

# High Trees

**Covid-19 Lockdown Response Report**



# Contents

Introduction	3
Tackling Digital Exclusion	5
Wellbeing & Referral Service	7
Children, Young People and Families	8
Community Action	9
Education and Training	10
Employment and Welfare	11
High Trees Service Users	12
Learning and Next Steps	13

High Trees has existed as a community hub and anchor for the past 22 years, founded by local residents we are based in Tulse Hill in Lambeth we deliver a range of projects and services grouped in four interlinked areas; Children, Young People and Family Services, Education and Training, Employment and Careers and Community Action. Rooted in the local community, and guided by community need, High Trees exists to address the impacts of structural disadvantage on our beneficiaries. In 2019-20 our users were 74% minority ethnic, 76% female and overwhelmingly came from communities suffering structural and systematic disadvantage, with 91% unemployed or in low paid work and 37% of individuals with English as an additional language. 68% of High Trees' service users are from Lambeth's central Brixton wards (Tulse Hill, Brixton Hill, Coldharbour, Ferndale and Herne Hill) which include 7/13 of Lambeth's 10% most deprived lower super-output areas in England (top 5% for income deprivation).

## Our Users

**91%** Unemployed or in low pay work

**74%** Minority Ethnic

**76%** Female

Demand for support is high with a year-on-year increase in individuals accessing our services and against the context described above it is of no surprise that the pandemic and the resultant lockdown hit the communities and individuals we work with particularly hard. Though much of lockdown was a collective experience nationally, the

experience of our users was characterised by a further slide into poverty, (for those in work) job insecurity and the negative impact on wellbeing was exacerbated by the impacts of digital exclusion, overcrowding and the lack of access to outside space (75% of our users are residents in social housing which locally is characterised by large residential blocks with no private outside space).



On the announcement of the first lockdown in March 2020, High Trees worked quickly to transfer all of our services to remote delivery and by mid-April all our services were available to our existing and new users as remote support. Engagement with our services during lockdown remained extraordinary high, with many of our past beneficiaries' reengaging and new beneficiaries accessing our services. This report provides a summary of our services and our response to the Covid-19 pandemic between March 2020 and March 2021.

High Trees have always worked to ensure our services are responsive, are meeting a need within the community and that when and where gaps are identified our response considers whether the need can best be met by expanding or making changes to our own services or by

## OUR IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

- Distributed 212 devices to tackle digital exclusions
- Supported 99 beneficiaries with employment advice and guidance
- 291 beneficiaries accessed wellbeing support check-ins

collaborating with partners who may be better placed to meet this need. Our services are under continual evaluation and development, with user voice playing a central role in their design, so when considering how best to meet our users need during lockdown, we already had an in-depth and evidenced based picture of the particular challenges that many would be facing. We built on this knowledge base by spending the first 3 weeks of lockdown making telephone

calls to hundreds of our current and past users across our service areas to find out what immediate challenges they were facing and what they were most concerned about going forward.

These calls gave story after story of families and individuals struggling with the issues that already made life difficult thrown into sharp relief and never has the human cost of systematic and structural inequalities been so evident. Lockdown was a fundamentally different experience for children with no device to access their school work, for individuals who typically relied on Wi-Fi in public spaces or their work to access their bank accounts or benefit claims and ran out of their monthly phone data one week into lockdown. We spoke to mothers who had been allocating their one mobile phone in slots to their 3 children throughout the day - while trying to keep the others occupied in a one bedroom flat, people who has spoken to no one else in weeks and individuals who had no idea how they would feed their children adequately now schools – and their one guaranteed nutritious meal a day – had closed.

## OUR FOCUS AREAS

- **Digital Exclusion**
- **Access to Food**
- **Emotional Wellbeing**

An analysis of these calls gave a snapshot of the 3 issues that were having the biggest impact on our users, and by extension the wider residents in the area we are based in– digital exclusion, access to food and emotional wellbeing. High Trees did

a full review of to what extent our current services could meet these needs and what other services were being offered locally – whether by statutory bodies or others in the VCS sector. We concluded that the local foodbank, which we already had an established partnership with, was best placed to address food provision, and made contact with all our service users to determine whether a referral was needed – this need was subsequently further addressed by the local authority and many smaller and hyper localised community action groups. High Trees, within four weeks of the announcement of lockdown set up two distinct responsive services – one to tackle digital exclusion and one to offer wellbeing support. Information about these services and impact can be found in this report.

