



The Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project: Stories from the grantees



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Introduction

The Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project received funding from [Impact on Urban Health](#) to improve employment outcomes for Black people with long-term physical and mental health conditions in Lambeth, South London.

The Employment Project is underpinned by an understanding that the current systems related to employment are problematic, discriminating, and marginalising towards Black people with long-term conditions and disabilities. The project's approach to changing systems is described using the metaphor of 'soil and seeds'. Over two years, the project aimed to prepare the 'soil' for, and sow the 'seeds' of, systems change so that Black people with disabilities/long-term conditions will benefit in the longer term.

One part of the project has involved the distribution of grant funding by a community-led Working Group (Black residents of Lambeth and surrounding areas with lived experiences of long-term conditions and/or unemployment) to Black-led and/or Disabled-led organisations. Funded projects were to pilot new employment support initiatives for Black residents with long-term conditions in Lambeth.

This report outlines the learning and experiences of the projects awarded grants by the Working Group. It follows their journey from applying (soil) through to future capacity-building (fruits), reflecting the soil and seed metaphor central to the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project's approach to systems change work.

How did the grant fund work?

Black Thrive Lambeth had £300,000 of grant funding to distribute to individuals and community organisations through a community-led Working Group. The grants were available for between £1,000 and £50,000 to deliver projects for up to 18 months. Projects were funded in two rounds across 2020–21.

The Working Group aimed to use the funding to support a range of projects. For the first round of funding, the group prioritised applications which focused on improving the quality of support available for Black people with long-term conditions, including those already employed. In the second round, the Working Group sought to fund projects that focused on improving employment outcomes for those with physical and mental health conditions, projects working with employers and projects focused on the working poor¹ or recently unemployed (< 1 year). This included prioritising applications that:

- **Improved organisational culture**, including awareness and use of 'Access to Work²' and reasonable adjustments, increased staff disclosure and improved satisfaction rates for Black employees with disability/long-term conditions.
- **Improved in-work support** for Black employees with disabilities/long-term conditions.

¹ Working poor refers to people in work but still experiencing poverty, often due to low pay. [National Policy Institute, 2016](#).

² Access to Work is a programme that can help you get or stay in work if you have a physical or mental health condition or disability. [Access to Work 2022](#)

- Improved the health and employment outcomes of individuals **with physical health conditions (diagnosed or undiagnosed)**.
- Conducted Black-led, community-led **research into health, race, and employment**.

How did we learn about the grantees' work?

Project stories are a way to share experiences and learning in a research or evaluation study. Grantees collected a project story using a template (see Appendix 1). Stories could be done in any format (written, audio, visual etc.) and were submitted three or four times in their project delivery. Grantees were invited to attend reflection sessions to discuss their progress, successes, and challenges as well as to collaborate and network.

What support did the grantees have?

The grantees had support from the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team and a nominated peer researcher from the McPin Foundation to help with their project story development. Grantees also had access to a 'wellbeing fund', which they could use to purchase items/services to support their physical and mental wellbeing. Additionally, grantees had access to a capacity-building grant to further organisational development/skills-building for individuals or teams and to help facilitate grantees' work beyond the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project. The below diagram shows the key relationships the grantees had with partners during the project.



Who were the grantees and what were their projects?

[Paws & Pause](#): **Employment Training Programme**

Paws & Pause is a social enterprise dog day-care. They provided nine traineeships to support Black people in long-term unemployment due to mental ill health and addiction into their next steps of work, further education, or self-employment.

[Aspire2inspire Dyslexia](#): **Create your future with dyslexia: Lambeth**

This new programme was for Black Lambeth residents with dyslexia and other learning differences facing barriers to training or employment, via workshops and 1-1 support. This project supported 30 people to identify their employment-focused goals and overcome obstacles relating to their long-term conditions, to progress into work or training. Of these 30 people, 11 received dyslexia assessments.

[Vicky Quadri](#): **Vicky's Sew Along Project**

This project supported 15 Black people with long-term conditions to participate in weekly sewing classes. They were taught the fundamentals of threading a sewing machine, using it correctly and running through the machine's health and safety. They were also able to create accessories using their new sewing skills. Vicky also provided sewing machines for beneficiaries to rent or borrow to start their sewing journey.

