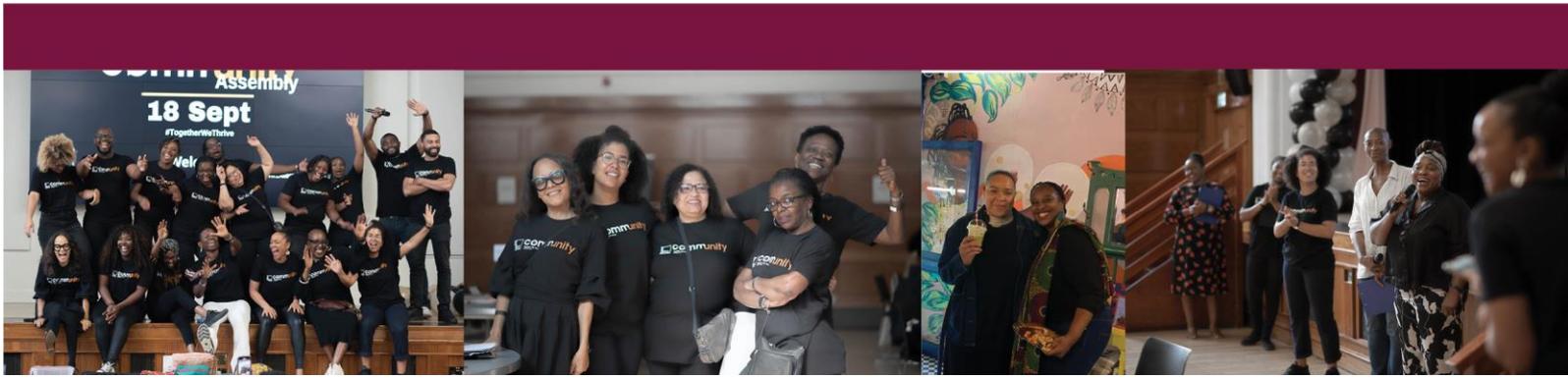




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The Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project: A Summative Assessment of Impact and Systems Change

Sheffield Hallam University | Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research



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Introduction

This report provides an **independent summative assessment of the Employment Project delivered by Black Thrive Lambeth** between March 2020 and June 2022 with funding provided by Impact on Urban Health (IoUH). It has been undertaken by researchers from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University and forms part of a wider evaluation of the work of Black Thrive Lambeth between 2018-23.

Black Thrive Lambeth is a **five-year partnership that has been developed to promote, preserve and protect mental health and wellbeing in Black populations in Lambeth** and to promote equality and address discrimination in mental health and allied services. The partnership is hosted by Black Thrive Global CIC, and includes NHS Lambeth CCG, Lambeth Borough Council (including Public Health Lambeth), The Metropolitan Police, South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (SLaM) and representatives of the local voluntary and community sector. Collectively these partners are committed to improving the mental health and wellbeing of Black communities in Lambeth through a process of 'systems change' and the application of an anti-racist and race equity lens.

The **Employment Project has been one of the largest and highest-profile initiatives undertaken by Black Thrive Lambeth** to date. It aimed to improve employment outcomes for Black people with long-term health conditions (LTCs), including mental ill health, by creating the conditions for systems change. This summative evaluation report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** provides an **overview of the Employment Project** to highlight the key components of project delivery.
- **Chapter 3** provides an overview of the **evaluation methodology**, with the evaluation framework provided in Appendix 1.
- **Chapter 4** discusses in some detail the **key achievements of the Project**, differentiating between the impact on Black people, the impact on grantees, and the impact on wider stakeholders, as well as highlighting the importance of support for capacity building and wellbeing.
- **Chapter 5** considers the **impact of the Project on its systems change goals** focusing on strategic learning and mental models; policies, practices and resource flows; relationships and connections; and power and decision-making.
- **Chapter 6** explores the extent to which investing in systems change initiatives such as the Employment Project can be considered **value for money**.

- **Chapter 7** highlights some of the *challenges encountered by the project team, grantees and wider stakeholders*, to enable readers to situate the findings in their wider context.
- **Chapter 8** is the *conclusion*, providing a summary of the main findings, critical reflections and considering the implications for the future.

2

An Overview of the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project

In March 2020, a two-year Employment Project was launched by Black Thrive Lambeth, funded through a grant from Impact on Urban Health (part of Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation). The project aimed to improve employment outcomes for Black people with long-term health conditions (LTCs), including mental ill health, by creating the conditions for achieving 'systems change'. The project was a key component of Black Thrive's activity between 2020-22 and was closely aligned with the wider vision of improving mental health outcomes, access and equity for Black people in Lambeth.

During the initial phase of the Employment Project, community researchers with lived experience of the issues under investigation, researched the systemic issues related to employment and LTCs with Black residents of Lambeth. Their aim was to better '*understand*' the issues from a Black lived experience perspective and to identify *solutions* potentially leading to systems change.

The second phase, '*response*', involved a departure from mainstream employment programmes in an attempt to shift the system, and again was community led. The community had input into funding projects that they thought were important; the intention here was to change what the system funded, change the understanding of the issues through collecting data not previously available, and change how the system was organised, for example by commissioners.

A community grant-making approach was developed by the Employment Project through which £300,000 in grant funding was allocated to pilot projects run locally by individuals, groups and organisations. An Employment Working Group set up by Black Thrive consisting of Black professionals and members of Lambeth's communities with lived experience of managing one or more LTC, co-designed the funding process (application form, eligibility criteria etc), and decided which projects should receive funding over two rounds.

In total, 13 grants were awarded to those working on employment support initiatives for Black people with LTCs. These were mainly awarded to Black-led grassroots groups or organisations. Some hadn't received funding before and hence were piloting their projects, and several providers had long-term conditions themselves. Whether a new intervention or an existing programme, all had never previously delivered their services to exclusively Black and Disabled cohorts. Work with these grantees represented "*the bottom - up systems change work*" while a 'top - down' approach involved efforts by the project team to work closely with and influence key stakeholders such as Lambeth Council, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), other employers, and the National Health Service (NHS).

2.1. The Key Strands of the Employment Project

The following section provides an overview of the key strands of the Employment Project.

2.1.1. Funded Projects

Supported by the Walcot Foundation – a grant making charity in Lambeth – the Employment Project awarded 13 grants in total; 11 of the grantees participated in interviews for this evaluation. Whilst the views of all interviewees, including grantees, are anonymised, this report begins with background information about the funded projects, mainly led by Black individuals, groups and organisations. The Evaluation Team recognise the importance of **providing these organisations with visibility and credence and to acknowledge Black entrepreneurship and contributions**, something that has been suppressed historically in records, including research and evaluation reports. Each project is summarised below including their objectives, track records of work in employment and race, and how lived experience of racism, ableism and managing LTCs informs their work.

Name of funded project	Background information and the aim of the funded project
Access to Health and Employment, independent grantee	The grantee, an employment specialist in mental health has extensive experience of working with Black and minority ethnic (BME) employees and lived experience of some of the challenges they face. 'Access to Health and Employment' funded by the Black Thrive Employment Project aimed to help Black people with LTCs from Lambeth to overcome barriers to employment. This involved supporting Black people to manage their mental health conditions to access or sustain employment and working with employers to make reasonable adjustments.
'Aspire to Inspire Dyslexia' 'Create Your Future with Dyslexia Lambeth' (CYFwDL)	'A2i Dyslexia' supports people with dyslexia and other learning difficulties to return to apprenticeships, education, and employment. The Black Thrive Employment Project funded an 18-month programme (CYFwDL) of support (including dyslexia assessments and employability skills) to help Lambeth's Black residents with learning differences / difficulties to overcome barriers to training and employment. Support was delivered by Black employees with lived experience of issues related to race and a learning difference / difficulty.
CS Coaching & Development	'CS Coaching & Development' is a leadership and education consultancy run by a Black professional with extensive senior-level experience in education. The six-month grant from the Black Thrive Employment Project was used to coach long-term unemployed Black parents with LTCs in Lambeth to raise their employment aspirations. By doing this, the intention was to foster parental engagement with their children's education, in turn improving their children's engagement with education.
'Homecoming programme' The Diverse Creative CIC	'The Diverse Creative CIC' raises awareness of dyslexia, provides a range of support, whilst working towards addressing the stigma of dyslexia. Funded by the Employment Project their 'Homecoming programme' provided support to Lambeth's Black residents with LTCs seeking work. This involved: training sessions with local community experts with extensive experience of coaching (confidence and career mapping); an online network post-training for Black people to engage with their peers and access information; and a research report on Black Disabled peoples' experiences of employment.

Katakata	‘Katakata’ provides a community space for residents to connect and build relationships. Various activities, including arts, healthy cooking and yoga are available. The organisation is led by Black people with LTCs, and so there is a deep understanding of the issues of race, disability and so on. Their funded project over 18 months, involving three cohorts, supported 17 Black people from Lambeth with disabilities to develop and realise their social entrepreneur ventures through paid employment, mentoring and training with Katakata.
KUSH, independent grantee	‘KUSH’ is a restorative wellness and wholeness health project delivered by a Black professional with lived experience of LTCs - an independent grantee aiming to support people to achieve balance, mental and physical wellness, working primarily with marginalised people with LTCs. Funded by the Black Thrive Employment Project, KUSH offered an online programme for Black people with LTCs in employment educating them on self-care, using stress management tools and mindfulness techniques.
Paws and Pause	‘Paws and Pause’ provides a therapeutic dog care work setting for long-term unemployed people with mental health conditions and substance dependency to develop skills for work. The social enterprise received funding from the Black Thrive Employment Project to provide trainee placements in the animal sector for Lambeth’s Black residents with mental ill health. The aim was to help develop their skills so that they felt capable of working.
Renaisi	Established approximately 20 years ago, Renaisi is a social enterprise with a strong place-based approach to its work, in supporting people into sustainable employment, social research and evaluation, and learning and imparting knowledge on systems change to improve conditions for communities to thrive. As a grantee of the Black Thrive Employment Project, Renaisi aimed to create a shared referral system with other organisations in the employment system to streamline the referral process for Black Disabled people to access employment support more quickly and easily.
RTW Plus	‘RTW Plus’ support people through their journey of rehabilitation, helping them access services for pain management, allowing them to be functional despite suffering a significant health condition or injury. The Black Thrive Employment Project funded the delivery of a pain management programme, which involved: an education programme for managing pain, self-directing recovery, and functionality. The second stage focused on communicating with, and accessing support from employers, entitlement, and legislation; and the third explored strategies for getting back into work.
‘The Black on Track Employment Project’ The Ubele Initiative	‘The Ubele Initiative’ is a Black – led intergenerational social enterprise. As an infrastructure organisation they focus on supporting local people from diverse communities to develop social action and community enterprise initiatives. The ‘Black on Track’ funded project concentrated on four deliverables: training in community enterprise development for Black people aged 35-65 in Lambeth; the opportunity for involvement in social action projects; a mapping exercise to determine the challenges faced by underemployed Black people with LTCs as well as the support available; and multiplier sessions to bring stakeholders together to tackle the identified challenges.
‘Wellness to Work’ project Black Swan, independent grantee	‘Black Swan’ emerged in response to the call from the Black Thrive Employment Project. With a history rooted in activism and social justice, a Black healthcare professional with personal experience of the mental health system, embarked on a pilot ‘Wellness to Work’ project to provide Black people with LTCs in Lambeth with strategies to mitigate against their stress due to barriers to work, including racism. Practical support such as CV writing was also offered by a Health Employability Specialist.

All but two of **the funded projects were run by Black professionals with lived experience** of race inequity, disability and/or experiences of mental ill health or other LTCs. In their interviews, they conveyed a deep understanding of how these factors intersected with employment. Through each of their projects, they aimed to address barriers to employment and LTCs by, for example, developing employability skills, offering coaching, mentoring, dyslexia screenings, wellness activities combined with employment information, advice, and guidance. Peer-to-peer delivery was expected to improve access to support for Black people living in Lambeth – who perhaps did not attend / engage with other support services. Crucially, the centrality of race and lived experience in project delivery was anticipated to act as a catalyst for improving Black Lambeth residents' employment outcomes by aiding access to work, moving people closer to employment by making them work ready, or supporting individuals to sustain their employment in the face of health and/or race related challenges.

2.1.2. Capacity building fund

Capacity building support was available through the Employment Project, allowing grantees to access experts for one-to-one and group support with tasks such as writing funding bids and accessing funding, marketing and branding, and acquiring knowledge about different business models and structures. The primary aim of this range of support was to meet the professional development needs of grantees to ensure funded projects became sustainable and thrived beyond the lifetime of the project. The perceptions, experiences and impacts of this support are explored later in this report.

2.1.3. Wellbeing Fund

This fund could be used to purchase wellbeing activities / services (e.g., therapy, fitness sessions, and massage) for grantees, recognising that working with people with challenging circumstances, in emotionally charged situations, impacted on those delivering services. The emotional burden of undertaking such roles was augmented for those with lived experience of the issues they supported their clients with, becoming even more challenging against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustices highlighted by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (detailed later). Again, the experiences and impacts of the Wellbeing Fund are discussed later in this report.

2.1.4. Research and Evaluation

Research and evaluation activities were a cornerstone of the Black Thrive Employment Project. They aimed to gain a more detailed understanding of the challenges and experiences of Black people with LTCs; the intersections between race, ethnicity, health, and employment; the provision for Black people locally; and how suitable it was in meeting their needs. Black people played an integral role in research and evaluation activities. Their involvement helped to build trust with Black interviewees with many common experiences around race and culture. It also ensured that the right research questions were being asked based on their 'insider' experiential knowledge. Researchers were trained and advised, gaining research skills themselves and ensuring that methodological rigor was maintained.

Developmental evaluation of the Employment Project by The McPin Foundation

The McPin Foundation is a mental health research organisation in Southwark, working nationally, championing expertise by experience. The primary role of the organisation is to ensure that research is improved by mobilising the expertise of people who live with mental health problems to inform the research process at all stages. With an ethos of building partnerships with likeminded people or organisations at the heart of research practice, McPin aims to lead to new solutions to improving people's lives. McPin delivered the developmental evaluation by training and developing community

peer researchers with lived experience of the issues central to the Employment Project. The organisation described taking an embedded research approach, working alongside Black Thrive and also within the wider system to try and help them on their journey to improve employment outcomes for people with long-term health conditions. They also undertook a rapid review on employment as part of the project.

