Community Primary School. Natasha created Sweetcraft Creations to make affordable and high quality products available to families and community members. Natasha applied to Action Stations and used the £250.00 grant to put towards building her business and buying resources that could help expand it. By applying for the Action Stations grant, this allowed Natasha to make new products and to keep up with the demand of orders she receives.

TRENDY TREASURES

Michelle applied for an Action Station to set up a second hand clothes swap shop based at Arbourthorne Community Primary School. Michelle wanted to have a space for the community to not only come and purchase second hand clothing, but donate as well if they felt they had clothes they didn't need anymore. Michelle worked really closely with the school and even made her plea for donations reach as far as London, which generated some extremely generous donations. Michelle applied for her grant to purchase essential items such as clothes rails, hangers, bags and other items that helped her set up her shop like labels. Once set up, Michelle opened her shop twice weekly and invited members of the community and families of the school to come and browse for items they may need, donate or want to swap - Trendy Treasures was born through Michelle's passion of helping others.



COMMUNITY LITTER PICKING

Sonia applied for an Action Station because she identified the need in the community for a Litter Picking Team. She applied for £250.00 to buy the equipment needed to not only help clear the community of waste, but to keep the team working safely whilst they volunteered. Sonia purchased litter picking grabbers, bin bags, gloves and litter picking hoops, providing enough to build a small team of people interested in keeping the environment clean and tidy. Sonia has approached individuals from the School and the community to put together a small team of volunteers that don't mind spending a few hours a week getting out in the community and making it a cleaner place!



9 Improving life skills

What?

A number of different initiatives to upskill families in the community around how to manage in daily life and embrace new technologies.

How?

The school had already developed a former caretaker's house into a life skills centre on site, Red Robin House. Red Robin House aims to meet the needs of families flexibly and in response to requirements and wishes. Children access a life skills programme from Nursery to Y6 (cooking, growing, self-help, money management, etc.). Provision at Red Robin House previously involved supporting parents through digital training, including digital and online safety sessions, a coffee club which also provides free access to Wi-Fi, speech and language sessions, a parent & baby club for developing confidence in parenting, new to English classes and more. AEBA built on these strong foundations to introduce additional skills initiatives including training on energy savings with the National Energy Champions and a Maker skills programme developed by the school in partnership with the University of Sheffield's School of Education (see Section 5, Pillar 4). As well as specific skills initiatives, every AEBA

project was intended to help build people's skills and confidence.

So what?

Many volunteers reported that they had enjoyed these activities and learnt new things. One important impact was how to model learning for children and improve their aspirations in and for the community in the future.

There were a number of skills activities that did not progress – such as an initiative called Teach a Man to Fish (a youth-entrepreneur scheme) or Signal (a methodology for households to assess their own circumstances and develop personalised strategies to improve them). A number of factors can be cited for this, including a lack of capacity as larger, more time-consuming projects (such as the Community Fridge) were getting up and running, as well as a lack of engagement and interest from volunteers themselves.

Many of the stalled initiatives have good reputations for bringing positive benefits to those involved. This suggests that greater attention could have been invested in articulating what the benefit for people would have been of being involved. It also suggest that there was simply 'too much' on the table.

From left to right: Sunflowers at Red Robin House; Children take pride in their growing achievements; Radishes from the polytunnel.





Catalyst projects

10 Friends of Arbourthorne Pond

What?

AEBA supported local people to set up Friends of Arbourthorne Pond, which is situated next to the school. The pond had become derelict and was often vandalised which diminished community morale.

How?

AEBA worked alongside Sheffield City Council and the Environment Agency to acquire funding to undertake conservation work at the pond, and supported local people to run holiday events to engage local children in fishing, nature and conservation activities. A small amount of funding from the Arbourthorne Ward Pot enabled the purchase of fishing equipment for families in Arbourthorne.

So what?

There are six people giving time on Friends of Arbourthorne Pond Committee which manages the project, and over 100 supporters who have signed up as Friends of Arbourthorne Pond. AEBA helped the community with applying for funding and setting up a community bank account. It is a good example of how a school-based initiative can support wider community-building and regeneration, with positive transformations on the urban environment.



Main image: Arbourthorne pond. Inset image: A proud catch.

11 Arbourthorne Social Savers



Arbourthorne Social Savers learning from savings groups in Manchester.

What?

“Arbourthorne Social Savers came together after a group of mums with kids at Arbourthorne primary school started volunteering with AEBA. Through AEBA we heard about Community Savers and decided it sounded really interesting. We were able to go and visit some of the savings groups over the Pennines and got inspired to start up our own savings club. We are now running our savings meeting once a week at St Leonard’s Church.”

ARBOURTHORNE SOCIAL SAVERS - COMMUNITY SAVERS

How?

The establishment of Arbourthorne Social Savers was catalysed by community organisers and academics who had met at the University of Sheffield whilst working on research looking at the value of savings approaches from the Global South for women in low income communities in the UK (King 2020). Following a visit to Wythenshawe in Manchester to meet with a women-led network called Community Savers,

volunteers in AEBA decided to set up their own group. They applied for some initial funds to get going, but are now independent members of the savings movement supported by Community Led Savings and Action Support (CLASS).

They have attended two important learning exchanges with other women savers (in 2021 and 2022) and members will also take part in a trip to Nairobi, Kenya later this year.

So what?

Savings-based organising is an approach tried and tested by SDI (Slum/Shack Dwellers International) over more than 20 years in the Global South. People on low incomes save a little of what they have each week whilst also working together to attract investment into their community. Arbourthorne Social Savers are all also volunteers in AEBA but the group operates independently. With support from CLASS the savers have begun to apply for their own funding and develop new projects and relationships. This also builds solidarity and enables community action.



Pandemic projects

The COVID-19 pandemic struck less than one year into the AEBA project. This had several impacts. The online transition did mean some activities had to be paused, such as Family Feast, but digital technologies were effectively mobilised to maintain social connections and morale during this difficult time. Many people reported that they had met more people and made more new friends online than they had before. The pandemic produced a greater shift towards emergency provision, and highlighted the critical importance of the Community Fridge for addressing food poverty and Get Growing for enabling social interaction outdoors whilst adhering to social distancing regulations.

For the AEBA team, networks of care and solidarity were prioritised, which were critical to people's wellbeing and mental health during the pandemic. They sought to ensure volunteers were safe and well, kept in touch via phone calls, moved some activities online and set up new initiatives. Bundles of resources were made available to those who needed it for online groups and projects. One example is that Red Robin Family Fun Club gave people growing kits to use at home, were given support over WhatsApp, and were later invited to bring seedlings into school to plant out in a Covid-safe way.

Little Cooks in Lockdown was one new initiative which was supported by University of Sheffield students using WhatsApp. Medical students also came up with a social media campaign for 'Mindfulness Mondays' and 'Feelgood Friday' which shared tips and ideas to help mental health.

Three additional strands of online work during the pandemic were:

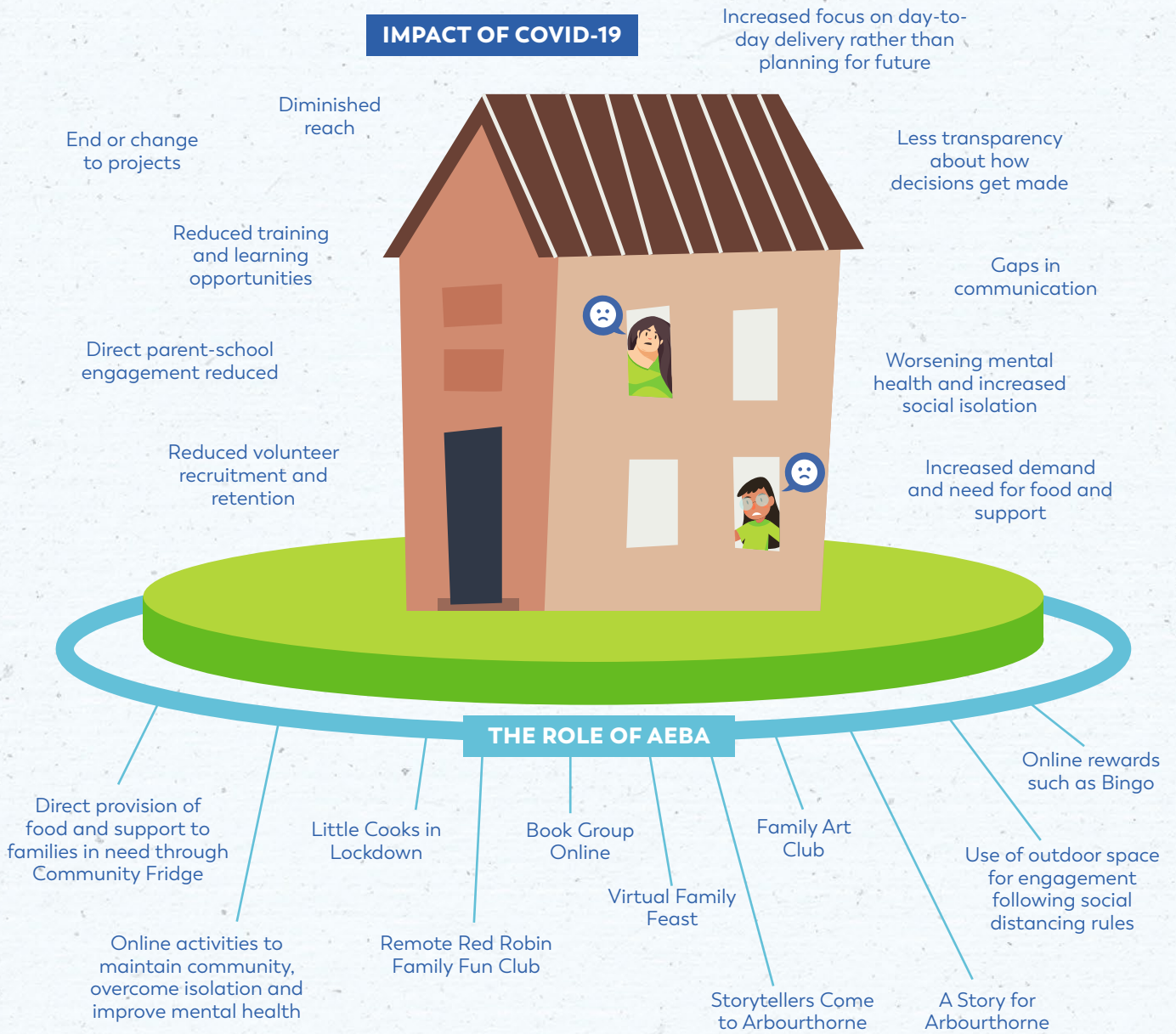
- **A Story for Arbourthorne:** online stories during lockdown, read by community partners, project and school staff. Children often acted out the stories at home. Storytellers Come to Arbourthorne was another initiative which included bespoke, virtual and creative workshops, connected to history and literacy, for children and parents to enjoy together.
- **Competitions:** several competitions were run to keep families motivated and connected at home, including the best decorated boiled egg at Easter and a power of kindness poster campaign. This campaign led to one child applying for an Action Station to deliver plant pots and seeds to people in the community, children writing letters and paintings for residents of a local care home; and donating toys to the Spires Foodbank. A competition was also run to name the new outdoor growing area – the winner was 'Our Healthy Hideout'.
- **Family Art Sessions Online:** the school's artist-in-resident was supported by AEBA to work with families online over WhatsApp, with videos provided for those that could not attend the live session. Craft kits were purchased and sent to families to participate.