High Trees identified that one of the biggest issues affecting service users was digital exclusion. Residents of Tulse Hill, some of the most marginalised people in Lambeth, were struggling to access the help they needed with increasingly more services and support going online. We created two responsive services to tackle this issue, the Connecting Tulse Hill Partnership and the Digital Hub.

## Connecting Tulse Hill Partnership

The Connecting Tulse Hill (CTH) Partnership came together to provide a collective response to addressing digital exclusion in Tulse Hill during the Covid-19 pandemic. The partnership was led by High Trees, working to bring together local partners including primary schools, tenants and residents associations to provide a service whereby digitally excluded households were provided with laptops or digital devices and/or mobile wifi data so that they could stay connected to vital services during the pandemic.

### Connecting Tulse Hill Partnership provided support so:

- **Individuals could access and apply for welfare support they may be entitled to**
- **Individuals could take part in online courses that are being delivered by High Trees**
- **Children and young people could engage in their remote school- support**
- **Individuals and families could stay connected to each other via video-calls**

The partnership included Tulse Hill Labour Ward Councillors, Jubilee Primary School and Tree Shepherd. The initiative was also supported by St. Matthews Project, YellowQube and Holy Trinity Primary School, and three Tenants and Residents Associations: St Matthews, Tulse Hill Estate and St. Martins Estate.

At the beginning of the Partnership, High Trees set up their first Crowdfunder with a target of £10,000. Thanks to our 155 individual donors, match funding from Lambeth Council and contributions from a local housing association we exceeded our target and raised £15,175. The success of this fundraising had a huge impact on our collective work, as did the additional £15,000 raised by St Matthews TRA and High Trees for equipment and additional resources.

With the funds raised, the partnership was able to secure a total of 190 devices including:

- **130 laptops/tablets**
- **60 Mi-Fi devices**

The devices have reached some of the most vulnerable people locally and have made a huge difference to people's lives. All devices were allocated and collected by beneficiaries and referral organisations by the end of September 2020.

**"Thank you for all you are doing for me. I would have been lost without you and unable to understand the guidelines and access food vouchers. You have helped my children too as we can now study on the new laptop and not have to worry about missing homework. I can also study my course and attend classes to complete my qualification." - Connecting Tulse Hill Service User**

During the Second National Lockdown the High Trees Community Action team continued to support service users affected by digital exclusion and those that had received equipment through the Connecting Tulse Hill partnership. As a legacy project to the partnership, High Trees' IT suite was opened as a Digital Hub.

## Digital Hub

In the beginning of 2021 the Community Action team re-connected with every beneficiary who had received support from the Connecting Tulse Hill Partnership to check the devices were still working and service users were still confident in how to use them. As a result of these calls the Digital Hub was created and it was one of the few places locally, offering face to face technology support. This was a vital service for many local residents who needed access to the internet for job applications, online studying, and accessing council websites.

High Trees provided bookable computer access alongside in-person IT tutorials and support for those that needed it. We found that support on issues with hardware, software and specific tasks were of huge benefit to services users and we took referrals from other organisations.

Part of the digital hub included the distribution of 14 phones with a 24GB sim card for those without internet access at home. 8 loan laptops were provided for learners on High Trees courses to access online lessons and do coursework. In addition, 12 WiFi codes were provided to give free internet access until July. This was part of the 'Everyone Connected' project from the Good Things Foundation.

## The Numbers

**74** Service users supported face-to-face

**172** IT & well-being Phone Support Calls

**13** IT & well-being Video Support Calls

**22** Devices Distributed



In one instance, we had a referral for someone who needed to use video calls for appointments with an immigration lawyer. High Trees was able to provide instruction on using the phone, software, helping her email documents and facilitate those essential appointments

Supported by the Walcot Foundation, Barclays and the Guys' and St Thomas' Charity, we set-up and ran a Wellbeing and Referral Service for local residents to ensure they were aware of the resources and services available to them locally, to provide wellbeing support and to provide up-to-date information regarding finances, employment and housing.

