

We Do Things Differently 20-21

Resilience in the time of Covid

Highlighting the positive
impact of our services during
the Covid-19 pandemic.



Introduction

The pandemic year (2020-2021) has been an obviously extra-ordinary year for people all over the world.

We have seen unprecedented sufferings for everyone across all social, economic and cultural divides not to mention the unbearable countdown of deaths from an illness never before experienced by today's generation.

No one was spared, everyone was vulnerable. However, according to the latest London Poverty profile compiled by Trust for London, the effects of Covid-19 was felt the hardest by families in poverty which is highest in London at 27%. They felt the worst employment impacts, food insecurity and increased debts. Over 17,000 of the over 100,000 people who died of Covid in the UK were from London. Mortality rates are 23% higher especially in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of Black residents.

Working with local people in Tower Hamlets, one of the most impoverished boroughs in London, (39% poverty rate with Newham and Hackney following in second and third place at 37% and 36% respectively) has been extra challenging for the Communities and Neighbourhoods (CaN) Directorate at Poplar HARCA.



But our teams have shown great resilience and commitment to overcome these difficulties. Together with our residents, local and regional partners, donors and funders, we have faced the pandemic head on and used our creativity to continue delivering much needed services to our local communities. Our teams responded to calls for help to the best of our ability.

Each individual, from the new-born child, the primary school kid, the teen-aged young person, the mother, the father, the elderly grand-parent, and the disabled among them – each has one way or the other, benefited and engaged with our programmes and services. Despite physical closures of our offices and neighbourhood centres, we have remained accessible to everyone via online platforms, social media, over the phone as well as individual home visits by CaN staff and volunteers.

We are pleased to present this version of the CaN Annual report summarising the incredible work of the CaN Directorate in collaboration with all other Poplar HARCA departments in the time of Covid.

“In the midst of a global pandemic, often speaking to my adviser was the only interaction I would have with anyone for days. It has helped me subdue feelings of isolation and loneliness - it gave me something to look forward to and to stay motivated. I got this job because of your help. I am forever grateful.

Jobseeker's Feedback

All in this together

Responding to each family member's emergency need

- Mother:** Lost her job as a retail shop manager, completed Health Training and got a job in the NHS.
- Baby:** Baby food and other essentials provided to families via the Save the Children Fund grant.
- Toddlers and parents:** Able to come out of the house and safely use new outdoor play equipment at a nearby play area improved through funding from the London Marathon Community Trust Fund.
- Teen-aged young person:** Benefited from Health Spot and supported by youth worker at Spotlight.



- Father:** Lost his job as a Chef in a hotel, volunteered at our food bank, cooked hot meals for distribution during lockdown, later got a job at a vaccination centre.
- Primary school child:** Home-schooling using computer device provided through the Connecting Communities/ Power Up Digital Inclusion programmes.
- Person with disability:** Was able to access essential services online after receiving a computer device and basic digital skills training provided by our Digital Champions.
- Elderly grandparents:** Overcame isolation with help from our befrienders and benefited from Digital Inclusion programme, got a computer device and trained to use zoom to communicate with families abroad.

Social Value generated by CaN Work 20-21



230 young people
referred to our Kickstart
programme

**12 adults with
learning difficulties**
trained in IT skills

96 people
received accredited
qualification in Digital Skills

104 local migrants
engaged in bespoke
employability programme

21 unemployed migrants
got into jobs

3 Digital Champions

became paid Tutors

6 vulnerable women

engaged in specialist
employment support

E & T client hired as Appointment Co-ordinator for Endocrinology at Barts

The impact of the pandemic on employment has been difficult to assess. Traditional measures used could not capture emergency activities such as temporary shutdown of some sectors as well as greatly reduced working hours.

According to the Health Foundation, the government's furlough scheme did not stop the unemployment rate to rise from 3.8% in November 2019 to 5.0% in November 2020. It is projected to go up even more at the end of the furlough scheme.

A YouGov survey funded by the Foundation also found that before the pandemic, some groups – such as young people and those from minority ethnic backgrounds – were more likely to be unemployed. They have also been hardest hit by the effect of Covid-19 restrictions that included loss of work, reduced pay or continuous unemployment.

