

# The Lighthouse Church Community Needs Assessment

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by Eido Research



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# the lighthouse

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# Executive Summary

The report outlines the research conducted to help the Lighthouse Church (officially known as Holy Trinity Swiss Cottage) understand their local needs and strategically develop their impact in the local community with their new building. The report draws on data from 100 door-to-door surveys from the local area; six in-depth interviews with community leaders; and two focus group discussions with parents and children from a local school.

The resulting data shows there are predominantly two groups that are caught in a process of cyclical deprivation: low-income families with children, and youth.

Since completing this research however, the recent coronavirus pandemic has had a major detrimental effect on the nation's economic and social health and wellbeing. Those communities already disadvantaged and experiencing deprivation and isolation have suffered the most.

In light of this, the needs of the community described in this report are now even more acute, and the resulting solutions proposed by the Lighthouse Church are needed more than ever.

*"there are predominantly two groups that are caught in a process of cyclical deprivation: low-income families with children, and youth."*

## Underlying physical and social issues

For these two groups a combination of physical issues (including poor housing conditions, financial instability, lack of community resources) is being exacerbated by a variety of social issues (including a lack of ambition or aspiration, and a lack of role models):

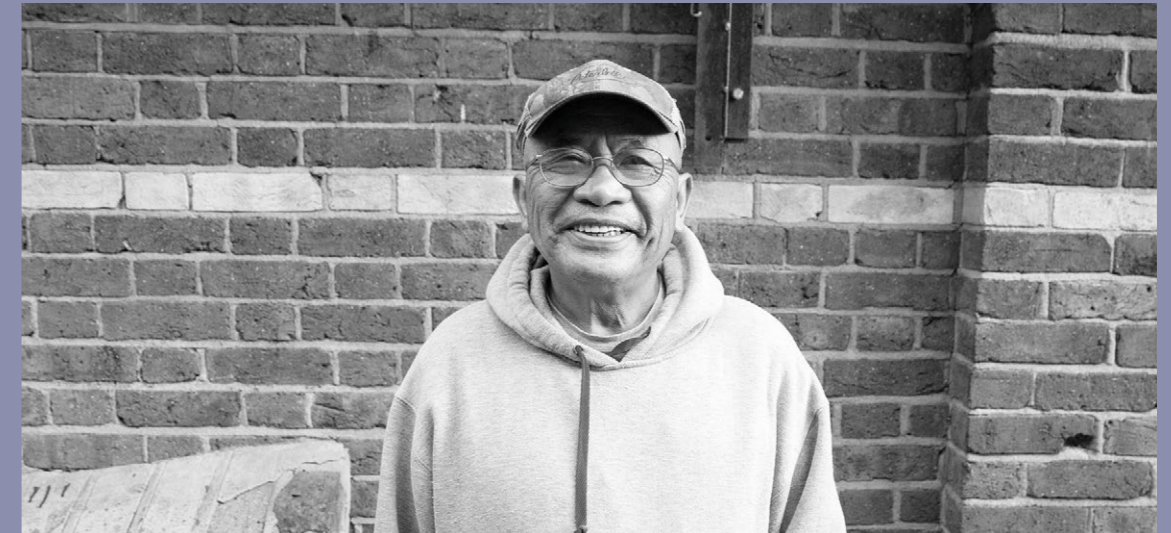
- 57% of the local community, and 6 out of 6 community leaders, considered financial instability to be at least a moderate problem in the local community.
- 60% of the local community, and 5 out of 6 community leaders, considered unstable housing/ living conditions to be at least a moderate problem in the local community.
- 8 out of 11 parents, and 6 out of 6 children who participated in the focus group, believed a lack of physical community resources to be at least a moderate problem in their local community.
- 10 out of 11 parents in the focus group believed a lack of aspiration and ambition to be an underlying issue facing the youth. Likewise, 3 out of 6 community leaders also identified this as a key area for concern.

## Resulting problems for youth and families

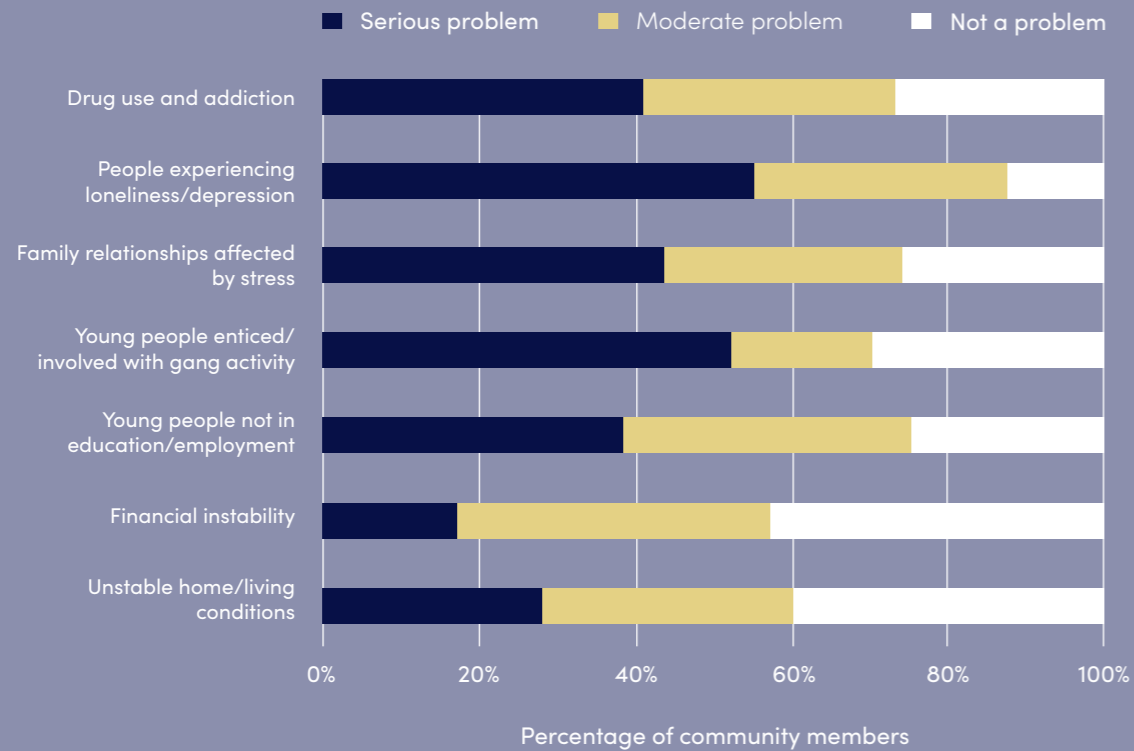
As described by community leaders, the result of this deprivation is that youth are turning to a variety of alternative routes to get their needs met (including crime and gang activity), whilst parents and families are increasingly becoming isolated and fragmented from society.

- 70% of the local community considered young people involved in gang activity to be at least a moderate problem in the local community, whilst 4 out of 6 community leaders believed this to be a severe issue.
- 88% of the local community and 6 out of 6 community leaders, considered people experiencing loneliness and depression to be at least a moderate problem in the local community.
- Community leaders highlighted that often it was the youth themselves who were the main victims of increased crime and gang activity.

Pictured: Local residents, and local community leaders, who were a part of this research



**Figure 1: Percentage of community members who considered the following social issues to be problems in their community**

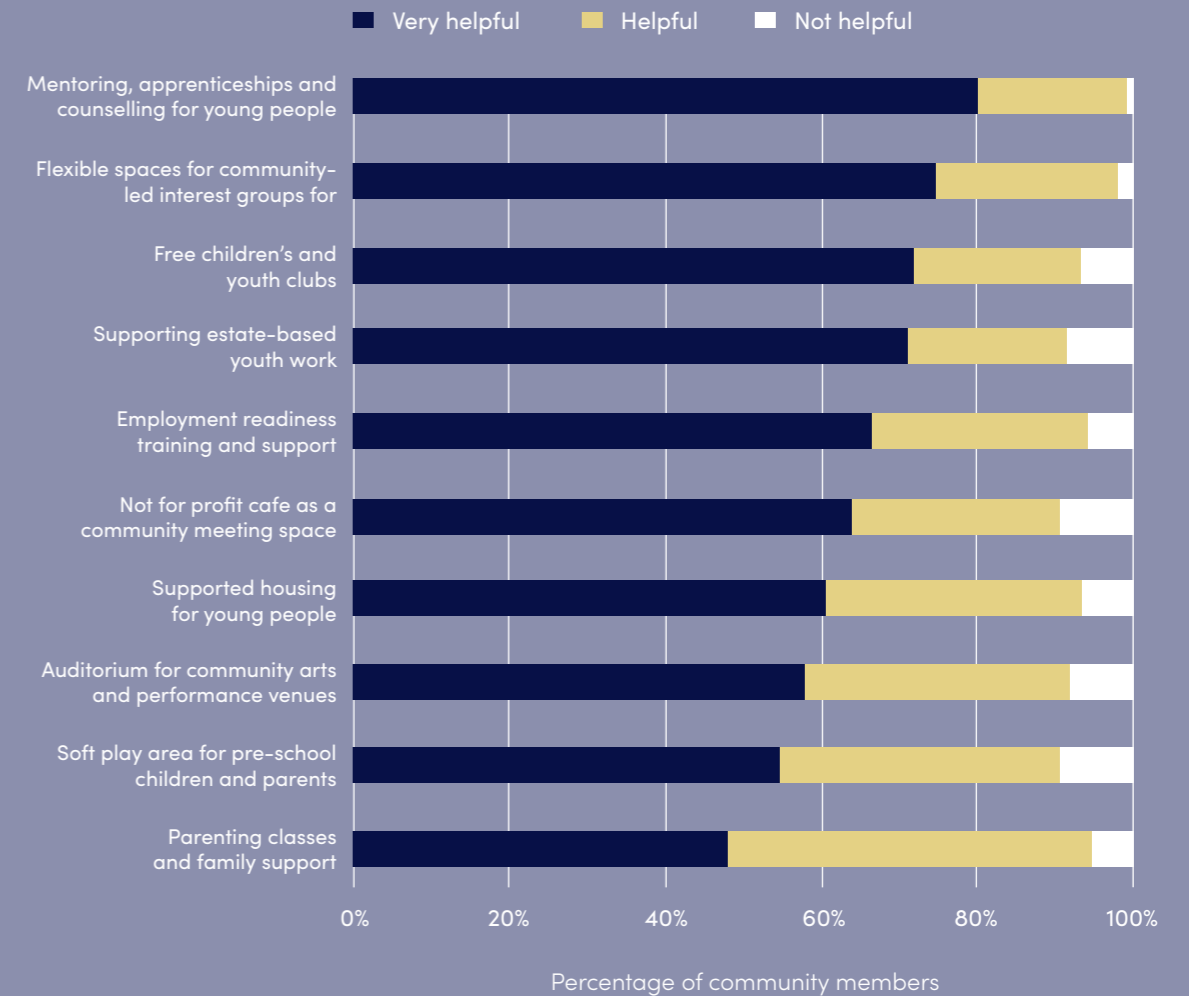


With the end goal of limiting or alleviating these cycles of deprivation, the research asked participants how helpful they would find the proposed solutions by the Lighthouse Church. Based upon these responses, four main areas of intervention were preferred by the local community.

