GROWING THE GRASSROOTS

THE IMPACT OF SOUTH EAST LONDON MIND'S ENGAGEMENT WITH VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS



Summary

Centre for Mental Health was commissioned by South East London (SEL) Mind to evaluate their innovative approach to engaging voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and providing direct routes to accessible funding in the London boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham. We aimed to explore the delivery, management, and impact of two programmes delivered by SEL Mind, as part of the charity's effort to address mental health inequalities in the local area:

- **An Equality Grants Fund**, which addressed mental health inequalities in the Royal Borough of Greenwich (Greenwich) by providing grants of between £5,000 and £10,000 for VCSE organisations that support the mental health of disadvantaged and marginalised groups
- **A Culturally Diverse Communities Project (CDCP)**, which provided wellbeing and mental health support to racialised and marginalised communities in the London Borough of Lewisham (Lewisham) by sub-contracting VCSE organisations that provide mental health support for underserved communities.

Both programmes were possible due to funding provided through NHS England's Community Mental Health Transformation initiative as part of the implementation of the 2019 NHS Long Term Plan. This brought about significant investment in community mental health services, guided by the Community Mental Health Framework (NHS England, 2019).

Our research suggests that the programmes delivered by SEL Mind are crucial for the delivery of mental health support to marginalised communities across Greenwich and Lewisham. All the organisations we spoke to commended the efforts made by the charity in this area of work, with the majority expressing great relief in having increased access to funding opportunities directed at VCSE organisations.

People who used the services also highlighted the positive impacts of these projects, including:

- Building stronger connections within communities
- Reducing isolation
- Supporting mental health
- Reducing stigma
- Contributing to individual personal growth.

Importantly, 66% of respondents said they would not know where to go for support if these services did not exist, and a further 20% said there was nowhere else they could go for support if they did not exist, highlighting how these services are filling gaps within the sector. Future funding could enable these VCSE organisations and others within Greenwich and Lewisham to offer more specialised and long-term support to marginalised communities.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Mental health charities such as local Minds and other larger organisations in the sector can use grant funding as a means of supporting smaller community organisations and initiatives as part of their efforts to tackle mental health inequalities. Grants are a more flexible and supportive funding route than traditional commissioning and contracting for small organisations.
2. Grant programmes need to be easy to navigate for community organisations, many of whom do not have the infrastructure that larger charities possess to apply for funding and implement projects. This may mean adapting routine ways of working in order to make it possible for community groups to participate.
3. Grant programmes can provide additional benefits for community organisations, such as training, mentoring and capacity building. This should include facilitating greater communication and collaboration between organisations.
4. Larger charities, foundations and commissioners should consider longer-term funding offers for smaller organisations to enable them to be more sustainable. Short-term funding creates instability and can lead to the loss of valuable support in communities if it is not continued.

BACKGROUND

South East London (SEL) Mind is a mental health and dementia charity providing support to people living with mental health problems and dementia in Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, and Southwark. It provides a wide range of services, including peer support groups, counselling, befriending, mental health programmes in schools, suicide bereavement services, Individual Placement and Support (IPS) services, and support for carers.

SEL Mind has explored ways to engage with more specialised voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations, particularly those working with racialised and underserved communities. These organisations can reach people that SEL Mind and statutory mental health services might not, and are often unable to be directly commissioned by integrated care boards or mental health trusts. To address these barriers, SEL Mind has been subcontracting VCSE organisations in Lewisham and providing VCSE grants in Greenwich to address mental health inequalities.

SEL Mind commissioned Centre for Mental Health to evaluate SEL Mind's approach to engaging VCSE organisations and providing direct routes to accessible funding in Greenwich and Lewisham. We aimed to explore the impact of this approach and showcase positive outcomes and good practice. We also aimed to make evidence-based recommendations for future planning and improvements to the grant-giving function.

