

# *Together We Can!*

## Covid 19 – Emergency Response and TWCx Extension Year

January 2020-June 2021

*compiled by*

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TWC! external evaluation support



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NEIGHBOURS TOGETHER



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## Contents

1	Executive Summary.....	3
1.1	TWC! Vision – in summary .....	4
1.2	COVID-19 Emergency – 2020 .....	5
1.3	This report.....	8
2	Supporting Our Community.....	9
3	TWC! Food.....	12
3.1	Emergency Food Support (Mar 2020 -Apr 2021).....	12
3.2	Hodge Hill Pantry .....	15
4	Connecting for Well-being .....	18
4.1	Street-Connecting .....	18
4.2	Trails and Events .....	22
4.3	Supporting Community Groups .....	23
5	Green Connecting .....	25
6	Tackling Isolation and Supporting Families.....	28
6.1	Well-being packs and Family Support Work.....	28
6.2	Book Group, Arts Café and Summer Programme (2020).....	30
7	Connecting and Supporting Young People .....	33
7.1	Detached work, mentoring and support .....	34
7.2	Youth Connecting Team.....	36
8	Reflection and Learning .....	38
8.1	What worked well? And what were the challenges? .....	38
8.2	What happens next.....	42

# 1 Executive Summary

*TogetherWeCan!* was initially a 3-year (Jan 2017 – Dec 2019) intergenerational, community-building project within the Firs & Bromford estate, undertaken as a partnership between:

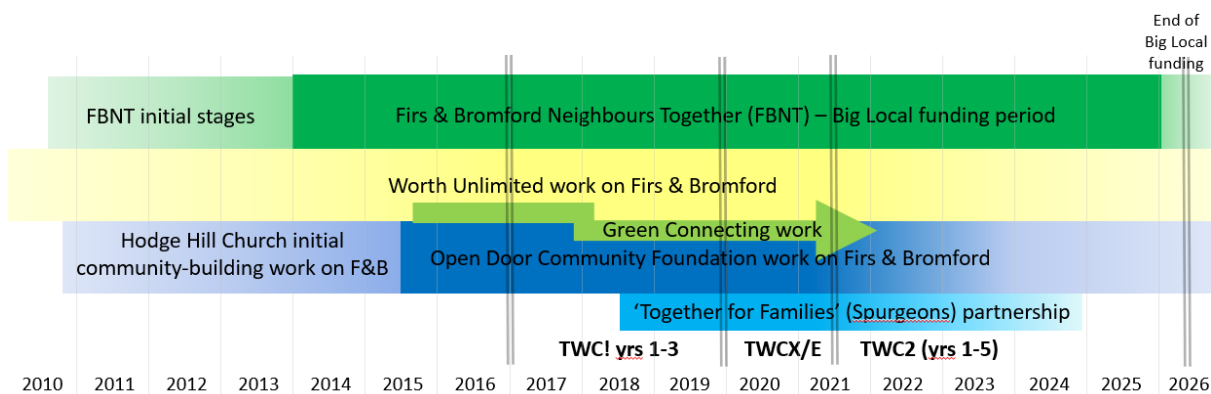
- **Worth Unlimited** (WU – youth work),
- **Open Door Community Foundation** (ODCF – adult-focused community-building),
- and **Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together** (FBNT – board of local residents, administering the Big Local funding, developing a community vision, and overseeing various ongoing community events and activities).

Since September 2018, *TWC!* has also included the ‘Together for Families’ partnership with Tame Valley Children’s Centre (run by Spurgeons), focused on local families with under 5s.

Full details of work, project team and original plans for 2020 can be found in the *TogetherWeCan!* Year 3 (2019) – Evaluation Report.

In 2019, *TWC!*'s initial three-year funding was extended for a further year (Jan–Dec 2020, TWC-X) to allow FBNT to develop a vision and plan for up to 2026 (the end of FBNT’s Big Local funding) and beyond, and the three core partner organisations to work together to discern the ongoing role of *TogetherWeCan!* in supporting the implementation of that 2026 vision.

Figure 1 Timeline for *TogetherWeCan!* and its constituent partner organisations



As everywhere, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted these plans, leading to a break in the TWC-X programme and funding, with a significant additional funding from the Big Lottery to cover the COVID-19 emergency response, with the specific aim of supporting neighbours in and through the crisis (Figure 2).

This short report tells the story of that extraordinary time<sup>1</sup>. It documents how the funding received helped the *TWC!* team and volunteers to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and reflects on their experience.

<sup>1</sup> For narrative clarity, the story of this report is told according to phases of the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, rather than according to funding period (see Fig 2)

Figure 2 Extension (TWC -X) and Emergency (TWC-E) funding + time periods used in this report

		FUNDING	Pandemic Phases	
2020	Jan	TWC-X (original)	pre-COVID 19	
	Feb			
	Mar		<b>EMERGENCY</b> (Spring 2020 – LOCKDOWN 1) Initial lockdown and crisis phase – ‘essential’ work only	
	Apr			
	May			
	June		TWC-E (Emergency)	<b>INITIAL TRANSITION</b> (Summer 2020) Re-opening and re-connecting – with continuing social distance and gathering restrictions
July				
Aug	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> LOCKDOWN</b> (Autumn/Winter 2020) Local, then national restrictions and closures			
Sep				
Oct				
Nov	TWC-X (remainder)	<b>TRANSITION/RECOVERY</b> (Spring 2021) Re-opening/rebuilding - recognising continued nature of pandemic, restrictions etc		
Dec				
2021		Jan	TWC-X (remainder)	
		Feb		
		Mar		
		Apr		
	May			
	Jun			

### 1.1 TWC! Vision – in summary

The overall aim of *TogetherWeCan!* is to contribute to “a flourishing community, with flourishing connections between flourishing people”. We also seek to help and support our local people to establish sustainable livelihoods, understood as encompassing and developing a holistic range of assets including personal skills and strong social networks, as well as financial security.

Across the three ‘age bands’ of our work - young people, adults, and families with under 5s - *TWC!* brings together children-, youth- and adult-focused community work to maximise the opportunities for intergenerational (as well as cross-cultural) interaction and relationship-building, through three parallel ‘strands’ of work:

- **‘Street connecting’** - making connections with, and between, local people, and growing new forms of associational life from those connections;
- **‘Doing stuff together’** - facilitating places and groups which local people feel they belong and can contribute to;
- **‘Support and development’** - supporting local people to grow in the confidence, skills and connections needed to be able to participate in and contribute to the life of their neighbourhood, and wider world.

*TWC!* works with people of all backgrounds, ages and abilities. Our approach doesn’t ‘target’ people according to ‘need’. We are all too aware that neighbours face many structural and personal barriers to living flourishing lives, in a neighbourhood with a history of under-investment and asset stripping, high unemployment, low incomes, and poor mental and physical health. Our focus is working together, enabling all our community to share their gifts and skills, for the benefit of all.

## 1.2 COVID-19 Emergency – 2020

Our Firs and Bromford community have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>2</sup>: We have a higher-than-average number of people who have endured lockdown in flats and overcrowded conditions. We have a higher-than-average number of people who relied on the hospitality and service industry for employment and who have lost their jobs or been furloughed. In addition, many of the pre-existing struggles our community faced, including supporting people with mental health conditions and isolation, have become exacerbated.

### **What we saw**

As the COVID-19 outbreak developed, *TWC!*'s direct role as key community engagement partners in Firs and Bromford gave the team a unique insight into the changing context in the local area.

Over the spring of 2020, the team identified the following emerging issues:

- A rise in the number of people experiencing loneliness and isolation as a result of being required to self-isolate. In many cases, this includes people who had pre-existing anxiety and depression which has been exacerbated as a result of the Pandemic.
- A rise in the number of young people experiencing emotional issues, often very acute issues.
- Rising concerns about low level anti-social behaviour involving young people as lockdown regulations ease.
- A rise in the number of people requesting support with making claims for Benefits and self-employed people seeking support with accessing financial support packages.
- An increase in people with housing issues including challenges in meeting rent payments, unhealthy housing conditions, and difficulties with neighbours during the lockdown period.
- An ongoing need to support people with food supplies either because of drastic changes in their financial circumstances or because they need assistance with shopping.