- Social space to reduce isolation
- Creative environment
- Tailored support for youth and children
- Discussion spaces and support groups

Opposite is a visual representation of the degree of effectiveness of the proposed solutions, according to the participants. In general, all of the suggestions were well received and thought to be helpful to some degree. Mentoring, counselling and apprenticeships for young people scored highest, and although parenting classes and family support scored lowest, nearly half thought these would be very helpful solutions.

**Figure 2: Percentage of community members who considered the Lighthouse Church's suggested solutions helpful**



To conclude the report, several recommendations are made for the Lighthouse Church to implement. We have drawn on strategic tactics which have been devised from asking participants how to ensure on the ground communities engage with such services, to ensure high turn-out.

We hope that this report will provide the Lighthouse Church with a thorough understanding of the needs of their local community, and in turn contribute towards developing a space which is at the heart of its community. Creating this space will contribute towards creating and nourishing a healthier, connected and more fulfilled community surrounding the Lighthouse Church.

# 1. Introduction

The Lighthouse Church (formerly Holy Trinity Swiss Cottage) is seeking to raise £12 million to build The Lighthouse, a new centre in the heart of their community. The Lighthouse aims to create a place of connection and inclusion, and aims to be an example of how “faith and non-faith groups and organisations can work together because they share a vision of what makes a stronger and better community; one with more social justice and belonging” (Lighthouse, 2019).

In 2013 the Church conducted a needs audit. This initial survey informed the Church’s plans for developing the new Lighthouse centre, but as it was conducted six years ago it is increasingly out of date. The Church now wishes to test their emerging plans for Lighthouse against an up to date assessment of community need, and the community’s response to the Church’s proposed solutions to that need. They further wanted to have a concrete understanding of the best ways to engage better with the local community and increase their impact. With this in mind, Lighthouse asked Eido Research to conduct a ‘needs assessment’ of the local community around the Lighthouse Church, with the goal to answer the following questions:

- *What do the local community want from this new building?*
- *What are some of the areas of greatest unmet need from local residents?*
- *How can Lighthouse best meet these needs?*
- *What are the best ways that Lighthouse can engage with the community?*

This report aims to outline research solutions to help the Lighthouse Church understand their local needs and strategically develop their impact in the local community.

## Brief history of the area

The Lighthouse Church is located on Finchley Road, which lies in the London Borough of Camden. To provide an overview of who the Church is aiming to serve, some key data has been collated from the last census performed in 2011. It is key to remember that the demographic group and socioeconomic status of residents may have changed within the past eight years since this consensus was initially performed.

The Finchley Road area consists predominantly of flats and it contains a higher than average level of rented housing (excluding social housing). 51% of household spaces in this area are rented housing, which contrasts with the national average of just over 16%. Only 35% of the residents were born in England, which can be considered more ethnically diverse than the UK average. As a whole, the UK population claims itself as approximately 86% white, with residents of this area being 56% white, with the second largest demographic in this area identifying as ‘Other Asian’.

With 61% of the resident population, the surrounding area has a larger than average concentration of residents that are degree educated or similar, and the most common social grade of residents was ‘higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, or professional positions’. Documenting a statistical overview of this area enables us to understand the multiplicity and nuances that are present, highlighting the importance of identifying how best to serve such a diverse population.

## Methodology

A mixed methods approach was implemented to capture a range of community voices. This approach allowed for flexibility and adaptability to the study design, as well as eliciting more information from only one research question. A further benefit of using both qualitative and quantitative measures is that it enables a robust understanding of the problem, and thus yields more complete evidence, gaining both depth and breadth to the literature.

**The research carried out six in-depth interviews with community leaders identified through the Church; 100 door-to-door random surveys and two focus group discussions.** One focus group consisted of 11 parents of children at a local primary school, and the other group consisted of six students who attend this primary school, each discussion lasted one hour. Using this mixed methods approach enabled us to strengthen the findings of the research. Each data group was asked similar questions, looking at the social issues in their society, the underlying causes to these issues and the suggested solutions they have for these issues. These questions were formulated through consultations with the Lighthouse Church leaders.

The qualitative data sets such as the in-depth interviews enabled robust exploration and rich contextualisation, and in turn we were able to generate an understanding of attitudes, perceptions and insights. Conversely, quantitative research, such as the door-to-door surveys, focused on large groups, identifying key trends and patterns. The benefit of amalgamating numerical data with thematic approaches, is that it avoids over-reliance on statistics and “captures ‘soft-core views and experiences’ (Jogulu and Pansiri, 2011) and the subjective factors necessary to elucidate complex social situations” (Emerald Publishing, 2019).

The focus group discussions and all the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. In analysing this material we adopted a grounded theory approach in order to allow the thematic framework to emerge from the data through an iterative coding process. The quantitative data was analysed through a descriptive analysis framework so as to lead to a clear visual interpretation of the data. The visual representation of the data is illustrated throughout this report to support the qualitative, narrative descriptions.

## 2. Underlying community issues

### Physical issues

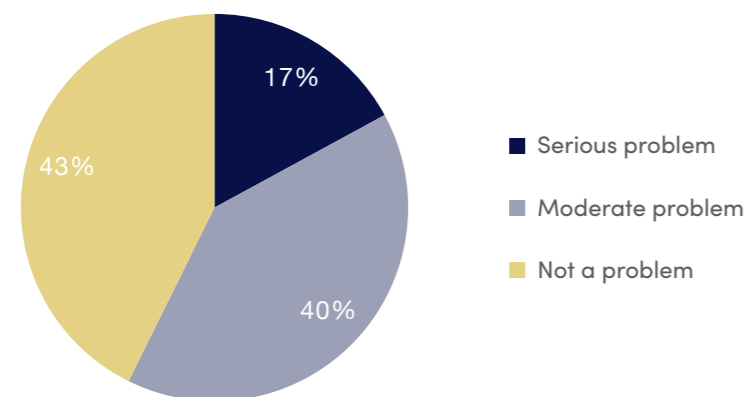
The underlying physical issues of the community were identified as being financial instability as well housing related issues. These two factors of people's lives are being compounded by a lack of integration with wealthier parts of the community, and a lack of community activities and resources available.

### Financial instability and housing

As poverty levels and the cost of living are much higher in London than the UK as a whole, Camden is a borough with a particularly high child poverty rate of 40% (Child Poverty Action Group, 2018). Our findings mirrored this national data, with parents, community leaders, and local residents all identifying financial instability and housing as major underlying conditions in the community. "Poverty and housing are the underlying causes [of] community issues", said one community leader and long-term resident.

Whether it was the cost of community services, or general household expenses, residents articulated financial pressures. Here 6 out of 11 of parents in the focus group, 4 out of 6 community leaders and 57% of community survey respondents all indicated that 'financial instability' was at least a moderate problem in the community.

**Figure 3:** Percentage of participants who consider 'financial instability' to be a problem in the local community



*"10 out of 11 of parents and 5 out of 6 of community leaders agreed that unstable housing affect their community."*

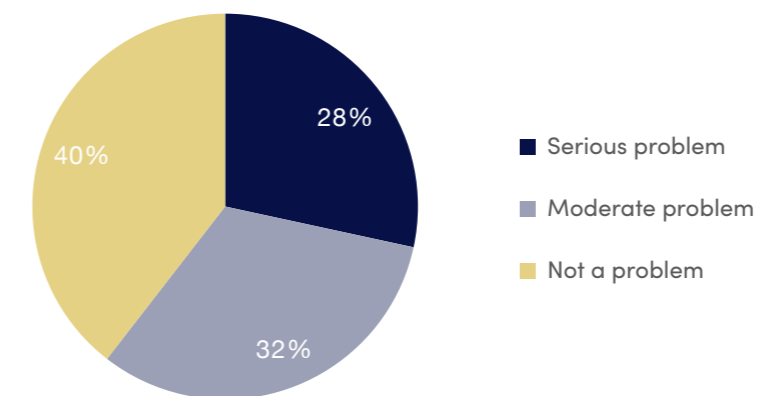


"There is a large amount of financial instability around there, but that is hidden, you are never going to know", said one community leader. There are "a lot of families on low income, and families with a poor condition of their finances", added another community leader.

Very often this financial instability was linked to the unaffordability of living in area. "So many things are unaffordable" said one community resident. We have "unaffordable nursery spaces for our children" added a parent, "and the result is that we have to decide between that or other costs in our lives".

Through community spaces hosting paid activities, one parent commented on how this "filters out the demographic of young people and families who can assess the provisions", alienating those who lack the financial capacity to afford such activities.

**Figure 4:** Percentage of participants who consider 'unstable housing/ living conditions' to be a problem in the local community



Coupled with affordability of basic lifestyles, was the home and living condition of local community members. Unstable home and living condition was identified as another core underlying issue, with 52% of survey respondents seeing this as affecting their community. Likewise, 10 out of 11 of parents and 5 out of 6 of community leaders agreed that unstable housing and living conditions affect their community. From "poor living conditions" and "not enough space at home", to the "low state of repair of property" and ongoing "maintenance problems", they articulated that this unstable living condition was a key underlying issue.

*“buying homes is almost prohibited unless you have a very healthy bank account”*



“If you have a leak in the roof, housing associations and councils aren’t forthcoming now [...] the house wouldn’t get a look in, or be dealt in the way it should be”, said one community leader.

Housing challenges were seen as being a catalyst in wider domestic and familial problems, having a repercussive effect. One community leader clearly articulated that if there is damp in a room, “you have to live in another room and if you are short on space, it becomes a problem, so little things begin to manifest into bigger things”.

It was further noted by the local councillor that due to rising house prices, an increased number of people are living in social housing and thus there are “lots more issues, [such as] adult social care, disabilities, poverty”. As a result of high house prices in the area, the local councillor further noted that young families and youth who live in his ward of Frognal and Fitzjohns are not able to afford homes. Thus, “buying homes is almost prohibited unless you have a very healthy bank account”. Due to these affordability challenges, he noted that the “community spirit is gone”.

Lack of integration and wealth disparities

Whilst financial and home instabilities are often identified as key issues in many communities in the UK, a unique factor about the local area surrounding Lighthouse Church was the high level of wealth disparity and lack of integration between community members. Here areas of social deprivation are often found next to areas of high wealth and prosperity.

For example, one parent identified that this ever increasing wealth inequality has created a divide “between the poor and the wealthy people” and this divide was noted as being clearly noticeable. “I live in a council flat where I have been 20 years and the house opposite me is a big massive build, and the owners have owned it, so it is really looking out the window [and seeing the divide]”.