Our own interaction with jobseekers who came to use our service reveal that Covid-19 has had a severe negative impact on them. Some have had job offers withdrawn, scheduled interviews cancelled, while record numbers of people have lost their jobs. When businesses and workplaces shut down, the success rate for those applying for work dived down. Job seekers with underlying health problems or those caring for people with health issues faced even more difficulties. Lack of childcare has also prevented people from applying for jobs.



Throughout the difficult period, we have maintained contact with all our clients through WhatsApp, telephone calls and emails. We have delivered specific employment support sessions online and in-person, to help them to search and apply for jobs, update their CVs, fill in applications forms, write supporting statements and prepared them for interviews.

Most jobseekers not only asked for assistance to find work but also for help to access mental health support, food banks and food distribution centres, money advice and NHS services. This was especially valuable for the migrants whom we have targeted to support early in 2020, through funding from LBTH (Welcome to Tower Hamlets Programme). Despite the pandemic, we were very pleased to achieve the outcomes we have set at the beginning of the year and enabled them to find jobs and acquire essential skills for work including Digital Skills training.

Our team provided a list of support services to all our clients. Regular check-ins by our Advisors has helped to keep them positive and motivated. Key to keeping people connected and able to access essential services were the computer devices that we distributed to those at risk of isolation. The digital skills training we provided also proved crucial, thanks to our Digital Inclusion programme, Power Up. Remarkably, we have surpassed our target for getting people into accredited training, putting them better positioned to find a decently-paid jobs.

The Impact of Covid on Young People

Our response



1,963 young people
supported remotely,
online or in person

2 podcasts

around gender bias produced
by young women called "The
Choose to Challenge Podcast"

70 tablets

with mobile data given to young
people for home-learning

3 altercations

among groups of young people that
could have turned violent, mediated

45 hours per week

Detached & Outreach Youth
Work across **11 wards**

100 people

attended the virtual launch of
Spotlight's Climate Change Campaign
video called "Time for Change"

27 young people

completed two-day programme
exploring bike maintenance and
bike ability assessments

Impact of Covid on Young People Our Response

1,600 meals

given out over 6 weeks to
250 young people in the
summer holidays 2020
via Munch Box project

63 meals cooked

by 9 participating young
people with members of their
families in a **weekly on-line**
programme called Grub Club

5 young people

benefited from a mentoring
programme to tackle vaping,
substance misuse and grooming

10 young people

from across the Spotlight service
have been involved in consultations
for the Tower Hamlets Council Area
Action Plan (AAP)

54 young people

engaged in the Music Revival and
Music Survival on-line schemes run
in partnership with Today at Apple

9 months

high-level artist development
programme funded by Apple,
to start in September 2021

My son has definitely found a new level of
enthusiasm. We can definitely see his confidence
grow and his overall speech get better since starting
Music Survival. It has helped him tremendously.
His well-being has greatly improved.
Thank you so much Spotlight.