However, in addition to these challenges, the team also saw a rise in people wanting to help their friends and neighbours in whatever way possible. A key part of our *TWC!* response has been to expand our role as an enabler to harness this energy and to facilitate a community-led response.

### **How we responded**

In summary<sup>3</sup>, our response covered the following areas:

- A. Supporting Our Community** – seeking to develop appropriate, community-based responses to a sharp increase in those seeking support with financial and housing problems, particularly related to changes of employment status, difficulties and delays incurred whilst applying for Universal Credit (and other Government support) and tenancy issues.
- B. Food Programme** - during the initial COVID-19 crisis (Mar-Jun 2020), the team's existing 'support

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<sup>2</sup> For example, our local area is ranked in the top decile of [British Red Cross COVID Vulnerability Index](#)

<sup>3</sup> This outline summary covers all areas contained in the plans originally submitted in the emergency funding application but re-arranged in order to tell the story of what happened next more clearly. More details, including where plans changed, are given in each section below.

and development' work developed into providing immediate support for people in food crisis. This work developed in three ways:

- **Local co-ordination of distribution of food parcels and 'recipe bags'**, ensuring supplies go to those who need it most, with local community volunteers supported by *TWC!* to abide by the necessary government advice and safety protocols.
  - **Continued support of the local 'Community Food Table' initiative** where people are able to help themselves to free donated food.
  - **Enhancing local food-system resilience** through supporting the community to grow more fruit and vegetables and development of Hodge Hill Pantry
- C. Connecting for Well-being** - continuing to use 'connecting' as the basis for developing our community-based well-being work through:
- Resuming our **street connecting** work, operating to strict health and safety and social distancing guidelines, to enable informal conversations on the doorstep with people who may have had minimal social contact over many months; and **supporting community groups** to emerge from lockdown and initiate recovery from the pandemic
  - evolving our **Street Events** work in response to changing COVID-restriction landscape, to enable neighbours to come together safely to enjoy moments of joy, reflection and connection
  - **Supporting community groups** to emerge from lockdown and initiate recovery from the pandemic
- D. Green Connecting** - translating our 'Greener, Cleaner Firs and Bromford' programme, designed to encourage and support development of resident-led activities in local green spaces, into **home-growing** and **community gardening initiatives** which could be sustained despite lockdown
- E. Tackling Isolation and Supporting Families**
- Providing **wellbeing packs** (including puzzles, arts and craft materials and seeds and pots) to families and older people, in particular:
    - increase the focus on those members of our community who are forced to self-isolate due to their health condition, with a particular focus on those who live alone
    - work with our community to better identify individuals who have not yet been in receipt of this support
  - Continuing, wherever possible, to enable local people to **connect through participation in groups and activities** including Arts Café and Zoom Book Group
- F. Connecting and Supporting Young People** - looking to build on our existing connections and resources to respond to the growing concerns of the impact of Covid 19 on the safety and wellbeing of young people, through:

- **Targeted Outreach and Mentoring<sup>4</sup>** – supporting the successful reintegration of young people back into their community as the lockdown measures are eased through targeted detached youth programme in local parks and hotspots, reducing risks of perceived anti-social behaviour and providing safe spaces for young people to go to within their local area.
- **Youth Wellbeing Support** - social distanced one-to-one or virtual mentoring centred on supporting those most effected by the lockdown period, including the hundreds of children locally on the SEMH register.
- **Transition Support** - offer services to enable us to play ‘catch-up’ with a large number of children who needed support with the transition process to secondary school, whose needs have not been met.

### ***Development over time***

When the proposal for emergency funding was developed in mid-2020, 6 months (and therefore beyond the timeframe of the ‘Emergency Funding’ application) seemed a realistic estimation for a ‘recovery phase’. Our initial COVID-19 response plan was therefore split into 3 phases - Emergency (Mar-Jun 2020), Transition (Jul-Sept 2020) and Recovery/Discovery (Oct 2020 onwards). As our local situation developed, alongside the wider national and international picture, it became clear that the unfolding of the pandemic required a more agile response, summarised as follows:

**Emergency Phase (Mar-Jun 2020)** - responding effectively and comprehensively to support people through what has been, for many, a significant a period of crisis. Using the very best creative skills of our staff and our volunteers, this included practical provision of food; acute and longer-term mental health support; social connection and interaction; and support to access welfare entitlements, as swiftly as possible

**Initial Transition Phase (Jul-Oct 2020)** – support our community to respond to numerous changes to the lockdown restrictions and regulations, through COVID-secure opportunities for social connection, exploring sustainable community food offer and by providing positive youth activities and social action projects over the summer, including supporting many young people transitioning to secondary school at this unprecedented time.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lockdown/Winter (Nov 2020-Mar 2021)** – use the platform we had established to ensure we are well-placed to work towards Recovery, albeit via a second wave and return to high Tier restrictions

**Transition/Recovery (Apr-Jun 21, then Jul 21 onwards under new funding)** – respond to gradual lifting of restrictions and expansion of social spaces, mindful of the ongoing impact of COVID and its legacy on our community, volunteers and team.

Our original plan included channelling the goodwill and positive energy from the community so that it inspired new acts of kindness and engaged a larger circle in positive community action. How little did we know how much that would be needed! Our hope remains that, by harnessing the immense potential energy of our community, together we can build momentum into the post-project period and offer a significant legacy aspect of our response.

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<sup>4</sup> Delivered across the Firs and Bromford and neighbouring Ward End, where local Police advised that the absence of any youth support structure was proving a strain in community-relations and safety.

### 1.3 This report

This report tells the story of *TWC!* response throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, from initial crisis and Lockdown 1, through initial re-emergence during summer 2020 and then tightening restrictions over the autumn and winter, and finally into transition and recovery in the first half of 2021. Taking each work area in turn, it records what we did during each phase together with feedback and evidence about the difference that made, and shares reflections from staff and community members about their experiences and learning for the future.



## **2 Supporting Our Community**

*Seeking to develop appropriate, community-based responses to a sharp increase in those seeking support with financial and housing problems, particularly related to changes of employment status, difficulties and delays incurred whilst applying for Universal Credit (and other Government support) and tenancy issues.<sup>5</sup>*

Prior to March 2020, the vision of *TogetherWeCan!* Support & Development work – with adults and young people - was to facilitate regular ‘places of welcome’, through which people can be supported to grow in confidence to identify and share their gifts, skills and passions, be active participants in their community, and overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives. Weekly Open-Door drop-in sessions provided hospitality, a listening ear, and multiple forms of practical support, from using computers and accessing the internet, to help writing CVs and applying for jobs, to support and advice (through our partnership with Birmingham Community Law Centre) about benefits entitlements and challenging unfair decisions. We also worked on a small group and 1-2-1 basis, mentoring individuals to grow in confidence and to move towards greater participation in local groups and activities, as well as supporting people through crisis situations (e.g. eviction) and to navigate systems (e.g. applying for benefits and challenging unfair decisions).

The issues we identified at outset of the COVID-19 crisis (see Section 1.2) – loss of jobs and income from work, increased claims for Universal Credit, benefits and Government financial support packages, increasing housing issues – presented considerable challenges for our support work. The potentially significant increase in those requiring intensive support coincided with the temporary suspension (under lockdown) of those community gathering ‘places of welcome’ in which we had sought to provide that support as a community. Whilst there was an incredible spontaneous increase in people wanting to help their friends and neighbours, facilitating this response in a COVID-safe manner also posed considerable logistical challenges. In particular, COVID restrictions on access by members of the public to our ‘Hub’ location were felt particularly keenly by some members of the community. Whilst staff continued to work remotely and from other locations, the temporary loss of the Hub for scheduled groups and activities, in facilitating *TWC!* team ‘presence’ on the Bromford Estate and as drop-in ‘bumping space’ for informal connections, had a significant impact for staff, volunteers and key members of the wider community.