Service Evaluation: Care Coordinator perspectives on support around employment and vocational activity

The Employment Project Team, supported by external consultants and volunteers, conducted research with Care Coordinators involved in mental health community care in Lambeth to determine: how much the coordinators were able to focus on employment and vocational opportunities as goals for their clients; how far the organisational culture, policies, processes and resources supported the coordinators to set such goals; and the bearing (if any) of clients' race and ethnicity on entry to and experience of employment and vocational related support.

Research report by TSiP and McPin: An Equitable Recovery from COVID-19: Insights from Community Research in Lambeth

The Social Innovation Partnership (TSiP), worked with The McPin Foundation and Black Thrive to explore the employment and health experiences of Lambeth's Black people, COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement. TSiP and McPin mobilised Black community researchers with lived experience of LTCs that Black people could identify with and trust to secure their engagement with the research process.

No Wrong Door research with employment support providers

The Black Thrive Employment Project Team undertook research with employment support providers as part of the No Wrong Door project, which aimed to understand links between employment support providers in Lambeth as part of efforts to address the fragmented support system and reduce the likelihood that individuals seeking support experience disjointed employment support.

Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation was embedded in the wider evaluation of the Black Thrive Lambeth partnership being undertaken between 2018-23. Its primary purpose was to provide a **'summative' assessment** of the Employment Project. As such, the focus was on interviewing grantees and key stakeholders of the project **to determine 'impact' and 'change'** through thorough exploration of:

1. What the Employment Project involved: the key strands/aspects of work, including projects funded, capacity building, wellbeing support and so on.
2. Stakeholder and grantees reflections on the work undertaken; achievements and challenges.
3. Impact on systems change in relation to employment: policies, practices, and resource flows; power and choice; relationships and connections; learning about race equity and health/employment.
4. Whether the Employment Project represented 'value for money'.
5. To what extent the project enabled Black people in Lambeth with long term health conditions to gain meaningful employment and/or change the landscape.
6. The legacy, if any, of the Employment Project.

A **mixed methods approach** to the evaluation was developed encompassing:

- Semi - structured qualitative interviews with grantees to map and understand the range of projects funded, the background and expertise of individuals, groups and organisations receiving funding (n=11).
- Semi - structured qualitative interviews (and a small focus group) with key stakeholders: the Black Thrive Employment Project Team; McPin Evaluation Team, and system actors to explore the impact and change attributable to the Employment Project (n=12).
- Quantitative data collected by funded projects.
- Wider secondary sources relating to the project.¹

¹ The full Evaluation Framework is provided in Appendix 1

All interviews were conducted virtually by Zoom or Teams video call, recorded (with consent) and transcribed.² The interview topic guides outlining evaluation questions were sent to individuals in advance to help them prepare for the interviews. Quantitative data was provided by the Employment Project Team and re-analysed to produce aggregate data about the reach and achievements of the work undertaken by grantees.

² All quotes used in this report are anonymised to protect the identities of interviewees and provide reassurance for individuals sharing sensitive information.

4

Key Achievements of the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project

In this chapter we draw on the data collected to reflect on the key achievements of different aspects of the Employment Project. For the funded projects, we draw out and differentiate between the impact on Black People, the impact on grantees and the impact on wider stakeholders, as well as highlighting the importance of supporting capacity building and wellbeing.

4.1. Funded Projects

4.1.1. *Impact of funded projects on Black people with LTCs involved in the projects*

Projects funded by the Black Thrive Employment Project had multiple and significant impacts on the Black people involved in them. Notably, **an increase in self-belief and confidence** was reported by grantees across the range of funded projects when discussing the impacts of their work. A growth in confidence was key to a number of people **getting into jobs**. In some cases, confidence resulted from: eventually being diagnosed with learning disabilities/difficulties and subsequently receiving the necessary support; having the opportunity to develop new skills in safe and supportive work environments; and / or receiving guidance on recruitment processes, interview techniques and so on.

Several examples were provided of how **'empowering'** the diagnostic assessments were for people who were anxious, lacking confidence, and frustrated due to not being heard or supported for their enduring learning difficulties. The assessments led to a better understanding of specific conditions such as dyslexia, without which individuals experienced constant struggles in education and employment. Access to a full dyslexia assessment, for example, enabled one individual finding it difficult to study to get the right support, continue in education and become an electrician. In another case, an individual went on to finish in higher education having received a diagnosis and relevant support. Satisfied with the support they had received, project participants went on to refer friends. The grantee recounting these successes placed emphasis on **promoting independence** in the people accessing their project.

In another project, the grantee reported that their clients felt more confident and empowered to **independently look for job opportunities** in professions that they hadn't considered before. According to the grantee, their project had empowered, "people to operate from a space of strength, a lot of the time...disability... [is spoken about] from a space of lack" (Grantee 1). The project **changed mindsets** - a key enabler – which other employment programmes rarely focused on.

The journey from initial involvement to the end outcome in a specific project was described as one that engendered confidence, empowerment, and connection with others. Project trainees were made to feel part of a team and normal irrespective of their mental health conditions, sending out a message of acceptance and belonging. Grantee 9 conveyed the growth of trainees on their project with confidence being the pivotal factor:

I think it's usually confidence, like seeing all of our trainees from beginning to end, they've massively grown [in] confidence, a lot of them start off very timid...with the team, not necessarily feeling able to take charge of anything. By towards the middle or end of our programme, they engage, they're part of a team.

A growth in confidence amongst other **vital employability skills** resulted in several positive employment outcomes for trainees on a specific project, including: one of them securing paid part-time work with the project after taking part in a competitive recruitment process; another gained a part time job in childcare; and an individual who had completed a project placement had gone on to study full-time as well as working part-time. A noteworthy case was relayed in an interview, where a trainee had demonstrated the **confidence to set up her own business** after completing her project placement:

We had one trainee who went onto, now she's doing three days a week, having her own...business. Which I think is a great outcome because this individual actually really, part of what she really struggled with was, it was with the team interaction, and, and the being around other people and I think actually for now, this job for her is really perfect (Grantee 9).

Confidence was built in individuals to negotiate with managers in circumstances where working relationships were tense to **sustain employment**, a grantee shared, "there were some [people] on the cusp of losing their role and they walked away with a greater confidence on how to speak to their managers" (Grantee 4). In another example, the grantee recalled how an individual she had supported was able to deal confidently and composedly with an unfavourable work situation and continue in that employment.

Whilst not all of those supported went on to secure employment, evidently, some were **moved closer to employment**. Seeing people of the same or similar race with LTCs and / or learning difficulties **inspired individuals**, instilled confidence, and self-belief, leading to the mindset that 'if they can do it, so can I'. An interview with a grantee from a Disabled-led organisation revealed how a young man who had never worked before was inspired by the people he engaged with in an initiative funded by the Employment Project:

He's never worked all his life. And from this Black Thrive project he's got into – he's, like, trying to design his own, you know, clothing brand...Through the social enterprise course that was designed with people with special needs and stuff...He comes out there and feel[s] like, wow, I can go and do this. If XXXX [name of grantee] can do this, I can do it as well. (Grantee 8).

Indeed, nearly all grantees identified the centrality of lived experience in their funded projects as key contributory mechanism. This special feature created **identification and trust** amongst those groups with historically low trust in mainstream providers due to historical and present experiences of racism, receiving provision that inadequately met their needs, and so on. Lived experience informed how to reach those communities and how best to engage with them.

Grantee 5, like Grantee 8, underscored how not only their (employee) lived experience but also that of local community members informed their organisation's approach to project design. By collaborating with the very people they aimed to serve, they were able to understand their needs and engage with them. Organisational values **placed people's experiences at the centre of the design and delivery of provision**.

In the same organisation, in their funded project, participants **received coaching and training to set up their own social action projects**, which not only empowered them but others in the wider community. A grantee recalled how a participant with a history of drug addiction, recovery and mental health challenges started a project to offer support to people with addiction after their treatment ended. This work inspired others and *"she inspired herself by her very own work"* (Grantee 5). Another participant's **project continuing beyond the lifetime of the Employment Project** delivered activities and entertainment for older people in Lambeth who would otherwise be isolated. Further, by partnering with another participant amid establishing a restaurant business they were able to gain mutual financial benefit.

In a few cases, Black people who had set up their businesses were supported to move towards a social focus by adopting community enterprise principles. The following is a case in point recounted by the grantee: *"there's one woman that does yoga for children and she has **scaled up her business and broadened her impact** and she's going into schools, and she now has a programme where in summer she supports Black children to engage in yoga"* (Grantee 5). When discussing the impacts of the project on Black people in Lambeth, the grantee surmised:

*I think that we did move the needle a little bit because participants left the programme **more aware of services** that are available, whether that's health services, mental health services, entrepreneurship support services, employment support services, so just that awareness... in Lambeth as a result of the project.*

Indeed, initiatives funded by the Black Thrive Employment Project **ran events, created videos, used social media** and so on to generate interest about their provision but also to raise awareness of the range of services available in Lambeth to support Black people with employment and health related matters. The high level of interest and engagement from local residents was conveyed in a grantee narrative: *"we had events that people attended through the Black Thrive funding. We had podcasts. We had live shows. I can't tell you the figure. That's quite a huge number of people"* (Grantee 7).

Grantees stressed, in several interviews, the underlying principle (of their funded projects) to **teach people strategies that they themselves could implement to self-manage their LTCs**. For example, individuals learnt how to adjust their response to chronic pain and **manage the pain to reduce its impact** and this generated *"positive feedback from individuals...[who] didn't have an understanding that they could actually do things differently themselves, they were always looking for a cure from somebody"* prior to involvement in the project (Grantee 4). When summing up the outcomes of their project, the grantee reported making progress in terms of shifting people's attitudes about work and how they could work by managing their chronic pain situation. Another project also highlighted their objective to help Black people to learn to live well with LTCs.

Emphasis was placed, in a different project, on helping Black people to **develop self-restoration tools around mindfulness, stress management, and self-regulation**. Using an example of a client negotiating a challenging situation in the workplace, a grantee described how she supported her to manage her feelings by using breathing techniques and pausing in the moment when 'triggered' by unfair treatment. The techniques gave the client *"the ability to respond rather than react because that's what was expected of her"* (Grantee 10). With continued support - one-to-one and through a WhatsApp group - the client has continued to **better manage her workplace challenges and sustain employment** (Grantee 10).

By helping Black people **identify and solve the personal issues that were impacting on their work lives** such as parenting issues, communication with schools, childcare commitments, and housing problems, one funded project moved them closer to employment. In cases where individuals entered employment, they could better sustain it due to having addressed these pre-existing barriers to employment. The grantee of this project reflected on the outcomes resulting from the support that she had provided:

One of my clients attended the first interview he'd had in 10 years; his daughter was then able to secure an apprenticeship on leaving school. Another client has almost completed her degree which she was going to do and applied to go onto a midwifery course, she's now been appointed a parent governor, and this was a parent who had a quite challenging relationship with the school (Grantee 3).

The impact of this project was much wider than simply getting Black people into education or employment: it **empowered people to take ownership of their own lives**. For example, the Black person who became a parent governor was **supported into a position of power**, plausibly one that contributes to systemic change for Black people in the education setting. Further, the grantee's model of support - premised on 'parental engagement' - aimed to **have knock-on effects for the children of the Black parents receiving the support**. Therefore, in the example (above) of the parent attending his first interview in ten years, by working with him to raise his aspirations, the parent in turn was able to support his daughter into an apprenticeship.

In another example, a client who had a serious problem with their housing but lacked the confidence to seek support was directed to her MP who took on her case and helped her to move into better housing. In such instances, the funded project was instrumental in **laying the basic foundations required for security, improved mental health, employment, and long-term change**.

Certainly, project impact was broader than supporting people to meet employment goals. In another interview, the grantee described an unexpected positive outcome from her project. Rather than those she supported focusing on securing employment, they began to **"re-evaluate their priorities, in terms of their health versus seeking employment"** (Grantee 6). She explained how an individual was enabled to make the best choice for themselves:

After having done the course, they realised how much their self-care was important for them...they were going to sell their house and move back to Jamaica, but they decided not to and so...stay with their children and actually reconfigure their kind of caring [of elderly parent] responsibilities, to share it out to other people and to recentre their own self-care.

A different client with a serious LTC was unable to work but was supported to reinstate an organisation that they had established and clarify their role and activities around that.

Significantly, a grantee emphasised that their funded project had **widened access to their provision** for Black people. She noted that when their generic projects were open to all populations in Lambeth, very few Black people got involved. However, a large number of Black people engaged in provision specifically for their communities. This was largely attributed to issues of trust and identification with people of the same / similar race, ethnicity, and culture. Indeed, another grantee reaffirmed the importance of relatability:

Representation [in terms of race, ethnicity, health condition(s)] really matters in these spaces...for the most part, that relatability aspect allows someone the level of freedom and confidence to maybe speak about things they've never spoken about before...because nobody looks like them or understands them (Grantee 1).

Although only one grantee specifically talked about the importance of widening access to provision, conceivably, other grantees also realised the benefits of targeting projects at Black people only, particularly in those initiatives where Black people were previously underrepresented. Under-representation in some activities / services could plausibly be related to the cost of them. Black Thrive funded some services which were previously inaccessible to many Black people as they could not afford them, and a key stakeholder reported the benefits of this:

One grantee XXXX [name] said that she would never have been able to work with all of the people that she's worked with if it wasn't for Black Thrive cos her service is normally paid for, so she's been able to deliver this stuff for free for Black people and I think the results of her XXXX [type of] session has left the clients feeling more empowered to get a job or to do a course (Stakeholder 10).

4.1.2. Impact of the Employment Project on grantees and their work

Black Thrive's investment was acknowledged as being the catalyst for several projects starting up in the first place. This investment was described as not only **financial but also as practical and moral support** conveying to potential grantees that the Black Thrive Employment Project Team **valued and had confidence** in them and their business ideas. As one grantee recounted, the Employment Project supported her to grow her idea into a feasible project; a project by and for Black people to improve their outcomes:

Practically speaking, it's enabled me to get closer to an idea, so as I said before, XXXX [name of project] initially came into the world through this pilot, this employability project...but what the project has enabled me to do, is to start exploring ideas around how we can support Black people and Black communities, better, to open their possibilities of flourishing (Grantee 6).

The potential benefit to Black people was two-fold as **both grantees and members of Lambeth's Black communities potentially benefitted** from the new projects: grantees were supported to bring their business ideas into fruition, and local people were able to access projects largely run by Black people with whom they could better identify with, trust in, and be understood by culturally, racially and so on.

