

#VitalSignsMK

# VITAL SIGNS

2021/22



• HEALTH AND WELLBEING



• POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE



• WORK



• EDUCATION



**MK Community  
Foundation**  
Funding Fairness



# VITAL SIGNS

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## What is Vital Signs?

Vital Signs® MK is an annual publication designed to summarise the current research on the communities of Milton Keynes and present it in an easy-to-read summary of a much longer report (available from our website [mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk](http://mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk)).

Vital Signs is an international initiative supported by many UK Community Foundations. It aims to identify significant research that reflect the vitality of Milton Keynes measuring several areas critical to the quality of life in the city.

In 2020, we reported specifically about the effect the COVID-19 pandemic had in relation four areas: Diversity; Health and Wellbeing; Poverty and Disadvantage; Crime and Safety. From the research carried out in 2020 the issues that emerged through various lockdowns were; extended furlough; closures in hospitality, retail and schools; continuing self-isolation and travel restrictions.

This year's focus is Health and Wellbeing; Poverty and Disadvantage; Work and Education. We have also looked at each area through the lens of Diversity and how different parts of our community are adversely affected to reflect the intersectionality of issues.

## Who are MK Community Foundation?

Established in 1986, MK Community Foundation is an independent charity working for and at the heart of Milton Keynes. It is our mission to connect people with resources, skills, and ideas to enrich lives and create positive growth for Milton Keynes and we achieve this with the help of our donors.

## Our Value Statements

### F-A-I-R

**Fairness:** We seek detailed understanding to make the right decisions

**Assistance:** We share our expertise and referrals for those who need advice

**Inspiration:** We communicate our unique proposition passionately and with hope

**Reliability:** We deliver what we say, when we say

**Our Strategic Goal is to build a resilient, creative, inclusive and philanthropic community.**

Over the last 35 years we have distributed over £15 million in grant funding and provided Voluntary, Community and Cultural Sector organisations with a further £18 million of rent subsidies. This includes over £1 million distributed last year through our Emergency Response Appeal. Grants started at as little as £100 to help brownies to move online up to £100,000 for the foodbank when it was providing approx. 2500 food parcels a month compared to nearly 1000 pre COVID-19.

With your help we are sending funding where it is needed most in Milton Keynes. By guiding businesses, philanthropists, charities and community groups to the right giving and grants, we're on a mission for a fairer community and our Vital Signs report helps us to prioritise that need.



# UNITED NATION SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## What are the Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go together with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth - all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

Within each goal there are several targets. Details can be found at [www.sdg.un.org/goals](http://www.sdg.un.org/goals).

Here at MK Community Foundation, we felt a natural alignment with the SDGs through our Vital Signs reporting and particularly our Vital Thinking events. It was important that we also bring this focus to our funds, grant giving and internal activities as an organisation. We accepted that it was impractical to work on all 17 goals, so we have highlighted seven areas of focus and a particular target within these goals where taking local action can help to support global change.

### Goal 1. No Poverty - Target 1.1.

By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

### Goal 3. Good Health & Wellbeing - Target 3.4.

By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.

### Goal 4. Quality Education - Target 4.4.

By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

### Goal 7. Affordable & Clean Energy - Target 7.3.

By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.

### Goal 10. Reduced Inequalities - Target 10.2.

By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

### Goal 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities - Target 11.3.

By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.

### Goal 12. Responsible Consumption & Production - Target 12.6.

Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.



## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

**Mental health has continued to be hugely impacted by the pandemic. Mind BLMK reported that last year there were over 2,559 instances of support requested in Milton Keynes. This includes face to face, video and telephone support.**

Mind BLMK's Crisis Café provide an alternative resource for those in urgent need. 55% would otherwise have accessed NHS services at a time when the NHS and emergency services were most under pressure (Mind BLMK, April 2020 – March 2021).

The past year has continued to shine a light on issues around loneliness and isolation. The Mental Health Foundation reported that in November 2020 of a sample of 4436 surveyed across the UK 25% of adults expressed feelings of loneliness within the previous two weeks. The measures to control coronavirus were having a significant impact on people's mental health, with the report data showing nearly half (45%) felt unable to cope with the uncertainty of the pandemic and a quarter (26%) were worried how they would cope with self-isolation.