During the ‘emergency phase’, the work of the whole team (youth and adult sides, connectors and support/development workers) became channelled into what might formerly have been considered ‘support and development’ work. A key part of our *TWC!* response has involved attempting to maintain and expand our role as an enabler, harnessing the energy generated by the community-spirit unleashed by the Pandemic whilst also seeking to facilitate a safe, sustainable, community-led response to the difficulties faced by so many of our neighbours. Supporting those with significant cash flow problems, particularly as a result of changes in their employment status and delays incurred through applying for benefits, to ensure they have a stable supply of food quickly became a major undertaking (Section 3). In addition, *TWC!* staff were engaged with supporting neighbours seeking to promote

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<sup>5</sup> Expressed in the original application for emergency funding as “extra capacity to ensure that people are supported through the UC process, including providing specialist support those needing support to appeal decisions”, alongside “providing support to people who may incur tenancy issues over the next 6 months as a result of a change in their finances and those for whom lockdown has heightened their desire to move house”.

well-being through maintaining community connection (Section 4), providing families with young children and those who were self-isolating with social and logistical support (Section 6) and connecting and supporting young people who were particularly affected by the pandemic (Section 7).

As the initial transition phase developed over the summer and autumn of 2020, the increase in those experiencing difficulties with the Universal Credit process was not, as yet, as bad as had been feared. This is potentially because relatively high population of those most 'at risk' were already on benefits and so already 'in the system' and relatively experienced at accessing welfare support, or able to receive assistance to do so from others in their families or wider community. As a result, our advice and support work instead developed into a mix of high-volume low-intensity support alongside provision of food and well-being packs<sup>6</sup>, with around 15-20 more time-intensive 1-2-1 cases each month.

During emergency, initial transition and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lockdown phases, the majority of this *TWC!* support response fell on paid staff and a small core of volunteers. Roles were partly dictated by circumstance (e.g. those who were available, which often precluded those taking extra precautions because of health vulnerabilities), task requirements (e.g. ability to drive to make deliveries, precluding those without access to a car) and practical constraints (e.g. restrictions on the number of people able to work safely in restricted or enclosed spaces). The hope remained that we could support neighbours to support each other, although throughout early 2021 this continued to be made more difficult by restrictions on group gathering. Despite this, by the summer of 2021, the Pantry space was able to provide welcome and support to up to 30 households each week, including opportunities to participate in wider recipe bag and gardening activities (see Section 0). Then, in June 2021, Open Door Place of Welcome was able to re-open, outdoors, seeing re-engagement of up to 6-10 adult volunteers and 10-12 adult visitors each week.

### **Adult 1-2-1 Support in Numbers**

- Intensive 1-2-1 'crisis support' work with around 15-20 households each month (min. 13, max. 22) – resulting in typically 50 or more support sessions<sup>7</sup> each week (min 47, max. 80)
- Key issues faced including mental health, housing, immigration, benefits, bereavement, employment and family issues
- 6-10 adult volunteers re-engaged in 'open air' Open Door sessions (re-opened June 2020) welcoming 10-12 adult visitors each week

**Note:** this 1-2-1 support work overlaps low-level support provided via our Food Programme (Section 3) and also the work of our Family Support Worker (Section 6) and Youth Connection and Support Workers (Section 7) – both of whom also engage in 'barrier-removing' and support work in their 1-2-1 contact, as reported in those sections.

By the summer of 2021 it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated pre-existing tensions in how the work of 'barrier-removing' and crisis support fits within the wider

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<sup>6</sup> An estimated ¼ to 1/3 of the 150 households receiving food support also receiving some sort of assistance with welfare, benefits or housing concerns (Section 3), whilst all face-to-face deliveries of well-being packs created the opportunity to support isolated individuals, families with young children and young people on the doorstep, as well as to connect them with wider support (Section 5 and 6)

<sup>7</sup> conversations, meetings, telephone calls or engaging with online/written communication

TWC! vision and project. This has prompted a wider review and subsequent attempts to consciously shift in our understanding and application of crisis support, from a specific role focused on 1 or 2 key paid workers to developing a community-wide, collaborative approach.



*Clockwise from top left: Recipe bag set up gave volunteers opportunity to connect; Preparing for open-air Open Door (Jun 2021); Recipe Bag and activity bag giveaways as a bit of a bumping space; support work in a time of COVID*

### 3 TWC! Food

In the words of Lucy, our Community Support and Development Worker, “food has always played an epic part in TWC!”. Whether the Real Junk Food Project, Community Lunch, Flavours of Hodge Hill, Women’s Group, After-School club or Street Events, a great many of our neighbour-led and supported groups and activities had food as a central, often defining element. That these activities span both our ‘connecting’ and ‘support’ work points to the essential power of food as a point of community connection and social support, gathering but also nourishing, literally as well as figuratively. It was, therefore, completely natural that during the initial COVID-19 crisis (Mar-Jun 2020), the team’s existing ‘support and development’ work developed into providing immediate support for people in food crisis, despite the fact that TWC! had, previously, resisted taking a ‘provider’ role, particularly when it came to food. This ‘emergency food support’ – encompassing food parcel distribution, support for local ‘Community Table’ and community growing initiatives – continued until spring 2021, when they were gradually replaced by more sustainable alternatives namely Hodge Hill Pantry and the ongoing recipe bag project.

#### 3.1 Emergency Food Support (Mar 2020 -Apr 2021)

Drawing on the power of food as gathering place, supplying social as well as physical nourishment, this work developed in three ways:

*Local co-ordination of distribution of food parcels and ‘recipe bags’, ensuring supplies go to those who need it most, with local community volunteers supported by TWC! to abide by the necessary government advice and safety protocols.*



In the early ‘Emergency Phase’, it quickly became clear that support for people in food crisis was a key part of the ‘essential service’ which TWC! could legitimately continue to provide: meeting people’s physical needs but also providing crucial opportunities for connection and support. The Open-Door team were well placed to act as local coordinator for food parcel distribution, ensuring supplies from The Active Wellbeing Society and from the FareShare Trust go to those who need it most and that the network of staff and volunteers

delivering food were supported to abide by the necessary government advice and safety protocols. This work ran alongside supporting families who were eligible for alternative Free-School-Meals provision, topping up food available to families and assisting them with accessing and activating FSM vouchers.

Individuals and families were often signposted to us by local schools or other services, but provision was open to anyone who asked, specifically avoiding making judgements about who ‘deserved’ it. There was, however, a considerable overlap with our ‘barrier-removal’ advice, with an estimated ¼ to 1/3 of those receiving food support also receiving some sort of assistance with welfare, benefits or housing concerns.

As time moved on, we became aware that one of the positive trends emerging from the lockdown was the growing propensity of people cooking, rather than an over-reliance on take-aways and ready meals. During the transition phase, from summer 2020 onwards, we sought to support this trend by adjusting our food response to incorporate more intentional sharing of recipe ideas. We started to put together 'Recipe Bags' containing key ingredients and a recipe sheet for using them. Recipe bag themes included using up surplus pears and beetroot, as well as KitKat Blondies. As well as being a useful way to make use of a surplus of 'awkward' ingredients, encouraging recipients to share pictures and further recipe ideas via social media helped to maximise the opportunities this offered for social connection. In this way, the essence of the food parcel initiative – sharing the abundance of food in our community in order to help those in most need – was able to be translated into much more inclusive, asset-based co-creation, with anyone in the community able to join in and share ideas, gifts and skills.



# Together We Cook!



## Recipe Sheet – Week 4

*We've got some great recipes this week! Adam Zulfqar has given us his mom's recipe for making pizza bases. Genny has contributed her favourite flapjack recipe for the sweet treat. And there's a bonus recipe: Carl Josephs shares how to make Jamaican Fluffy Fried Dumplings, which you can eat with anything!*

### Mama Mia Pizza



If you've never made pizza from scratch at home before, you'll be surprised at how easy it is. The dough needs just a few ingredients, a little bit of kneading and a

5 While the dough is rising you can prepare your toppings, and preheat the oven (hottest setting).

6 When dough is ready (it will be risen and a bit puffy) divide it into 4 or 6 balls, or however many pizzas you want. Put a little bit of flour on a clean surface, flatten each ball of dough and roll it out with a rolling pin or flatten and gently stretch it by hand until it is the right shape and size.

7 Put each pizza base onto a flat or shallow baking tray. Spread tomato sauce in a thin layer over the base (Adam suggests using ketchup) then add any topping you like.