GREENWICH PROJECTS

In 2023, the Equality Grant Fund was launched to help address mental health inequalities in Greenwich. Funded by the Greenwich Mental Health Hub (a partnership between Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, SEL Mind and the organisation Bridge Support), the Grant Fund is managed by SEL Mind on behalf of the hub. The grant fund aimed to support disadvantaged and marginalised groups within local communities by funding VCSE organisations that improved the accessibility and inclusivity of support, offered innovative approaches, and addressed mental health inequalities.

To qualify for the grant, organisations had to be non-profit or registered charities operating in Greenwich for a minimum of two years, and have an annual income of less than £250,000. Their projects had to be for the benefit of Greenwich residents, specifically marginalised and underserved communities. These projects could be peer-led, promote social connectedness, and seek to address the unique mental health needs of marginalised communities. Services had to be aimed at adults aged 18 and above. The services are summarised below.

African Smile

A programme established to promote physical and mental wellbeing and community relationships. It supported people from African communities by improving their self-esteem and addressing racism.

Avant-Gardening

An LGBTQ+ service for participants to discuss mental health issues and health inequalities. This service supported people from LGBTQ+ communities by providing integrated mental health support.

The Big Red Kick (Greenwich Threads)

A service for carers and those cared for to tell their story through the creation of a patchwork quilt. This service supported them to gain confidence and develop new skills.

Creating Ground

A programme for migrant women to improve their mental health and wellbeing, build confidence, and access local mental health services. This service supported migrant women by creating a safe space for them to talk about mental health and raising awareness of local mental health support.

Everyone's a Singer

10 singing wellbeing workshops for African and African-Caribbean communities. This project helped to reduce stigma and strengthen community connections through open discussions around mental health.

Big Red Bus Club

A six-week programme of activities aimed at supporting the mother-baby relationship for people at risk of or experiencing postnatal depression. This project helped to reduce feelings of isolation through peer support.

Think Tenacity Academy

A service for Black marginalised and disadvantaged groups affected by generational and racial trauma. The service aimed to reduce the barriers to accessing help and offer culturally sensitive mental health support. It helped to reduce mental health stigma in Black communities.

Woolwich Service Users

A project to support clients, many of whom are homeless or in insecure or temporary accommodation, to learn practical tools and take part in activities to reduce anxiety.

Jeevan Vigyan

An 18-week programme for the Nepalese community to support both physical and mental wellbeing through weekly yoga classes, mindfulness workshops, wellness seminars, group meditation sessions, and community engagement opportunities.

LEWISHAM PROJECTS

In partnership with South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust as part of the Lewisham Mental Health Alliance, SEL Mind launched the Culturally Diverse Communities Project (CDCP) to provide mental health support across Lewisham and address inequalities impacting racialised and marginalised communities. The project was funded through NHS England's Community Mental Health Transformation initiative and allocated by the Lewisham Mental Health Alliance leadership board.

As part of the project, SEL Mind commissioned four VCSE organisations to engage people from marginalised communities within Lewisham who, historically, had not felt comfortable reaching out for support.

The CDCP offered support via short courses for people from racialised and underserved communities, led by people with experience of mental health problems. The project aimed to support these communities, bridge the gap between the voluntary sector and local community groups and mental health services, and understand best practice for early intervention to prevent people from racialised communities from entering the system in crisis. Further aims were to reduce stigma and promote peer support.

Each organisation received £35,000 per year for two years to deliver their projects. The findings for each project are outlined below.

Mabadiliko

A service that runs online support groups for people from Black African and Caribbean communities, as well as people who have experienced domestic violence, and offers culturally sensitive counselling.

Holistic Well Women

This service facilitates in-person workshops that aim to empower women in the community. With the funding, they offered arts and crafts classes, healthy walks, sessions based on healthy eating, and a wellbeing choir. Women reported experiencing less social isolation since joining the service and said they had built confidence and developed skills.

Sydenham Garden

A programme that began by supporting the mental health of young people aged 18-25 years from racialised and marginalised communities through art-based and nature-based activities. During year 1, it naturally developed and supported 68 neurodiverse young people from LGBTQ+ communities in Lewisham.

