

# Case Study: Halifax Opportunities Trust



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## ARCHES research project

This case study forms part of the ARCHES (Arts and Culture in Health Ecosystems) research, led by Leeds Beckett University (LBU) in partnership with Dr Janet Harris, Social Life and Locality.

The ARCHES study focussed on arts/ culture/ natural spaces offer provided by four community anchors. The research team worked with these organisations to explore what they understood ‘scaling up’ their services to mean, the challenges they faced with regards to scaling and sustainability, and what would help them to be more effective at meeting their ambitions.

### The role of community anchors in addressing health inequalities

Community anchor organisations are well-placed to respond to the wider determinants of health, with many services for specific prevention priorities embedded in broader support programmes to take a ‘whole-person’ approach (Locality et al., 2022).

### The research showed that:

- CAO activities are being effectively delivered in ways that address health inequalities by fostering connections, enabling people to become capable of managing life circumstances, increasing wellbeing and health.
- CAOs are a key mechanism for building long-standing and trusted relationships with communities who are experiencing inequalities.
- CAOs can provide spaces that allow people to come together for positive reasons, building on their creativity, strengths, and interests.
- CAOs collaborate with more specialist organisations in the arts, health and care fields who benefit from the connections and trust that anchors have developed.
- Arts, cultural and nature-based activities are used as a gateway to connecting community members to other services (e.g. ESOL classes, employment services) within the organisations or externally, in order to address social determinants of health.

[Read the full ARCHES report here](#)

## Halifax Opportunity Trust

[www.regen.org.uk/about-the-trust](http://www.regen.org.uk/about-the-trust)

Halifax Opportunities Trust (HOT) is based in Halifax in the borough of Calderdale, West Yorkshire. While some of their projects are Calderdale wide they are based in and have a particular focus and relationship with communities centred on Park Ward in Halifax. Park Ward has a population of approximately 15,000 and has approximately twice as many people who are income deprived compared to the Calderdale average. It is ethnically very diverse with a predominantly Asian British population. (Data from Calderdale Borough Council)

HOT was established in 2000 to continue some of the activities of the government funded West Central Halifax Partnership when it came to an end in 2002. They focus on helping people to find new or better jobs, to learn new skills, to start or grow businesses and to help raise their families.

HOT provide a range of services including employment training, an inclusive education programme for new migrants, and a nursery. This project focussed on the work of 'The Outback' a community garden and kitchen.

This case study aims to summarise the main points from all of the workshops, interviews and discussions that were held with Halifax Opportunities Trust between March 2022 - January 2023.

The research included in-depth interviews with partner organisations, statutory bodies, and staff members. The Research team trained staff from Halifax Opportunities Trust and some of the Outback volunteers to carry out community research. They used a survey and two focus groups to explore the use of the Outback by local people.

**The table below shows the research methods used and the number of people involved.**

Method	Number	Who
In-depth Interviews	7 interviews with internal stakeholders (staff, management, volunteers and service users, trustees) 3 interviews with external stakeholders which includes commissioners and partners	Staff, volunteers, partners, commissioners – carried out by ARCHES team
Survey	20 people	Carried out by community researchers
Focus Groups	2 focus groups, 20 people involved	Carried out by community researchers

Because interviews involved a relatively small number of people to maintain anonymity, we use the following classification in the case study;

- Internal Stakeholders (IS) Staff, Management Committee, Volunteers, Service Users
- External Stakeholders (ES) Organisations who are collaborators or partners, Commissioners

## Context

The Outback is a community garden and kitchen run by Halifax Opportunities Trust in Park ward in Calderdale. The Outback sits next to the Jubilee Children's Centre and Nursery, on a piece of land that was left unused for years until Halifax Opportunities Trust leased the land from the council and started to develop it as a community garden. The construction of the Outback was funded via the Trust's reserves.

The Outback houses a straw-bale kitchen building, which is used for a range of activities and events. A community kitchen runs from the building on Tuesdays and serves hot meals to anyone who needs it from the local community. The hot meals give the Outback volunteers and the employment team the opportunity to create a safe space to chat with those who come for meals and understand how they can be further supported.

The Outback was initially a small growing operation, but it has been growing steadily over the years and now it includes several growing areas, including two small polytunnels and a beehive. The Outback has been growing in other ways as well, and it has become more and more integrated with the other areas of activity at Halifax Opportunities Trust. Now it is an important resource for the Staying Well programme (a social prescribing scheme) and the employment programme, as well as other small activities run by Halifax Opportunities Trust.

## Addressing health inequalities

The staff and people working with Halifax Opportunities Trust (partners, commissioners, board members) agree that the Outback addresses health inequalities as part of their core work by moving local people closer to employment, which has an impact on their confidence, resilience, and overall wellbeing.