In a guest blog for the Campaign to End Loneliness Professor Carolyn Chew-Graham, a GP and researcher in mental health of older people based at Keele University said: "Enforced isolation, whether this is due to 'shielding' or 'self-isolation', causes disruption to daily routines, loss of social contact and loneliness which can lead to mental ill-health."

As with last year's report we will continue to focus on older and younger people. We also wanted to highlight other marginalised sectors of our community whose mental health has been adversely affected by the pandemic, this includes the LGBTQ+ community and Neurodivergent community.

### Vital thinking

- How do we build on the improved community cohesion seen through the pandemic to continue to support the most vulnerable in our community, including those with specific needs such as the neurodivergent?
- How can we increase awareness of mental health provision to audiences with cultural, financial, or additional physical needs?
- What support is needed for organisations and businesses to understand and support mental health in our community in the same way as physical illness?



### Vital Action - Arthur Ellis

In April 2020 we provided a grant to Arthur Ellis, an organisation that provides mental health and emotional wellbeing of children, young people, and adults. The grant has enabled them to develop a bespoke referral management system for them to accept clients into their mental health service as quickly as possible. Previously, they were managing their referrals manually which took a lot of time. At the start of COVID-19, they began receiving as many referrals in one day as they would normally receive in a one month. This was prolonging the time it took to see people because of the administrative requirements.

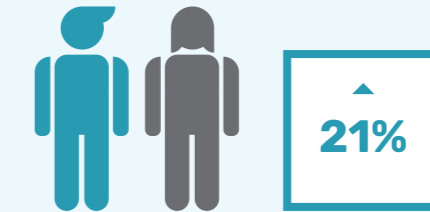
This new system meant that no matter how many referrals they received, they can call beneficiaries within minutes and set up appointments with them within a week vs the typical mental health waiting lists where people can wait for months and even years before an appointment.

They were also able to automate most of the process, pulling information through from multiple systems and sources into one file. This helps them to improve the accuracy and security of their data input.

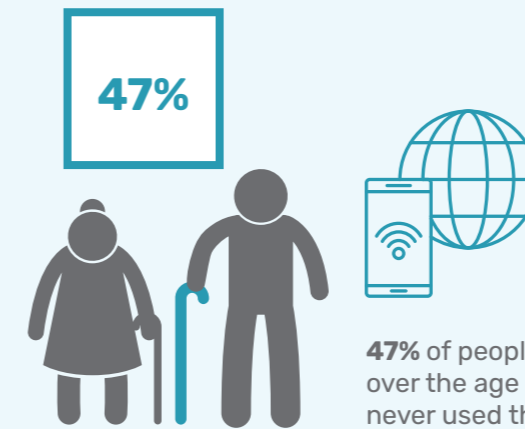
### KEY FACTS



During the lockdown of 2021, Arthur Ellis saw a total of **446** referrals showing an increase in referrals of **112.40%** up to 31st July 2021 compared to **210** referrals in 2020 lockdown.



YiS (Young People's Mental Health) reported a **21% increase** in referrals from last year with 15-17 year olds having the highest level of need.



**47%** of people in the UK over the age of 65 have never used the Internet.

Age UK Milton Keynes telephone befriending service saw a further rise in referrals from **58** reported in 2020 to **84** during the same period in 2021 a rise of **104%**.



Trans and gender diverse people reporting they were three times as likely to attempt suicide (**12%**) than cisgender people\*

\* denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex



A Talkback report for MK Council found that **67%** of people with learning difficulties and/or autism reported being lonely as a result of lockdown.



## POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE

Poverty can be defined in many ways. The measure most used in the UK is relative poverty, which considers people living in poverty when they live in households with income below 60% of the median\* of that year.