The overall aim of the service was to ensure that people were still able to access the services they needed throughout lockdown including:

Providing Access to:

- Foodbank vouchers
- Specialised support services
- Regular one-to-one wellbeing calls on an ongoing basis
- New and existing support services

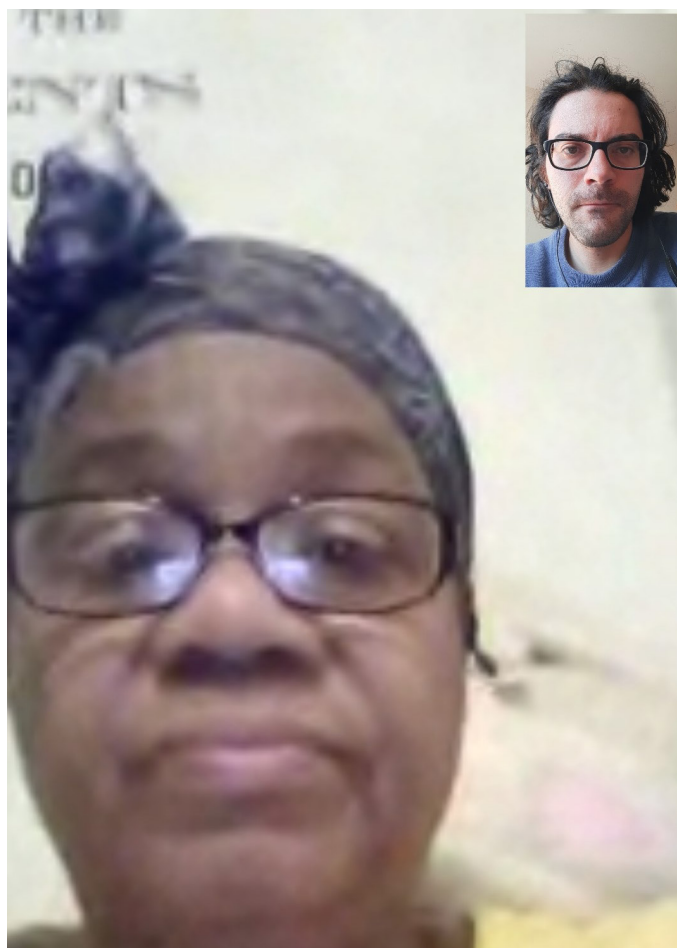
Through this service, 291 people accessed wellbeing check-ins over the course of 450 sessions. Of this total, many went on to access our Children and Young People's Services, Education and Training Services and our Employment Support. This service has been successful and continues to run today.

**291** people attended wellbeing check-in sessions providing support, advice and guidance

**99** beneficiaries provided employment support, advice, information and guidance

**138** beneficiaries given support in accessing foodbanks

**23** beneficiaries given support to access benefits



"It has just given me an overall boost in wellbeing to know that I can chat to someone for half an hour each week about what has been going on in the news and locally and that if I need something urgently, someone from High Trees would do their best to help. It's made a real difference, especially whilst I had to stay at home" - **Wellbeing Service User**

## Service Overview

The Children, Young People and Families services are based at Tulsa Hill Adventure Playground and provide open access free play and youth activities five days a week at the playground alongside in-school coaching to 10-18 year olds two days a week. Adventure Play is offered alongside help with homework, sports activities, cooking, arts and craft activities, bike maintenance and free play. The playground is also open during school holidays for daytime open access play sessions.

## Lockdown Response

Throughout lockdown, our team offered Zoom activities (from quizzes, to group chats and home cookery), telephone support for young people and their carers, and thanks to the generous support of donors we were also able to deliver activity packs to the homes of each of our young people to ensure they had access to the resources they needed. We also set up a toy lending library, delivering board games and other activities to the young people's homes – like many of the activities started during lockdown, this has remained with us now we're able to re-open.

## The Numbers

**254** youth sessions were held from March to March, incorporating a wide range of fun activities.

**119** young people attended sessions over the course of the year and **55** new young people joined us.

**130** young people joined our summer play scheme that provided a place to play, socialise and study in a covid-19 secure environment.

**289** young people and their families received our weekly newsletter including activities to do, wellbeing support and help with homework.