In cases where businesses were already established but struggling to operate due to individuals' self-doubt and loss of impetus, the Employment Project provided a welcome financial boost, but more importantly **a whole package of support** that signalled to grantees that the potential of their businesses was **recognised and valued by the Black Thrive team, who themselves had lived experience of being Black, therefore bringing a peer-to-peer** element to their working relationship with grantees. Grantees were instilled with confidence knowing they could access specific

support to realise the full potential of their projects. The resulting motivation was captured in the following excerpt from a grantee interview:

The funding that I got from Black Thrive not only gave me a financial lift but also the fact that someone believed in what I wanted to do, so the support they gave and just the fact that someone else had seen that what I wanted to do had value and could bring value, so that provided the motivation, it almost propelled me to then start believing in my business once more (Grantee 3).

Another grantee credited Black Thrive with the existence of her current organisation which grew out of her pilot venture funded by the Employment Project. **The pilot project “was the seed” for the subsequent one** which had already begun to engage the public sector and reap financial reward (Grantee 10). Importantly, Black employees in the public sector with experiences of discrimination, trauma, and mental ill health were able to access a racially- and culturally informed service for self-care delivered by a Black person whom they could relate to more easily.

When discussing the impacts of the Employment Project on grantees and their projects, the **increased visibility of their funded initiatives** was identified and echoed in most, if not all, grantee accounts. This visibility helped create connections and referrals systems between grantee projects and larger education and employment providers in Lambeth, as evidenced in the following interview:

So now, you know, our XXXX [name of organisation] has been heard about from many places. People call us, you know, to find out...do we have the workshops still going on. You know. We're in touch with the Jobcentres Plus now...They're always contacting us for to send referrals. So, it's brought us out there (Grantee 7).

In another example, the grantee concurred that although she had been working in Lambeth for a long time, involvement in the Employment Project had led to **more exposure as a viable business** through Black Thrive's promotional activities, “especially through the video and through networking” (Grantee 10).

The improved credibility of established organisations (of funded projects) amongst Lambeth's larger institutions resulted from involvement in the Employment Project, for example, a grantee reported “I think that it has actually helped us with our credibility” (Grantee 7). The grantee explained that the perception of their organisation had improved within an educational institution because of the support provided to some of the Black students with learning disabilities / differences.

Projects / organisations run by **White people (for all local populations) gained invaluable insights from the other funded projects** when brought together by the Black Thrive team. Within this arena, the focus on equality and inclusion was described as “an inspirational and enlightening and educational piece” (Grantee 4) and the intention was to take that learning and deliver a similar programme in the same way in other parts of the country.

The impact on a different organisation was so profound that they had **begun to reassess their perceptions and approach to diversity and inclusion**, realising that they needed to “educate” themselves more. As one grantee stressed, “through the reflective routes of Black Thrive, I've gained such a perspective from Black people” (Grantee 9). An increase in awareness resulted in the grantee's commitment to changing internal organisational approaches to the recruitment of trainees and working towards a more diverse workforce, for instance, she shared:

When we next have a recruitment drive...we'll be a lot more aware of where we place like our leaflets and making sure that it's not just in services, that we're branching out to community organisations (Grantee 9).

Evidently, lasting impacts were also experienced by the grantee on a personal level because the group reflections with the other grantees (mainly Black) had opened her eyes into understanding the experiences of Black people and racism.

The grassroots projects run by grantees were able to **build relationships and connections** with each other. They knew what each other were doing by engaging with a WhatsApp group, email and attending group meetings. A Black Thrive stakeholder reiterated, *"they had a WhatsApp group, they had a group email, and that meant they could build both personal and professional relationships with each other"* (Stakeholder 10).

Capacity building (discussed in detail later in this chapter) was a cornerstone of the development of funded projects, enabling individuals and organisations (at a grassroots level) to learn and grow. Grantees with lived experience of the very barriers they were trying to support their local Black communities to overcome invested even more of themselves to create 'change' – efforts that were bolstered by the *"massive support that they were getting from Black Thrive"* (Grantee 2). All interviewees echoed that **substantial and ongoing support by the Black Thrive team underpinned the design, delivery, and success of their projects.**

The **unexpected and unprecedented capacity building and wellness support** represented **'added value'** for grantees who were **empowered** themselves to in turn empower Lambeth's Black population. In their interviews, Black Thrive was articulated as being a source of support permanently available to help develop their ideas, working with them to help them achieve positive outcomes – a rare concept amongst traditional funders. A stakeholder reaffirmed that the reason behind this approach was to empower grantees to be able to apply for more funding to sustain their projects beyond the lifetime of Black Thrive, by giving, *"them the tools and the capacity to continue on doing the work...tailored work for Black people with long term health conditions* (Stakeholder 4).

As a result of pilot project outcomes, a few grantees were able to secure other sources of funding. Having **developed a track record of delivery** coupled with the knowledge, skills, and tools (e.g., firm business plans) gained through capacity building activities, several grantees expressed **confidence and awareness to search for and secure further funding.** One of them explained how they would use the case studies they had produced for the Employment Project to demonstrate impact and outcomes to potential funders. Another grantee described how their influential mapping work into the issues faced by underemployed Black people with LTCs and the services available to them, was *"inspiring other possible funding and projects"* (Grantee 5).

There was some evidence, although limited, of funded projects securing **buy-in from people**, even at senior levels in organisations, keen to support the growth of grantees and their ventures. In one case, a senior public sector employee convinced by the merit of a project, demonstrated her support by doing some voluntary work for the grantee. The grantee relayed, *"they're all very interested in how they can continue to support my work and bring other people in"* (Grantee 10).

4.1.3. Reciprocal impact of funded projects on the Employment Project

Extensive lived experience, knowledge and expertise held within each funded project clearly led to a vast amount of learning for the Black Thrive Employment Project Team. Their innovative approach to funding small projects, including sole grantees, whilst

empowering for grantees, brought some issues to the fore, such as the need for wellness support, which the Employment Project responded to with solutions.

Described as a 'reciprocal' relationship rather than a paternalistic one, the funded projects and the wider Employment Project benefited by "*learning from each other*" (Stakeholder 10). A move away from a traditional model of funding certainly brought with it challenges, however, evidence across all interviews revealed the **responsive and evolving nature of the Employment Project**. Importantly, the following comment touches upon the pressures on the Black Thrive Employment Team, triggered by the needs and complexities of the funded projects, which the team dealt with without letting the projects feel any of the strain:

I know it was a struggle and a challenge for Black Thrive themselves at some points, but the grantees never ever felt like it, they felt fully supported at every step of the way (Grantee 2).

The progress made by the funded projects impacted positively on the Employment Project by **confirming how feasible it was to work in this novel way**, incorporating funding for projects alongside research and evaluation, wellbeing support, capacity building and so on. A few testimonies highlighted that the funder of the Employment Project was keen to fund further work for the Black Thrive team to embed and sustain learning, policies, and practices in relation to employment, race inequalities and long-term health conditions.

4.1.4. Impact of funded projects on other stakeholders

Black Thrive's presence, profile and influence in Lambeth coupled with the intensification of the Black Lives Matter movement during the lifetime of the Employment Project, impacted local people of diverse backgrounds, including the grantees, leading to unanticipated outcomes for them but also public sector bodies such as the NHS. One such case was relayed by Grantee 10 who reported creating a race-conscious program in response to her personal experiences of racism fuelled by the social climate. This was delivered to a public sector organisation, benefitting their employees at a time of social unrest and since then the benefits of Grantee 10's work are being experienced on a wider scale. Having run one six-month program, she reported that she was about to commence another six-month program, presumably benefiting a new cohort of people locally.

Whilst undertaking the developmental evaluation, McPin's research team and Black Thrive's team realised that working in a racialised space brought with it a huge 'emotional load'. Community peer researchers, for example, with lived experience of racism and mental ill health, were at risk emotionally due to the burden of hearing sensitive stories and or reliving their own difficult pasts. This led to **the introduction of the wellbeing fund to accommodate wellbeing needs**, whereby those involved in the project and its evaluation could purchase support such as therapy to help manage their wellbeing. 'Aunties Kitchen' was set up by McPin as a space for people of colour to use as they pleased. Both the wellbeing fund and the kitchen space represented **huge learning for the evaluator, the Black Thrive team and the funder of the Employment Project** in relation to managing emotional stresses when undertaking sensitive work.

Indeed, the Employment Project as a whole, including its various strands, impacted on the funder, imparting learning that reportedly led to **them contemplating rolling out wellbeing type funds across all their projects**. In their interview, the funder emphasised that the insights gained from the Employment Project had informed their thinking about the different components that are required when funding and working

with projects. A drive to work better with those projects allocated funding was expressed:

I think it's probably about working in trusted partnerships and evolving our work as a funder, and I was learning about how to be a good and better funder in these spaces, versus like...more traditional type approach I guess, which is 'here's some money, have some outcomes', but that's fairly reductionist because I think even if funders operate in that way they can be different as well (Stakeholder 11).

Interviews with White-led organisations revealed a significant impact on them (discussed earlier) resulting from working closely with the funded projects and gaining detailed and profound understandings of issues of race, oppression and so on. No doubt, the ripple effect of **this learning was conveyed as spreading far and wide beyond the duration of the Employment Project, informing policies, procedures, and practices in future work with clients and/or partners.** Indeed, a stakeholder emphasised the impact of working with the Black Thrive Employment Project manager, Working Group, and grantees of funded projects:

This project has fast-tracked us with confidence and strategies...this work basically super boosted the way in which we are addressing anti-oppressive practices. And we've learned from doing this really focused piece of work around working in a local community with a specific group thinking about Black heritage. In a way before we had lots of various different people coming to the organisation and we didn't place race centre on a – in a team meeting. We might have been dancing around the issues. We thought we were working in an anti-oppressive way, but we weren't (Stakeholder 7).

Evidently, the Employment Project **built and improved relationships and connections** at a grass roots level between the funded projects, but this was also achieved (in some cases) at a strategic level between funded projects and the local authority, NHS, and education institutions. Whilst it is difficult to reach any conclusions about the impact of funded projects on these larger organisations, based on interview evidence it is possible to surmise that, for instance, the ongoing referrals between an education provider and a funded project and, a different project securing further contracts with the public sector suggests those **external stakeholders recognised the value of funded projects and benefited** from setting up referral systems and/or using their services.

4.2. Capacity building support

The capacity building support was an unexpected element of the Employment Project for many grantees but was embraced by all of those who discussed it. Described as an “*anomaly*”, grantees had never heard of or experienced anything similar when applying for and securing funding. This support fund signalled to grantees that Black Thrive was **investing in their longevity, helping them to develop themselves as well as their projects** and sent a strong message about Black Thrive's ethos, which was conveyed in a grantee narrative - “*The fact that an organisation like Black Thrive is interested in me being sustainable as a small business really sets the tone and the character of what Black Thrive are really about*” (Grantee 1).

The Employment Project drew on the services of an external consultant with extensive experience of working with local voluntary organisations who understood that **grantees with lived experience held the solutions to the problems within their communities but struggled with the 'business' side of their ventures**, including setting up their aims and objectives in line with funders requirements. An “*intervention to help grantees*” to meet the conditions of funders was arranged by the Black Thrive team. During his interview, the consultant recounted advising that grantees be

supported to outline, “*ideas and the mission statements, their aims and objectives, project outputs and project outcomes, laid out and clarified*” in preparation for funding opportunities (Stakeholder 12).

A health check template was developed by the consultant to diagnose the issues encountered by each grantee followed by a summary report for each of them. Black Thrive’s Employment Project Team had compiled a list of additional consultants that grantees could contact and work with on fulfilling specific requirements identified in their health checks.

A member of the Black Thrive Employment Project Team surmised that the additional support from the project might have empowered the grantees to deliver during the two difficult years of the pandemic and whilst explicit reference was not made to the pandemic, the accounts of grantees directly and indirectly highlighted **the empowering impact of receiving capacity building support**. For example, Grantee 1 relayed the long-term benefits of engaging with the additional support provided by the project:

They were very intentional about how they supported us and made sure that we had all the resources to be able to make this move or to engage in this particular pot of funding to support our businesses moving forward because they believe in what we’re doing, so that level of empowerment is benefiting me now and I’m about to finish working with Black Thrive, that for me is long-term change.

Advice and support provided through Black Thrive’s networks and more formal structures was described as **offering reassurance to grantees that the barriers they were experiencing were real but could be overcome**. As a result, there was a sense that help was always there should it be needed, and as one grantee relayed, “*you were able to get advice and support and to feel that you weren’t in it on your own*” (Grantee 3).

Grantees recalled gaining advice through Black Thrive funded consultants on the structure of their organisations / businesses, **how to write bids, develop business plans, gaining clarity on business focus and target communities and how to access funding**. One grantee reported receiving guidance on the location of her business, which influenced her to rethink and move her business into the heart of the Black community to better serve their needs:

The current capacity building fund from Black Thrive has enabled me to reframe, not only my own business, which is outside of Black Thrive, but it’s enabled me to reconfigure how I’m doing my business in terms of its location...So, I’m thinking about serving the community, in the community (Grantee 6).

Grantee 6 and another grantee recounted the advice they had received on the structure of their businesses, in determining what would be best suited to their individual business objectives. Although Grantee 3 decided against setting up a different structure, she recalled the time she had to ‘reflect’ on which structure might best serve her business interests. Both grantees were guided in a particular direction in terms of organisational structure that required significant work to convert to a new status.

To improve experience, a grantee suggested offering a broader palette of options as part of capacity building, and a mentor to discuss the options with before embarking on a particular course of action to avoid wasting grantee time and project funds. **The need to avoid assumptions about grantee readiness was stressed, and the need to establish whether they understood the level of commitment required**, for example, to become a Community Interest Company (CIC). Where grantees had been

advised to pursue a different company structure, in a couple of cases, they expressed the burden of attempting to do this alongside other project and personal responsibilities.

Several grantees received **support with marketing and branding** to help make their projects more visible to prospective clients and attractive to potential funders. Evidently, some grantees hadn't focused on this area of business development before, and neither had they received any support with it. The impact of this specific support was immediate and evidenced in a grantee account. In this example, the grantee was struggling to recruit participants for her funded project. In response, the Employment Project provided additional resource i.e., released funds for the grantee to gain expert guidance on developing and running a social media campaign. The benefits were experienced quickly by the grantee, she stated, *"and that helped me, supported me to sort of get the word out through various channels"* (Grantee 6).

The above example demonstrates a departure from traditional ways of allocating funding and working with grantees. In a scenario where, typically, a less engaged funder may have withdrawn funding, **the Black Thrive Employment Project Team showed flexibility and helped resolve the challenges** experienced by the grantee. The holistic approach to grant making meant that grantees were supported every step of the way with all parts of their projects.

