



**it takes
a village**

Strategy, 2024–2026

**LITTLE
VILLAGE**

INTRODUCTION

Our vision

For every child to have the essentials they need to thrive.

Our mission

To bring about change for children and families through the power of sharing, reusing and connecting.

Our values

- Love
- Thriving
- Solidarity
- Sustainability

Little Village Strategy 2024–2026

Since 2016, Little Village has been supporting families with babies and children under five with essential items such as clothes, nappies, toys, books, buggies and beds. As our footprint and our work has grown, so, very sadly, has child poverty.

This new strategy is a response to the growing demand from families for a wide range of support. It also sets out our plans for raising the profile of baby banks. Over the next three years, we want to help educate the public about what baby banks do, inspire more people to want to help, and encourage them to join our “Little Village”.

At the same time we will continue to develop our organisational sustainability, to ensure we’re in a position to support families for years to come.

*“For me as a single mother, it was very difficult for me. I was not working. I didn’t have money for anything. I didn’t even know how I’m going to take care of my child, but you guys saved me and I was very happy and my child was safe and alive. **Please Little Village do not stop helping us. We love you.**”*



Little Village Strategy, 2024–2026



THE Need We're Meeting

The Need We're Meeting

The UK, despite being one of the richest countries in the world, has growing levels of child poverty. There are now 4.2 million children living in poverty – that's one child in every three.

Of these children living in poverty, half live in a family with an under five-year-old.¹ This illustrates the increased pressures that families with very young children face.

Although many people don't realise this, London has the highest rate of child poverty in England. A shocking 800,000 children, representing 39% of all of London's children, are growing up in poverty in our capital city.²

As well as being on the increase, the nature of childhood poverty is changing. We're seeing more children growing up in poverty despite having a parent in work

– reflecting increasing levels of insecure work. In fact, 38% of Universal Credit claimants are in work.³

Today's reality is that millions of hard-working parents can't afford to buy essentials for their children.

It's not just rising numbers of children in poverty. The severity of individual families' situations is also getting worse. In 2022, one million children were destitute; this means they lacked access to essential basics such as food, shelter, heating, clothing, footwear or toiletries. That year, London had the highest

The Need We're Meeting

destitution rates in the country.⁴ And across the UK, the number of destitute children has almost tripled since 2017.

The impact of these rates of childhood poverty and destitution are devastating and have long-lasting effects on individual lives. Children growing up in poverty see a significant detrimental impact on their:

- Achievement at school: they are **less likely to be school-ready at age 5** and to achieve five good GCSEs at age 16.⁵
- Mental health: children living in poverty in their early years are four times more likely to develop a mental health problem by the time they are 11.⁶
- Overall development and behaviour: this can impact children living in poverty, because they tend to have weaker relationships with carers due to family stress.⁷

And after all that, these children face living a shorter life. Those living in the most deprived 10% of areas will die nine years younger than those in the richest 10%.⁸

The cost to each of these individual children is staggering – and that alone demands action. But there is also a significant cost to society overall. The Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood, together with the London School of Economics, worked out that in England alone we are paying at least £16.1 billion per year on addressing issues that arise from poverty in childhood.

These costs – from running the care system to treating short- and long-term mental and physical health challenges – might have been avoided if action had been taken earlier in those children's lives.⁹

More importantly: the children themselves could have been saved from those challenges.

To compound this, parents are often having to navigate these challenges alone. The Royal

The Need We're Meeting

Foundation's research found that over half of parents report feeling lonely sometimes (36%), often (13%) or always (3%). In addition, 70% of parents report feeling judged by others, and among these parents nearly half feel that this negatively affects their mental health.¹⁰

At Little Village, we see the individual faces behind these statistics; we hear their stories. That's why our needs are urgent and our plans ambitious. Our Impact Report shows how we are making such a big difference to people's lives – but we can't do it alone.

"Early childhood is a critical time for development of later life outcomes, including health. Less positive experiences early in life, particularly experiences of adversity, relate closely to many

negative long-term outcomes: poverty, unemployment, homelessness, unhealthy behaviours and poor mental and physical health."

— 2020 Marmot Review

Children in the most deprived areas will die
NINE YEARS YOUNGER



Our Founder, Sophia Parker, and a group of local Tooting parents set up Little Village in 2016. She had just had her third child and was only too aware of the “stuff” that small people accumulate.