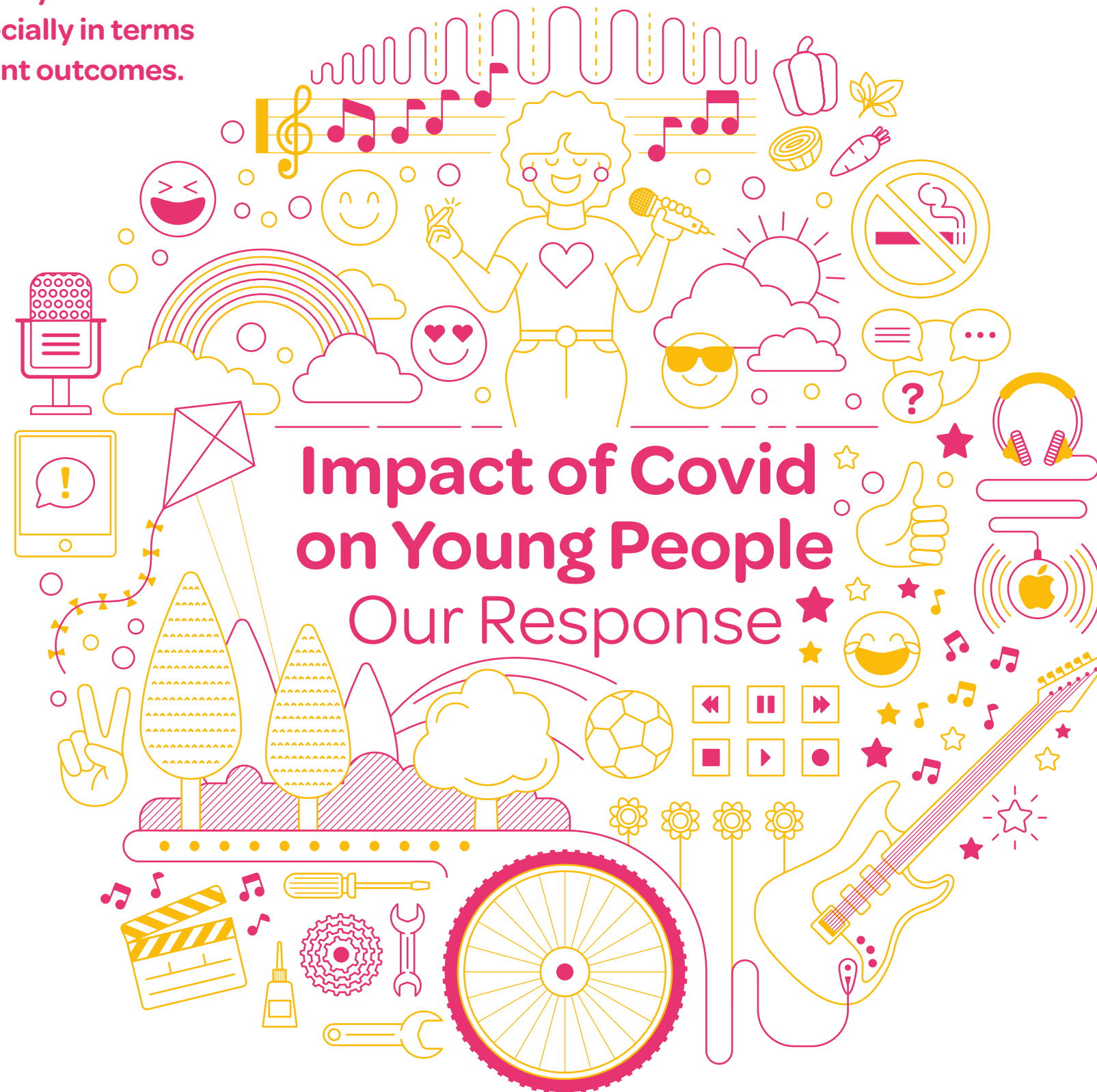
Dad of Spotlight member with speech difficulty

The coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly impacted the lives of young people, particularly those aged between 12-24 years. Emerging evidences show that they are one of the worst-affected groups especially in terms of mental health and employment outcomes.

A study recently conducted by The Health Foundation found an increased reason for concern across a range of measures showing the enormity of young people's negative feelings during lockdown. This includes: feeling worthless, unable to solve problems, not enjoying day to day activities, feeling constantly under strain, feeling lonely and depressed and unable to concentrate. The latter was exacerbated by a lack of private space to work and/or study at home.

The report also found that young people, especially those from poorer households and from a minority ethnic background, were more affected. They are twice more likely to lose their jobs than their peers, with 12.8% reporting to have lost their jobs.

In Poplar and across Tower Hamlets, our youth service Spotlight has seen the struggles of our youth members and young people in the wider community during the pandemic. Like every youth service in the country, we had no choice but to close our buildings, which used to be safe havens especially for vulnerable young people. Despite the enormous challenges however, Spotlight has managed to continue working with young people in all our patches mostly through virtual 1-2-1 and group engagement.



Our youth workers kept in touch with young people and their families especially those at risk of suffering from mental health problems, in financial difficulties, having problems with computer equipment, at risk of committing violent crimes, and experiencing all sorts of issues as a result of being stuck indoors.

