

**Building brighter
futures in education
for children & young
people in poverty.**



A young girl with dark hair, wearing a bright yellow t-shirt, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is climbing a wooden structure, possibly a play area or a tree trunk, with her arms raised. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green grass and a wooden post.

Level Trust gives children what they need for learning.

Working across **74 Luton schools**, our aim is to ensure that school, college and nursery aged children have everything they need to fully participate in their education.

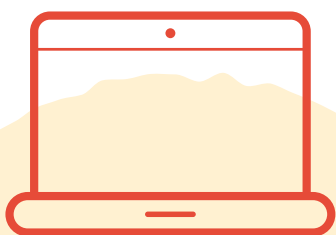
This report outlines what we did last year, why we did it and what impact we had.

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What we did.

Over 2020/2021 we worked with children on **6,001** occasions, **1,007** more than the year before. We did this by providing:



1,566

children with a computer through our work with **Luton Learning Link**.



2,451

children with a total of **6,286** items of free school uniform through our Uniform Exchange.



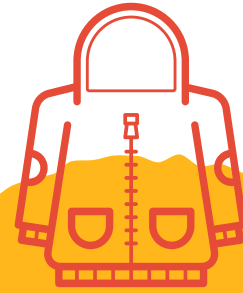
386

children with **remote activity schemes**.



513

children with **free** school shoes.



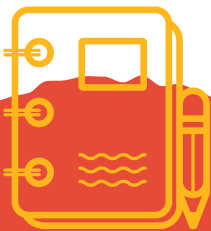
369

children with **free** winter coats or warmth for their homes.



500

children with **presents** at Christmas time.



155

children with **learning resources**.



We helped Luton's children and young people save...

27 tonnes

of CO2 equivalent saved by reusing school uniform.



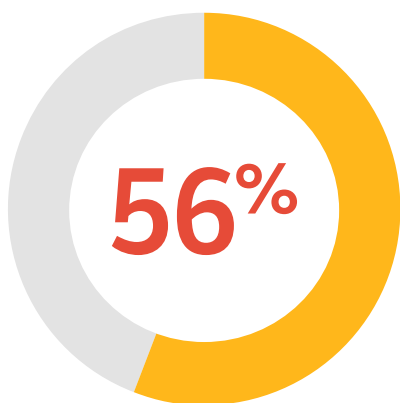
How did we listen?

To understand the impact our work had we:

- Surveyed **276 children** who took part in our activity scheme.
- Surveyed **14 children** and **81 parents and carers** who used the Uniform Exchange.
- Ran feedback sessions with **36 children** in three schools.
- Collected case studies and feedback from **8 school partners**.
- Recorded details of **every** Uniform Exchange order
- Collected diversity data from **279 children** who attended our activity scheme and **149 parents and carers** who used the Uniform Exchange.

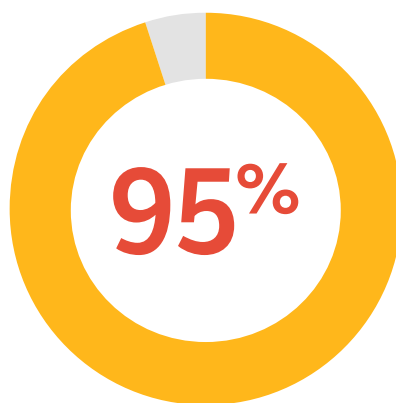
Why children needed us.

Children need us because families cannot afford costs associated with learning.



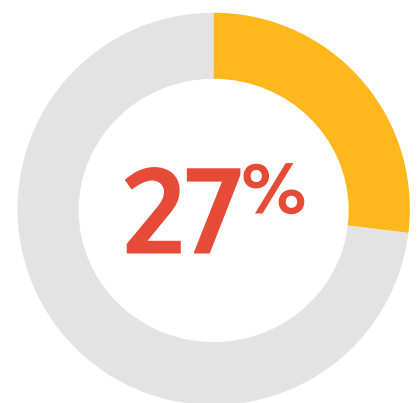
(173 of 276)

of children who took part in our activity scheme received **free school meals**.



