



IMPACT REPORT



Quaker Social Action (QSA) is an east London-based anti-poverty charity that carries out a variety of practical projects to support people living on low incomes. Insights from this frontline delivery are used to provide training for other practitioners, and to carry out influencing and campaigning work on a national level.



2020–21 AT A GLANCE

- 61,172** people accessed our website
- 40,868** users accessed our 'we can help' website pages
- 975** people were supported directly by our projects
- 229** professionals accessed online training workshops

Our projects in 2020–21

- **Down to Earth** provided practical support to 643 people on low incomes struggling with funeral costs, and strategically pushed for change within the funeral industry and government
- **Made of Money** provided a creative and reflective approach to financial wellbeing for 130 individuals and families on low incomes
- **Move on Up** housed 12 young adult carers, supporting them to build their life skills and make positive moves into further education or work
- **This Way Up** shared practical mindfulness skills with 142 people to help them build resilience and make a positive plan for the future
- **Bags of Taste** supported 39 people to develop healthy and affordable cooking habits through friendly and sociable cookery courses
- **Aberfeldy Big Local, Pimlico Million** and **Worlds End & Lots Road Big Local** all brought together neighbours to connect with each other and bring about positive change in their local area



New projects launched in 2021

- **Cook Up** provides a shared kitchen space for people who don't have access to one, to cook and connect together
- **Turn a Corner** is a mobile library for people affected by homelessness in London, offering a good book, a companionable chat and signposting to further support



INTRODUCTION



The unspoken assumption in writing this introductory piece, as I do each year, is to focus on QSA – speaking with authentic pride about our work. But for this year, this most extraordinary of years, I want to break with that tradition.

The work that we do at QSA sits within a social structure. Much of this is the familiar architecture of our lives; central government, local government, the corporate sector and charities who can be large or small, who can give our money for social good or who can – like QSA – receive those funds to deliver services.

All of these structures rely on the people within them to keep everything moving. And outside of all those systems are other people – sometimes those who are in the public eye and who inspire us with their words or deeds, but also sometimes whole swathes of ordinary people just actually being quite wonderful.

In this last year there has been such an outpouring of care and concern, so many people doing their professional and civic duty; it is beyond humbling to think of it. And it is beyond sad to know that all of this support was needed and that this last year has been the most terrible of times for so many people.

“In this last year there has been such an outpouring of care and concern... it is beyond humbling to think of it.”



The pandemic did not affect us all equally. Those of us who were already living in cramped conditions, struggling to put food on the table never mind finance a digital device for every member of our household that needed it, struggling already in a precarious job or with an underlying health condition, or caring responsibilities, or so many other disadvantages – it was these of our neighbours who needed us the most.

We at QSA sought to play our part in this. We sought to be as creative and responsive as we could be this year. We thought hard about how to adapt what we did before and how to bring in new ways of doing things, to

continue to support people across all of our services. We collaborated wherever we could and we also worked diligently to look after each other. After all, you can't pour from an empty jug.

So, this year, my introductory thanks goes far beyond the usual appreciation for our staff, volunteers, trustees, supporters, funders and partners. It goes out to everyone who stepped up and offered something practical, creative, hopeful and inspiring into our world over this last year. Boy, we needed it.

Judith Moran, Director

HOW WE WORK



Person-centred support – working with, not doing to

The first part of our mission is to enable people on low incomes to seek solutions to the issues affecting their lives. We seek to work with, not do to, knowing that people experiencing poverty are the real experts.

To do so requires our staff to build relationships based on trust. We try to see the whole person, rather than just the specific issue for which that particular service has been designed.

Move on Up, our supportive housing project for young adult carers, is the first of its kind in the UK. Each tenant joins us at a pivotal moment in their lives as

they try to establish a sense of independence whilst often still in their caring role. It is our job to work alongside each one of them, listening and encouraging them to get to know their strengths and to build confidence to push through into personal, professional and financial achievements.

“For me it’s important to have my own space where I can be vulnerable and then pick myself back up again when I need to. It’s so much better to be in a good mental state so that you can support someone else.”

Move on Up tenant.

Our financial and mental wellbeing projects, Made of Money and This Way Up, both work with people to unlock skills, knowledge and inner resources to make positive changes over time. Sessions provide a space to learn new skills and tackle a range of issues, making use of group settings so that people can share ideas and reflect on their past experiences.