She wanted to find a way of sharing these items in the community, knowing that in an area like Tooting, and indeed London more widely, there are stark inequalities, with rich and poor families living cheek by jowl. It was clear from the very first days of the charity that people wanted to find ways of supporting other local families and what they lacked was the mechanism to do that.

Soon after, Little Village was born – and this simple idea grew into a big difference.

By providing clothes, toys, and equipment we ensure that babies

have a safe place to sleep; that parents have a buggy they can use to take their child out to the park or play groups; that toddlers have toys and books to stimulate their development; and that children have warm coats and suitable shoes to go to school in. None of these things are luxuries – they’re essential for healthy development.

And what started as a “baby bank”, gifting high quality items, has become so much more. The needs of the people who come to Little Village may seem to be material, but through our community we are able to meet another need that is



LITTLE VILLAGE: THE STORY SO FAR

more hidden, yet also universal: the need for connection. Not only does this promote a sense of belonging, it also provides a powerful safety net. Yes, we help to alleviate material poverty, but we also build community and give people opportunities to thrive.

By providing advice and signposting, we help families navigate the complex world of benefits, agencies and charities, so that they are better able to access other sources of financial and practical support. By doing so, we hope to alleviate some of the significant pressure and stress they are under.

We know from experience that everyone has times in life when they need help, and times in life when they're able to offer help. That's what we're here for.

The desire to connect, to gift, to share essentials and understanding, already exists in our city's neighbourhoods and

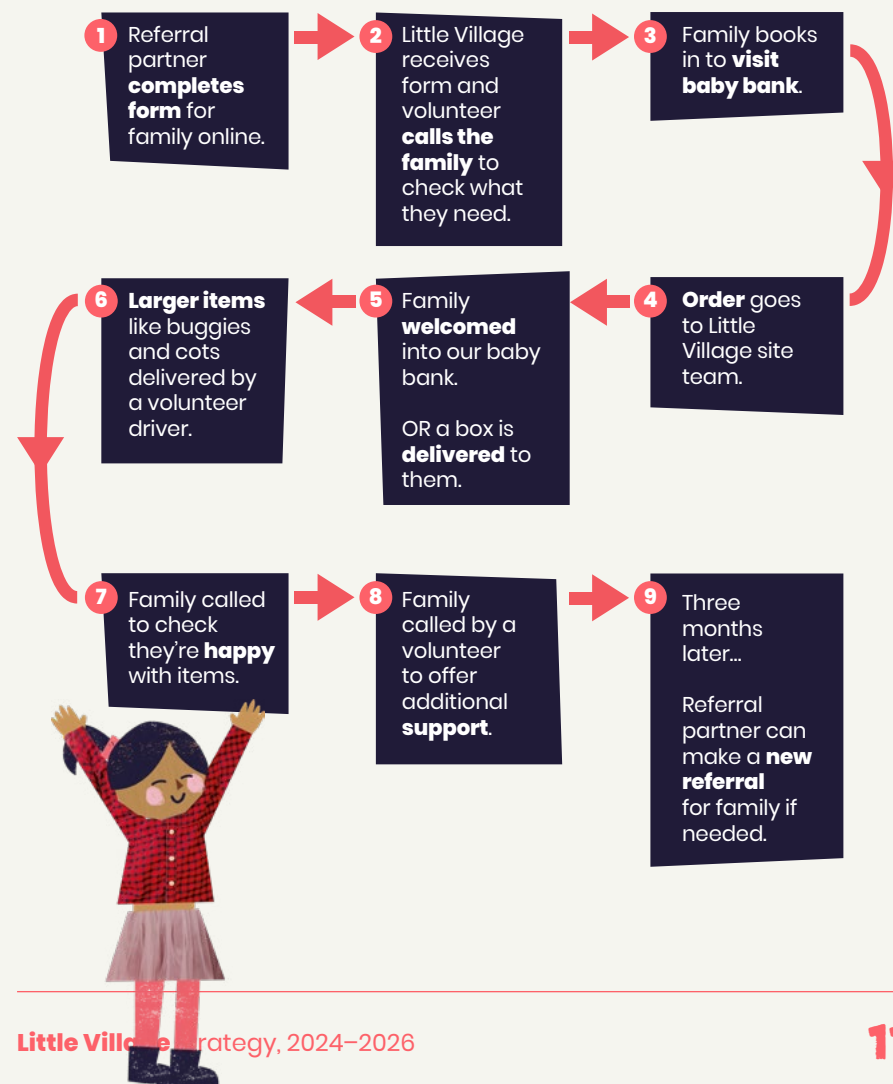
communities. Little Village provides a mechanism for this to take place. We catalyse the simple act of sharing a small, essential item with a neighbour who needs it, into a chain reaction of donating, volunteering, reusing, so that small things can make a big difference.