The biggest impact of these activities was to overcome social isolation, maintain confidence and cohere the community in and beyond school.

Crafty competition entries.



FIGURE 6: AEBA: A lockdown lifeline.



5 Pillars for success



PILLAR 1 A family school

Arbourthorne Community Primary School has a well communicated and shared ethos and vision, as a family school. A culture of engagement and care, with clear core values, permeates the school. Strong, bold leadership from the school has been critical to AEBA, along with a willingness to allocate resources imaginatively.

“The ethos has always been, and still is now, that the school is not about the child, it’s about the family...they would never ever turn you away”

-VOLUNTEER

“IT FELT LIKE A FAMILY, LIKE THE SCHOOL WAS REALLY SUPPORTIVE OF FAMILIES”

-VOLUNTEER

The school has always felt a strong ‘moral responsibility’. Parents feel genuinely welcome in the school, through its whole child-and-family approach and ‘open door’ policy. Parent feedback on their relationship with the school is overwhelmingly positive.

Before AEBA, the school’s approach to parental engagement had several strands. The school engaged in national programmes and schemes, such as the Education Action Zone and Excellence in Cities programme, and offered adult education working with community education teams and Sheffield college.

“WE’VE ALWAYS TRIED TO LOOK WITHIN THE COMMUNITY TO FIND POTENTIAL PEOPLE [TO WORK HERE]...THEY HAVE A CONNECT WITH THE COMMUNITY, LONGEVITY AND RELATIONSHIPS.”

-VANESSA LANGLEY



Staff articulated that the overall culture of the school is more important in supporting parent engagement than specific external programmes.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, parents were welcome as volunteers in school with an emphasis on engaging parents to support their own children, recognising that they face many challenges in their own lives, including their mental health and experiences of living on the estate. Several staff members started as parent volunteers and helpers in school and were encouraged to train and gain qualifications as teaching assistants or teachers to stay in the school.

The school has always seen its role as ‘more than education’. There is a strong and committed leadership, able to think outside the box and work creatively to use its discretion, for instance in the expenditure of pupil premium. School leadership recognise that they need to deliver on expected targets and accountability frameworks and ‘not take the eye off the ball’ of educational outcomes, but that there is scope to think and act differently. An open minded approach to development and innovation has ensured AEBA has stayed the duration.

This approach led to several school-based initiatives such as Red Robin House, an artist-in-residence, a community room, curriculum innovation, trips and local partnerships, for instance with other local schools and education providers.



The community room at Arbourthorne Community Primary school.

“This school is here to serve the community and the ownership is with the community...parents will be welcomed into the staff room ...as intrinsic in the life of the school.”

-SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Parental engagement has been seen as everyone’s responsibility, led by a strong pastoral team, comprising the headteacher, safeguarding officer, pupil support officer and colleagues working at Red Robin House. Staff know that the best way to connect with families is through face-to-face contact and building trust and individual relationships.

How did this matter?

Arbourthorne Primary had always worked with social and community organisations, shared best practice with other providers, engaged with Sheffield College for family learning and education, had a range of parent-led groups, and engendered a sense of civic responsibility in children through carol singing or gift giving. This provided the baseline for greater community engagement through AEBA. The school also was able to have relatively high financial discretion to support AEBA, through flexibility provided by the Pupil Premium.

AEBA represented a departure from the existing parent engagement strategy through new volunteering opportunities that were focussed on individuals rather than parent-child relationships.

During the pandemic, AEBA was a lifeline, as parents were not allowed on site and without the initiative there would have been few opportunities for engagement. School has been able to signpost parents in need.

Learning lessons

AEBA built on what the school was already doing and its strong ethos and culture of care and engagement. The additional resources increased capacity and new ideas were brought to the school which were embraced by an innovative and bold leadership. Without this leadership and vision, AEBA could not have been a success.

The school has also made concrete additional contributions to the success of AEBA. For instance: providing staff time, including for recruitment and signposting; providing space and funds to set up the Community Fridge; providing facilities at Red Robin House for sessions with parents and families; allowing the use of school grounds for growing initiatives; enrolling teacher and student volunteers; co-funding the part-time environmentalist post; providing office space for the coordination team; overseeing the Family Feasts prepared by volunteers in the school kitchen; supporting and participating in the management of the programme.

A key learning lesson is to integrate activities more firmly within school processes and decision-making, and ensure school values are reflected. A Steering Group was set up for coordination and communication but AEBA was not fully integrated in school decision-making structures. COVID-19 had a strong impact on the school’s relationship with parents, who were no longer allowed on site. The increasing difficulties facing families meant the pastoral team were overstretched and had little time to spare beyond addressing immediate need. The funding and governance arrangements, as well as the impact of COVID-19, meant that the connection between AEBA and the school was sometimes weaker than intended.



PILLAR 2 Volunteer programme

A central pillar for success for AEBA is the volunteer programme. There are three kinds of volunteers:



parent volunteers



community volunteers



student volunteers

In addition, staff, teachers and children also 'volunteer' as they are extending their commitment and time beyond the usual expectations with being in a school setting.

Volunteers have given over 200 hours a week to support the activities; some had been volunteering previously at the school and others were recruited to the initiative. Figures reported by AEBA count an average of 22 volunteers working throughout the project, doing an average of 2 hours per week. This masks large variations, however, with some volunteers clocking up over 20 hours of volunteering time per week (see Figure 7).

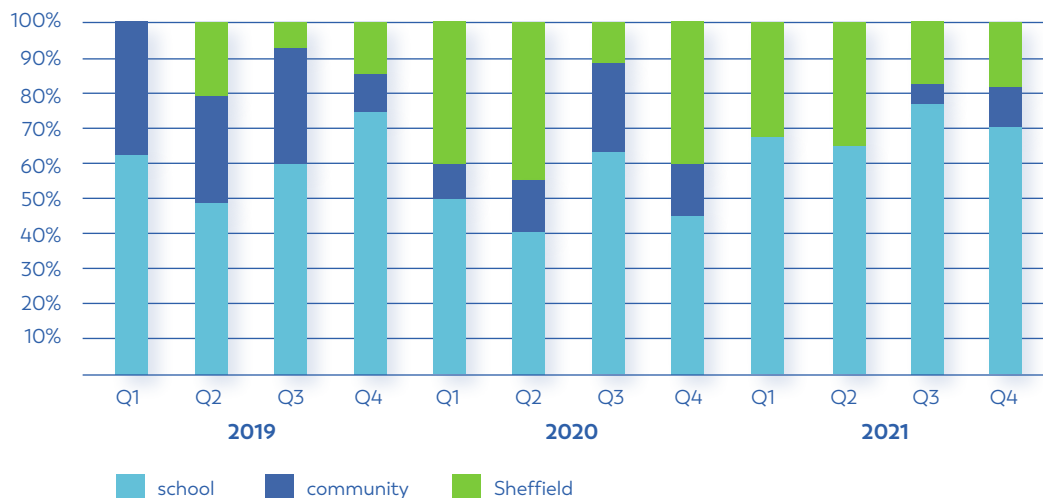
“The volunteers are the backbone of the project... without them, there wouldn't be the hands to do the growing area, we wouldn't be able to give out 75 bags of food a week, we wouldn't have the growing area, we wouldn't have the clubs.”

-AEBA STAFF TEAM MEMBER

FIGURE 7: Reported average weekly volunteer hours against the total thereof.



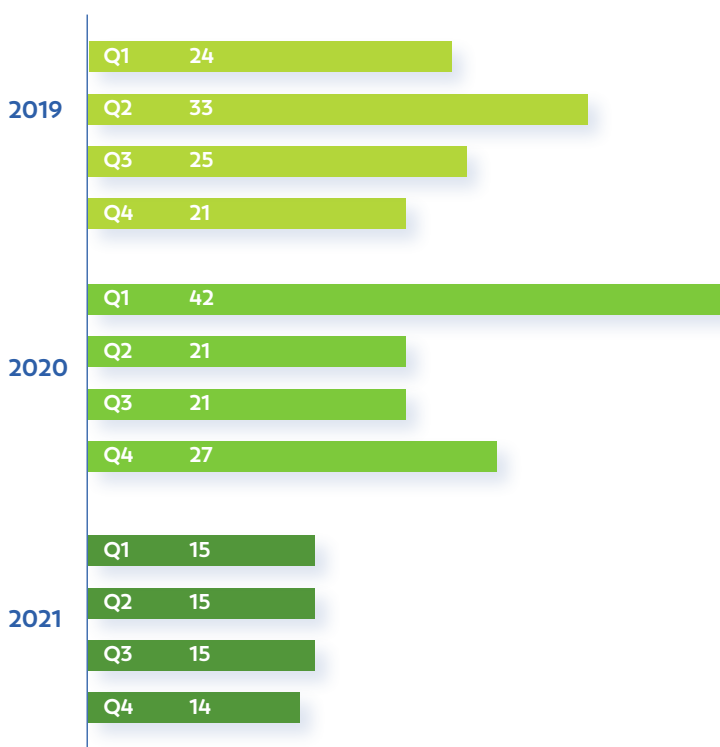
FIGURE 8: *Where are volunteers from?*



The initial recruitment of volunteers to AEBA was through parents already involved with the school. A few parents came to the launch of the project but many became involved later on, recruited through face-to-face interactions, recommendations from existing volunteers or staff or social media (see Figures 8-9).

*Top: Tilling the soil.
Bottom: At the Community Fridge.*

FIGURE 9: *Reported volunteer numbers 2019-2022.*



Working with volunteers was initially quite 'ad hoc'. Once a volunteer coordinator was in post, the volunteer programme took off. This included setting out policies and processes, codes of conduct and volunteer check-ins and reviews, with the support of Voluntary Action Sheffield. Later in the programme, the roles of 'team leaders' were developed to enable volunteers to take greater ownership and control over activities. Each activity in Section 4 had at least one Team Leader who worked collaboratively with the AEBA team to deliver the project. Volunteers applied to be team leader via a competitive interview process. Two volunteers also sat on the Steering Group.

Volunteers received training and support, either formally or 'on the job'. Training was essential for activities such as the Community Fridge. Volunteers also gained credits for their hours given, which they could swap for rewards. Initially this was via a scheme called Timebuilders run by St Marys Church. These rewards included trips away to the seaside or venues such as the Magna Centre, visits to the school (including owls), tickets for sports events or free swimming passes. During lockdown, the scheme ended, and an Entertainments Team organised volunteer rewards including online games and quizzes and a day out to walk with alpacas.

There have been specific opportunities for volunteers to contribute their ideas to the project, with two ideas picnics organised (see image below).



One of the Ideas Picnics.