Therapy 4 Healing (T4H)

This project offers group and psychological therapy. It is aimed at groups such as older adults from Black communities, parents, and people living with ADHD.

Overall, our evaluation found that these services had positive outcomes for marginalised groups in Lewisham. Peer support had a significant impact. Service users were invited to run or co-facilitate projects which led to increases in confidence and self-esteem, and resulted in some volunteers entering paid employment or apprenticeships.

HOW WE DID THE RESEARCH

The initial proposal was to use a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis for this evaluation. However, due to a lack of statistical data, we pursued qualitative methods to address the data gaps. This approach is supported by previous research, which highlights the value of qualitative methods in providing deeper insights where quantitative data is insufficient (Costa, 2024).

INTERVIEWS

Between October and November 2024, we conducted nine semi-structured interviews with VCSE organisations across Greenwich and Lewisham. Of the nine organisations we engaged with, seven had received the Equality Grants Fund, while the remaining two were partner organisations for the Culturally Diverse Communities Project (CDCP). In these interviews, we sought to draw upon the direct experiences of grant beneficiaries and partner organisations to highlight good practice, and to identify key areas of improvement for these types of grant-giving and management programmes.

SERVICE USER SURVEY

A total of 24 service users took part in our survey. The survey consisted of 30 questions that were designed to:

- Understand the needs of marginalised communities within Greenwich and Lewisham
- Highlight the impacts of the funded services and good practice
- Understand which gaps these services were filling within the sector
- Establish whether these programmes have reduced the strain on public services
- Highlight the potential impacts of future funding.

The data from seven respondents were removed from the analysis as they did not answer any of the questions. Therefore, the data from 17 respondents were analysed as part of this evaluation.

Although the number of participants engaged in this study is objectively low, we are confident that, within the limitations, we interviewed the right individuals with appropriate knowledge in the relevant parts of the system.

OUR FINDINGS

INTERVIEW FINDINGS: EQUALITY GRANTS FUND

Application process

The current application process for the Equality Grants Fund was described as "easy" and "straightforward" by the majority of beneficiaries. A small proportion suggested that minor improvements could be made: for instance, SEL Mind could consider providing additional guidance for smaller VCSE organisations that may lack experience in submitting grant proposals, and use a submission platform that allows users to save their progress as they work through the application. Moving forward, SEL Mind should prioritise communication with all applicants to prevent misunderstandings, including providing information about repeat applicants and constructive feedback for unsuccessful applicants.

Impact and outcomes of the Equality Grants Fund

All grant beneficiaries unanimously agreed that the grant had "really helped with getting the projects off the ground", with several noting that their projects "wouldn't have run at all" without the funding. With the support of the Equality Grants Fund, many beneficiaries told us that they were able to extend their services to engage "the right people", especially "members of the community that [they] wouldn't have reached otherwise".

As a result, some grant beneficiaries felt that they were able to foster positive relationships and build the foundations for long-lasting and meaningful connections within their target communities. As one grant beneficiary told us, those who participated in their funded project have "become quite a group... it's been successful because those people did stick together [after the project had concluded]". Similarly, another grant beneficiary shared some positive feedback from their service users, noting that the group is "still in contact... they said if we hadn't run that [project], then they wouldn't have met each other... they've been a real valid source of support for each other over the last year".

Importantly, the Equality Grants Fund enabled specialist VCSE organisations to provide accessible mental health and wellbeing support for underserved groups, such as Black and racialised communities, LGBTQ+ communities, migrant women, and adults with caring responsibilities. As many grant beneficiaries highlighted, these groups often face complex barriers that can deter or limit their involvement with statutory mental health services, including low trust in the mental health system and health professionals, cultural and language barriers, and mental health stigma. Through the use of creative and targeted methods, these organisations can "create a safe space" for people to discuss mental health in a more accessible way, or "just chat to other people and get away from their responsibilities". This increased engagement with underserved communities has also created opportunities for organisations to signpost or refer people to relevant mental health support services:

> **"The feedback has been really good from our participants... I know some have gone on to access services that they've learnt [about] through coming to our programme."**

Working relationship between SEL Mind and grant beneficiaries

During interviews, we sought to understand how each grant beneficiary perceived their working relationship with SEL Mind, to identify good practice and to explore how support for VCSE organisations could be improved in future work.

