



Observations from the Pandemic

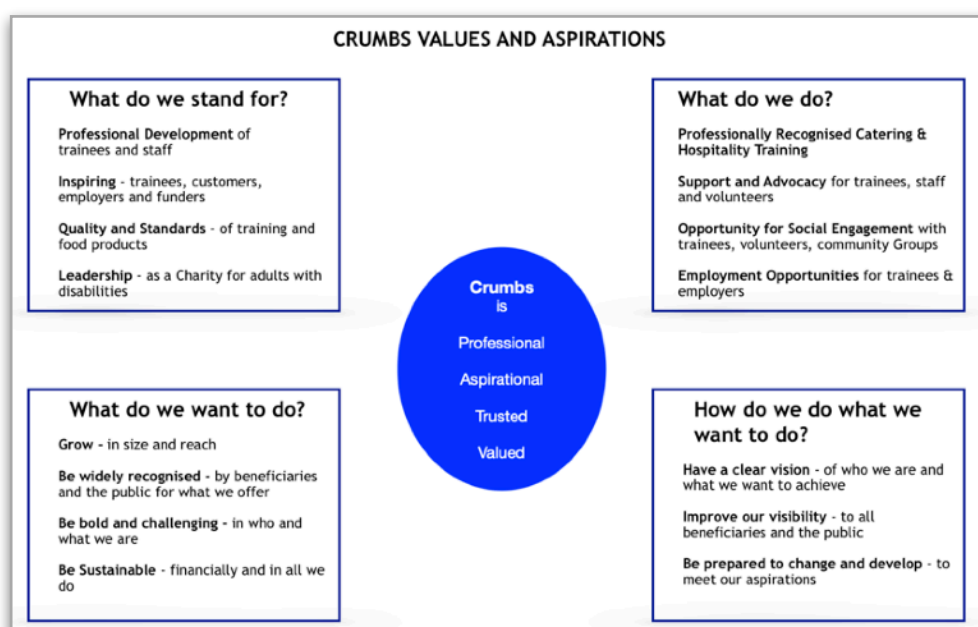
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## 1. Introduction

**Crumbs** is a small charity that has, along with the wider charity sector, been significantly impacted by the pandemic over a prolonged period of time. The need to rethink, refocus and re-engineer the work of the charity has been essential to ensure both its long term resilience, and that it can meet its charitable objectives in the post Covid economic and social environment.

The trustees have been very mindful of the charities objectives and the values and aspirations as shown in diagram 1, when considering the restructuring and re-engineering of the charities activities.



### Crumbs Charitable Objectives

“The promotion of education and social inclusion of disadvantaged individuals with....by providing learning and training designed to assist in progress towards better employment and a more independent life through vocational training....”

The charity carries out those objectives through providing professionally recognised training in catering, housekeeping and administration that provides opportunity for trainees to achieve Institute of Hospitality endorsed awards at foundation certificate, certificate and diploma levels. This training programme also includes work placement opportunities and a work steps programme to prepare the trainees for employment and to move towards more independent living.

During the period of this report the trustees have undertaken a comprehensive review of all of the activities of the charity and have recognised the financial imperative to take action to secure a more resilient financial position and that the core training objectives must be the central focus in any restructuring. Therefore long term resilience and restructuring must focus on:

- Education and training as the core public benefit
- Financial security and resilience to be able to meet the charity's objects.

In view of this, the restructuring was based on the following principles:

- Training is refocused as the core objective of the charity's activities.
- Food production will be based on the training programme requirements
- Food sales will be as a result of training not a service in itself.
- Food sales as a revenue stream will be a limited contribution to income.
- The cost base must be realigned to reflect the charities priorities and income.
- The cash reserves provide a short - medium term window within which to implement the restructuring and resilience plan.
- The wider community and social relationships should be maintained.

This report reflects on the achievements that have been made in the context of the pandemic and the forced closure of our training centre that resulted in the suspension of our professional practical training. Despite those difficulties and the over riding need to ensure the long-term resilience of the charity much has been achieved with some very long-lasting benefits to our community.