Due to the lack of outdoor space, one parent added that she does not have the “space to let children play out in the garden compared to how the other half lives” and this heightens the divide and increases the personal distance between the rich and poor. A senior youth worker who was interviewed as a part of this research, noted that in areas “where you see wealth, poverty is hidden behind it”. She mentioned that the wealth brings up the average of the local area and so there is an illusion that an area is comfortable and does not need support, which leads to provisions and services for the poor falling through the net,

*“where you see wealth, poverty is hidden behind it”.*

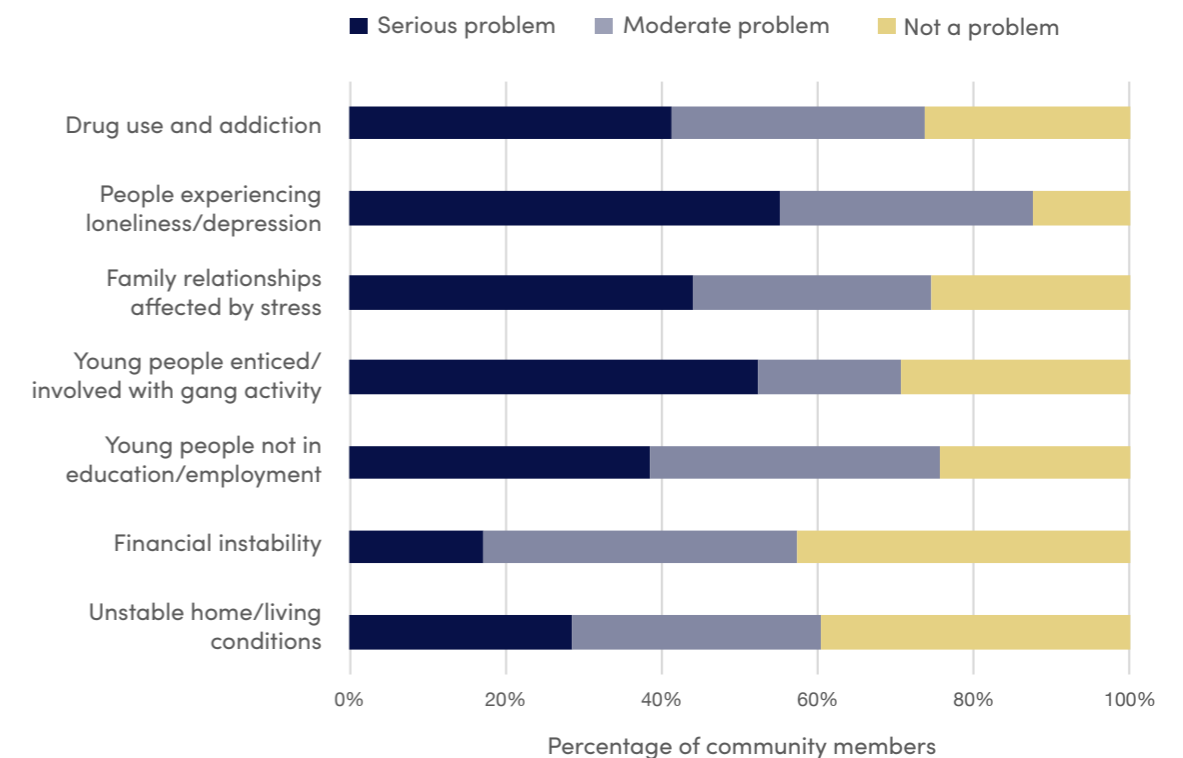


*“Those with less income won’t be exposed to as much as perhaps those further up the road [i.e. the “wealthy” West Hampstead residents]. We are in a pocket of West Hampstead, but it kind of gets left out because it is assumed that we’re fine, and this area is just not fine, even though it is a stone throw away [from the more affluent parts of West Hampstead]”.*

The wealth disparities identified, were likewise leading to increased segregation and lack of integration in the community. This was mentioned 3 of the 6 community leaders. One community leader, who is a senior youth worker noted that there is often a deliberate lack of integration between residents who are at different ends of the socioeconomic spectrum:

*“In certain wealthier parts of Camden, they host street parties. They are hosted in a way which creates a feeling of ‘if you’re not from this road, you’re not welcome’. This broadens the social gap and pushes people further away, rather than inviting them in. It is not the same middle ground”.*

**Figure 5:** Percentage of community members who considered the following social issues to be problems in their community





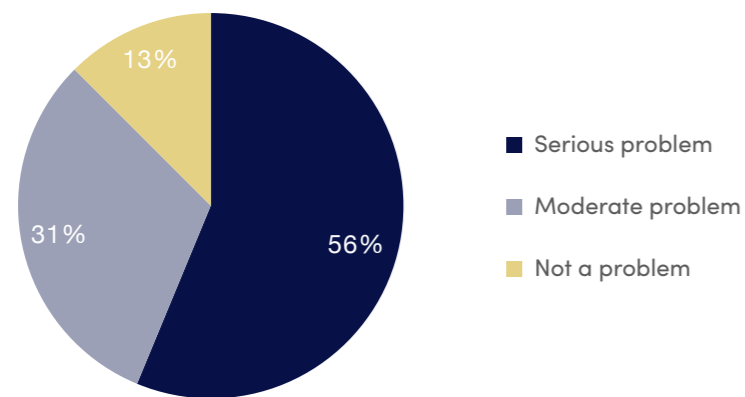
*“over the last 25 years the area has changed for the worse. In terms of community lots of facilities are closing down for children”.*



### Lack of community activities

The presence of financial instability, poor living conditions, and high wealth disparities, are compounded by a lack of community activities present. Here 2 out of 6 community leaders mentioned this as an underlying factor, whilst 5 out of 11 parents in the focus group noted that lack of physical resources is a severe social problem.

**Figure 6:** Percentage of parents in the focus group who considered a ‘lack of physical resources’ to be a problem in the local community



One community leader noted that there used to be activities and facilities for the community in the past, however, “over the last 25 years the area has changed for the worse. In terms of community lots of facilities are closing down for children”. This was reiterated by another community leader who noted the cause and effect of closures, “the services on offer have been very much reduced. They are critical to the area, because otherwise there is a strong risk of individuals ending up on the street”. This leader, who is a senior youth worker in the area, further stated that the lack of community activities was a result of budget cuts and the rise of austerity, meaning community venues did not have the funding for such services. This community is “forgotten and is not a well prioritised area”. She mentioned that this is “because it is not vast rows and rows of estates. There are pockets of them around and they are very neatly hidden behind railway lines or behind shops”, indicating that because this area does not have a large number of visible housing estates, it is seen to not need as much community support, as opposed to those areas which are rife with social housing.

*“nothing to accommodate the children around here and that is why there are so many children that get up to mischief now”.*



The lack of community activities was also due to the physical space being bought by developers and now one of the community leaders labelled it a “lost playground, a forgotten area [which is] not well resourced”. This was further supported by a participant who passionately spoke of a bygone era which had community activities for the youth and adolescents:

“A couple of years ago Holy Trinity Church used to do a group called “Massive” for the local children or schools in the surrounding areas. That was going for a couple of years and everyone used to join whether you had a religion or not, but when that got stopped there was nothing for them to do [...] That kept the kids together because it was something to look forward to and somewhere to go, and they felt safe”.

Due to the lack of community activities it was noted by a community leader that there is “nothing to accommodate the children around here and that is why there are so many children that get up to mischief now”. There was great importance given to the value of community activities, which would encourage the local residents to get to know one another and be in a stimulating environment together, reducing loneliness, isolation and boredom. The correlation between engaging in youth crime and not having activities available was one that was oftentimes mentioned across all the data sets. The aforementioned community leader further commented that:

“there is nothing for them [young children] to do here. They had a little community area where children used to go and play, but now it has gone private and a private person has bought it so it’s a preschool ... we’re not allowed access to that anymore, it’s gone”.

As well as there not being sufficient activities for youth and adolescents, some parents spoke of the lack of activities for their younger children. There is “not enough for young children or for kids to play” and “there is a park, but the kids weren’t allowed in the park because they kept climbing the trees and they were being told off for climbing trees”. Simultaneously, parents mentioned that there is nowhere for them to go to and so “mother’s [end up] walking around Iceland with young babies, waiting for 40 minutes whilst an older child might be in a group”.

Due to the lack of communal meeting points, one parent in the focus group mentioned the loneliness felt by families that live in shared accommodation. As they “don’t have much space, they probably don’t get much chance to meet other people, so somewhere they could interact with other people and get to know them [is important]”.

*"25% of parents in the focus group suggested a lack of aspiration as a serious issue, and the other 75% mentioned it was a moderate problem."*



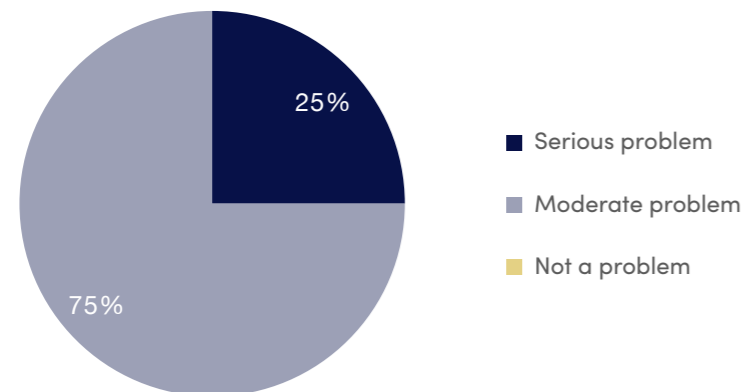
## Social issues

If declining housing conditions, financial instability and a lack of community resources are the main areas of physical deprivation, a lack of aspiration, agency, and ambition are the main areas of social deprivation. The following section outlines how these social factors are only compounding the identified physical factors.

### Lack of ambition / aspiration

The first area of 'social deprivation' was the low perceived alternatives, or ambitions that community members had for themselves and their families. Indeed, there was complete agreement from all parents in the focus groups that this was at least a moderate underlying problem. Likewise, 3 out of 6 community leaders also identified this as a key area for concern. "There is a lack of aspiration and lack of ambition for school achievement amongst parents" said a community leader and head teacher at a local primary school. She acknowledged that "parents don't come from an affluent background, so kids won't take an affluent background back. We try and break that cycle in school by giving children the opportunity to do different things and show children they can achieve".

**Figure 7:** Percentage of parents in the focus group who considered a 'lack of aspiration' to be a problem in the local community



*"There is a lack of aspiration and lack of ambition for school achievement amongst parents"*



Not being in education or employment was seen as contributing to youth and adolescents lacking aspiration. The local councillor expressed that "kids who aren't in education or employment are those who arguably lack aspiration, lack guidance, lack ideas, lack objective in their lives and probably haven't been raised to have one. I would argue that there is a [need] of inspiration and guidance". The head teacher of a local primary school commented that children have a clear "lack of aspiration or not knowing how to get qualified [...] and none of it even matters anyway, not knowing what qualifications will look like, or what that will bring them. So, I suppose being part of a gang and making money that way is much easier. They can see that [gang culture pathway] more readily".

Not being in education or employment was seen as contributing to youth and adolescents lacking aspiration. The local councillor expressed that "kids who aren't in education or employment are those who arguably lack aspiration, lack guidance, lack ideas, lack objective in their lives and probably haven't been raised to have one. I would argue that there is a [need] of inspiration and guidance". The head teacher of a local primary school commented that children have a clear "lack of aspiration or not knowing how to get qualified [...] and none of it even matters anyway, not knowing what qualifications will look like, or what that will bring them. So, I suppose being part of a gang and making money that way is much easier. They can see that [gang culture pathway] more readily".