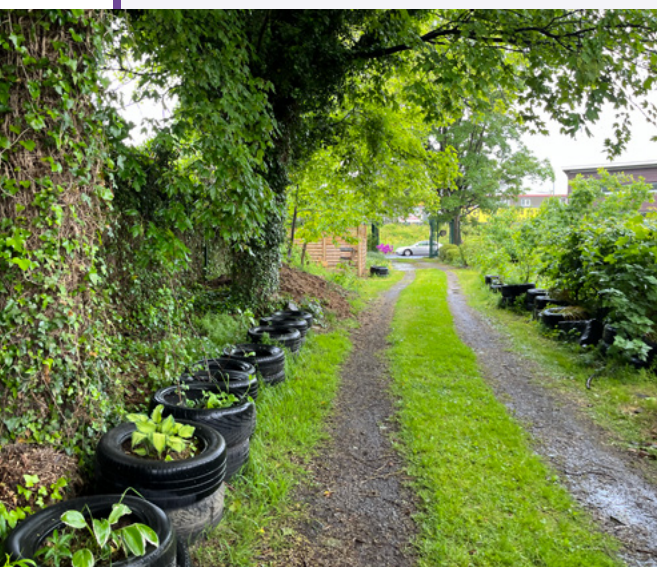
**"[We] build up that sense of trust, and I think that's the basis of why we work as well, because we have a safe, warm environment and no prejudice, no judgement on them, and you can engage as little or as much as you want socially. So when you are feeling more confident and more trusting, you get more involved in things. I've seen that time and time again, where people have been quite reserved, and they've come and then through over a few weeks, suddenly start having conversations in the garden and they realise that people are going through the same experiences and they will start to trust [...]. I would say about 80% of the people that come to us in that category, put that building up trust, and addressing those barriers with them is definitely something that's working time and time again."** (IS)

Those working with Halifax Opportunities Trust as well as staff find the Outback's approach to addressing local health and inequalities as being person-centered and community-oriented. They spoke about the approach being rooted in a deep knowledge of community relations and key actors who are adept at navigating the complex system of local power relations. Some noted that this manner of working is the opposite of a transactional approach. The staff's dedication to reducing health inequalities through their work at the Outback came up repeatedly in interviews:

**"The team there are just very much unsung heroes because they just get on and do it."**  
(ES)

The impact that engagement with the Outback has on staff was also brought up. Several staff members mentioned that being involved with the Outback improves their wellbeing, provides a supportive network and offers an opportunity to develop new skills. Some also noted that the work of the Outback is considered to be 'life-saving' for some community members and volunteers.

The community research survey revealed those who come to the community kitchen on Tuesdays come for a range of reasons that include food (70% of those who answered the question), advice (25%), clothes (35%), social (70%), and volunteering (25%). Those who come by have some familiarity to other activities that take place at the Outback, as 70% of them attended other events or activities organised there.



When asked about what the Outback team could do to improve the garden and what happens there, 35% of those who answered the question said that it already had a positive impact. Some ideas about what can be improved in the future surfaced. These included increasing the offer for events and activities (45% of those who answered), improving the Outback's visibility (10%), making it more inclusive --including sign language (5%), and increasing support for the local community (10%).

The focus group with parents who use the Outback on Saturdays corroborates the survey findings. When parents were asked what they get from visiting the Outback, improving wellbeing (70% of responses) and learning a new skill (30% of responses) were the two benefits mentioned.

When asked about whether they would like to see any changes to the Outback, the focus group participants answered that they would like to see a wider range of activities, including sewing clothes/tailoring, trips, camps, music, dance, sports-cricket/basketball/gymnastics, outdoor cinema,



movie theatre, evening programmes (musical), as well as a wider range of times for activities (especially work-friendly hours). The focus group also showed that what these participants value most about the Outback is that it “brings people together” (60% of responses), “the environment itself” (20% of responses), and “the activities on offer” (20% of responses). When asked how they would like to help the Outback team in the future, responses included helping those in need (13% of responses), getting involved in cultural exchange (25%), running/helping to run activity (56%), and sharing skills (6%).

The focus group with local people who do not use the Outback highlighted some of the same themes as the other strands of the community research. When asked what people need in the neighbourhood, the main themes that surfaced included day care centre for older people, social space in summertime, cleaning / improving Hanson Lane & Memorial garden, creating our own neighbourhood group/forum, and a community cinema.

This focus group also surfaced ideas about what would help other local people engage with the Outback. Suggestions included that word of mouth, specific timetables for activities, growing plots for the neighbouring terraces, and a bee keeping course could increase involvement with the Outback. Lastly, when asked what the Outback team could do to support the health and wellbeing of local people, the focus group participants noted two main opportunities: (1) getting the opportunity to grow their own fruit and vegetables, and (2) learning about what healthy traditional food is.

