

AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY FROM COVID-19: INSIGHTS FROM LAMBETH

Community Research December 2020



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Through this research project, *An Equitable Recovery from COVID-19*, we set out to understand the current experiences of Black people and what would be needed to support community-wide recovery in the aftermath of COVID-19. However, while the insights shared in this report shed some light on the nuanced experiences of Black people, more must be done to understand Black identity and how these identities shape social reality. We must go deeper than this small project allowed. Therefore, with that understanding, we have written this report with the primary aim of validating the voices of people within Black communities in Lambeth and showing that they are not alone in their experiences.

The Research Journey

To achieve this aim, we implemented a community-based research methodology which promoted the involvement of the local community at every stage in the research process. This did not come without its challenges, highlighting just how big the barriers to engagement are when researchers “parachute in” to communities with no established relationships. By using this approach, involving 12 community researchers who interviewed 37 people, we were able to address two priority lines of enquiry:

- 1) **What resources or support are needed now, to help Black people in Lambeth (and Southwark) cope with the current pandemic?**
- 2) **Going forward, what will it take for Black people in Lambeth (and Southwark) to recover financially, physically, emotionally and socially from the pandemic?**

The findings from our research are presented and broken down into four sections, with each section including a set of recommendations for local government and local funders, as well as areas for further research.

Our Findings

In the first section, **The “New Normal”**, we explore the different ways in which people have responded to this new way of living as a result of the pandemic. As expected, for the majority of people COVID-19 has been a source of anxiety. While our research showed that some Black people have adjusted by shifting towards self-care, there are still some who feel unprepared for the world and how it is changing. Finally, given the nature of the pandemic, an important finding from the research was heightened health awareness, both physical and mental health, within Black communities.

Therefore, in this section, we recommend that local governments and funders:

- **Use the context of COVID-19 to support conversations about public health** within Black communities

- **Prioritise the voices of traditionally unheard communities** in broader discussions about environmental racism
- **Co-design community-led workshops to give residents the confidence to transition into the “new normal”**, targeting specific groups such as older people

The second section, **Who Can We Trust?**, explores the reasons for some Black people’s growing distrust in the health and safety guidance throughout the pandemic and the rise of medical scepticism, particularly when the public sector is involved. We also look at the role of the media in the racialisation of COVID-19 and the impact this has had on Black people’s experiences of overt racism. Finally, we discuss the need to rethink effective methods for the dissemination of information, particularly for those with lived experiences of racial injustice and for non-English speaking communities.

Therefore, our recommendations here are to:

- **Co-develop strategies for effectively engaging and interacting with communities**, particularly those that speak English as a second language
- **Commission local independent research into COVID-19** that will be more credible within local communities
- **Co-design youth-led workshops on the social determinants of health** to ensure communities are having broader conversations about public health

In the third section, **Back to Basics**, we look at access to three necessities during lockdown – food, health support and technology. Through our research, we found that access to food was a challenge and for those that did receive support from local organisations, the food they received was not culturally appropriate. The same was true for health-related support where some experienced challenges accessing relevant healthcare which meant there was added pressures on (younger) family members. Finally, we found that for those with good access to technology, this was somewhat of a lifeline during the lockdown, but people are already experiencing digital fatigue.

Therefore, rather unsurprisingly, in this section we recommend that local government and funders:

- **Provide more culturally appropriate food parcels** distributed across the community regularly
- **Co-design wellbeing support strategies for young carers**, recognising the significant impact of COVID-19 on young people
- **Set up a digital Buddy scheme**, that includes strategies to support wellbeing as technology use increases, to teach local people digital skills

The fourth and final section, **The Future of Work and Education**, considers how employment and people's preferences are changing as a result of the pandemic and what needs to be done in response. For Black people, in particular, we found that working from home has been a welcome change as it has provided an escape from "toxic" work environments. Furthermore, some have seen this time as providing the opportunity they needed to explore self-employment and other income streams. Looking towards the future, we also explore the three factors we have identified as being influential in securing the employment of people from Black communities – upskilling, access to opportunities and greater representation in decision-making. In this section, we also share specific insights from Black people living with long-term conditions, such as the need to provide more in-work support rather than job-seeking support. This section closes by considering the role the education system has in correcting the employment system, and how educating *all* young people on biases and systemic racism is the first step towards tackling the problem.

In this final section, we offer a longer list of recommendations which largely fall under the following broad categories:

- **Re-design recruitment processes and job-seeking support** to focus more on an individual's values, skills and potential
- **Deliver in-work support that promotes wellbeing** by putting people at the centre of its design
- **Develop course content to be delivered in schools** to ensure that young people are best prepared for work and living independently

Conclusion

We recognise that this report only just scratches the surface, and more research is needed, particularly when it comes to understanding the differences in the experiences of people *within* Black communities. Nevertheless, we hope this report effectively communicates the need for local governments and funders, who are truly passionate about systems change, to build on the current wave of self-determination within communities and use that to drive society towards greater equity. While justice, rather than equity is our ultimate goal, we do hope that this report (and others) will be catalysts for change in Lambeth.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, when the economy is hit by unexpected shocks, we have seen that low-wage, low-skilled and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) workers tend to bear the brunt of job cuts. We saw this during the recessions of the 1980s, 1990s and 2008-2009 with the global financial crisis.¹ Without strong government action, history is likely to repeat itself as we realise the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 recession on both the nation's health and wealth.

While Black communities share some similarities, there are also important differences *within* Black communities that we need to understand to effectively combat adverse experiences in the aftermath of COVID-19, especially within employment.² To explore this subject in greater detail, we have opted for a community-based research methodology that promotes the democratisation of knowledge and the inclusion of communities at all stages in the research process. By using such a methodology, we aim to uncover highly special cultural nuances and insights.

We recognise that the insights shared in this report only begin to scratch the surface and we (and other researchers) must go deeper, as more needs to be done to understand Black identities and how these identities shape social reality and experience. Therefore, we have written this report with the primary aim of validating the voices of people within Black communities and showing that they are not alone in their experiences.

This report begins by describing the community research approach and how it was applied throughout this project, with a focus on our learnings at each stage. We then present our findings in four parts, with each part containing a set of recommendations for local government and local funders in Lambeth, as well as areas for further community-based research. In each section, we also share the discussions and reflections we've had as a community research team throughout the research process, and especially during our analysis of the data. Finally, we conclude this report by reflecting on our findings.

¹ The University of Sheffield 2020, accessed 18th September 2020, < <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/coronavirus-recession-threatens-worsen-racial-inequalities-youth-unemployment-Black-lives-matter-1.890568>>

² Elise Gold and Valerie Wilson 2020, accessed 18th September 2020, < <https://www.epi.org/publication/Black-workers-covid/>>

THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

The Community Research Programme is a movement to replace extractive research approaches with research methods built upon principles of community leadership and co-ownership. This community research project was funded by **Guy's and St Thomas' Charity** as part of the **Black Thrive Employment Project** and delivered in partnership between **The Social Innovation Partnership**, the **McPin Foundation** and **Black Thrive**.

The purpose of this research project was to inform two priority lines of enquiry about Black communities:

1. What resources or support are needed now, to help Black people in Lambeth cope with the current pandemic?
2. Going forward, what will it take for Black people in Lambeth to recover financially, physically, emotionally and socially from the pandemic?

Our approach to answering these questions was to create an interview guide that touched on COVID-19, race and employment. With race as an overarching theme, we chose to collect insights relating to COVID-19 as a way of informing what Lambeth Council and others, such as local funders, could do in response to the pandemic. Given that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted those from ethnic minority backgrounds, we saw this as a valuable opportunity to inform the development of culturally relevant responses to the Black experience of COVID-19.³ We then chose employment as a specific topic to ensure our research was relevant for the Black Thrive Employment Project, which aims to improve employment outcomes via systems change for Black people in Lambeth living with long-term conditions (LTCs).⁴ Therefore, this report draws out specific insights relating to those with disabilities and long-term conditions where possible.

For this community research project, a **team of twelve community researchers rooted in Lambeth, who also self-identify as Black, were recruited and trained**⁵. Each of these community researchers also has lived experience of LTCs. One of the principles of our community research approach is that research should be done 'by the people, for the people'. It was imperative to ensure that those doing the research also had some understanding of the experiences of those being researched. Below, we share some learnings from our research journey to highlight the importance of community research as a methodology and demonstrate how it works in practice (more detail can be found in the appendices).

³ The Lancet 2020, accessed 21st September 2020, < [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30228-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30228-9/fulltext)>

⁴ A long-term condition is a health condition for which there is currently no cure, but which can be managed with drugs and other treatments. A long-term condition is one that lasts a year or longer and impacts on a person's life. [Source](#).

⁵ We have defined individuals rooted in Lambeth as those who live, work, study and/or care for someone in Lambeth.

Learnings from the research process

Our research was organised across two organisations brought together through Black Thrive's Employment Project. The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) led the project with incredible support from the team at the McPin Foundation. This partnership provided opportunities for shared learning and growth across both organisations.