(77 of 81)

of parents and carers surveyed told us that they always or sometimes **struggled** to afford the cost of school uniform. (86% last year)



(22 of 81)

of families told us that they had used **payday loans or credit cards** to pay for school uniform before they had known about the Uniform Exchange.

Families told us they could not afford shoes, coats, school uniform and P.E. kit because of a diverse range of factors. The two most common reasons families gave were being a single parent family or having low paid work.

Reason cannot afford school uniform*	Number of families who gave this reason		
		2021	2020
Family trauma	7	9%	5%
Job loss	2	2%	7%
Long term illness or disability in the family	13	16%	8%
Low paid work	28	35%	22%
Changes in benefits	7	9%	10%
Debt	10	12%	2%
More than four children in the household	11	14%	13%
Recently arrived in the UK	2	2%	2%
Single parent	30	37%	22%
Living in temporary accommodation	8	10%	2%

Families were more likely to give two or more reasons for why they could not afford uniform. One mother told us she was a single parent of four, was in low paid work and had got into debt trying to cover all the family costs.

Another family told us that they had a disability and changes in benefits had meant they were now struggling to afford the basics.

* This data came from the 81 families who answered our online survey.

How has Covid-19 affected us?

This year we helped 1,000 more children than we have on any other previous year. This sharp increase in the number of families needing our support we believe is in part due to the pressures the pandemic has put on family budgets.

It is also notable this year that families told us they were experiencing more disadvantages when compared to the year before. Job loss was the only disadvantage that decreased from the previous year with only 2% of respondents reporting they had been affected as compared with 7% the year before. All other disadvantages were reported at the same rate as the year before or more frequently. The reasons for poverty that families reported in much greater frequency than last year were low pay (22% in 2020, 35% in 2021) experiencing debt (2% in 2020, 10% in 2021), single parent family (22% in 2020, 37% in 2021) and homelessness (2% in 2020, 10% in 2021).

In order to respond to the increased level of need, we have continued to find ways to make our work more efficient so we can grow our capacity. This has been greatly helped by the appointment of our shift supervisor and our work with Seraph, a local company who have helped us use technology to make our work more efficient.

What happens to children when their families cannot afford costs associated with learning?

Children are at risk of harm.

In previous years, data has made it clear that going without warm clothing and footwear that fits effects a child's physical health, causing them to become unwell or experience physical discomfort.

This year the feedback we received from young people pointed very clearly to the impact that going without the things they need for learning has on their mental health. Young people told us about the worries they have when it comes to money and how feeling like you are constantly left out or 'different' has a huge impact on their sense of wellbeing.

"A lot of suicide happens from this stuff. People feel like they can't do much and they're really fed up with everything and it results in suicide. It's because they've been put down their whole life, like you're poor, you're poor."

Young people also told us how going without food made them lack energy and stopped them being able to concentrate.

Children participate less in learning.

10 out of 81 parents surveyed said that their child had missed out on lessons because they couldn't afford to purchase the school uniform or P.E. kit required.

One parent told us, "At the start of the school term his trousers weren't the right colour grey so he was taken out of his class till I was able to afford the correct ones."

Without the correct equipment for school and learning, children told us they missed out on taking part in subjects that require them to purchase resources such as food technology, design technology, music and extra curricular activities. Young people also told us they miss out on exam revision because they can't afford revision guides. The most common activity we were told that children missed out on was P.E. because kits are expensive.

"You have to be able to buy things for school like food for food tech. If you don't bring in your ingredients you aren't able to cook. I know some people who didn't bring in their ingredients for their exam and got a demerit."

— 15 year old

Children feel worried.

12 out of 14 children surveyed said they worried about not having the right things for school and **13 out of 14** said their parents worried about it too. Young people told us that if they worried about getting in trouble with teachers or being bullied for looking different.

"If you don't have the things you need for school you get in trouble or get a detention, but the reason you don't have it might be out of your control and teachers don't understand."