4.3. Wellbeing Fund

Acknowledging the importance of protecting the mental health and wellbeing of the Employment Team and Working Group, Black Thrive launched the wellbeing fund to support their self-care. McPin also introduced this support for their staff, including the community peer researchers, and Black Thrive extended the fund to grantees too. Grantee accounts stressed that their lived experience of, for instance, racism, inequality, mental ill health and learning differences / disabilities, inevitably created trauma with some of this distress being lifelong. Supporting other Black people with some of those issues brought back the memories and pain - the following excerpts bring to the fore some of the grantee experiences:

Doing this project, I didn't realise how close I would get that, get towards my family history and re-traumatisation of the material that I was dealing with...My own vicarious trauma. I was really re-triggered (Grantee 6).

It's quite traumatic when you have to keep listening to the same thing. I mean, I'm not saying xx would not experience the same. But for someone like me who was at that place, felt it, knew it, and then seeing 17 other people in the same position was, like, listen, this is quite heavy (Grantee 7).

With such experiences, being able to access a fund for wellbeing activities was vital and welcomed by the grantees. Therapy, massage, workplace wellbeing exercise, books and other activities and materials were funded to ensure self-care and minimise the effects of trauma. Grantees used words such as 'care' and 'helped' and removing some of "the tax of delivery" (Grantee 1) to describe the impact on their wellbeing. Again, the responsiveness of the Black Thrive team to grantee needs was emphasised, and their approach to supporting grantees was perceived as 'radical'.

4.4. No Wrong Door initiative

The No Wrong Door project began as a sub-project of the Black Thrive 'Employment Project', also funded by Impact on Urban Health (IoUH). After running for around 18 months, further funding was secured for the initiative to boost the capacity and resource in the Black Thrive Employment Project Team. They emphasised that without

the initial resource from IoUH other ventures would not have been possible: *“If we hadn’t got money for the Employment Project, we would not have had the resource to bid for the money we’ve now bid for from Cornerstone for example, to do the No Wrong Door Project. If you fund the backbone, we can have resources to do different things”* (Stakeholder 9). Indeed, the continuation of the No Wrong Door initiative was perceived as the legacy of the Employment Project.

Born out of data from the ‘One to Many’ report by the Guys and St Thomas’ Charity into the extent of LTCs in Lambeth’s Black population, the No Wrong Door project **aimed to build relationships and connections between employment support providers in Lambeth** and address a fragmented support system, prone to duplication, hence resulting in the individual seeking support having a disjointed employment support journey. By creating a coherent network of providers who share information with each other, the intention is to ensure that each Black and Disabled individual receives a seamless transition to the employment support they require at the next stage of their journey. Stakeholder 1 underscored her understanding of the project:

I think part of the rationale is that people don’t like having to retell difficult stories multiple times so one of the aspects is can they look at some kind of passport system where people can just share information without having to recount traumatic events multiple times or they’ll fall through cracks and don’t know what their next step is.

Across the interviews a consensus emerged that it **was too soon to identify the achievements** of the No Wrong Door project. Nevertheless, interviewees reflected optimism in the project, particularly in initially focusing in on a part of the employment system rather than the whole, to achieve better outcomes for Black Disabled people in Lambeth.

By harnessing the collective voice of the No Wrong Door partnership of five core providers these organisations could potentially be better heard than if individually attempting to engage with large employers. The following excerpt underscored the possible benefits of seeing the project to fruition:

One of the challenges we all have is connecting with employers, even though there are many employers in Lambeth, some pretty major ones, if we each with our tiny voices from our tiny organisations keep knocking on their doors it’s much less effective than it will be with just one voice (Stakeholder 3).

Whilst a stakeholder expressed disappointment that the ambition of the No Wrong Door project was yet to be fulfilled, he did deliberate on how the learning activities - for example, independent evaluation - might inform stakeholders of what worked, what didn’t, and bring them to reflect on their own involvement and how they might work more collaboratively. Such learning, in his view, was in itself *“a positive change of a system”* (Grantee 2).

Partners of the collaboration demonstrated their commitment to the pilot by regularly attending the meetings, but a stakeholder explained the key challenge was *“trying to get disparate voices in the room to agree on things, trying to make sure everybody has the same understanding, and everybody has the same sort of commitment and able to push or pull in the same direction”* (Grantee 2).

Indeed, whilst undertaking the interviews, two stakeholders reaffirmed that their understanding of the project was still coming together and developing rather than developed. In one of these cases some uncertainty was expressed about the origins of the project, and this was perhaps due to getting involved in the project later.

In another example, a stakeholder explained that so far, the discussions in relation to the No Wrong Door project, whilst useful, had been more academic and strategic rather than focusing on “*the nuts and bolts*” of the operational issues. The missing piece of the jigsaw in his view was the absence of employers themselves in a forum that was primarily concerned with addressing employment outcomes. This was contrasted with his experience of a different project with similar aims:

That also sought systems change in improving employment outcomes, but which engaged with major employers in Lambeth such as XXXX [name of employer]. Without direct contact with employers as key stakeholders, the potential for systems change is already reduced (Stakeholder 3).

The No Wrong Door venture was seen as an ambitious one – “*really big and slightly unwieldy*” (Stakeholder 6). This was for a number of reasons: in the challenge of bringing together diverse providers (established and smaller organisations) at the same pace; establishing how different organisations might ‘fit together’ within the system to achieve change; and getting buy-in from organisations that hadn’t worked together before with limited awareness of the scope of others’ roles. Instead, one stakeholder stressed that the project should begin smaller, providing opportunities to learn lessons, before upscaling:

Test something quite concrete and small and look about how can we scale it up and take it elsewhere but in order to do that you have to make it quite contained to be able to [actually monitor] change (Stakeholder 6).

Another account revealed that their attempt to **pilot a shared referral system** had been unsuccessful as the anticipated number of referrals had not come in. This was partly attributed to senior leaders of collaborating organisations not understanding the urgency to set the pilot in motion by making referrals – practitioners on the ground with the caseloads were felt to be better placed to do this (Grantee 2). Conversely, this could have been due to the partners being unclear about what their roles were and a general lack of clarity on the No Wrong Door aims.

5

Understanding the Impact of the Employment Project on Systems Change

The theory of change for the Black Thrive Employment Project established a series of activities, outcomes and long-term goals against four categories of systems change:

- Strategic learning and mental models.
- Policies, practices and resource flows.
- Relationships and connections.
- Power and decision-making.

Stakeholders and grant recipients discussed ways in which the programme overall, and the projects funded, were able to make progress in these areas.

Black Thrive understands the systems change element of its work as bringing together bottom-up grassroots project work and top-down influencing of political and operational systems. Empowering Black people with lived experience of disability and unemployment to run their own projects would help to illustrate gaps in services, and better ways of working, to statutory services. Using a community grant-making model would also change the way resource is distributed, placing decision-making power directly into the hands of Black communities.

The idea of a community funding pot would sort of give the community the chance to fund things that they thought was important. And through that we would change what gets funded by the system. We would change the understanding of what the issues were that needed to be tackled, from commissioners in local government and NHS and so on, they would basically organise the system differently. (Stakeholder 9)

Systems change and the conditions for achieving it were understood across the different stakeholders of the Employment Project, ranging from grantees, Working Group members and the team undertaking the developmental evaluation. Interviewees were able to describe concepts of systems change, and what they felt the Black Thrive Employment Project was trying to achieve. One stakeholder noted the Employment Project had shifted from an outcome-based project to one based on growth and development. They reported: “instead of seeking outcomes as in a change in the number of people employed, it’s now become more about laying the seeds in the soil, so laying the foundations for systems to change over time” (Stakeholder 7). Some grantees were less capable of describing their own role within systems change, however, or of identifying outputs and outcomes that might contribute to change in the

employment system. This may indicate that these groups did not yet have the level of understanding and capability to engage in the level of strategic work that Black Thrive had envisaged. If this is the case, then either more work, and more time, will be needed to build that capability in the first instance, or grant making criteria will need to include an assessment of readiness to engage in strategic systems change.

5.1. Strategic learning and changing mental models

Funded projects, as well as the experience of the programme overall, helped individual organisations learn and develop their own practice, and also produced learning for how systems can or should operate. This included insights that could be transformed into new strategic approaches and learning that helped to shift mental models and ways of thinking about Black lives, disability and employment. Black Thrive tried to use various forms of data from benefits statistics and its own research to extend strategic learning. However, interviewees reported that they struggled to either access official statistics in the first place, or to get external stakeholders to take the learning on board.

5.1.1. Learning from project insights

Black Thrive worked on developing different models for generating strategic learning and insights into projects, including making use of peer researchers and trying to improve available data on employment and health outcomes for Black residents of Lambeth. Indeed, **evidencing its activity, learning, research, and discovery throughout the lifetime of the project emerged as a major strength** of the Employment Project. Publicly available research reports, a video and webinar produced by the Black Thrive Employment Team articulated project impacts, which in turn could **perhaps create lasting impact by changing the mindsets of key stakeholders**, for example within employment, health, and the local authority. Signs of some impact and potential change were noted and recounted - *“there is certainly more of a conversation by the strategic partners around the issue of employment and health...it might translate into something significant”* (Stakeholder 9).

One interviewee described a ‘cycle of research and discovery’, through action learning and a developmental evaluation, which they felt would become an embedded practice within Black Thrive as a result of the Employment Project. Another described the impact of Black Thrive’s work as highlighting evidence relating to outcomes for Black Disabled people. A grantee also highlighted their own work mapping challenges and solutions for Black residents.

The data... shows starkly the difference in employment between Black people and others and especially over the pandemic, how it’s impacted on different parts of the population and I see this cos I sit on an equalities group for the local authority and I know they are too looking at that information. We are also looking at that information from a mental health perspective. So I think it is helping in seeing what the issues are and then us thinking about where we put those resources in the right place. (Stakeholder 8)

We wanted to contribute to systems change so we engaged with some mapping consultants who supported us in really mapping what are the challenges that people are really facing and what are the organisations that are working on solutions because sometimes you realise the barrier was that people don’t know where to go for support and if they knew where to go for support then that would be a starting point[.] (Grantee 5)

Interviewees from Black Thrive also identified the production of a range of reports and documents relating to the Employment Project and related research as an important step, and a new one for the organisation. They felt these documents would help to

record successes and share learning more broadly, as well as helping the organisation to attract further funding. In the words of one Black Thrive interviewee, this documentation helped them to “*trace the journey of the work*” (Stakeholder 9).

Stakeholders also identified this kind of research as important for filling a gap in knowledge and evidence around employment and Black people. This brought some tensions, however, in terms of achieving the scope of research needed with the resources available to do robust community-led research.

Some learning translated into limited changes in policy, practices and resource flows. This includes getting funding for a new employment service for learning disabled people, and reforming how the Lambeth Council Employment and Skills Board worked. These are discussed in more detail in section 5.2. One stakeholder described how they felt Black Thrive’s work had challenged existing services to review their practice across Lambeth, in light of learning about a lack of access for Black residents. Another, from funder Impact on Urban Health, reflected on how Black Thrive’s work might shift attitudes and approaches in its own funding work.

I think they’ve been quite significant in that and also in identifying, highlighting I suppose, what isn’t working, that the existing services are not delivering the outcomes that are required and that there’s a significant amount of disappointment from service users about these services that have been in the borough a very long time. So I think that’s really helped shift the conversation. (Stakeholder 2)

The insights from [the Employment Project] alongside insights gained from other projects are beginning to influence our thinking on how we deliver enterprise support or other types of activity in the foundation. So, I think it has had an impact, definitely. (Stakeholder 11)

Finally, one White stakeholder reported there had been tensions working with Black Thrive, because some people felt White-led organisations were unqualified for work on racialisation and racism in the employment system. They reflected, however, that they had benefited a lot from the relationship, which had helped them to examine and start to improve the practice of their own organisation. They had not yet achieved the level of success in supporting and promoting Black leadership within their organisation but wanted to continue that work.

The leadership team is primarily White, and I think that is where one of the tensions comes in, where we’ve done a lot of work on that. The whole idea of the Black Thrive project was to build up project managers that would build into our leadership system to change the makeup of our leadership system. Although we haven’t been successful now we’ve been successful in lots of other softer goals around that... I don’t think us just hiring someone to make our leadership team more diverse is the way to go; I think we need to do all the internal work to make our space a fertile ground for that to grow into our leadership team[.] (Stakeholder 7)

Strategic learning also included changing ways of thinking about ethnicity, disability and employment, and finding new ways of working to provide better services for Black residents. This relates to wider issues of race and equity.

5.1.2. Race and equity: Enabling access for Black residents

As part of achieving systemic change, the Employment Project set out to change mental models regarding Black people, disability and employment services. This included improving access for Black service users; while the prevailing belief may have

been that this group was “hard to reach” or “difficult to engage”, the Black Thrive Employment Project in fact demonstrated how Black service users are willing and able to engage, *if services are properly designed to respect their experiences and take into account their needs*. It also went far beyond shifting this mental model alone, to consider how to influence service design, encourage Black leadership, recognise and address trauma experienced through racism and ableism, and break down assumptions about Black Disabled people. Interviewees, including both white and Black interviewees, reflected on how the projects had affected their own mental models, as well as how thinking in different parts of the system might have been shifted.

Access to employment support for Black people

Many interviewees highlighted the basic need for Black residents to access services and support. Interviewees described a profound impact of having employment and disability services explicitly for Black people, and in most cases run by Black people, often with lived experience of disability themselves.

Being in an organisation where it's led by people that cover, that has those two components of disadvantages [race and disability] in this – in the Lambeth society, makes it easier for whoever comes under the umbrella to see, like, there is a light. There is a light. (Grantee 8)

One of the White-run projects also reported how Black Thrive had supported them to challenge their own practices and ideas of inclusivity, reaching out to a wider audience.