## 2. The last eighteen months

**Crumbs** trainees have always undertaken their training by attending the Crumbs Centre for their contracted training hours per week. This training was largely 'learning by doing' through working alongside and with the staff in a wide range of food production and service tasks within the Centre, to meet the food

production needs in supplying supported living residents, community lunches and similar customers.

## Our Headlines in Numbers

Trainees - 32

Staff - 14

Volunteers - 20+

Trustees - 12

Hibberd Court Residents - 50

Covid-19 impacted the charity during 'the first lockdown' with the closure of the Centre to trainees, although the permanent staff continued to operate the centre to provide meals for the sheltered residents within the local community. For the trainees it was recognised that it was imperative to continue to engage with them given their varying degrees of vulnerability, including underlying wellbeing and medical conditions.

It was felt important to have regular contact and to be able, where possible, to see the trainees and speak to them to be able to assess how best to provide support. This was achieved through wide range of different initiatives including; regular telephone contact, setting up a trainee WhatsApp group, building a special trainee website so they could post comments and access online materials, and setting up regular zoom training sessions. For those trainees without access to appropriate technology or the Internet individual learning packs were prepared on a weekly basis and delivered to the homes of the trainees by permanent staff. Regular contact was also established through parents and carers. Where trainees were not able to access laptops or iPads loans were made available. A number of donations of laptops and iPads were made by community supporters that helped in providing resources for the trainees.

Screenshot of the Trainee Website



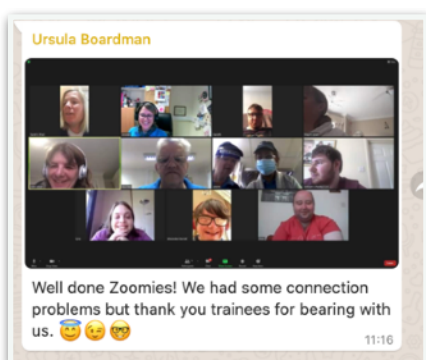
Although some of the activities with the trainees were designed to be engaging and fun others had a more serious training purpose. Online quizzes were developed and proved to be very popular with the trainees and these were both general quizzes and those related to specific training outcomes.

The reopening strategy post the first lockdown required very significant changes to our operational structures and practices including; detailed risk assessments, revised operational policies and protocols as well as a detailed Covid -19 contingency plan. All of which were required by the local authority before training could recommence and the trainees were allowed back into the training centre.

Once training had recommenced, the successes of the online engagement with the trainees developed a new structure for trainee engagement and learning that lead to revised attendance pattern for their training. In the Covid-19 secure environment the number of trainees that could be accommodated within the centre for their professional training had to be reduced to a maximum of four trainees at any one time. The significantly enhanced Covid prevention protocols curtailed the time available to support the professional training activities.

By taking advantage of the online engagement that was already a feature of a new relationship with the trainees, not constrained by the time available within the centre, much of the additional learning opportunities were created online. The

#### Group Zoom Session



technology also facilitated the support that was able to be provided to individual trainees. This additional support included one-to-one mentoring sessions with permanent staff as well as access to a wide range of mental health support links provided through the trainee website. Group zoom sessions were introduced where trainees were able to discuss and react with each other, albeit in the online environment creating a new 'virtual' community. This approach lead to a new integrated model for training as a 'blend of online curated content and professional experiential learning'.

It was important to maintain contact with the wider community of Crumbs. This was achieved with regular phone calls and emails to the volunteers and supporters, some who were able to return to volunteering after the first lockdown, when and where it was considered safe to do so. Many of the volunteers by virtue of age or underlying health conditions were not able to volunteer as they had in the past.

The community links and support continued with local charities as well as via the local authority and connections such as the Community Action Network (CAN). These links resulted in passing on excess food donations to food banks and other local agencies.

The situation prior to the second lockdown was that the food services and events diminished significantly. With no community lunches, closed offices, home working

and no events, the demand dropped to less than 5% of budgeted activity. A Crumbs@home website was developed as a possible alternative market but given the extremely competitive nature of food home delivery and the inconsistent nature of product and our supply this was not viable.