Communication

Many grant beneficiaries told us that they felt well supported by their grant manager from SEL Mind. Communication was noted as particularly strong, which allowed the organisations to "get on" with their projects, as they were confident that they could reach out to SEL Mind for support at any time. However, a small number of beneficiaries felt that communication could be strengthened by ensuring that all queries and requests are addressed in a timely manner. This could be achieved through the provision of regular optional 'drop-in' sessions to enable beneficiaries to access support when required.

Outreach and integration

The majority of beneficiaries noted that they were unaware of the other organisations and projects that were funded by the Equality Grants Fund. As such, many felt that they had been "very much working in isolation" from one another, and that there were "a lot of missed opportunities" for connection, collaboration and peer support. One organisation emphasised that working in a small VCSE organisation can be isolating, as the self-doubt and constant pressure of "the need to do better" can cause overwhelming levels of stress. This could be addressed by providing networking opportunities (online or in person) for the organisations involved to encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration between local groups.

Additional support from SEL Mind

In our interviews with beneficiaries of the Equality Grants Fund, we found that each organisation had received varying levels of additional support from SEL Mind. Aside from the financial support provided by the grant, a small number of organisations reported receiving additional assistance upon request. For example, one grant beneficiary told us that they were able to host wellbeing workshops with mental health professionals with the help of the team at SEL Mind. While SEL Mind completed an in-person introductory meeting for each grant beneficiary, many said that they were unaware of the different types of additional support that they could access from SEL Mind. To ensure equitable access to support, SEL Mind should provide a clear overview of the available support for all beneficiaries of the Equality Grants Fund in the form of a comprehensive information pack or webinar.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS: CULTURALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES PROJECT (CDCP)

The CDCP is an innovative approach to grant delivery and management. By sub-contracting a range of non-profit organisations, SEL Mind hoped to engage with marginalised communities who are less likely to access statutory mental health support services. From our interviews with two partner organisations, it was clear that there were mixed feelings with regards to the delivery and management of this type of partnership working.

We summarise the key learnings and reflections below:

- **Develop a shared vision** – To facilitate the smooth delivery of the project, all stakeholders, decision-makers, and partner organisations need to come together and reach a shared vision at the start of the partnership
- **Clarify work responsibilities** – Clarity and guidance over work responsibilities and expectations are useful, as many smaller organisations have limited experience in sub-contracted work
- **Cultivate working relationships** – Strengthening relationships between partner organisations could improve workflow and establish a clearer referral pathway between service providers
- **Strengthen communication** – It is essential for commissioners to ensure decisions regarding the longevity of funding are made and communicated in a timely manner.

COMMON THEMES ACROSS BOTH PROGRAMMES

Two common themes emerged from our interviews with the beneficiaries of the Equality Grants Fund and partner organisations of the CDCP, including suggested improvements for the evaluation and reporting process, as well as the financial and operational challenges faced by VCSE organisations.

Reporting outcomes: challenges and considerations

As part of the monitoring and evaluation process of the Equality Grants Fund and CDCP, all beneficiaries of the grant are required to produce impact reports to outline project progress and outcomes. Although the reporting process can be time-consuming and labour-intensive, these reports are essential for SEL Mind to understand the impact of their funded projects, to demonstrate effectiveness to commissioners, and to identify areas for improvement, in order to better serve racialised and underserved communities in south east London.

In general, organisations preferred to use qualitative methods (e.g. case studies) over quantitative methods to report their project's impact and outcomes, as the latter approach was considered by many to be reductive. As some organisations commented, the "heavy focus on numbers" poses a risk of minimising the real impacts of their projects. This is because quantitative data fails to "capture the real-life stories from the people on the ground". Organisations would appreciate a wider range of "creative" and "flexible" reporting options to document the work that is being delivered at community level.