I think for me, the main lesson was awareness. So, we may have, before the project, we have been like, yes, we're inclusive and diverse, but you need to educate yourselves more, because through the reflective routes of Black Thrive, I've gained such a perspective from Black people. And obviously, the research [on] why we weren't reaching those people, really educated us into how we can be more inclusive and attract Black people and ethnic minority groups. (Grantee 9)

Opportunities to run services, as well as use them

As noted in Chapter 2, all but two of the funded projects were run by Black professionals with lived experience of racial inequity, disability and or experiences of mental ill health or other long-term conditions. Several grantees reflected on the ways in which Black Thrive had helped give them the confidence to develop and run their projects, through the initial grant but also through the wrap-around support the programme provided. In this way, the Black Thrive Employment Project helped some grantees to reframe and change their own internal mental models, and to build capability for developing and running their own programmes. One interviewee, for instance, commented that the capacity building support had helped them to “reframe” and “reconfigure” their business, giving them greater focus and a clearer vision (Grantee 6). Some saw their projects as ‘giving back’ to the community, while others highlighted the importance of increasing the number of Black-run services in predominantly white service areas. A number said they wouldn’t have been able to do this without Black Thrive.

I got to a point just before I met Black Thrive where I was really considering whether I would continue with the business or not and so the funding that I got from Black Thrive not only gave me a financial lift but also the fact that someone believed in what I wanted to do, so the support they gave and just the fact that someone else had seen that what I wanted to do had value and could bring value, so that provided the motivation, it almost propelled me to then start believing in my business once more and rethinking about how I was working.(Grantee 3)

This experience was really anomaly because so we got the funding to do the programme and from that funding we were able to hire people from the exact community that we are supporting, so that in itself is like wow this is the first time that we've been able to like pay everybody who looks like the people that they are serving and things of that nature, so from that standpoint just absolutely phenomenal even for the delivery partners, the contractors, they had never experienced anything like this before where they're literally working side by side with peers and people who look like they will have very similar lived experience to family members and things of that nature. (Grantee 1)

However, one interviewee highlighted how the expectations of clients, and the racism in which they are rooted, could act as a barrier to running their service.

In this kind of setting and in terms of dyslexia organisation, there's not many Black people in this setting doing this work. So it's very predominantly white based. So sometimes I've had clients ring me up and say, oh, what – where's your qualifications? These are white clients because they don't believe that I can actually do this... the fact that I'm Black, they just don't believe I can do this kind of work. (Grantee 7)

Building self-confidence and self-care

Interviewees highlighted the ways in which receiving a grant from the Employment Project had helped to build their own self-confidence and that of the Black residents they worked with. One interviewee described a sense of learned “helplessness” among people who needed help, because they did not have the confidence to find and access support. This had been fuelled by racism in systems that, for instance, taught young Black people that they were not good enough for certain jobs or careers. Their project aimed to build self-confidence among its participants, and thus change mindsets and raise their aspirations (Grantee 5). Another reflected on how the growth among participants went beyond confidence alone, as over time they saw their impairment acknowledged, accepted and normalised by colleagues:

So, it's confidence but it's also feeling normal, like even though they've got mental health conditions, that they're part of a team of people who don't necessarily have mental health conditions and that's okay and they're accepted into society, and they don't feel on the outskirts of things, so I think it's connection and confidence and feeling empowered, how to go forward. (Grantee 9)

Supporting wellbeing was central to the approach of many grantees, and that of Black Thrive. This included understanding participants' needs, and helping them to prioritise self-care first, rather than seeing employment as the primary, or only, goal. It also involved framing the grants themselves as means for developing and supporting grantees, as well as those they worked with.

I was really impressed and also touched by the level of care, that I was shown. Was a lot of care around you know, the advice from one of the board members saying, no it's a lovely you know, application, but just be wary that you're not over, over, you know over subscribing yourself. We want you to be well in this, this is about your learning as well as deliverables and this was always reiterated from the front, so the very nature and the modelling of care and we are, understand, you are part of the community but want to do something for the community, let us hold both. (Grantee 6)

Recognising the impact of trauma through lived experience of racism and ableism was also central to Black Thrive's approach. This was apparent in the types of projects funded and the way they worked with Black residents, but also in the extra support

provided to grantees. This included initiatives such as the Wellbeing Fund, described in Chapter 4, and providing space for feedback from grantees and action in response.

We're asking people who have lived experienced, right, to apply, but what does that mean and what does that imply. My feedback was actually, if you don't have structures of care and a structure support system within your organisation, already built in, right, or to be cognisant of that, if you're doing this particular work, how do you know, we have to be very wary of asking people to do this work, if they've got lived experienced and they haven't thought about the structures of care that they need and support in order to do that. That feedback then triggered them [Black Thrive] to go, oh, can we support these individuals, particularly people who are sole awardees, like myself and others. (Grantee 6)

This is an important reflection for future projects. Due to the nature of this work and the racism and ableism experienced by many involved, those in receipt of grant funding, people on the grant-making working groups and those working directly for Black Thrive might all face situations that risk re-traumatising them. Trauma-informed wrap-around support should be available to people at all of these levels.

Intersection of ethnicity, disability and other identities

The Employment Project had a dual focus on support for Black residents and on disability or long-term illness. Naturally, when discussing race, equity and changing mindsets, several interviewees made the point that many grantees and project participants had intersecting identities that could result in them being multiply marginalised. An interviewee highlighted how a lack of data on Black residents with long term conditions hindered strategic work on support for employment.

We already knew from some of our background literature research, literature reviews initially when we are forming the project that there is a dearth of data around Black health unemployment level, so there's general data around the challenges for Disabled people and work although nowhere near as much as some of the other sort of data streams that you can find around this subject, but particularly for the Black people with long term health conditions and unemployment and that felt like we were challenging the group a little bit to go back and look at what their internal processes and how could they give that information or use that information to kind of inform some of their referrals. (Grantee 2)

Others spoke more about systems and understandings of disability that could hinder Black (and other) Disabled residents getting the support they need. One interviewee highlighted the ambition to shift systems from a “medical model” of disability, which focuses on impairment, to “a more coproduction and recovery based and strengths-based processes” (Stakeholder 2).

One grantee also highlighted other intersecting identities, such as gender, which also had to be understood through the lens of race in order to fully appreciate some of the additional barriers faced by particular groups.

My premise has always been that one of the issues that we have as a BME community is that there is a cultural aspect and there are institutional things that prevent us from achieving the things that people see in life as being desirable so we can't sort one problem without actually unpicking some of those other problems. Some of the clients, there were a couple that did drop out really early and one of them dropped out because she was the main carer for her mum and she was going through quite a difficult time and she didn't have the headspace or capacity to be able to take the project onboard. In our community, especially as

women, we are going to be the carers for elderly parents, for siblings sometimes and children and that in and of itself can present barriers because how do we balance the demands and expectations with also the world of work, so that's one of the huge premise on which my project was designed. (Grantee 3)

5.2. Policies, practices and resource flows

Interviewees identified ways in which their work had affected change for different elements of the system, including:

- a) Employment and health systems.
- b) Funding systems.
- c) Ways of working within Black Thrive and funded organisations.

5.2.1. Shifting thinking in the wider system: health and employment

Black Thrive and other interviewees reported mixed success in terms of influencing thinking in health and employment systems. Black Thrive targeted some key systems where improvements could make a difference to how services were run and how resources were deployed. However, they found that Lambeth Council and other statutory services had only done very limited work previously in employment and health for Black residents, with little coordination and little data available. As such the Council was starting from a much earlier point than first anticipated, and Black Thrive had to spend much longer building up relationships. This made it difficult to achieve tangible change within the lifetime of the project. Black Thrive interviewees reflected that statutory partners were often unwilling to take meaningful action, which curtailed a number of attempts to improve systems, including the examples of South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) and the Lambeth Employment and Skills Board, described below. It is hoped, however, that initial groundwork will yield positive systems change in the future.

Black Thrive tried to work with Lambeth Council to leverage their social value procurement policy which included 'securing employment opportunities' as a subcategory, as well as Black and Disabled people as priority groups. However, while this strategy existed on paper, Black Thrive felt it had not been 'activated', and that it lacked the necessary systems, data and accountability structures to make this happen within the timeframe of the Employment Project.

The Project commissioned some research to be carried out with South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) on mental health inpatient services for Lambeth residents. The research considered how and to what extent employment is embedded as a priority for those inpatients under the Care Programme Approach (CPA) – a care package for people with mental ill health. The aim of the research was to influence SLaM's key stakeholders to shift some of their policies, practices and mental models in relation to employment, but the research encountered resistance from SLaM's senior stakeholders. This did not achieve its aim of changing policy, however; according to Black Thrive, SLaM was reluctant to take on board the results of research conducted, and to make changes in response. The research did, nevertheless, highlight the need to prioritise employment support, and to offer relevant referrals to service users, as one interviewee commented.

It's helped to highlight the fact that although people, the Trust and care coordinators say that employment is a very important area it's not prioritised in

the same way as other things are, it's not a key performance indicator, there are no employment support workers in the teams, that kind of thing. (Stakeholder 2)

Black Thrive introduced 'DFN Project Search' to Lambeth Council - an internship programme supporting people aged 18 – 25 with a learning disability into employment. Having eventually overcome the initial barrier of convincing the council to pay the license fee to set up the programme, there are four Black people from Lambeth on the programme and this is expected to grow as the project becomes established. According to Black Thrive, the project is currently achieving a post-programme employment rate of 60 per cent, compared to an overall employment rate for learning Disabled people of six per cent. The programme has also demonstrated success elsewhere in the country. The project reflects “a mind shift”, according to Black Thrive, by dispelling preconceptions about what jobs people with learning disabilities can and cannot do.

A tangible change occurred as a result of dialogue with the Council and the influence of a member of Black Thrive's Partnership. Previously Lambeth Council had a substantial Employment and Skills Board with a large membership, but it was felt to be ineffective in terms of influencing change, rarely making any reference to the Employment and Skills Strategy in Lambeth. Black Thrive was successful in pushing for this board to be restructured to make it more effective. Black Thrive was also able to work directly with the Council on how they set their equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) targets for some of their employment programmes. As with the Employment and Skills Board, there appeared to be little strategic direction in this area, so Black Thrive produced documentation for guidance. Interviewees identified the importance of having information, data and the voices of Black Lambeth residents, and using that data to shape services. However, Black Thrive interviewees noted that the Employment and Skills Board had yet to engage in more meaningful action to drive practice and systems change. This was an early step in systems change, and interviewees hoped service change would follow.

I guess the fact that, we've always talked about race and disparity but it's becoming more and more to the forefront of things that we do and using the data in a more, these are the issues and how can we put the resources in that place. So those are some of the things I think we're moving in the right direction, we're not there yet but that's some of the things that we are doing. (Stakeholder 8)

Interviewees noted the difficulty of trying to identify whether some of this work was making a tangible difference to residents or influencing further practice. What these examples did underline, according to interviewees, was the importance of understanding at an early stage the starting point for the existing system the project was trying to influence. As noted, in the case of Lambeth Council interviewees felt it was a lot further behind than they had initially thought, with regards to understanding the need for comprehensive and targeted employment and health support for Black residents. In the case of work with SLaM, Black Thrive faced push-back from senior officials who considered the issue a temporary one, caused by changes in service due to COVID. However, Black Thrive interviewees expressed their commitment to continuing to influence the service using the evidence they had gathered. In the case of Project Search, a reluctance to commit spend of £10,000 to purchase a programme license also posed a problem. Black Thrive was able to overcome this by presenting clear evidence of the programme's effectiveness and cost-benefits, but nevertheless this is a good example of the challenges involved in changing resource flows.

Even in the face of challenges, one stakeholder from an NHS background highlighted the important role Black Thrive had played, and continued to play, in shifting mindsets and conversations, hopefully leading to longer term changes in policy, practice and resource flows.

It has, I think they've been one of the very important partners in that, I suppose because they've been so passionate about it and they've brought evidence, as others have, that service users want to work and get jobs, they don't need to be continuously told to practice their CV writing skills. I think that has persuaded this borough particularly to invest in IPS [Individual Placement and Support] which is an employment model specifically for people with enduring mental illness. So yes, I think they've been quite significant in that and also in identifying, highlighting I suppose, what isn't working, that the existing services are not delivering the outcomes that are required and that there's a significant amount of disappointment from service users about these services that have been in the borough a very long time. So I think that's really helped shift the conversation. (Stakeholder 2)

5.2.2. Changing funding systems

Black Thrive interviewees highlighted the innovative nature of this form of funding. They felt that the experience had had a positive impact on the funder, and that there was a good chance of it funding similar projects in the future, and in other geographical areas. Black Thrive did not necessarily see its own role as running future community grant funds in boroughs of London beyond Lambeth, but rather supporting funders to find similar, Black-led organisations which could take up that role for their own local residents. In this way, systems change could reach beyond the borough in ways that supported other expert organisations with lived experience.

As described earlier, the additional funding streams for capacity building and wellbeing support were also seen as a systemic shift in the method of delivering funding. The intensive support given to grantees across the main project grants, additional capacity building support and wellbeing grants had a significant impact on grantees, the strength of their organisations, and their perceived ability to grow in the future. A number of interviewees also highlighted how Black Thrive had funded groups that would not otherwise necessarily have access to funding in the first place, because of their lack of expertise in securing grants, and their lack of track record in managing them. One interviewee claimed that *"their philosophy absolutely has broken barriers and supported groups where they wouldn't be supported before."* (Grantee 3) Black Thrive interviewees also noted how useful it was that grantees knew from the beginning who else had been funded, so they could build connections and relationships across groups.

As noted, one potential area for learning is around providing similar support for those on the grant-making group, including access to some of the same kinds of capacity building support that grantees themselves had access to. The COVID-19 pandemic meant Black Thrive had to adapt its plans for this group quickly and wasn't able to run it in the way it originally envisaged, but future projects could build this element in to ensure the grant-making group feel as well-supported as grantees.

Finally, the 'No Wrong Door' project also sought to influence the way that local authority commissioners funded services. Black Thrive interviewees told us that part of the aim of this project is to encourage commissioners to fund services in a more collaborative manner, and in a way that enabled greater coordination. Although Black Thrive was able to secure funding for No Wrong Door from Impact on Urban Health, external system partners have not yet engaged in the project to the degree that is needed to make it successful. Despite considerable efforts, stakeholders within Black Thrive and externally reported that organisations struggled with being open about what worked well and less well within their services, understanding their roles in the project, and providing further contacts and relationships themselves.

5.2.3. Ways of working within Black Thrive and grantee organisations

As noted, Black Thrive saw its role in driving systems change as split between bottom-up approaches of funding Black-led, lived experience-led groups to run services designed by them, and influencing decision-makers from a top-down perspective. Grantees too highlighted the important role of Black Thrive, both in terms of the direct help given to organisations, and their role in influencing the system higher up. Indeed, one interviewee argued they should have a stronger role in influencing systems at a national level.