[Katakata](#): **Catalysing a network of Black social entrepreneurs in Lambeth**

Katakata employed a six-month paid-to-work programme for four cohorts (17 people over two years). Participants worked at Katakata's venues, receiving mentoring, cooking classes, basic food hygiene education, and participating in a social entrepreneurship course.

[Andrea Wright](#): **Black Swan**

Black Swan delivered a Wellness to Work project to address the challenges Black people living with long-term conditions face, including barriers to employment and structural racism. The project embodied indigenous approaches to disrupt dominant narratives about health and wellbeing. Black Swan supported two participants during project delivery.

Ulanah Morris: **CCSH – Consciously Creating Success & Health**

Ulanah delivered a radical trauma-sensitive programme to four Black people currently in work, living with long-term conditions. The programme provided the participants with stress management tools and mindfulness techniques.

[The Ubele Initiative](#): **Black on Track**

Ubele is an African Diaspora-led intergenerational social enterprise that derives its name from the Swahili word, which means 'The Future'. Their project, Black on Track, aimed to empower participants by increasing their awareness of their skills, providing them with training to develop new skills, and creating social entrepreneurship opportunities. The Black on Track project directly supported 20 participants.

[The Diverse Creative:](#) **The Homecoming Programme**

A programme for Lambeth residents aged 18-45 with long-term health conditions built on lived experience, local research, and cultural nuances. The programme included six relevant training sessions with community experts, support from a disability coach, confidence coach, leading career coach, psychometric testing, dyslexia screening and high-touch support that sits outside of training sessions. The Homecoming programme supported 39 participants during their project.

[Diversity Dana:](#) **The Possibility Project**

The Possibility Project aimed to tell the stories of Black people experiencing long-term health conditions in first-person narrative, in both video and print. This was to inspire and provide practical guidance to jobseekers and potential employers on how reasonable adjustments can be made to allow those with long-term health conditions to thrive in the workplace.

[Renaissi:](#) **Employment and Health Shared Referral System (No Wrong Door)**

Renaissi piloted and coordinated a shared referral system between providers of employment, health, and social inclusion services within Lambeth and aimed to support 20 individuals who had disengaged from support. It aimed to test whether better coordination and collaboration between providers leads to higher quality support and service provision for Black people with long-term health conditions. The project supported three people via the referral system.

[RTW Plus:](#) **Living Well with Pain**

The Living Well with Pain programme is designed to teach strategies to help people in pain understand that they can live better lives by following simple techniques. It differs from other pain programmes as it focuses on employment and pain, not just clinical interventions, and can work at scale. The project delivered three modules to 86 participants to help them understand how pain works in the body and brain and created a personal 'pain plan' to help them return to, or stay in, work or education.

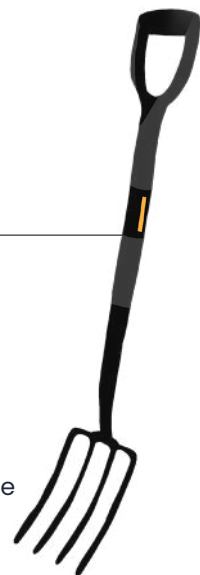
Suzette Metz: **Access to Health and Employment**

This initiative aimed to address inequalities in health, employment, and structural racism for Black residents. The project offered 1-1 support, workshops, and a personal development program to five residents with long-term conditions to help them gain and sustain employment. The project also aimed to raise awareness and support for jobseekers and employers on how to apply for 'Access to Work' funding.

Preparing the Soil: Early Experiences



Preparing the Soil: Early Experiences



Motivation for funding

Most of the grantees told us their motivation to apply for funding from the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project came from a combination of lived experience, passion for racial equity and a desire to see change. Grantees shared a desire to work with people in a trauma-informed³ way that recognised a gap in services suitable for Black communities' needs. Linked to this was a desire to generate evidence for the success of Black-led projects. Three grantees told us that part of their motivation was to challenge stigma and disrupt workplace discrimination. One grantee told us their motivation developed from discussions about a lack of collaboration between Lambeth's employment support services.

"We wanted to provide a nurturing and supportive environment where participants can gain multiple types of experience, understand there are many ways to 'make a living', and be empowered to make their creative ideas happen."