Via our high-street hubs dotted around London – alongside our home delivery service and local partner organisations – this big difference is felt by thousands of families each year.

Demand for Little Village's support has never been higher. As the cost of living continues to bite, the number of families in need of help grows; in 2023 we helped 25% more families than in 2022.

Reviewing our strategic priorities has helped us to take stock of the progress we've made to date, the external context we're now operating in, and the priorities we feel Little Village is best placed to address in the next three years.

How Little Village's Baby Bank Operation Works





SHAPING OUR STRATEGY

What families, volunteers and staff told us

As this strategy took shape, we listened to and collaborated with the families, volunteers, staff and trustees who make up Little Village.

Through surveys, focus groups, individual interviews and strategy discussions, we asked them to tell us what we're doing well, what needs improvement, and what they'd like to see from Little Village in the future.

It was clear from everyone's feedback that they care deeply about Little Village's values, and that our ethos of doing everything with love, care, and attention should remain central to our approach. We also heard loud and clear that our communities want us to continue raising our voice for change – to speak up for the families we support; to shine a light on the stark realities and

grave injustice of poverty and its impact among families with young children.

But we know that the after-effects of years of rapid growth and change, at a time of extreme external pressure from the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, means that our systems and processes haven't always kept pace with our growth. We know that we need to invest in stronger foundations and infrastructure and more robust processes. And we need to develop better partnerships and new ways of raising the profile of family poverty and the work of baby banks.

OUR VILLAGE OF VOLUNTEERS

"The community at Little Village is what makes it such a unique place to volunteer. Each person who walks through the door, both families and volunteers, can immediately feel the sense of good intent and purpose."

— Volunteer

"If you've got a culture like LV where it's created out of pure love, that filters down. It all comes down to the staff. In all of my dealings across Little Village, I would say they lead with love everywhere."

— Volunteer



All of our volunteers play a crucial part in enabling us to share essentials and share understanding with the families we support. They do this via a

variety of roles, which are carried out either at one of our hubs or remotely. Here is a bit more information about what each role involves:

- 1. Helping at the baby bank:** Greeting families, understanding their needs and supporting them while they select their items. Recommending other relevant local support networks.
- 2. Picking and packing:** Sorting and checking donations; packing tailored bundles of items for families; meeting and greeting stock donors.
- 3. Managing family connections:** Calling families before delivery to ensure they receive the essential items they need and after their visit or delivery to understand more about their situation; acting as first point of contact; flagging resources such as parenting support and community networks.
- 4. Signposting & guidance:** Offering frequent support to families who are particularly isolated or vulnerable, making sure they are connected with the local support and expert services they need such as help with finances (maximising budgets), housing, benefits and family welfare.
- 5. Driving and delivering:** Delivering/collecting essential items across the Little Village network to/from families, hubs, or donation points.

Ultimately, the overall feedback from our community was that Little Village's impact is both valued and valuable – and will be needed more than ever by families in the coming years.

The external context we're operating in

The levels and depths of poverty affecting children in our country continue to rise, with more than one million children now going without basic essentials. The pressure on families with young children is not likely to go away – or even ease off – any time soon.

Baby banks have emerged as part of the response to COVID-19 and the increased cost of living,

with over 300 now operating independently across the UK. But they do not have the profile, attention, or co-ordination that has benefited food banks.

Like food banks, baby banks provide families with an immediate material need. But baby banks also promote a circular economy, bring local communities together, and connect families with wider networks of support so that they can thrive – and not just materially. The ability of baby banks to catalyse this chain reaction means they have much more to offer over the long term.

Public services – like the NHS and social services – know this, and often rely on being able to

300

baby banks now operate in the UK



refer families to baby banks. Yet despite playing this vital role in public service provision, baby banks typically receive no public funding.

The forthcoming general election offers an opportunity to raise the profile of their contribution to the early years and local community ecosystems.