A key principle of the new measure is that poverty should be related to the extent to which people have the resources to engage adequately in a life regarded as the norm in society. Other definitions consider that income alone does not determine whether someone is in poverty or not. Material deprivation considers whether individuals have access to essential items and key services. Absolute poverty is when individuals are unable to meet their immediate needs. In other words, they are unable to obtain basic needs such as shelter, water, food and warmth.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and far-reaching restrictions on public life in 2020 and first half of 2021, Milton Keynes performed relatively well in terms of deprivation and poverty. Child poverty rates dropped slightly while employment rates increased. At the same time, Milton Keynes is a city of large disparities with child poverty rates almost three times higher in its most deprived areas compared to the most affluent parts of town. Wages have dropped at a much larger rate in Milton Keynes than in the rest of the nation, making it harder for working families to make ends meet. At the time of publication the number of people requiring support through Jobseekers' Allowance and Universal Credit remains high at more than twice the level compared to prior to the pandemic.

\*the middle value in a data set

The number of rough sleepers dropped significantly, although this is due to emergency measures put in place rather than reflective of reduced need. The number of people provided with emergency accommodation increased sharply in the last quarter of 2020 and into 2021.

### Vital thinking

- With an estimated (10,726) or 17% of children living in relative poverty in 2020, some areas of Milton Keynes show child poverty rates as high as 31%. What can we do to reduce the rate of child poverty in the worst affected areas of Milton Keynes?
- The proportion of children eligible for free school meals increased from 15.0% to 18.4%. What more can we do to support those who rely on school meals to get meals during school closures?
- Close to 23,000 families – among which 14,000 with children – in receipt of Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit will experience a substantial cut to their weekly benefits in October 2021. How will this impact child poverty and deprivation?



### KEY FACTS



The proportion of children eligible for free school meals in MK increased from **15.0% to 18.4%**.



An estimated (10,726) or **17%** of children were living in relative poverty in 2020, although some areas of Milton Keynes show child poverty rates as high as **31%**.



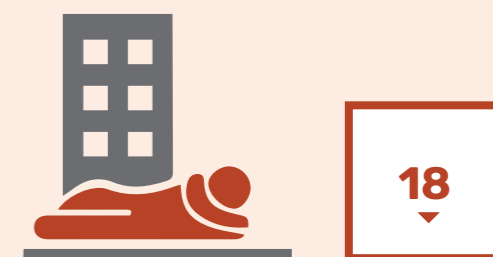
The 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation indicates that **18 of 132** local areas listed for Milton Keynes belong to the **20%** deprived areas in England. Of those, 2 areas belong to the **2%** most deprived in England.



The number of claimants of Jobseekers' Allowance and Universal Credit remained reduced slightly in the last year, from **9,560 in June 2020 to 9,310 in June 2021**. This is still double the number of claimants compared to pre-pandemic levels.



Employment increased slightly to **80.9%** in 2020 compared to **78.3%** in 2019, although median gross pay for a full-time worker in Milton Keynes dropped by **4.9%**.



The number of rough sleepers counted on a single night decreased from **35 in 2019 to 18 in 2020**. The number of people in emergency accommodation rose from **31 in September 2020 to 69 in January 2021**.

### Vital Action - St Marks Meals

St Marks Meals provide meal boxes to schools so parents who are facing poverty can collect a box which contains enough ingredients to feed a family of four, these boxes also contain recipe cards. During the pandemic the charity saw the demand for meal boxes increase and as a result moved into larger premises with the help of a MK Food Support grant.

Originally the project began tackling holiday hunger under the name 'Make Lunch', by providing hot meals at lunchtimes to families living in poverty. They realised the limited impact of such a programme when speaking to

teachers and school staff and who recognised that it wasn't just holiday hunger that was a problem, but that children were going hungry on any night of the year. They are partnered with many schools now allowing them access to the most vulnerable families and resourcing trusted teachers to meet the need.

They noticed a significant increase in demand during COVID-19 delivering over 600 boxes on request from their school's partners compared with only 108 for the same 6 week period pre COVID-19.







## WORK

**The coronavirus pandemic has had an enormous impact on businesses and employment, with temporary closures, a shift to online shopping and reduced travel and socialising. Resulting in a two-tier impact on business, some benefiting from lockdown while others were unable to pivot their services.**

Smaller companies are more likely than larger companies to operate in sectors that have been most affected by the pandemic shock, such as accommodation, food, arts, recreation, and construction.