Pilot interviewing

In June 2020, we collected rapid insights from the community to feed into an open public consultation by the Health Select Committee on equalities and COVID-19. We conducted a total of eleven pilot interviews and used this data as the foundation for another round of in-depth data collection. We refer to the initial experiences people shared during these interviews at different points throughout this report.

From the first round of interviews, our biggest learning was the need to support not only the interview participants but also the community researchers themselves. This became even more important after the death of George Floyd in the USA and Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the UK. When conducting research in your own community and drawing on your own lived experience, having continuous conversations about racism and discrimination can be triggering, traumatic and draining. This led to the creation of the Community Researchers Wellbeing Fund – funded by Guy's and St Thomas' Charity – to provide holistic and easily accessible wellbeing support to community researchers.

Interviewing

Given the funding requirements, our goal was to speak to at least 25 people from Lambeth and Southwark that self-identify as Black. Although we were able to reach our goal, speaking to **37 community members** in total, getting access to these voices did not come without its challenges:

Recording – recording interviews was a significant barrier to engagement. Some community researchers needed to have weeks of pre-interview conversations to put people at ease over the prospect of being recorded.

Consent – even when community members were happy to be recorded, a second barrier was the need to state their full name when giving consent, particularly for individuals with more radical views.

Medical scepticism – concerns about the organisations involved were expressed including scepticism that a charity linked to Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital and vaccine-related research wanted to talk to them. For one individual, these concerns were enough to stop them from being an interview participant.

We share these challenges to emphasise that if we faced these barriers as community researchers, how much greater would the barriers be that are faced by a researcher with no connection to the community? As a team of community researchers, rising to these challenges

enabled us to bring forward new insights from the Black community which are often neglected by mainstream research.

Analysing

With our interviews complete, we conducted our analysis in three steps:

1. Individually coding our transcripts,
2. Collectively identifying emerging themes; and
3. Collating our data into a single live document.

Conducting the analysis in this way allowed us to share our perspectives as community researchers and compare that to what was coming out in the data. Our analysis sessions also provided a space to informally support and encourage one another throughout the project as our findings often led to broader conversations about racism and discrimination.

As a model, the community research programme develops the existing skills of individuals and builds a team that *together* produce new research. In this instance, carrying out the analysis required a different set of skills to conducting interviews and so this provided the opportunity for different members of the team to grow and excel.

Reporting

While an easier approach might have been to delegate this task to one person, we opted to create this report as a team. Although this took more time, what we are left with at the end is a final product that captures the different voices of the interview participants as well as the community researchers. In each section of the report, we name the lead community researcher responsible for the write-up to embody the sense of community leadership and ownership that was embedded from the start.

Limitations of the research

Firstly, while we believe our report does well to capture and validate the voice of some Black communities, as mentioned in the introduction, we recognise that with just 37 interviews there are still unheard voices and uncaptured differences in the experiences of Black people. Furthermore, as demographic data was not collected from all of our research participants, drawing conclusions about the experiences of specific groups is challenging.

Secondly, although a community-research approach was implemented, one type of traditional research process was used, i.e., interview, analyse and report. As a wider community research programme, we will continue to explore new and alternative research processes that are better suited to capturing nuances within communities and amplifying the value of the lived experience of community researchers.

The “New Normal”

Lead researcher: Achille Crawford

THE “NEW NORMAL”

The impact of COVID-19 has been enormous. As one of our research participants stated when speaking to the unprecedented nature of the virus; “It was sudden, it was out of nowhere and it hit everyone and anyone, no matter if you're Black, white, boy, girl, straight, gay.” Therefore, with so many potential angles to cover, we start this report by looking at how it has affected the routines and well-being of Black communities.

Anxiety about COVID-19

As expected, the changes brought about by the pandemic have been a source of anxiety for people, regardless of age, gender or employment status. Our research showed that a large number of the people we spoke to were affected by the anxiety of adjusting to new restrictions brought about by COVID-19. These restrictions impacted their ability and willingness to see family and friends, particularly those who were vulnerable⁶ and how people were able or unable to carry out traditionally mundane tasks like grocery shopping.

“No, to be fair, everything I was worried about did happen. So, I was worried about not seeing my family as much and how I'd miss them, which did happen. I was worried about, kind of, losing a lot of my support network, like, my friends. So, I couldn't see them as much, which did happen, but I just had to get used to it.”

– **Alesha**

Community responses to COVID-19

During this period of anxiety, communities of all identities and cultures took it upon themselves to support one another. Some of our older research participants spoke to how community-centred responses have been present during the lockdown, with support accessible through places of worship, community networks or neighbours.

“Well, to be honest the Black community does stick together so to be fair we never really fell short at all. So, I was one of the few that was lucky to work up until the last moment where they said everyone has to close but we managed. If we ever needed help there's community banks that you could probably go to. We didn't really need that to be fair but as a Black community we did know where to go.”

– **Charlie**

“It's been nice to see other sisters and brothers in the community who have off their own back made sure the community has been supported, like food hubs and helping

⁶ All interviewees have been given pseudonyms.

people like myself, running around knocking doors. That's been nice to see. Obviously not everybody was able to do that or want to do that, really, but it was nice to see all a diverse set of people getting together when needed. That was good to see."

- Naomi

However, there are other informal support networks, ones which rely on face-to-face interactions, that have been lost as a result of lockdown. One community member spoke about how these networks used to support vulnerable individuals in the community.

"I know a lot of Black people; they rely on other Black people. You get the guy that doesn't really do anything, that signs on the dole, in the area, he asks everybody for a pound and they give it to him, but now there's nobody there. There's a multitude of different things, there's a guy that always asks me 'have you fifty pence, have you got this, have you got that?' do you understand what I mean? I haven't seen him for the longest time. I avoid people right now; I keep myself to a distance."

- Daniel

Isolation and self-care

Our interviews have also shown that being isolated has allowed people to re-prioritise their time towards self-care.⁷ For those with jobs, some of these hours in the day were previously reserved for working or commuting or were simply wasted when people were too exhausted from their typical working routine. As you will read later in the Future of Work and Education section, for Black people the exhaustion of everyday working life is compounded by negative experiences in the workplace. Our research has shown that for individuals in employment, this additional time has primarily been put towards strengthening key relationships with family and friends. For others, lockdown pushed them to become more comfortable in their own company and less reliant on others for entertainment. Taking the time to enjoy being alone has allowed people to work on themselves and learn new things.

"So, I was at home and I wasn't drinking, so that meant my body clock was just, kind of, elevated, so I could get up and train and meditate and do all those, sort of, things to look after myself, that you don't really get a chance to do... I'm quite a social person so the first couple of weeks were strange. But I actually started to enjoy my own company because you're allowed to confront your own thoughts or do things that you've been meaning to do but that life doesn't give you the time to."

⁷ Self-care is defined as 'the actions that individuals take from themselves, on behalf of and with others in order to develop, protect, maintain and improve their health, wellbeing and wellness. [Source](#).

– Alex

“I think, yes [it's affected my relationships with people], it's been a great time for reflection, it's deepened and richer, which I expected, and it's made those who I've not needed just even less go by the wayside. It sounds really harsh, but yes you can reflect and see what you need and what you don't need.”

– Naomi

Positive outlooks on isolation

Not all community members we spoke to expressed having difficulty adjusting to the changes and restrictions imposed by COVID-19. From the beginning, some people had a more positive outlook on being in their homes during the lockdown, despite the impact it had on their interactions with others. During our interviews, they spoke to just carrying on as normal. We found that the common factor between people saying this was that they had an unchanged relationship with technology. This was either because pre-COVID they had little/no relationship with technology, or they were already a self-confessed “technologist” with a strong relationship with technology.

“It's [COVID] been a breeze, it's been no problem at all ... I haven't been able to see my family as much. Things have been different on the streets, there's been less people about. Not really anything much else apart from that to be honest.”

– Philip

In addition, one person was able to give a unique insight into their experience of lockdown after being recently released from prison. It was interesting was that while they spoke about not having all the opportunities he expected, they also recognised how lockdown had put them on a different path than if they had been released to a COVID-free world.

“It's [COVID] not really affecting me personally but it's limiting my time out and, like, meeting new people. I've done a long time being incarcerated in prison ... I'm not having the proper opportunity that I would have had if COVID never happened, if you understand what I mean? ... Some of it [lockdown] I've enjoyed ... Yes, basically the lockdown is a time for me of reflection. I've just moved into this place, so it gave me time to settle in to get my bearings and, like, to ground myself. Keep myself grounded. When you get freedom after so long, most people want to party, drink, smoke drugs and all the rest of it. I never went down that road, and I won't go down that road as long as I stay grounded and have time for reflection and to reach out if I need help.”

Feeling unprepared for permanent change

COVID-19 has not only given people time to reflect on themselves but also to reflect on the world in general. During the pandemic, people began to look at the world differently and question where they fit into it. The comments below show how people believe the world has changed permanently. There's a "new normal" and it has changed in a way that makes people - particularly older people and those with long-term conditions - feel uncomfortable, unfamiliar and unprepared.