We need their voice at a national level because the projects that they've supported, there are so many things that are going on that are going to come out of this, it's driving that momentum forward and the more we have people from the top and the bottom driving the momentum forward the quicker we are going to see change and change that is sustainable. (Grantee 3)

As a result of the project, Black Thrive recognised the importance of documenting, publishing and sharing its work, to share good practice alongside mistakes, and to try and encourage new approaches and mindsets based on evidence generated by its projects.

One interviewee also acknowledged the level of pressure upon workers within Black Thrive, because of the complexity and evolving nature of the project. Interviewees from Black Thrive itself noted the need for increased resources to manage projects like this, and in particular to fund the infrastructure necessary to manage such projects.

It affected all levels of the project – the fact that it was so short cycle. The fact one person effectively through most of the project was delivering everything and there was so much pressure on her to deliver everything – the working group, the system change work – to meet with the council, to meet with a partnership board, to meet with us... the grantees, do the wellbeing support. [It] was symptomatic of the way the funding had been structured top down to Black Thrive. They needed more funding for more staff. To do system change work you need more staff; you need more money; you need more time. (Stakeholder 7)

Actually we're gonna ask them to fund a backbone. Which allows for two posts per project at least, and infrastructure. And that your projects come out of that. So rather than fund projects, we are seeking money in a different way. And I think that some of the thinking around that has come out of this particular project... Our thinking around, if you fund us this backbone, we work on securing additional resources to do different kinds of things. (Stakeholder 9)

The projects also helped grantee organisations to secure further work. Additional capacity building support offered by Black Thrive was cited as crucial for grantees to be able to develop their organisations. This included support to apply for future funding.

... even if you didn't know how to access experts in that space they compiled a list of experts that we could tap into, so they were ...really, really intentional about supporting grass root organisations doing the work on the ground. (Grantee 1)

One interviewee, however, also pointed out that they did not necessarily know who the funders are, or which would be best to approach for future funding for specialist work around Black culture, community and disability. This may be an additional future support needed, to help funded projects transition and survive after their initial funding has ended.

5.2.4. Systems change will take time

Some interviewees struggled to identify concrete examples of systems change, reflecting that these processes can take a long time to produce often very subtle, but significant, shifts.

I think systems change though is going to happen in very subtle ways and by paying attention to a group of people who are badly served by the system and even just voicing how wrong that is and how much you would like the system to better reflect, I think there are subtle changes that can come about through that. So certainly by raising the profile of this there's probably some form of legacy there but I do think it's early days. (Stakeholder 3)

This is understandable. As noted, the Employment Project faced a range of challenges that forced it to adapt, not least the COVID-19 pandemic. It retained its focus on deep systems change, and certainly began conversations in those areas that have the potential to shift practice, policy and ways of thinking. Black Thrive and many of its grantees are already looking to continue that work.

5.3. Relationships and connections

The Employment Project built significant links across local organisations and statutory services, and between individuals. As noted, elements such as the No Wrong Door project were fundamentally based on connections between services.

The COVID-19 lockdowns limited the extent to which organisations and individuals could network with one another during the project. However, Black Thrive was still able to facilitate groups for grantees to get to know one another and share their experiences during the funding period. This was seen by a number of interviewees as a valuable, and unusual, element of the grant, although one commented that, for them, *“it could have been useful to have a bit more direction around that, because I didn't know what to reach out to people on, so it kind of fell flat”* (Grantee 9).

There were successes and challenges in building relationships, as with other elements of systems change. Some stakeholders found it hard to understand their own role in elements of the complex project, and some local government services were hard to engage with, as they had not worked in a collaborative way before. Even so, plenty of good relationships were built, and foundations were set for the future.

5.3.1. Understanding roles in complex systems

Some stakeholder interviewees highlighted the complexity of the work Black Thrive was undertaking, and how this could make it hard to understand their role within it. This is perhaps a symptom of the growing and changing nature of Black Thrive's work within a very complex system with multiple partners, which can be inherently hard to navigate. However, there were also challenges in resisting the pressures of project creep stemming from the scale of the challenge and amount of work required, and a need to manage this through clear understandings of roles and purpose.

I think we built trust and we established a relationship with Black Thrive. And then we were asked to work with another organisation as well. And then you're in a dance. Because you share expertise and you've got different expertise and you don't know them and they don't know you but you've been told to get the money. You've got to work together. And it was an interesting journey. (Stakeholder 7)

I think often that's the challenge of if you bring together a group of organisations who have never worked together before or don't work together then actually it's

quite hard to, kind of, create change because you don't really know the scope of their roles and what they're doing. (Stakeholder 6)

Partnership working was also a challenge for the No Wrong Door project, as organisations with different levels of experience, understanding and commitment were asked to work together.

We met a lot of challenges on the way largely around the collaborative itself or the shared referral system itself, so we were having quite regular conversations monthly with the rest of the partners as well as Black Thrive and I think it was largely one of the key challenges around just partnership working, trying to get disparate voices in the room to agree on things, trying to make sure everybody has the same understanding and everybody has the same sort of commitment and able to push or pull in the same direction, so yes of course we are all around table all the time, so everybody was always available, however, there may have been varying different understanding within the group. (Grantee 2)

The interviewee quoted above referred to tools such as a charter and shared referral forms that were developed in order to try and bring all partners up to the same level of understanding. Even with these challenges, they reflected that partners had improved their knowledge of how unemployment affects Black people. They also pointed to learning for their own organisation about *“how would you steer a system like this, how would you lead a system like this, how do you coordinate, facilitate a system like this? How do you make decisions about who to bring in, who not to bring in?”* (Grantee 2) This is valuable learning to carry into the future of the project.

5.3.2. Raising awareness in local government and health services

As highlighted previously, interviewees described some difficulties working with the local authority, which was perceived to be at an earlier stage of developing coordinated, collaborative work around race, employment and health. This project had provided valuable learning in how to start building those relationships and would need further work and investment to develop after it ends.

So I've had some conversations [with the NHS], did it change my relationships with them? Not directly, but I guess I, I have a little bit more understanding about what bridges are potentially required or what questions and organisation, a big employer like the NHS may want to ask somebody coming out of a, of a project like this. (Grantee 6)

One of my expectations or hopes for it was whatever learnings we came out with it was something that could be developed longer term and as I say in that regard it's been quite successful in understanding a little bit more about what's required for that greater partnership working and using more of a sort of holistic approach to working and collaborative across the system. I think this is something we probably know is already a known barrier or a known challenge within Lambeth who doesn't seem to have necessarily the same tighter networks or the relationships as some of its neighbouring boroughs like Southwark for instance, so Lambeth does probably still have some way to go... but I think it's something that wants pilots and studies or pieces of work like that that are done and you reflect on the learning. (Grantee 2)

One interviewee said they felt the project had built *“more interconnectedness between people who are working towards systems change”*, having *“captured the attention of Lambeth Council and other organisations that are into systems change”*, including large charities working in this kind of space (Grantee 5). Another grantee had run sessions directly for Lambeth Council on radical self-care and Council employee

wellbeing, and the Council had begun conversations with them about expanding their work further (Grantee 10). Finally, a grantee said that the grant itself, and the relationships Black Thrive held, opened doors for their organisation in turn.

So many people were involved in all of that and some really good contacts, everyone was opening their arms to have a conversation and welcoming I suppose is the best way, and you don't get that often in other commercial areas, it's more like here off you go, make or break, so that was good. (Grantee 4)

5.4. Power and decision-making

A key part of activities, outcomes and impact in this area related to the Employment Project's working group. This was envisaged as a key mechanism for shifting power in grant making approaches. In short, the working group was responsible for awarding grants to applicants it felt best met the project's grant criteria. As they came from the same background as those the projects were meant to help, they could use their lived experience to inform their decision making. In terms of systems change, this had the potential to create a more collaborative, better informed and thus more effective system of services for Black Disabled people experiencing unemployment.

There were some significant challenges in creating the working group as originally envisaged, not least because of the COVID-19 pandemic and curtailment of face-to-face activities. Black Thrive was not able to recruit a group comprising of both people with lived experience of racism, ableism and unemployment, alongside key people in the system who had a role in the employment pathway. Instead, it focused on a community working group. That community working group was also mixed, however, in terms of its level of knowledge and strategic capability. Some members were ready to engage in strategic systems change, and ready to take on the power that Black Thrive wanted it to, while others needed much more intensive support to skill up in the first place. One Black Thrive interviewee also noted that while they may have "felt empowered in the moment", it was unclear if they would carry that empowerment through to other areas of their life, or if this accounted to any wider power in the system.

They were, nevertheless, a central part of decision-making through awarding grants to Lambeth projects. Projects themselves reported feeling empowered by this funding in turn, as many of the examples above show.

There are Black entrepreneurs who have been emboldened, supported and empowered, to be a presence in the community is a big one. Those of us who wouldn't – and I can say this honestly, wouldn't – have had this opportunity. I'm tingling when I say it... I wouldn't have had – it wasn't likely that I would have had the courage, the belief. When I walked into that first interview [with Black Thrive]... what was mirrored back to me was a real belief in my ability as a Practitioner, just the belief that was mirrored to me, was enormous and you don't, I've not seen that before in an [organisation], you know, with a funding body. (Grantee 10)

At an individual level, interviewees also noted ways in which Black residents with long-term health conditions also had more choice in terms of services they could access.

There are more choices for Black people rather than just having to go to like the Job Centre for services that are already available to Black people in Lambeth, we have projects that are like catered specifically to Black people with long term conditions and they are specific conditions so we have work focussed on like dyslexia and the neurodivergent community. There isn't like a tailored, there aren't tailored workstreams or tailored services for people like for example with dyslexia in the Job Centre or the services that are already provided so I feel like it has

broadened the scope of support and accessibility and that kind of thing for black people in Lambeth with long term health conditions. (Stakeholder 4)

As with systems change overall, affecting power structures takes a long time. This is something acknowledged clearly by interviewees. Nevertheless, Black Thrive and the Employment Project have made some strides in terms of developing relationships with local statutory services and introducing their own funders to new ideas that transfer power from budget holders to communities.

I think longer term it's something that can actually happen and provide Black people a lot more say, or access to services that supports them... overall all of what Black Thrive is doing and I think there's some incremental changes that have been happening. I think some people are feeling empowered, but like I say the grass root organisation, those with the lived experiences feel like they've got a body that could support them in setting up their own ideas for some of these systems change and actually work through more effectively to get them the outcomes they are looking for. (Grantee 2)

One interviewee suggested that there was a need to capitalise on the work that had happened during the past two years, but that Black Thrive might need support to identify and focus on key areas of influence.

Black Thrive have the ears and the interest of so many important players in Lambeth that there is real scope to do something really exciting but then I think there's also a challenge... I think it's at a critical point where it could do something great. I think whether that's working with some kind of – another external person to, kind of, come in and, you know, observe, like you said, and do that and actually advise them to kind of say, right, let's just focus in on that and like let's check you've got the right partners in place to do that then it would be a shame for it to be a missed opportunity because the components are absolutely there to do something amazing. (Stakeholder 6)

This may be an exciting area for further development and may help the organisation to maintain a tighter focus, building on attempts to influence the local council and other statutory partners during the project.

5.4.1. Employers lagging behind

Influencing employers was one area where Black Thrive and other stakeholders said they did not have much success. This was partly because large employers did not respond to them directly, and partly because Black Thrive was not able to successfully engage with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), despite ongoing conversations. One stakeholder said this work would continue: *“we know that the DWP are one of the biggest providers of employment so we're consciously thinking about how we build that relationship and we have had a number of people reach out.”* (Stakeholder 8) Another interviewee highlighted the importance of a coordinated voice to try and engage employers (Stakeholder 3).

Employers, including the DWP and its partners, are clearly a key element in this system, and one where it is crucially important that systems and structures are built with the needs of Black and Disabled people in mind. This is an element that will require future work, although it has proved difficult to date. If good relationships can continue to be built with other parts of the system through No Wrong Door, the Employment and Skills Board and other areas of work, it is possible pressure may be leveraged on DWP and employers to engage in a meaningful way.

6

Was the Employment Project ‘Good’ Value for Money

This chapter considers the extent to which the Employment Project represented good value for money. It discusses what value for money is and some of the challenges of applying it to systems change projects before setting out our approach to understanding the value created by the Employment Project and four ‘value scenarios’ that help illustrate the types of value that can be created by this type of work.

6.1. What is value for money?

In evaluation, value for money refers to a judgment about the optimal use of public or charitable resources associated with a particular investment and its stated aims and objectives. Typically, all social, economic and environmental benefits associated with an investment are compared with alternative options or a ‘Business as Usual Scenario’ and framed in terms of:

- **Economy:** was the project economically advantageous (i.e., low cost)?
- **Efficiency:** did the project deliver a high volume of activities/outputs?
- **Effectiveness:** did the project achieve a high volume and/or range of outcomes?

However, with projects seeking systems change, traditional value for money approaches are less applicable. The goal is not to deliver at the lowest possible cost, provide the largest number of outputs, or achieve the highest number of individual outcomes. Rather, it is to produce transformational or lasting change at a system or societal level. Helpfully, the HM Treasury Green Book, which sets out Government’s thinking about economic evaluation, recognises that transformational changes are hardly ever brought about by individual projects or programmes. Instead, they require strategic portfolios of programmes grouped into related subjects but that do not necessarily lend themselves to traditional economic evaluation approaches³.

This means that in cases such as the Employment Project, a more nuanced and focussed understanding of value for money is required that sets any evidence about outcomes and the value associated with them in the context of the wider transformative agenda.

³ HM Treasury (2022). [The Green Book: Central Government Guidance On Appraisal And Evaluation](#) (Appendix A7 - Transformation, Systems and Dynamic Change, p 122)

6.2. Understanding the value created by the Employment Project

For the Black Thrive Employment Project, if we set aside the systems change goals, it is possible to use the evidence collected in this evaluation to consider the outcomes achieved by and for the funded projects and the value that could be assigned to them. This is still relevant to the systems change goals. However, if we can identify the value that is created by providing employment support for Black people differently, THEN we demonstrate that there is an economic case for systems change alongside the social, moral and ethical imperatives.

To do this, we have created three value scenarios, based on the following criteria:

- Which of the outcomes associated with the Employment Project is it possible to value in monetary terms?
- By whom is that value realised?
- What financial proxies can be applied to monetise that outcome?
- What are the additionality considerations (i.e., to what extent would this outcome have occurred in the absence of the Employment Project?)

Each of value scenario is presented below.

