



Spotlight on

# Vulnerable Families

The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the inequalities that exist in our communities, with figures suggesting that people in deprived areas are impacted by coronavirus at double the rate of their affluent neighbours. Those who lived on narrow margins prior to the pandemic are being pushed further into poverty and exclusion by unemployment and debt. More families are finding themselves vulnerable due to unexpected loss of income, and applying for benefits and visiting a foodbank for the first time. Information and advisory services are overwhelmed with enquiries from those struggling to understand their new financial and legal position.

The disruption to education has further highlighted the divide – evidence suggests that children from disadvantaged households are not accessing digital learning resources at the same rate as more affluent students. They are more likely to live in a household with no internet access, nor have a computer or tablet available to them. This seems certain to widen an already recognised attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children, with life-long consequences. With child hunger hitting the headlines, and a youth mental health crisis unfolding, the impact of this prolonged isolation on the health and wellbeing of children is an area of growing concern.

Home is not the safe place it should be for many. During the pandemic the risk of abuse and violence has risen sharply, leading to impacts that will not end when the crisis lifts. Children who witness violence against a parent – or are abused themselves – experience profound trauma which often goes unrecognised by support services, and is only revealed much later in life.

**From simply struggling to make ends meet, to coping with anxiety, separation and loss, Covid-19 has changed all our lives. In the difficult times to come, local charities who rely on our funding will provide the essential help, care and advice to support vulnerable families to move positively into what may be a more uncertain future.**

Together, Norfolk shines brighter





## Getting every child online in Norfolk

As a result of Covid-19, children have been struggling to learn from home, and families have felt the strain of trying to deliver meaningful education in isolation. This is tough enough, but even harder for those denied access to learning opportunities due to a lack of wifi or IT equipment.

In the midst of the pandemic, Norfolk's 430 schools and academies still needed around 6,000 devices to support home learning, and estimated at least 1,000 households with school-age children were unable to connect to the internet.

Bringing together a number of local partners, Norfolk Community Foundation's 'Every Child Online' and 'Plug the Gap' schemes raised funds to provide new IT, refurbish and re-purpose pre-used devices, and enable online access for children in need identified through Norfolk schools.



10,821

Norfolk children are thought to live in a household where a parent is suffering abuse

**Norfolk Community Law Service** continues to support people in urgent need as circumstances change abruptly as a result of the pandemic. The Family Court Service supports vulnerable clients unable to afford a solicitor, but who are ineligible for Legal Aid, and would otherwise have to represent themselves in the Family Court. The charity also provides free specialist support for those affected by debt and domestic violence.

**Leeway** is a specialist domestic abuse charity supporting adults and children who experience abuse across Norfolk. With pandemic restrictions escalating tensions in the home, the charity reports a surge in requests for help, increasing the number of enquiries to their helpline by an estimated 25% and demand for emergency accommodation exceeding capacity.

**Great Yarmouth & Gorleston Young Carers** is contacting every carer and their family fortnightly during lockdown to check they are coping, and connecting them with wider support services where needed. Peer support is important, and the

charity is helping to provide tablets for the young carers who don't have access to a computer to help them keep in touch.

12,000 children and young people in Norfolk are estimated to care for a family member



**Bridge Plus** provides information, advice and advocacy services to local BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) communities through its multi-lingual team of advisers. Requests for help have soared during the pandemic, with issues including benefit claims and financial hardship. The charity is maintaining close contact with those with complex needs, and those who face barriers such as language and/or lack of digital skills.

**Soul Foundation** is expanding its existing hub to support local people struggling to access food during the pandemic. Before the crisis, the charity was providing 1,000 meals per week to help tackle local food poverty – with the new food hub, this will increase to almost 30,000 per week. The hub is helping to supply food to other local charities, homeless hostels and schools, as well as a rising number of local families.

1/5

of the Norwich population was estimated to be in food poverty before Covid-19



Visit our website to find out more about our work, or talk to our team on 01603 623958 / shinebrighter@norfolkfoundation.com

[www.norfolkfoundation.com](http://www.norfolkfoundation.com)

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