With the second lockdown food production ceased and production staff were furloughed. All online training continued with the non- furloughed training team. Senior staff provided the administrative and logistic support for the centre as well as collecting and distributing donated food to the sheltered accommodation residents and other local agencies.

The charity has had to respond to Covid-19 not only through these initiatives but also in rethinking the financial resilience of the charity to secure it's long-term future. The development of the Resilience Plan required a detailed examination and analysis of all of the charities activities and ensuring the activities met the charitable objects. As a result the trustees concluded that the organisation had suffered "mission creep" away from core objects of education and social inclusion towards social enterprise activities. It was essential to re-focus on the core objectives of education and social inclusion and this required a structural reorganisation and unfortunately redundancies. This restructuring was completed in May 2021.

### 3. Our community and the work we do

**Our** principal and most important community are the trainees, and they have been at the centre of all of our activities. As stated earlier in the report it was essential to maintain involvement of the trainees despite difficulties caused by the pandemic. We had to be creative and innovative in our response and as a result have increased the trainees participation in a wider range of activities. These are mostly online, but developing the online connections have added significant value to the trainees overall Crumbs experience.

In the past the Crumbs experience was restricted to the trainees attendance, now it can and does happen 24/7. This is led to a much higher level of direct involvement, a wider and stronger connection between the trainees and a stronger sense of shared purpose.

*"I know so many more people at Crumbs now, it's really good"*

*"I've met people that otherwise I would never have met or seen"*

Interesting comments from the trainees as the result of

online zoom sessions included; *"I've met people that otherwise I would never have met or seen"*, *"I know so many more people at Crumbs now, it's really good"*. These new connections and friendships have been developed because they now see each other in Group zoom sessions where before they would only ever come into contact with the other trainees who attended for the same training cycle as themselves.

#### Training in Numbers

▶ Certificate Completions - 32	▶ Fun Quizzes - 43
▶ Group Zoom Sessions - 960	▶ Home Visits - 650
▶ 1-2-1 Sessions - 2000+	▶ Donated Laptops/IPads - 4
▶ Training Quizzes - 82	▶ Crumbs Campus online courses available - 41

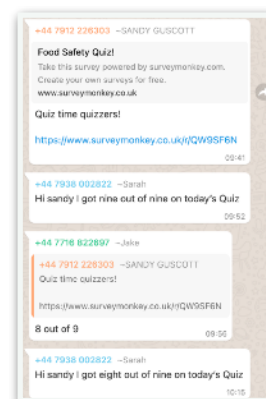
Despite the constraints of the pandemic we have been able to maintain the community of trainees involvement with the following training:

- Starting and completing the Foundation certificate via Zoom. This included the induction programme as well as trainees completing online quizzes.
- Fun quizzes rather than training quizzes, including quizzes designed by the trainees for trainees.
- Trainees with extra support needs have been working and completing online modules to prepare them for the FPS units via Zoom
- Starting and completing Units towards FPS (Food Production & Service) and AD (Administration) certificates via Zoom. The prepared and printed training packs consisted of the same modules preparing for FPS via Zoom
- All trainees after the first lockdown completed an online Covid-19 return to work course (Those without internet access had a paper-based course and questionnaire)
- Trainees completed Allergen Awareness online with the Food Standards Agency
- One admin trainee completed a Customer Service online course with Southampton College