“The team make you feel very comfortable, and it helped knowing that the people on the course were in a similar sort of situation to yourself and there for a reason. Just for me it’s had a huge impact on my life.”

Andy, This Way Up participant.

truth



Sharing our learning and speaking truth to power

The second part of QSA's mission is that we share our work with others when it is clear that it has the potential to bring benefits to communities outside of our own.

By working alongside people on low incomes – seeing how specific poverty issues affect households, how they tackle them, and helping where we can – we gain insights and knowledge which we can use to train other frontline workers, to develop our own services, and to influence policies and attitudes through reports and campaigns.

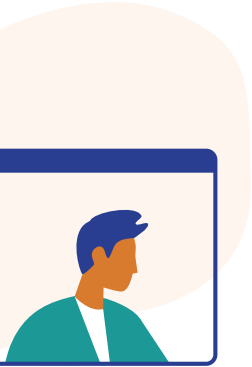
Since 2010, our Down to Earth project has been the only UK-wide service supporting

people struggling with funeral costs. During 2014–2018, we ran the Fair Funerals campaign, calling on the Government and funeral industry to work with us to improve the affordability of funerals for those on low incomes. Since then, we have continued to share insights and evidence, including through the powerful testimonies of our clients in the media.

Our campaigning helped to bring about the Competition and Markets Authority's investigation into the funerals market, which in turn has resulted in mandatory price transparency in the funeral industry. Each year in the UK, up to half a million people purchasing a funeral can be expected to benefit from this. QSA's Down to Earth team engaged fully with the CMA's investigation, providing feedback at every stage of consultation, backed up by detailed evidence.

ADAPTING TO THE PANDEMIC

As we went into lockdown in March 2020, significant action was taken across QSA's services, including the closure of our longstanding furniture re-use project, Homestore. For most of our staff work continued from home, requiring QSA to consider new ways of reaching and supporting service users.



Down to Earth: dealing with increased demand

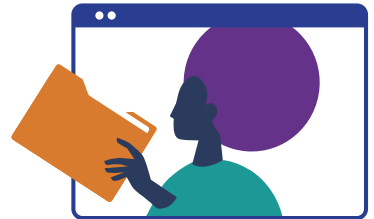
The pandemic has had a significant impact on our funeral costs helpline, Down to Earth, through the increase in deaths and the extra financial difficulties experienced by people across the UK. We provided expert support and guidance to more than double the number of new clients from December 2020 to March 2021, compared with the same period in the previous year. During periods of peak demand, we implemented a triage system, involving newly trained volunteers and redeployed staff to manage calls and enable the team to provide support promptly.

Developing new digital resources and guidance

New online guidance and resources were developed quickly to take into account the urgent changing needs of our service users. This included guidance from Down to Earth on organising a funeral during the pandemic, a guide to mindful wellbeing in lockdown from This Way Up, and links to helpful financial information and advice from our Made of Money team. Over the course of the year these new resources were accessed by over 25,000 users.

“These words and ideas have been phenomenal and have really helped... There are so many ideas on there that are so simple, that people hadn't thought of.”

User of Down to Earth's guide to organising a meaningful funeral during the pandemic.



Shifting service delivery and training online

Some projects were able to adapt their usually face to face support to an online setting. This move has not been without its limitations, with many families struggling with digital access and new time pressures, for example as a result of home schooling.

This Way Up, our mindfulness and coaching programme for people on a low income, has provided additional online services in response to the pandemic. A ‘pop up’ lockdown course was made available for previous attendees to refresh and deepen their resilience skills, applied to the unique challenges of lockdown. We also ran an open access ‘introduction to mindfulness’ course, for anyone across the UK, which was attended by 60 people.

Down to Earth and Made of Money continued to run training workshops for frontline professionals, sharing knowledge around funeral costs and financial capability. As a result of running this training online for the first time we were able to increase the number of participants to 229 and reach more professionals from outside of London.