6.3. Employment Project value scenarios

A summary of each of the scenarios is provided in table 6.1 and elaborated upon below. These predominantly draw upon qualitative data collected from grantees. Unfortunately, there was limited and inconsistent collection of quantitative data by grantees, meaning that the scenarios presented are hypothetical, based on qualitative evidence, rather than on actual project level quantitative data.

6.3.1. Scenario 1: Sustained and meaningful employment

The funded projects were able to identify numerous examples of Black people they had supported to **successfully find work**, having previously been out of work and had generally negative experiences of the labour market, often related to racism. Although grantee monitoring of employment outcomes is limited, it has been possible to identify at least 21 examples of individuals finding employment following support from the funded projects, with the actual number could potentially be considerably higher.

This type of outcome can be valued from two perspectives: 1) the additional income gained by participants who entered work, after deducting tax, National Insurance and changes in benefits received or, 2) reduction in unemployment benefits claimed. The former approach more accurately captures the value for Black people in the community who have been failed by the employment system. The latter approach focusses on the exchequer perspective. It should be noted that additionality for this type of outcome is usually quite low, with only around 30 per cent of outcomes attributable to specific community projects. For the grant investments totalling £300,000 between 20-30 employment outcomes, sustained for a year, would probably be needed for the project to create value greater than the investment made.

Table 6.1: Summary of Employment Project Value Scenarios

Scenario	Outcome	Value Beneficiary	Financial Proxy	Additionality considerations
1. Sustained and meaningful employment	Black people who were previously out of work enter employment that is meaningful to them	a. Black people in the community who have been failed by the employment system <i>Or</i> b. The exchequer which pays for unemployment benefits and associated support costs	a. Additional income gained by participants who entered work, after deducting tax, National Insurance and changes in benefits received <i>Or</i> b. Reduction in unemployment benefits claimed	Often low (c.30 per cent) for this type of project. Many participants likely to have found work anyway.
2. Personal wellbeing improvements associated with finding or moving closer to work	Black people who engage with the employment project/wider employment system experience improved wellbeing	Black people in the community who have previously been failed by the employment system	Improvement in life satisfaction - additional household income that would produce the same increase in life satisfaction (Fujiwara et al. 2014)	Likely to be significantly higher than for employment outcomes (c.50 per cent)
3. Reduced demand on public services	Black people who engage with the employment system are less likely to access urgent/reactive public services	Public services, including health, mental health and criminal justice	Reduction in variable cost of key public services	Often low. Direct causal link difficult to establish.
4. Financial growth and sustainability of grantees	Small, local, Black-led employment service providers have more access to a diverse range of funding sources	Black-led employment service providers	Annual value of grant and contract income received	Novel approach to funding means this is likely to be high.

6.3.2. *Scenario 2: Personal wellbeing (including physical and mental health)*

Grantees were also able to recount examples of Black people experiencing outcomes linked to their **personal wellbeing** such as physical and mental health, confidence and self-esteem, often related to feeling better supported and therefore '**closer**' **the labour market** than they had been before. This type of outcome can be valued from the perspective of Black people in the community who have previously been failed by the employment system. Increasingly, economic evaluation values personal wellbeing outcomes based on an improvement in life satisfaction, linking this to the additional household income that would produce the same increase in life satisfaction (Fujiwara et al. 2014). Previous research in this field has used Fujiwara et al. (2014) to estimate that a £16,000 increase in household income would be required to produce the same improvement in life satisfaction as a significant labour market progression (1.14 'life satisfaction points'). Additionality for this outcome is likely to be significantly higher than for employment outcomes (c.50 per cent).

6.3.3. *Scenario 3: Reduced demand on public services*

Interviews with funded providers suggested that, through engagement with the Employment Project provision, addressing barriers, and finding a purpose, some Black people were diverted from services that they would have otherwise ended up using, hence representing **potential savings to the public purse**. In some cases where people had previous contact with the law, and blue light services, for example, due to addiction or mental health crisis, perhaps, use of such services was diminished. A case in point emerged during an interview with a grantee who explained, "*one of our participants...he said that if we didn't actually join the workshop he would have gone back to prison*" (Grantee 7).

These types of outcomes tend to be valued from the perspective of the relevant public services by estimating the change in the variable cost of each service at the individual level (often through self-reported measures). Additionality for this type of outcome is often low and direct causal links are difficult to establish.

6.3.4. *Scenario 4: Financial growth and sustainability of grantees*

Numerous grantees emphasised the importance and catalytic benefits of receiving grant funding through the project. Although the amounts involved were relatively small, it enabled some projects to start-up and others to scale and diversify previous support provision. At least one grantee had already secured additional income from other sources to continue to grow the work. If the 13, mostly Black-led, providers in receipt of grant funding were, on average, to generate an additional £23,000 each to continue their activities, this would 'match' the initial investment made by the Employment Project.

Challenges identified by stakeholders in the Employment Project

Although the primary purpose of this report has been to provide a summative assessment of the Employment Project, in the process of collecting qualitative data from different stakeholders a number of challenges associated with the delivery of the project were identified. These challenges are important, as they allow the summative findings to be understood within the wider context in which the project was delivered, so we highlight them in this chapter.

7.1. Grantee challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic

The unprecedented world-wide COVID-19 pandemic was unforeseen and presented a raft of challenges for all the stakeholders of the Black Thrive Employment Project. First, we turn to outlining the impact of the pandemic on grantees' projects; the complications grantees found themselves grappling with during project delivery and their efforts to address them. The inevitable impact of the challenges encountered on project aims and outcomes is reported. Secondly, the impact on other stakeholders of the Black Thrive Employment Project is discussed.

7.1.1. Recruiting participants

Many of the projects funded during round one had commenced delivery when the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a national 'lockdown'. Inevitably, the lockdown significantly impacted on the ability of grantees to recruit people to participate in their funded projects. A task that was initially perceived as being relatively straightforward due to the high population of Black people in Lambeth became demanding and complicated as the recruitment activities that had been planned to take place in public places could no longer happen.

The grantees reported that the lockdown restrictions prevented them from going to job centres, the local libraries, and community centres; all places that they had envisaged meeting people, talking to them face-to-face about their projects. One grantee commented, "*COVID had impacted the places that I would normally recruit for participants. So, those, those options weren't available to me in the way that I had envisaged*" (Grantee 6). Her plans to informally spend time in public places where people hang out were not possible.

Another grantee explained how the pressures of the pandemic on GP surgeries had had a knock-on effect on her project's recruitment plans as GP surgeries were overburdened responding to the pandemic and therefore unable to engage with and support her project. She stated:

COVID definitely impaired our capacity to deliver, we couldn't go out and meet with GP surgeries, we did try on a number of occasions to do that, alternatively we reached out to them electronically and virtually, but they were busy with the pandemic that was going on...it's not the priority for those GP surgeries to help identify and move that forward (Grantee 4).

Similarly, Grantee 3's account highlighted that her reliance on schools to help recruit participants was hampered by their overwhelming responsibilities responding to the pandemic. She stressed the importance of face-to-face communication for recruitment as this was necessary for creating trust amongst Black communities, particularly where projects involved institutions distrusted by such communities:

So, the target group that we were working with in the Black community, we know that sometimes there can be inherent distrust of organisations, of authority, so the ability to be able to talk to them and be able to communicate what the project was about and what we needed to do I think was a barrier. I had to rely on schools quite considerably and the schools were going through their own responses to Covid.

7.1.2. Methods of project delivery

Grantees had anticipated delivering their projects in person but the spread of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown(s) restricted delivery to virtual platforms such as Zoom. This change had immediate impacts on participants, grantees and their staff. All the grantees interviewed for this evaluation recounted the complex challenges they encountered.

Firstly, not all potential participants had access to the technology that was required for online engagement. In one example, Grantee 6 recounted her efforts to access the relevant technology for an individual to participate in her project – *“they didn't have a phone, they didn't have a computer, or the computer wasn't working, they were using a sister's computer, a number of issues and barriers”*. Having found an organisation issuing phones and computers in the community for free, the potential client decided it was not the right time for them to participate. Whilst the grantee did not make explicit reference to the time she had spent attempting to make arrangements for the technology, it was evident in her narrative that she had invested extra time that would have been unnecessary in an in-person project delivery scenario.

Even in cases where clients were able to engage with provision online using their phones, a grantee explained that this method wasn't necessarily conducive to participation due to the length of the sessions that were delivered. She remarked, *“our courses were two hours, the first one is two hours and a bit and then the other two are a little over an hour and sitting there on your phone and trying to engage is not ideal in that sense. Those were some of the complications we faced”* (Grantee 4).

The accounts of several grantees revealed that some project participants had limited digital skills and thus it was time consuming for grantees to help them to navigate digital assets and virtual platforms for communication:

The accessibility to everything that's being delivered became a constraint so then you have to spend more time trying to get people to learn Google forms and how to engage on Zoom and break outs and whatever (Grantee 5).

In certain projects, participants with learning differences lacked the confidence to appear online as part of a group, which resulted in them not accessing some of the sessions or dropping out altogether. To overcome such challenges, in one example, the grantee changed project provision from group workshops to fortnightly one-to-one sessions, which was well received by the participants. However, this proved difficult for the project facilitator – *“it was a bit draining on the facilitator because she had to provide us a lot of time to do those workshops”* (Grantee 7).

Undoubtedly, adjusting project provision in response to the pandemic impacted on grantees’ time not only in assisting some participants to access the technology required to go online and how to use it but crucially, the transfer of session content online was laborious - an entirely new way of working that was not built into project plans and budgets.

7.1.3. Challenges experienced by the Black Thrive team during the pandemic

Key stakeholders of the Black Thrive Employment Project reiterated that the first round of funding was allocated before the country went into lockdown, disrupting plans for the in-person delivery of the work. All aspects of the Employment Project had to be put online: the Employment Working Group meetings, and even the community research was all conducted online - a change that was reported as creating *“a very different feel”* (Stakeholder 9). A planned small feasibility study into the grant making approach prior to implementing it on a larger scale did not occur due to the pandemic.

A digital literacy gap (for example, using Zoom or digital surveys) emerged as a challenge for some of the grantees and the Employment Working Group members, consequently impacting their work and requiring support from the Black Thrive team. The Black Thrive team also described having to put more effort into online facilitation (of grantee meetings, working group meetings and so on) to help groups to feel comfortable with each other, to build rapport and work well together.

To help address grantee difficulty recruiting people to their projects, the Black Thrive team attempted to engage with the system on their behalf. Even having contacts in the system did not result in the desired number of people recruited for projects. A member of the team explained that irrespective of the pandemic, *“there aren’t pathways, so there is no systemic way of accessing the residents and getting them into support in Lambeth”* (Stakeholder 9).

Where contact was possible with key people in the system, the Black Thrive team encountered problems engaging with them because they were too busy dealing with COVID related issues. Consequently, aspects of the Black Thrive Employment Project were not achieved despite it arguably being an apt time for the system to proactively engage with the project due to the pandemic illuminating the health, race, and employment inequalities experienced by Black people.

7.2. Other challenges experienced by grantees

Grantees revealed that for some Black people **the stigma of divulging a learning difficulty or form of neuro-divergence** led to individuals being shunned, isolated, and even perceived as being ‘cursed’. Such stigma, perpetuated by family members and the local community, **acted as barrier to recruiting participants** in some instances. Participants did not want anyone to become aware of their learning difficulty in fear of being ridiculed or blamed for not trying hard enough. When highlighting this cultural barrier, a grantee outlined examples to convey the gravity of the stigma and how it was manifest in feelings of shame, she shared:

We had one participant that was...at some points, hiding in her cupboard when the facilitator was doing the sessions in fear of her family finding out that she had dyslexia...Other people were saying that...there was another participant that in church when she told him that, you know, she's found out that she has dyslexia they were laughing at her (Grantee 7).

However, a deep understanding of such cultural issues allowed grantees to convince individuals to engage with their provision and the cultural identification between grantees and project participants built the trust necessary to secure and sustain their involvement in provision.

Difficult personal circumstances prevented some participants from continuing their involvement in projects. A Black grantee explained that in her community women were more likely to be carers for elderly parents, siblings and children, and balancing the demands and expectations of this role presented barriers to them taking up and sustaining involvement in other opportunities.

In a few accounts, the **Black Thrive team's requirements of grantees were reported as being time consuming**. Involvement in meetings for reflection, writing stories for local evaluators and participation in research, at times felt burdensome and inhibited project delivery. However, with hindsight such requirements were understood as being beneficial for grantees. As one grantee emphasised:

It kept us engaged. And it kept us knowing constantly our outcomes, our outputs...what Black Thrive expected of us. Whereas other providers kind of just leave us for the whole year and then...you're giving a report. But with Black Thrive they were quite, you know, embracing and always...keeping us together. So, yes, it was time-consuming but at the same time you understand why they kind of did it that way (Grantee 7).

Confusion caused by two project stakeholders requesting the same information and unclear communication around the evaluation was raised as a minor challenge by one grantee. They reported, *"we weren't quite sure of what the evaluation process was. And maybe just to have that outlined beforehand or earlier on, because then it got to like the end and we were like, oh what are we supposed to be doing and then we were kind of, there was quite a short delivery time for that evaluation process"* (Grantee 9). Gaining clarity on the role of different members of the Black Thrive team was also discussed.

7.3. Other challenges experienced by stakeholders

The interviews revealed that recruiting people for the Employment Working Group was more difficult than anticipated as there wasn't a pool of Black people that Black Thrive was already engaging with that could be accessed for this group. This meant that the criteria for the Working Group membership were not fully met i.e., *"a mix of people with different professional backgrounds as well as people who had direct experience of having a long - term health condition"* (Stakeholder 9). They were able to recruit Black people who had some experience of the issues due to having a relative, for example, with a LTC and employment related issues, but future work should look to engage Black Disabled people and Black people with LTCs directly. Black Thrive's intention to recruit key people working in employment who were already part of the system, so they could facilitate recruitment for the grantee initiatives was not realised. In the end, the Black Thrive team went with who they could get as opposed to the intended mix of people.

Once formed, the Working Group played a significant role influencing various aspects of the Employment Project, including grant making. Their lived experience informed

the co-design of grant criteria and the decision-making process in awarding grants. Information from the Walcot Foundation, and other Black professionals working in the grant-making sector, about the different phases of the grant making cycle was imparted to the working group. Whilst the group shaped key decisions, an interviewee recounted *“because of time constraints, some of the process was fast tracked”* (Stakeholder 5). For instance, the Black Thrive team sifted through the grant applications, long-listing those that met the criteria set by the group, prior to forwarding them onto the working group. However, the stakeholder acknowledged that the group was given the opportunity to look at all the applications that were received should they have wished to. The points system for assessing and awarding grants was described as *“confusing”* and *“a bit rushed at the end”*, and the stakeholder also expressed that the group would have benefited from regular formal updates on grantee progress in concise *“accessible”* reports rather than the weighty monthly reports they received, described as excluding people without higher level skills.