"IT WAS REALLY GOOD TO HEAR WHAT'S ALREADY BEEN DONE AND LOOK AT ALL THE IDEAS PEOPLE CAME UP WITH. I'VE ENJOYED IT." -VOLUNTEER

"IT WAS REALLY GOOD. IF WE NEEDED ANYTHING OR ANY SUPPORT, THEY WERE THERE. WE DID A LOT OF TRAINING."

-VOLUNTEER



How did this matter?

AEBA shifted the location of volunteering from within the classrooms, to outside undertaking project-work. AEBA represents a step change in the scale and range of volunteering at the school. Many volunteers had new experiences and opportunities although some missed being in the classroom with their children. AEBA formalised the school's approach to parent engagement and volunteering. Without AEBA there would have been no volunteering during the pandemic as a result of lockdowns and social distancing.

Learning lessons

The volunteering programme has been essential to delivering activity on the ground. It has taken considerable time, effort and commitment. Participants agree that the quality of the volunteer experience is more important than the quantity of volunteers. Recruitment has sometimes been difficult and volunteers have needed a lot of support to muster the confidence to take up new roles. A key issue is the balance between the formal and informal dimensions of the volunteer programme. Whilst it can be seen as good practice to develop strong structures to manage the volunteering programme, there has been concern that a more professionalised model does not fit with the specific community dynamics and needs in Arbourthorne. There have also been disagreements between volunteers which have impacted on the volunteers' experience (see Section 6).



PILLAR 3

The funding jigsaw

A creative approach to funding the project has been a central pillar underpinning success. CIVA have given their own time for free as part of their significant contribution to the project, and mobilised their extensive networks and connections to raise funds. The model of funding has involved using grants and awards to leverage off each other, providing considerable added value to the original investments.

The school has also creatively used its budgets in part through the Pupil Premium Fund. As the school has 65% pupils receiving the pupil premium (compared with 22.5% nationally), this is a considerable resource at the school's discretion.

The initial grant from the National Lottery Community Fund was for £123,483 with a £10,000 COVID Uplift grant. Alongside the school, CIVA and the Tudor Trust have also provided key funds for the project. Several funders have provided time in-kind, whilst the AEBA team made good use of locally available grants from ward pots and other organisations to deliver project activity.

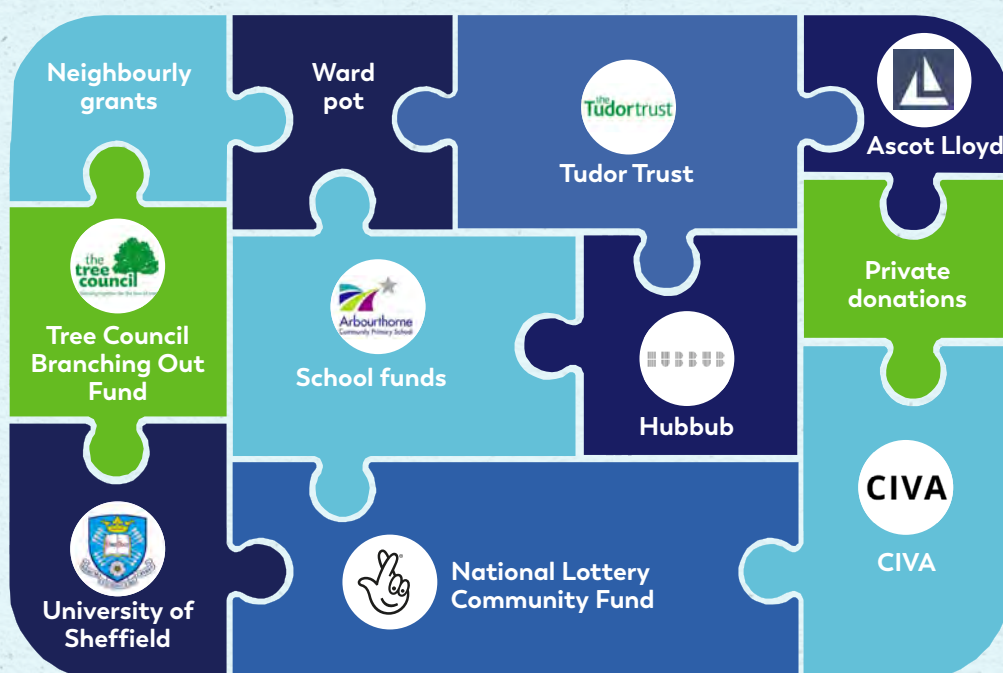
How did this matter?

The funding package has been critical in enabling all the different activities to take place. The key principle has been to fund staff time to build capacity for other grants to be secured. A key aim of Phase 1 was to achieve financial sustainability. However the context of COVID-19 in year 1 of the project, along with other learning lessons, has meant this has not yet been achieved.

Learning lessons

Sustainability was ambitious in the timeframe of the project. One consequence of the creative but complex funding package has been a lack of transparency about who funds what and who does what, both to volunteers and others involved in the project. A great deal of time is spent managing small grants with different reporting arrangements and the administration, staffing and payment structures can be complex. Funds are held by different organisations which can diminish the possibility for more strategic resource mobilisation and expenditure.

FIGURE 10: The funding jigsaw.





PILLAR 4

Innovative partnerships and exchanges

AEBA has successfully mobilised a range of partners to develop and deliver its activities, locally, within Sheffield and nationally. Some partners were already working with the school, such as the Manor and Development Trust, the Spires Centre or Tiddlywinks Nursery. Some have had paid roles, whilst others have given advice and guidance for free. In addition exchanges with other organisations have been important, for instance a visit to Hartlepool gave one parent the idea to take forward the Slow Cooker Library and Recipe Book, and a visit to Wythenshawe led to the establishment of Arbourthorne Social Savers.

The school has also received many visitors to learn about what has happened. Arbourthorne's Headteacher has chaired the Locality C Poverty Strategy group and has shared key aspects of the project which others have implemented as a result, such as the Community Fridge and Family Feast. The school has welcomed many visitors to learn about what has happened.

How did this matter?

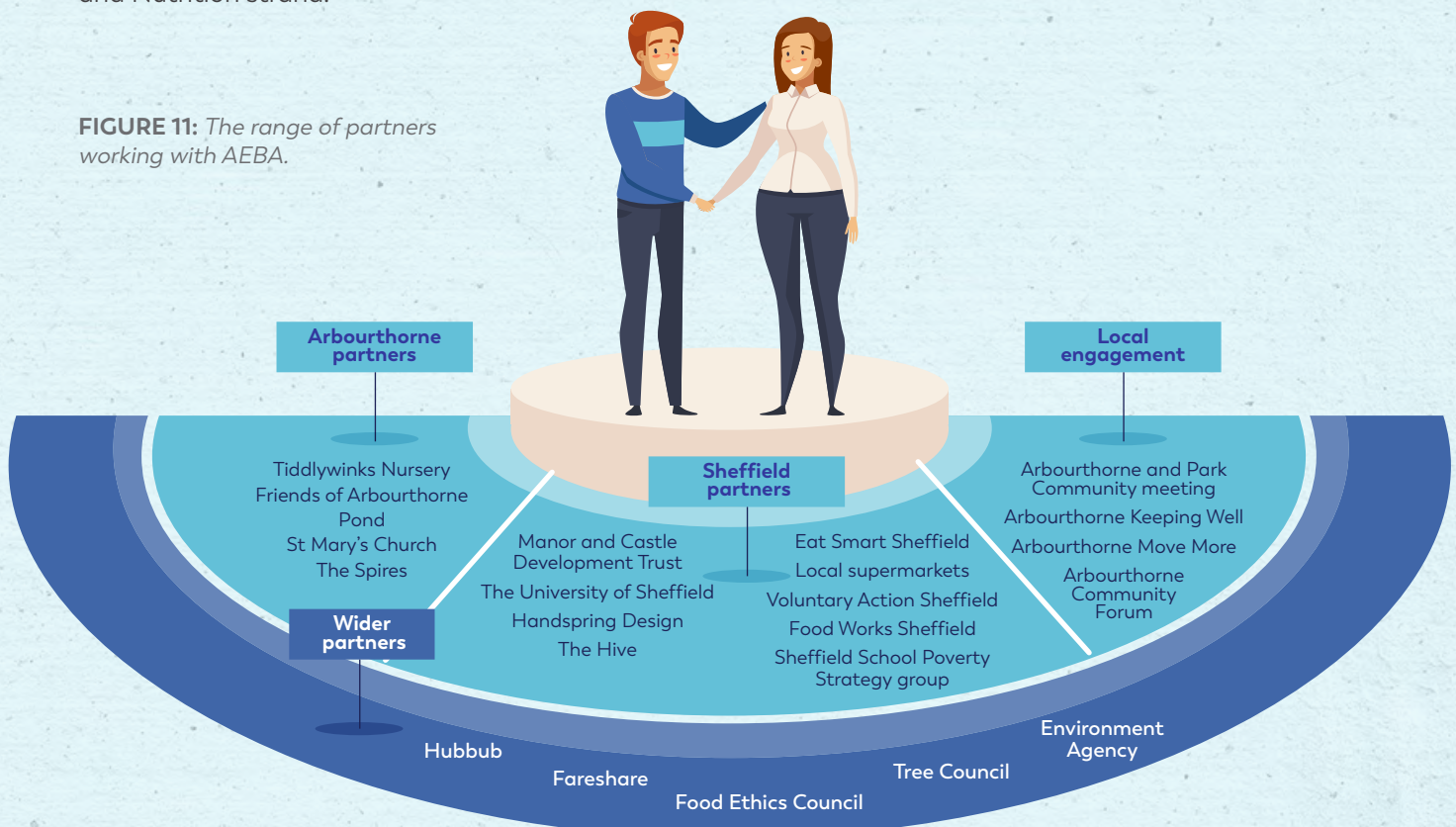
Each of the partnerships has added value to the activities of the project. For instance, Hubhub, Sheffield Food Works, Fareshare Yorkshire and the Spires Centre Foodbank and Allotment project have all been important in delivering the Food and Nutrition strand.

AEBA collaborated with St Mary's Church to develop the reward scheme and provide more food for local families, and with Manor and Castle Development Trust on a Holiday Activity Fund. The team engaged with local organisations and networked effectively with Sheffield-wide organisations and networks, such as the Schools' Poverty Group.

Learning lessons

Whilst funding and partnerships make for a vibrant and exciting set of ideas, care needs to be taken to match new ideas to capacity. With a small team, both the AEBA staff and volunteers could sometimes feel overwhelmed by the volume of activity. The funding and partnership landscape is complex, which made communication difficult. It was difficult for volunteers to feel a sense of ownership over this patchwork of activity. Where ideas were catalysed through people themselves, for instance, through the visit to Hartlepool, this was positive and created a sense of ownership over initiatives such as the Community Fridge and Slow Cooker. Other initiatives felt more imposed from the outside and volunteers did not understand why and how they came about. A key lesson is to balance new ideas, possibilities and opportunities with the capacity to deliver and mental bandwidth to engage.

FIGURE 11: The range of partners working with AEBA.