8 Place tray in the hot oven and bake for 8-10 minutes.

#### The Tomato Sauce base

A pizza needs a tasty tomatoey layer on top of the dough

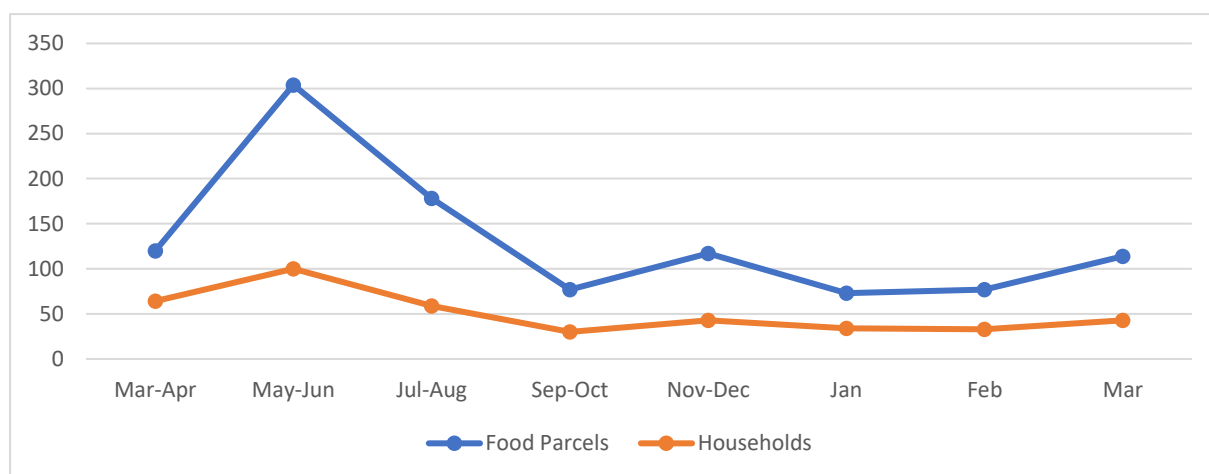
Each Recipe Bag invited recipients to submit suggestions for future recipes. One (above) particularly caught the imagination of one family, who started to report what they had done with the leftovers from the previous week's recipe bag. In this way young people were drawn into participation and contribution, prompting positive engagement in wider community on their own terms.



### Emergency Food in Numbers

- Around 1200 food parcels distributed to around 150 households (Figure 3) – an average of around 78 parcels each month, peaking in May-June 2020 and again November/December 2020 and March 2021, tailing off as replaced with Pantry provision from April 2021 onwards – each providing opportunity for connection via doorstep chat or collection point
- Estimated ¼ to 1/3 of those 150 households also receiving assistance with benefits, welfare or housing concerns
- 449 recipe bags distributed between Mar-Dec 2020, resuming with 45 in June 2021
  - 30 neighbours engaged in online Together We Cook forum sharing photos and ideas based around our recipe bags<sup>8</sup>
- 8-10 volunteers involved in emergency food distribution (alongside 5 staff), with at least 50% of those volunteers seeing significant step up on their participation in the project

Figure 3 – Emergency Food (Mar 2020-March 2021)



**Continued support of the local 'Community Food Table' initiative where people are able to help themselves to free donated food.**

In the early stages of the COVID-19 emergency, a local 'Community Food Table' initiative emerged, with neighbours setting up tables from which local people were able to help themselves to free donated food. As with other food provision, these tables served a dual purpose by creating gathering or bumping spaces for people to connect in a socially distanced fashion, whilst also supporting people in direct food crisis. Connection with the *TWC!* team helped to ensure those who were particularly struggling were able to be directed to financial wider support, where appropriate.

Throughout the emergency phase and into the summer 2020, *TWC!* sought to provide appropriate support to community members running these tables, whilst working hard to ensure they remained neighbour-neighbour support, rather than increasing dependence on external service provision.

<sup>8</sup> <https://padlet.com/OpenDoorCF/TogetherWeCook>

### **3.2 Hodge Hill Pantry**

*Enhancing local food-system resilience through supporting the community to grow more fruit and vegetables and development of Hodge Hill Pantry*

As well as changes in personal cooking habits, we were aware that the COVID-emergency period had highlighted potential pressures on food supply systems, particularly through supermarkets. It also became apparent that these pressures had the greatest impact on those who were most vulnerable to financial and food insecurity. We wanted to take the opportunity to work with the community to create a more sustainable food offer that includes expanding local growing and donating schemes, with added health benefits achieved by the growers (see Green Connecting) and to explore a re-modelling of our current food offer with more focus on promoting resilience.

*TWC!* has long resisted the conventional ‘food bank’ model of emergency food provision, opting for alternatives which are less transactional and more relational, which seek to enhance the dignity and agency of neighbours, and maximise opportunities for social interaction and ‘ways in’ to other community groups and activities.

In June 2020, *TWC!* staff members brought together members of Hodge Hill Church with a representative of the Your Local Pantry network to explore the idea of setting up a branch of YLP on the Hodge Hill Church site (Coleshill Road, B36 8BG), and a successful application was made for HS2 funding (administered through Groundwork). The vision for the project was to create the first Pantry in north Birmingham, serving the Firs & Bromford estate (building on well-established connections with neighbours) and the wider area of Hodge Hill, offering dignity and choice to members, as well as a café-style Place of Welcome (when COVID safety precautions allow), and additional support and signposting for people with financial, benefits and housing issues, and connections in to other community activities (supported through the wider *TWC!* programme, and beyond).

The Hodge Hill Church site was chosen as one of very few local venues that offered space for a permanent pantry shop and food storage, as well as space for the café / Place of Welcome and access to a kitchen; while located just over the boundary of the Firs & Bromford estate, it is within easy walking distance of the Firs end of the estate which has been historically under-resourced. While an initial team of volunteers has been drawn primarily from the Hodge Hill Church congregation, the commitment of the project to a ‘Place of Welcome’ ethos includes a strong desire to draw more local people (including Pantry members) into volunteering within the project.

As a development of the emergency food provision model, the Pantry offers scope for low-cost, safely-managed, ‘in person’ food collection – with the added dimensions of choice and social interaction. The Pantry also includes a food growing space and opportunities to link in with the work of our Green Connector and her team, and also the provision of free fresh fruit and veg, often grown locally. Joining up the Pantry with the ongoing Recipe Bags project encourages Pantry members to use less-familiar food ingredients and cook more confidently and healthily. In time, the development of a café-style Place of Welcome will add an additional location to our local network of PoWs, and the possibilities for fluid movement between local spaces.

Key outcomes from the Pantry project include:

- Improved health and wellbeing - through increased access to food, fresh fruit and veg, and support with cooking meals (through Recipe Bags, conversations with others, etc) and through social interaction, emotional and practical support, developing friendships, and connections into other community groups and activities, and signposting to support and advice services.
- Increased community cohesion - through social interaction, opportunities to volunteer, and bridging geographical and cultural divides between different local neighbourhoods.
- Enhanced education and training - through supporting members to develop and share skills in food growing and cooking, and financial budgeting; and through training for volunteers (e.g. food hygiene, first aid, community safeguarding, etc.)



*Al fresco Pantry Welcome Team, April  
- October 2021*

The pantry project launched in May 2021, after extensive preparation work in preceding months to create a welcoming environment that minimised COVID infection risks. The Pantry offers not only food but also ‘wraparound’ support, as our support worker and other volunteers provide a listening ear and support with a range of issues (see x). We are developing a thriving community garden in the centre of the Pantry site, producing food and plants shared for free to Pantry shoppers, and offering a space to engage with gardening and learn some ‘green skills’. Full launch of the café-style ‘Place of Welcome’ within the Pantry setup is planned for Spring 2022.

### ***Hodge Hill Pantry in Numbers***

In opening 2 months, Hodge Hill Pantry enrolled 104 members, with around 23 shopping each week in May, rising to 34 per week in June (51 members shopped at least once in May, rising to 64 in June – meaning 116 adults and 79 children were receiving support from the Pantry).

We have a growing team of active and committed volunteers, around 10 in June 2021. Members of the Pantry team have engaged in training for Food Hygiene, First Aid and Community Safeguarding.



*Young people encouraged to shop for their families at Pantry*



*Pete is very enthusiastic about getting people to try new foods!*

## **4 Connecting for Well-being**

*TogetherWeCan!* uses the term ‘connecting’ to describe activities which seek to make contact with local residents, encouraging and enabling them to connect with each other and participate in activities with their neighbours.

