Case Study: Voluntary Action Rotherham - Support to Rotherham Families First

Supporting a community vision to grow and thrive

For more than three decades, Ann Levick has been committed to helping children and families across Rotherham who are facing hardship. What began in 1991 as a local Christmas Toy Appeal has grown into Rotherham Families First, an award-winning charity that now supports thousands of people across the Rotherham borough every year.

She was determined that vulnerable children and families should not lose a vital source of support. With guidance and assistance from Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR), she established Families First in 2017, creating a formal structure that would allow the initiative to continue, develop and reach more people in need.







Helping a small community project build strong foundations

As the organisation began to grow, VAR provided support to help turn a passionate community project in to a sustainable organisation. Through VAR's guidance, advice and access to specialist support, Families First was able to strengthen its governance, develop its organisational capacity and build confidence for the future.

This support helped the organisation evolve from a volunteer-led community initiative into the registered charity now known as Rotherham Families First, achieving charitable status in May 2024.

> *"I couldn't have done what I have done without the support of VAR and the wonderful people that work there. Rotherham Families First would not be able to help thousands of Rotherham families if it was not for the support I had from VAR in the first instance and over the years. They always give good advice, look for answers if not to hand. They are my go-to people."*
>
> Ann Levick, Rotherham Families First

Delivering a vital support service across Rotherham

Today, Rotherham Families First provides practical support to families experiencing poverty, hardship and crisis. Working through anonymous referrals from professionals such as teachers, social workers and health visitors, the charity distributes essential items including clothing, bedding, baby equipment, household

goods, toiletries, toys and school supplies. Its unique anonymous referral system ensures support is delivered with dignity, preserving the privacy and self-respect of the families it serves.

Families First also continues to coordinate Rotherham's annual Christmas Toy Appeal, bringing festive joy to more than 2,000 children and young people each year.

Recognition for outstanding community impact

The growth and success of Rotherham Families First has been recognised through several awards in recent years. These include VAR's Community Project Achievement Award in 2021, the EFL Community Hero Award in 2025 and, most notably, the King's Award for Voluntary Service in 2024 (below), widely regarded as the equivalent of an MBE for voluntary organisations.



The difference Voluntary Action Rotherham has made

The success of Rotherham Families First highlights the impact that effective voluntary sector support can have on local organisations. By providing guidance, encouragement and a supportive environment in which the organisation could develop, VAR helped ensure that a valued community initiative not only survived but flourished.

Today, what started as a small local project has become an award-winning charity supporting families across the borough every week. Its continued success stands as a testament to the dedication of its volunteers, the generosity of local communities and the importance of having strong voluntary sector infrastructure support in place to help organisations achieve their potential.

> *"We now have over 20 volunteers who give their time each week and work tirelessly for Rotherham families. We are taking anonymous referrals from professionals that know them. We have at least 4 neurodivergent volunteers, who come on a weekly basis. One has grown such a great deal that he now gives eye contact, can hold a conversation and has now found a job with a contract – we are very proud!"*

Appendix 1 – Case Study: Voluntary Action Rotherham



Timeline of Rotherham Families First including the support VAR has provided over the years

- Provided resources to run the Christmas Toy Appeal including laptop, email address, stationary, stamps etc (2017).
- Advice re: insurance, volunteer expenses, setting up a bank account and becoming a constituted group (2019).
- Won the Best Project Community Achievement Award (2021).
- With VAR's support became a registered charity (2024).
- Received the King's Award for Voluntary Service (2024).
- EFL Community Hero Award in 2025 (2025).
- Provided funding support through bespoke funding searches through Grant Finder.
- Registering with VAR to recruit volunteers – VAR brokered numerous volunteer opportunities with Rotherham Families First.
- Ongoing volunteer management support including DBS checks and trustees.