BOX 5:**School-university partnerships for An Even Better Arbourthorne**

Several departments from the University of Sheffield have been involved in AEBA. The partnership with the Urban Institute catalysed the women's savers initiative and delivered the learning programme, including planning for the future workshops with participants.

Arbourthorne Community Primary has been awarded the status of being the first Maker School in Sheffield. Together with the artist-in-residence and whole staff team, the school has spent a year developing an innovative whole school Maker programme with professional development in electronics, coding, robotics, digital literacy, 3D design and fabrication which is being developed with parents and community in its second phase of the project. Following an initial connection made through AEBA, the school developed a partnership with the School of Education at the University of Sheffield to design and deliver this programme.

Medical students have undertaken 'community placements' for years to learn about health inequalities and the impact on people's lives. Multiple cohorts have been involved, supporting mental health and wellbeing initiatives, healthy eating and nutrition and offering advice on how activities are run such as the Community Fridge.

Architecture students have made visible changes to the school environment as part of their Live Projects work at the University, transforming the growing space into an educational space for learning, including the outdoor barn and a composting system. In total, AEBA has counted 64 students that have been involved.

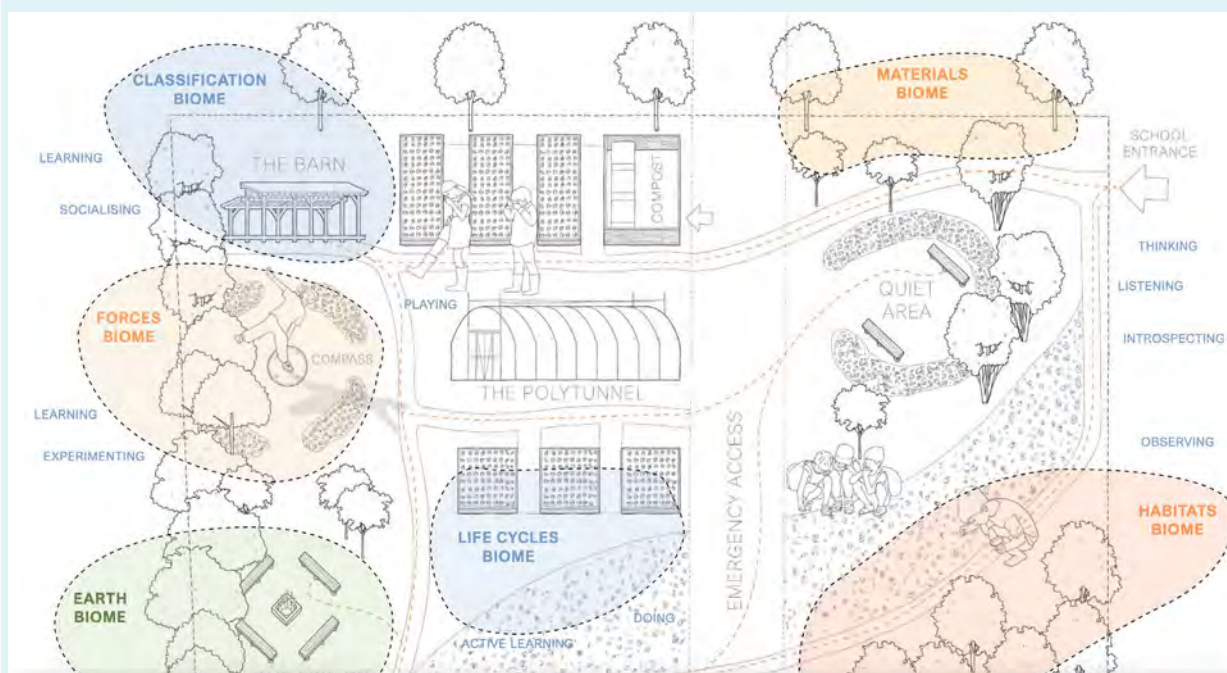
"All I can say is that it has been amazing. Working with all the different age groups for our well-being activity and seeing how thoughtful the children actually are has definitely impressed and left an impression on me. Also, spending time at the hive has been such a great experience and all the children are so lovely. Working on a project called 'medicine in a box' has allowed us to raise the aspirations of the children and hopefully inspire them to become doctors one day in the future! All the staff and volunteers were really friendly and I have really appreciated the time spent here. Thank you!"

**-EKTA, MEDICAL STUDENT,
UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**

"My original reason for working with the University was to move away from the humdrum and put a little bit more innovation and excitement back into why we're here and the purpose of serving children and the community within the city of Sheffield. The level of innovation and support for children to learn key skills for the future and families is absolutely vital. The work from the architecture students produces a manageable, visible impact for schools and for children and for families. And the work with the medics is driving up our focus on health and nutrition."

- VANESSA LANGLEY, HEADTEACHER

Architecture students' speculative designs for the transformation of the outdoor space.





PILLAR 5

Participant learning

The idea of the participant learning programme was to embed learning locally to contribute to longer-term community ownership and sustainability. The learning programme was designed and delivered by academics at the University of Sheffield to help AEBA learn what was working (or wasn't) and to assist the school and community partners to envision the future of AEBA.

Participant learning involved developing baseline understandings through interviews and focus groups, capturing COVID-19 lessons and impacts, supporting the Steering Group to think about the future and enrolling the whole volunteer community in reflection and planning next steps.

How did this matter?

Key milestones of the learning programme have included: the initial set of interviews to set a baseline for the project (2019) and discussion at Manor and Castle Development Trust; two workshops online with the Steering Group to plan for the future; one workshop face to face to develop a collective narrative; an online showcase as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science and panel discussion; a further set of interviews (2021-2022); support for the extended network with other schools and meeting in April 2022; and two collective planning meetings.

Two touchpoints to gather views on the ground via interview programmes (2019, 2021)

Workshops and discussion spaces to plan for the future

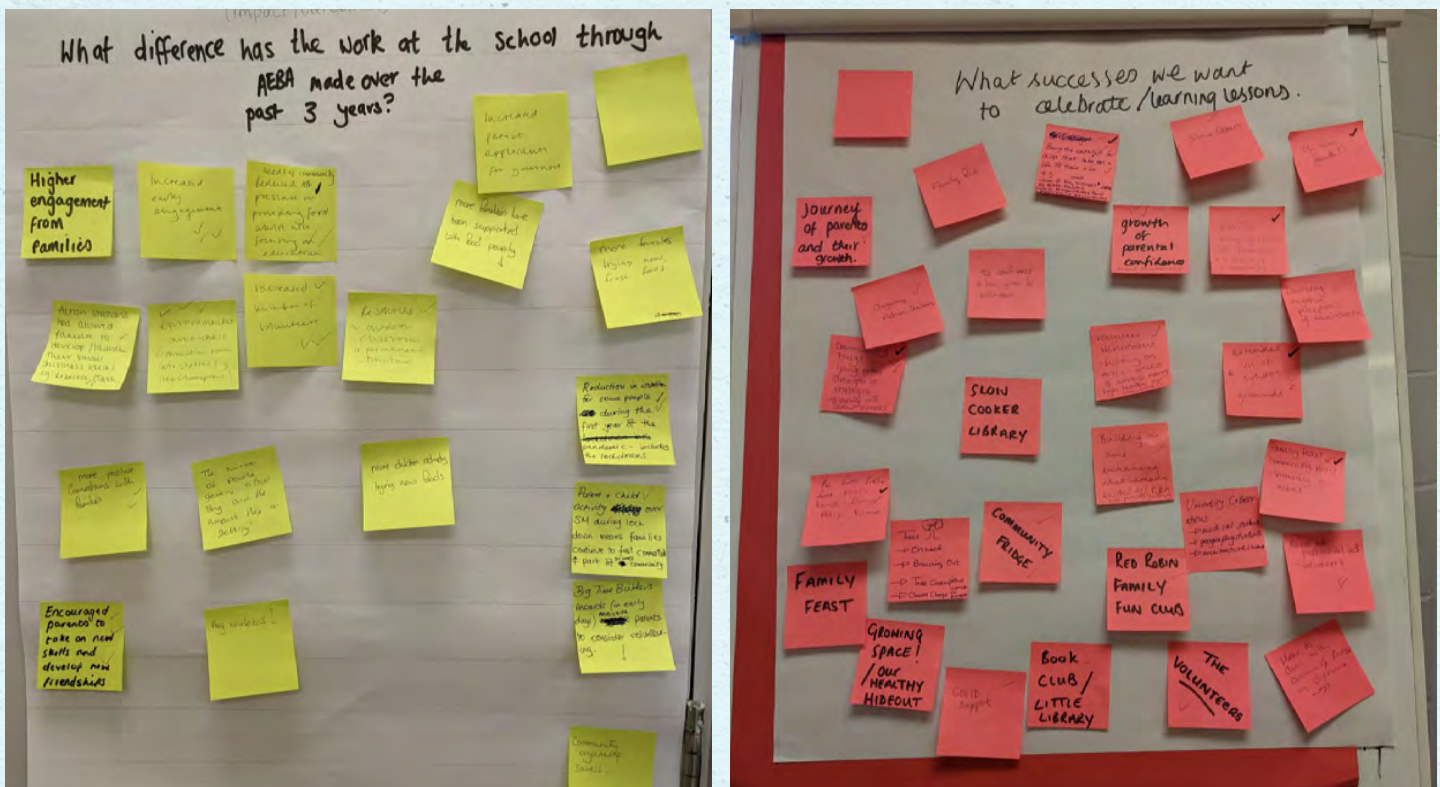
Representing the work and creating platforms for reflection



FIGURE 12: Participant learning strategy.

"IT HAS HELPED US UNDERSTAND WHAT WE'RE LIKE AS AN ORGANISATION AND FLEX WITH THAT, BUT ALSO SHOWN US HOW TO BRIDGE THOSE LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITY... THE RESEARCH AND PEOPLE SKILLS THE PARTICIPANT LEARNING PROGRAMME HAS BROUGHT HAS HELPED US SECURE A MUCH BETTER PROJECT."

—SCHOOL LEADERSHIP



Details from the reflection workshops held with the AEBA Steering Group.

The learning programme has created a structured set of spaces to reflect and learn about the project as it unfolds. One outcome was focussing of activity around key strands to consolidate and build on what was already in place, rather than taking on new ideas (2020). Another outcome was improved volunteer voice in the programme and in shaping the future.

Learning lessons

The initial idea was for a participatory learning programme, with volunteers actively engaged in reflection and learning throughout. Staff from the University also intended to get more stuck-in and hang out at the school and with volunteers.

This was not possible during COVID-19 and the learning programme was reshaped as a result. It took some time for the role of the university as a learning partner to be well-understood and communicated. The lack of face-to-face contact meant building trust was initially difficult.

There is no off-the-shelf model for assessing the impact of complex, multifaceted initiatives over time, where causality and attribution is hard to capture. Participant learning is therefore important to capture the difference that activities made in people's own terms. It is important to find ways of acting on the lessons that emerge as projects unfold to ensure that early recommendations can be taken up and identify who is responsible for action. Again, the pandemic was a complicating factor interrupting the expected unfolding of the project.

