

Written Evidence submitted by The Children's Literacy Charity (CLC)

The Children's Literacy Charity (CLC): The impact of the Coronavirus crisis on our Services

Introduction: the CLC

The Children's Literacy Charity (CLC), a charitable company limited by guarantee and previously called "Springboard for Children," was founded 26 years ago. Its aim is to close the literacy gap for the children most in need thus better enabling them to achieve their true potential. We work principally in schools in the most deprived London boroughs

We recruit and train our own expert tutors and these paid staff provide our flagship "Expert" programme delivering one-to-one literacy interventions in dedicated Literacy Lab spaces, tailored to the child's individual needs, across the entire range of language skills. Currently we employ 20 tutors and three school programme managers. Over the course of the year, we have delivered over 12,000 hours of support to 578 children

Measuring the effect of our work has always been important and this year has resulted in our most impressive impact data yet. Of the children who graduated from our programmes, **99% narrowed their literacy gap and 69% closed their literacy gap completely**. The children starting on our programme are typically 14 months behind their peers; by the time they graduate, they have made such significant progress that they are five months ahead.

But beyond the data, with all our children we see a transformation happening from the one to one sessions- releasing energy and potential, sparking creativity and broadening horizons.

We know our charity can change lives for good: the feedback from pupils, parents and teachers is that our literacy intervention is one of the most effective there is and the work we do enabling children to close their literacy gap allows them to succeed at school alongside their peer group. As a long term investment, we know that raising literacy levels is of vital social and economic importance.

However, with Covid 19 and the closure of schools, we have found ourselves facing two uncomfortable realities: firstly that those children who are most disadvantaged will fall even further behind and secondly that with increasing economic uncertainty, we may not have the funding to provide our service at the very moment when it is most needed.

Our income has, historically, been based on a mixture of monies from schools, often using the Pupil Premium, together with fundraising by the charity, mainly from trusts and grants. It has been hard enough to deal with the financial pressure both on schools and on funders; the Coronavirus crisis impact has made the funding challenge that much harder.

The Lockdown period – Our Response

CLC tutors work one to one with children; clearly, since lockdown, we have not been able to provide a service to schools although we have made available materials and web links. All our tutors have been furloughed and we will recover some funding through the new Treasury scheme. Fortunately, most, but not all, of our schools have agreed to honour our summer term invoices but understandably almost without exception they are not prepared to commit to the autumn term until they are surer of their own financial situations.

At the same time, it is enormously difficult to secure future funding from trusts, foundation and corporate donors. Most of our regular donors have been flexible in how/when we apply their funding but in current circumstances it is almost impossible to set up new funding partnerships and submissions.

The CLC Need

As noted above, because of the financial uncertainty, our schools are unable to commit to our engagement for the new school year. However, all have indicated that, money aside, they would love to maintain their relationship with us- a relationship that, in most cases, has lasted over many years. Further, there is a widespread recognition that many of those children most in need of personalised literacy support may well have fallen further behind and this will be exacerbated for those without access to home technology and some of the resources available online or those whose home lives are particularly unsupportive and disruptive.

In our initial letter to the Chairman of the Select Committee we said that one of the ways we can continue to support children remotely is to provide them the opportunity to access phonic-based, reading activities via a digital resource such as a tablet. We would dearly love to provide each child with a tablet (approximately £100 per unit) to use at home with their adult. Each tablet will have downloadable phonic-based games on high quality apps, access to Audible for audiobook and e-books for children to read appropriate to their level. To purchase this equipment and provide related support would require in the region of £22-£23,000.

Beyond that though, we would ask Government and the committee to consider some additional funding for a planned 'Catch Up' programme which we are currently developing. Alongside our traditional one to one expert programme, which costs £2000 per place per academic year, we want to offer schools a 'catch up' programme which will offer a shorter, intensive weekly session with perhaps two to three children at a time, giving them a much needed literacy boost. With Government funding of £60,000 - £75,000 to underpin such a programme we believe we could significantly expand our reach and impact to help those children most left behind.

If it would be helpful, we would happily provide further details on both funding propositions as and when required. As with all our work, the results would be quantitatively measurable and qualitatively invaluable.

Jeffrey Defries

Chair Children's Literacy Charity

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