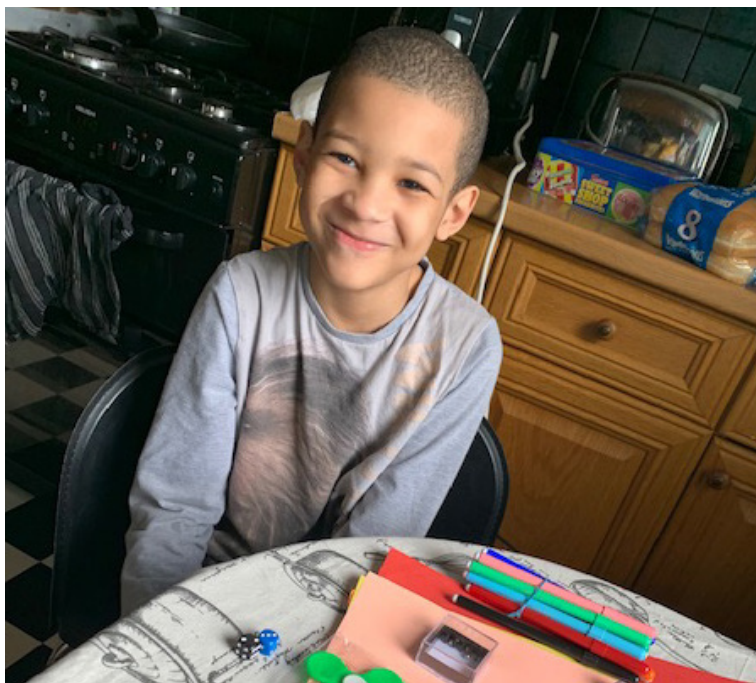


**16** young people were supported by our 1:1 youth coaching which we extended and offered to all young people attending the adventure playground.

**35** activity packs sent out to our young people in May, packed full of art and craft activities.

**10** families made use of our Toy Library scheme we launched in July which allowed young people to borrow games and equipment from the Adventure Playground.

**19** young people were supported by our online study hub while schools were closed.





## Service Overview

The Community Action team work to support residents from Tulse Hill and neighbouring areas to build more active, represented and civically engaged communities. We do this through providing mentoring, practical support and accredited training in Community Organising. Through this support we help local people take action for themselves on the issues that affect them.

## Lockdown Response

In response to COVID-19 our team set up a helpline and wellbeing service to provide people with essential information and regular, remote contact as well as a digital device loan scheme to support digitally excluded people. We opened High Trees as an essential Digital Hub for those who need a Covid-19 safe, quiet space where they can come to access a computer and the internet.

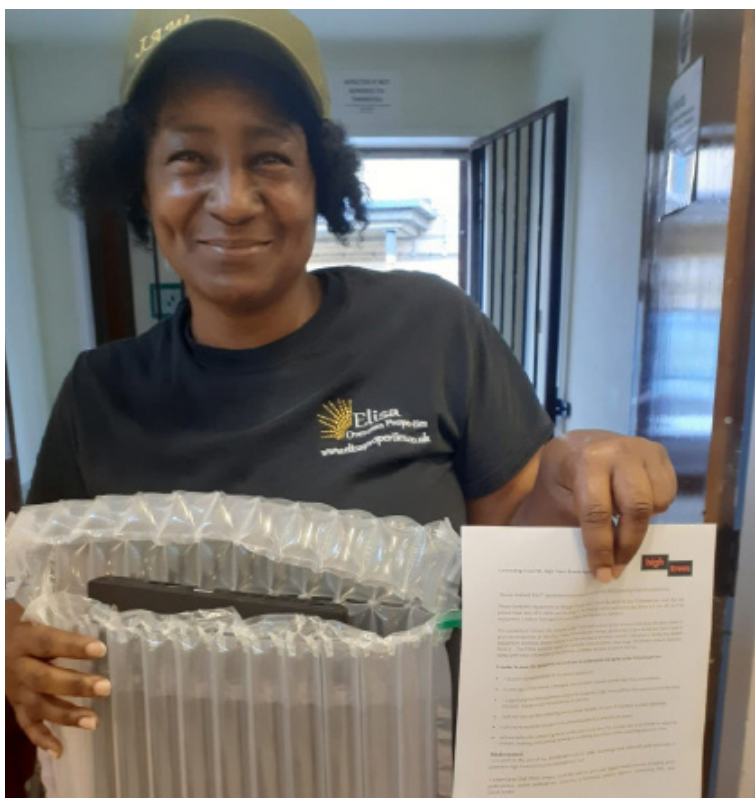
## The Numbers

**17** people were supported by the team to undertake and complete Community Organising Training

**190** devices including laptops, dongles, and tablets were delivered, through our Connecting Tulse Hill partnership, to those that needed them the most