"I don't think it's going to be back to normal life, you know, it's totally changed. Before pandemic, and after pandemic ... you cannot touch the people in the bus, or so on, you can cover the face, and the hands, they always wash your hands ... it's totally changed your lifestyle."

– Isaac

Setting the scene for new agendas

There's naturally been an increased focus on personal health linked to the permanent changes taking place in society. Whilst we do not know how long this heightened health awareness will last, COVID-19 has provided a unique platform for broader conversations about public health within Black communities. Recently, we have seen air pollution move up the political agenda, particularly in London.⁸ Funders and policymakers should be building on this heightened health consciousness to get Black communities and other minority groups fighting back against issues such as environmental racism.⁹

"So, like I'm a bit of a germophobe in life in general. I'm very aware of what I touch, and if I'm out I'll try not to hold the pole on the train, and things like that. But now, it's really amplified it."

– Fiona

⁸ Evening Standard 2020, accessed 2nd October 2020, <<https://www.standard.co.uk/futurelondon/cleanair/london-air-pollution-sadiq-khan-plan-a4444756.html>>

⁹ Environmental racism is defined by the World Economic Forum as 'a form of systemic racism whereby communities of colour are disproportionately burdened with health hazards through policies and practices.'

[Source.](#)

“I'd say, in a way, depressing, made me quite anxious about anything I've done. Went out, I was forever running around with bleach, disinfectant, all sorts. Every time someone stepped in or stepped out, I'm wiping this, you know, I'm cleaning that, and then-, I was going throughout the day doing stuff like that all the while, that was at first, and everything. Yes, I'd say, yes, it makes you feel a bit depressed. Very anxious.”

– Tracey

Overall, people’s lifestyles have changed dramatically. For some, the changes have been unexpectedly beneficial, as we saw for one individual recently released from prison. For others, the changes have left them feeling confused, with a great deal of uncertainty. Furthermore, people recognise that some of the changes and trends we are seeing right now might be more permanent, such as the shift to increased digitalisation, but the reality is that the long-term impact of these changes is unknown. Finally, these changes have also provided funders and policymakers with the platform to have more significant conversations about public health within Black communities, particularly when it comes to socio-economic determinants of health, which we explore in more detail in the following section.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Use the context of COVID-19 to support conversations about public health within Black communities
2. Prioritise the voices of traditionally unheard communities in discussions about public health

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL FUNDERS

1. Co-design community-led workshops to give residents the confidence to transition into the “new normal”, focussing specifically on older people, people with long-term conditions and non-English speaking communities

AREAS FOR FURTHER COMMUNITY RESEARCH

- Understanding the experiences of individuals recently released from prison to inform better post-prison support
- Understanding how people think they will fit into the “new normal”
- Understanding community-led support and Black leadership
- Understanding how people’s relationships changed during COVID-19 and what impact has this had on their mental health and experiences during the pandemic

Who Can We Trust?

Lead researcher: Davino Beckford

WHO CAN WE TRUST?

In the previous section, we discussed how Black people (and communities) have responded to government guidelines and the restrictions that have been imposed on them. In this section, we focus on their responses to the virus itself; how people's perspectives have changed over time and the role the media (and history) has played in shaping these responses.

Changing perspectives on the pandemic during the lockdown

During our first round of pilot interviews, there was a consensus that people had initially underestimated the severity of the virus. This was consistent with our second round of interviews which found that many community members were concerned by the speed at which COVID-19 was spreading across the UK. As a result, people started to adopt government recommended guidelines, such as social distancing, self-isolating and washing their hands frequently.

"My initial reaction-, when I first, first, first, first heard about it, I just heard it briefly on the radio like, 'New virus in China' or whatever. I just thought nothing. I was like, 'Okay. It will be gone in another couple of weeks. It's just going to stay in China.' And then obviously the news was going around that it was spreading, it was spreading, it was spreading so, originally at the beginning I was a bit scared. Like, I was cautious of where I went, who I spoke to. I was staying meters away from people, I was washing my hands constantly."

– Marvin

However, as time went on, the people we interviewed talked about becoming increasingly confused and having a growing sense of distrust towards health and safety guidance. This came down to four distinct reasons:

1. Day-to-day activities that involved following the government guidelines, such as grocery shopping, did not appear to be causing people to contract the virus. This finding was particularly interesting because the sole purpose of the guidelines was to prevent the spread of the virus, but the effectiveness of these measures actually caused people to see the virus as less of a threat.
2. Suspicions of underlying political agendas meant people felt that UK government guidelines and public health messaging lacked credibility. As a result, some community members spoke of following the guidelines implemented by other countries, such as the USA.
3. Rapidly changing and inconsistent advice made many community members feel there was a lack of expertise in dealing with a public health crisis. One community member

spoke of receiving advice from their doctor that directly contradicted that of the government.

4. The Black Lives Matter protests were not seen to cause a rapid spread of the virus (particularly within BAME communities) which contradicted the pre-protest messages in the media and that of the UK health secretary, Matt Hancock.¹⁰ Furthermore, post-protest research from the USA showed no spike in COVID-19 cases.¹¹

Consequently, our interviews showed that over time the community began making their own decisions about what guidelines to follow and precautions to take, suggesting a large disconnect between Black community members and the government communications and guidelines.

*“So then when the marches were being organised, I felt that it was something that I really felt I wanted to be at and I struggled for a bit thinking about whether I was being negligent and irresponsibly and, obviously, the government line was that yes we were if we were to go, but I felt as a Black woman I couldn't not be there and I went and felt really nervous and obviously got there and was amazed by how diligent everyone was being, wearing masks and trying to respect social distancing as well as they could, but I was more astounded by how many people there were there and by the fact that it was impossible to do social distancing and, obviously, we had a demographic there who are statistically meant to be much more likely to contract the virus and suffer from it. And it was a really beautiful day but with the undercurrent of, I really hope this doesn't have some awful f*cking backlash because, you know, I'd feel eternally guilty for it and when there wasn't, I was, you know, I'm in a way a conspiracy theorist and I don't want to position myself like that at all, I 100% and totally believe that the coronavirus is a real threat, but I was perplexed by the lack of consequence, it almost seemed, for this mass gathering.”*

– Gayle

Medical scepticism

Perhaps unsurprisingly, medical scepticism and distrust towards the healthcare sector in Black communities have also been a prevalent trend. This trend has seemingly stemmed from a history of atrocities committed against Black people in the name of 'science', such as the Tuskegee Experiment in the United States.¹² The sentiment that “I didn't take it so seriously

¹⁰ The Guardian 2020, accessed 2nd October 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/07/Black-lives-matter-protests-risk-spreading-covid19-says-matt-hancock>>

¹¹ Independent 2020, accessed 2nd October 2020, <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/coronavirus-Black-lives-matter-protests-study-a9584101.html>>

¹² Office for Science and Society, accessed 28th September 2020, <<https://www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/history/40-years-human-experimentation-america-tuskegee-study>>

because it's just another virus. We have dealt with many other viruses before and this one isn't that different" was a common one. Many community members believed that any vaccines being developed and administered to the population were going to have harmful effects on them. Consequently, they would rather abstain from putting their faith in the government to treat them as anything less than 'guinea pigs'. This feeling was exacerbated when French politicians suggested that Africa be used as a testing ground for the COVID-19 vaccine.¹³ Even when a community member had a firm belief in science, it was the involvement of the government that led to suspicions.

"To be quite honest, right, I'm a person that I don't even trust the flu injection that they request you to take every year. I've never taken it, and every year they ask me over and over if I'm interested. Then I tell them no. So, it's the same thing for this vaccine, typical. I don't believe in it to be honest."

– Ola

"I do believe in the importance of finding a vaccination, I'm not a denier or anything like that. Science is science and you're a fool not to believe most of science but that doesn't mean the application by governments and so on cannot be suspicious. Therefore, although I would love them to find a vaccination, I'm not willing to trust them with my life as well as anyone of an ethnic minority to be essentially a guinea pig because there's doubt in the effort and care."

– Kwame

In addition to the distrust in vaccines, there was also a general distrust in hospitals. There was a certain belief amongst some Black people, particularly those already living with long-term conditions, that once admitted into a hospital during the initial phase of the lockdown, the chances of returning home healthy and alive were slim.

"On one occasion, I did have to go to the hospital, A&E. I was sent home the next morning. I actually felt more comfortable at home, because of all of the negativity that was put into the press about the numbers of people that went to hospital and they died. There wasn't a really good recovery rate, that was being represented in the press."

– Jada

Turning towards alternative explanations and solutions

¹³ Quartz Africa 2020, accessed 28th September 2020, < <https://qz.com/africa/1836272/french-doctors-say-test-covid-19-vaccine-on-africans-spark-fury/>>

Because of the way COVID-19 was handled by government officials, such as Dominic Cummings, and the way it was covered by the media, some Black people have started to search for alternative explanations and methods of combatting COVID-19.¹⁴ This has included a shift towards “conspiracy theories” and natural remedies to prevent catching the virus. In the first quote below, what is particularly interesting is the ease at which the research participant believed in the 5G theory – all it took was being sent a WhatsApp video – which leads us to question what and/or who is driving what people perceive to be a trusted source of information.