Some organisations felt that the purpose and use of the demographic data being collected was not always clear. To avoid confusion, all data requests should be relevant for decision-making purposes, and the need for the requested data should be clearly communicated to all partners and grantees to ensure a shared understanding.

Limitations of short-term funding

The instability that comes with short-term funding emerged as a strong theme during our interviews. Although all the organisations we spoke to were pleased to receive funding for their projects, the limited timescale of these funding opportunities means there is a need for organisations to "spend a lot of time" to "keep applying for grants" as an attempt to secure the next round of funding. This leads to a wide range of concerns and pressures for small VCSE organisations:

- **Divided attention** – Writing grant applications and proposals is time-consuming, which diverts an organisation's valuable resources from delivering the projects and services that support their communities
- **Short-term planning** – Provision of short-term funding means that organisations are unable to produce long-term plans for their services. A few organisations told us that they "would have run [their project] completely differently" if they were able to secure a more sustained stream of funding
- **Leaving communities "in limbo"** – As organisations come to the end of their project, they are often met with queries from their service users regarding "when the next [session] is". Some organisations stated that they often "don't have the answers", which adds to the pressure of securing the next round of funding as they strive to continue their work to avoid "leaving the community in limbo"
- **Risk of losing relationships** – As many organisations noted, it takes a large amount of time and dedication to build trust and foster positive relationships with underserved communities. For example, one organisation mentioned that it took almost one year to fully engage their target community. The lack of reliable funding streams means there is a real risk of losing the relationships that organisations have worked tirelessly to establish
- **Job stability** – Short-term funding places many organisations in difficult positions as they are unable to provide stability for their employees. As one organisation noted, "some of the money is funding some posts and we can't tell staff if they're going to be made redundant or not [after the current grant ends]".

The voluntary sector has long been saturated with short-term funding opportunities, despite repeated calls for more sustainable, multi-year funding. Our findings further demonstrate a severe need for long-term funding opportunities for VCSE organisations. Without sustained funding, these organisations are restricted to working on short-term goals and outcomes, which may significantly limit their potential to have a meaningful, long-term impact on the communities they support.

IMPACT ON SERVICE USERS: SURVEY RESPONSES

Needs and barriers to support

"I accessed the service because I wanted to meet other women of colour in a free and uplifting environment."

We asked respondents to tell us why they originally sought support from the projects and services funded by the Equality Grant Fund in Greenwich and the Culturally Diverse Communities Project in Lewisham, to understand the presenting needs of these groups. We also asked respondents to tell us about any challenges they had faced when trying to access previous mental health support, to highlight gaps in services and barriers to support.

Our findings suggest that marginalised groups in Greenwich and Lewisham sought support from services that reduced social isolation by facilitating social connections with people from similar communities. Our findings also suggest that these communities sought support from services that promote mental wellbeing, for example, for people living with depression or anxiety, those who have experienced loss, and people with low self-esteem. Respondents were particularly interested in support that incorporated art and creativity.

Common barriers faced by groups in Lewisham and Greenwich were unaffordable support, long waiting times of up to six months, and a lack of culturally sensitive services. Around 33% of respondents said they had faced no barriers when trying to access mental health support. One respondent mentioned that language barriers prevented them from accessing support, and another mentioned that there were not enough local support groups.

Impact of the projects

"[I] don't always open up to people, which has now changed."

In our survey, we asked a series of questions designed to highlight the impact of the funded projects on individuals, their families, and the wider community in Greenwich and Lewisham. We also asked questions designed to help us understand what gaps these funded services were filling within the wider sector.

Just under half (47%) of the respondents reported that these services had helped them to make new friends and improve their self-esteem and confidence. Access to social groups and a desire to reduce isolation and boost self-esteem were some of the common reasons people sought support. Respondents reported that these services helped them to develop new skills and knowledge, as well as helping them to feel more part of the community.