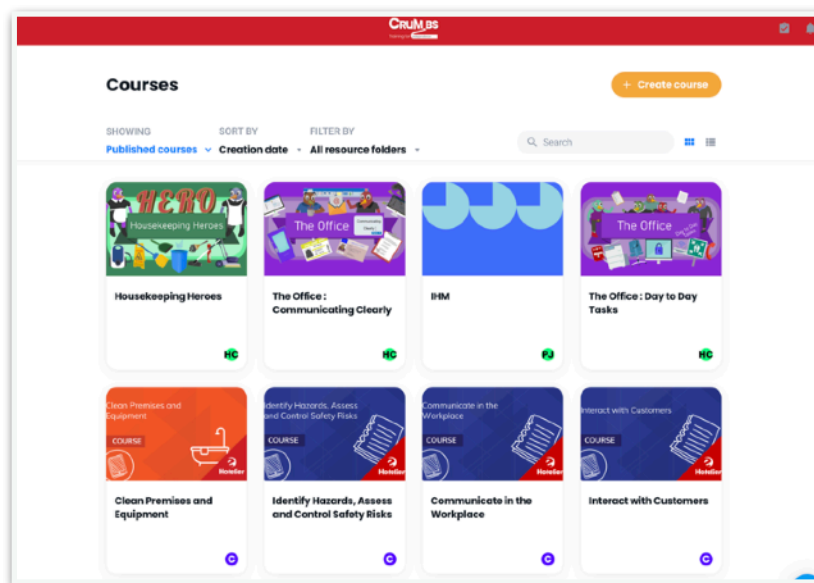
- 65% of trainees joined and interacted with the Trainee Website- accessing learning materials, trainee forum, posting photos of their arts, crafts, and home cooking/baking.
- 75% of trainees joined in with the quizzes and gained certificates when scoring 100%. Trainees with reading difficulties struggled with the quizzes but have continued to contribute and participate, often with the help and support of a carer or parent.
- 80% of trainees engage with the Crumbs social media pages. Trainees with reading difficulties engage well with social media because they can use tools on their devices to read the messages for them and record their own messages to text.
- Two group Zoom sessions attended weekly by all trainees with internet access. Trainees were sent training videos e.g., health & safety, food safety/hygiene/ allergen awareness, customer service. They were asked to make notes and were asked questions relating to the video seen each week.
- 1-2-1 Zoom sessions – mostly for training: Foundation training, pre-FPS training, FPS and AD units and Work-Steps. Zooms also took place for trainees for wellbeing checks and to keep communication going between trainees and staff.
- From September three group Zoom sessions have taken place weekly as trainees began to filter back into the centre to fit in around their shifts.
- 1-2-1 zoom sessions continue weekly for Foundation training, pre-FPS, FPS, AD and wellbeing. Trainees are also being mentored via Zoom on work/training related issues, confidence building, general personal issues, and Work-Steps.
- Individual trainee reviews are taking place via phone and/or Zoom sessions.
- Home visits still made to any trainee not able to attend Crumbs and have no internet access. Face to face 1-2-1 sessions started at the centre in September under Covid-19 conditions. This is for any trainee struggling with parts of their learning on Zoom or have no internet access at home.

### WhatsApp & Quizzes



- A suite of online courses have been developed and tested by the trainees with positive results. These courses include a narration and VoiceOver to facilitate trainees who may have more difficulty with reading.
- The duration of the training has had to be extended for six months in order to mitigate the lost professional training opportunities.

### The Crumbs Online Campus



Engaging with the wider community of Crumbs and has proved more difficult given the constraints imposed by the pandemic.

Involvement in community lunches had to cease as Community lunch clubs did not meet. Many volunteers who through age or clinical vulnerability were unable to attend the centre even when open. Those who were

able to attend continued to volunteer (2) for such activities as driving. In addition we have a number of volunteers (8) who will return to supporting the training centre once all Covid restrictions are lifted.

However it was possible to engage with the wider community in other ways to support the work of other charities and local agencies. Providing daily cooked food for sheltered accommodation residents and sharing donated food through food banks and distribution centres continued until the second lockdown. At that point the sheltered accommodation provider closed access to the hot food service as a covid security measure but free food was provided three times a week, to sheltered accommodation residents on a collection basis.

If anything the relationship with the community of parents and carers of the trainees was strengthened during the pandemic with regular communication including phone calls, emails and zoom meetings. These were much appreciated by parents and carers and as were the wide range of activities that were created for the trainees.