Prior to March 2020, a developing Street Connectors Team were regularly engaging neighbours through ‘door-knocking’ (conducting door-step conversations to get to know neighbours and discover their gifts and skills) and other local events, co-ordinating and supporting seasonal/holiday activities and supporting neighbours to plan and run ‘micro-local’ Street Events - focused in on just one street, a green space, or a small cluster of neighbouring streets. As a direct result, a number of resident-led groups and activities were supported to start, grow and develop, with a growing number of local residents were encouraged and mentored to take active roles in those projects. Along with the Green Connecting work (Section 0), many of these projects, such as Men’s Group, Book Club and Families Club, had a degree of focus on enhancing well-being, through social connection and interaction, physical or creative activity and emotional expression/literacy (Section 6) .

Facing the challenges of COVID-19 and Lockdown, *TWC!* sought to develop this community-based well-being work through reviewing and refocusing our connecting activities to enhance the contribution to social connection and well-being as follows:

### **4.1 Street-Connecting**

*Resuming our street connecting work, operating to strict health and safety and social distancing guidelines, to enable informal conversations on the doorstep with people who may have had minimal social contact over many months.*

During the initial COVID emergency period (Mar-Jun 2020), all street-connecting and other groups were suspended. Seeking to respond to the unprecedented situation, staff immediately realised the value of the “much more solid” volunteer street-connecting team, built and developed over the preceding few years. The Street-Connecting (S-C) team switched to online weekly gathering, using practices of community attentiveness developed over the last few years to exchange observations regarding “what are we noticing? ...seeing? ...loving? ...hating?”. As well as providing a valuable space for mutual support, these discussions were used as basis for sharing and developing ideas for responding to the unfolding situation.

Group reflection revealed an immediate and strong sense of the need to stay physically present in neighbourhood, seen to be connecting and caring, albeit with appropriate safeguards and social distance. As a result, the emphasis of the S-C team switched to simply encouraging people to be physically present to neighbours, wherever they could be. Indeed, the pandemic experience built on and deepened our growing insight that doorstep is key place for building community. Team members did participate in organised events – for example Clap for Carers, Street Parties for VE day – some self-organised by neighbours, others initiated by members of the S-C team, but the key emphasis was on encouraging local people to do whatever they could to, safely, stay together.

#### **Street-Connecting in Numbers**

During the initial transition period out of lockdown (May-Oct 2020), more organised street-connect events re-commenced, working within Government guidelines. 4 initial door-knocking sessions during

May-June 2020 developed into to 3 sessions per week during July-August, including a new evening session (20 sessions in total). This reduced to 2 sessions per week through September and October (10 sessions in total) until the November 2020 lockdown meant door-knocking was no longer possible.

Each 'door-knocking' session involved a team of between 2 and 8 community members, plus *TWC!* team seeking to safely make contact the most isolated, offering support and providing opportunities for people to share neighbour-to-neighbour about how the pandemic was impacting them.

As a result, over period May to October 2020, over **100** door-step conversations were recorded via new Google Form. By collating the content of these conversations, the team were able to identify common themes. Some were positive, especially regarding new emergence of small pockets of micro-community. But there were also real challenges, particularly concerning housing (quality and availability), additional isolation caused by English as second language, and struggles with caring responsibilities and health.

Reflecting on the difference this made, the team identified:

- Clarification of purpose – given the success of neighbour-neighbour connecting during the first Lockdown, discussions regarding resuming organised street-connecting focused on question of why this might be considered 'essential work'. The street-connecting team answered this by identifying parts of Estate where they were not connected in with 'organic' community building, perceiving need for more organised door-knocking to check in with those areas and establish levels of isolation.
- Sense of renewed energy and two new team members – increasing diversity of team according to ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds – with others stepping up into increased leadership. One new team member completed an 'inclusion calendar' enabling whole *TWC!* team to plan events with greater awareness of cross-cultural context.
- Able to start evening Street-connecting – an aspiration for last 3 years
- Identification of issues causing particular concern to local residents - particularly the struggles faced by those living in flats or maisonettes, which were typically cramped and without gardens. Real concern for wellbeing of those families prompted additional neighbour-led attempts to respond (see below).

### *Sahra's Story*

Sahra has lived in her block on [the Bromford] Estate for the past 16 years. Here she talks to Paul, our Street Connector, about how neighbours worked together to improve the communal garden and the difference it has made:

*What was lifelike in the blocks before doing the communal gardens together?*



It's been quite quiet. People do know each other by names and say hello to each other, but there was not huge deal of connection between people who live in the flats. And the communal garden was just not nice at all. It was quite rundown, actually, there was nothing there really.

*What made you come together to do the garden?*

We hadn't actually thought about doing garden until we had the Street Connecting Team come over. We talked to the neighbours, and everybody seemed to have the same issue. The *TWC!* team encouraged us to do things ourselves. This is one of the things we first thought of it - and it was brilliant!

People came out of their flats and had such energy to do make things better. Saying things like: "I want to come back to a better and nicer and cleaner a place, to come home to something to be proud of". So, the whole two blocks came together and actually within two, three weeks, the whole community areas were so much better: so nice, so much cleaner. And it bonded us all of us. It was so nice to see all of our kids playing together so nicely. As two blocks we know each other a bit better now, we know who needs a bit more caring, who needs looking after. We became like a little village basically, so we know each other quite well. It's a nice feeling to know your neighbours.

*And what is life like now?*

It's lovely. Although we still have a lot of problems within the flats and with outside the flats. But it is such a feeling to come back to just to see how much we have achieved ourselves. But it's sad also at the same time knowing that we did this ourselves. "You shouldn't be doing this; it should be the council doing this". And because the council is neglecting the whole place, it feels like at least we don't something to be proud of and to show them that we can do this, but it shouldn't be us doing it.

*And tell us a bit more about the other stuff that needs doing now, maybe some of the stuff that the Council needs to be doing?*

There's some huge stuff that needs to be doing by the Council for example, there's no lighting back in the back





in the garden or in the front of the flats so it's getting darker now it's getting winter. And we can actually when we come into the flats and we go into the backyard and we can't see anything is quite stark and it's not nice because when you need to go and take the bins out, you can't go through you have to do in the daytime.

There are also a lot of problems within the flats. Some of the windows don't work. There's continually leaks, that keep going. Nobody seems to be doing anything about the flats and the problems within the flats. So

that is a shame, but the Council need to do it.

*So, what do you think you've achieved together?*

We feel quite proud. The fact that we've done this ourselves for ourselves and for our own wellbeing. Also it's nice to see, and have that connection with, your neighbours. You feel more secure. You feel safer, where you are, and you feel like you can trust and rely on your neighbours more. And the kids are loving it - they're having such a lovely time, and also the adults, we are bonding and having a lot of time together, so it's nice feeling.

*What's your hope for the future?*

My hopes are even more stuff happening in the garden, planting more flowers and stuff like that. And also for the inside the flats, that people from the Council come and fix it up because it doesn't look nice. Inside our flats, it looks nice because we've done them ourselves but the communal area within the flats is horrible, there is no paint, there is no proper flooring. It looks disgusting to come into and it shouldn't be like that, because we all pay rent and service charge, so they should be doing the work.



## 4.2 Trails and Events<sup>9</sup>

*Evolving our street events work in response to changing COVID-restriction landscape, to enable neighbours to come together safely to enjoy moments of joy, reflection and connection.*

During 2020 and early 2021, the ongoing pressures of the pandemic created considerable challenges for the street events side of our work, particularly in undermining the ability to plan for the future. In response to not being able to hold street events as we normally would, members of our community got creative. Our Halloween Trail, conceived and devised by Amy and Laura (two members of our Art Group) reached approximately 400-500 people across the Firs and Bromford states. This success in generating new types of events which enabled people to come together to celebrate seasonal traditions and rituals but in a socially distanced manner inspired development of an ‘Events Team’ supported by Paul and Ria. The team worked together on two more static Christmas and Easter outdoor events (reaching 100-150 people respectively) and the Wizard of Oz activities and trail (see below).