The lack of aspiration and ambition is closely linked to poor self-belief and an absence of perceived alternative options. Referring to young people's perception of cyber bullying and negative labelling, a community liaison officer said, "the thing that you can't get across to these kids, was the fact that what's happening can't be switched off, when you said 'you can switch that off', some of them looked horrified, some of them had no concept of the fact that you could not switch it off so they think that it is real and they don't realise that they can control it". Similarly related to self-belief, is the unconscious loss of hope, "if you don't have hope, you can give up and people can overtake you, they can pressure you to do stuff and you have no hope. If no one says anything to you, and you have no hope, you feel 'what's the point in all of this', which leads to a lot of these problems". It was further noted that young people are not given a platform to show their worth. If they were given this opportunity,

**“a lot of youth think they’re not good because they’ve been told so, so many times, that you start to believe it, so they start doing bad things, start living up to that reputation”.**



*“they would excel, but because they’re never given an opportunity to show their worth, they are already labelled before they can even put their best foot forward. They don’t have the confidence [...] and they have a self-esteem issue which gets the better of them. When they are confronted with authority it feels like a sticking point, a conflict, but if they were able to put their best foot forward in the first place they wouldn’t be stigmatised for those issues. [There] is not a lot of support for youths any more, it has been stripped back [...] they are asked to sink or swim, and a lot of them are sinking because of these issues”.*

### **Absence of role models**

A “role model” has been conceptualised as “someone along whose ways of good citizenship a child is encouraged to mould his personal-development path to a bright future via educational persistence, intellectual development and positive self-concepts” (Assibey-Mensah, 1997: 242). As this quote highlights, there is a large significance of having a role model so as to pave the way for a hopeful future. However, coupled with a lack of aspiration, community members identified a lack of good role models as being a key underlying issue.

Feeding into the aforementioned narrative of lack of aspiration and ambition, a community leader expressed that “a lot of youth think they’re not good because they’ve been told so, so many times, that you start to believe it, so they start doing bad things, start living up to that reputation”. It was noted that this self-worth and self-belief can be illustrated through necessary examples from others. The local councillor mentioned that “it is good to have someone to point to, to say, if they can do it so can you [...] you always have to walk a fine line between sanctimonious and preachy. Still, I think that ambition and drive do sometimes need an element of inspiration, to sustain ambition and drive”. This highlights the importance of having a responsible adult around the youth to praise them. A parent in the focus group noted the value of asking the youth, “‘what are you doing on that street corner’ [and] it’s just having those people to go to, so they know ‘I’m not completely anonymous and I’ve got people around who know who I am’”.

## **3. Resulting problems**

Whilst all the underlying issues identified in the previous section effect both families and youth alike, the resulting problems are somewhat specific to each group. Here the result was that families experienced an increasing level of social isolation and mental health issues, whilst youth were turning to alternative areas of crime, gangs, and drugs.

### **Social isolation for families**

A community is often the familiar thread that brings people in society together to advocate, support one another and engage in collective action (Delanty, 2009). Not only is having a community a strong source of practical support, but it offers emotional support amidst challenging times. However, in a context of high levels of financial pressures, unstable home environments, and a lack of integration, isolation is often the result.

Leaders explained that by having unstable housing conditions there was little room or space to build and maintain community relationships. *“It makes it virtually impossible to plan ahead, to be able to maintain social relationships, families are embarrassed by having poor living conditions and therefore are less likely to engage with other families, this leads to a breakdown in relationships both between families and other families, but also between young people”*, commented a community leader.

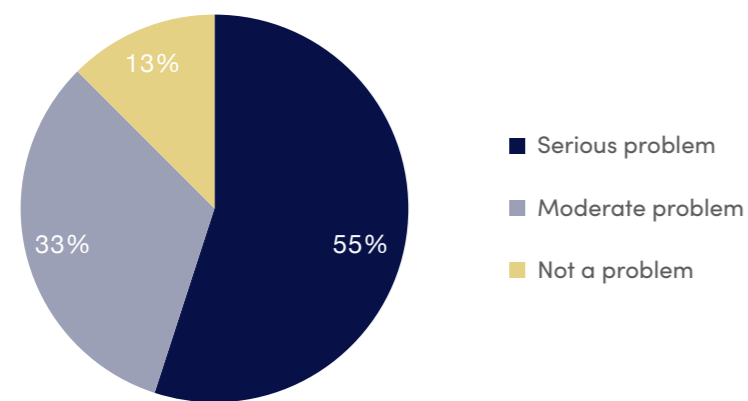
Likewise, the poor housing conditions also acted as a form of isolating embarrassment. *“You’ve got a family living in cramped living conditions, the house is in disrepair. They are embarrassed by their situation and therefore the older kids don’t invite their friends round. This also puts stress on the internal dynamics in the family. If you have everyone in the same situation under one roof it has implications on mental and physical health. It can lead to homelessness and an even greater level of embarrassment and isolation”*. Also, unsuitable and confined living conditions, can put further pressure on families and they may lack resilience to cope with such challenges. Thus, one parent in the focus group concluded that “people’s perceptions of coping skills [...] and how they can deal with the lack of space and cultural differences” can be an underlying cause to mental ill health and isolation.

Several parents who participated in the focus group illustrated that living in a busy, built up area with a population that is highly mobile, was a further cause of isolation as it meant “not being able to see the same people every day”.

This was coined as 'mobility instability' by one community leader who is a head teacher of a local school. She noted that due to this frequent turnover, at the school they "lose loads of children because they get moved on from temporary accommodation [...] Loads of children get moved constantly, with just a day's notice", instilling a fast-paced environment of not getting to know peers and colleagues".

The result of these factors was evident in the high levels of loneliness and isolation in the data. For example, 70% of those who responded to the survey, and 5 out of 6 of community leaders, identified social and emotional loneliness and isolation as one of the key problems in the community.

**Figure 8:** Percentage of participants who considered 'loneliness & depression' to be a problem in the local community



### *"I don't know anyone in the 50 metre radius".*

This disconnection and loneliness was emphasised by another parent in the focus group who mentioned that "around here we don't really have a community or we don't get together, we know each other from the school, but that's it". To support this statement, a community survey respondent noted that "I don't know anyone in the 50 metre radius". A parent in the focus group commented on the irony that there are "probably a lot of families [...] who have something in common and feel loneliness, who can come together".

Finally, for families who were accessing shared accommodation, isolation was also noted as a direct result of their circumstances. As one parent noted, "the families in hostels are in need of space and somewhere they have to feel they belong, part of a community, to come out, to meet people". However, "they don't feel they can access something like this because they feel like they don't belong" and so there is an assumption that the families continually stay at home where they are not able to meet their local community, resulting in an increased sense of isolation.

*"ultimately [crime and gang involvement] happen because young people aren't engaged elsewhere."*



This also had knock on effect on the children of these families. Due to the lack of space in the shared accommodation, one parent in the focus group discussion noted that it has an "effect on what you are able to do with your child, because we all live in small flats...I'm aware of these families with small children and they have a tiny, tiny garden. I think, they feel, they are not part of a community as such". Moreover, there was a sense of embarrassment related to living in poor living conditions and being associated with living in shared accommodation, so it further heightened the isolation families feel as they are less likely to engage with other families, which will "lead to a breakdown in relationships both between families and other families, but also between young people".

Finally, loneliness as a social issue was highly salient to older adults. A local councillor mentioned that with a "higher than average percentage of elderly [in the local area], there are issues such as isolation, solitude that elderly members can feel, especially as they lose their families and friends, thus they need the support structure as they don't always necessarily have it". This lack of family presence was further alluded to as a factor towards experiencing loneliness. "I don't have any family here, nor does my husband, so there is a bit of loneliness for my son" stated one parent in the focus group. Recognising the importance of isolation as a core social issue is paramount in understanding what this community is lacking, and how this correlates to general life satisfaction and health so as to try and fill this void and alleviate isolation.

### **Youth becoming involved in gangs, drugs, and crime as alternative reward systems**

Whilst further social isolation and relational breakdown were subsequent issues for deprived families, for the children and youth of these families consequences were often more extensive.

Having limited perceptions, or indeed physical options, to improve their wellbeing, community leaders commented of young people being drawn towards alternative ways to meet their physical and social needs. Here they pointed towards a combination of gang activities, drugs and crime as alternative reward systems.

As previously mentioned, participants felt that as the youth were not stimulated by activities or able to "let off steam", it led to increased levels of boredom and a lack of engagement elsewhere. One parent, who is also a teacher at a local primary, aptly coined the term "The Lost Years", when referring to the ages 10 to 18.

*"involvement in gangs offers a 'form of promotion', especially if there is a lack of education or employment opportunity, or by having failed the opportunities that were given to them".*



She felt there were no activities for the youth and adolescents, specifically between leaving school and arriving home in the evening. A community leader, who is a senior youth worker concluded that as a result "ultimately [crime and gang involvement] happen because young people aren't engaged elsewhere. I'd like to think that if there were provisions for them or living in an area that made them feel safe, they wouldn't take those risks".

In this regard involvement in gang activity was seen as an opportunity to escape boredom which was ensuing from the lack of aspiration and community services / activities available. The community liaison officer mentioned that "they've got nothing else to do, [so the youth say] I could join that gang, make money, I could get some respect'. It's also fear, because 'if I'm there, I'm with them, they're not looking at me".

This causal route was also highlighted by another community leader and member of the parent's council for Camden. "There was an incident here about a year ago or two, someone got stabbed just outside our house. That was one of the local kids, who never lived here but lived just down the road, and that was because kids were coming from different areas and kids didn't have nothing to do...In 2016 there was a lot of families here, but because a lot of families had to move out of the area because of one reason or the other, the children started to police themselves. If something was happening in an area, they [children] would retaliate, break into cars, come into people's homes stealing stuff. It would start with little stuff and manifest into bigger stuff".

Likewise, focus groups with children revealed that youth involvement in gang culture may be because they have "lost someone in their family and are insecure in themselves" so they are looking to belong. Through their potential desire to gain a sense of belonging, "they choose to revert to the gang, to the pact, to the comfort of belonging. There is probably also a conversation to be had there about identity and by joining a gang it gives you an identity".

In addition, a councillor noted that involvement in gangs offers a "form of promotion, especially if there is a lack of education or employment opportunity, or by having failed the opportunities that were given to them".

Associated with this idea of promotion, the community liaison officer commented that through 'street cred' or 'street currency', "people get to the top of the pile and it is all about money and the gangs are all about money [...] It is all about an operating gang making money, and drugs is usually behind that, but it is about respect. The higher up you get in the gang, the more respect you get but you have to keep that respect because there's people coming from underneath and that is where all the knife crime comes in". Thus being part of a gang and making money through this involvement was documented as being the easier route to financial stability.

This was supported by the respondents of the survey, 59% of whom believed that young people enticed or involved in gang activity is affecting their community.

