



News Release:

Date: 15th March 2016

New research reveals small cash grants, coupled with holistic support, significantly improve the lives of the severely disadvantaged

"The grant has proper changed my flat, it's changed my life. I'd have been on rock bottom without it."
Jacob, Grant recipient

New research into the innovative Open Doors Programme, run by the charity Family Action with support from Lankelly Chase, reveals the significant impact small cash grants have when combined with other support. With in-depth interviews with grant recipients and their support workers, the report "Opening Doors, Changing Lives", gives a unique insight into how these grants, together with accompanying support, can have a real impact on a recipient's entire life. Health and confidence are improved, access to support networks is opened up and future resilience is increased. The report also highlights how important it is that the grants come in the form of cash rather than vouchers as this promotes trust and responsibility as well as fostering independence and empowerment.

The Open Doors Programme has provided more than 1000 small cash grants (average £321) to people who, together with living in poverty, are experiencing two or more of the following issues: serious mental health problems; domestic abuse; homelessness or imminent risk of homelessness; sexual exploitation; substance misuse or frequent contact with the criminal justice system (but not in prison).

Family Action uses an holistic approach across all its work and this has also been essential to the success of the Open Doors Programme. We have been careful to understand the 'whole' picture of a grant recipient's situation rather than focusing on just one issue. And we have been careful to combine cash grants with intensive support from partner organisations to ensure that the impact of the support received is sustainable in the long term. The Open Doors Programme also makes economic sense - by giving a good 'return on investment' to agencies and investors involved we have shown that a small input can have a big impact.

David Holmes CBE, Chief Executive of Family Action said

"The Open Doors programme has proved without doubt that small cash grants together with a programme of support can transform the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Family Action is calling on everyone involved in welfare provision to use the learning from this report to ensure that small cash grants are available when needed."

"The Programme has shown that a creative, holistic approach to grant making can have a profound impact on grant recipients and can support and sustain the impact of other support services. The Open Doors Programme also reminds us that a little help, a little compassion, a little humanity in the form of a cash grant, when people are at their lowest ebb, can have quite spectacular results. We have shown that a life can be changed for the better for just £321."

The charity is asking policy makers, politicians and commissioners of services to ensure that welfare reforms and the provision of support for those with complex needs takes an holistic, life cycle approach. This includes joined up working by agencies and organisations in order to maximise the positive impact of cash grants for those experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage.



Alice Evans, Director of Systems Change at Lankelly Chase said

"We know that trusting supportive relationships matter to people who face multiple disadvantages as they turn their lives around. This research and programme has shown when you combine that positive relationship with cash grants there is an alchemy there that creates a lasting positive impact for people. It is my hope that others learn from these principles as they design their welfare assistance programmes."

You can access the full report here: www.family-action.org.uk/opendoors

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Notes to Editors:

The Open Doors Programme is administered by Family Action and funded by Lankelly Chase. It provides cash grants alongside intensive support delivered to recipients by a range of partner organisations. From the launch of the Open Doors Programme in August 2013 to the end of the programme in February 2016 there have been 1093 grants made to a total value of £350,400. The average grant was £321.

The report uses qualitative and quantitative data collected from August 2013 to the beginning of October 2015 in order to tell the stories of grant recipients.

Summary of Report Findings

1. All recipients felt they were helped by the grant - with two thirds crediting the grant as helping 'enormously'
2. Cash grants provide a number of practical benefits by widening the number of places that a recipient can use money. This additional flexibility enables recipients to achieve the best value for money, and encourages them to budget and take responsibility for how the grant is used.
3. Open Doors Grants help to make a house a home – this is the starting point for helping those receiving support to be safe and secure. The grant also enables recipients to feel secure about themselves in terms of their ability to provide for their families and their standing in the community.
4. After receiving a grant, 73% of recipients felt in control of their lives. For recipients empowerment is not just about this sense of control, but also the feeling of confidence, value and worth that the grant gives them. They are proud of the progress they have made and that someone has given them some responsibility in their life.
5. Our experience of managing the Open Doors Programme shows that receiving a cash grant enables the recipient to make progress towards their aims and meet needs which improve their wellbeing. Cash grants help recipients feel safer, more valued, more confident and more able to cope. Grants also improve housing conditions that would otherwise impact negatively upon physical health.

6. Grants enhance the services of partner organisations, regardless of what type of support this is, by enabling more holistic support to be provided and giving clients the space to focus on the other changes they need to make in their lives. Support workers are also better able to engage clients. Irrespective of the type of support provided, partner organisations apply for a grant based on the level of progress that a client has made, not at a particular time within the support.
7. Receiving a grant does not alleviate all of the problems faced by those experiencing SMD meaning they are still likely to need further support in the future. However, receiving a cash grant enables recipients to learn skills and develop a structure to their lives, which increases their resilience and sustains progress resulting from the support.
8. Grant recipients and staff feel that without the Open Doors Programme an individual's situation would have worsened considerably. Both groups identified the likely impact of not receiving a grant to be declining mental and physical health, reliance on criminal activity and a general lack of safety. Provision from elsewhere is seen as unlikely, certainly not with the relevance to needs and straightforward approach of the Open Doors Programme.
9. Grant recipients and staff feel that the Open Doors Programme is much easier to access than other welfare provision. It does not make vulnerable clients feel that they have to justify their situation in order to get assistance and grants are processed at a speed that suits the needs of those who require a grant.
10. Welfare reforms are creating a number of issues for the client's of partner organisations, including housing system problems resulting from the removal of the spare room subsidy, and benefit difficulties because of changes to assessments, such as those for Employment Support Allowance (ESA). Increased demand for support has been observed, coinciding with a reduction in Local Welfare Provision and longer term support services. This means that the support provided, and outcomes achieved, by the Open Doors Programme are more significant than ever.

Case studies

All case studies have been given pseudonyms. The stories may be used in articles with consent from Family Action. However, due to the sensitivity of their situations, we are unable to put forward the case studies for interview.

For further information and to arrange interviews with a Family Action spokesperson:

Email: media-pr@family-action.org.uk

Tel: 020 7241 7621/Out of Hours mobile: 07903 074174

About Family Action

Family Action is a charity committed to building stronger families by delivering innovative and effective services and support that reaches out to many of the UK's most vulnerable people.

We seek to empower people and communities to address their issues and challenges through practical, financial and emotional help.

Our work is wide-ranging and includes help for parents-to-be, the provision of many Children's Centres in local communities, intensive family support, emotional health and wellbeing services, counselling, mediation and



therapies, support in schools and financial grants programmes. Family Action is also recognised as a leading provider of training and consultancy, offering organisations and their employees services that can help to minimise family issues that may have an adverse impact on work or home life, providing child and adult safeguarding training, and delivering training around Family Placement.

Registered Charity Number: 264 713

Website: www.family-action.org.uk

Twitter: @family_action

Facebook: Family Action

About Lankelly Chase

Lankelly Chase exists to bring about change that will transform the quality of life of people who face severe and multiple disadvantage. We focus particularly on the persistent clustering of social harms such as homelessness, substance misuse, mental and physical illness, extreme poverty, and violence and abuse.