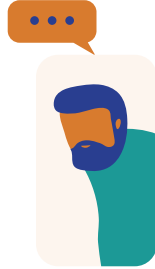


Undertaking research and planning ahead

After such an upheaval to QSA's ways of working and the significant impact of the pandemic on the lives of those we support, we have also taken time to reflect upon what we can learn from the year. We commissioned an internal report on the impact of the pandemic at the start of 2021, interviewing service users and staff, and bringing together insights on the broad range of ways that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in the UK. As we plan ahead, we have prioritised our commitment to diversity, which will be strengthened by a bespoke piece of work by an external advisor. We will also continue to focus heavily on digital, with a desire to reach more people than before, using a variety of means beyond just face to face methods.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HOMELESSNESS

In December 2020, QSA merged with longstanding charity, Quaker Homeless Action (QHA). With a great sense of privilege, QSA has now taken on QHA's mission of offering practical assistance to and a voice for homeless and marginalised people in Britain.



Researching unmet needs in a time of crisis

In preparation for the merger, QSA undertook research to understand and identify unmet needs within the field of homelessness prevention and response, with a particular focus on what had changed as a result of the pandemic. We wanted to understand where we could creatively respond using QSA's existing strengths and resources.

We convened online listening exercises with former QHA volunteers, trustees and supporters. We also consulted with a range of people working in homelessness and related sectors, and reviewed news articles and reports on homelessness and on designing solutions to complex problems.

Cook Up

A kitchen space for people without access to one

QSA's new pilot project, Cook Up, is providing a shared kitchen space for people without access to one. An emerging theme from our research showed that people who are homeless can have limited options when it comes to food choices. People living in hostel accommodation won't always feel safe in their shared kitchen space, those in B&Bs might only have a microwave or kettle, and those living on the streets have no kitchen at all.

Though there are many much-needed initiatives supplying meals to people who are homeless, as far as we know, there are no initiatives helping them to cook their own food. Cook Up provides a safe and welcoming space for people to cook their own meals and choose what they eat.



Turn a Corner

A community library for people affected by homelessness

Turn a Corner, based on QHA's mobile library, provides a community space and library for people affected by homelessness to increase wellbeing through connection, conversation and reading. The van is currently based at locations across central London, offering a free library lending service with no fixed address or membership required to borrow a book. Supported by volunteers, the team also provides guidance on connecting with other local services and distributes resources and donated items such as sleeping bags, clothing and hygiene products.

Turn a Corner also provides an opportunity for QSA to continue our learning by speaking to people with lived experience of homelessness.



Support for the Covid-19 Homeless Taskforce



QSA provided a £10,000 grant to support the work of the Covid-19 Homeless Taskforce: a group of small, independent, community organisations and charities, working alongside people experiencing homelessness during the challenging winter of 2020–21.

The grant contributed towards:

- Accommodation at the YHA for 16 LGBTIQ+ guests of the Outside Project
- 4,411 early morning breakfasts on the streets in Camden
- 7,545 evening meals/interactions across nine boroughs
- 4,774 bedtime check-ins and hot drinks/snacks in Westminster
- The pilot of a grassroots vaccination programme in Camden for people affected by homelessness, with over 30 people vaccinated