Grantees were also motivated to apply for funding to facilitate opportunities for Black people with long-term conditions in Lambeth. These opportunities included providing work experience, peer support, skills development, and confidence. Several grantees also wished to work with people to highlight existing strengths and support career progression.

Two grantees specifically wanted to provide inspiration and improve representation. One grantee told us they were motivated to promote beneficial systemic change for Black people within Lambeth, with goals to replicate the model across London if successful. Similarly, another grantee saw the funding as an opportunity to refine their work and learn from others. For some grantees, their motivation was more practical; it allowed them the opportunity to expand or continue their current work.

Grant application process

Most grantees told us they found the application process transparent and straightforward, whilst several told us it was more accessible and collaborative than other grant funding they had applied for. One said they were *"grateful to work with another Black organisation that understood their objectives, needs and cultural differences when processing the forms"*. Grantees described the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team as supportive in answering questions and attending to detail when reviewing and feeding back on applications. Grantees told us they felt welcome to contact the team and that the process considered the diverse needs of people with lived experience and small organisations. This contrasted with other funding sources, which were said to be inaccessible, unwelcoming to Black or Disabled-led organisations and *"filled with barriers"*.

³ Trauma-Informed approaches aim to understand and respond to the impact of trauma on people's lives at a practical and organisational level, with emphasis on safety and strength. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2022).

One grantee said they had experienced some challenges in presenting their project to receive funding, but the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team supported them in doing so. Another told us they adjusted their project based on feedback from the team to tailor it to the Lambeth community. We heard from two grantees that adjustments could have been made to the application process to make it more accessible for neurodiverse applicants, e.g. allowing video submissions. Grantees were pleased the team had offered a Q&A session for the second round of funding and suggested it would have been beneficial to have an application guide document.

Most grantees said receiving the funding was quicker and simpler than other funders; however, one noted difficulty getting the correct type of bank account. One grantee described receiving the money as the moment it had started “*to feel real*” as they had not expected to be accepted. There was a sense of having to make sure the project did a good job, which was overwhelming. Grantees noted feelings of excitement and pressure after receiving funding, to have a chance to do this work, and to be believed in.

Sowing the Seeds: Support and Set-up



Sowing the Seeds: Support and Set-up

Support

All grantees spoke about the individualised support given by the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team, with one person describing it as a radical approach to the funding relationship. It was felt that there was an authentic investment in the wellbeing of grantees. The Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team were also described as being flexible and available and having nurtured a culture in which mistakes were seen as an opportunity for learning rather than failure. Additionally, the relationship was seen as inclusive and sensitive to the needs and experiences of grantees and informed by a unique understanding of Black experiences and issues. The support and additional time given were important during the early phases, where the Covid-19 lockdown had caused isolation and economic difficulties. Several specifically noted the time and energy given to them by the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project Programme and Partnerships Manager.

"I think Black Thrive as grant awarders have been exceptional with the way they have shown true care and modelled a completely different way to do their business. They were invested in our wellbeing and capacity to do what we hoped to achieve, which has not gone unnoticed. It is commendable, radical and disruptive to the normal procedures of moving large amounts of money."

"Black Thrive has provided advice and guidance and access to specialist advisors that have helped to drive my vision forward – 'a model and culture of care'."

A few grantees noted challenges with communication. Some felt overwhelmed with emails. One suggested that it would be good to have clarity on when (and what) to approach the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team with for future projects.

"There was a lot of information that came through. It was sometimes difficult to be across everything."

Similarly, most grantees spoke positively of their relationship with the McPin Foundation evaluation team, especially the more informal approach that reduced the 'evaluator/evaluated' power dynamic. Examples included the evaluators supporting with technical skills such as video conferencing and attending project delivery sessions. Grantees found the project story template and option for audio recording useful, especially those with neurodivergence who said they felt less stressed about producing the data. However, several grantees did tell us they were initially confused about the role of McPin and felt the relationships and roles of McPin and the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team could be clearer. One grantee said this was connected to multiple emails received from different people, and the McPin team not always responding quickly. One grantee noted they had difficulty with the McPin support person changing twice, which did cause some disruption in their ability to develop a strong working relationship.

Several grantees highlighted the value of the reflection groups hosted by McPin and the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team and how this was a unique space they had not experienced in other funding streams. The space brought grantees together to share experiences, successes and challenges and support each other in resolving these. The space was described as motivating, inspirational and supportive. One grantee told us that due to their background being more corporate and the format of their project, they did feel out of place in the group. However, they did appreciate the opportunity to have a Black-focused, safe space.