“The learning programme has made a huge difference to the volunteers - it has created a culture of openness and clarity and given them a safe space to voice their thoughts and feelings.”

-VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

“The input from the university has been fundamental to partners being exposed to a wider research-based understanding of a community development approach.”

-SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

6 Understanding what counts



The AEBA room at Arbourthorne Community Primary School.

The key measure of success for AEBA is the difference it has made to those involved and the wider community. Whilst the numbers are impressive (see Figure 13), quality matters over quantity and any targets set need to evolve to reflect the changing nature of the project and participants' aspirations.

A number of factors can be cited as having contributed positively to AEBA including

- The hard work, dedication and commitment of volunteers, AEBA staff and school staff
- Perseverance in the face of adversity in the pandemic
- Creative solutions and the embrace of online innovations to keep communities going
- Prioritisation of activities to ensure that time could be spent delivering what had already been started – the ability to say 'no'
- Time invested in personal relations and problem-solving to make volunteering work for people.

There are many impacts that can be cited from the project, including addressing basic needs. However, given the wider theory of change (Figure 3), the report focuses here on two:

- 1) raising people's self-efficacy
- 2) mobilising the school as community infrastructure, and the key lessons that can be learnt.

This is reflected in the journeys of the volunteers themselves.

FIGURE 13: Counting success in AEBA.

3 main activity strands delivered

45+ Action Stations awarded

15 volunteers on Community Fridge

22 volunteers on average per quarter

+40% volunteers from the wider community



2350+ volunteer hours donated

45 slow cookers distributed



70 families learning to cook in Little Cooks in Lockdown

75 families fed at Family Feast

15 adults and children litter picked

16 adults and children joined Red Robin Family Fun Club

5+ collective planning meetings for the future

15+ external partners



2 ideas picnics

12 founding members of the Book Club

10 team leaders supported

6 departments from the University of Sheffield involved

80 members of the Community Fridge on average



200 food bags handed out in the first quarter

15 exchanges and visits to and from the school

210 Twitter followers
543 Facebook likes

2 transformations of the school grounds

40+ trees planted



IMPACT 1

Raising self-efficacy

For the medium and longer term outcomes of AEBA to be realised, raising people's confidence and self-belief, as well as building collective identity, are central to believing change is possible.

People volunteer for many different reasons (see Figure 14) but all reported positive impacts from their involvement. People have enjoyed meeting new people and making new friends, having company and a sense of camaraderie, especially during the pandemic. Volunteers have had a sense of satisfaction from feeling productive

and helping the community. They have gained a sense of achievement and pride particularly where people have come out of their comfort zones and taken on team leadership roles. Several volunteers' children have been involved and have enjoyed the experience, where this was possible with social distancing.

"The people who volunteer the most are often the most vulnerable and need more encouragement to grow and more confidence building, more reassurance."

-VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

FIGURE 14: *Why do people volunteer?*

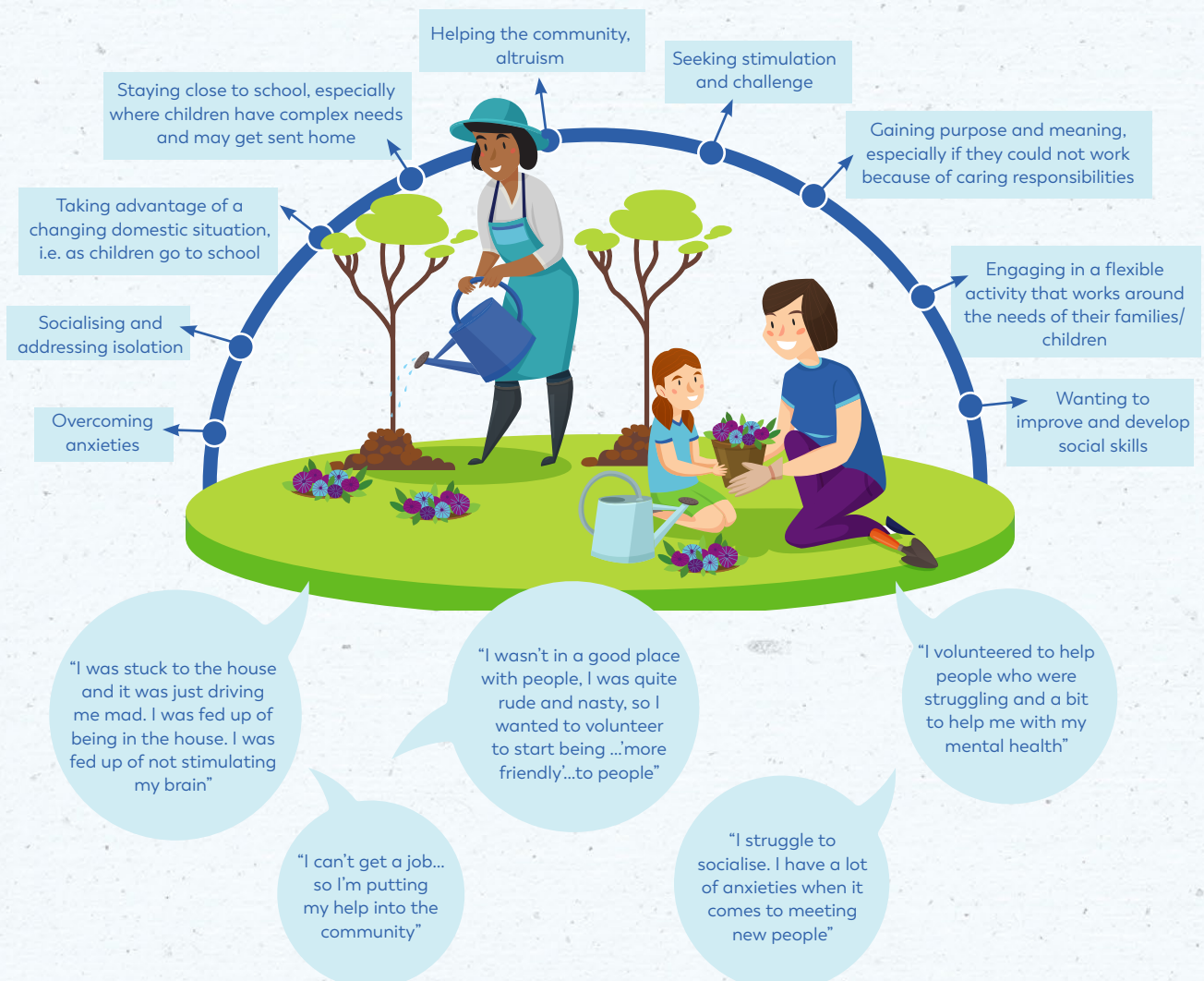


FIGURE 15: Volunteering outcomes.



The volunteer programme has enabled people to gain a wide range of indirect and direct skills (see Figure 15). There has been a positive progression in how much influence and input volunteers have wanted to have over time. This has led to new team leader posts and a willingness to be involved in making more and more decisions. Groups have also begun to apply for funds themselves and articulate what they want for themselves and their community.

Learning lessons

Whilst all volunteers have positive feedback on their experience and have improved self-efficacy and a sense of pride in their achievements and the community (see Volunteer Stories below), there are a series of issues highlighted by the volunteers that have impacted on their journeys. These relate to communication; decision-making; volunteer voice; volunteer numbers and daily management. There have also been a number of volunteer disagreements which impacted the experience.

At times, these issues have affected volunteers' self-esteem and sense of ownership of the project. Some volunteers have felt out-of-the-loop or at times described themselves as 'unpaid labourers'. Volunteers have been stressed and noted how volunteering could negatively impact on their mental health. Some expressed the desire for more autonomy in the project. This suggests that greater attention needs to be paid by all involved, including externally-funded project coordination staff and the volunteers themselves, to ensuring the school's existing ethos and culture permeate the project, building local ownership and improving governance and decision-making.

BOX 6:

About the volunteers

Life in Arbourthorne has become more challenging in the last years; there is a high level of mental health struggles and the SEND intake has increased over time. Arbourthorne has been described as a challenging environment at times, but one that has so much to celebrate.

The majority of volunteers are women, and only women participated in the interview programme. Many volunteers have caring responsibilities and cannot work, either because they receive specific benefits, or because the demands of the family mean it is difficult to hold down a job. The flexibility of volunteering is important.

For many volunteers, volunteering is not a stepping stone to employment but the goal in itself – it is often what people are doing for themselves, as much as the wider community. There are often high levels of domestic negotiations to do this; some people's families are supportive; others less so, even though the women see volunteering as a lifeline for themselves.

“THAT SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT KNOWING YOU'D HELPED SOMEONE AND DONE SOMETHING TO HELP THE SCHOOL.” –VOLUNTEER

IMPACT 2

Mobilising the school as community infrastructure



Building the Healthy Hideout and the polytunnel where fresh produce is grown.

The school has been effectively mobilised as community infrastructure (see Figure 16).

First, the project has transformed the physical space of the school. There is now an outdoor learning space in the 'Healthy Hideout' which comprises the barn/outdoor classroom, polytunnel, firepit, sensory garden and flower beds.

Second, the project has built social infrastructure through creating spaces for sharing and connecting with the community. The Healthy Hideout, for instance, serves as a social space, an educational space and a growing and cooking space. Family Feast is another key example.

Third, the project has built networks of care, solidarity and community amongst volunteers. These infrastructures of care are critical in navigating challenges in their everyday lives.

Finally, an infrastructure of connections has also been built through the funding jigsaw and partnerships developed, which lays the foundations for the future.

Learning lessons

Maintenance of all these networks is essential and takes time, commitment and investment. With these in place, there is considerable opportunity to extend these infrastructures further into the community. Of these infrastructures, social and care networks are the most important to volunteers, and caution is needed to ensure that they are not negatively impacted by overambitious physical improvement projects or new partnerships.

The stresses of everyday life, and increasing mental health problems, make the development of networks of care and solidarity all the more important, but also more difficult, particularly during the pandemic. On the other hand, during COVID-19 the pandemic led to the effective deployment of digital tools and methods to supplement community infrastructure.

"I DON'T FEEL LIKE WE HAD MANY OF THESE ISSUES BETWEEN VOLUNTEERS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC SO I WONDER HOW MUCH IT'S JUST THE STRESS OF LIFE COMING OUT ELSEWHERE."

FIGURE 16: Mobilising the school as community infrastructure.

This part of the school grounds has been completely transformed by a polytunnel, growing area, firepit, sensory garden and outdoor classroom. It is now the **'Healthy Hideout'** supported by the Get Growing group.

Red Robin House: a converted caretaker's house developed by the school as a life skills centre. Red Robin House has been used to develop skills for the future and for the Red Robin Family Fun Club.

The **Little Library** is outside the school and offers the opportunity for parents to read and exchange books. A book group and children's book group were also set up on the initiative of one parent.

One of the most successful and popular activities is the **Community Fridge**, operating out of two containers at the front of the school. Food donations that would go to food waste are provided to members twice a week.

AEBA played a role supporting the regeneration of the **community pond** and helped catalyse the Friends of Arbourthorne Pond.