Challenges were also encountered on a macro – level, which acted as a barrier to meeting the Employment Project aims: firstly, the absence of a co-ordinated employment system managed by the local authority, that drew together employment providers, compelled the Black Thrive team to start developing one themselves; and secondly, a greater involvement from the Department for Work and Pensions was expected, but as reported, *“DWP didn’t really engage or want to engage...the other big employment support provider in the borough...again [!] had all these conversations, they didn’t...engage”* (Stakeholder 9).

George Floyd’s murder in May 2020 ignited emotions in people worldwide. This incident undoubtedly impacted on Black Thrive’s people and projects due to the racially motivated nature of the crime. The Employment Project grantees (funded during round one) had just commenced delivery and the McPin developmental evaluation was also in its early stages. With the Black Lives Matter movement gaining traction and world-wide protests, race and equality were at the forefront of the minds of both project grantees and stakeholders, which is evidenced in the following excerpts:

I was very stirred by all of what was happening, Black Lives Matter (Grantee 6).

At the time I joined we were having a real explosion of Black Lives Matter and equality and diversity was much more needing to be addressed openly so I was quite overwhelmed, suddenly race was a big issue...it was the first time that race had come front and centre in what I was doing (Stakeholder 1).

When I first started, I felt like I had a bit more of an activist approach because it was in the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, and I was like we need to be making noise and rallying the streets (Stakeholder 4).

We all know that during, you know, George Floyd and all these racism and things that came out...people are talking about being Black and doing this in a Black way (Grantee 7).

Evidently, this tragic event spurred Black people to action, for example, several grantees reported that their reasons for setting up their own projects was in direct response to the race equality issues in the spotlight. However, a white stakeholder relayed the challenges of winning trust and building relationships against the backdrop of George Floyd’s murder. They explained how an arena for people coming together to discuss matters related to the progress of the Employment Project; learning about people’s experiences and how to improve them; arriving at action points and so on, *“became a cauldron of emotion... Honest, open conversations were possible but very difficult conversations”*. The focus of those meetings shifted to people sharing their

lived experiences but not furthering the aims of the group meetings, and impending deadlines for outstanding tasks created some tension.

In response, through open conversations about their (i.e., stakeholder) concerns, reflective spaces were built into the project where people could come together and share and reflect and talk about their experiences, whilst the other learning meeting continued to operate and work towards meeting project aims. Consistent with the Employment Project's ethos, this strand of the work was very much based on a reflect, learn and / or adapt approach, demonstrating that at a time of major unrest it was able to evolve and accommodate the ensuing needs of those involved in the project.

Conclusion

This report has provided a summative assessment of the **Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project** undertaken by Black Thrive Lambeth between 2020-22 through funding provided by **Impact on Urban Health**. The project aimed to improve employment outcomes for Black people with long-term health conditions (LTCs), including mental ill health, by creating the conditions for systems change. The main evaluation findings, including some critical reflections, are as follows.

1. The importance of funding and supporting Black-led employment support providers

A central and novel component of the project was grant funding for Black/Disabled-led employment support providers. Many of these providers were small, local, not-for-profit groups, who embraced lived experience and had not previously received funding to support employment or engage with the wider employment system. The qualitative evidence suggests this approach led to a range of benefits:

- ***Impact on Black people:*** a number of people who engaged with grantees experienced employment related outcomes such as paid work (including more meaningful work), feeling more confident to find or engage in paid work, and skills and training that will better equip them for work in the future. Importantly, outcomes for individuals extended beyond those directly related to work including physical and mental health, personal wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem (all social determinants of health). In some examples the benefits extended to family members and carers.
- ***Impact on grantees:*** Grantees were keen to emphasise the importance of the grants for their project. Without the funding some projects would not have happened at all whilst others were delivered at greater scale and with more visibility to communities and external stakeholders than had been possible previously. The support from the Black Thrive Employment Project Team was valued whilst the introduction of innovations around capacity building and wellbeing was a welcome addition to the project, particularly in light of the unexpected and detrimental COVID-19 pandemic.
- ***Impact on wider stakeholders:*** the project has been able to raise awareness of the issues facing Black people with health conditions and some of the challenges they face when accessing (predominantly white-led) mainstream services. It has also raised awareness of different approaches that could be taken when applying a racial and anti-racist lens to employment support. The learning about the need to prioritise wellbeing, particularly during a global pandemic and race related unrest, was of notable importance.

The evaluation has also been able to identify some key contributory ‘mechanisms’ that enabled these changes to occur. These include:

- Taking a **personalised, care-centred approach** based on **identification and trust** so individuals can access support that is tailored to diverse needs.
- Applying a **racial lens to take account of trauma linked to racism** and discrimination that may have affected Black people’s ability to find work and their wider physical and mental health.
- Embedding **lived experience in how support is provided** to enable trust, identification, and trauma informed approaches.
- Taking a **relational approach to grant making** through ongoing dialogue and responsive capacity building to ensure learning can be captured and acted upon on an ongoing basis.

These mechanisms can be thought of as the ‘seeds’ or ‘ingredients’ of effective employment support for Black people with health conditions that should be embedded in future services and interventions across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Crucially, they highlight the importance of not taking a one size fits all approach: it’s clear from this evaluation that a suite of very different interventions is needed to take account for different cultures and a broad range of experiences and personal development and learning needs. However, while this approach has been embedded in the Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project, it is apparent that the employment system in Lambeth is not currently set up to take such a person-centred and culturally sensitive approach.

Although the grants programme was a relatively small component of the project in terms of funding allocated it was probably the most visible to external partners and community members. Despite this visibility, the impact on the ground of these projects was relatively small in terms of reach (i.e. number of people engaged in the project) and quantity of outcomes (i.e. number of people supported into/closer to employment). Our findings suggest that the grantees’ reach and outcomes were limited by their distance from the employment system which meant they struggled to engage employers and employment support providers in their work. Upon reflection, it seems that Black Thrive and their funders underestimated just how much support and capacity building the grantees required to get them to a point where they might be able to engage with the system in a meaningful way. It may be that future multi-faceted programmes such as this require additional human resources (i.e., more investment in funded staff and capacity building costs) to achieve all of their goals.

2. Understanding the impact on systems change

Systems change happens over time. Interviewees found it difficult to identify tangible examples of systems change and shifts in power, which can often be subtle. Nevertheless, the Employment Project has begun to lay the foundations for change through work to change mental models, build relationships and connections across the system, and is beginning to have an impact on policy and practice. This includes in areas such as the local authority Employment and Skills Board, which Black Thrive worked to reform and refocus, as well as the launch of the first DFN Project Search programme in Lambeth, supporting young Disabled people into employment. It also includes the No Wrong Door project, which is actively building a collaborative and coordinated system of providers, where one did not previously exist. Change can be seen in the growth in confidence of grantees, supported through the additional capacity building and wellbeing funds. Finally, the project generated a significant volume of new research that has started to bridge the gap in the employment system’s understanding of the experiences and challenges of Black community members seeking work.

Challenges remain with engaging specific parts of the system, such as employers, and translating learning into practice, including in procurement and health services. Overcoming some of these challenges will require commitment, movement and action from external stakeholders, which may be difficult to secure. Black Thrive is already building on its early work to continue to shift these mindsets.

Upon reflection, it seems that Black Thrive and their funders underestimated the scale of the challenge in affecting change within the employment system in Lambeth. In part, this was due to misplaced assumptions about the pre-existing coherence and interconnectedness of the employment system (including the extent to which a system existed at all), alongside its ability and willingness to change. In addition, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic at the very start of the project undoubtedly made it even more difficult to secure meaningful engagement and affect large scale change at the speed required. Perhaps understandably during this period, key actors and organisations in the system needed to prioritise the immediate issues facing employment seekers in the borough, rather than addressing the more systemic issues associated with race, racism and ill-health.

Despite these mitigating circumstances, the findings of this evaluation raise questions about the extent to which external partners in the employment system were willing, able and sufficiently knowledgeable to recognise existing problems and take the radical action needed to affect lasting change. Reflecting this, it was a consistent struggle for the Black Thrive Employment Team to engage key system actors and have them lead activities that might lead to lasting change. Ultimately, the intransigence and closed-off nature of the employment systems was the biggest barrier to change.

These findings highlight the challenge of how best to frame systems goals and objectives and define the role that different actors can play: although most partners at all levels (grassroots, operational and strategic) understood the overall goals of the project they each struggled to describe their own role within systems change and tended instead to focus on the activities of the project team or other parts of the system. Throughout the project this lack of understanding in the wider system about how to 'do' systems change was a major barrier to achieving lasting change.

3. Value for money of the Employment Project

Understanding the value for money of systems change projects is complicated as many of the outcomes and associated benefits do not lend themselves to valuation in purely financial terms. However, it has been possible to generate four 'value scenarios' to help articulate the types of benefits created by the project and for whom, to help demonstrate that economic case for systems change alongside the social, moral and ethical imperatives. These relate to:

- Sustained and meaningful employment for Black people.
- Improved personal wellbeing of Black people.
- Reduced demand on urgent and reactive public services.
- Financial growth and sustainability of small, local, Black-led employment support providers.

Arguably, Black Thrive and their funders underestimated the challenges for grantees of collecting quantitative data that was sufficiently robust to evidence outcomes and value for money. Typically, the data provided by the projects was incomplete and outcomes were recorded inconsistently through a variety of validated and unvalidated measures. Significant additional capacity building support would have been required to enable the project to collect the data required to evidence outcomes and impact in a robust way. Similarly, the employment system itself does not have the necessary

systems, processes or measures to know the extent to which external providers are contributing to system goals and targets.

These challenges are not unique for small providers engaging with a variety of public service systems. Indeed, the Evaluation Team has encountered very similar issues in other current projects focussing on employment, health and mental health outcomes. Learning from this wider work suggests that data collection by small providers is most effective when the requirements are tightly defined and prioritise collection of a small number of key data points and measures extensively and effectively. Further, these processes are most effective when data is fed back down (i.e. key findings communicated to grantees) having initially been fed up (i.e. to funders), as this enables grantees to understand how data has been used and how they can put it to use themselves to evidence the value of their work.

4. Challenges affecting the Employment Project

The summative evaluation findings need to be understood in the context of the challenges faced by the Employment Project during its implementation. Key amongst these was the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown restrictions which forced grantees and the Black Thrive team to make significant changes to how the project was delivered. Whilst most activities were planned to be undertaken face-to-face the majority had to be delivered online which created additional barriers to participation and learning for some Black people. A number of projects were unable to recruit as many participants as they had hoped, and others had to completely re-design how support was delivered. The Black Thrive team too were forced to work remotely having designed the project around high levels of in-person engagement.

Other challenges to emerge included the cultural stigma associated with being diagnosed with learning difficulties for some Black people, and the complex nature of many individual's needs and personal circumstances which can act as a barrier to accessing support on a consistent basis. Certainly, the heightening of racial tensions associated with the global notoriety of the George Floyd murder, also had an impact on how the project was delivered but also provided an opportunity to bring discussions about race and racism to the fore in arenas where this may have been suppressed previously.

5. Limitations of our findings

There are a number of limitations to our findings that readers should be aware of. The first of these relates to the limited and non-standardised quantitative data collected by the funded project which means it has not been possible to quantitatively assess outcomes relating to employment and wider wellbeing. This has in turn limited our ability to produce a robust value for money assessment. However, given the relatively small size of the providers in receipt of funding, and the size of the funding awards, it is important to reflect on the extent to which it is ethical and appropriate to ask small organisations to provide detailed quantitative data, given their capacity constraints. Lessons from other, similar projects suggest that this most effective when a small number of measures that are straightforward to capture are prioritised, and support provided to put data collection systems in place and troubleshoot on an ongoing basis.

Secondly, given the scope and scale of the evaluation, and the imperative not to overburden grantees or their beneficiaries, we have not had any direct engagement with Black people with LTCs directly supported through their projects. Arguably this is a gap, as we have relied on the funded projects themselves to elevate the voices and experiences of Black people supported through project, and this carries a risk that the 'best' stories have been cherry picked to paint the project in the most positive light possible.

Finally, our ability to assess progress towards systems change is limited by time. Our findings demonstrate that systems change can take a long time and needs to be assessed over a longer time period, probably between five and ten years, but our fieldwork was undertaken whilst the project was still ongoing. If Black Thrive and their funders want to understand the true and lasting impact of this project, it will be necessary to revisit the evaluation questions again at a later date. However, this may present challenges methodologically, for the more time that has elapsed the more challenging it will be to associate any changes in the employment landscape for Black people in Lambeth with the seeds sown by this project.

Appendix 1

Evaluation questions	Method				
	<i>Interviews with funded projects (n=11)</i>	<i>Interviews with system actors (n=12)</i>	<i>Review of quantitative data</i>	<i>Secondary project sources (i.e., DE, project monitoring)</i>	<i>Secondary external sources (i.e., evaluations of similar projects)</i>
<p>Overarching summative questions:</p> <p>To what extent has the project enabled black people in Lambeth with long term health conditions gain meaningful employment? (Does this represent 'good' value for money?)</p>	X		X		X
<p>Contributory questions based on theory of change:</p> <p>What signs are there that the project has laid the groundwork for more black people in Lambeth with long term health conditions gain meaningful employment in the future?</p>					

<p>Policies, practices and resource flows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the project led to any change to policies, practices and resource flows relating to employment? • To what extent will these last beyond the life of the project 	<p>X</p> <p>X</p>	<p>X</p> <p>X</p>		<p>X</p> <p>X</p>	
<p>Power and decision making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do Black people with LTCs have more power (i.e., choice) relating to employment/ employment support? • To what extent will this last beyond the life of the project? 	<p>X</p> <p>X</p>	<p>X</p> <p>X</p>		<p>X</p> <p>X</p>	
<p>Relationships and connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have relationships and connections improved in ways that benefit Black people with LTCs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between Black people and employment support providers? • Between Black people and employers? • Between employers and employment support providers? 	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>X</p>	

<p>Strategic learning and mental models:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has the project enabled learning amongst key strategic stakeholders? • What evidence is there that this has led/is leading to changes in how they think and act? 	<p>X</p> <p>X</p>	<p>X</p> <p>X</p>		<p>X</p> <p>X</p>	
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