In September 2020, Spotlight launched the Supporting Families initiative 'Breaking the Cycle'. The programme is funded by Tower Hamlets and is a partnership between Tower Hamlets Early Help Team, Youth Justice Service, Osmani Trust and Spotlight to engage young people at risk of involvement in crime and/or anti-social behaviour. Spotlight also launched a pioneering GP service HEALTH SPOT, specifically dedicated to the well-being of young people. Health Spot offers friendly, confidential medical appointments with a GP who is experienced in supporting young people with health needs.

Young people who have used it highly recommend it to their peers. **“Health Spot has helped me massively. It is an exceptional service. I felt comfortable to talk to Helen, the wonderful GP, about my health worries and concerns safely. I am honestly so grateful to Spotlight.”**

The above are just two of our major initiatives launched in the Covid year. In the previous page, we have detailed the various outcomes achieved by Spotlight with and for the young people despite the pandemic. They are a testament to the resilience of our youth service, the young people themselves, our staff and volunteers.

Impact of Covid on Health & Well-being

Our response



8,666 food interventions made

13 partners

delivered daily online health & well-being sessions

21,290 views

generated by health & well-being sessions via HARCA Centres Unlocked

75 vulnerable residents

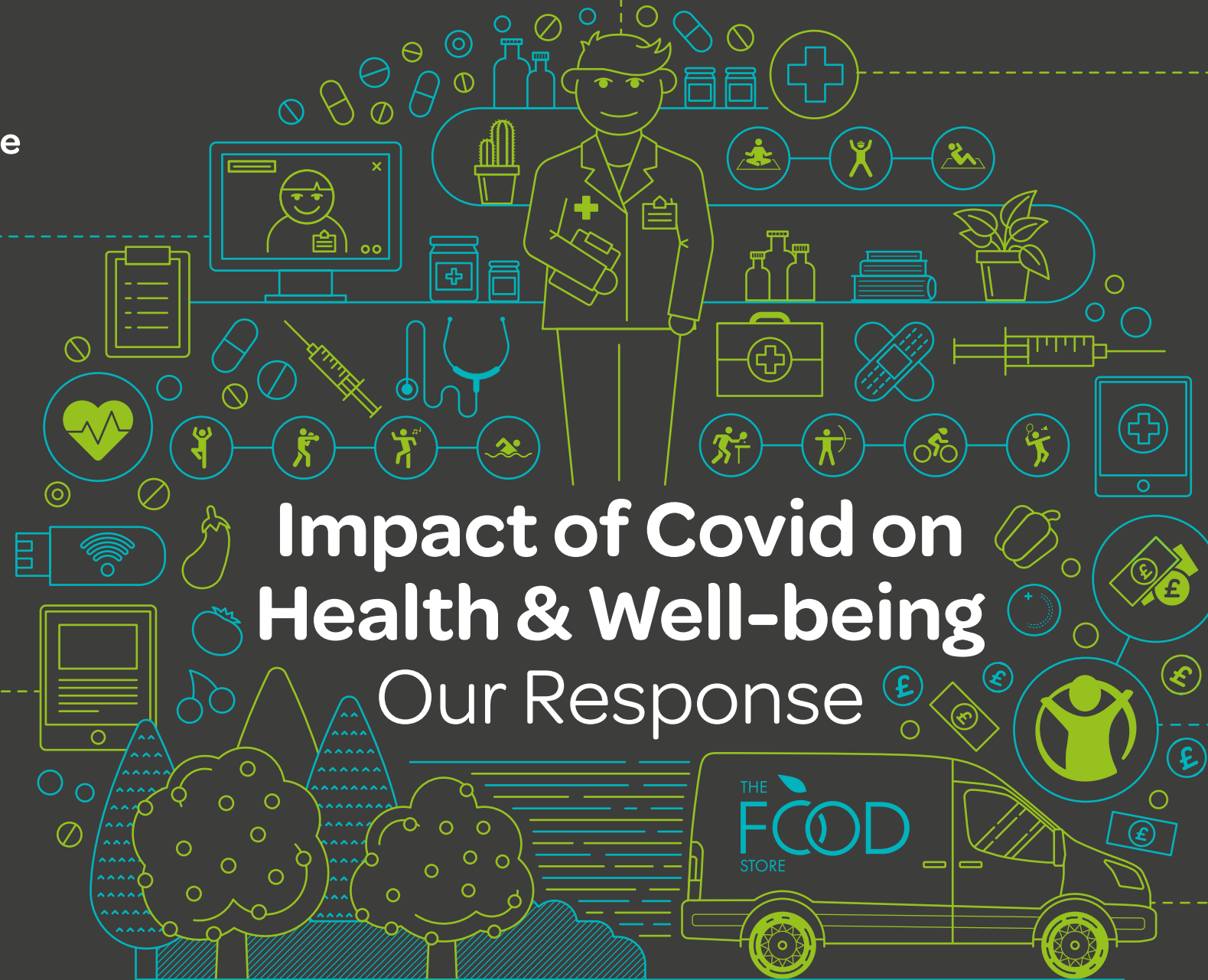
received tablets and dongles

57 residents

benefited from the Covid & Isolation Community Support Hub (CISH)

96 Christmas meals

and goodie bags delivered to homes of elderly residents in December



455 local people

attended in-person health sessions

10 sixth-formers

from Langdon Park School engaged in a 10-week programme for Young Health Champions accredited via the RSPH

£13,298, Save the Children fund

awarded to 41 families, 70 children

£84,105

grants awarded to mutual aid groups to deliver emergency services

60 families

registered as members of Food Store

Covid-19 was devastating for my family. We felt alone, lost my job and struggled financially. The Food Store not only ensured we have enough food on our table. They facilitated welfare and employment support that got me into job again six months later.

Health Centres Users Feedback

The London Poverty Profile 2021 reports that during the pandemic, levels of happiness, feeling worthwhile and life satisfaction have fallen across the city.