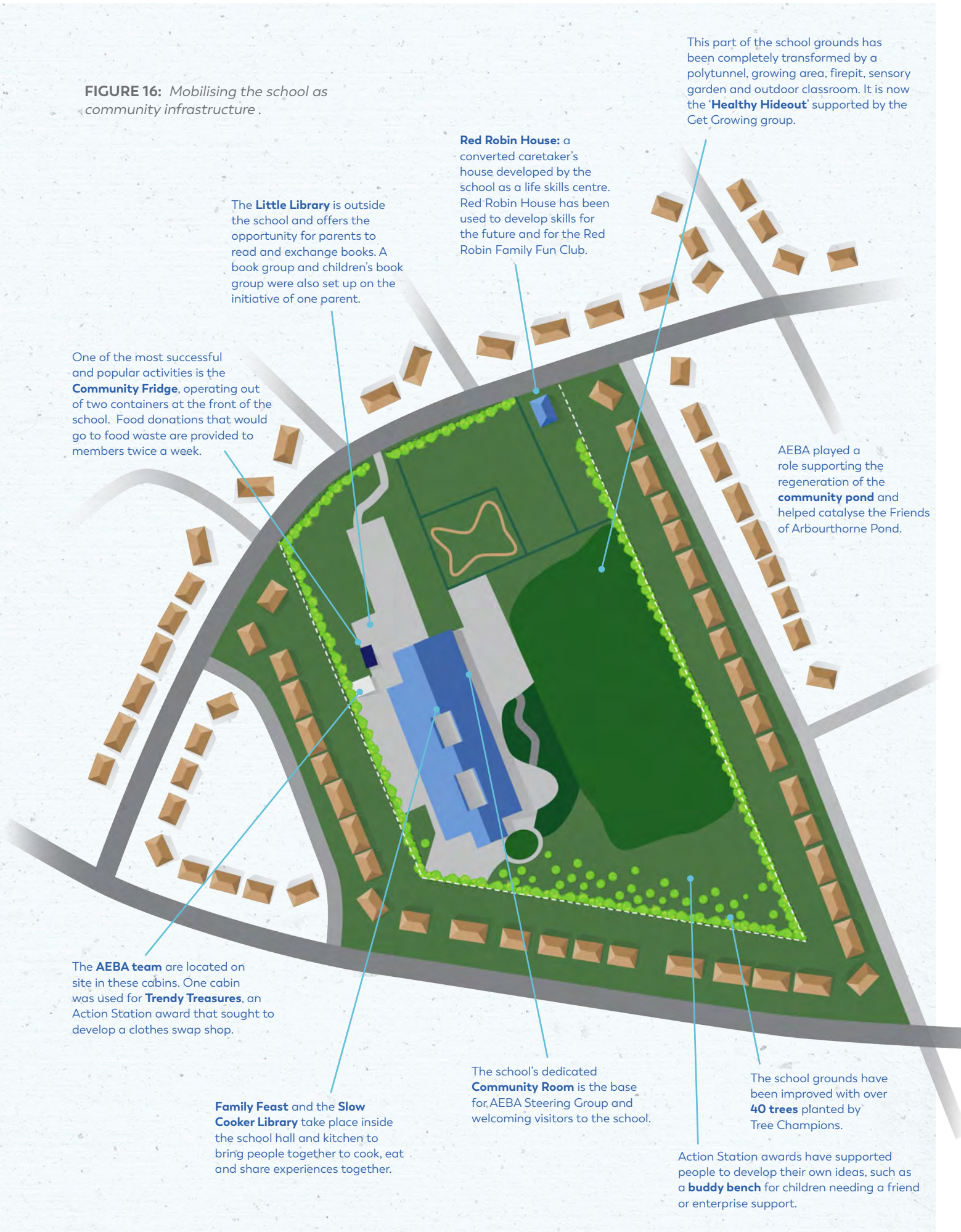
The **AEBA team** are located on site in these cabins. One cabin was used for **Trendy Treasures**, an Action Station award that sought to develop a clothes swap shop.

Family Feast and the **Slow Cooker Library** take place inside the school hall and kitchen to bring people together to cook, eat and share experiences together.

The school's dedicated **Community Room** is the base for AEBA Steering Group and welcoming visitors to the school.

The school grounds have been improved with over **40 trees** planted by Tree Champions.

Action Station awards have supported people to develop their own ideas, such as a **buddy bench** for children needing a friend or enterprise support.

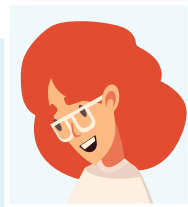


Volunteer stories

Here are a selection of some of the volunteer's stories, gathered during interviews in 2021. Names have been changed to protect their identity.



Kay was volunteering for a long time before AEBA and carried on as community volunteer at the school once her children had left. Her children also have special education needs and it has helped her child settle at school, knowing that mum is around. She started volunteering because she lacked confidence, which has grown throughout her time as a volunteer. She volunteers once a week. She also took part in the Slow Cooker course and learnt new skills and tried new foods. She is looking for a job but had found it challenging to find something that fits around school hours.



Mags is a parent volunteer who was involved in the school before AEBA. She used to go into the classroom and help out. Her children have special educational needs and she has not been able to work due to her caring responsibilities. She volunteered to overcome social isolation and anxiety and a lack of confidence, to meet new people and venture out. She volunteers 4-5 hours a week. She got involved in several activities and became a team leader. She was pleased she was able to follow her interests and passions and be supported to do this. She found it daunting to begin with but grew into the role. She has absolutely loved volunteering most of the time and being part of the project. She often gave her Timebuilders rewards away to help others in the community. She said she did not feel confident to apply for posts, such as the volunteer coordinator post, when they were advertised, but would now feel capable of doing it. She feels more engaged with the community and volunteering has brought her out socially. This has impacted her child who also is more confident than before. She has found it difficult to maintain volunteering when the role has grown, especially with juggling family life. She reflected that she should be careful not to take too much on as can become overwhelmed. She has felt out of the loop at times and struggled to feel a sense of ownership of her idea. She missed the connection with school when volunteers had to stay away because of social distancing.

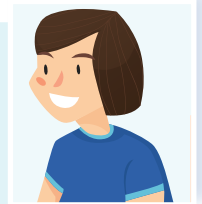


Abbie is an occasional parent volunteer and got involved via word of mouth. She wanted to meet people and be able to help out. She has a small home and garden and wanted to do much more. She has enjoyed volunteering, especially when the weather has been warm, and has learnt a lot. It has taken a few negotiations at home to be able to make this work. Sometimes, she wanted to do more, but it has been difficult juggling the logistics, particularly with after-school activities, as she has older children at different schools and limited access to transport. She loves the Community Fridge and doing her bit to combat food waste. She stopped volunteering because she got a job. She has a child with SEND and it became too much to handle.



Molly is a parent volunteer and specifically moved her children to Arbourthorne because of the school's excellent SEND provision. She has been very happy with how the school has supported her children. She was a first time volunteer with AEBA and saw the

opportunity on social media. She was able to volunteer because her child had started at school and she had more time. She had felt stuck at home and needed to do something for herself. She eventually became a team leader and this boosted her confidence. She has been pleased to give back to the community and enjoyed meeting new people and making new friends. She can see that her organisational and communication skills have improved. She used to look forward to volunteering but had to stop as she got a different part-time job and it was hard to juggle. She would be prepared to volunteer in the future again.



Sharon is a parent volunteer who works part-time. She was encouraged to volunteer by school staff and had seen leaflets and adverts on social media. She has struggled

with her mental health and felt stuck in the house. She wanted to help people who were in difficulties and also help herself with her mental health, through meeting new people. She volunteers for a couple of hours a week. She has found the volunteer disputes on the ground demoralising and has not wanted to be part of that atmosphere. She has enjoyed giving back to the community and has increased her self-confidence and belief that she can do different things. She thinks the work for the community is brilliant and wants it to continue.



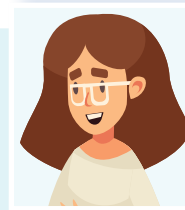
Sarah is a long-time parent at the school, but started volunteering for the first time through AEBA. She was encouraged to get involved by another volunteer. Her children have SEND and her caring responsibilities mean she cannot work. She likes school, and wanted to volunteer to get out, meet new friends and help the school and community. She volunteers for several initiatives for around a day a week. She enjoys doing it and thinks it is important to role model positive community engagement for the children. Volunteering has improved her quality of life and she wants AEBA to carry on.



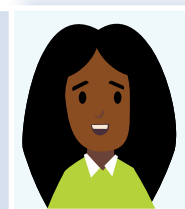
Linda has been a parent and volunteer at the school for a long time. Before AEBA she used to go into classrooms and laminate, cut and stick, send messages, deliver posters and leaflets around school and help children work. Her children have SEND and she is a carer who struggles with her own mental health and depression. She initially started volunteering at school to be around her own children but wanted to carry on for other reasons. With AEBA she has become a team leader and this made her feel valued and recognised. She has benefitted a lot from AEBA: focus, stimulation, a sense of pride and achievement. Volunteering has been a form of escape. Initially volunteering kept the depression at bay, but at times it has worsened her mental health, particularly when there have been disputes between volunteers. Nevertheless, she has enjoyed the camaraderie of volunteering and it has given her reasons to leave the house. She wants AEBA to continue as it is really making a difference.



Karen is a new parent volunteer, recruited through recent Stay and Play activities and volunteers occasionally. She enjoys meeting new people and being with children outside. She is relatively new to Sheffield and AEBA has helped her meet new people. She thought the Slow Cooker course was great as it taught people how to save time and electricity. She has found it difficult being a new parent during lockdown, as she was not able to go inside the school or look around it. She has not experienced the family school culture and ethos that longer-standing parents are familiar with.



Debs is now a community volunteer who had been a parent at the school for a long time. She was involved since the beginning and was invited to join by school. She volunteers between 2-3 days a week. She is a carer and has brought her whole family to be involved in the initiative. She finds it challenging to connect with people face-to-face and lacks confidence. She is a team leader and enjoys it: it is something for herself, even though the extent of her volunteering is sometimes questioned at home. The family benefits in different ways, including from trips and food from the Community Fridge. Volunteering gives her something to do and she has really gained in confidence. She has had the opportunity to speak up and participate in public forums. She feels more capable of doing things, has made friends and gained skills. Sometimes she has felt underappreciated and does not always like being pushed out of her comfort zone. Despite these challenges, she is getting out of it what she wants.



Trish is a parent volunteer and team leader who was approached to get involved by school staff and other volunteers. She has physical and mental health difficulties which makes it difficult to undertake paid work. She used to volunteer before AEBA and liked going in the staff room. She was motivated to volunteer to improve herself and her social skills, particularly to learn to interact differently with people. She has found it helpful to have a structure and be clear that she needs to abide by rules and codes of conduct that benefit everyone. Volunteering has met her goals, although she has not always felt valued or recognised as she would want. She has not always understood the bigger picture and found it a challenge to continue delivery over the summer when paid staff were not around. She loves seeing people's faces when they get their food bags and working as part of a team. It was a big moment for her when she became team leader.