60% of respondents said that their community felt more connected to one another, and around 45% of respondents said that their community had greater awareness of local mental health support because of the services funded by the Equality Grant Fund in Greenwich and the Culturally Diverse Communities Project in Lewisham. One respondent said that they were more aware of affordable and free mental health services.

Respondents reported that these services felt more inclusive (53%), and that they were culturally sensitive, more affordable than other services, and removed any stigma around mental health (all 27%). One respondent said that the service they attended was friendly and supportive, and another said that the service was informal and fun.

Over 65% of respondents said they wouldn't know where to seek support if the services funded by the Equality Grant Fund in Greenwich and the Culturally Diverse Communities Project in Lewisham were not available. In addition, 20% of respondents felt that there was nowhere else they could go for support. This both highlights the gaps in mental health services and demonstrates how these funded services are filling this gap.

Future funding



"Continue to provide a warm and welcoming environment for creativity without prejudice."

We asked respondents to tell us how these services could be improved and what else could be offered. This was to understand how future funding could be used. Common themes included:

1. **More sessions:** Respondents felt they would benefit from more sessions and activities like the sessions they were currently attending. They asked that these services extend to other boroughs, and they also called for longer sessions.
2. **Specialised activities and new skills:** Many respondents requested specialised sessions and activities such as women-only sessions, sessions that offer employment and housing support, English language sessions, and sewing classes.
3. **Greater awareness:** Respondents called for greater awareness of these organisations and services so that more people could benefit from them.
4. **More funding:** Respondents said more funding was needed to "deliver long-term benefits to participants".

WIDER LEARNING AROUND GRANTS PROGRAMMES FOR SMALL VCSE ORGANISATIONS

Delivering grants to small VCSE organisations in the UK, particularly in areas of high need and deprivation, requires a nuanced approach that addresses their unique challenges and leverages their strengths (Woodhead *et al.*, 2023). We reviewed available literature about effective strategies for grant delivery, the needs of small organisations in receipt of grants, the best forms of support to offer them, and considerations for sustainability.

NEEDS OF SMALL VCSE ORGANISATIONS

Small VCSE organisations often operate with limited resources and face significant challenges in areas of high need and deprivation. Their primary needs include:

1. **Funding stability:** Consistent and reliable funding is crucial for these organisations to plan and execute their projects effectively (The VCS Alliance, n.d.).
2. **Capacity building:** Many small VCSEs lack the infrastructure and skills needed for efficient operation, including financial management, governance, and strategic planning (Directory of Social Change, 2023).
3. **Access to networks:** Building connections with other organisations, funders, and stakeholders can enhance their impact and sustainability (The VCS Alliance, n.d.).
4. **Flexibility:** The ability to adapt to changing community needs and circumstances is vital for their success (Directory of Social Change, 2023).

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS

To address these needs, grant-making bodies should consider the following strategies:

1. **Multi-year funding:** Providing multi-year grants can offer the stability needed for long-term planning and project implementation. This approach reduces the administrative burden of frequent reapplications and allows organisations to focus on their core activities (The VCS Alliance, n.d.; Local Government Association, 2024).
2. **Capacity-building support:** Grants should include provisions for capacity building, such as training in financial management, governance, and strategic planning. This support can help organisations become more self-sufficient and resilient (Directory of Social Change, 2023; El-Hoss *et al*., 2023).
3. **Simplified application processes:** Streamlining the application process can make it more accessible to smaller organisations with limited administrative capacity. This includes reducing paperwork, offering clear guidance, and providing support during the application process (The VCS Alliance, n.d.; Thomson and Caulier-Grice, 2007).
4. **Flexible funding:** Grants that allow for flexibility in how funds are used can enable organisations to respond to emerging needs and opportunities. This might include unrestricted funding or grants that cover core costs (Directory of Social Change, 2023).