“The meetings where grantees gather have been really helpful and useful – to see everyone, to have a sense of being part of something important, to see that others have similar struggles and to be inspired by the work of others. Really motivating and supportive.”

“Everyone has been welcoming – it’s more about feeling different and being different even in a space meant for Black people.”

The wellbeing fund was also a standout for grantees in the project. It was the first time the grantees had access to a fund to support their emotional and physical wellbeing in their work. This fund was used for various types of support, but the ability to undertake self-development through training and mentoring was reported in project stories as valuable to individuals’ personal growth and project delivery. One grantee felt that although the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team had offered support, they hadn’t personally engaged with the team as much as they could have. The grantee did note that over time they were able to reach out more and had learnt that in the future to do so earlier.

Set-up

Grantees noted some challenges in gathering outcomes data. These challenges were linked to confusion about requirements from the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team and the McPin team, and limited experience with this kind of data collection. Two grantees felt that developing the form took up a lot of time and would have preferred the project team to have sent them a pre-existing template that could be personalised. Two grantees fed back about difficulties around data collection in Black and/or traumatised communities. For one, this was connected to how disclosure can be retriggering and disempowering. For another, they noted challenges in collecting data due to hesitancy and distrust around data collection stemming from previous experiences of systemic racism.

“Designing the wellness form. A lot of time and stress were spent. I’m not sure why Black Thrive could not have designed the form with each grantee personalising it for their particular project.”

“Getting the monitoring right is very challenging, because people are often trying to give ‘the right’ answer.”

The pandemic also impacted set-up; grantees noted that it slowed their ability to be ready for recruitment and delivery. Additionally, there were technical challenges due to projects moving online, using video conferencing, Wi-Fi connections, online recruitment, and learning new IT skills (shared documents, online surveys). Two smaller grantees noted unanticipated time and financial impacts of the set-up. This included social media upgrades, IT support and materials. However, they were awarded additional funding, a unique approach undertaken by the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project to recognise the challenges smaller grantees faced, especially during the pandemic.

Seedlings: **Project Beginnings**



Seedlings: Project Beginnings



Challenges

The most significant challenge in the early stages of project delivery was Covid-19. The pandemic was difficult for grantees, who experienced sickness, grief and economic impacts that affected time and capacity. Several grantees noted the support offered by the project team, whilst two recognised their strength in taking time off for wellbeing and having support to do so. Grantees found it difficult to engage people due to limited in-person activity and a sense that potential participants were facing the negative impacts of lockdown and illness. One grantee questioned the pandemic's effects on people, noting that previously, some services would be there to help, but people have had to 'soldier on' without much during this time. Three noted the challenge of delivering a project as individuals and the impact this had on them, including the lack of access to a wider team for support and supervision.

"The pandemic and working mostly in isolation was stressful for everyone, impacting myself as a project director and participants. The level of stress was high, participants were anxious and at the same time hungry for connection."

"On a personal level, there were challenges I faced as the grantee. These included a lack of supervision – I had not fully anticipated the emotional impact it would have on myself working with this group."

Furthermore, it was harder for grantees to connect with other community groups/organisations due to lockdown measures. Some grantees noted that it would have been difficult to engage with some systems, such as the NHS or Job Centre, irrespective of Covid-19. Three told us they developed new strategies to email local communities, colleges and charities in the Lambeth area and became more active on social media. Another connected with GPs. However, this didn't have the anticipated impact due to limited access to GP surgeries and the workload of GPs during the pandemic. Another grantee struggled to recruit from schools which led to the project overall having fewer participants.

"This is the sticky bit – contacting and making connections – cold calling ... It's slower work but I'm loving discovering all these different organisations in the local area."

"Leaflets were put in surgery, but people weren't going to surgeries."

Many felt that working online was a barrier to engagement. One grantee felt that quality was lost working virtually. For others, working online was almost impossible due to their project's format. These grantees had to develop new online aspects; for example, the grantee working with dogs started fortnightly skills workshops online.

"Covid was the biggest obstacle, it took our energy down and reduced the income generation of the cafe. It meant we couldn't start the project as we intended and had to deal with the 'beautiful picture' we had painted for how the project would run didn't come out the way we wanted."