What does this mean for Little Village's future?

Even if we continue to grow at the rapid pace we've managed since 2016, we still wouldn't be able to help all the babies, children and families in London who need us. And it still wouldn't solve the underlying, systemic problems that bring them to our doors. That's why part of our approach has always been to "raise our voice for change" – giving families a platform to tell their stories about the often hidden realities of children in poverty.

We have joined with three partners – Save the Children, Baby Bank Network Bristol and Purposeful Ventures – and together are working to incubate a new, national Baby Bank Alliance that will launch publicly in 2024. The Alliance aims to boost both the profile and impact of the more than 200 baby banks currently running in local communities across the UK.

We see the Alliance as a way of connecting these individual baby banks, so that together they can become a more powerful force. By amplifying their collective voice, our ambition is to raise awareness of their work; attract the attention of those with power and influence to support their collective mission; and, most fundamentally, catalyse long-term, systemic change to end child poverty in the UK.

More broadly, across all the work we do at Little Village, our approach is to seek out collaboration and partnerships wherever possible. No single

organisation can achieve its mission and goals on its own. Our ambition is rightly bigger than being a sticking plaster at a moment of need for families

– but to end child poverty requires partnerships across sectors and geographies.

It does, after all, "take a village".

Our strategy for Little Village's work over the next three years focuses on four key ambitions:

- 1. Supporting Families:** Continuing to share both essential items and understanding, so that babies and children in London can thrive.
- 2. Inspiring:** Growing the "village" of support and inspiring more people to join us
- 3. Raising Awareness:** Raising our voice for change, to raise awareness of family poverty and baby banks, and build the Baby Bank Alliance.
- 4. Resilience:** Ensuring the sustainability of this work by developing a strong and resilient organisation.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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Little Village Strategy, 2024–2026

Strategic Priorities

Ambition 1

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Continuing to share both essential items and understanding, so that babies and children in London can thrive

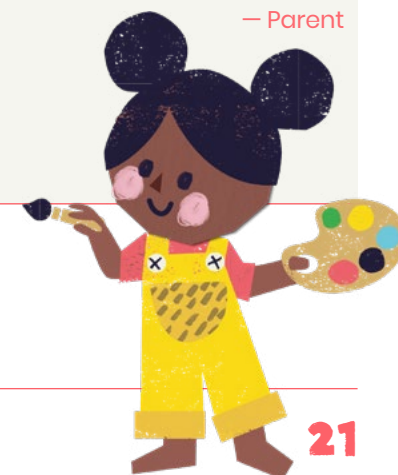
Our pan-London baby bank network will continue passing loved baby goods from one family to another, sharing essential, high-quality items that are gifted with love and kindness.

We will do this in one of three ways:

1. A dedicated appointment at one of our high-street hubs, providing a “shopping experience” for families;
2. A box, packed to order by our volunteers and delivered directly to a family’s door; or
3. A bundle, delivered via a trusted partner to families they’re working with.

“It was very nice that some culturally selected pieces were chosen for my kids who are mixed race and there were lots of bright coloured things and an African print jacket. As well as nice Christmas clothes and fluffy/sparkly things. Also the toys were chosen with my kids’ preferences in mind.”

— Parent



Little Village Strategy, 2024–2026

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We will continue to deliver “big kit” – such as cots, buggies and toddler beds – to families via our volunteer drivers. Our ambition is to support at least 15,000 babies and children under five with essential items during this strategy period.

We’ll also connect over 1,500 families with a wider network of support. Starting with a referral to our specialist signposting and guidance service, we’ll help families find extra support – such as food bank referrals, access to Healthy Start vouchers, or help with housing issues.

“The exemplary professionalism of Little Village staff has averted a potential safeguarding incident with one of my vulnerable mothers. Great working together to support parents. Little Village staff, keep parents and children safe!”

— Referral partner

Objectives

- **Open a new hub on the Regent’s Place campus in Camden**, providing a high quality “shopping” experience so that families can choose their own items.
- **Extend our community outreach** to provide essential items to families via trusted partners, so that we can reach more families without extending our physical footprint, and reinforce their existing “villages” of support.
- **Develop partnerships with other advice and guidance services**, so that we can expand our provision and support offering.
- **Create efficiencies in our operations**, to ensure we’re running our baby bank network as smoothly as possible.