The supporters group have not been able to meet but have maintained contact and have been kept regularly aware of what was happening at the training centre and the additional new range of activities that have been developed for the trainees. This

group regularly raises funds to support the trainees directly through small grants, for such as clothes and shoes as preparation for attending interviews. Additionally a number of local service clubs including Rotary clubs have provided support and facilitated links with other charities and service organisations. This has allowed the extension of the Community networks where, for example, Crumbs was able to provide quite specific support at Christmas for the local Salvation Army.

One group of volunteers essential to the community of Crumbs are the Board of Trustees. They have been extremely active in reviewing, developing and planning for the long-term future of the charity. All of the trustees have been very actively engaged in working groups with regular reporting to the full board, as the plans were being reviewed, analysed and developed. The role in sound governance and strategic direction is critically important especially in times of significant disruption and change. In carrying out their responsibilities the trustees have been particularly mindful of the need to secure a sustainable future for the charity and were very aware of the impact the work of the charity has, not just with the trainees, but on the wider community. Should that long-term sustainable future not have been secured, the demise of the charity would have had a devastating effect on all at the communities that Crumbs support.

#### 4. The differences we are making

**The** differences that we have made this year and will continue to make in the future have been profound and far reaching. It is true to say that these differences were not initially planned, but have happened through force of circumstance. This has created the opportunity to innovate and collectively develop new ways of working for the benefit of our trainees and the wider community. This is not to minimise the challenges that needed to be addressed, but to recognise some of the positive benefits that we have been able to achieve.

The trainees are, by the nature of their disabilities, disadvantaged. Their learning difficulties and mental health problems are often complex and often contribute to a lack of confidence, self-esteem, poor communication skills and restricted opportunity for both independent living and employment. One of the barriers our trainees are finding is in the use of technology. Covid-19 really highlighted these barriers as the main way of purchasing goods, ordering takeaways, sourcing important information to support them at home and keeping in contact with friends and family was and remains online.

The pandemic has been a catalyst of change in the use of technology and moved most communication into the digital and online world. The imperative to be able to

access resources, apply for benefits and jobs, all now requires an online presence. By rapidly adopting new and different technology and communication devices we have been able to not only maintain our training but we have also encouraged the development of new digital skills in our trainees, skills that will be essential for their future.

These new skills support the trainee development of self-awareness, social engagement and self-confidence that has led to significant benefits in terms of social inclusion and social interactions not just with other trainees but also within their wider communities. As an example trainees now are using applications such as WhatsApp to regularly exchange and comment on ideas, information and photographs. They often post photographs of dishes that they cooked prompting positive peer to peer responses from the other trainees. They share in the learning from these activities as well as responding positively to the social interactions that arise. For those that live in sheltered communities they have obviously shared their new skills and learning with positive comments on their improvements in self-confidence from their carers. For those living with parents these improvements to become more obvious through their interaction and postings on social media where these are very positive and inclusive and have again been commented on favourably by parents.

Typical WhatsApp



*"improved her self-confidence and can now use her iPad on zoom to talk to her friends and family"*

In the comments received by parents and carers as to how the trainees have responded to this new digital environment through Crumbs initiatives, they have said, *"improved her self-confidence and can now use her iPad on zoom to talk to her friends and family"* and *"she now uses her smart phone to*

*plan her bus journeys, to plan meeting up with friends, all of which she refused to do before you introduced her to the benefits of technology"*, they have also noted that *"he is now more confident in dealing with outside agencies"*.

*"she now uses her smart phone to plan her bus journeys, to plan meeting up with friends, all of which she refused to do before you introduced her to the benefits of technology"*

Our trainees have told us that they feel more confident now using their devices, for learning and sourcing information, many of our trainees did not know how to research using a search engine for valuable information, however, they do now.

Technology is also supporting literacy and numeracy development as well as their professional knowledge and understanding as shown in diagram 2.