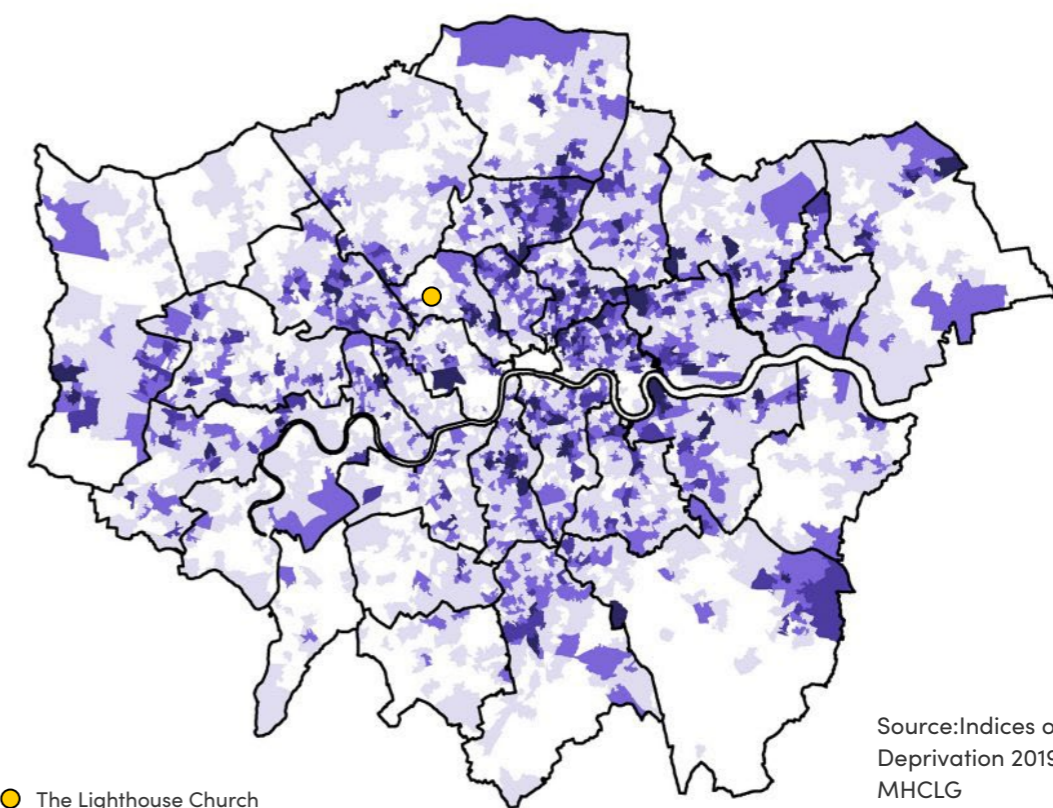
### Resulting gang and crime activity

The result of these factors lead many community members and leaders to perceive a high level of gang activity from the youth in the community. Here 52% of all participants, and 4 out of 6 community leaders, identified this as a serious problem facing in the local area. One community leader, who acts as a community liaison officer mentioned, "you are bordering on gangs and knife crime [here] so I would say there would be a lot of youth problems and also to a certain extent there are going to be hate crime problems because there are all over".

**Figure 9:** The map below visually highlights this crime domain in London in 2019

**Of areas in England**

- In 5-10% most deprived (269)
- In 10-20% most deprived (667)
- In 20-50% most deprived (2,224)
- In 50% least deprived (1,549)



Source: Indices of Deprivation 2019, MHCLG

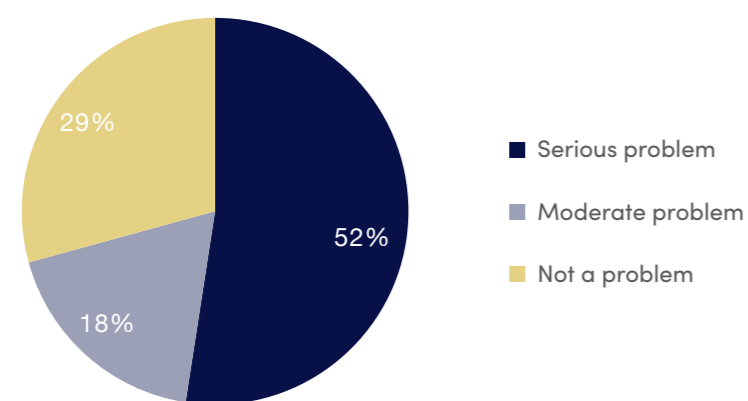
● The Lighthouse Church

*“older children are turning up outside schools, whether it be for drugs or criminal activity. I know of a handful of kids who have been groomed involved in that stuff”*

It was noted by a senior youth worker that there has been an increase of gang related stabbings after school time and that this is “affecting a lot of Camden [and] there are huge issues in terms of rivalry around the borough [...] I just don’t think there are many places that are safe unfortunately”. She further mentioned that there is a high level of drug dealing which occurs on housing estates. Last year, this led to a boy getting stabbed on the estate but, “it [the housing estate] is so tucked away, you would never even know it existed. The people I know who live there, hate living there and are desperate to leave because they don’t think it’s a safe space”.

Likewise, the high level of gang activity was mirrored by a high level of crime and a decreased sense of safety. Participants perceived the types of crime prevalent in the local area ranged from drug dealings and stabbings, to burglaries and theft on mopeds. 29% of survey respondents felt that crime is increasing in the community. One specific community survey respondent mentioned that crime can have an impact on different demographics divergently, “when you get into the nice areas it is all going to be about burglaries”.

**Figure 10:** Percentage of participants who considered ‘young people involved in gang activity’ to be a problem in the local community



Here again, it was apparent amongst participants that youth were the main demographic involved in crime in their neighbourhood. There was a lot of weighting on mugging and assaults being undertaken by teenagers who had fallen out of the education system. This change was seen as a recent development. A community leader noted that “if you go back a couple of years ago, five years ago, we hadn’t got there yet. It was quite ok, it was quite okay to go out and children would come here and play, we would go there are play [...] do the nice stuff we used to, but it’s not become that anymore”, further isolating parents and families from communal spheres.

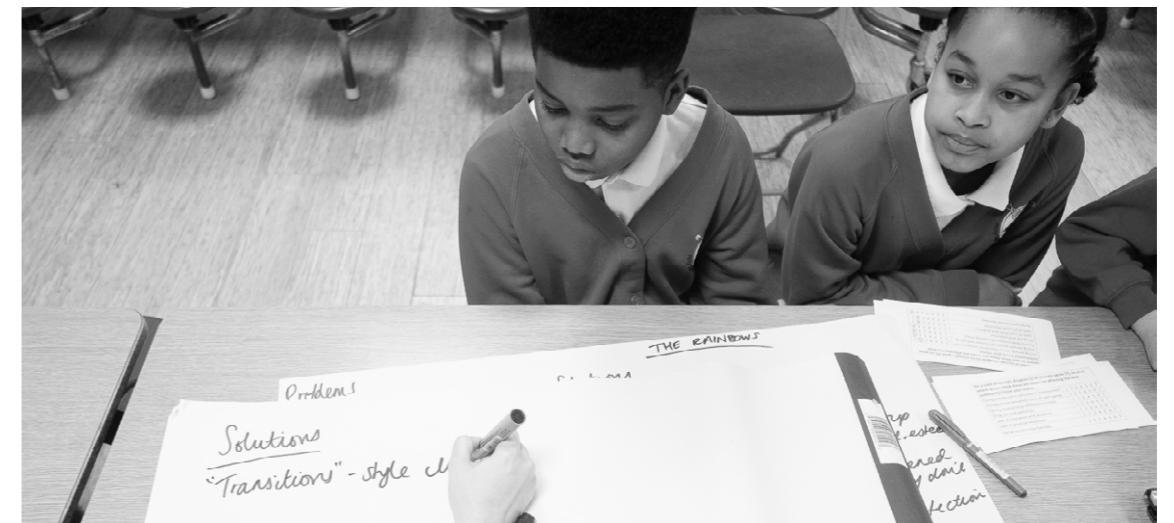
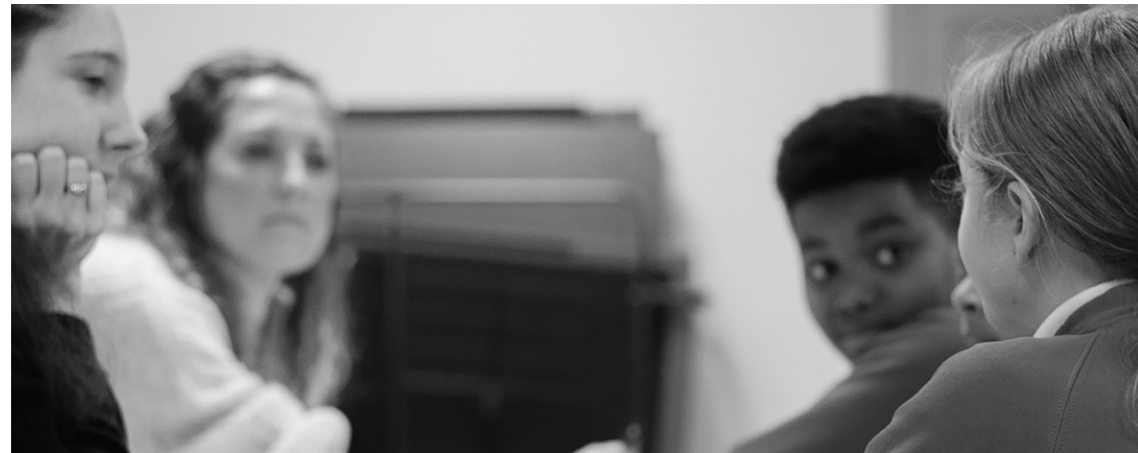
Participants also observed how crime started with children as young as 7 or 8, who are “stealing, and the language they use is changing a lot...the language they use is not appropriate for their age group, or not appropriate at all, but it is commonplace now”, as was noted by a community leader. One parent in the focus group even mentioned that his four year old son was offered drugs by teenagers. Naturally, as a parent this is worrying and he fears for what will happen to his children, but also the criminal careers the adolescence are engaged with.

In addition to the youth being perpetrators of crime, another social issue identified was crime’s negative impact on youth, as they are at the receiving end of criminal activities. The community liaison officer commented that most people:

*“don’t seem to realise that most youth today, live on a totally different planet to their elders, so there is a 24/7 social media world out there that people don’t understand and it doesn’t switch off. At the lower end of the scale there is school bullying, at the higher end of the scale there is county lines [...] eventually this affects the mental health of our youth, because it is 24 hours”.*

A child in the focus group mentioned that he had abuse hurled at him as he was near his house. Moreover, the community leader who acts as a senior youth worker in the local area, mentioned that grooming had become an increased issue recently. She noted how “older children are turning up outside schools, whether it be for drugs or criminal activity. I know of a handful of kids who have been groomed and who have been involved in that stuff”. Also, in the same school she mentioned how more fights are occurring after school, where “some students [from other schools] come to pick a fight with kids”. The shared views of the participants highlights how recent rises in youth crime is a social emergency, which acts as a “strong wave of violence blighting our communities” (House of Commons, 2019: 3).