“I got a WhatsApp video, and it just says about the 5G theory, and I'm, sort of, sticking to that, theory, I believe in that ... we seem to be bombarded with it [information about COVID-19] every day in the news, and I think they're misleading people, as I said, personally ... It's consistent, they're consistently misleading us...”

– Jason

“I do take precautions which is to use a lot of home remedies and stuff like that, which I hope it's helping to build my immune system, so my immune system is stronger... I drink a lot of bush tea daily ... [and] I steam, regularly.”

– Tracey

Engaging non-English speaking communities

That said, to what extent can communities, specifically non-English speaking communities, be expected to “listen to” and engage with information when it’s both confusing for those who do not speak English as a first language but equally does not penetrate their networks? For community members who are a part of these networks, there was a feeling that people were being neglected in public messaging. This was something we uncovered in our first round of interviews, suggesting that efforts to address this ongoing need have not been effective. Therefore, a more strategic and co-designed approach to reaching hard-to-reach and isolated communities is crucial.

“There hasn’t been enough information for the people in the communities that need it the most. Not everyone is born here and speaks English. There should have been more information in different languages like Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese.”

– Tasha

Furthermore, one person we spoke to from the Angolan community specifically mentioned the need for better representation of the different groups that exist within a community, such as the

¹⁴ BBC News 2020, access 2nd October 2020, < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-52784290> >

Portuguese-speaking community, and also emphasised how the boundaries of the borough do not define communities.

“I feel that we had a lot of support from the local government, but I feel that maybe the Angolan community should have a representer, to represent us as Angolans. I know the Portuguese community have someone in place to do that, but the Portuguese and Angolan, they're together but they're not together like that... Like I say, Lambeth for example, Lambeth Angolan community, they'll definitely know each other but it expands. It goes to Croydon, it goes to other sides, so it definitely expands...”

– Jaden

Discussion: Black Identity

Upon completing this research project, we were asked about Black identity and how our research can speak to the experiences of different groups within Black communities. After a discussion, however, we concluded that Black identity as it has been traditionally understood is outdated. Black people have progressed beyond the categorisation of Caribbean or African, and they now define their identity in new ways, such as by space, location and culture. Therefore, further research must be conducted to truly understand Black identity in the 21st century and to allow us to confidently speak to the experiences of different groups within Black communities.

The media and race

Amongst Black community members of all ages, there is a feeling that COVID-19 affects them disproportionately, or that they are being made to believe that it does by media reporting. Either way, as a result of the coverage, there is a belief that the media's portrayal of COVID-19 has increased racism. Specifically, the community members we spoke to felt that the media was pushing a narrative that while COVID-19 is a collective problem, it is particularly a problem and prevalent within Black communities. During our interviews, community members explained how, as a consequence of this, they have encountered new and more direct forms of racism during daily activities like walking down the street.

“I think COVID-19 has increased racism in this country. Because, now that the media is trying to shape the face of Coronavirus to be Black people's problem, many people

have used this to bring their racism that they already had, but now they actually have a reason to do it. If they don't want to sit next to you in the bus, oh, it's COVID-19. They don't want to serve you, or take money from your hands, or shake your hands, Covid-19. They don't want to stand next to you, COVID-19... Once this pure racist protocol is set, we will see more racism in the healthcare field. And on the street."

– **Natalie**

Furthermore, this experience of discrimination is compounded for those who have physical disabilities. In our first round of interviews, we learned how some people were no longer being prioritised by society, even when it came to tasks that involved interacting with people who knew them (as seen in the quote below). During this time, Black people with visible disabilities are facing both greater racial discrimination and societal de-prioritisation.

"I'm visually impaired so I get assistance when I go shopping ...When I got to that Lidl, I saw a huge queue and I said 'what is going on?' and I felt people very disturbed, like, it is only nine o'clock in the morning but people were really, really upset, that's how I felt and I start walking up the queue... you know, usually when I jump the queue, people don't watch me really because I carry my stick, people know that I have to be ahead of the queue for assistance and when got there I just said to the guy 'look I don't want to do this queue, is it possible for me to come back?' and that's when I realised that people were not going to let me go jumping the queue."

– **Beatrice**

Despite the media's attempts to racialise COVID-19, it was encouraging to see that some of the people we interviewed had an understanding of how social factors determined the spread of the virus, such as class and socio-economic status. This was particularly true for the younger people we spoke to.

"I don't think race really has anything to do with contracting Coronavirus. I think maybe if you're poor and you live in a condensed environment and, you know, you have to do certain things for survival. For example, you have to go to work, you can't work from home or you live in a overcrowded house because you can't afford to live anywhere else and, I get that yes, sometimes, you know, statistically minority races fall into that poorer bracket more often."

– **Marvin**

Even when the media has used its platforms to bring attention to systemic racism and called for systems change, younger community members shared how these messages have been emotionally exhausting to consume. Seeing the same content being shared is an overwhelming experience and difficult to escape when it is dominating the news. How can the media be an effective means of information dissemination, when some Black people are reluctant to even turn on the news or log-in to social media?

“What was putting me off is, everything that I saw was about Black people dying, Black people dying, Black people dying and just oppression, injustices and stuff. And, of course that's really important to be aware of and think about, but, not all the time. Like, surely that's not healthy. And it ended up making me feel so depressed. As soon as I went back off, I was able to cope again. I just don't want to have, be bombarded, by Black death all the time.”

– **Rebecca**

Discussion: Black pain - whose burden is it?

“Some people feel like that oppression or, that history is a burden. They carry that on their back, every day, whether they're just going to the shop or, going to public transport or, going to work. They can feel like that, 'Because I'm Black, this is how things are.' You know what I mean? You shouldn't live your life like that.”

– *Peter*

For Black communities, accepting the trauma of our past can be difficult, especially when white privilege and anti-Blackness continues to be prevalent within our society. Even though we recognise that images of Black death and racial injustice will traumatise us further, many of us still choose to consume them and those images remain with us.

National governments, the media and social media platforms have a responsibility to co-design new approaches to disseminating information in a way that both educates those without lived experience of racial discrimination and protects those with it.

Our findings have suggested that there is strong distrust within Black communities, whether that is a distrust in health service, the media or government, and as a result, people are seeking new sources of information. If these institutions want to regain trust within Black communities, then more needs to be done to understand the root causes of this distrust and how people are now determining who/what is a trustworthy source.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Community nurses holding drop-in Q&A sessions about COVID-19 health and safety in partnership with community organisations in local spaces, to bridge the gap between hospitals/governments and local communities
2. In communities with English as a second language, disseminate information through community leaders and well-networked community organisations
3. Partner with other local governments to develop joint strategies to engage and support communities with English as a second language to talk about COVID-19 and share information
4. Allocate representatives who can speak on behalf of and advocate for the needs of different communities within the borough, particularly communities with English as a second language

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL FUNDERS

1. Commission local independent research into COVID-19 that will be more credible within local communities and involve them in the design and delivery of this work
2. Co-design new approaches to disseminate information on systemic racism and violence in schools, workplaces and community spaces
3. Set-up workshops that allow younger people to educate their communities on the socio-economic determinants of health

AREAS FOR FURTHER COMMUNITY RESEARCH

- Understanding the sources of information that different communities trust and why they are trusted
- Understanding Black identity in the 21st century and how it should be defined

Back to Basics

Lead researcher: Sylvana Walcott

BACK TO BASICS

COVID-19 is currently exposing the structural inequalities in our society. These inequalities are then also exacerbated as Black people and those living with long-term conditions statistically earn less.¹⁵ While it may still take a while before we fully grasp the long-term impact of this pandemic, the short-term impact is already starting to affect vulnerable groups. In this section, we explore the extent to which Black people have felt they have had adequate access to the necessities most people need to cope within this “new normal”, such as food, health support and technology.

Access to food

Experiences from community members showed that basic access to food and amenities for Black communities was challenging due to inefficient and/or ineffective support from local organisations. This went beyond a lack of access or awareness, where even those who reached out for support, did not receive it.

“For support as far as Lambeth [Council] and helping us. We don't really say we've got much support from them because even when we have needed them they haven't really showed up.”

– **Charlie**

“I signed up to a get a food parcel and I haven't heard back from them [mutual aid group], and I'm thinking, you know, if it wasn't for yourself, like I said, there would have been no help at all, nothing.”

– **Jada**

The temporary shortages of certain products and lack of delivery slots in supermarkets made regular grocery shopping more challenging too. Being forced to shop in more expensive supermarkets has led to increased spending for already economically vulnerable groups.