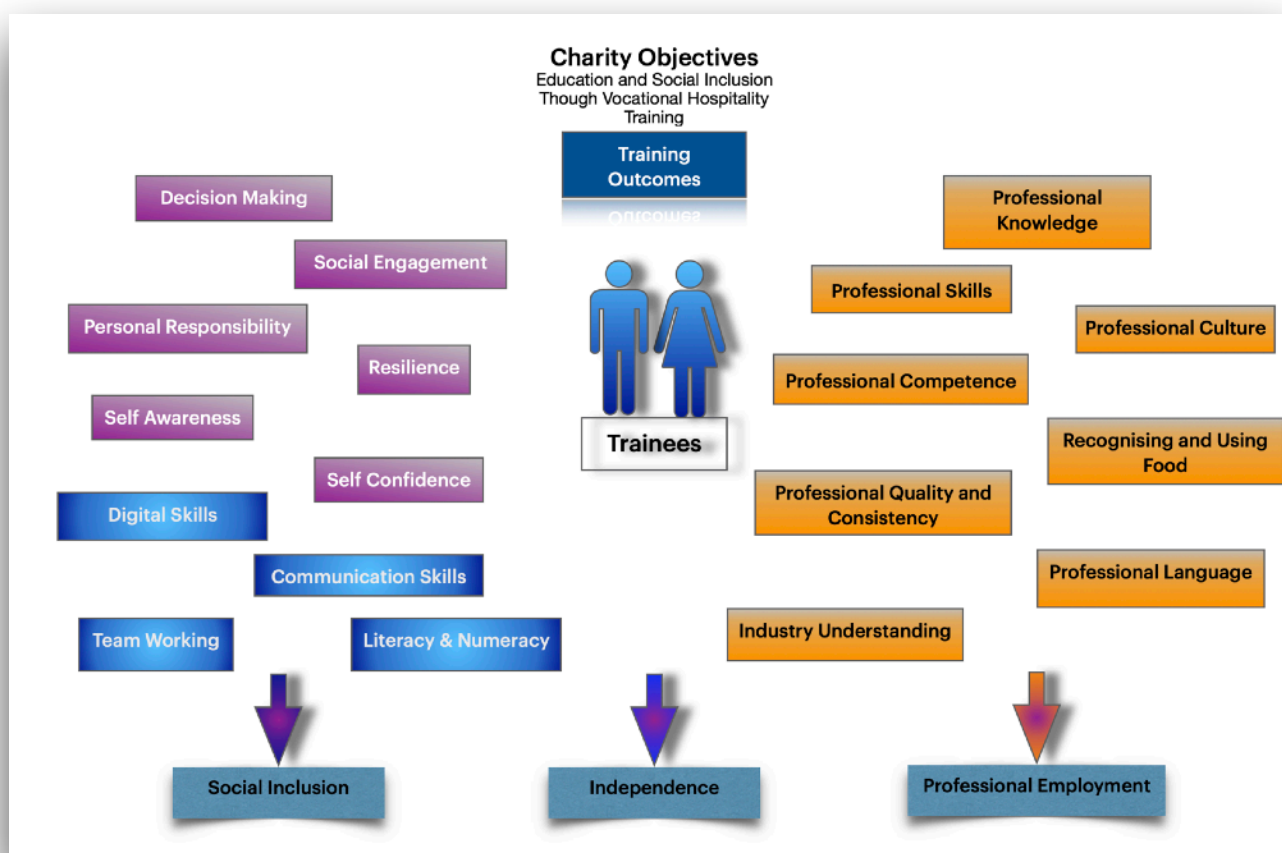


Diagram 2

## 5. What we have learned

**As** a small charity facing the challenges of the last year we have learned a lot about ourselves and our ability to be able to respond to those challenges. We have learned that being proactive in responding to those challenges means that you can be in control, rather than being reactive where the choices available to you are often very limited. By being proactive we have been able to demonstrate the commitment that we have to the trainees and we have wildly exceeded our expectations as to what could be achieved under the pandemic conditions. We have learned that adversity can lead to innovation and that the trainees can embrace the use of technology, not just as a tool to support their learning, but also in improving their opportunities in their everyday lives. Much of what we learned and achieved has been through trial and error. Our initial expectations were quite low as we had no previous experience on which to predict outcomes, but in all areas our expectations have been exceeded. Where ideas were clearly not working they were dropped, but

where they were working they were embraced and developed at what is often referred too as "at pace".