TYPES OF SUPPORT

Effective support for small VCSE organisations goes beyond financial assistance. Key forms of support include:

1. **Technical assistance:** Providing expertise in areas such as project management, monitoring and evaluation, and fundraising can enhance the effectiveness of these organisations (The VCS Alliance, n.d.; Local Government Association, 2024).
2. **Mentorship and coaching:** Pairing small VCSEs with experienced mentors can provide valuable guidance and support, helping them navigate challenges and seize opportunities (Directory of Social Change, 2023; El-Hoss *et al*., 2023).
3. **Networking opportunities:** Facilitating connections with other organisations, funders, and stakeholders can help small VCSEs build partnerships, share resources, and amplify their impact (The VCS Alliance, n.d.; Thomson and Caulier-Grice, 2007).
4. **Advocacy and representation:** Supporting small VCSEs in advocating for their needs and representing their interests in policy discussions can help create a more enabling environment for their work (Directory of Social Change, 2023).

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Ensuring the sustainability of small VCSE organisations requires a focus on both financial and operational sustainability:

1. **Diversified funding sources:** Encouraging organisations to diversify their funding sources can reduce dependence on a single funder and enhance financial stability. This might include exploring social enterprise models, individual donations, and corporate partnerships (The VCS Alliance, n.d.; Thomson and Caulier-Grice, 2007).
2. **Building reserves:** Supporting organisations in building financial reserves can provide a buffer against funding fluctuations and enable them to invest in their long-term development (Directory of Social Change, 2023; El-Hoss *et al*., 2023).

3. **Strengthening governance:** Enhancing governance structures and practices can improve organisational resilience and accountability, making them more attractive to funders (The VCS Alliance, n.d.; Local Government Association, 2024).
4. **Impact measurement:** Helping organisations develop robust impact measurement frameworks can demonstrate their effectiveness and attract further funding and support (Directory of Social Change, 2023).

Delivering grants to small VCSE organisations in areas of high need and deprivation requires a comprehensive approach that addresses their unique challenges and leverages their strengths. By providing stable funding, capacity-building support, and opportunities for networking and advocacy, grant-making bodies can help these organisations achieve sustainable impact in their communities.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore the delivery and management of two programmes provided by SEL Mind, as part of the charity's efforts to address mental health inequalities in Greenwich and Lewisham. By providing a space for small VCSE organisations to share their experiences, we strived to identify key action points for SEL Mind to continue their work enhancing the mental health of local communities.

Our research suggests that the grants provided by SEL Mind are crucial for the delivery of mental health support to marginalised communities across south east London. All the organisations we spoke to commended the efforts made by the charity in this area of work, with the majority expressing great relief in having increased access to funding opportunities directed at small organisations. We found that many of the organisations felt well supported and were able to form positive relationships with the grant managers from SEL Mind.

Moreover, the people who used these services reported positive impacts. Responses from our survey highlighted impacts such as reducing mental health stigma and isolation, supporting mental health and social connectedness, and contributing to individual personal growth. Over 60% of respondents said they would not know where to go for support if these services did not exist, and a further 20% said there was nowhere else they could go for support, highlighting how these services are filling gaps in the mental health sector. Future funding could enable these VCSE organisations (and others within Greenwich and Lewisham) to offer more specialised and long-term support to marginalised communities.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Mental health charities such as local Minds and other larger organisations in the sector can use grant funding as a means of supporting smaller community organisations and initiatives as part of their efforts to tackle mental health inequalities. Grants are a more flexible and supportive funding route than traditional commissioning and contracting for small organisations.
2. Grant programmes need to be easy to navigate for community organisations, many of whom do not have the infrastructure that larger charities possess to apply for funding and implement projects. This may mean adapting routine ways of working in order to make it possible for community groups to participate.
3. Grant programmes can provide additional benefits for community organisations, such as training, mentoring and capacity building. This should include facilitating greater communication and collaboration between organisations.
4. Larger charities, foundations and commissioners should consider longer-term funding offers for smaller organisations to enable them to be more sustainable. Short-term funding creates instability and can lead to the loss of valuable support in communities if it is not continued.

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CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

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