**291** people attended wellbeing check-in sessions providing support, advice and guidance

**21** device set-up sessions were delivered to support those with new devices in setting them up and getting connected.



## Service Overview

High Trees run a wide-ranging education and training programme. We offer free courses ranging from functional skills ICT, English and Maths, ESOL classes, vocational courses, Family Learning, Art and Wellbeing to Community Organising courses. Our offer of accredited and non-accredited courses ranges from basic skills that can help with employment or build skills for everyday life, to specialised accredited courses that can provide routes into new areas such as housing, community action or education. Our provision is normally delivered across all our High Trees venues, which includes the High Trees Learning Centre, the Scout's Hut and the Tulse Hill Adventure Playground, or in multiple other venues in Lambeth, including children's centres and libraries.

## Lockdown Response

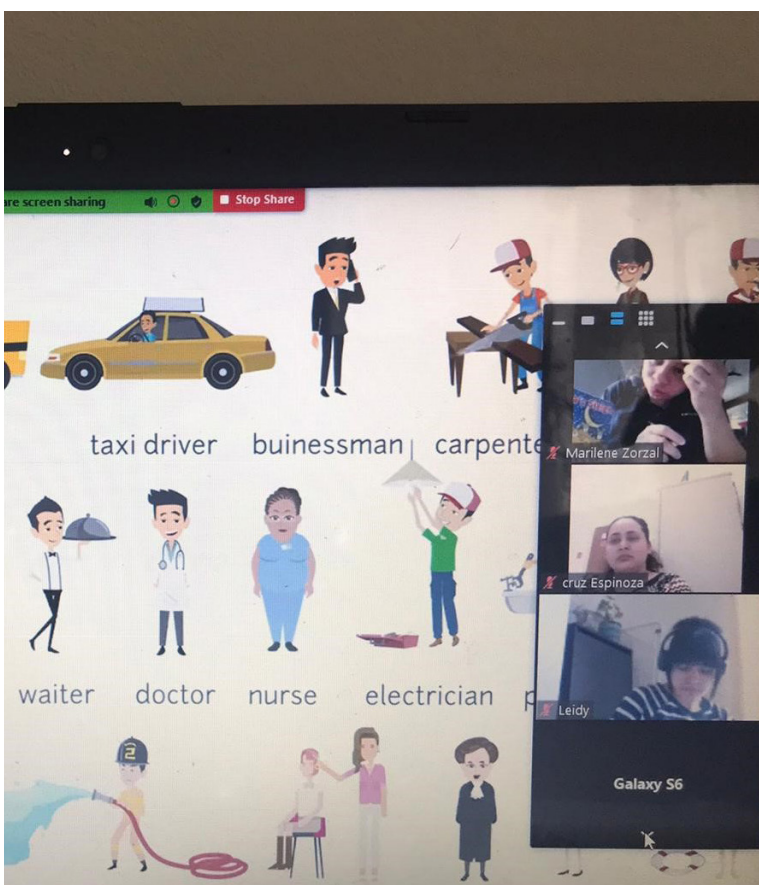
Throughout Lockdown, we ran most of our adult education classes via a mixture of online classes, one-to-one support via telephone, group and one-to-one support on WhatsApp and videos from our tutors online. We also worked with tutors to develop some lockdown specific provision, such as courses designed to help parents with home-schooling. We worked with 538 learners through this period, over 466 sessions with 200 sessions being held virtually and 266 held in person.

## The Numbers

**162** of our learners gained a qualification

**175** sessions of accredited courses were run for our learners

**291** sessions of non-accredited courses were run for our learners



**75** unique courses were run, 21 accredited and 54 non-accredited

**36** educational activity boxes were distributed to families with young children thanks to a generous donation from from Awetisome Life and Little Hand Learning

## Service Overview

High Trees offer bespoke one to one employment support with experienced advisors who are experts in helping those with multiple barriers. We offer tailored sessions as well as extra support brushing up on CVs, upskilling to meet current demands or identifying potential vacancies. We also run a weekly drop-in Jobs Club.