7 Learning lessons

There are a number of learning lessons that have been woven throughout this report. AEBA's approach to making a difference (see Figure 3) has broadly worked well, but can be further refined as the basis for future developments. Figure 17 presents an adjusted 'theory of change' for the project on the basis of the learning programme.

First, the activities that have worked best are those that combine community relevance with a high potential for building community infrastructure. Whilst there are many ideas that could be implemented by the school, those meeting basic needs and creating physical and social infrastructure are most valued. Volunteers will vote with their feet if activities do not align with their understandings of what matters for Arbourthorne. The learning lesson is that it does not matter as much what happens, so much as how and by whom.

Second, the learning programme has supported the importance of the culture of the school and the volunteering programme as key conditions for success. Delivering above and beyond a traditional school improvement agenda has required dedicated, innovative and brave school leadership. This has been matched by the dedication and commitment of volunteers.

However, the evidence in this reports suggests three revised or additional pillars:

- 1 Local ownership is critical by the school and volunteers.** The parallel structures between AEBA and the school sometimes led to disconnects and raised questions about responsibility for project delivery. Participatory learning is important to the extent that it fosters this local ownership.

"There should be a lot of working with the volunteers to develop their confidence and skills and knowledge in the things that they are doing and give them ownership of the things that they are doing."

-VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

- 2 Adaptive governance is required that responds to local needs and priorities and enables capacity to be matched to opportunities.** There is a danger that the complexity of funding arrangements and a multi-partner governance structure can diminish local ownership of the project. Doing less better is more beneficial in the long-run than doing a lot quickly.

"This is a community where you have to be flexible and respond to need as it arises. People need a voice."

-SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

- 3 Community development skills are required to support the longer-term ownership and sustainability of the initiative.** In a community like Arbourthorne, knowing how to work flexibly and informally to build community relations, overcome distrust and support people's mental health is critical.

"It tried to spread itself too thin too quickly."

-AEBA TEAM MEMBER

These three pillars are critical conditions for success. As a result of collaborative reflection on these issues in June and July 2022, the learning programme recommends a different governance structure for the school, to embed more co-productive principles with the project as it moves forward (Honingh et al. 2018; Perry et al. 2019).

FIGURE 17: How AEBA will make a difference 2.0.

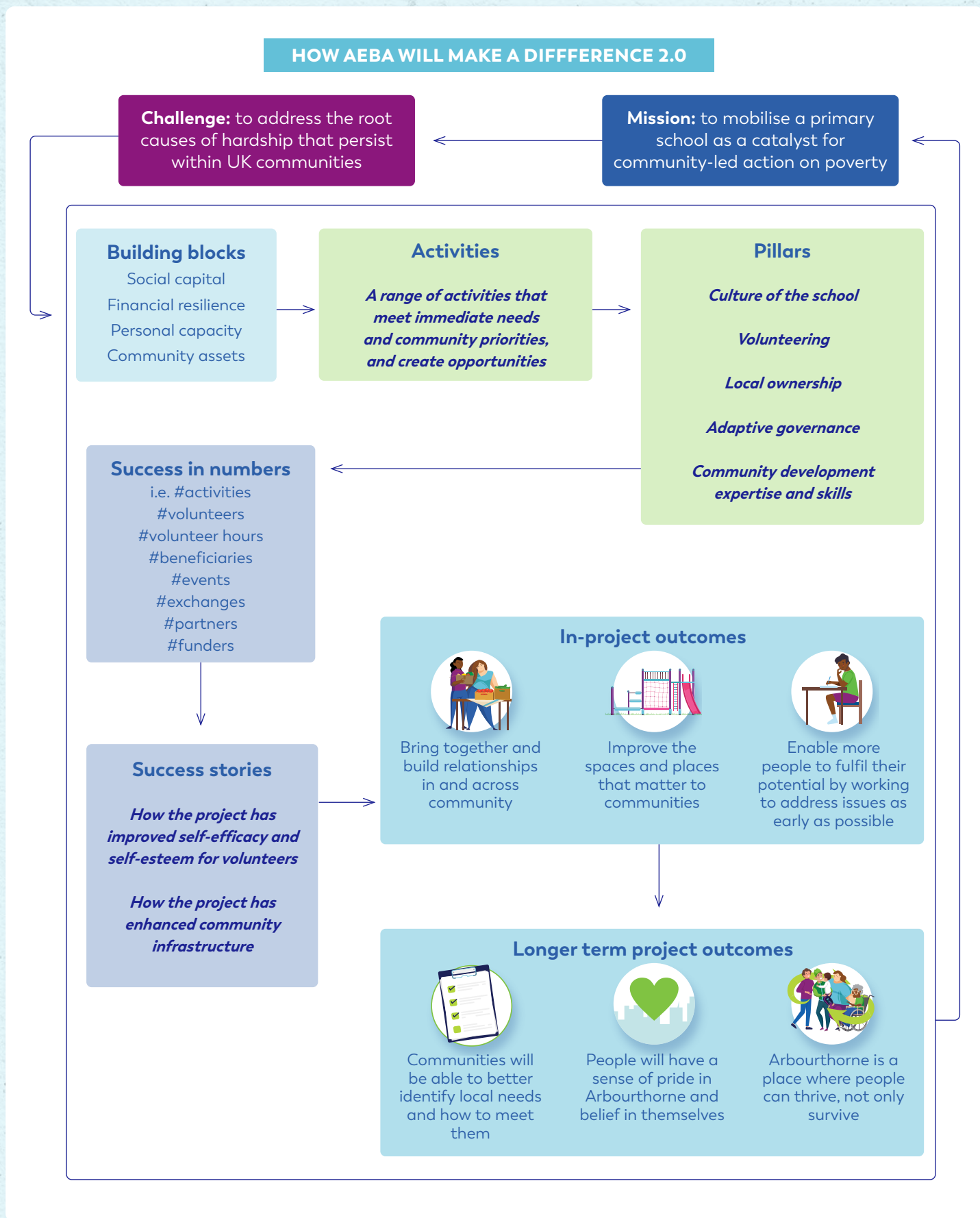
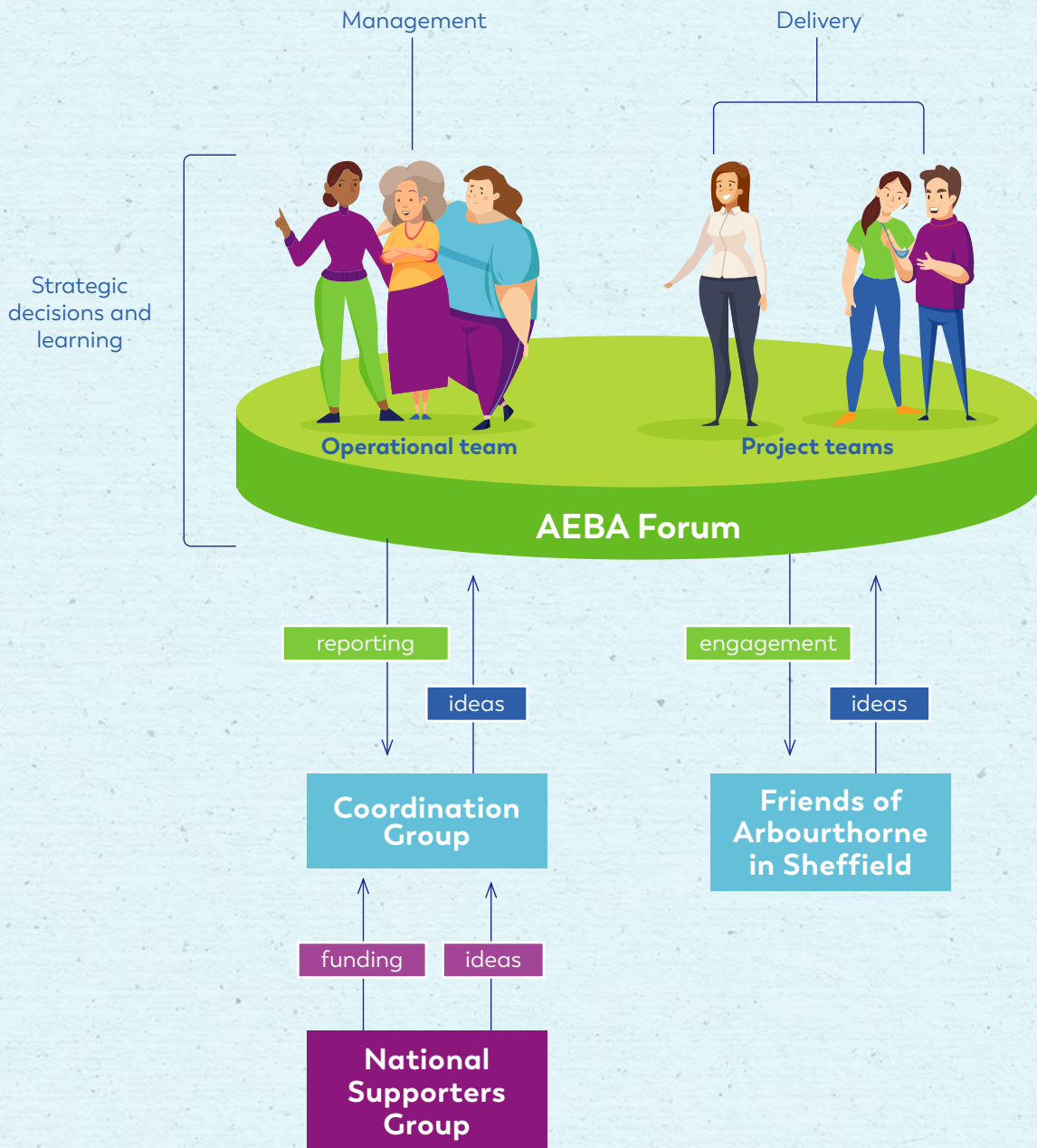


FIGURE 18: Towards co-producing AEBA.



What are the key lessons for other schools?



#1 Bed in - initiatives need to be embedded in the school's strategies and decision-making and align with existing activities.



#5 Take time - this is a long-term commitment and not everything can be achieved at once.



#2 Tailor to - projects need to be tailored to and reflect the specific needs and challenges of each particular community.



#6 Power up - a central priority is enabling volunteers to mobilise their own power to improve their lives and the lives of the community.



#3 Let loose - enough structure is needed to make things work, but project designs need to be loose enough to let volunteers' input change the direction of travel.



#7 Scale out - trailblazing schools seeking to transform their communities can benefit from peer networks to share knowledge and scale out what they are doing.



#4 Do with - parents, children and the community need to be involved from the start - do with people, not to or for them.

Embedding community infrastructure into the life of the school.



In April 2022 a group of like-minded schools and initiatives, including AEBA, met at the Institute of Education in London to discuss how they were seeking to work with and for their communities beyond their educational missions.

