

MEETING: 30/01/2020

Ref: 15419

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Positive Transitions**BeyondAutism****Adv: Tim Wilson****Amount requested: £178,400****Base: Wandsworth****Benefit: London-wide****Amount recommended: £178,000****The Applicant**

Established as The Rainbow Charity in 2000 by a group of parents to provide schooling for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs), the applicant was rebranded as BeyondAutism in 2011. Today, the charity takes pupil referrals from 17 local education authorities and operates two schools in Wandsworth for children aged Reception to 18. Following an initial pilot in 2016-17 the charity also offers post-school provision for 19 – 25 year olds. This is based on a personalised curriculum to prepare learners for independent or supported living covering health, wellbeing, community participation, training and employment.

The Application

BeyondAutism (BA) seeks funding from the Trust's positive transitions programme for a specialist vocational practitioner (plus delivery costs). The post-holder will work with at least 25 young people with ASDs each year, developing bespoke Person-Centred Plans to support them on pathways to employment. This will include the provision or facilitation of supported work, sheltered employment, work placements, and volunteering. The post-holder will deliver a range of activities including interview skills, workplace etiquette and communication skills. BA will develop an employment toolkit for workplace hosts covering guidance on the Equality Act, reasonable adjustment, job coaching and models of learning. The overall aim of the proposed work is to help participants gain a better understanding of their workplace skills, build their confidence and self-belief, and address the low levels of employment found amongst people with ASD.

The Recommendation

The charity is a well-established provider of school-age services, and now wishes to expand its post-19 support through this employment preparedness programme. The work builds on some initial experience and reflects an established need. 2019 data from Ambitious About Autism suggests only 32% of people with ASD are in paid work (only 15% in paid, full-time employment). The Trust's advisor on its Bridge to Work programme has reviewed the application and is supportive. The charity has requested a tapered grant in order to encourage phased exit from City Bridge support. Funding is recommended as follows:

£178,000 over five years (£46,000; £42,000; £42,000; £29,000; £19,000) for the salary and support costs of a full-time specialist vocational practitioner along with the production costs of an employment toolkit for a programme that will help maximise the workforce participation of young people with autistic spectrum disorders with multiple and complex needs.

Funding History

None

Background and detail of proposal

Many of the children BeyondAutism works with are non-verbal, using processes such as Makaton and picture exchange communication system to converse. Additionally, the charity notes that many have associated behavioural challenges, which in combination with the additional support required for communication can make it very difficult for them to access mainstream services.

The charity has some experience of arranging work placements through its existing post-19 programme, but so far on an ad hoc basis with limited capacity to provide follow-up engagement. This application seeks to formalise and expand BA's approach to supporting the independent living skills of young people who have attended its schools, as well as those who are referred to the programme from other locations.

The programme has a strong early emphasis on employer support through a toolkit providing a range of resources towards supportive placements. Interestingly, several hosts to date have been current or past City Bridge Trust grantees such as Trussell Trust, Toucan Employment, Camden Society and Roots & Shoots.

Financial Information

Over the 3 years shown in the table, income and expenditure are both due to increase by 43%. The charity notes that the rate of increase comes from growth in the provision of school places, expansion of its early-years services and an increase in its outreach work. The charity expects continued further growth as it develops services across its portfolio of activities because much of the work it delivers involves 1:1 support which, of necessity, requires incurring additional cost as new beneficiaries receive BA support.

Most of BA's income is received from long term contracts with 29 Local Authorities. Since these bodies are legally obliged to provide education to all children within their local area the income can be viewed as a relatively low risk income stream.

Despite income growth BA incurs significant deficits on unrestricted funds in all three years shown in the table, resulting in negative free reserves by 2020. The deficits result mainly from a self-imposed aggressive depreciation charge relating largely to the charity's buildings. 2019/20 is the final year of depreciation of refurbishment costs. Beyond the reduction in depreciation costs, BA also plans to charge Local Authorities increased fees for new school placements (following several years of frozen fees), increased donor engagement and voluntary income, as well as reduced expenditure through a reduced reliance on agency staff and careful procurement. All these factors are expected to result in unrestricted surplus and rebuilding free reserves.

The charity explains that whilst trustees do wish to rebuild free reserves to the 3 month target, they are comfortable with the current low levels because the charity is underway with an ambitious programme of growth and development and maintains a strong cash flow (2018 accounts show cash balances of more than £1m). The figure for unrestricted reserves in the table below does not include the charity's freehold land and buildings, which 2018 accounts show have a net book value of £7.2m. In the case of real financial need it is possible that the charity could borrow against these assets or release funds through some sales. The charity's Finance Director states that the organisation is confident of its viability as a going concern.

Year end as at 31st August	2018 Audited Accounts £	2019 Draft £	2020 Forecast £
Income & expenditure:			
Income	4,979,679	6,063,772	7,139,796
- % of Income confirmed as at 25th October	n/a	100%	4%
Expenditure	(5,215,509)	(6,355,879)	(7,471,100)
Total surplus/(deficit)	(235,830)	(292,107)	(331,304)
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	667	0	0
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	(236,497)	(292,107)	(331,304)
	(235,830)	(292,107)	(331,304)
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	5,182,560	6,238,784	7,119,100
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	401,580	109,473	(221,831)
No of months of operating expenditure	0.9	0.2	-0.4
Reserves policy target	1,295,640	1,559,696	1,779,775
No of months of operating expenditure	3.0	3.0	3.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	(894,060)	(1,450,223)	(2,001,606)