### Scaling

In the early days, Halifax Opportunities Trust looked into ways to capitalise on the Outback to cover some of their costs, for example, by hiring the space. In 2018, the employment team operating within Halifax Opportunities Trust started paying to use the Outback space. The employment team’s manager is a keen gardener, and it is their passion and connections that grew the role of the employment team at the Outback. In time, the Outback has become an integral part of the employment team’s work. Another Halifax Opportunities Trust staff member played a key role in developing the food component of the Outback. There is awareness among staff that passion and energy of key people in outside groups can combine with energy of staff to increase use of existing resources.

There is shared understanding among staff members and some of those partnering with the Outback that the employment team deploys the Outback to move local people closer to employment by improving their wellbeing, confidence, resilience, and sense of control. Those working with Halifax Opportunities Trust saw the Outback as an example of the larger, community-based work done by Halifax Opportunities Trust locally:

**“I think Halifax Opportunities Trust is brilliant at [working with local groups] because they are really localised, they understand those communities really well, a lot of people were employed there, come from those communities, and so they understand the importance of getting that approach right.”** (External stakeholder)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Outback received funding to cover its costs for two years. Some staff members described this funding as flexible and noted that it increased capacity and innovation (e.g. Hopeful families project). Halifax Opportunities Trust leadership noted that it is best if the Outback is not solely reliant on prescriptive external funding, as that may impact on the team's ability to be creative and innovative.

The Outback is seen by staff members as an example of how scaling works as an organic process of connecting existing resources and activities across the organisation in response to local needs. This approach relies on the team's knowledge of what resources are available across the organisation. It is contingent on connecting different activities across the organisation, "weaving [the new activity] in with what we already have and do, so it becomes a new thread in our existing rich tapestry" (internal stakeholder, blog for Locality website 2014). It also relies on spending time in the community to continue building trust and relationships, and exploring new ways of developing longer-term partnerships that span across projects and are not restricted to one-off collaborations.

From the perspective of staff members, scaling activities have included expanding the scope of the employment team's work, building networks/partnerships, and being flexible about the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers. In the early days, volunteers were recruited to provide practical help with the gardening but now their role goes beyond that as they are better embedded in the overall functioning of the Outback. Staff members noted that nowadays volunteers feel like they have "a stake in the place" and a feeling of ownership.



The fact that the Outback has increasingly become an "important and valuable place" within the larger organisation was seen as part of the scaling journey. Staff members noted that the Outback is a place for creative and innovative community work, where community engagement is key. The Outback allows the organisation to try out creative ideas (often developed by the community and volunteers). Recently, the Outback has been scaling their work by responding to the ever-changing needs of local groups, and by spending time in the community to build trust and relationships. Trialling activities for a short period of time and regularly evaluating events/activities and reflecting on how they could be improved were also noted as ways of growing the work.

The interviews with staff members surfaced ideas about how to engage with new groups who could benefit from the Outback, and how the Outback could be relevant to other initiatives, for example to the Greening Up Agenda. Ideas included having staff members or volunteers who speak the language of different local communities; being (more) active on social media but also by using traditional outreach methods to be more visible to those without social media; opening the garden during times accessible to those in full-time jobs (evenings, weekends); creating new similar spaces for

growth and community kitchen in the local area; continuing to assess what programmes and events are worth replicating or need improving going forward; and supporting staff to take up additional training to develop new skills (mental health training was seen as particularly useful given the Outback's main target groups). Staff members also noted that a strategy for engaging those in the community who do not take part in activities run by Halifax Opportunities Trust is needed:

**"[On] my wish list is that we engage people more in the community around and growing, and we create pocket gardens, we do land grabs and pocket gardens, so that a member of staff could take out garden volunteers out into the community."** (Internal stakeholder)

Having to respond to an ever-changing target group has not been without challenge for the Outback staff and volunteers. Staff members also spoke about the difficulty of working with strict project outputs/outcomes (e.g. target numbers) as this impacts negatively on their capacity to respond quickly and flexibly to the emerging needs of the local communities.