Young people, aged between 16 and 24 have higher rates of unemployment, higher rates of unemployment benefit claims and 70% of employment losses were among the under 25s. The higher impact has been driven by the sectors young people predominantly work in, hospitality, retail, and leisure.

A higher percentage of older workers were furloughed and an analysis of ONS data finds that only around 35% of workers aged 50+ are reemployed after a redundancy in the UK in 2019, compared to an overall average of 49%.

### Vital Action – SOFEA

Sofea is an organisation that provides education, employability and wellbeing programmes for young people. The grant awarded enabled them to provide vital support for 16-24 year-olds. The young people supported commonly present with learning disabilities including ADHD, autism and dyslexia as well as diagnosed mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, PTSD, personality disorders, developmental delay and brain injury. Whilst these characteristics are typically significant

### Vital thinking

- The development work around the Oxford to Cambridge Arc creates a wide variety of employment opportunities, how do we skill our workforce to take advantage the opportunities presented?
- Employment levels are higher than in the rest of the country, however, wages have dropped. What are the implications of this for in-work poverty, and how can we ensure that the city attracts well-paid and secure employment?
- The move to working from home could open up more opportunities for disabled people. How do we encourage employers to provide the right equipment and working conditions to support a more diverse workforce?



barriers for young people engaging with education, employment and society more widely, SOFEA's coaching and mentoring programme provides these vulnerable young people with coping strategies that enable them to engage fully, both within SOFEA's warehouse and training facilities as well as outside in their own homes and communities. Feedback from the specialist Community Initiative to Reduce Violence team shows "significant emotional and behavioural shifts in 90% of the supported cohort" and "realisation and acceptance of previous negative behaviours; intentions to move forward positively". The positive results reinforce SOFEA's position as a preferred partner of statutory organisations across Milton Keynes including Thames Valley Police, Youth Offending Team, MK Council and social services teams.



6.1%

In May 2021, there were eight wards within Milton Keynes with unemployment rates above the borough average of **6.1%**. Levels of unemployment were highest in the wards of **Woughton and Fishermead (11.0%), Bletchley East (9.7%) and Central Milton Keynes (8.7%)**.

Top 3



The latest UK Powerhouse report prepared by Irwin Mitchell and the Centre for Economic and Business Research suggests that Milton Keynes will be **one of the top three cities for economic growth by Q4 2021**.

### KEY FACTS



## EDUCATION

**The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all aspects of society and been felt sharply across all levels of education, from early years settings, through secondary schooling on to apprenticeships and universities.**

Between March 2020 and the end of the summer term, early years settings, schools and colleges were asked to limit attendance to reduce transmission of coronavirus.

From the beginning of the autumn term schools were asked to welcome back all pupils to school full-time. From 5 January 2021, schools were asked to provide on-site education for vulnerable children and children of critical workers only. This remained in place until 5 March 2021.

Summer 2020 and 2021 exams were postponed and teacher assessments replaced grades. The government has opted not to publish results for these two years therefore we were unable to access this information.



### Vital thinking

- How can we share best practice developed during lockdown, including the 'Big Ask' consultation, across schools in Milton Keynes to support vulnerable children?
- How do we best support young people who are suffering anxiety as a result lockdown and self-isolation?
- How can we provide extra support for young people and ethnic minorities? How can we secure more apprenticeship opportunities in the Milton Keynes area and provide incentives to existing and new businesses to employ and train young people?



### KEY FACTS

15%



Milton Keynes had twice as many young people from BAME communities taking up apprenticeships **15%** compared to **7.6%** in Northamptonshire and **9%** nationally.

13%



There was a **13% decrease** in children attending nursey in the Q1 of 2021 as parents were reluctant to return to nurseries.



200,000

Department for Education figures show that Milton Keynes pupils, from state funded primary, secondary and special schools missed more than **200,000 days** of face-to-face teaching in the autumn term after having to self-isolate or shield due to COVID-19.



## LOOKING AHEAD - NEXT GENERATION FUND

This year MK Community Foundation is proud to celebrate 35 years of grant giving and whilst we want to celebrate the past it is important to look to the future as a result our birthday sees the launch of our Next generation fund.