Participants' engagement with technology during the pandemic was also an issue for several grantees. This was particularly evident for one grantee who aimed to recruit from a local community club for older-aged adults. Recruitment was low, and extra time was needed to teach older participants to use IT programs and support anxieties around technology and Covid-19. Grantees spoke about the need to be flexible. Flexibility was usually successful but was taxing for

grantees. One project noted they had been slightly over-ambitious in the Covid-19 context but realised the benefits of scaling down.

“Technology worked and sometimes didn’t. It was certainly a barrier to get over. One had to remain flexible and be willing to think on the spot.”

Three grantees raised challenges associated with people not meeting the project’s demographic criteria. This ranged from people who did not identify as being Black, people outside of the geographic area and people who did not have a long-term condition or experience challenges with employment.

“We were experiencing Black people from other boroughs were interested in the project, but we were turning them down as we were holding the space for Lambeth. It was really challenging doing that, turning down Black people who needed service and support.”

Many grantees had difficulty with staffing, some associated with Covid-19 and sickness. For two, the staff were not the correct fit for the project. One grantee felt that the collaboration group they were working with seemed unclear about the project’s purpose and scope. It was also felt that partners’ motivation, commitment, and role were not clearly expressed or demonstrated. One grantee experienced challenges with people attending the session whilst intoxicated. This required the team to spend additional time working with people in a development-focused way around accountability and ensuring additional harm reduction support was in place.

Successes

Grantees experienced success early in project delivery. Some said video conferencing was successful, facilitating engagement while people felt isolated and creating a safe space for participants. Additionally, smaller group sizes meant grantees felt they could support individuals and facilitate discussion in group activities. Grantees that implemented online ways to connect participants, such as WhatsApp, reported that it developed a sense of community and allowed members to foster post-project connections.

Nearly all grantees felt the overall engagement from the people they recruited was a success and that people were keen to be involved in their work. One grantee who worked with participants in a café environment told us how the people they supported fostered a “can do attitude”, where “nothing is impossible”, inspiring the grantee team to adapt their work to reflect this. Another told us that the participants they worked with wanted to continue their self-care work and that the support they got from their group gave them a sense of beginning their self-care journey. Two grantees adopted one-to-one sessions based on participants’ feedback. These were successful, allowing participants to explore barriers to engagement and their goals in an individualised way that suited their preferences and accessibility needs.

“Amazing how much warmth can be generated in the virtual space and how safe people can be made to feel – safe enough to talk about sensitive issues and to be vulnerable. Covid has been an eye-opener in that regard.”

Several grantees felt that their team’s cohesiveness and work were an early success, especially during the pandemic. One noted that they felt it was a personal success to manage a larger team than usual. Another told us that the support their team had provided one another had been an important ingredient in project delivery.

Race, Racial Equity, and Lived Experience

Grantees felt that, in some instances, early recruitment had been impacted by what they believed to be a hesitancy amongst some Black people to identify as having a long-term condition or needing employment support. It was felt that this might be associated with previous experiences of discrimination, either from systems/organisations or within their own communities. There were barriers associated with experiences of stigma and fatigue of systems.

“There have been significant changes to the activities that were delivered at the beginning. The intake of participants started slow. This may have been because of dyslexia being something that people, particularly in the Black community, are uncomfortable discussing or being attached to (stigma).”

One grantee held an event that specifically focused on openly discussing dyslexia in the Black community and how to challenge the stigma and cultural barriers that impact ‘hidden disabilities’. Feedback from the event brought more interest to the project, including university staff members who wanted to understand more about what they might do to support students affected by such intersections.

One grantee invested time exploring the roots of unhelpful stereotypes that ‘Black people don’t do dogs’. They researched to better understand the impacts of dogs being used as tools of racial hostility towards Black communities. In the early stages of delivery, one grantee told us that they had not yet focused on systemic racism, ableism, and how they intersect. Consequently, they felt their team sometimes lacked the language to engage with this subject matter. Another grantee said the project had brought their equality and diversity policies into focus and would inform their future work in improving these and their communications to be more inclusive.

“We have yet to have a collaborative meeting that focuses on systemic racism, ableism, and how they intersect. This means that the collaborative is sometimes lacking the language to engage with this subject matter, in a practical way.”