Ambition 2

INSPIRING

Growing the “village” of support and inspiring more people to join us

Little Village relies on the kindness and commitment of local communities, schools, businesses, and individuals who want to make a difference to the lives of children and families in their local area.

We rely on this village of supporters to create a sustainable chain reaction of donating, volunteering, and reusing. They do this by holding community donation sessions; passing on and gifting high-quality items from their own family; volunteering to sort donations, pack boxes, and deliver them families; raising funds; and telling others about our work.

Our aspiration is to grow that village, removing any barriers to volunteering with us, and making it as easy as possible to pass on pre-loved goods from family to family. In this way, we aim to grow a dynamic local-donation ecosystem that helps families to thrive.

“I can’t do anything big to change the inequalities and injustices in the world, but through Little Village I can play my small part. And I feel supported and appreciated for doing that.”

— Volunteer

Objectives

- **Inspire and connect with more people, businesses, and communities** who want to support our work.
- **Remove barriers to volunteering**, by recruiting for a variety of accessible opportunities.
- **Improve our volunteer onboarding and training**, so that all volunteers feel part of Little Village, understand their role, and embrace our culture and values.
- **Make volunteering at Little Village more relevant, attractive, and accessible** to the communities we support.
- **Make it as easy as possible to donate high-quality, pre-loved kit and clothing**, through better systems and communications.



Ambition 3

RAISING AWARENESS

Raising our voice for change, to raise awareness of family poverty and baby banks, and build the Baby Bank Alliance.

We recently conducted research that demonstrated the low profile of baby banks and their work to support families compared to food banks. This needs to change.

We also know that the situations faced by families on low incomes are not widely understood – and that all too often, blame is placed on individuals in need rather than on the systemic challenges that affect all families.

Changing this will require a huge collective effort. We can't do it alone.

That's why we'll continue to work with Save the Children, Purposeful Ventures and Baby Bank Network

"Although I have volunteered for a short amount of time it's made me much more aware that not everyone has basic necessities and they do not have the privilege of being able to get them."

"It's put a lot of things into perspective and I don't think much people, especially our community, realise how big of a problem poverty is, especially during the cost of living crisis."

— Volunteer

Bristol to incubate and launch a national Baby Bank Alliance. Our ambition is to connect baby banks across the country and become

a more powerful force – so that together, we can raise the profile of our collective work and change the narrative about family poverty.

Objectives

- Continue to collaborate on and contribute to the **development of a national Baby Bank Alliance**.
- **Collect and share data and evidence on the scale of the issues** faced by families, including the impact of “poverty of possessions”, to further public understanding of the reality of family poverty.
- **Recruit a Lived Experience Manager**, so that we do better at supporting families to engage with Little Village’s work in ways that enhance their skills, build their confidence, raise their voices to share their stories, and create long-term change.
- Strengthen our communications, **build the Little Village brand, and raise our profile** so that we can help bring about attitudinal change.
- **Make the case for greater re-use of baby kit and clothing**, to highlight the positive impact on our climate of local donations; and increasing family dignity by encouraging them to keep the chain going – return items to us to gift to another family within their community.

Ambition 4

Resilience

Ensuring the sustainability of this work by developing a strong and resilient organisation.

We’ve grown very quickly over the past few years – and we now need the systems, processes and spaces in place to support what has become an incredible organisation.

An ongoing challenge for all baby banks is space. The loan of a free “warehouse” space in 2021 helped us to test the concept of a central storage facility, and a priority is now securing a new central warehouse space for the long term. We also need to ensure that all our spaces are accessible, fit for purpose, and as low cost as possible.

Meanwhile, our technological infrastructure needs to keep pace with our work and our ambition.

We will continue to invest in this infrastructure so that we are able to support families smoothly, keep sensitive data safe, and engage thoughtfully with a growing number of stakeholders and supporters.

All charities need funds to operate and Little Village is no exception. Money is critical so that we can pay staff, support and manage volunteers, cover building and maintenance costs, purchase and update hardware and software – and much more. As a new charity we were lucky to attract a wide range of financial supporters and increase our income rapidly, particularly during the COVID-19

crisis. But this rate of growth is exceptional. And it did not allow for solid foundations to be put in place to ensure long-term financial stability.

Now, post-pandemic, the funding climate is extremely challenging for charities and we need to build sustainable, diverse, longer-term funding streams so that we can continue to thrive. Our priorities will be developing and deepening our relationships with all our donors and inspiring people and organisations to join our village of support for families.