We have learned that the trainees are more adaptable and have higher aspirations than the "wider disability support system" often allows. By engaging with the trainees on a much wider platform than we have previously we have been able to take a more holistic and integrated approach to their education, training and social inclusion. This has created additional activities that would not of been considered pre-pandemic.

The commitment and enthusiasm of the staff has been a major factor in supporting the development of those new activities. They have responded to the range of challenges that required them to learn new skills and new ways of working that for many, put them well outside their comfort zone. The importance of teamwork and communication with the sharing of new ideas has come to the fore over this period and there has been a positive acceptance and championing of the changes that have been made.

We have learned that our relationships with the wider community have been improved, not just in the positive outcomes for the trainees but also the carers, parents and other external agencies with whom we deal on a regular basis. This has included the sheltered accommodation residents and the other charitable and social service agencies. The positive actions that we have taken during the pandemic have been recognised by the local authority and that has assisted us in developing a new level of relationship.

At the organisational level we have learned that reviewing all activities of the organisation in line with the charitable objects is a necessary and important area of governance. It ensures the focus of the charity is in meeting its charitable objects and that it's not diverted into additional subsidiary activities that are not contributing to the core aim. This analysis allows the charity to develop resilience to future shocks and to be able to take a more strategic overview by testing potential developments against the core objects. We have also learned the importance of good governance and teamwork of the trustees in handling the difficult organisational changes of restructuring, including redundancy.

The overall outcome, after a difficult transition period, has been very positive and has led to some radical changes in the way that we now work. That in turn has created new synergies and opportunities in the way that we support our trainees and our wider community.

## 6. How we are changing what we do

**As** the previous sections have identified there are significant changes in the way that we now achieve our core objects and trainee outcomes. The renewed focus on professional vocational training as the route to independent living and employability has seen a major change in emphasis to the activities and the operation. This has created more time for the trainees to be able to practice and enhance their professional skills, rather than being sometimes adjunct to meeting specific food production requirements.

This in turn has allowed us to foster different external relationships with hospitality companies who now recognise the mutual benefits of supporting our training through placements and employment. These companies include; Stein's, Chartwells, Compass Group, and BaxterStorey. Whilst not all High Street brands these are very large catering organisations that provide a wide range of catering services to, education establishments, banks, local authorities, offices and industrial locations.

The biggest changes have been in relation to the direct communication and participation of the trainees. Trainees now interact with the staff, the centre and other trainees on a daily basis where as previously the only interaction would have been on days they attended within their training cycle. As a result we are now providing significant additional support to the trainees, not just in their learning but also in their health, well-being and wider social inclusion.

The technological advances we have been able to make, coupled with the adaptability of the trainees to using that technology has changed the training approach to a 'hybrid' model. This model uses the very significant and developing online presence to support a more consistent and skills based progressive professional training. This has extended the reach and the breath of the knowledge and understanding that is now available to the trainees leading to better outcomes.

These changes are permanent changes and will be built upon as we continue to invest in technology to support the trainees. We will also be providing the trainees with a completely new dimension to their training, using technology, that we are confident will better prepare them for their future lives.

## 7. Conclusions and summary

The last 18 months have been completely overshadowed by the impact of COVID-19. The charity has responded to the disruption and discontinuity the pandemic has caused by adopting and adapting to new ways of working that rather

than diminish, has enhanced the trainees overall Crumbs experience. Through the rapid adoption of different technologies, we have maintained the integrity of the community of Crumbs, and developed new strategies in meeting our charitable objects that are now a permanent feature.

We have learned that our trainees are more adaptable to change than was generally recognised. They have a resilience and sense of purpose in their relationship with Crumbs that has led to a stronger sense of community. That sense of community has also expanded beyond the trainees to the wider communities we serve. By maintaining links and demonstrating, as an organisation, we have proactively responded to the needs of our community in innovative ways that has strengthened those relationships.