In winter 20/21, anxiety scores were 44% higher than pre-pandemic levels. Even for those who have been spared infection, the impact of this extra-ordinary time has taken its toll on their health and well-being. Especially so for young people. A Health Foundation's report reveals that young people's lives have been significantly impacted by the pandemic – disrupted schooling, lost employment and not being able to see friends. According to the report, while we have seen many young people's wellbeing bouncing back between lockdowns, for around 30% of them, wellbeing has remained consistently low.

Colleagues who have reached out to families during this period have seen similar trends among adults especially parents who either have lost their jobs or continue working from home while home-schooling their children. Older people, especially those living on their own felt very lonely and isolated. Before the first lockdown, we were already concerned that those already at risk of isolation, on very low-income and with financial difficulties will suffer the most.

Our work around health and well-being ensured that our residents had access to health-related services. Through a virtual portal we called HARCA Centres Unlocked, Facebook users among our residents and local people were able to take part in activities that they would normally attend in person at our community centres.



Our community development and well-being team worked with external partners, who each week provided live sessions like fitness, yoga and Pilates. We also uploaded video recorded health sessions such as gardening, meals on a budget, information about healthy lifestyles, play and arts activities for children and other interactive online activities. The team also helped distribute computer devices and arrange free connections for those who would otherwise suffer isolation due to lack of access to digital resources.

At the height of the pandemic and throughout lockdown periods, the team worked with local mutual aid groups and Tower Hamlets Council to operate food banks and cook hot meals at our neighbourhood Centres. Notable among them is the Women's Inclusive Team (WIT) and the Burdett Mutual Aid group led by the Burdett Football Club (BFC). Volunteers delivered food parcels to vulnerable residents while school children collected them from our Centres during term breaks and summer holidays. We worked with Save the Children Fund to offer families with children under five years up to £340 in food vouchers, white goods and other essential needs, including computer devices to support home learning.

We will continue to work towards improving our health and well-being offer, keeping in mind the health inequalities that most families in our communities experience to this day. It is a huge undertaking but at CaN and Poplar HARCA, we believe that we have a role to play in reducing these inequalities and we want our contribution to count.