Pictured: Focus group of parents and children from a local primary school



## 4. Identifying the solutions

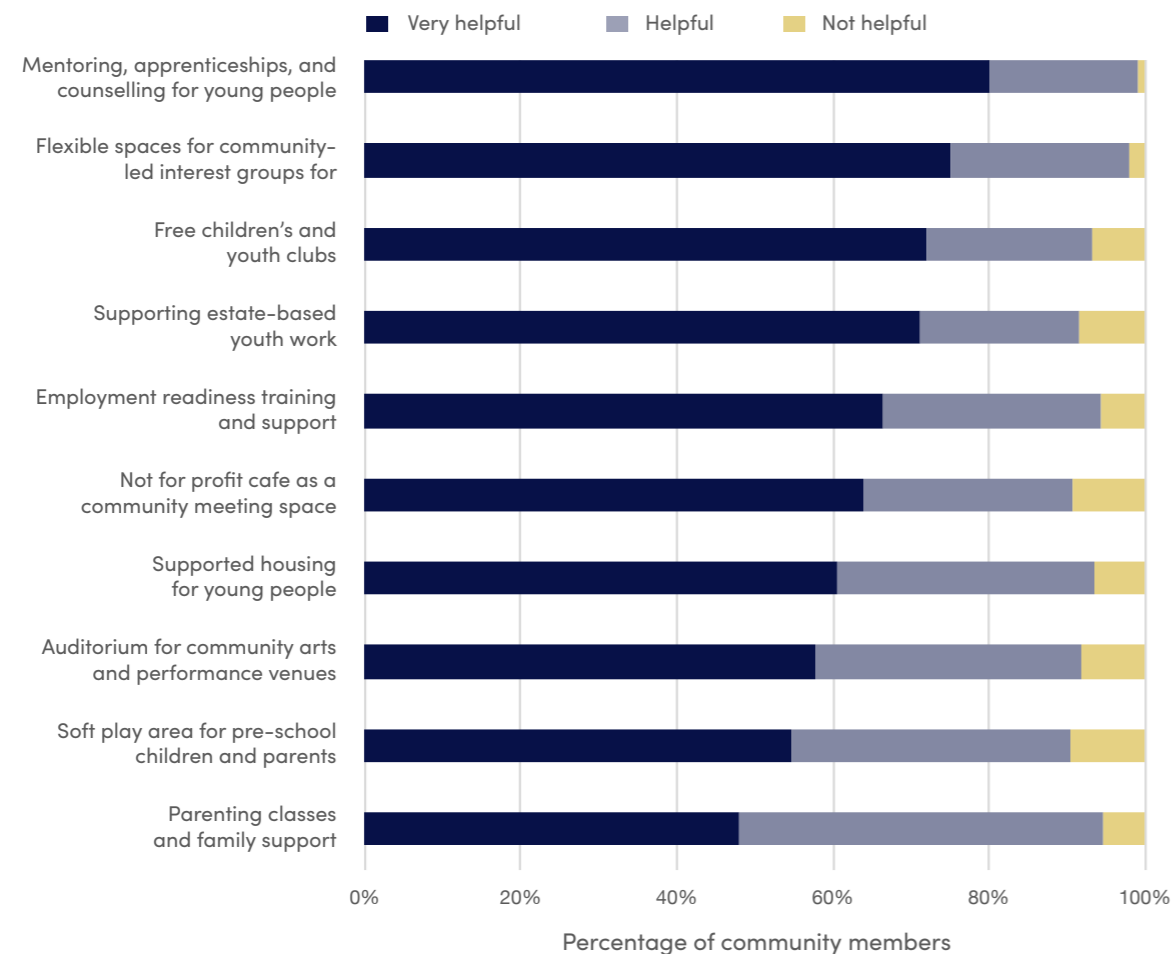
Having identified the underlying issues and resulting problems in the community, the next step was to engage community members over some of the possible solutions that the Lighthouse could implement in their new building.

Here responses revolved around intervening in both of the cycles of deprivation noted in the previous sections. Whether that was the cycle of aspirational deprivation between parents and their children, or the cycle of deprivation between isolated families and a lack of physical community resources, residents said interventions should focus on disrupting these cycles.

The following section identifies these solutions in four main areas:

- i) Social space to reduce isolation
- ii) Creative environment
- iii) Tailored support for youth and children
- iv) Discussion spaces and support groups

**Figure 11:** Percentage of community members who considered the Lighthouse Church’s suggested solutions helpful



*98% of respondents thought that ‘flexible spaces for community-led interest groups’ would be helpful or very helpful.*



### Social space to reduce isolations

As mentioned, some of the core social issues identified were loneliness, isolation and a lack of a community. In order to alleviate these issues, the participants suggested building a social space where community members could meet one another, and get to know each other’s cultures, break down any barriers and engage and connect with their neighbours. Here, 98% of respondents thought that ‘flexible spaces for community-led interest groups’ would be helpful or very helpful. As one community member commented, “I love the idea of a space to get to know people, I am a life coach and I would love to be able to host events”.

There were some concrete suggestions to build the social spaces through hosting “coffee mornings”, community events such as potluck dinners, and regular social gatherings. The onus was on “making it accessible, [creating a space where people feel] this is for you, no matter where you’re from, or whatever your socioeconomic background is, you belong here. It is about feeling they belong”. This idea of belonging was clearly illustrated by a parent who participated in the focus group discussion. Creating this social space is paramount in giving the community a platform where they can be heard, seen and listened to within their own communities as it is the “community who have ownership over space” according to the senior youth worker. In agreement, 91% of survey respondents thought that a ‘not for profit café as a community meeting space’ would be helpful for the local community.

One participant suggested that a way to form these networks would be to build a residents' community, by getting in touch with neighbours and asking them to come along to the community centre. This was seen as a direct channel to tackle loneliness in the elderly, and it was seen to offer a space for the community to get together to share their woes and joys.

In addition, it was suggested that this space be a place where the youth can come to socialise, making it an accessible venue across the age spectrum. To ensure this space is accessible to all, it is vital to keep costs low and ensure it is affordable for those on lower incomes. Establishing this would allow lower income families to not feel marginalised and allow them to partake in the social space which is on offer. As well as organising social events within this space, one community survey respondent mentioned that once these communities have formed and built a network, they can then mobilise themselves to organise community based activities, such as litter picking or environmental clean-ups. Thus, “all of these interventions are building blocks for a community”.



*“all of these interventions are building blocks for a community”.* ”

## Creative environment

In addition to constructing a social space for community members to meet and engage, participants suggested a creative environment should be devised, so as to allow community members to channel their energy through innovative and visionary means. Based on growing evidence “engagement in specially designed arts activities or arts therapies can reduce physical symptoms and improve mental health issues” (Jensen and Bonde, 2018). There is also literature to illustrate that the arts and sports are a tool for crime prevention and social inclusion (Nichols, 2007; Cameron and MacDougall, 2000). Thus, one of the aims of this space would be to process feelings, reduce anxiety and increase self-esteem through creative means. These creative pathways could include a number of participatory arts activities and interventions, such as drama, dance, art, producing music, sports and poetry. 92% of respondents thought that an ‘auditorium for community arts’ would be helpful or very helpful. This solution was supported by a teacher who noted that the local primary school is “doing a lot of work around arts performing and it is really hard to find a venue to do something lovely. It’s really lovely because it brings everybody together”.

One of the students who partook in the focus group mentioned how she is already a member of a dance class and she finds it an effective way to convey her emotions because “you’re not being told what to do, it’s a free way to dance your expressions and you can be very honest”. There was a significant importance on the youth using this creative space as one participant mentioned “if the youth are doing community arts and performance, then they are becoming interested in something which is stepping away from social media, in itself that may link them back to social media, but in a positive way”.

In addition to it being an effective way to harness emotions and feelings, another student in the focus group noted the transferable benefits of having a creative space, “if you don’t have things to do, or you don’t have lots of different things you can learn, as well as normal school, you will have less opportunities for jobs and you have a smaller skill set”. Thus, she noted that through learning creative skills, it can build skill sets and in turn makes students more employable.

*“you’re not being told what to do, it’s a free way to dance your expressions and you can be very honest”.*

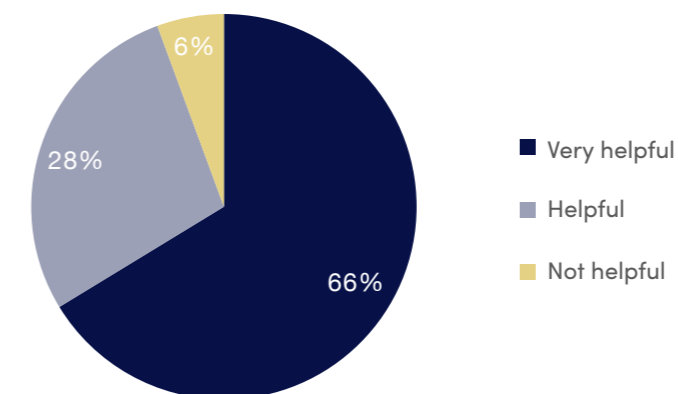
## Tailored support for youth and children

Whilst the above mentioned solutions were not age specific, the following solution looks at using the space for bespoke support for youth and children. There was a consensus view across the data set that the “youth is most important”, and the focus of the centre needs to be on them so as to “get them off street corners”, as was mentioned by one community leader. Hosting bespoke and tailored support for youth and children would aim to instil a sense of aspiration and ambition in their lives, so they have more of an appetite and enthusiasm to aim high to reach their goals.

There were a number of practical youth specific solutions which included; employment training which would host sessions on how to build a CV, youth clubs with sports, games and activities targeted at youth, and longer-term mentoring and apprenticeships. Noting that the Lighthouse Church already does many of these interventions through both Spear and Torch programmes, 66% of all participants affirmed employment readiness training to be very helpful and a further 28% believed it to be helpful. As the earlier underlying causes mentioned, there is an understanding that youth engage in crime and violence for a number of reasons, such as a lack of aspiration and ambition, in conjunction with a lack of role models. One community leader highlighted the importance of mentoring schemes which could be delivered in the centre,

“The world can be a big, scary place at times, especially if you are trying to make your own way in terms of employment and activities. Having someone to act as a guide, signpost you on your journey or provide a positive role model or a good example of how it is done and share that experience is a positive thing. Not all people can have strength within themselves and it is good to have that externally [...] and get direct experience from working world”.

**Figure 12:** Percentage of participants who considered ‘employment readiness training and support for disadvantaged young people’ to be helpful

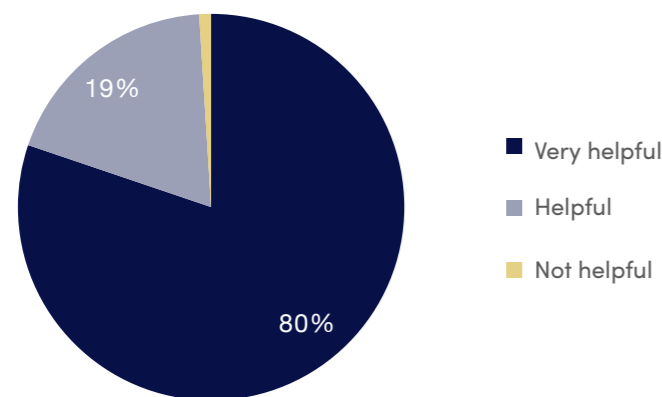


*"the estate based youth work would help the youth understand they have nothing to apologise for and nothing to be afraid of in going forward."*



A local councillor recognised that the “best way to defeat negative circumstance is to be in the company of people who can provide positive feedback and influence”, highlighting the need for mentoring, counselling and apprenticeships for young people. Participants across all three data sets considered this suggestion to be the most helpful solution, with 80% of them rating it the highest. This was further validated by the senior youth worker who noted the value of bespoke learning, “apprenticeships are brilliant, the children who aren’t getting jobs are generally “doers” aren’t necessarily academic. The school system is tailored for academic thinkers and not creativity, so apprenticeships open up incredible opportunity, for informal learning, learning as they are doing”.