Little Village's strengths lie in our people, our culture, and our belief

that the way we do things is just as important as what we're doing. We are proud to have an inclusive culture that reflects our values of love and solidarity – but we aren't complacent about it.

In this strategy period, we'll actively focus on diversifying our staff and board of trustees, so that we are more reflective of the communities we work with.

Creating a dynamic environment of continuous learning and reflection – and tracking the experiences of all our staff, volunteers, and stakeholders – also remains a priority for all of us at Little Village.

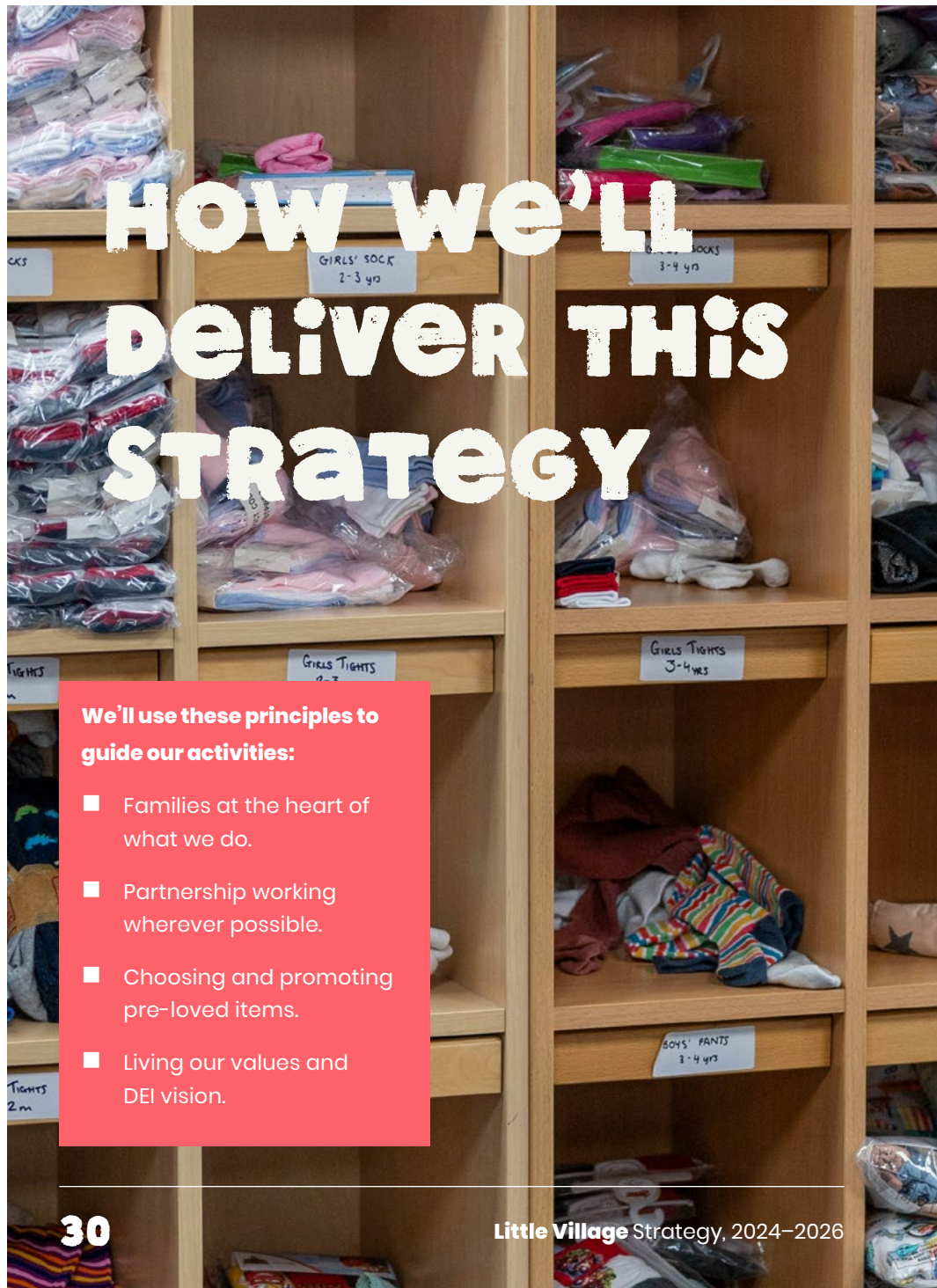
The **way** we do things is just as important as what we're doing.