“No, it wasn't easy because normally, right, I would shop online at Iceland and things like that. But since the Covid came in and so forth, you couldn't get the opportunity or there wasn't any time slots... But then the thing got difficult and then I find myself having to spend more money, because okay, I'm not getting it at Iceland. I have to go to Waitrose”

¹⁵ Fair4AllFinance 2020, accessed 28th September 2020, < <https://fair4allfinance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Mapping-the-groups-most-financially-impacted-by-the-economic-fallout-of-the-Coronavirus-pandemic-1-4.pdf>>

Acknowledging the fact that the local authorities are dealing with an unprecedented crisis and are doing the best they can, more however should be done now to improve the situation for especially vulnerable groups as there is a reality that COVID-19 will be with us for the foreseeable future.¹⁶ For our interview participants that did manage to get government support, they felt that it did not account for the cultural differences within ethnic communities, particularly when it comes to food and eating habits. Furthermore, for those with long-term conditions who are already dealing with the anxiety of shielding, not being able to access basic food and supplies can cause added stress, potentially affecting their mental health. There is a real risk that social inequalities will broaden if no immediate action is taken.¹⁷

“Although the government, as far as I know, [have] been providing supplementary foods in households, it's not the foods that they're used to, and therefore it limits our capacity to be who we are, because it's not food that we normally identify with.”

– Joy

“One of them, an uncle, he actually-, there's a complaint in the family, I wasn't witness to this. There's a complaint in the family that he was neglected in the ward in terms of feeding him. Just basic feeding because no one could visit, and he said he was neglected because no one wants to come into contact with somebody who had Covid. So, they were doing the bare minimum in a sense and apparently the family believe that he died due to that neglect rather than the condition itself.”

– Kwame

Access to health support

The community members we spoke to living with long-term conditions also talked about feeling there was a lack of tailored health-related government support and assistance during the pandemic. For those that could, additional asks (and pressures) were often put on younger family members to provide support. Unfortunately, not everyone had those networks they

¹⁶ The Independent 2020, accessed 2nd October 2020, < <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/coronavirus-when-will-it-end-date-outbreak-stop-a9414196.html>>

¹⁷ Runnymede Trust 2019, accessed 28th September 2020, <<https://www.friendsprovidentfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Runnymede-report.pdf>>

could rely on. Research has shown that the increased burden that COVID-19 has put on young carers throughout the UK has been significant.¹⁸

“It’s been literally since March, and we’re in August now, you know, and it’s been a long time and it’s been hard because I’ve had to put a lot on my son which I don’t like doing. He’s seventeen but I mean there’s been no support, no support.”

– Jada

“Yes, knowing that I have health problems and such, I’ve not received no support whatsoever.”

– Tracey

Access to technology

Amongst community members with children, there was a concern that their children were falling behind in their learning due to insufficient access to technology. For others, working from home and dealing with the newfound demands on their bandwidth was a new challenge. Equally, limited digital literacy was restricting some people’s ability to navigate online services which have become increasingly important and are seemingly here to stay.¹⁹

“As for this lock down, when we were actually in lock down, the education, expecting our children not being able to access certain things because of the limitation in devices, you’ve now put everything online... It’s just been difficult. Mobile wise, with the networks, it’s been difficult with the internet services, it’s been difficult with the telephone services, it’s just been difficult in every avenue of technology”

– Joy

However, there was a significantly positive impact on community members who had good access to technology. They were able to use this to meet their personal and professional needs, adapt to services going online, whilst all the while remaining connected socially. For many people, their relationship with technology proved to be a lifeline.

“Yes. I’ve definitely been video calling a lot more and using apps like Houseparty and Zoom. I’ve been doing like, a few meetings that I’ve had to do for my business and for

¹⁸ Carers Trust 2020, accessed 2nd October 2020, < <https://carers.org/downloads/what-we-do-section/my-future-my-feelings-my-family.pdf> >

¹⁹ Omdia 2020, accessed 2nd October 2020, < <https://technology.informa.com/624371/covid-19-triggers-accelerated-shift-to-digital-technologies-and-services> >

other like, financial things we've been using Zoom and yes, so, that's definitely changed how I use technology. And also, like booking systems for, I don't know, like, the GP or getting stuff from the pharmacy or going to the bank. So, yes, the use of technology for me has increased."

– Marvin

Access to technology also needs careful management not to become too burdensome. Amongst community members with strong access to technology, there is also a growing sense of resentment towards technology and increasing digital fatigue. Constant remote working, virtual socialising, and screen time are taking their toll, suggesting a need to rethink what a shift into the digital age would look like. As an adjustment to the "new normal" is underway, we should not assume that technology use is always welcomed even when available.

"Yes, I mean it was definitely going through the roof at the beginning, like, with all the different WhatsApp groups and people wanting to be in contact, but I've fallen out of love with my phone, so now I try and put it other rooms and keep it away from me if I can."

– Gayle

Although some measures and responses have been put in place to help people cope with their basic needs during the pandemic, what we have found is that more needs to be done to properly support people during this time when it comes to access to food, health-support and technology. Furthermore, the need to rethink how this support can be provided effectively is especially urgent if the changes that have taken place are here to stay.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Create food parcel provision keeping in mind some of the cultural differences such as language and eating habits
2. Set up tailored wellbeing support for young carers

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL FUNDERS

1. Fund a community Buddy Scheme to help people gain essential digital skills
2. Co-design strategies for supporting community members overwhelmed and exhausted with the demands of a digital way of life

AREAS FOR FURTHER COMMUNITY RESEARCH

- Understanding the extent to which mutual aid groups were effective at accessing those most in need in local communities
- Understanding the gaps in health-related support during the pandemic

The Future of Work and Education

Lead researchers: Femi Aseru, Achille Crawford,
Michael Morris and Sylvana Walcott

THE FUTURE OF WORK

Given everything that has happened in the world, it would be expected that individuals' perspectives on employment would also change as a result of COVID-19. In this section, we explore what the future of work could look like given people's past experiences of the employment system and the forced changes to work routines caused by the pandemic.

Adapting to new work routines

The pandemic has brought about a forced change to working arrangements across a variety of industries. Working from home has gone from being a luxury to a standard practice that those in employment have had to adapt to. This has meant not having access to well-equipped workplaces but also adapting to a smaller working environment. In particular, for people co-habiting with partners or family members, working from home has caused a large amount of stress due to spending all day in close proximity to each other.

“And, obviously, there's living with a partner where you are getting up and going to work and then living your independent lives and then coming back to each other in the evening but being around your partner 24 hours a day in quite a stressful environment when I was working from home and so was he, it all feels very claustrophobic. I did, definitely, find it quite difficult towards the end.”

– **Gayle**

Shifting employment preferences

Despite the challenges of adapting to these new work routines, many Black people have still embraced the shift to flexible working. There was a common perception amongst our interviewees that as Black people they feel like they have to work twice as hard as their colleagues, while at the same time trying to keep a low profile to not “outshine” others. Even after they have shown they have the necessary skills and knowledge to do the job they've been hired for, Black people's “belonging” within many organisations is still constantly questioned. This feeling, combined with micro-aggressions and excessive micro-management, has led to working from home being viewed as a welcome escape from “toxic” work environments.

“A lot of people are working from home now and they are happy because they are now not working in toxic environments. With toxic I mean those jobs where you're constantly rushed. I am so much more relaxed and much more productive. I get a lot more done.”

– **Tasha**

"I've definitely appreciated, like, not feeling like I'm being watched and pointlessly surveilled throughout the working day. And it means that you can, kind of, actually do your life around work, whether it's just mundane things like, you know, putting a wash on, and then having a nice lunch and getting to go for a run, it's a kind of much healthier work life balance, I find."

– **Gayle**

Given historical trends, predictions have already been made that Black people will be one of the groups “hit hardest” during the post-furlough recession.²⁰ Furthermore, with working from home becoming part of the “new normal”, there is the potential for the globalisation of the job market leading to increased pressure for anyone looking for work.²¹ The people we spoke to already have fears of redundancies from permanent changes to the job market. The time to reflect has led some to consider forms of self-employment and other potential income streams. This finding was not unique to those who were unemployed or furloughed, with people in full-time work still considering how they can innovate during this time. This suggests that for some Black people, this turn to self-employment has been a choice, not a necessity.

"I suppose thinking of restarting a business I suppose [is a benefit of the pandemic]. The time off has allowed me to explore that ... The actual business that I was thinking about doing is training. Where there's a gap that needs people to be trained in whatever area. Then we provide training in that area and hopefully get some people employed, slotting people in. Being in touch with several organisations that deal with young people, disabled and it's just helping them to get into-, find work really, basically. Get some money in."

– **Destiny**

²⁰ <<https://www.standard.co.uk/business/young-bame-workers-set-for-unemployment-crisis-as-furloughing-ends-a4458691.html>>

²¹ <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2020/06/15/how-coronavirus-will-change-the-job-market-forever/#32c91c645b7d>>

Discussion: Self-employment versus entrepreneurship

Within our team of community researchers, many of us see ourselves as entrepreneurs and have our own businesses (or are currently starting up). For this reason, we recognise our biases when it comes to entrepreneurship, but this is just one form of self-employment. Black people are turning to self-employment for different reasons as shared in this report. As changes to improve in-work experiences will most likely take some time to be effective, these efforts should not prevent self-employment being offered as a viable option for those who wish to explore it and improve their current work situation.

