



# BLACK THRIVE LAMBETH

EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH

COVER REPORT



This is a Black Thrive Lambeth cover report, the aim of which is to pull together the data, evidence and research we have produced to date as part of our Employment Project. The Black Thrive Lambeth Employment Project seeks, over an ambitious two-year period, to improve employment outcomes for Black Lambeth residents with long-term physical and/or mental health conditions. The goal is to change the systems which hold oppressive practice in place and currently lead to inequitable outcomes.

Black people in the UK are less likely than their White counterparts to be in employment and those Black people who are employed, are **more likely to occupy low paid, precarious work**. This inequality is also found in Lambeth; **in 2020, the employment rate amongst Black 16-64 year olds was 71.5%, compared to 81.8% for White individuals. Black 16-64 year olds were 12.59% less likely than White 16-64 year olds to be in employment**<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, despite Black communities making up 18% of Lambeth's adult population, they account for 27% of people with multiple long-term conditions. Additionally, **Black residents in Lambeth develop multiple long-term conditions up to 10 years earlier than their White counterparts**.

Our starting point is always to centre the voices and needs of residents. Through our experiences listening to and working with Black Lambeth residents with long-term conditions, via our Employment Working Group and cohort of grantees, we feel strongly that **employment should be positioned and prioritised as a human right, as well as a social responsibility**.

“For the past 5 years my son who is in his mid-30s, with a Psychosis diagnosis, has been saying, he wants to work. Despite having a professional background in the public sector, that allows me to be an effective advocate for my son, it has proved extremely difficult and frustrating for me to find employment support for him in Lambeth. My family has lived in Brixton for over 60 years so I know the borough well.

A breakthrough came just over a year ago, when a psychologist, with whom I had shared my frustration, overheard a conversation in her team about a carpet cleaning social enterprise offering paid work. While still very much under-employed, my son has been working a day a week for the past 12 months with the carpet cleaning enterprise, gaining valuable work experience and a huge boost in self-esteem. It's the one day of the week that he needs no prompting. He is up early, washed, dressed and ready to leave for work. Finding appropriate employment support to help him to move forward with his aspirations, remains challenging.”

- Parent of SLaM service user.

For the majority of residents, competitive, meaningful employment is their ultimate goal; for many this goal can, and should, be met in the short-term. Recent research at a Lambeth hospital <sup>2</sup>, in which **91 service users across six wards** were screened for vocational interest, highlights that many service users see starting or returning to employment as an integral part of their path to recovery. In total, there were nine job retention cases (service users already in work); nine service users expressed an interest in volunteering; **73 asked for employment support** with **55 of those expressing interest in paid, competitive employment**. The vast majority of those who participated in the screening were Black.



Patients asking for employment support  
**73/91**



Patients interested in paid, competitive employment  
**55/73**

Although there are over one hundred providers offering a range of employment support in the borough, there is currently no coordinated system meaning that if residents find the right support that suits them, it is by luck rather than design. While the rhetoric of employment as a key social determinant of health becomes further widespread, research shows that this is not translating into employment being embedded as a clinical priority <sup>3</sup>. A recent SLaM service evaluation found that care coordinators felt that while employment and other vocational activity are theoretically seen as important objectives, in practice they are given little resource. Some care coordinators also felt that they lacked detailed knowledge of local employment support services to which they could refer their clients.

Nevertheless, our research conducted with Lambeth-based employment support providers <sup>4</sup> highlights several areas of opportunity for more joined-up, collaborative working. The research aims to explore how a No Wrong Door approach to delivering employment support could work in practice. A No Wrong Door collaboration would see all employment support providers in Lambeth aware of each other's existence and offer, and well connected into a collaborative network of referral and information sharing, so that service users experience seamless, efficient and effective support in their journey towards employment.

<sup>2</sup> Vocational survey of SLaM patients, Milburn, D (2021) not intended for publication

<sup>3</sup> Pollard, T, Irvine, A (2021) Interviews with SLaM care coordinators, not yet published

<sup>4</sup> Irvine, A, Ibison, Y, (2021) No Wrong Door: A study of employment support providers in Lambeth, not yet published

The wide variety of providers who engaged with this research means that drawing a unified experience of delivering employment support in Lambeth is an almost impossible task. It also further complicates the process of clearly outlining a single route forward. This should be neither off-putting, nor surprising. Complex problems and systems, require equally complex, multi-factorial solutions.

There are, however, several opportunities for action. Based on residents' stories, our own research and an ever-growing body of supporting data, the table below groups together a collection of potential systems change levers and suggested activities. Taken collectively, they could forge the path to building a more equitable system of employment support for Black Disabled Lambeth residents.

We know that place-level change does not happen overnight, and that for many commissioners and providers, the call to shift their cultures, processes and ways of working may feel like a mammoth task. Systems change is a complex endeavour, that can at times feel like an uphill struggle – this does not, however, mean that such a task is a worthless pursuit. We must strive to create a healthier system which avoids duplication, siloed working and competition, favouring instead the promotion of knowledge sharing, trust and collaborative practice. The time is ripe for change and the potential reward would far outweigh the effort exerted.