The success of the events, which were really valued by local residents, demonstrated the potential of a small number of people coming together to offer something creative and exciting to the wider community. The high level of attendance and participation indicated the importance and attractiveness of opportunities to come together, whilst also raising stretching questions regarding the practicality of organising such events.

### *Follow the Yellow Brick Road (Map out of Lockdown)*

Inspiration for a Wizard of Oz themed event came as Firs and Bromford Neighbours Together reflected on the Government’s ‘roadmap’ out of lockdown. A passing reflection that “it was a bit like Yellow Brick Rd” inspired a series of improvisations around the Wizard of Oz, exploring themes of home, bravery, heart and visions of the future.

The project began distribution of scarecrow kits and activity bags during the May school half-term holiday. Later in the summer, a Wizard of Oz trail saw 9 neighbours dressed up walking Firs and Bromford with Santa’s sleigh dressed up Wizard of Oz style!



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<sup>9</sup>The original application for emergency funding detailed “Continuing to support the local Art Group who’ve been making Arts Trails & Treasure Hunts to encourage families to explore the wonderful local nature walks within our area to support their collective wellbeing” – this work developed into our wider events and trails work, as narrated here.

We had a fantastic response and creating a real buzz about the ideas involved. Awesome work by Ria, Clare, Phil & Louise, in particular, to dress the sleigh and organise costumes.



### 4.3 Supporting Community Groups

*Supporting community groups to emerge from lockdown and initiate recovery from the pandemic*

Over the transition and recovery phase (Apr-Jun 21) attention turned to supporting neighbours and community groups to re-emerge over the next 3 to 6 months, according to the government roadmap. The street-connecting team continued to meet via Zoom, supported by Paul via 'walk n talk' mentoring. In total, over the first 6 months of 2021, Paul supported 10 groups - 5 new projects, 5 re-starting after the pandemic (see below), supporting around 15 individuals through over 40 mentoring sessions.

Over the same period, the wider focus of Paul's work shifted to securing and planning the Hodge Hill Pantry, seeking to provide connecting space around food, alongside more sustainable response to food insecurity (Section 0) and supporting the ABCD training (Section **Error! Reference source not found**). Paul also worked with Birmingham Near Neighbours to design and deliver vaccine-awareness raising and education workshops, particularly targeting groups where vaccine take-up was lower. Feedback from the Street Connector team led to the original plan involving doorstep conversations being rethought into online-training sessions. Although timing of the project, falling as it did during Ramadan, led to additional challenges regarding cross-community working, Paul was able to develop strong links with local GP Practice. Discussions around the project identified issues around accessibility of vaccine locations, contributing ultimately to securing visits from a 'vaccine bus' to the Estate helping to considerably reduce the distance local residents were required to travel in order to get vaccinated.

Figure 4 Supporting Groups and Activities - Summary

Name of Project / group	Year started	Status	Support and Developments
Events Team (NEW)	2020	Active	Developing a programme of events in the year – focusing on Wizard of Oz (see above)
Litter Picking	2018	Active	Group re-emerged/re-launched with some new leadership (1-1 support). Made link to Hodge Hill Residents Group
Tom’s Lights	2016	Active	Supporting local neighbour who has established Christmas traditions around decoration of his house, developing into successful small business. Linking in Tom to the Wizard of Oz Events.
Knowing Me, Knowing You (NEW)	2020	Active	New Project, led by local resident, aimed at equipping local people to share stories. Launched with an Eid Picnic, organised by 5 volunteers and attended by 20 people, at which 4 speakers shared their experiences of Ramadan, Eid and Fasting. It was a lovely mix of people and fabulous feedback regarding value of space to share together, importance of hearing other people’s experiences and opportunity to get to know neighbours more deeply. Lots to build upon.
Street Watch (NEW)	2020	Active	Working with the Police, a regular street walks to identify possible issues, look at ways to work together with BCC & Police
Heritage Centre (REVIVED)	2019	Active	New group taking forward project to enable land-transfer to redevelop community space in centre of Bromford estate, supported by Green Connector.
F&B Village Vision	2017	Active	With wider FBNT, project to develop vision for ‘Firs and Bromford Village’ reached a critical moment, working with East Birmingham Inclusion and Growth Strategy Team. Preparation and consultation on Village Green/Hub vision. Ongoing community engagement with developments regarding housing and flood defences
Pantry (NEW)	2020	Active	Secured funding Working on plan to open (Covid safe) Supporting weekly sessions and admin team – training 20 volunteers
Church House (NEW)	2020	Active	Re-visiting the vision for community house. Opening recruitment for residents.
Bromford Theatre Group	2010	Active	Supporting with re-launching Funding from FBNT for a film
Mindfulness Walking Group	2020	Planning	Supporting local resident to develop idea for well-being project
ABCD Training Sessions (NEW)	2021	Completed	8 90-minute Zoom sessions with Cormac Russell, Nurture Development attended by <i>TWC!</i> team, core volunteers – aim to introduce ABCD concepts and language to wider audience. Held during a difficult time during pandemic (Jan 2021), sessions were limited by challenges of Zoom-training and lack of wider connecting spaces; also learning regarding delivery of training to different groups

## 5 Green Connecting

*Translating our 'Greener, Cleaner Firs and Bromford' programme, designed to encourage and support development of resident-led activities in local green spaces, into **home-growing** and **community gardening** initiatives which could be sustained despite lockdown*

Since 2017, our Green Connector, Cath Fletcher, has worked to build a team of 'green champions' who can take the lead on green-focused activities, working with neighbours to develop new and existing green spaces, both larger scale and 'micro' sites. This work focused on participation - drawing more people into using the green spaces and engaging in green-focused activities; learning and training - linking local residents with opportunities both locally delivered and further afield; and building a network of partners supporting the use and development of local green spaces.

During the initial emergency phase, COVID-19 and subsequent restrictions to individuals' movements and activities meant that the usual Greener Cleaner Firs & Bromford group gardening sessions in the community and at local schools were unable to take place. This led to regular volunteers being unable to engage in this positive activity as they would normally, reducing their social contact and physical activity.



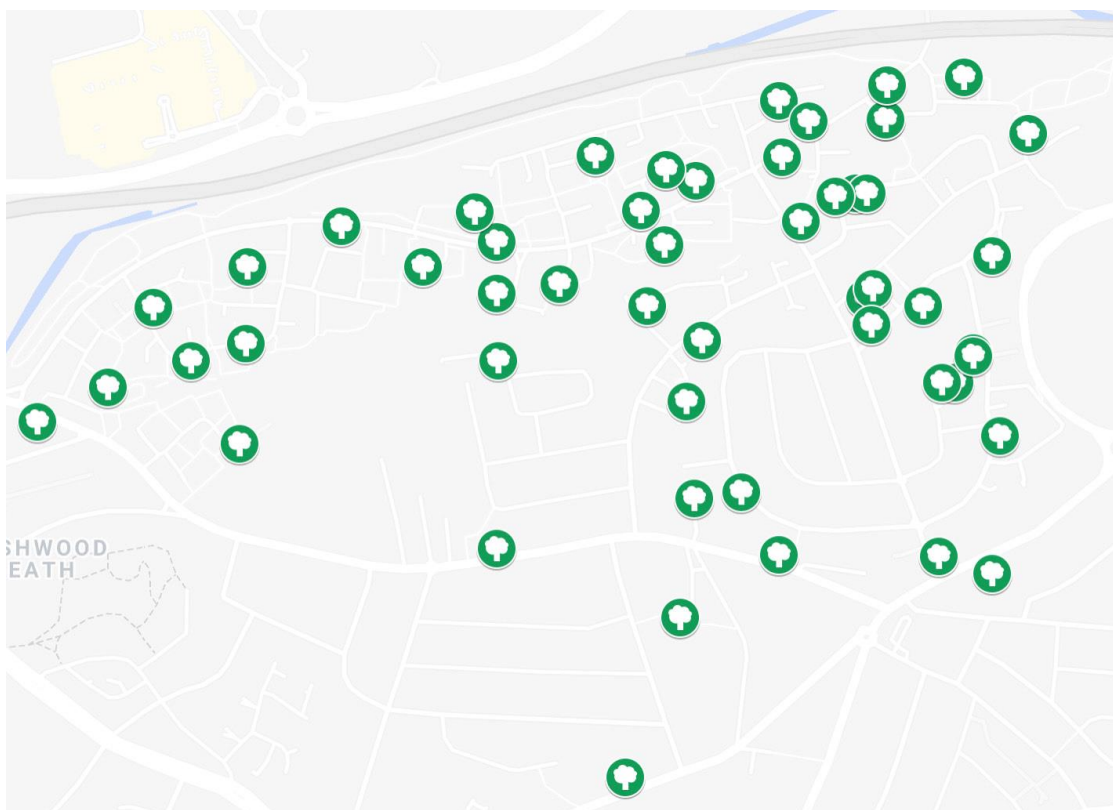
Concern regarding potential negative resulting effects on the mental and physical wellbeing of our volunteers and regular attendees, together with requests from those self-isolating for support in growing in their own garden or other spaces, prompted a shift in project delivery from supporting communal maintenance of existing community garden spaces to encouraging home-growing. Building on a volunteer-led project earlier in the year, which saw fruit trees and bushes planted in residents' front gardens, we adapted our community green activities to focus on delivery of growing packs, plants, seeds, related resources and activities for those self-isolating, families where children are off