FINANCES

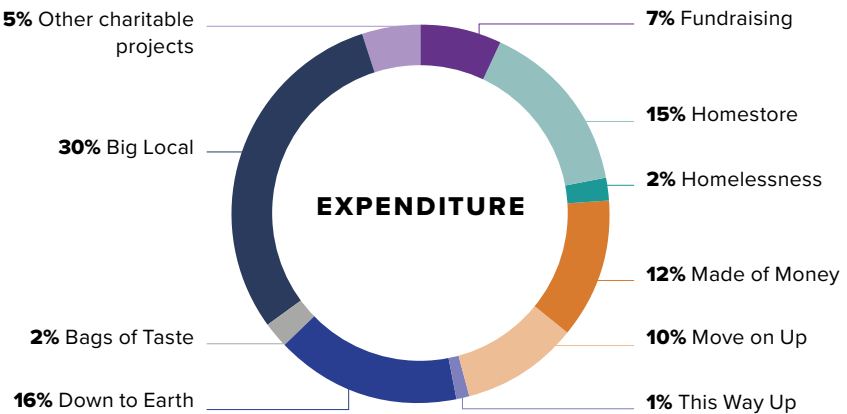
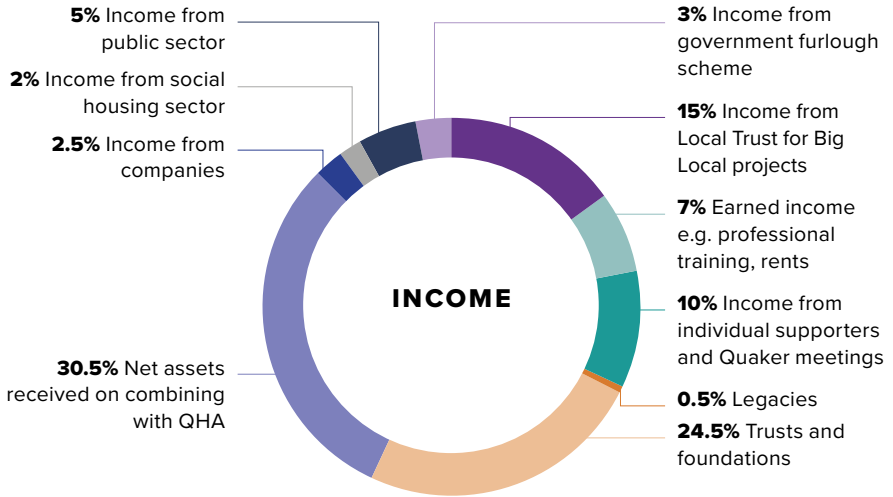
During the financial year ending 31 March 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic caused great financial uncertainty for QSA and the wider charity sector. In light of this uncertainty, QSA exercised great financial prudence in terms of controlling expenditure, maximising income, and making the decision to close its most longstanding project, Homestore. QSA was able to secure a number of additional grants – including some generously provided by existing funders – plus support from the government’s Coronavirus Community Support Fund and staff furlough scheme. QSA launched a special pandemic fundraising appeal and received extremely generous donations from supporters; the 2020 Big Give Christmas Challenge fundraising appeal was also successful.

As a result of these actions, and the merger with Quaker Homeless Action, QSA finished the financial year on a strong financial footing. The income for the year of £2,137,426 exceeded expenditure of £1,380,831 giving a surplus of £756,595, including an increase in unrestricted funds of £99,154.

Of the total income, £325,104 is income from Local Trust which QSA receives on behalf of the three Big Local projects for which it is the Local Trusted Organisation. Also within the total income, QSA received significant net assets through the merger with Quaker Homeless Action (QHA), valued at £649,879, restricted for homelessness work.

Unrestricted income was 34% (£727,791) of the total – unrestricted funds are crucial in enabling QSA to respond flexibly to the needs which it identifies.

QSA’s reserves at 31 March 2021 sat at £1,839,562, consisting of £1,048,939 in restricted funds and £790,623 in unrestricted funds. The latter figure is composed of £613,914 in designated funds and a general fund (free reserves) of £176,709. The reserves are managed by a finance & fundraising sub-committee, which uses a risk-based approach to identify key financial risks and designate reserves to offset these risks. Accordingly £208,638 is held for emergency/wind down scenarios, and £302,216 for operational contingencies given that we fundraise in-year; the remainder of the designated fund is £103,060 in fixed assets.



HOW YOU CAN HELP QSA

Volunteer

A number of QSA's projects are supported by a team of brilliant volunteers. For current opportunities visit quakersocialaction.org.uk/volunteer

Fundraise

Create your own fundraising event or hold a collection to support QSA. Together we can take practical action against poverty. For information visit quakersocialaction.org.uk/fundraise

Donate

Give online by visiting quakersocialaction.org.uk or by post to FREEPOST QSA. You can also donate by bank transfer or set up a regular gift by standing order, for more information please contact fandc@qsa.org.uk

Join us in this year's Big Give Christmas Challenge – from 30 November to 7 December your gift can be doubled in this festive online fundraiser. For information visit quakersocialaction.org.uk/biggive2021

Leave a legacy

Many of QSA's innovative responses to inequality have been made possible by gifts in wills. Make a lasting impact to help people living on low incomes in the future. For information visit quakersocialaction.org.uk/legacy












THANK YOU

The work of QSA is made possible thanks to our supporters, trustees, funders, staff, volunteers and partner organisations. Thank you to everyone who has played a part in our practical action against poverty.

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-  info@qsa.org.uk
-  quakersocialaction.org.uk
-  020 8983 5030
-  Quaker Social Action
17 Old Ford Road
Bethnal Green
London
E2 9PJ



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Director: Judith Moran
Chair of Trustees: Caroline Tisdall