### Collaborative/partnership working to scale up

Scaling or weaving (staff preferred this term, which describes how different services and activities at Halifax Opportunities Trust work together) requires internal capacity to think through strategic activities and respond innovatively. Staff members noted that a key challenge for continuing to grow or weave the Outback activities is internal capacity. There is recognition among staff members that the scaling of activities at the Outback has been down to "innovative" and "brave" staff. Relying on part-time, temporary staff employed only for the duration of a project was noted as a challenge by several staff members who work with the Outback:

**"[We] don't have enough people to step into those roles. So, recruitment's very very difficult at the moment. The other thing as well with recruitment for our industry is it's so temporary. You've got we get some funding it's for two years or one year. We want to offer permanent contracts for people so, they're not going to leave a permanent job for a temporary job."** (Internal stakeholder)

Relatedly, limited core funding appears as an important barrier as it can interfere with the strategic goals of community anchor organisations:

**"[The] nature of working within the charities [is] that...we don't really think ahead until we've got that funding because we can't make plans unless we've got money. It all comes down to that."** (Internal stakeholder)

Some staff members pointed out that the commitment that Halifax Opportunities Trust has made to the Outback has lifted some of the pressures of working with strict budgets. Those working with the organisation as well as staff members noted that increasing core funding would allow Halifax Opportunities Trust to offer ongoing employment to staff and increase staff and volunteers so they can engage in more outreach to attract new groups and deliver more activities at the Outback.

**"It's all down to funding, you can't do the jobs without volunteers. And that's what makes us unique because we all work together as a big team."**



### And that big team strengthens the community.” (Internal stakeholder)

Interviews with staff members showed that relaxing funding requirements such as target numbers and eligibility would enable those who need these activities to join without too many restrictions in place. Creating a funding system that is flexible and based more on trust than on bureaucratic requirements would go a long way towards ensuring that “whoever needs [the service can join]”.

Strategic partnership working across sectors is seen as another key challenge by some of those working with the Outback (partners, commissioners) and staff members. Halifax Opportunities Trust have been working in collaboration with local organisations on projects but many of these have been short-term contracts. The interviews document a need for further strategic partnership building between local authorities and local community anchor organisations.

### Mapping the local ecosystem

At the start, members of the Outback team leveraged their connections to develop relationships with external organisations. As time went by, some of the relationships have grown as partners have got to know or worked alongside staff and volunteers through their involvement with projects at the Outback.

In other cases, especially when exploring new ideas, staff members may take the initiative to develop new relationships. Staff members noted links with key organisations such as St. Augustine's Centre, the Recovery College and Halifax Academy School. The relationship with Halifax Academy was strengthened during the pandemic, as the Outback started to provide fresh produce to families. This has led to other collaborations including having organised paid student visits at the Outback, setting up an allotment at the school and having the Outback staff deliver workshops and talks at Halifax Academy School. Calderdale Council's Climate Agenda was also brought up and the council are supporting the work of the Outback through this funding stream.

Collaborative or partnership working has a key role in how the local ecosystem shapes scaling. Staff members take multiple approaches to partnership working ranging from paying an organisation for their specialist support (e.g. wellbeing gardener) to co-production activities such as the work with the Recovery College for a gardening and wellbeing project. The difference between transactional and collaborative or relational partnership working models was also brought up in interviews with those working with Halifax Opportunities Trust. The interviews show that it is important for community anchor organisations to provide “advice at every level in the system to affect it for the better” but it is not clear what the mechanisms to progress this would be.



Interviews with staff and people working with Halifax Opportunities Trust document the link between scaling and local recognition. When individual staff collaborate with local organisations and the wider health system, they form an individual connection and can leverage their personal relationships, with positive benefits in terms of the scope of work the Outback can provide. Partners and commissioners see value in the work done at the Outback; however, it was not always clear if this translates effortlessly into system-wide recognition of the approach taken by the Outback, especially at the level of the larger health system through the CCG, ICS and Calderdale health system, as well as the wider community.

Some staff members mentioned that the Outback is also a resource for social prescribing locally, as the space is available for teams to bring their service users to take part in activities. The challenge is ensuring that 'specialist staff' (support workers/ organisations) are also available for those who are referred into the service through social prescribing.

As a community anchor organisation, Halifax Opportunities Trust offers a range of activities through the Outback and outside it. Some staff members enquired whether this might make it more difficult to be recognised and receive funding as a 'specialised' type of organisation.

This research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and National Centre for Creative Health as part of a three-stage national initiative to mobilise community assets to tackle health inequalities.

## Locality

Locality supports local community organisations to be strong and successful. Our national network of over 1,800 members helps hundreds of thousands of people every week. We offer specialist advice, peer learning and campaign with members for a fairer society. Together we unlock the power of community.

## Leeds Beckett University

The Leeds Beckett University Centre for Health Promotion Research (CHPR) is a leading academic institution for health promotion research in the UK. Research focusses on community health, active citizenship and volunteering. Our emphasis is on what communities can contribute to health and how participation can be stimulated and sustained.

[www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/centre-for-health-promotion](http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/centre-for-health-promotion)

## Social Life

Social Life was created by the Young Foundation in 2012 to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. All our work is about the relationship between people and the places they live and understanding how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas. We work in the UK and internationally.

[www.social-life.co](http://www.social-life.co) @SL\_Cities

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