Preparing for the future job market

Our research has shown that there are some people whose sole focus is simply 'getting a job'. As community researchers, however, we recognise that this attitude in the current job market will not be sustainable, particularly as COVID-19 has caused an acceleration into the technological age. We anticipate that what we currently define as low-skilled labour will change, potentially requiring a minimum level of digital skills. Therefore, further research must be done to understand what will be expected of the low-skilled labour of the future.

Upskilling Black communities

Preparing for the future job market does not only mean acquiring digital skills, but there is also a need to show people the value they already have based on their lived experience. While some young people in creative sectors have been able to grasp the opportunities available (as shown by the quote below), more must be done to identify and advocate for the lived experience acquired skills of older adults as well. As we shared in section one, older adults have already expressed feeling unprepared for and lack confidence in the "new normal". Therefore, helping them to recognise their unrealised skills will be one way to overcome this.

"So basically, like I said, they [TikTok] are looking for people with my background. Because I'm a minority, an ethnic minority from an urban area and I understand the language that we speak, which is slang. Because TikTok right now has had a big influx of new users, they need people with my set of skills to be able to police the content. So, that would be report any content that is vile, basically, anything that does not apply to TikTok and policies."

– Zane

Opening up opportunities to Black communities

Upskilling Black people is only one-third of the puzzle in preparing people for the future job market. The second is ensuring that people know about the opportunities available and can take advantage of them. The experiences shared by the community members we spoke to suggest that there is currently a lack of engagement in opportunities to support job-seeking and employment. For some, this may be due to a lack of awareness, but for others, the reasons may be more personal, such as a lack of confidence. Although this research did not focus on the barriers to engagement in these services, some of the community members we spoke to offer a glimpse into the type of underlying and deep-rooted issues that can prevent engagement. One woman shared how location and postcode wars were preventing her son from going into neighbouring communities to look for employment opportunities.

“I think it's quite hard for them [young people] to go out sometimes and look for employment, so again coming back to having things within the community, that would bring it, that would actually boost employment for the young people, because they don't have to go too far out of their area, they're in their comfort zone, they don't have to put themselves at risk of going into somebody else's area where they might get stopped and, you know, confronted about what are you doing in my area, kind of thing.”

– Jada

This also links to social responsibility for employers to actively engage more local people and provide job opportunities to those living in the communities that host them. If we could encourage more employers to actively advocate for local recruitment, opportunities would have to be advertised locally. Such a shift would also help to limit Black communities from becoming further disadvantaged as a result of the increased globalisation of the job market.

“Things like, I mean a lot of places I've worked, people would come from Kent and out of London to come and work in London and maybe it would be beneficial if more companies would employ people from their own communities instead of employing further afield.”

– Jada

A particularly interesting finding from our research was that while individuals living with long-term conditions identified that they would be one of the groups most disadvantaged in the future job market, they did not speak of wanting additional support during application processes. Instead, they shared that having a disability did not need to be viewed as a barrier

to working and recruitment processes should be more focussed on potential. When considering how to diversify, more employers should look to expand their potential talent pool by recruiting individuals with a desire and willingness to learn new skills.²² Such a shift in how diversity is defined would also benefit the long-term unemployed, another group who recognised that the impacts of COVID-19 would “hinder” their chances of finding employment.

“[I hope] that people just across the board will just be employed because of their skill set and we will see that reflected in the diversity anyway, rather than having to go for diversity first and then the skill set.”

– **Ashley**

However, of those that did speak to support services (of any kind), they expressed the need for these services to be more humanistic in their approach. Effective support cannot be provided as a tick-box exercise. Support services must invest time to really understand a person, their experiences and their needs.

“If professionals were more-, yes, they knew their patients on a more human level, then they'd be able to reach out and get people who might be less proactive involved. Like I said, I think they give up too easily, I don't know.... if things were maybe more personalised, it would just help get people to reach back out.”

– **Vivienne**

²² <<https://www.diversityintech.co.uk/how-to-achieve-diversity-in-tech>>

Discussion: Who does the Job Centre Serve?

“If you're a person that has no skills and no qualification then I guess they might be alright for that but if you have certain skills, and you have certain qualifications, then sometimes the jobs that they [the Job Centre] want to put you forward for is, I'd say, mindless jobs where you don't have to use your brain as much. Do you understand what I'm saying?”

– Tracey

As a team of community researchers, we believe that the support currently offered by some employment support providers, such as the Job Centre, has not been designed to meet the needs of individuals, but instead to meet the needs of a system looking to reduce unemployment. We share these views mainly due to our own experiences within the employment system, but from the quote above we are not alone in our judgement. For individuals with a host of transferable skills, often acquired through informal non-work-related activities, where can they go?

Greater representation in decision-making positions

The final piece of the puzzle in preparing people for the future job market is to address the need for greater representation and diversity in decision-making positions. This is to encourage hiring a more diverse workforce and attempt to reduce both the unconscious and conscious biases that Black people are regularly confronted with.^{23 24} Furthermore, given that the racialisation of COVID-19 has already caused overt racism in the streets, it is not difficult to imagine overt racism in the workplace too and the risk of this happening has already been predicted by the people we spoke to.

“Let's not always look at it as if it's a malicious thing. If you hire somebody, sometimes you just want to hire someone you feel you will get on with or you can connect with, you can talk with. And sometimes when there's a difference of ethnic background, origin, culture, mannerisms, that instantly makes it harder to be hired and the reality is that the people in the management positions in most environments are of a Caucasian origin than ethnic minorities.”

– Kwame

²³ Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. [Source](#).

²⁴ < <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/17/minority-ethnic-britons-face-shocking-job-discrimination> >

"I think because it's been put out there that Black people are more at risk of contracting this virus, so people are going to be wary, I believe. Ignorant people, I'd say, are going to be more wary of employing a Black person."

– Tracey

However, being Black does not mean that you will inherently take action to promote greater equity. In reality, there are times when it can mean the opposite. For some Black people trying to "fit in" is easier than speaking out. In recruiting a more diverse workforce, employers have a responsibility to be aware of this and ensure that it informs their recruitment processes. If the aim of diversity is to promote greater equity, then employers need to think about the values and perspectives all employees should have.

"You could say have more Black teachers but some of them, the Black teachers, can be even worse than the others because they try to fit in. Where some that will, you know, stand out and speak up about things but there's a lot that, you know, they will just see things that are not right but they will just go along with it."

– Natalie

Discussion: Survival mode

"It's survival because sometimes those who speak up with injustices or those who think about their pride first can be the ones that lose because doing the self-righteous thing isn't always the smartest thing, and that's a shame but that's what it's about, survival."

– Kwame

When we discussed this quote as a team, one of the first questions we asked ourselves was, "What is more important, the end goal of survival or the end goal of achieving justice by any means necessary?" By exploring this question, we agreed that:

- As Black people, everything you do comes from a place of survival when you are born into a society that tells you that you are nothing
- The leaders of the past, such as Martin Luther King Jr, who were willing to die for what they believed in are gone and no one has taken their place
- Black people (we believe) do have a duty to speak out, but how we choose to do it should be a personal choice – we all have a part to play

Better in-work support

Once people are in employment, there is then a question of what can be done to improve their in-work experiences. Given COVID-19, one Black employee we spoke to had particular anxieties about starting a new job remotely and shared how unsettling joining a new workforce can be during this time.

“Yes, I’m actually really anxious about it [meeting colleagues], because I started a new job from home. I’ve only ever met four people in an office of 400. So, that in itself is very daunting. It’s like having my first day all over again.”

– **Fiona**

Furthermore, for the people we spoke to that were living with long-term conditions, their experiences of disclosing additional needs and employers responding inadequately were common. Although these experiences were pre-COVID-19 and the shift to working from home may help to overcome some of their challenges, employers should still be considering what effective wellbeing support looks like in this new context.

“When I was in employment, I had asthma. The employers that I had and came into contact with, they were generally okay about, you know, if I needed to have a break, or if I needed to go and have my pump, and things like that. With my depression, it was a bit less support within the workplace...there wasn’t somebody that had that understanding of depression or mental health. So, it was harder to speak to somebody or to feel as though I could speak to somebody... A lot of the time, you would go and speak to, I’d say, like, your line manager, [and] you were always passed on, there was no designated person. A lot of the time, you don’t want to go and have the same conversation. It’s hard enough having that one conversation one time, let alone being passed on to have it with four, five different people.”

– **Jada**

Work should be more than just a job

Our research has also highlighted that work should be more than just a job and should provide other opportunities to learn and develop to keep people engaged. Therefore, employers need to properly understand the career aspirations of their employees and provide clear progression plans. People can be unaware of the transferable skills they possess, and employers can play a role in supporting their employees to identify them. Nevertheless, for employers that already believe they have sufficient progression plans set up in their workplace, in the context of COVID-19, there is a need to rethink how individuals can demonstrate their ability to progress without putting themselves at risk. As we mentioned previously, Black people can already feel

the need to prove their worth in the workplace, and so employers should be aware of how this internal feeling could cause Black employees to become particularly overworked and at risk at work during the pandemic.

“I work in a hospital, so it's, kind of, impossible not to be close to people, it's a mental health hospital, so you might get a place on, like a one-to-one observation where you have to be in, like, arms reach of someone and yes. It's a bit scary because of that, but I can't really see any other way of me continuing to reach my career aspirations without putting myself at risk.”

