

## Impact Assessment Koala Community Hub 2021

Firstly, thank you for helping support the set-up of Koala Community Hub!

Since we opened in August 21, our impact on the local autistic and neurodivergent community has been phenomenal – and we are only just getting started.

Whilst your funding initially set up the Kids and Teens groups, having the cost of DBS checks, insurance and other set-up costs covered has meant that we have been able to expand already to cover new groups. Groups initially ran monthly, but now our Young People Not in School, Teens, Kids and Toddlers groups are now all running every 2 weeks – this has been due to increasing demand. We are also running Parent support and Adult groups monthly.

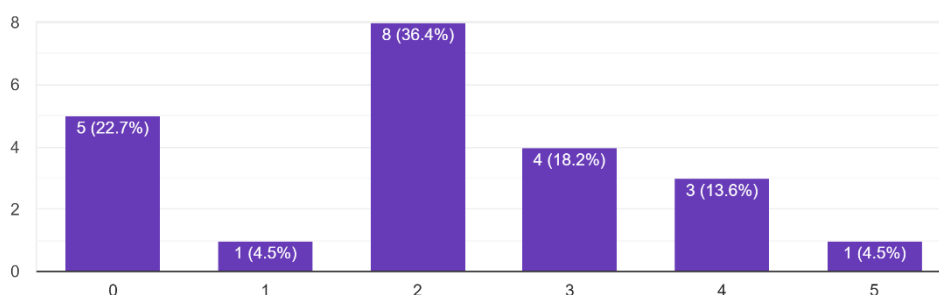
The footfall for our groups has been increasing organically. Due to being a volunteer-led organisation, we have not had the capacity to market as much as we would have liked and we have also been wary of ‘over-marketing’ and not being able to meet demand. Turning people away from groups, due to our cap of 15 per session, would have been devastating – particularly when there is so little support available currently.

In our first 6 months of opening, we have supported 125 parents, 179 children and young people, 41 adults and seen volunteers dedicate 189 hours to Koala! We now have 7 dedicated adult volunteers (6 of whom are autistic/neurodivergent) 2 regular Teen volunteers and 1 primary aged volunteer. These numbers are growing as people grow to trust Koala and build relationships with us.

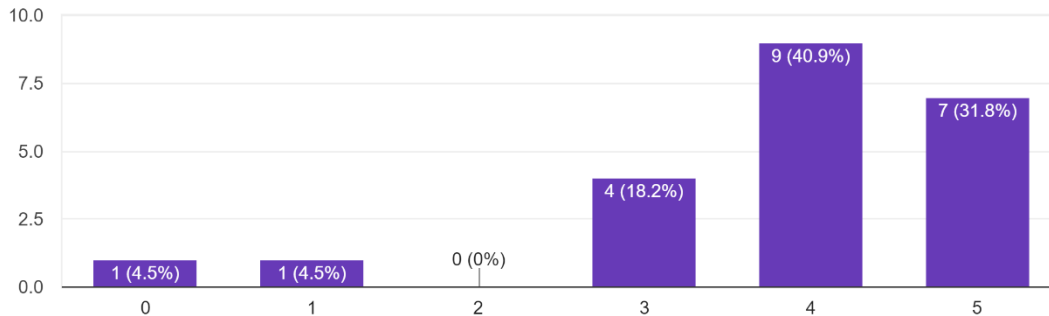
Our community have helped us to raise over £2500 in fundraising and we have secured £13,000 of grant funding.

We are currently carrying out our first Koala Impact survey and results are really encouraging. Our highlights so far have been the impact we have had on people’s mental health, the fact that we appear to have the environment right and how our approach is appreciated. However, our community still need so much support and we hope to grow over the next year to achieve this.

On a scale of 1 to 5, where would you say your mental health was before you engaged with Koala?  
22 responses



On a scale of 1 to 5, where would you say your mental health is now?  
22 responses



Please add any other comments you'd like to share below: 8 responses

The best support network we have ever had.  
Koala has felt like a life line, I have felt understood, supported and at ease  
Wealth of knowledge and advice.  
Toti and the group was the best thing that happened to me.  
Lovely group and super helpful  
My child's mental health has improved attending the groups.  
Koala is just the best group we have ever been to with absolutely no expectations to do anything you don't want to. The friendly supportive people just make you feel so welcome that you want to come back. it is an extremely safe place to go with like minded people in the same position as yourself. It brings great comfort to us as a family. We will be forever grateful to Tori for starting such an amazing community hub. Before coming to koala toddler group I was in place where I felt we didnt belong we attended groups at other venues but none of them understood my toddlers behaviours which led to me feeling quite anxious thinking I'd have to try to explain to people at these groups who just do not understand I'd lost count of how many times I was asked if I could try to tidy up my daughters "mess" (she likes to make piles of items) I felt quite isolated from other parents I found I couldn't really include myself in conversations because I couldn't relate to them nor could they relate to me. That all changed once we had our first visit to koala toddler group I started the session instantly apologising for the piles of toys my daughter immediately started creating to which the staff were quick to reassure me she was free to be herself and I was even told how cool it was what she was doing ! I almost cried at that comment finally someone gets us and sees just how amazing she is! I was able to listen to advice from the staff and they really gave me a good insight to my daughters life and how she sees the world. We cant wait to go again :)

Many of our community have been keen to offer testimonials and some of them can be found here:  
<https://www.koalacommunityhub.co.uk/testimonials>

One particular young person we worked with found it extremely difficult to access our groups and showed quite extreme behaviours when visiting us. We have worked with the parents and now they feel safe enough to visit the groups and spend time with us.