“The Uniform Exchange is great. I can help other children with my old uniform. That make me happy and stops the uniform going to landfill.”



Sumia, age 10

The impact we had.

Children's basic needs were met.

Over the year we gave Luton children **6,286** items of school uniform, **513** pairs of school shoes, **369** winter coats, **155** sets of learning resources and **1,566** computers.

8 out of 8 (100%) schools surveyed said our work met children's basic needs for warm and waterproof clothing.

“Level Trust are playing an intrinsic part in helping some of our most struggling families – to be able to clothe children appropriately is a basic need. Level Trust help to enable this.”

— Lealands High School

52 out of 52 parents who answered our survey question told us they would use the money they saved through using Level Trust to help them pay for more essential items for their

children and families. This included food, school trips, clothing, household bills and paying off debts.

“I can buy my children decent meals, put a little extra on the gas, so I can keep them warm and take my children to places, spend time with them and buy them other clothes and shoes they need.”

— Mother of two

“Means I don't have to choose uniform or food for my children.”

— Single mother of three

Families also told us that using the Uniform Exchange stopped them from going into debt, stopped them struggling to afford the basics and meant they had more resources to support their children.

Children participated more in learning.

73 out of 95 (77%) children and families surveyed said that using the Uniform Exchange reduced the risk of them missing school. Children told us that they now could take part in P.E. and go to school.

“I know that having the right uniform now means I will not miss any lessons or stay in school for detention or be sent home for not having the right uniform.”

— Abdul, age 13

Schools also noted that children attended school more because of our support.

“We noticed an improvement in attendance with one child because he/she benefitted from appropriate outdoor wear (coat and shoes) to come to school in. Without a coat, this child tended not to come if it was raining or cold.”

— Rothesay Nursery School

Our activity scheme, called SMASH, gave children the opportunity to try new things and do fun activities. 11 year old Ruby said, “SMASH is amazing! They pick you up on a bus so you can get there. You do all sorts of activities like crafts and drama.”

Children grew in confidence.

100% of children who took part in SMASH (386) showed an improvement in their confidence and **9 out of 13** children surveyed said that getting school uniform from the Uniform Exchange made them feel more confident.

“I felt more confident because I was just like everyone else and my uniform wasn’t too small for me and we all look the same.”

— Sumia, age 10

Children told us that they felt more confident because they looked like their class mates, could take part in lessons and could play with their friends. Children at our activity scheme said it was because they had the opportunity to try new things.

Schools also remarked on children’s improved confidence.

“Child A attended the summer activity scheme. He was very anxious about this and was paired with his friend in school. I believe attending has helped him to have the confidence to mix with other children.”

Children and parents felt less worried and had a sense of pride.

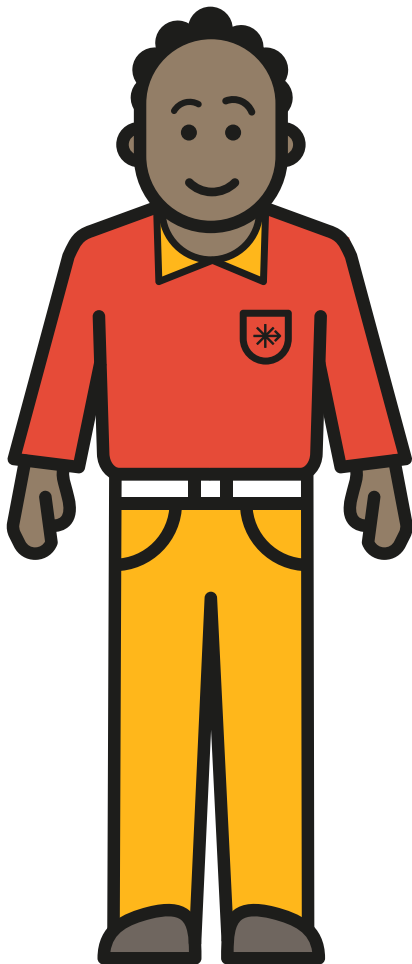
Schools told us that our work helped to lift the financial burden off their families and parents told us that because of this they felt less worried.