Several grantees also told us that their projects had specific input from Black community members with long-term conditions in shaping their work, including two grantees’ projects that were primarily White-led. This input was seen as critical in ensuring that the services provided were accessible and reflected the needs of Black Lambeth residents with long-term conditions who may have previously had poor experiences with employment support. Further, several grantees embedded a process of ongoing feedback from participants to shape and improve their work. One grantee noted they had aimed to develop a co-production group to embed lived experience in their work but felt this had been slow in setting up and didn’t impact the early stages of delivery.

“We are in development with Lambeth College for a wider programme, and there are Black people from the community helping us to shape an even more intense programme in Lambeth to help them access employment with the challenges they face. The feedback we are getting from participants is also helping us reflect, change and improve the programme.”

Many grantees brought their own lived experiences to their work, which was positive but emotionally exhausting. Two also told us they recruited staff or volunteers with lived experience. One project, which described itself as Black and women-led, felt the shared lived experiences had contributed to a solid team, and more work with lived experience leadership was needed. One told us that they didn’t disclose their lived experience to the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team but that watching other people hold their hands up and being true to themselves inspired them not to be afraid of labels. They also told us that there is a lot of self-protection in the corporate world – a need to build a suit of armour – and some things are harder to hide, such as race.

Several grantees spoke about the unique opportunity to be involved in something where their own lived experience was valued as expertise and how it helped them connect with their participants. However, several also told us about feeling triggered or re-traumatized through the work via hearing stories like their own or hearing others' trauma. Further, some grantees shared that they had recent experiences of racism and grief due to both individual and community loss during the pandemic that also intersected with their lived experience and delivery of their work. Despite this, grantees said that they had been able to work through some of these experiences by using the wellbeing fund and due to the culture of care developed by the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project team.

"Self-doubt, disappointment, decline in mental health and activation of trauma presented many challenges along the way. It was a blessing to have experienced these moments to be able to understand myself more clearly working in that capacity as the project lead, with the material I was dealing with. It was an important moment of self-discovery and learning."

Trees: **Delivery and Outcomes**



Trees: Delivery and Outcomes



Delivery

As grantees continued project delivery, there were challenges associated with the dropout of participants for several projects. Some grantees reported that this was due to the impacts of Covid-19 on employment opportunities and challenges transitioning to face-to-face formats. However, one grantee noted that participants engaged more in person due to the creative environment and culture fostered and that the face-to-face cohort was easier to engage. Other grantees felt the participants may not have been in the right place in their lives to complete the programme. One grantee noted they felt that some participants were not motivated by paid employment due to receiving benefits. However, most grantees spoke of good engagement and people finding the course, with one telling us participants felt safe in the project due to the “for us, by us approach”.

One grantee noted that Lambeth’s fractured employment support system was a challenge for them. There was no supporting ecosystem and a limited referral pipeline to ensure people were connected to the right services at the right time. There was also oversaturation: service providers competing for the same clients. One grantee felt that more could be done to connect communities and businesses and ensure a diversity of complementary services. One felt that there was some gatekeeping by established employment support providers.

“They aren’t interested in playing ball with grassroots organisations because they are playing a numbers game, and I think that really changes the position we have as smaller organisations trying to penetrate this space.”

“I don’t think there is a pipeline of where to go for support in Lambeth, it’s very fragmented.”

Another challenge was the short timescale to deliver the project. In future, grantees said they would extend their delivery time to reduce the pressure on staff and allow more time to connect with the people they were working with. One noted that they had developed a waiting list because the project did not have the ongoing funding to provide dyslexia assessments. They felt that for systems change to be embedded, funding was needed on longer-term cycles for continuity in the community.

Notably, when grantees reflected on their contributions to systems change in Lambeth, most identified change for the individuals they worked with, which they hoped would impact the system in future. Grantees told us they could not develop strong links with key employment organisations, for example, the Department for Work and Pensions, the local council or the NHS trust. One grantee noted gatekeeping at Job Centre Plus where their key contact at the organisation was engaged and helpful, but the on-the-ground staff were not, which impacted recruitment.

“I started initially by engaging Job Centre Plus and sending out a lot of information to them. It didn’t work as well as I hoped.”