**Figure 13:** Percentage of participants who considered ‘mentoring, counselling, and apprenticeships’ to be helpful



In addition to apprenticeships, participants illustrated the value of upskilling the youth to get ready for employment, and how this can give them optimism for the future and a pathway out of gang culture. By hosting sessions that teach practical skills such as budgeting and finance management and interview skills, it will give the youth a physical and psychological safe space where they are shown other routes they can use to escape youth violence without judgement. The local councillor illustrated his version of modern society whereby,

*"people who come from advantaged backgrounds have it easier to get ahead in life and those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds find it a lot more difficult. I think therefore those who do have a disadvantaged background [...] have a series of*

*"the most needed area is support for families and services for children. This is the greatest need that has been largely neglected from the area"*



*knowledge and skills that they end up lacking and I think there is something that could be done by the community to help compensate those challenges and help people overcome them, that would make people better able to compete and succeed in life".*

Moreover, he concluded that the youth living in housing estates would also benefit from tailored support as,

*"many estates end up having all kinds of people from all kinds of socioeconomic backgrounds and circumstances, so many estates have a wide variety of people in them, especially youth, especially those youth whose family backgrounds and environments are not as good as they could be, so they definitely need that help. If only to help them overcompensate a social stigma of growing up in council flats that parts of our society still have. So the estate based youth work would be much to help the youth understand they have nothing to apologise for and nothing to be afraid of in going forward. As well as dealing with any issue that may emerge, as social housing in our city is used as a refuge for the most needy and desperate".*

### Children specific

Whilst the above section focuses on tailored support for youth and adolescents, the following solutions focus on bespoke support for younger children. According to one community leader, “the most needed area is support for families and services for children. This is the greatest need that has been largely neglected from the area”. With the aim of addressing the underlying causes that alluded to the lack of community activities, lack of integration and cramped housing which had limited space for children to play, the following solutions were suggested.

Parents in the focus groups suggested that the community centre should offer short-term drop in sessions for young children and toddlers so that parents can have some time for self-care and wellbeing. One parent noted that if these drop in sessions were offered, it would give “time to yourself, especially if you don’t have anyone and they’re [children] not at nursery yet, you need that bit of time [for yourself] and for the children it is good to so they can play with other children”.

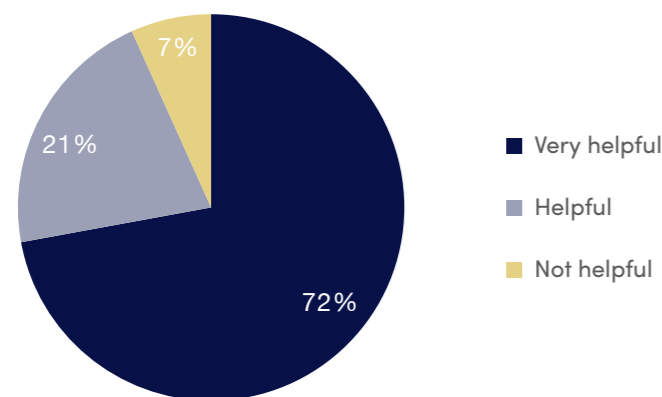
Another parent aptly commented that she “desperately needs a place to take our child during the day”. This was reiterated by a community leader,

***"Another parent aptly commented that she "desperately needs a place to take our child during the day".***

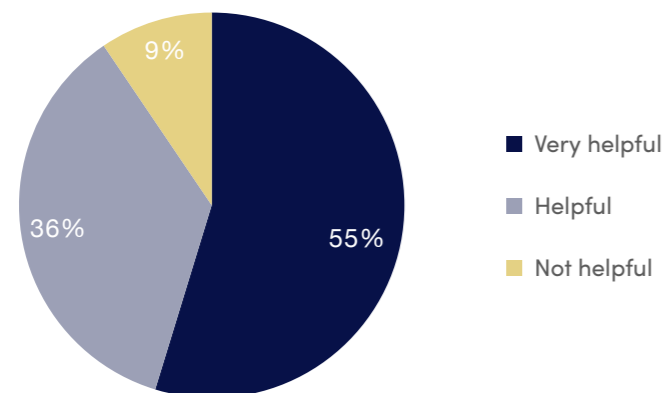
"it is very important for kids to have a safe space to interact and grow without any kind of excessive interference". He further mentioned that these spaces are a "great place to help with social interaction". There was an importance on this space being affordable as it became apparent in the community survey that parents "shouldn't be paying to meet the community".

Affirming these thoughts, 72% of all respondents felt that having free children's and youth clubs in the area would be very helpful, whilst 66% of them considered soft-play areas for pre-school children as a very helpful suggestion.

**Figure 14:** Percentage of participants who considered 'free children's and youth clubs' to be helpful



**Figure 15:** Percentage of participants who considered a 'soft play area for pre-school children and parents' to be helpful



One student suggested the solution of offering "transition" clubs tailored to year 6 children who were moving in to secondary school. By offering this club, the centre would endeavour to reduce stresses or anxieties that are felt before approaching secondary school. It was noted that a similar club is already carried out at a community centre nearby and the children found it useful, so they would like to replicate it, "we run it ourselves but they [organisers] plan activities for us".

The need for these children specific solutions are backed up by robust evidence which suggests that "play is important for building social competence and confidence in dealing with peers, a life skill that is essential for functioning in school, as well as in life on the job [...] Play is also critical to self-regulation and children's ability to manage their own behavior and emotions" (Singer, Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek, 2006: 7).

### Discussion spaces and support groups

Participants felt it was important that the Lighthouse Church provides space for talking therapies, group discussion and activity. This solution focused on the importance of having a safe space where youth and adults can share their feelings and thoughts in a non-judgmental environment. As one community leader commented, it "means you connect with people relationally and therefore share in the difficulties, right now embarrassment keeps people apart".

This sentiment was shared by a parent who felt that having a space to be transparent about their feelings, creates a belief in a community, whereby community members are,

*"coming together and having a space to normalise 'I'm feeling like this..', solidarity between parents, and giving them a space where they can share their struggles, instead of feeling bad and in turn, negating parental duties".*

Offering group or one to one counselling sessions seemed to be a highly valued solution to some of the aforementioned social issues and underlying causes as "telling people, helps people". In the focus group discussions with parents, there was a large significance given to the value of having a space to openly share and giving people "the space to be heard, to be seen, metaphorically and physically" as they hold on to a lot emotionally. This was further supported by a community leader who felt that the underlying causes of social issues may be "easier for people to manage if they felt listened to, if they felt they had a voice that was worth listening to and they had a space to negotiate". Similarly, this creation of a safe space could be used for community members of all ages. One student in the focus group mentioned that the space can be used for "bullies to talk about their feelings".

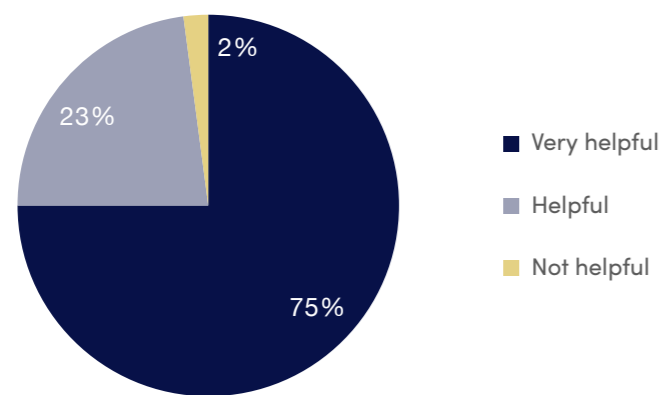
*“some of our children are really vulnerable because their parents have lack of knowledge in how to parent properly”.*

A parent in the focus group suggested a signposting and referral service. Either way, it was noted that this support should be tailored as a child noted, “people grieve in different ways” and “some people handle themselves in different ways. Some people isolate themselves, or some people want some time in a place to think”.

There was a recognition by one of the community leaders, that “mental illness has a social stigma attached to it that needs to be overcome, and a creation of a space is to allow people to deal with the issues in a non-judgemental and positive and constructive environment, so they don’t feel the unfair social stigma of mental illness”.

The graph below visually illustrates the positive response to the suggested solution of using the Lighthouse Church as a flexible space for community-led interest groups for physical and mental health and wellbeing.

**Figure 16:** Percentage of participants who considered ‘flexible spaces for community-led interest groups for physical and mental health and wellbeing’ to be helpful



## Support groups

Aside from hosting discussion spaces, a further suggested solution was offering a range of support groups. There was a highlighted need for these support groups to cover a number of different areas. Firstly, one child noted the value of offering support groups which explores the coping mechanisms for mental ill health and depression, which would allow practitioners to “teach them [people who experience mental ill health] how to feel good about themselves and how to not be depressed all the time”.

Secondly, the support groups could be targeted specifically to the youth to try and understand why someone is violent and look at alternative options to violence. Thirdly, support groups can be provided to parents who are struggling with family commitments. A local head teacher noted that, “some of our children are really vulnerable because their parents have lack of knowledge in how to parent properly”. In order to encourage parents to come to these support groups, this same community leader noted that parents have to be directed to sessions, as the “parents you want to go aren’t going to realise they need to go, so that probably needs scaffolding around [...] signposting through the local schools would help for that”. In order to ensure that there is a high uptake of these activities, the forthcoming recommendations section will explore the effective outreach and engagement programmes which need to be executed.

## 5. Recommendations

Building on the solutions suggested in this report, the following section explores three main areas of recommendation for the Lighthouse Church to pursue through their new building. In many cases the Lighthouse church are already engaging in the suggested activities. In these instances either continued or expanded programmes are recommended. However, in other areas, new activities are suggested.

Secondly, suggestions are made as to how to engage the local community and advertise these activities with local residents.

### General activities to increase community spirit

In general, a first recommendation is to provide community-based activities and events that can help in increasing relationship between community members.

Current Lighthouse plans such as the not for profit café as a community meeting space clear examples of what this could look like. This research has shown this activity could provide that ‘third space’ for local residents to engage with each other. This in turn will contribute to a reduced sense of isolation and loneliness.