“I think this is brilliant for the environment and also a life saver for parents on low incomes. I work in social care, which is minimum wage, and hours are getting cut. Things like this help ease stress.”

— Mother of one

It was notable in the feedback that children and parents had a sense of pride in using the Uniform Exchange because they could donate school uniform to help other children and support the environment at the same time.

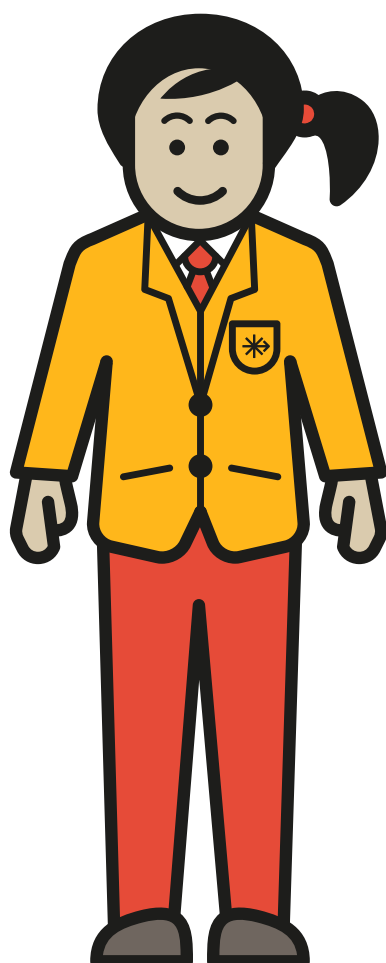
Children's Stories.



Husain*

12 year old Husain and his four siblings had been home schooled by mum during the whole of the pandemic. They had enjoyed being at home, but suddenly everything changed when mum was diagnosed with a long term illness. She no longer had the health to keep teaching them at home. Husain and his brothers were found school places quickly, but mum realised she was not going to be able to afford to buy all the children school uniform all at once. Mum said ' Usually you have one child already in school, and then another one starts later, so you don't have to buy everything all at once. I had five going all at the same time so it would have cost a lot of money.' With mum also unable to work because of her illness, the family could not afford it, and Husain didn't know what would happen. He was looking forward to starting a new school but didn't know what he was going to wear, or even if he would be allowed to go.

Mum spoke to her support worker at the hospital and she suggested Level Trust. We were able to help the family by giving them all the school uniform they needed. Husain was so excited that he got to start school on time, looking the same as everyone else. Mum said: 'If you hadn't helped us there were only two options; either they would have gone to a new school in inappropriate clothing or they would have missed school until I could save up enough money for the right uniform. Your help meant that they didn't have to miss a single day of school.'



Mia*

10 year old Mia is in the process of trying to rebuild her life after recently escaping a domestic violence situation. She now lives with her mum and three siblings somewhere safe. But things have still not been easy for Mia. Money has been extremely tight and Mum was not able to afford to heat their home properly. It was starting to get colder and they could only afford to put the heating on for one hour once a day. One of the main reasons for an expensive electric bill was due to an extractor fan which was fitted by the landlord to stop the mould and damp issues in the house. The house is also serviced by meter, which is more expensive. Mum said that it was also a balance between keeping warm or having food.

Mia knew mum was worried about money and she was worried too. So when her and her sisters' school shoes became too tight, she decided not to ask mum for anything. They didn't want to add to her problems. The sisters needed new school uniform too and they didn't know what they were going to do.

The school spotted that Mia was worried and had a chat with mum. They were able to direct the family to Level Trust. We gave Mia and her sister a brand new pair of school shoes, school uniform and a whole load of warm clothing and blankets to help the family in the cold at home. Mia now snuggles up on the sofa under blankets with her sisters and is able to keep warm. She is proud of her new school shoes and uniform and feels the same as everyone else in her class. Mia is now happy and feels like she and the family can now concentrate on rebuilding their lives.

The family enjoyed a good Christmas.

Who did we work with?

Schools

Children we worked with came from every local authority or academy school in Luton.