## Lockdown Response

During Lockdown, our Employment Support services switched to remote delivery – primarily via telephone, WhatsApp and video calls, and despite the odds some of our beneficiaries gained jobs during this time. We worked with 99 beneficiaries throughout the lockdown.

### The Numbers

**79** users through our Employment Support, reported reduced feelings of isolation

**50** people created new or updated CVs

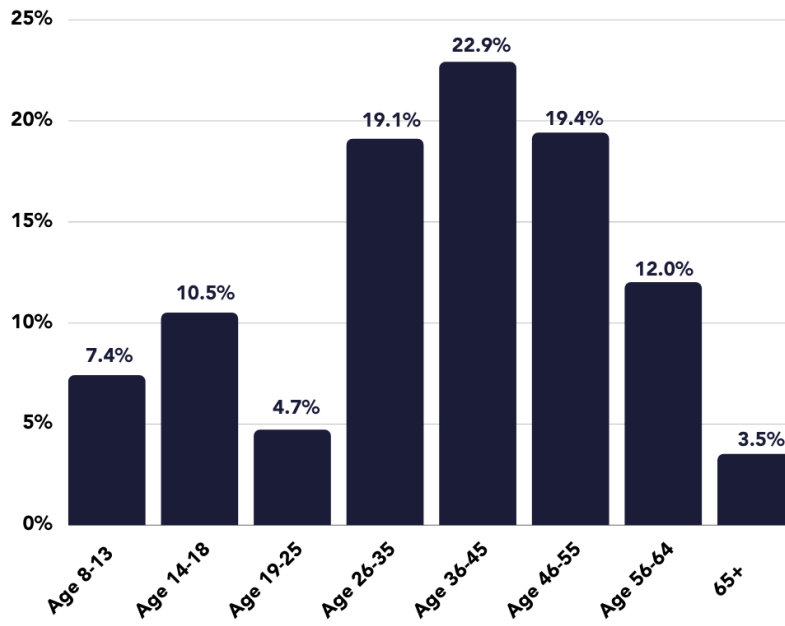
**38** people were supported to complete and submit job applications



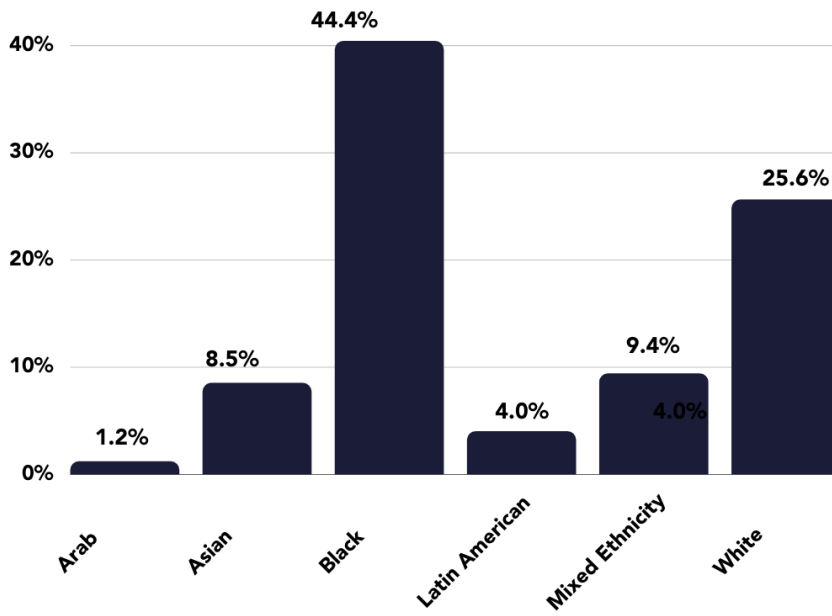
**41** people were supported to prepare for and attend job interviews