Objectives

- **Develop a property strategy**, so that Little Village can operate from a range of fit-for-purpose and accessible spaces that serve our operational and community needs over the long term. This includes securing a new “warehouse” space during 2024.
- **Create stronger systems and processes** that drive efficiencies and support a growing organisation – and invest in the technology that can make this happen.
- **Diversify our fundraising and deepen our relationships** with existing and prospective donors, so that we can build sustainable and longer-term funding streams to support our work.
- Actively focus on ensuring that our **staff team and board of trustees reflect the diversity of the communities** we operate within.
- Ensure that everyone in our ecosystem **experiences a kind and inclusive culture** that reflects our values of love and solidarity.





HOW WE'LL DELIVER THIS STRATEGY

We'll use these principles to guide our activities:

- Families at the heart of what we do.
- Partnership working wherever possible.
- Choosing and promoting pre-loved items.
- Living our values and DEI vision.

Delivery

The way we do things at Little Village is just as important as what we're doing.

It's what families comment on after visiting one of our hubs or receiving a delivery, and it's what volunteers say about the support and experiences they have at Little Village.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion at Little Village

We've taken the decision not to create a separate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy – because we believe that DEI cannot be separated from the rest of our operational plans. We include DEI within our overall strategy because it is – and should always be – integral to everything we do.

Our DEI vision sums up our ambition to create a diverse, fair, and inclusive culture. It was drafted by

a DEI working group, drawn from a cross section of staff and trustees, following extensive consultation. The working group is also leading on training and development work to embed our vision within our day-to-day practice.

How will we know we've achieved these strategic ambitions?

We will continuously track our progress against this strategy, using a set of measures to show how we're achieving our ambitions.

These measures will capture things like the number of children we supported with essential items, the number of families helped by our dedicated signposting and

guidance volunteers, the number and value of items we've passed on, and the CO₂ saved by our local-donation ecosystem.

But measuring numbers won't give us the whole picture.

Within villages, people talk to each other; sharing understanding, creating connections. So we'll also talk to our stakeholders – the members of our "Little Village". We'll gather regular feedback through surveys and in-depth interviews, to make sure we're keeping to our commitment

that the way we do things is as important as what we do.

And we will share our results with you. Because they are your results too. You are part of our community, and you make a big difference. Without you, we could not hope to achieve these ambitions – so we share both our annual Impact Report and our Annual Report and Accounts publicly on our website, and we humbly invite you to follow our progress. You'll be amazed at how sharing a small thing, can make a big difference.

Little Village's DEI vision

Our vision is of an inclusive culture where everyone at Little Village knows they belong and are valued.

We will be fearless in breaking down any barriers that stand in the way of diversity, equity and inclusion at Little Village.

We will learn about and celebrate our differences and respect every voice.

This vision, and our values (love, sustainability, solidarity and thriving), guides how we work, how we behave and how we make decisions.



Endnotes

- 1 https://wp.littlevillagehq.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RLTV06-It-Takes-a-Village.pdf?_gl=1*1auwdkf*_ga*MTgwODg0MzQzOC4xNzAwNTAwNjA2*_ga_CTK7I6NF8Q*MTcwMDUwMDYwNi4xLjEuMTcwMDUwMDY5Mi4wLjAuMA
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- 3 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-12-october-2023/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-12-october-2023.
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- 5 A DSSF study (2009) showed that 62.8% of children not receiving free school meals achieved at least 5 A*-C grades at GCSE, compared to 35.5% for children who received free school meals.
- 6 Gutman, L., Joshi, H., Parsonage, M. & Schoon, I. (2015) Children of the new century: Mental health findings from the Millennium Cohort Study. London: Centre for Mental Health.
- 7 <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2002-10732-001>.
- 8 Child Poverty Action Group (2017) The Effects of Poverty. <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/effects-poverty>.
- 9 <https://centreforearlychildhood.org/research/>.
- 10 <https://centreforearlychildhood.org/research/>.



**"THE VILLAGE
NAME IS LITTLE
BUT ITS HEART
IS VERY BIG."**

— Parent we supported



littlevillagehq.org