- **Reach Academy Feltham** (London) are part of the Feltham Convening Partnership which has a collective impact approach and aims to improve outcomes for children and young people in Feltham.
- **Manchester Communication Academy** (Manchester) sees its core purpose to mitigate the impact of disadvantage on children, families and communities, seeing the school as a vehicle and agent for social change. They are involved in the Family Zone North Manchester.
- **School 360** (London) is part of Big Education Trust and opened their school during the pandemic, with an explicit intention to build the school *with* a cohort of families not for them.
- **Surrey Square School** (London) is also part of Big Education Trust and works with an ethos to 'mould the hole to fit the child' rather than the other way round. The school has many community projects, including around food, which bring people together, to meet basic needs and produce longer term change. The school positions its activities within the Old Kent Road Family Zone.
- **The West End Children's Community** (Newcastle) is a partnership initiative that includes staff at Newcastle University and the West End Schools Trust, which is inspired by Harlem Children's Zone in the United States, and has a mission of bringing services together to address childhood disadvantage with a focus on cradle to career.
- **Halifax Academy** (Halifax) is part of the Impact Multi-Academy Trust and has multiple points of engagement with the community via its Community Connections programme (@connect_tha), including a Community Kitchen and Outback Garden.



Surrey Square School's Community Corner, a Saturday morning event opportunity for families to connect and have free hot lunch.

The meeting identified a number of common themes. The need for a consolidated evidence base was articulated, which links wider community roles with the indicators on which schools are judged (educational outcomes). Schools can feel like they are doing this work in a silo, going against the grain of existing expectations, and need solidarity, peer learning and networks of support.

The meeting brought together self-defined 'mavericks' who often feel like 'fish out of water'. The importance of creative and bold leadership was emphasised by everyone. How to manage and lead a school whilst completing longer term work was a key concern. A particular interest in learning from approaches in the Welsh and Scottish governments was expressed. Although the challenge of funding was raised, participants in the meeting recognised that there is flex in the system. Differences between how academies and schools in local authority control in relation to funding were also noted. Other challenges included how to engage teachers, the need to ensure partners' ambitions are aligned, managing timeframes and expectations and how to evaluate complex, multi-faceted interventions.



Top: Halifax Academy's Community Kitchen, one of many community connection projects. (Image provided by Halifax Academy)

Bottom: School 360 works with The Visionaries on strategies to engage families with the outdoors and nature, including an annual family camping trip.

8 Schools as community infrastructure

The work at Arbourthorne Community Primary School constitutes a different approach to school-community engagement. It is highly place-based, and diverse, recognising that a portfolio of interventions is more powerful than a fragmented approach (Dyson et al 2013); it seeks to be transformative, not only ameliorative, and adopts a theory of change based around capacity-building, social learning and entrepreneurship, linked to a whole school mentality which sees the school at the centre of the community. In this approach, a key distinctiveness is the volunteer programme, which seeks to de-professionalise the school-community nexus.

Many studies have argued that schools can play a wider role in their communities beyond the provision of education, for instance, as community hubs or extended schools (Kerr et al. 2014). Most existing definitions of community-oriented schools focus on schools and communities pooling resources to support each other and deliver services (Dyson and Raffo 2007; Diss and Jarvie 2016). Such initiatives still tend to see schools as providing such services to communities.

“BECAUSE SCHOOL IS FAMILY AND YOU HELP YOUR FAMILY OUT, DON'T YOU?”

–AEBA VOLUNTEER

The learning programme evidences how An Even Better Arbourthorne prefigures a different approach, by bridging between the individual, family and community. It shows how:

- **Schools can be an extension of home not the state:** schools are valuable in communities like Arbourthorne precisely because they extend the idea of family beyond the walls of the home and create different spaces for people to inhabit. Distrust can be high, but once overcome, schools can act as different kinds of institutions from the state in the fabric of people's lives.



Community-oriented schools focus on their role as service providers to communities

AEBA approach bridges individual, family and community



Left: The outdoor classroom under construction. Right: Alpaca walking as a volunteer reward.

- **Schools are sites for social reproduction:** volunteering has provided a central function in helping people manage and thrive in their everyday lives, but complex trade-offs are made in the process of people seeking to develop their livelihoods at the intersection of home, state and the economy. Volunteering is valued by participants as a way to enhance social infrastructures and infrastructures of care.
- **The contribution of schools is to foster and sustain community infrastructure:** investing in the creative and imaginative use of outdoor and indoor space can create different spaces to bring people together and overcome social isolation. Community infrastructure is not just hard assets and facilities, but refers here to the interplay between physical and social infrastructures, and infrastructures of care and connection.

The story of AEBA is a powerful one. At the time of writing, the cost of living crisis in the UK is ramping up and families are struggling to make ends meet. It is more important than ever to understand how schools can play a role in addressing these challenges in both the short and the long term, not instead of but as part of their wider educational mission.

References

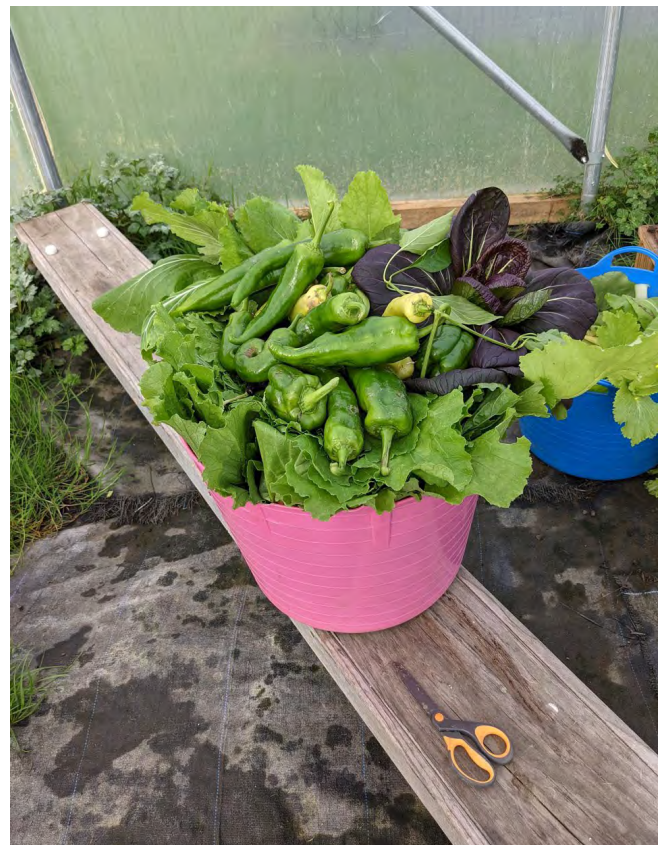
- ACPS – Arbourthorne Community Primary School (2020). An Even Better Arbourthorne. See Arbourthorne Community Primary School - All about... An Even Better Arbourthorne (arbourthorneprimary.co.uk). Accessed 30/07/22.
- Ainscow, M. (2012) Moving knowledge around: Strategies for fostering equity within educational systems. *J Educ Change* 13, pp. 289–310.
- Cleveland, B., Chandler, P., Backhouse, S., Clinton, J., McShane, I. and Newton, C. eds (2020) Schools as Community Hubs International Conference 2020. Building Connections for Community Benefit. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.
- Cummings, C, Todd, L. and Dyson, A. (2007). Towards Extended Schools? How Education and Other Professionals Understand Community-Oriented Schooling. *Children & Society*, 21, pp. 189–200.
- Diss, O. and Jarvie, M. (2016). *Unfinished Business: Where Next for Extended Schools?* London: Child Poverty Action Group.
- Dyson, A. and Raffo, C. (2007). Education and disadvantage: the role of community-oriented schools. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33 (3), pp. 297–314.
- Dyson, A., Kerr, K, and Wellings, C. (2013). *Developing Children’s Zones for England: What’s the evidence?* London: Save the Children.
- Guardian (2019). ‘Schools have become fourth emergency service for poorest families’ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/15/schools-have-become-fourth-emergency-service-for-poorest-families> [Accessed 09/09/20].
- Haddad, M., Lambie-Mumford, H. and Sims, L. (2018). *Extended Schools*. London: Child Poverty Action Group.
- Haig, T. (2014) *Equipping Schools to Fight Poverty: A Community Hub Approach*. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 46:9, 1018-1035, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2014.931006.
- Honingh, M., Bondarouk, E. and Brandsen, T. (2018) Co-production in primary schools: a systematic literature review. *International Review of Administrative Science* 0(0): 1-18.
- Hoskins, K., Bradbury, A. and Fogarty, L. (2021) A frontline service? Nursery Schools as local community hubs in an era of austerity, *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 19(3), 355-368.
- Kerr, K., Dyson, A. and Raffo, C. (2014). *Education, disadvantage and place. Making the local matter*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- King, S. (2020) *Greater Manchester Savers: The Story So Far*. Available for download: <https://communitysavers.net/2020/05/greater-manchester-savers-our-story-so-far/> Accessed 19th August 2022.
- Lubell, E. (2011). *Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action*. New York: Children’s Aid Society.
- National Audit Office Report (2016). *Financial Sustainability of Schools*. London: National Audit Office. Available at <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/financial-sustainability-in-schools/> [Accessed on 07/09/20]
- Partridge, L. and Bath, N. (2019). *Schools Without Walls*. London: RSA.
- Perry, B., Durose, C. and Richardson, L. with the Action Research Collective (2019) *How can we govern differently? The promise and practice of co-production*. Project report. Greater Manchester: Creative Concern.
- Raffo, C. and Dyson, A. (2007). Full service extended schools and educational inequality in urban contexts—new opportunities for progress? *Journal of Education Policy*, 22 (3), pp. 263-282.
- Simons, R (2011) *Schools in their communities*. Camberwell, Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research. Available at http://research.acer.edu.au/policy_briefs/2 [accessed on 07/09/20].

Roll of honour

The achievements of AEBA build on a long legacy of engagement and community support from Arbourthorne Community Primary School. The successes in this report would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of many people in and beyond Arbourthorne. They include: the volunteers; school leadership, teaching and support staff; the An Even Better Arbourthorne team; the Centre for Innovation in Voluntary Action; Sheffield supporters, including from the local community, staff and students at the University, and local councillors and organisations; wider ambassadors and fundraisers beyond Sheffield.

We would like to acknowledge our many funders, including the National Lottery Community Fund (Reaching Communities Yorkshire and Humber); Arbourthorne Community Primary School; CIVA; the Tudor Trust; Ascot Lloyd; Hubbub; private donations; Tree Council; University of Sheffield; Ward and neighbourly grants.

Clockwise from below: Growing in the polytunnel. Fresh vegetables grown on site. The Red Robin House.



COVID-19, the cost of living crisis and the impacts of climate change raise critical questions over the roles that schools play in their communities. This report tells the story of Arbourthorne Community Primary School in Sheffield and its initiative to make Arbourthorne even better.

The report concludes that An Even Better Arbourthorne paves the way to imagine how

- schools can be an extension of home not the state
- schools are sites of social reproduction
- schools can be mobilised as community infrastructure.

Community infrastructure is not just about the school as a physical asset. It is about the interplay between physical and social infrastructures and networks of care and connection in the community.

The AEBA project provides a potential blueprint and theory of change for how schools can play these roles. Importantly, this means valuing the skills and expertise within communities and prioritising local ownership over professionalised delivery in grounded co-production partnerships.