– **Vivienne**

Giving communities the tools to make change

While there is a clear call for employers to accept more responsibility, when conducting our research and through informal conversations within Black communities, we have felt a growing sense of self-determination within Lambeth. Communities are tired of waiting for others and want to be given the tools to make change happen themselves, particularly in creating greater equity for Black people. These feelings came out during our interviews when speaking about the anti-racism movement and whether it would lead to tangible change, particularly when it comes to employment – a question to which many people answered they were doubtful. Furthermore, even when organisations are taking action to promote greater diversity and inclusion, the community members we spoke to shared how they felt inclined to question whether this is authentic action.

“I think there will be some superficial attempts at trying to balance out inequality in the workplace, but I think once the media is not shining so much of a light on these issues, it'll go back to whatever normal was before. Yes, there will be a lot of performative gestures and then no real, like, systemic change, which is what tends to happen in this country.”

– **Alesha**

“We [Black people] don't need the government. We need to take matters into our own hands. Otherwise it's just never going to change.”

– **Tasha**

The role of the education system

While one way of correcting the problems that exist within the employment system is to provide training and capacity building to those already in it, another way is to influence young

people by reforming the education system. Community members continue to recognise and emphasise that the people of the future are in our schools, so how are we using these institutions to shape what that future should look like and address the inequalities that exist?

“I think education is the core of all of this, if I'm honest. I think the curriculum should be changed, because, and it sounds really, like a record, but I've heard so many people say, 'I've never used Pythagoras, but I'd like to know about my credit score'. I wish someone had taught me about how important the credit score was, or savings, ISAs. I'm 26 and now I'm having to go to my Mum or friends and go, 'Can you explain this to me, because I really don't understand what a cash ISA is versus my Help to Buy'. I think it all stems back from that, because if you grow up in a predominantly poorer area, you'll have seen your parents struggle and that's somewhat normalised to you.”

– **Fiona**

“I think that's the most key thing because I think an educated community is one that will create its own jobs and not be reliant.”

– **Alex**

Research has already shown that schools are criminalising Black working-class youths in particular, and this will inevitably impact their employment prospects.²⁵ However, both a change to what is taught and how it is taught could help to combat this. One community member we spoke to shared how school classes moving online had unexpectedly had a positive impact on the behaviour of some of her students, highlighting how a change in approach could significantly improve the experiences of young people in school.

“What I've found most bizarre, is that actually the children who were staying at home, working over Zoom and doing remote lessons, they were actually doing really, really well. So, these are children who are really, really violent and have really impulsive, unpredictable behaviour, and they're able to do, like, a whole session online with the teacher or a session with me. Whereas before, they wouldn't have been able to manage, like, doing a whole hour session, now they're much more resilient and able to get on with their work.”

– **Rebecca**

²⁵ The Guardian 2020, accessed 28th September 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/sep/28/Black-working-class-pupils-unfairly-excluded-in-england-thinktank-warns>>

Again, however, we must emphasise that this is not just about educating and supporting young Black people. All young people must be properly educated to address biases and systemic racism to effectively change the employment system.

“I’m a little bit sceptical about the relationship between education and employment for Black people. In that, I think that, I know lots of Black people with degrees and masters and stuff and who have lots of work experience but they still struggle to get to the positions they want at work. So, I think, it again a case of thinking about the structural inequalities around employment rather than thinking that just being more, because Black people, there are loads of Black people who’ve got multiple degrees. I don’t think it’s really about Black people becoming smarter. I think it’s about Black people being given better opportunities.”

– **Rebecca**

When we consider the future of work, we see local authorities, employers and employment support service providers²⁶ having a responsibility to respond to these changes in order to prepare people for the post-COVID-19 job market. This includes supporting the movements towards working from home and becoming self-employed, as well as ensuring that Black communities can take full advantage of the opportunities presented to them by changing recruitment processes. This will not only boost local employment but also positively impact the experiences of Black people and people with long-term conditions in work. More specifically for the Black Thrive Employment Project, there is a need to understand what “meaningful” employment looks like in the context of COVID-19, particularly for people living with long-term conditions. Prior to the pandemic it may have been that flexibility at work was a priority, but with the shift to working from home, there could be a new focus on providing sufficient wellbeing support. Finally, there is also the opportunity to consider how the education system can be used to positively influence the employment system.

²⁶ Employment support services include services for finding people employment, services for supplying employers with people to do work; and work experience; training for employment (but not by an FE college or university); and vocational guidance. [Source](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Provide small grants for those wanting to transition towards working from home permanently
2. Employment service providers should be required to have a workforce that demographically reflects Lambeth, with more local services being encouraged to reflect the demographics of the neighbourhood
3. Set up an independent organisation that specialises in wellbeing support for individuals with long-term conditions and can partner with local employers to provide expert advice
4. Require local employers (of a given size) to have a designated wellbeing officer in the workplace
5. Require local employers to list the transferable skills gained at different positions within their workplace

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL FUNDERS

1. Set-up a Lambeth network for individuals starting new jobs remotely
2. Co-design a community-led skills training program to support people looking to move into self-employment
3. Create a centralised online resource hub for self-employment
4. Co-design workshops for young creatives to teach their communities about future opportunities in the job market
5. Co-design a training programme to build the capacity of the employment system in Lambeth and shift existing perspectives and approaches
6. Co-design a human-centred approach to employment support service provision
7. Co-design a recruitment process for attracting diverse talent that focuses on individual potential and values
8. Co-design an online platform to support people with long-term conditions in making disclosures that are followed up in the workplace
9. Co-design a fund to support community-led systems change ideas
10. Build a network of small local businesses that are willing to train and mentor young people, particularly those excluded from mainstream education
11. Co-design a community-led financial literacy programme
12. Co-design a systemic racism course to be delivered in schools

This section is particularly relevant for the Black Thrive Employment Project. Therefore, recommendations 1 – 9 above should all be discussed and considered by the Working Group when deciding how to allocate funding. For example, recommendation 9 would involve the Working Group agreeing to reprioritise their funding towards (smaller) community-led organisations, while a focus on the co-design-related recommendations could be achieved by the Working Group collaborating with an existing employment support service provider.

AREAS FOR FURTHER COMMUNITY RESEARCH

- To what extent have Black people been disproportionately impacted by job loss due to COVID-19?
- How has the shift to working from home impacted on Black people's mental health?
- What are the barriers to Black people becoming self-employed?
- How would different communities define meaningful employment, and how have these definitions changed in the context of COVID-19?
- Where are the gaps in the support for those seeking employment (particularly those not on benefits) and how can communities be equipped to fill these identified gaps?
- What are the most effective ways to address unconscious bias in recruitment?
- What are effective community-based recruitment models to tackle local unemployment?
- What are the most effective ways for employers to motivate their employees?
- Where are the shortcomings in the current education system in preparing people for work?
- How have young people innovated in response to the shortcomings of the education and employment system?

CONCLUSION

Our research into COVID-19, employment and race has shown that there are a multitude of ways in which local government and funders can support the recovery of Black communities in Lambeth. The word recovery might make people believe that this is action to be taken once the pandemic has settled, but the reality is that ensuring that Black people are in the best position to thrive post-COVID-19 must start now.

In each section of this report, we list a series of recommendations for local government and funders. The common theme throughout this report and the recommendations put forward is the need to support more community-led initiatives. These could take the form of digital buddy schemes, confidence-building programmes or financial literacy courses. Furthermore, local governments and funders also need to work with local communities to co-design effective response strategies in Lambeth, such as how to disseminate information within communities that speak English as a second language. Whilst we recognise that this report has only just scratched the surface and more research is needed, as identified by our areas for further research, what we really want to emphasise is the need for local governments and funders to build on the current wave of self-determination within communities and use that to drive society towards greater equity.

As a team of Community Researchers equity is not our goal. Our goal is justice. Justice is achieved when there is a common understanding, appreciation and celebration within society for individuals and the differences between us. It means there are no barriers to overcome when it comes to our progression.

To close, we leave you with a quote from one of our research participants as we share their sentiment of hoping that this report and future research will be a catalyst for change in Lambeth.

“I'm hoping through this research, that it's not just going to be one research among others that yes, it's done, let's tick the box and move on. That, actually, these issues, you're going to tackle these issues from the root. And then, for society to start to take these things seriously and start to change, because at the end of the day, we are all human.”