[www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxH4gAgGKi4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxH4gAgGKi4)

The pandemic has hit young people particularly hard, youth unemployment has more than doubled since March 2020, with retail, hospitality and entertainment being closed for long periods – industries that are often the route into employment for many young people. Those approaching employment age have also been affected with schools being closed and reliance on home learning many young people will not achieve the exam success they need without considerable support. Coronavirus has had a considerable impact on young people with many fears that the “COVID-19 generation” could be out of work for long periods of time. In response to this the next generation fund aims to support our young people back into work or education. With the aspiration to close the gap created by the pandemic.

The criteria will be ‘Projects that support young people who have been disadvantaged due to COVID-19 back into meaningful education, training or employment.’

Ian Revell, Chief Executive of MK Community Foundation, said: “Thank you for everyone’s support and generosity – in time and donations. We celebrate the great legacy gifted to us and all that this has enabled us to do, and we also celebrate the amazing, life-changing, life-enhancing projects, programmes, community events and the specialist local organisations work that you have enabled. Thank you!”

This snapshot of Milton Keynes provides initial data on some of the issues arising from lockdown. This will continue to provide MK Community Foundation with insights into where our funding can be most effective.

We will continue to facilitate Vital Thinking Events throughout 2021/22 to inform our grant making, if you are interested in taking part in any of these events, please register your interest by emailing [info@mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk](mailto:info@mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk)

We can only continue to fund these vital projects thanks to our fundholders, members, corporate supporters and the generous donors who responded to our appeal. We still need your support to enable us to deliver our recovery funding. If you want to get more involved, please email [giving@mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk](mailto:giving@mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk)

### Thank you to all those who have helped to produce this report.

#### Staff at MK Community Foundation

#### Volunteer Researchers:

Amanda Saville, Andy Evans, Elizabeth Rathbone, Henry Woodcock, Jessica Dell, Keetie Roelen.

#### Editorial Panels:

Arthur Ellis, Jason Sinclair (Trustee), Mind BLMK, Red Cross MK, St Mark’s Meals, YiS.

#### Video/Production:

Bluecube Creative, Matt Worthington – Storm Videos.

## CASE STUDIES

### Aspire Oxfordshire



Aspire were supported for the purchase of refurbished laptops and internet contracts so their clients will have greater access to online learning through their Aspire business start-up course and other job and housing priorities. This project meant that Aspire were better able to stay connected to enhance their prospects.

### Citizens MK



As a result of funding from MK Community Foundation, Citizens MK were able to train teachers and students from 6 different Milton Keynes Schools to become community and school leaders. The training benefitted the participants by improving their confidence and ambition to help create social changes.

### MK Melting Pot



With funding received through our grant programmes, MK Melting Pot extended their previous fitness programme. The project addresses young people’s physical and mental health within Milton Keynes and would encourage young people to eat healthier and exercise more.

### Summerfield School



Funding to Summerfield School means that they can develop their Early Years outdoor area, which is in need of refurbishment. This project will allow the pupils to work outside in all weather to develop their communication, motor skills and confidence in a safe environment.

### Sieve MK



Sieve MK were funded for a project that aims to improve the social, emotional and mental well-being of Looked After Children in Milton Keynes. The programme will use a combination of full day workshops, coaching, mentoring and career profiling sessions to provide the participants with Functional Skills certifications.

### It’s What’s Next IT



Funding meant that It’s What’s Next IT could kickstart their Laptops for Students MK project with MK Community Foundation, helping to address the issue of digital poverty in Milton Keynes. The project looks at taking laptops donated from local businesses and people, refurbishing them and distributing them to families in need.

More case studies can be found on our website at [www.mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk](http://www.mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk)

We are always looking for ways to improve and develop our Vital Signs report, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to participate in future Vital Signs research.

## Join the conversation

Get involved and have your say on the findings in this Vital Signs report

-  Tweet your **#VitalSignsMK** thoughts to **@MKComFoundation**
-  Send an email to **giving@mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk**
-  Send a letter to **MK Community Foundation, Acorn House, 381 Midsummer Boulevard, MK9 3HP**
-  Call us on **01908 690276** – We'd love to talk more about Vital Signs with you!

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