“When we were in crisis, Koala came into our lives by chance... O was burnt out and traumatised, suffering constant meltdowns, hurting himself and only coping with 10 minutes of school a day. As a family we were desperate, tired and struggling to navigate a world that we didn't understand.

When we took our first nervous steps through the doors, Koala welcomed us with open arms and for the first time we felt understood, heard, accepted and seen. We haven't looked back since.

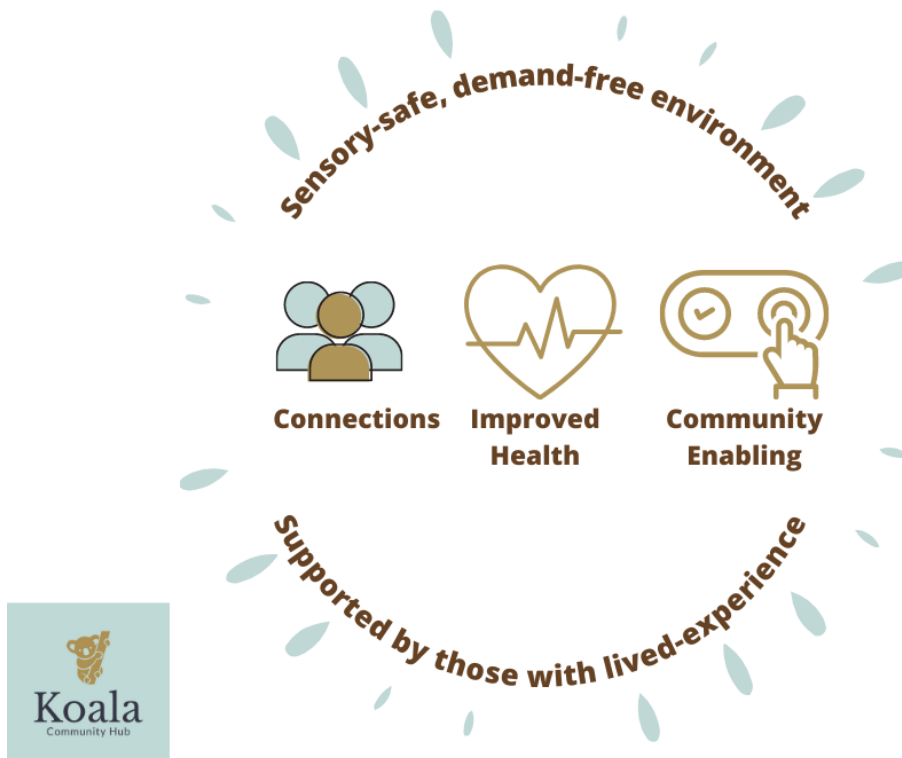
With patience and understanding O has gone from melting down as soon as he walked through the door to sitting happily playing games for an hour with his new friends. We are now part of a wonderful community, one that doesn't judge, where we never have to explain, apologise or excuse because they just get it! Koala has given us the knowledge and courage to advocate for our son and with their support and guidance he is now beginning to heal.



MARINA, PARENT

As we have grown, and understood the needs of our community more, we have had the opportunity to really understand the goals for the hub. These are:

## Koala's three goals:



**CONNECTION:** Ensuring that our groups and training are consistently sensory-safe means that autistic and ND people are more likely to be able to engage with us. We work with people individually so that they can access our groups, many of whom are severely anxious. This may be as simple as meeting them at the front door, or sending them a video explaining the small steps they can take to accessing a group. Once they feel safe, they can engage and make connections with their peers.

**PHYSICAL HEALTH:** Knowing that people have a safe and nurturing place that they can access will help to boost their mental health - this will then impact on their physical health. We would also like to offer some 'life skills' workshops to the older teens to prepare them for adult life and this may include how to look after their bodies through diet and exercise. We also have a volunteer who is very keen to run martial arts groups in the future.

**ENABLING:** Autistic and neurodivergent people are encouraged to build the hub the way THEY want it. We always talk about 'their' hub and what they want to see happen there and this runs through the core of everything that we provide. We run regular polls and surveys regarding new resources and are also due to start an 'ideas wall' where young people can leave anonymous post-it notes with suggestions for the groups. We also promote and facilitate our community to also become volunteers.

Whilst we know that our main aim is supporting our community, we also have A LOT of fun!





We truly believe that Koala will go on to change the lives of hundreds of people within Test Valley (and some from further afield) so thank you for believing in us and thank you for enabling the autistic and neurodivergent community of Test Valley to build a solid and nurturing community so that we can thrive, not just survive.

We hope that, once more funding is secured, that we can truly become the support network that we wish to be in the future and we will continue striving towards that.

In the meantime, thank you again!

From the Koala Community