– **Natalie**

Appendices

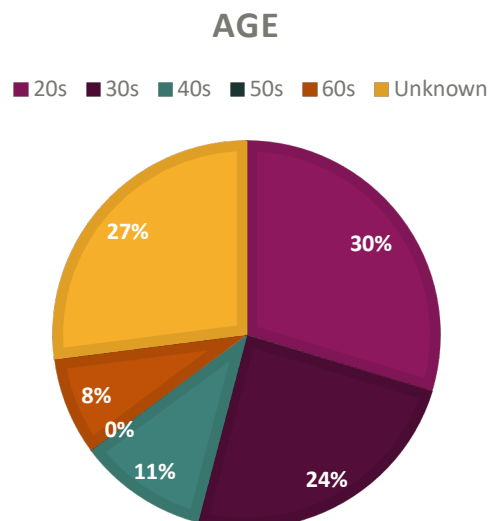
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Our research project required us to speak to at 25 people who self-identify as Black and are rooted in Lambeth or Southwark. As one of the purposes of our research was to inform the funding decisions made in the Black Thrive Employment Programme Working Group, we focused on speaking to individuals rooted in Lambeth (and just one interview participant was rooted in Southwark). Combining both the research participants from our pilot interviews and our research project, we analysed the transcripts from a total of 37 interviews with Black people rooted in Lambeth.

Below is a breakdown of who we spoke to by age, gender, employment status and those living with a long-term condition. As you will see:

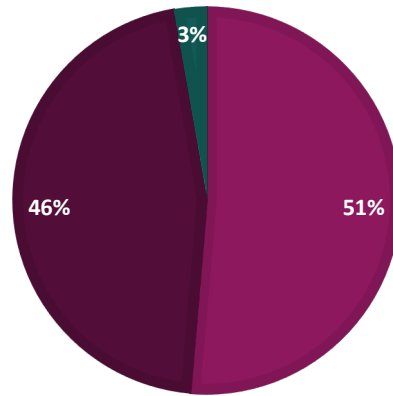
- The majority of the people we spoke to were relatively young, aged in their 20s or 30s
- There were almost equal numbers of male and female research participants
- We spoke to people from all employment statuses
- The majority of the people we spoke to stated they lived with a long-term condition. Some of the conditions that were disclosed during our interviews included asthma, hemiplegic migraines, Crohn's disease, diabetes and sciatica

In line with the community researcher model, we recruited our research participants through both our own networks as well as through local organisations.



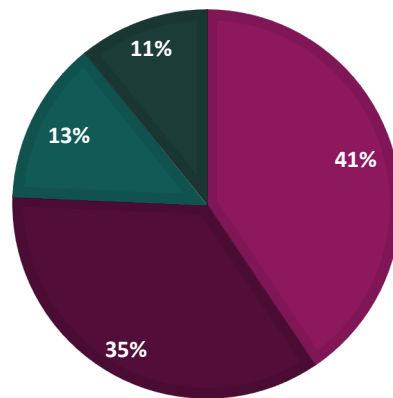
GENDER

Female Male Unknown



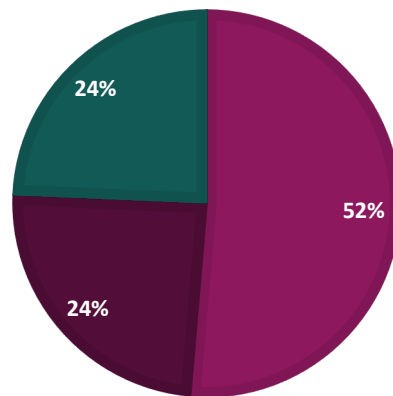
EMPLOYMENT STATUS

In work Seeking work Working for yourself Unknown



LIVING WITH A LONG-TERM CONDITION

Yes No Unknown



COMMUNITY RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

An institutional disconnect has led to communities from lower social classes developing counter-public spheres which have been sceptical of mainstream narratives. Brixton, for example, is a case in point as an area of counter-public spheres largely due to the presence of a sizeable Black community. Research by Addae and Danquah (unpublished, 2018) revealed that it is within these counter-public spheres that counter-narratives develop. Hence, a framework is sought in which communities can be part of all research stages (data collection, analysis, recommendations etc.) along with ownership of this knowledge. This is so that communities can see tangible results of research in their locales via shared processes and frameworks based on co-production across all phases.

Therefore, the approach adopted for community research is not to reinforce differences between academic knowledge-generation and communities. Rather, there is an emphasis on the democratisation of knowledge wherein both community researchers and researchers located in universities or agencies are equals around the table, both contributing useful research in the spirit of dialogue and thematic investigation as outlined by Freire (1970).

The table below outlines different aspects of the community research approach and how these are implemented in practice.

Theme	Explanation	How is this progressed?
Co-ownership and Logical Continuum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities are to be part of all research stages in a logical continuum (data collection, analysis, recommendations etc.) along with ownership of this knowledge is sought-after. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuous dialogue throughout all stages of the research. Power is shared without the sense of an over-arching dominant outside eye. ▪ Communities see tangible results of research in their locales via shared processes and frameworks based on co-production. ▪ The levelling up between community partners and professional academic researchers however has not always been welcome by traditional research. Dresser (2008: 234) asserts that academic researcher can become worried about threats to academic freedom and research integrity when community partnerships are involved. "Handing over control" of written products of research is viewed as 'restricting' academic freedom and the academic authority of the university.
Reciprocity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relationships and exchanges are mutual. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoiding extracting from the research participants more than is required.
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some researchers have found that when conducting fieldwork research in volatile communities or environments questions may arise from interviewees or research subjects about what the research will do for them and if it will spur change (Aldridge et al., 2008: 38). ▪ Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2008) also revealed that Black and minority ethnic communities are both suspicious and in fear of research due to prior researchers entering their domains with promises of change. These researchers then enter the field, obtain data and then leave without delivering on promises made at the outset. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The democratisation of knowledge for open discussion on research choices helps both communities and researchers develop pragmatic research designs ▪ Tangible outcomes are then fed back into communities and potential conflicts between community researchers and other stakeholders are mitigated against via transparent co-learning environments and collaboration. ▪ Geertz (1983) discussed the importance of 'local knowledge' in research and localised frames of awareness. In this way, there is an emphasis on both research and community co-discovering new situated knowledge. Communities have a knowledge equity which communities are misinformed as to the value.
Cultural Interface	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities within the urban locale come together with researchers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing relationships and obtaining research in 'hard to reach' communities for empirical data can assist in making exceptional contributions to knowledge. ▪ Relationships between very different worlds are formed as both academia and urban ecosystems learn from each other.

Inbetweener Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This approach notes that a researcher can place themselves in-between and this is even more relevant in cross-cultural research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for the utilisation of both outsider and insider skills in conducting research. • Milligan (2016) found that she was able to be viewed as a “knowledgeable outsider” if not as an inbetweener and thus gain trust and develop knowledge co-production.
Urban Social Brokerage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coupled with local knowledge of urban ecosystems enables a high level of credibility, authenticity and validity. There are researchers having the required accessibility, positionality and credibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ These aspects are lost or diminished with the usage of secondary data or from research deemed to be conducted from the outside of the community under study. Access to social networks and well-positioned with communities which require deep penetration, trust, credibility so as to inform knowledge and understand nuances and community traditions. ▪ Researchers need to be well-acquainted with urban ecosystems. ▪ Certain nuances, emerging trends and cultural relevancies and dynamics are taken into a contextualised consideration and evaluated in relation to data collected; these esoteric aspects may be simply missed or underestimated through data collection by outside sources.
Respect and Cultural Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respect of community ecology and its traditions and concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This must work in tandem with research integrity and ethics so as not to not compromise validity.
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflection on the research as it progresses, and to reflect on any emotions, challenges or issues which may arise during data collection. ▪ Continual self-reflexivity, for both the community researcher and the research itself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflective practice can assist in this so that there is an atmosphere of trust and conflict resolution; and allows for community researchers to question, along with academic researchers, which knowledge paradigms to enhance. Self-reflection can lead to better strategic planning and that cultural, linguistic and experiential concordance can be applied (Muhammad et al., 2015). ▪ This provides a safe space for community researchers to reflect on their experiences and feelings in the research. Community researchers will navigate a multitude of layers and nuances in their data gathering which will require reflection on their own positions and identities. ▪ It also helps to develop a dual perspective where a researcher also understands her/his own culture and appreciates difference among others. This helps one recognise the influence of their own culture/s on perspectives and how cultural values are shaped, and how they could impact the research process. ▪ The community researcher can confront her/his own vulnerabilities, thoughts and emotions which transpired during the research. Community researchers need to consider both the ways in which participants view themselves in the field and how their positionality can contribute to relationships. An ethical community researcher should ‘reflect in action,’ with an awareness of oneself and the other, and the interplay between the two. A reflexive researcher moves beyond her/his own positionality to consider how issues may develop in relation to others engaged in the research enquiry.

THE ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

TSIP

The Social Innovation Partnership's mission is to improve people's quality of life and make society fairer. We are a diverse team of technical and community specialists who are joining forces to drive inclusive social change.

The logo for the McPin Foundation features the word "McPin" in a stylized font where the "P" is a speech bubble, with "Foundation" written below it in a smaller, sans-serif font.

The McPin Foundation exists to transform mental health research by putting the lived experience of people affected by mental health problems at the heart of research methods and the research agenda.



Black Thrive is a partnership between communities, statutory organisations, voluntary and private sector. They work together to reduce the inequality and injustices experienced by Black people in mental health services.



Guy's and St Thomas' Charity is an independent urban health foundation. We work with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust and others to improve health in the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark, and beyond.

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