school and parents furloughed/working from home, and adults living alone. There was very good uptake of this through notices on social media, via conversations with residents being supported with food deliveries and general wellbeing check-ins with individuals.

This project worked alongside the wider well-being work (see below) to provide increased learning opportunities for those who are new to gardening and creative activity provision to stimulate physical and mental wellbeing. A parallel initiative developed, in partnership with Mother Garden scheme, designed to inspire and enable the local community to be growing at home through a plant swap scheme for residents to access and share plants, fresh produce and growing resources locally.

### **Green-Connecting in Numbers**

- Maintained 3-5 community gardens – including Ambridge House, Tame Valley School, Hodge Hill Church and outside the Hub – involving 66 local residents in gardening activities, as restrictions allowed.
- 150 of families/households supported - 134 with growing packs (outdoor raised beds, or indoor/balcony pots); 236 with seed planting packs; 300 through wider distribution as part of the Birmingham Mother Garden Network
- 414 plants shared/donated with coverage across the whole B36 8 area:



- 2 neighbours supported to attend Gardeniser training – as well as working towards proposal for a Green Connector trainee/assistant post within *TWC!* to bring additional capacity and extend employment opportunity to local community

As well as encouraging the physical and psychological benefits of gardening, this project sought to provide affordable options for securing gardening and food supplies within walking/cycling distances, reducing need for travel to crowded or enclosed locations for shopping. In turn, this created opportunities for community cohesion and building social capacity (whilst still staying safe and socially distanced), encouraging and developing sharing of skills and ideas, as well as food and resources.

We have had particularly good feedback from the local primary school who have reported that the children and families they have been in regular contact with have been enjoying and benefiting from home growing, as well as positive feedback from isolated vulnerable individuals who have had a boost to their general wellbeing and ability to cope with the current difficult situation.

During the transition/recovery period (Apr-Jun 2021), Cath sought to build on and expand these links with local schools, putting plans in place for joint growing activities over the summer, as well as developing links with other community organisations (e.g. TAWS) seeking to engage more local residents in gardening activities.



Overall, the pandemic period has led to a rapidly developing understanding of what ‘community gardening’ means, from a focus on encouraging community engagement with shared green spaces to encompassing a wider range of activities designed “to get community growing wherever and whenever they can”. Whilst communal green spaces will continue to be important to the ‘Green Connecting’ role, the project has now developed an understanding that the community can grow in their own spaces and come together to share plants and experience. This was thought to likely to lead to an expansion of engagement with gardening in people’s own homes but also, in turn, with a wider range of green activities, not only in *TWC!* supported spaces but also other places across the Firs and Bromford.

## **6 Tackling Isolation and Supporting Families<sup>10</sup>**

*Providing wellbeing packs (including puzzles, arts and craft materials and seeds and pots) to families and older people, in particular:*

- *increase the focus on those members of our community who are forced to self-isolate due to their health condition, with a particular focus on those who live alone*
- *work with our community to better identify individuals who have not yet been in receipt of this support*

*Build on and facilitate the work of Ria, our Together for Families Community worker, in seeking to connect with and support families with children under 5 through 1-2-1 support and group sessions*

*Continuing, wherever possible, to enable local people to connect through participation in groups and activities including Arts Café and Book Group*

*Distributing IT equipment with internet data dongles to enable digitally excluded people to access a range of online resources to help them maintain positive health and wellbeing during their enforced isolation*

TWC! COVID-19 response included supporting those within the Firs and Bromford area who received notification that they are most at risk from the virus and should therefore self-isolate. In many cases these are people who live alone. We observed that many people instructed to ‘shield’ were, understandably, becoming increasingly anxious, frustrated and finding it hard to distract themselves from the day-to-day misery of this crisis. During the ‘emergency’ phase (Mar to Jun 2020) these individuals were, in effect, under house-arrest without any guarantees of an end date. Some community members who were ‘shielding’ were known to us or came to our attention through our street-connecting work. However, we were concerned that there are people for whom this applied to who we are not yet in contact with and therefore sought opportunities to work with the community to reach out to them.

Through our community connecting - via emergency food support and recipe bags (Section 3.1), ‘door-knocking’ (Section 4.1) and youth connecting/support (Section **Error! Reference source not found.**) - we many met on doorstep who were “desperate to talk/share”. For some our TWC! worker or volunteer was literally only ‘real’ person, outside of household, spoken to for significant time. There was also sense that people responding to someone who was genuinely open willing to listen to them, rather than simply impart advice or provide a service. This section narrates the development of this work through our ‘well-being packs’ and particularly the work of Ria, our Family Support worker, as well as wider community groups.

### **6.1 Well-being packs and Family Support Work**

The initial COVID-19 lockdown also had an immediate impact on the work of our Together for Families Community Worker, Ria Evans, particularly through the temporary closure of the Children’s Centre building. With specific remit focusing on families with children under 5s, prior to March 2020 Ria’s

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<sup>10</sup> As part of our work to tackle isolation, we originally intended to distribute IT equipment to enable digital inclusion. In practice, the internet safety aspects of this made it more complicated than anticipated. Instead we have invested in additional laptops at the Hub for place-based internet access (when safe to do so).

role involved leading and supporting sessions encouraging local parents and families to connect with each other, including Stay and Plays, Forest Play, Parent and Baby Play, Baby massage, FAB Church and Firs Family Club. With such group work suspended, Ria shifted to supporting doorstep connecting activities (see above), linking with the food programme but with a particular view to supporting families with young children, many of whom faced similar challenges regarding social isolation and disconnection.

With these two constituencies particularly in mind, the team including local volunteers designed packs to support the wellbeing of isolated individuals and families, helping them become positively proactive. These included the development and distribution door to door of:

- 50 activity packs for parents to engage with their children on the theme of Easter (April 2020). These packs encouraged the development of fine motor skills, language and play as well as encouraging a positive making and bonding experience for parent and child. Packs were hand-distributed, providing opportunities for door-to-door conversations which were a highlight for parents craving interactions, as well as an opportunity for Ria and the team to check in regarding their well-being.
- 50 packs of soil, pots and seeds and instructions were given out in May 2020, supported by Green Connector, Cath.
- By June 2020, we were receiving requests, via local schools, from families we hadn't engaged with before for packs and referrals – in response we created and distributed 80 packs based on the Rainbow fish story and then in July we gave out another 80 packs based on a robot story.

*A local young mum said the packs were “a life-saver”, continuing: “I had never done messy stuff or arts and crafts at home but my 2-year-old was getting bored playing with the same toys and so I took the plunge with encouragement from Ria and put a messy mat on the floor and got stuck in. I’ve grown in confidence in what I can do at home with my son, and we’ve gone on to make a car wash from a cardboard box.”*

- Over the summer of 2020, in addition to supporting activities on the common and bluebell woods (see above), each week we gave out 50 activity bags with instructions and resources for example, chalk for pavements with 10 ideas of games to play; resources for making juggling balls, a skipping rope with 10 ideas of games to play.