“In the sense of how our project has allowed for system change we are disappointed about where we are at the moment. The systems change we were seeking to do was affected by us not being able to have face-to-face [conversations] with key organisations.”

One grantee working to develop a connected referral system in Lambeth only received three referrals. Consequently, it was difficult to assess the new system's impact when submitting their project story. One grantee mapped the barriers to employment and the support available to help people navigate the employment system in Lambeth and was seeking additional funding to complete this map.

Outcomes

Most grantees reported that a key outcome for the people they worked with was increased confidence and/or self-worth. This confidence related to skills in seeking employment, such as CV development and interview skills, café business skills, dog care skills, and technology skills, as well as confidence in seeking support and adjustments in the workplace for long-term conditions. Some grantees reported participants feeling more confident with entrepreneurial activities. Grantees also reported increased knowledge and implementation of self-care amongst participants, including seeking out support, mindfulness, and journaling, which helped them understand their own employment goals and support needs.

One grantee who delivered eleven dyslexia assessments reported that the people who received them not only accessed adjustments at work and in education but felt more confident in seeking employment or undertaking further education. Three grantees spoke about the benefits of taking a strengths-based approach. This was said to have been successful in building trust and helping people feel capable of progressing in their careers, whilst one spoke of participants feeling reduced social anxiety.

"Client feels more confident and in control of her time, emotional wellbeing and finances despite the challenges faced. Client 'A' felt she is now more aware of her key strengths and is now starting to prioritise her needs."

"This course caused me to gain a lot of knowledge about behind the scenes of business and how to go about it whenever I want to get involved in planning my own business in the future."

"I feel a lot of things have changed in my life. Working for the first time in (grantee). I have a great satisfaction working."

Grantees reported participants maintaining employment where they had considered leaving or had been on long-term leave, gaining employment or starting education, re-joining education, seeking support and adjustments to stay in education, and starting their own businesses. Two grantees offered ongoing employment to some participants.

"The progress made by this group of individuals suggests that ultimately, with more time, the clients who fully participated would have achieved long-term employment."

Grantees also noted outcomes for themselves and their teams. This included self-development through the wellbeing fund and on-the-job learning through delivery in a pandemic. They spoke about opportunities to learn and support each other. One noted that the project helped them better understand what kind of service they would like to deliver in future. Another reported that one of their team is also doing a PhD and others have expanded their wellbeing support for themselves and their teams.

"Having seen the project come to fruition! From the seed to the young seedling, this project has succeeded! I take stock of where I have come from and what has been achieved. It feels good!! I am taking a pause to see how I can continue this work and in what form does the next iteration look like?"

Fruit and Seeds: Connections and Growth



Fruit and Seeds: Connections and Growth



Networking

During the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project, several grantees developed new network connections with local organisations in Lambeth or their fellow grantees. Two people working as individuals noted that connecting and providing support to each other was vital in their time as grantees.

"I managed to create a buddy relationship with another grantee, which helped me enormously in moving through the project stages."



One grantee connected with one of the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project partners to deliver training at their organisation; however, this has been paused due to the grantee taking time off. Some grantees did not develop ongoing network relationships with other grantees outside of the reflective spaces and engagement in a WhatsApp group, and there was a sense that Covid-19 impacted networking due to limitations on meeting face-to-face. Grantees who had less involvement in reflective sessions also described less connection with their fellow grantees in the project stories.

One grantee noted that it may have been beneficial to have further explored how grantees could have referred to, and supported each other, to avoid overlap and oversaturation. It was also suggested that it may have been beneficial to have a more structured buddying system to help facilitate stronger connections between grantees. One grantee noted it might have been their own hesitancy to reach out that may have impacted how much connection they made with other grantees, whilst two noted that it was hard to network due to competing priorities of delivering the project.

"The network events were great, especially to see the sharing of experiences of Black people in employment and gain an insight into some of the barriers people may face. The discussions were inspiring and motivational, but I feel there wasn't much follow-up afterwards. I felt unsure how to reach out to people and how we could maybe support each other in our projects."

