

# Shopmobility Basingstoke

The shop is a social hub for its users and volunteers. It has a very loyal user base, with many regulars. Each piece of equipment is individually named and users have their favourites. In addition to regular users, the shop supports many out-of-town users who come into Basingstoke from surrounding areas to shop. The store offer a delivery service, meeting customers at the train station if required. The staff and volunteers try to create a fun and supportive environment for users, who enjoy coming in and are encouraged to build confidence using the mobility equipment.

The organisation is also able to provide unbiased advice about mobility equipment for those looking to purchase, and can loan out equipment for several weeks to individuals thinking about a purchase. The staff and volunteers are keen to support users to build their confidence, and can spend an hour or two when someone first comes into the shop, test driving different options and talking it through.

The shop was forced to close during some periods of lockdown, but as an essential business was largely able to remain open – though numbers decreased substantially. Staff were furloughed and volunteers, many of whom were highly vulnerable, stayed home. As most users are older and have physical health conditions, there were days – and sometimes weeks – without any trade. As a result, the organisation lost £19,000 in the 2019-20 financial year, having lost over 500 bookings between March and May 2020 alone.

In 2021, the numbers dropped again as the uncertainty of the pandemic kept regular users at home. Several regular users passed away during the pandemic. Wanting to keep in touch, the manager spent time calling each regular user at least once a fortnight. Users appreciated talking to someone, and the calls were often long ones.

Shopmobility Basingstoke is a charity which provides a fleet of scooters, wheelchairs and other mobility aids at a subsidised rental price. Pre-Covid, 15-20 pieces of equipment are hired out each day, mostly to regular users. The charity will turn 25 in December 2022 and is supported by two paid staff and 22 volunteers, some who have been volunteering since the organisation began! The organisation receives some funding, and premises, from the borough council. Users pay a small rental fee to hire out the equipment, and the organisation carries out a range of fundraising activities to subsidise fees. One annual fundraising highlight comes from taking over Whitchurch's shared charity shop, 'Rotations' for a two-week spot each spring, which raises £2,000 or so each year. The shop also sells tickets for a local coach company, which generates some revenue and acts as useful cross-promotion.





In 2022, some users are still reluctant to be visiting the town centre for shopping but trade is back to 75-80% of what it was pre-Covid. Users who have returned are grateful for the organisation's support. Last Christmas, the shop received 30 tins of biscuits and another 30 of chocolate from users in thanks!

Looking ahead, the organisation is fairly confident that numbers will increase to pre-pandemic levels or even higher. Some days things feel back to normal. However, costs continue to rise – this year's projected gas bill is over five times that of last year's, and other costs will rise as well. Despite rising costs, the shop is keen not to increase the fees users pay, recognising the importance of offering an affordable service to users. They are hoping that increased volumes will help keep costs low. Ultimately, the charity exists to support users and that's what it intends to keep doing for as long as possible.

Find out more about Shopmobility Basingstoke:  
<https://www.shopmobilitybasingstoke.org/>



They appreciated the gesture a lot, which helped them to feel they hadn't been forgotten about.

Volunteers also received calls, with many not coming back to the shop for over a year. In the summer of 2021, the charity held a summer picnic party for volunteers in its car park, to thank volunteers for sticking with the organisation. It was a much appreciated gesture and a valuable opportunity for volunteers, many of whom have become friends over the years, to catch up.

Before the pandemic, the shop used to organise regular 'trundle' events, gathering 10-15 users to go for a ride around the district, talking about the history, stopping at Milestones living history museum for a coffee and cake, or to a fish and chip shop and some local gardens. These events, like the calls during the pandemic, highlight how much more than a mobility equipment provider the organisation is for its users.



This case study was written by Leah Campbell at Action Hampshire on behalf of Hampshire CVS Network

March 2022