*“the creative auditorium for community arts would not only allow increased engagement with each other, but also give community members a space to channel their energy through innovative and visionary means.”*



Likewise, the creative auditorium for community arts would not only allow increased engagement with each other, but also give community members a space to channel their energy through innovative and visionary means. According to Schmid (2006) "creativity is the innate capacity to think and act in original ways, to be inventive, to be imaginative and to find new original solutions to needs, problems and forms of expression" (ibid: 6). It has been seen as an essential survival tool, where it is a "force in our personal development and in the evolution of society" (Ruth and Richards, 1997: ix). By hosting a space which enables the community to be involved in creative play, dance, theatre or art, it can work towards tackling mental health in divergent ways and facilitate socialisation. The community centre can further include an auditorium for community arts and a performance venue so local schools, youth clubs and neighbourhoods can showcase their art to their wider networks.

A third example, and one that would be new for the Lighthouse Church, would be to host a meal / culinary event in the building. An example of what this could look like, might be similar to the 'The Big Lunch' idea from the Eden Project, Cornwall. The main aim is for "as many people as possible across the UK [to] have lunch with their neighbours annually on a weekend in June in a simple act of community, friendship and fun" (Love Land, 2019). We have identified this community engagement as a good practise case study and thus suggest the Lighthouse Church implement a similar event. This is a great example of community participation and enhanced social inclusion that has resulted in reduced isolation, and can lead to improvement in health, educational performance and socioeconomic circumstances.

A final, more tailored suggestion for the general community would be to offer a confidential space for therapeutic services. As was shown in this report, loneliness, isolation, and poor mental wellbeing were core underlying issues. To address mental ill health and wellbeing, the Church could offer therapeutic intervention for those who are at risk of psychological and emotional problems. With the support of a trained therapist, the service users can learn cognitive strategies to manage negative emotions and beliefs that stem from distressing situations. This report shows there is a clear need for this service.

## **Continue and develop youth community programmes**

Whilst the above categories are aimed at the entire local community, this research has highlighted specific cycles of deprivation for the youth in the local area. With this in mind, there are particular actions and programmes that would be extremely beneficial to disrupting these cycles of deprivation.

To intervene in the lack of aspiration and ambition current Lighthouse Church programmes such as Spear and Torch both work to improve the social wellbeing and employment potential for youth. In this regard both areas of activity are encouraged to either continue or to expand where possible to help meet the local demand.

***"To intervene in the lack of aspiration and ambition, current Lighthouse programmes such as Spear and Torch both work to improve the social wellbeing and employment potential for youth."***

Likewise, in the past the Lighthouse Church has partnered with organisations such as XLP. Whilst this has to date occurred outside of the church, the new building would provide additional possibilities of hosting this organisation. Targeted towards the youth in inner-city estates, and with a similar focus to Spear and Torch, it is recommended that the Lighthouse Church continue with this collaboration and consider hosting XLP in the new building.

In addition to these programmes, there are other activities that the Lighthouse are considering that this report would endorse.

The yet to be formerly titled 'Lighthouse Home', would provide floating support housing, and would be managed by a commissioned provider. Whilst all the currently occurring programmes work with the aspiration and ambition of youth, the lighthouse home would provide those with more severe housing situations a place to alleviate high levels of physical deprivation. This, if used in combination with the above programmes, would be highly beneficial to intercepting in the cycles of deprivation already noted.

## **Continue and develop family community programmes**

Likewise, this research has highlighted the cycles of deprivation present specifically for underprivileged families living in certain types of accommodation. Here a lack of space and community resources is increasingly proving to be a particularly challenging issue.

As there are a lack of community activities and children specific areas in the neighbourhood, having services for families would be invaluable. This could include a soft play area for pre-school children and parents, as well as parenting classes and family support which would offer a space for parents to connect with one another and provide a space where they can prioritise their self-care and wellbeing. One community leader noted the value of parenting classes as she felt that it would "end the domino effect" of isolation, lack of community and stress felt by parents and families.

Of particular note here is the Lighthouse's proposed idea of having a family support worker. Although it wasn't the most popular solution perceived by community respondents it was still rated highly favourably, and likewise 6 out of 6 community leaders believed it to be a very important idea. In this regard, having a specialist family support worker would be highly beneficial to local families.

## How to engage?

Finally, there is a need for the Lighthouse to engage effectively with the local community. Here, to ensure community members attend these activities, one community leader noted the importance of outreach: "Having a space available isn't a guaranteed success, so the process of outreach is important. Friendly and non-confrontation outreach which is designed to bring people in [is important]. So once you got the space, market it considering groups you are reaching out for, how you market it can be very different [...] some of these groups you are looking for more word of mouth outreach programme which will probably be inevitably slow, but [...] eventually it will grow. I think that a well targeted social or community marketing plan is necessary, which focuses more on personal references and word of mouth, than on flashy adverts".

### Generally for the community

#### Listen

The first step in this process to engage with the local community is to 'listen'. One community leader noted that "it is really no good professionals just thinking they have the answer. You need to listen to them [communities] and demonstrate that you have listened to them". Whilst this report in itself marks a large step towards fully listening to the community, a follow up concrete way in which this can be developed is by hosting a monthly 'open evening' for the local community to join and have a platform where they can raise any concerns and express their suggestions. This session will focus on establishing their voice and finding an effective way of channelling their suggestions.

#### Collective, single issue action

Following this, hosting campaigns which involve the entire community, can unify people across the socioeconomic spectrum. A local councillor who is involved in community engagement in his ward noted what "tends to unite people in many cases is a common, often short term issue [...] in addition to a long term social marketing strategy, you would probably want the Lighthouse involved in short term campaigns which will definitely arouse public interest, but at the same time, have a series of clearly defined start, middle, endings". By giving community members "short term or mid term objective, i.e. getting together to paint a wall, or rebuild a flat, clean out somebody's house [...] This will mobilise people and create awareness". In order for community members to continue to be engaged they would need to have concrete and achievable objectives, because if it is "too drawn out or generic, people start to lose interest".

#### General marketing

Thirdly, to effectively promote the activities and services on offer, the Church should have a multi channel marketing strategy, which includes handing out flyers on the

streets and housing estates, putting up posters in public spaces, having events published on online and offline forums (i.e. school newsletters) and word of mouth. The Church can also specifically target people by hosting pop up events to engage "hard to reach" communities. An effective way in which they can do this is by "turning up at things they [communities] are doing, such as fun days, [this will] help them become a friendly face, and so when they walk by [the Church] if they see a friendly face they are more likely to come in". Doing this will allow the Church to harness a presence in the community. In addition to this, it is key to create a welcoming space so that community members feel like they belong, "so it's something about opening it up to whoever you are, wherever you're from", as was noted by a parent in the focus group.

By implementing these recommendations, the Church can work towards engaging a healthier, more unified community who feel they have a safe space to voice any concerns, socialise with their neighbours and exercise their civic rights. This detailed report has clearly identified there is a large unmet need which Lighthouse can address by building this community centre. Providing this space has the potential to enhance involvement of families, children, youth and people of all ages in Finchley Road.

### For the youth

Whilst the above steps would be good for the community in general, there is a specific need to be relevant when engaging with local youth.

One community leader who is a liaison officer, mentioned that "you got to get the right people to deliver the sessions, to bring people in", highlighting the importance of staff recruitment. Having staff whom are relatable and can tailor their support to youth and adolescents is paramount. This was supported by a local head teacher who noted the attractive draw factor the community centre needs to embody:

*"Rather than hanging out with the gang on the estate, what makes them [youth adolescent boys] think 'hey, I will hang out at the Lighthouse instead'. There has to be a really strong pull there for them to want to do that and that has got to be about the people they are going to. The people who are leading that have to be more interesting than the gang leaders."*

The headteacher further illustrated the importance of people feeling they can openly access something, and that they are to feel they are being aptly represented,

*"You have to be so careful what that looks like, in terms of who is doing that. I suppose I just worry that it is the white middle classes deciding what those on the estate should be doing, and I think it won't work that way, so it really depends on who is doing it [...] People have to feel they are being understood and that they are on some kind of level with you, or that you understand them"*.

# Conclusion

**The Lighthouse Church is located within a diverse community. Areas of deprivation are surrounded by areas of relative wealth. This often means that many deprived groups in the community go overlooked and unnoticed by larger organisations and services.**

**This research report has highlighted the process of cyclical deprivation for two of these groups: low-income families with children, and youth.**

**For both of these groups there is clearly a negative cycle of deprivation occurring. This is largely rooted in both physical and social underlying issues.**

**Physically, both low income families and youths are experiencing a high level financial instability, and poor living conditions at home, as well as a lack of community resources available in public.** For example, 5 out of 6 community leaders, and 60% of all participants considered unstable housing/living conditions to be a community issue, whilst 8 out of 11 parents, and 6 out of 6 children who participated in the focus group, believed a lack of physical community resources to be at least a moderate problem. However these two physical constraints are being exacerbated by social constraints. Here, 8 out of 11 parents, and 6 out of 6 children who participated in the focus group, believed that there was a lack of ambition and aspiration present in both families and youth. This was further backed up by community leaders, 3 of whom also identified this as a key area for concern.

**As described by community leaders, the result of this deprivation is that youth are turning to a variety of alternative routes to get their needs met (including crime and gang activity), whilst parents and families are increasingly becoming isolated and fragmented from society.** 70% of all participants considered young people involved in gang activity to be at least a moderate problem in the local community, whilst 4 out of 6 community leaders believed this to be a severe issue. Likewise, 88% of all participants, and 6 out of 6 community leaders, considered people experiencing loneliness and depression to be at least a moderate problem in the local community.

**With this in mind, the proposed solutions by both the community and the Lighthouse Church revolved around intervening in this cycle of deprivation.** Here residents stressed there should be a focus on activities that bring changed perceptions and aspirations, both for the youth as well as deprived families. With this in mind, the solution with the most backing was mentoring, counselling and apprenticeships for young people, with 96% of the total sample agreeing that this would be beneficial to their community.

**With regards to isolated families, and in particular the lack of physical community resources, the respondents communicated a clear need for community spaces.** Here, amongst other highly rated interventions, 96% of community members considered flexible spaces for community activities to be helpful.

Whilst the Lighthouse Church already hosts and runs many of these programmes, this report has shown that there is a need to continue and grow these interventions into the future. In this regard, their new building will be a highly valuable resource for the local community.

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## About the author

Saliha is a qualitative researcher at Eido Research, who has expertise working with minority communities in the UK and further afield. She has undertaken multiple research posts with University of Oxford and University of Sussex, exploring forced eviction, law enforcement and border controls. Saliha has previously worked within policy where she partnered with NHS England to produce a guide which examines how local voluntary and community sectors can help NHS organisations better engage with marginalised communities.

Saliha has an MSc in Migration, Mobility and Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies and her masters' dissertation used an intersectional approach to address multiple grounds of labour market discrimination. She is interested in advocating for the rights of marginalised communities, promoting public health and creating community cohesion.

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Pictured: Local residents, and local community leaders, who were a part of this research



An aerial photograph of a city, likely Washington D.C., showing a dense urban landscape with numerous buildings, streets, and green spaces. A dark blue semi-transparent rectangular overlay is positioned in the center of the image, containing white text. The text is arranged in two lines: the top line reads "the lighthouse" and the bottom line reads "eido research".

the lighthouse

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