The Spirit of Giving and Sharing

Volunteers take the lead



184 total number of volunteers engaged during the pandemic

10 volunteer Marshalls
helped 2 local GP practices in the Covid-Vax Hub roll out

19 volunteers
engaged in CISH; 8 are telephone handlers and 11 are volunteer shoppers

4 volunteers
helped in foodbanks that ran at our Centres

6 volunteers
delivered food to those isolating in their homes



Impact of Covid on Volunteering

Our Response

10 volunteers
have undergone befriending training

10 individuals
befriended by volunteers in just a month

15 young community heroes
informed regeneration plans

25 volunteers
mentored young people online

16 Digital Champions
engaged in Digital Inclusion work

6 volunteers
delivered medicines to sick elderly people

Volunteering at the garden has silenced the noise inside my head and slowed down my pace, helping me regain mental stability and clarity and ground myself literally with what's most important. In hard times like now, volunteering feeds and nourishes the soul, keeps us surviving and looking forward with hope.

Volunteers Feedback

In December 2020, they made our elderly residents very happy by delivering to each a special Christmas meal and gift in lieu of our Annual Christmas Lunch event attended by around 100 elderly residents.



In the spirit of sharing, we deliver sessions for partner organisations to share experiences and best practice. We also allocate placement opportunities to universities looking for opportunities for their students. A win-win arrangement for us as it has allowed us to recruit more long-term volunteers which we have matched to Community Centre projects.

The Impact of Covid on Resident Engagement

Our Response

500 resident members
of Regen WhatsApp groups Teviot /
Aberfeldy

6 Teviot RSG members
played an active part in the
Procurement Sub-Group (PSG)

80% of households
in Aberfeldy participated in
the Planning for Real exercise

2,200 ideas & feedback
gathered from Aberfeldy
Planning for Real Exercise

76 residents
active in the Teviot
Resident Steering Group

80 residents
active in Aberfeldy
Resident Steering Group

800 residents
door knocked in Aberfeldy

14 newsletters
produced

Impact of Covid on Resident Engagement

Our Response

“The RSG is an intelligent and inclusive group of residents, with tremendous local knowledge, from varying backgrounds with one common goal; to make the area a better place to live.”