**27** service users were successful in entering paid employment

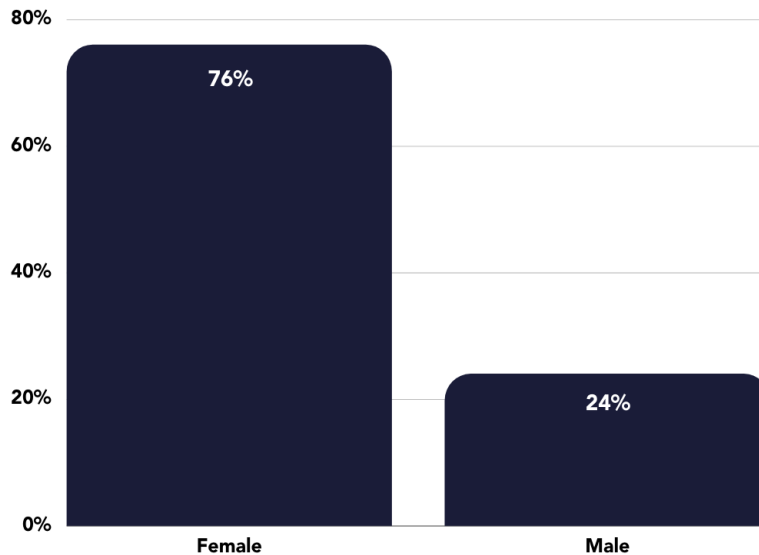
## Age



## Ethnicity



## Sex

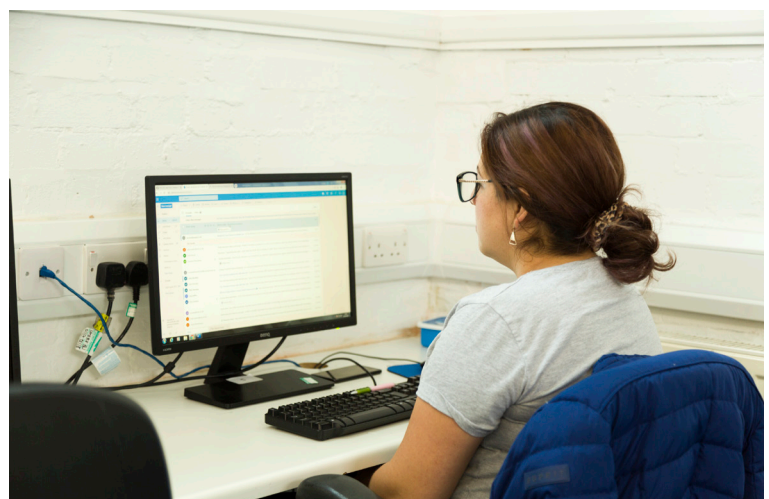


Throughout the pandemic the need for our services has increased rapidly and we are currently expanding our capacity in order to deliver support to those that need it. The 2020-2021 academic year sees us offer more free accredited and non-accredited courses than ever before and for the first time in High Trees history we are offering welfare advice alongside our employment service.

Our Community Action team will continue to work alongside residents, using community organising principles to focus on improving the built environment and expanding our support of smaller groups and individuals who are taking action locally. With the pandemic still ongoing, we continued to address digital exclusion through 2 wider avenues to continue to provide short-, medium- and longer-term solutions to the ongoing digital exclusion issue:

## Tackling Digital Exclusion:

- Digital lending library: We have set up an ongoing lending library of 40 laptops and 20 mobile wifi devices to provide on short-term loans to individuals accessing our services who continue to be affected by digital exclusion.
- Digital hubs: During Lockdown No.3 we have been running a digital hub at our main community building to provide individuals with access to computers and wifi if they do not have access at home. To date we have supported over 46 individuals to access vital services online
- Community Wi-Fi: We have been working on piloting a free community wifi scheme on Tulse Hill Estate to find a longer-term and more sustainable solution to address digital exclusion locally. If the pilot is successful, the plans will provide a blue-print for rolling out wider locally.



## Children, Young People and Family

The children and young people we work with have been acutely impacted by lockdown, and the one-to-one support we are giving the most vulnerable, alongside the opportunity to play and thrive remains a cornerstone of our work. The closer connections our team have built with the families we work with has had an enormous impact and given us the chance to work with these families to provide support in the ways they need. Our Toy Library has been a success and is something we continue to offer.

With Special Thanks to:



GREATERLONDONAUTHORITY



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trees

Meeting everyone as a person of great potential