Systems change lever	Desired outcome	Suggested activities
Empowering the voices of Black Disabled residents	Residents have power and agency over their stories and employment journeys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed resident perspective in the design of processes, systems and tools used by providers</li> <li>• Prioritise lived experience leadership for key roles within the system (e.g. coordinator/steward)</li> <li>• Seek resident feedback both on their experiences of navigating the system and their experiences of individual services</li> <li>• Co-design tools with residents that afford them agency over their individualised narratives and displays their strengths along with their needs</li> </ul>
Embedding system leadership and coordination	Coordination of a No Wrong Door collaborative system is centralised and embedded within a borough-wide commissioner or local authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit an overarching system stewardship / coordinator role to implement / pilot a No Wrong Door approach to employment support - prioritise lived experience expertise for this role</li> <li>• Embed the system steward / coordinator role within borough-wide commissioner or local authority</li> <li>• Ring-fence funding for this role over a long-term period</li> <li>• Leverage the system steward / coordinator role with borough-wide strategic aims for employment and health</li> </ul>
Maximising information flows	Information on the variety of employment support provision in the borough is up to date and widely accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in a directory of services, allowing users to filter services by key characteristics across a clear typology</li> <li>• Ensure clarity on each offer of support, related employment journey stage, eligibility criteria, referral pathway and other key information</li> <li>• Consider supporting co-delivery of services to avoid duplication</li> <li>• Invest long-term local authority / commissioner funding in directory of services to ensure it is up-to-date, user friendly and accessible</li> <li>• Invest local authority / commissioner resource into the external communication of directory to ensure individual referrals as well as referrals from statutory, NHS Trusts and the VSC are maximised</li> </ul>

Systems change lever	Desired outcome	Suggested activities
<p>Designing and piloting collaborative processes and tools</p>	<p>Providers are equipped with various processes and tools that incentivise collaborative practice and the person-centred delivery of services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot a model whereby providers can share data and referrals to support a person-centred employment journey for the individual resident</li> <li>• Pilot an approach to providers adopting shared ways of working and common practices (e.g. onboarding and assessment)</li> <li>• Build on learning from other collaborative partnerships on how to implement collaborative processes regarding data-sharing, safeguarding procedures and GDPR</li> </ul>
<p>Cultivating relationships and connections</p>	<p>Employment support providers within the No Wrong Door collaboration develop human relationships between each other based on trust</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest time in building long-term relationships between providers to develop a deep mutual understanding of their services</li> <li>• Create opportunities for human contact between providers– for example annual conferences, learning forums</li> <li>• Consider structures to allow for the engagement of grassroots organisations and service user input into the design of a No Wrong Door system</li> <li>• Signpost providers to opportunities to engage in joint working (e.g. collaborative funding bids or consortium contracting)</li> </ul>
<p>Investing in culture</p>	<p>The employment support landscape in Lambeth embodies a culture of collaboration over competition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene a network of providers centred on shared values and principles that run through the core of how services are delivered</li> <li>• Ensure any No Wrong Door network is built on shared goals, mission and aspirations</li> <li>• Consider embedding the <b>key principles of trauma-informed approaches</b> within employment support service delivery</li> <li>• Shift models of funding and commissioning to disincentivise competition (e.g. avoiding payment by results models)</li> <li>• Co-create a quality assurance framework or charter with employment support providers in Lambeth that embodies a collaborative culture</li> </ul>
<p>Measuring learning, as well as outcomes</p>	<p>Continuous co-learning and on-going improvement form the base of a healthy employment support system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design a shared outcomes framework that recognises and celebrates both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ outcomes</li> <li>• Facilitate spaces of reflection amongst providers that aid co-learning and the sharing of best practice</li> <li>• Develop a shared understanding of success amongst service users, providers and commissioners</li> <li>• Measure outputs, outcomes and experiences for learning and adaptation rather than for penalising or judging</li> </ul>



## YASMIN IBISON

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME  
AND PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER

Yasmin is the Employment Programme and Partnerships Manager at Black Thrive Lambeth. She is interested in finding innovative, sustainable solutions to large-scale complex issues, all whilst ensuring that community voice and perspective are empowered and embedded into decision-making processes. The work stream Yasmin manages is funded by Impact on Urban Health and seeks to improve employment outcomes for Black Lambeth residents with long-term health conditions via systems change.

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## ABOUT BLACK THRIVE LAMBETH:

Black Thrive Lambeth was established in 2016 to address the inequalities that negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of Black people in Lambeth. We are a partnership between communities, statutory organisations, voluntary groups and the private sector. We work collaboratively to reduce the inequalities that lead to poorer socioeconomic outcomes for Black communities in the borough and initiate the systems change required to see Black residents thrive.

Want to find out more about our work?

Visit [www.lambeth.blackthrive.org](http://www.lambeth.blackthrive.org)



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