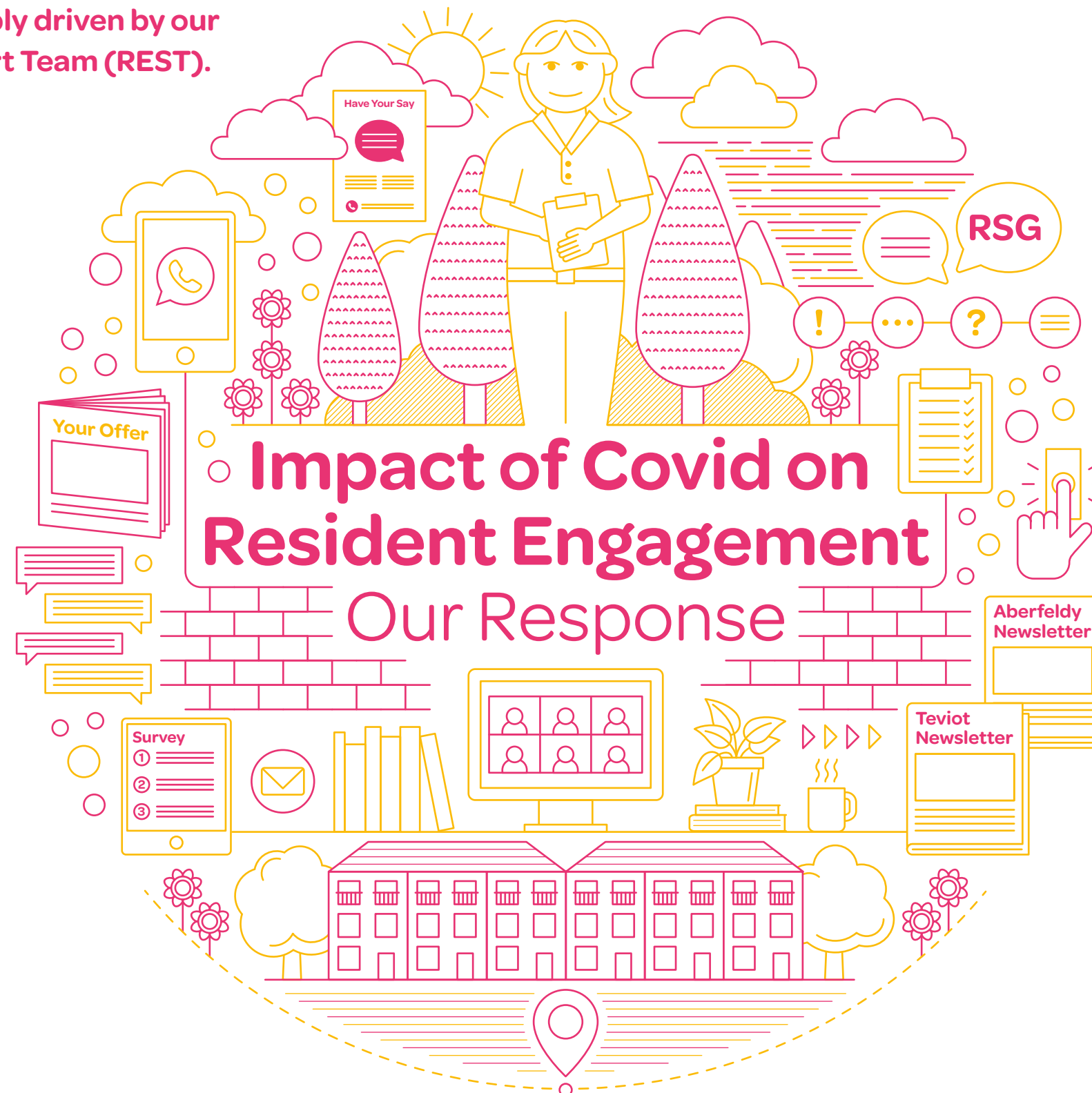
Independent Resident Advisor

The value of building and sustaining relationships with residents, using a variety of settings and opportunities to communicate, is a core principle driving all of Poplar HARCA's involvement activities. This is ably driven by our Resident Empowerment Support Team (REST).

They hold the thread that binds our engagement efforts at every team and every level of the organisation. At the height of the pandemic, it proved challenging to engage residents virtually, which was the only option left to us given the necessary restrictions that we all had to observe. But creativity and perseverance prevailed and REST still managed to keep in touch with local people, in the same way as the rest of Poplar HARCA had.

The pandemic came at a time when we were in the midst of major regeneration processes in a number of our estates. These necessitated constant communication with Resident Steering Groups (RSGs) for example. RSGs were formed to enable residents to make important inputs in all aspects of the regeneration plans in each estate. REST was heavily involved in facilitating the resident engagements in at least 2 of the sites, namely: Aberfeldy and Teviot estates.

In Aberfeldy, community consultations that started in 2019, continued throughout 2020. We developed a range of engagement tools to allow the consultation to continue whilst restrictions were in place.



The tools included: Regular telephone consultation, WhatsApp groups, Virtual Drop-Ins, Regular Newsletters, Virtual visits to new developments, Question Time format meetings, Video Q&A Interviews with lead officers, Regular Online surveys, Interactive Planning for Real toolkit, Draft Offer telephone consultation exercise, Regular video updates, RSG & Leaseholder zoom meetings, and Posters.

Consultation was maintained throughout the period of restrictions, and participation increased as a result of the engagement tools developed. Over 80% of homes participated in the Planning for Real exercise, involving whole families, generating over 2,200 ideas and items of feedback.

At the start of 2020 a sub group of the Teviot Resident Steering Group was developed to participate in the selection of a development partner. Six residents played an active role in the Procurement Sub Group (PSG) to select a development partner. The PSG procurement took a central role in assessing and interviewing shortlisted bidders, and facilitating an estate walkabout with bidders. The residents group were key in the selection of the successful development partner. The PSG are currently taking part in a procurement process to select a master planner for Teviot.

The Teviot community received regular Newsletters, WhatsApp, video and telephone updates and information throughout the year. Both RSGs in Teviot and Aberfeldy have been taking part in a series of participatory workshops to develop and shape a masterplan for their respective estates.