Gender

137 out of **149** Uniform Exchange parents surveyed answered our gender question. **90%** (123) were female and **9%** (13) were male. **1%** (1) said they were other.

For the children who engaged in our holiday scheme **52%** (135) were male and **48%** (126) female.

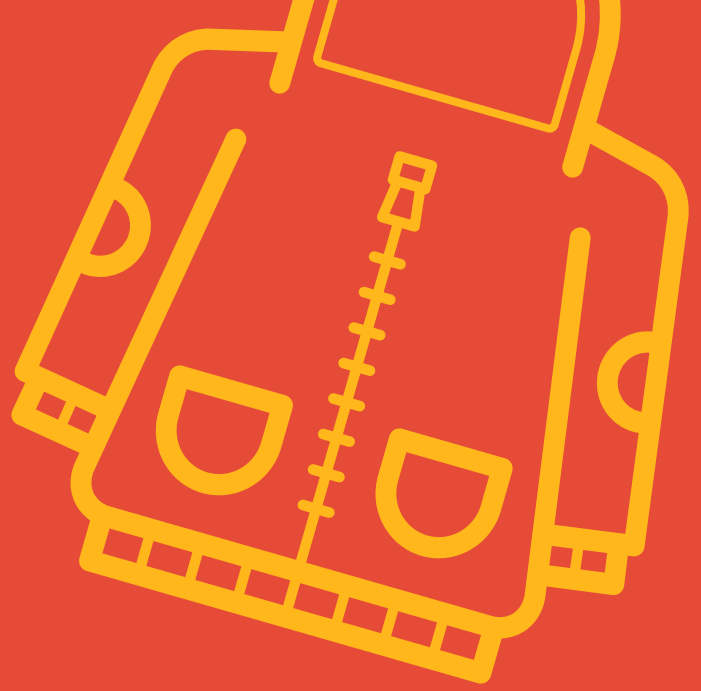
Disability

From a sample of **149** Uniform Exchange parents **11%** (15) said they had a disability and **11%** (14) said they had a long term illness.

For the children who engaged in our holiday scheme **22%** (55) had a disability, long-term illness or special educational need.

Ethnicity		
African	21	6%
Arab	16	4%
Bengali/Bangladeshi	25	7%
Black British	5	1%
Caribbean	40	11%
Chinese	1	0.3%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1	0.3%
Indian	5	1%
Irish	3	0.8%
Other Asian	6	2%
Other ethnic background	7	2%
Other mixed background	7	2%
Other white background	28	8%
Pakistani	68	18%
Polish	7	2%
White and Black African	5	1%
White Asian	12	3%
White British	116	31%

Thank you!



A massive thank you to
the children, families
and schools who
contributed to this
report. **You are what
makes Level Trust.**



Contributors

The schools who contributed to this report

Challney High School for Boys
Foxdell Infant School
Lealands High School
Pirton Hill Primary School
Ramridge Primary School
Rothesay Nursery School
Waulud Primary School
Whipperley Infant Academy
Whitefield Primary Academy

Main funders

Thank you to all those who make our work possible. Our main funders and supporters are:

Arriva
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Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation
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Easyjet
Foxley Kingham
Garfield Weston Foundation
Luton Rising
Tesco Dunstable
The Gale Family Charity Trust
The Mall Luton
The National Lottery Community Fund
The Steel Charitable Trust
The Swire Charitable Trust
The generous donors of Luton and Bedfordshire

Partners

Partnership is key to how Level Trust work. Our partners refer children to our work, and share their skills, experience and resources. What they bring makes our work possible. This year we worked with children from every local authority or academy school in Luton.

To deliver this work we worked with **53 schools** and **5 referral partners**.

This year our key delivery partners included

Chiltern Teaching School Hub
High Sheriff of Bedfordshire
Luton Council Education Service
Luton Council of Mosques
Luton Foodbank
Revoluton Arts
Team Beds and Luton
Tokko
University of Bedfordshire Access Partnership Team
Youthscape

Thank you for all your time, advice, effort and generosity.



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