One grantee worked as the facilitator for a collaboration-based project involving several organisations; however, the development of strong relationships between the organisations was limited. One grantee connected with the Lambeth Council Black and Minority Ethnic Staff Network by presenting a workshop at one of their events. This workshop also created links with Lambeth Council. Two grantees made connections with Lambeth College, and for one, this created an influx of referrals to the project. This relationship is anticipated to continue once the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project ends. Another grantee described developing relationships with a local school from which they recruited their participants, and one formed a stronger partnership with the Vocational Rehabilitation Association and HealthWatch Lambeth. Grantees also told us they were able to develop networks with participants and that the participants developed networks with each other, both in a social and employment support context. These connections were evident in projects that ran group cohorts who worked together over a longer period.

Capacity-building

Grantees with an annual turnover of less than £250,000 could apply for an additional capacity-building grant. Nine grantees took this up and primarily used the fund to get strategic support from consultants about future funding opportunities and organisational/personal development. One grantee used this funding to help them set up a new location, ready for future projects. Most felt this experience highlighted a need for their service in the Lambeth area and believed expansion beyond Lambeth would be beneficial. Several found that this experience has inspired them to develop new programmes. For example, one grantee aims to put together a personal finance programme on different avenues of personal employment, reflective of their learning around long-term finances, disability, and the poverty line. This grantee also told us that they believe their organisation would need to explore how to better support participants with technology skills, as the desire for online access to services has grown since the pandemic. Grantees who worked as individuals rather than as part of an organisation felt that if they continued their projects in the future, they would need to invest in additional staffing support to reduce the pressure on themselves.

“The capacity-building fund was a great added bonus for us, having to source your own freelancers/organisations was a good experience in itself, and the work has meant we have been able to dig into what we are doing well as an organisation and what developments we can make in the future. As an organisation, we would never have been able to afford to spend money on this kind of work at this stage, so it has been a real help.”

Summary

The work undertaken by Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project grantees was a success despite the challenges of the pandemic lockdown. Although not all grantees recruited their targeted numbers, they were able to learn new skills and support Black people with long-term conditions in their community. Notably, the funding stream was considered supportive in a way grantees had not experienced in other funding relationships, and the deployment of Black-led funding streams was welcome. The project was positive for grantees for the most part. However, there are some lessons to be learnt, such as the most effective methods of collecting outcomes data, how best to engage people in online working formats, and the skills needed by both organisations and participants for this. There were also opportunities to further enhance networking. The project's future and legacy will involve taking these successes and learnings forward, influencing large-scale commissioners and funders to shift how resources flow to local services and communities. The ultimate goal is to see Black communities accessing services tailored to their needs from which they achieve positive outcomes to support them to thrive.



Appendix 1: Project Story Template



As part of the Evaluation of the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project, you'll need to develop a 'project story' that explores your experience of being a grantee. This includes the experiences, progress and impact of those within your project. This is part of the contractual requirement, but we are here to help you. Your project story will feed into the overall BT project reporting, which will include external dissemination, so will be good opportunity to promote your work to a wider audience.

What do I need to do?

The idea is to capture the journey of the project from start to finish including: learning for others, lessons, recommendations, achievements and experiences.

Part 1: Date:

- The name of your project and a short overview of your organisation. (People will be interested in why you set this project up, any specific aims, what communities do you cover).
- How have Black people with long-term conditions helped shape your project? and if applicable how are they involved in delivering it?
- How did you find the process of receiving and spending the grant money?
- Are there any obstacles or successes that you have come across that you didn't expect?
- How does this project differ from other projects that you've seen or heard of?
- Anything else that you think is relevant.

Part 2: Date:

- Are there any obstacles or successes that you have come across that you didn't expect?
- How has COVID-19 affected the project you choose to run, if at all?
- Key achievements – both collectively and individual stories. It would be great to collect a number of different perspectives over time as views may change.
- Anything else that you think is relevant.

Part 3: Date:

- What have been the changes people have experienced in their employment journey since starting your project?
- Any recommendations for how the experience of being a grantee in the Employment Project could be improved?
- Ongoing key achievements for the project and individuals?
- Anything else that you think is relevant.

Part 4: Date:

- In what ways has your project allowed for systems change for Black people with long-term conditions? What does systems change mean to you and the people you work with?
- Why did Black people with long-term conditions choose to take part in your project?
- What have been the changes people have experienced in their employment journey since starting your project?
- The future for your organisation – has this project helped you think about other programmes, approaches, etc.?
- The future for people who take part in your project – has this changed how people view themselves, allowed them to access any new opportunities within or outside of the project, etc.?



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