September to December saw a focus on 1:1 work with individuals struggling particularly with mental health and Ria started weekly walks and talks with up to 5 women and children. Throughout the whole period she supported food requests and for essential items like nappies and milk (varying from 20 requests a week to approx. 4 once things settled down)

As the second Lockdown lifted, Ria started 1:1 play sessions and 1:1 baby massage sessions in the children centre with small groups. From April 2021; 5 parents/babies attended 6-week baby massage classes and 5 attended a new parent new baby group. In addition to repeating those groups in June, she added an extra baby massage class and supported a local volunteer to run a weekly forest school session which 7 families attended.

In feedback from our baby massage classes a parent talked about how important it was for her to share her birthing story with other women in a safe place and that it was the first time she had felt heard and able to say how scary and lonely she had felt.

In our first new parent new baby group most of the mums were first time mums and their children had not seen other babies due to COVID 19 restrictions. When the babies were placed on the floor (most around 6 months old) they began to coo and chatter and smile and at one point us adults couldn't hear ourselves over the noise. All the parents were shocked as they said their babies did not make this much noise at home and what a delight it was for all of us to see their babies interacting together.

### ***Family Support work in numbers***

- 260 activity packs distributed between April-June 2020 – each providing opportunity for doorstep engagement and support with around 50-80 families
- 50 activity bags distributed each week throughout the school summer holidays 2020
- 5 families provided with long-term 1:1 support over September to-December 2020, with between 4 and 20 families each week supported with requests for food or other essential items
- 6 new or re-started groups for parents and children – each attended by 5-7 families

## **6.2 Book Group, Arts Café and Summer Programme (2020)**

*Continuing, wherever possible, to enable local people to connect through participation in groups and activities including Arts Café and Book Group*

Although most face-to-face activities had to be suspended from March 2020, we wanted to continue, to enable local people to connect through participation in groups and activities, wherever possible. TWC! staff facilitated local residents to continue to connect through online Book Group (8 sessions during Lockdowns), jigsaw swap and Pop-Up Plant Swap and Arts Café (monthly throughout summer of 2021). As well as the trails and street-events (Section 4.2), over the summer of 2020 TWC! was able to support a reduced, socially distanced Summer Programme including family activities in the local woods, Forest Space and Old Rectory.

As lockdowns returned and the weather turned against us towards the end of 2020, we pulled together to put together some FAB Arts Cafe taster/gift bags to give out over the Christmas period... These included a set of Wellbeing Cards (designed by Jane Barrett) and a couple of our Arts Cafe staples (mindful colouring and How to write a Haiku!) along with an invitation to join us when we reconvene.

As soon as we were able, once restrictions allowed, and as part of our 2020 summer programme, FAB Arts Cafe held 4 physically distanced sessions for adults in the Forest Space. Many of the regulars came along to one or more sessions, plus it was a great way to connect with others who tried it for the first time!



*We read the Grimm Fairy Tales during the Grimmet of COVID lockdowns!*

*This family became masters at jigsaws – from 200 piece to 1000 in a weekend! (right)*



*Book Swap outside The Hub! Please take one/leave one/gift one! (below right)*

*FAB Arts Cafe Gift Bags - Christmas 2020 (below)*





## 7 Connecting and Supporting Young People

The *TWC!* team includes two roles focused explicitly on intergenerational work with young people:

- A **Street Connector for Young People** (Dan Sandford-Smith, Worth Unlimited) who leads on our street-based engagement ('detached work') with local young people, and our intergenerational social action work.
- A **Support & Development Worker for Young People** (Flo Berrow, Worth Unlimited), who supports young people to grow in confidence to identify and share their gifts, skills and passions, be active participants in their community and overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives, and also assists with the detached youth work.

From April-June 2020, our YP Support and Development worker, Flo, was furloughed and from September 2020-March 2021, maternity cover for the role was provided by Worth Unlimited's social enterprise development workers, Jane Barrett & Stewart Boyle.

From mid-March 2020, an immediate shift to emergency response saw the youth team redeployed to assist local schools with engaging with students identified as being particularly vulnerable: providing support with accessing food through alternative Free School Meals provision and, where necessary, emergency food parcels (Section 3.1), as well as wider mentoring, including supporting students with engaging with home-school work and supporting social/emotional well-being (Section 6).



*Youth worker and (temporary) delivery driver*

This youth-focused work interlinked with the wider *TWC!* connecting, well-being and food programmes, with the whole team able to pick-up and share local intelligence from doorstep conversations, helping to identify young people and families in particular need of support. Doorstep deliveries enabled the team to hold socially distanced conversations with young people, enabling the young people to maintain connection with wider community and youth workers to assess the level and type of support needed. Feedback from schools indicated this additional resource, provided by workers who already were in the right place, familiar with young people and wider community, and so able to quickly gauge and meet need on the ground, was invaluable.

These doorstep conversations with young people revealed the extent to which many of them had endured significant trauma over the initial period of Lockdown, in terms of anxiety, social isolation, difficulties with relationships and/or engaging with school. It was felt that many of these young people would need a great deal of support and encouragement to return to 'normality'. Youth workers were also aware they were working with young people who, having been confined to their own homes for weeks on end, had significant pent-up energy. We felt it important that this energy was channelled into positive youth activities and social action projects over the summer, rather than being left to emerge as anti-social behaviour.

## 7.1 Detached work, mentoring and support

As far as possible, we wanted to build on our existing community connections and resources to respond to these growing concerns of the impact of COVID-19 on the safety and wellbeing of young people and to try to minimise long-term impact of COVID-19 on their life-chances. Over the pandemic period, *TWC!* youthwork was guided by National Youth Agency COVID guidelines. These dictated the extent of work possible at different stages and the risk-management required.

Withing these parameters, working across the whole *TWC!* we designed a programme of specifically youth-targeted support, including:

**Targeted Outreach and Mentoring** – supporting the successful reintegration of young people back into their community as the lockdown measures are eased through targeted detached youth programme in local parks and hotspots, reducing risks of perceived anti-social behaviour and providing safe spaces for young people to go to within their local area.

Detached youth work operates without the use of a building or activity and takes place where young people "are at" both geographically and developmentally. It delivers informal and social education and addresses whatever needs are presented to or perceived by the youth worker. During the emergency and transition phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, this involved reviewing our engagement with young people regularly, ensuring our activities were in line with Government/National Youth Agency recommendations, but also ensuring that young people were supported to abide by regulations. At various stages, 'pop up activities' delivered included bike maintenance sessions, DJ workshops and football. These were delivered across both the Firs and Bromford and neighbouring Ward End<sup>11</sup>, where we've been advised by local Police that the absence of any youth support structure was already proving a strain.

With an increasing number of young people struggling with anxiety and reluctant to leave the house at all, invested in further gaming equipment so that youth workers could create safe on-lines spaces to link them into online gaming community as a gateway to interacting with their peers and supporting them to gradually overcome their anxieties about playing outside. This movement of youth connecting activities into an online space was a new development for the *TWC!* team, providing opportunities for establishing initial contact with young people, a digital first-step on the *TWC!* pathway. These spaces enabled young people to connect with each other and other groups across the city, as well as youth workers. In an unanticipated benefit, we saw re-engagement of a



*Youth Connecting over Recipe Bag cake*

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<sup>11</sup> Based on positive feedback through our partnership work on Firs and Bromford, a proposal was developed to expand Worth Unlimited delivery of a similar scheme to Ward End.

cohort of young people who had dropped away from activities prior to the pandemic but were re-engaged through our online work. There were also opportunities for older young people to begin to take on leadership roles.

Whilst online sessions offered many positive opportunities, the team were also aware that access to digital was limiting for some young people, because of access issues but also personal preference. They expressed caution that some online youth work they had witnessed, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, had been in danger of “jumping into young peoples” space without invitation, creating danger of hostile response. There has been much learning about how to create spaces for meaningful connection online, this work is ongoing but should have very real positive benefits.

Towards the end of the initial emergency period, workers recognised the emerging significance of detached youth work which occurs spontaneously (e.g. unplanned) in wider community spaces. This growing area of work was only reflected in data collection from June 2020 onwards, but with upwards of 25 occurrences of spontaneous detached youth work in June 2020 alone.

**Youth Wellbeing Support** - social distanced one-to-one or virtual mentoring centred on supporting those most affected by the lockdown period, including the hundreds of children locally on the SEMH register.

Doorstep delivery of food, schoolwork or well-being activity packs provided a crucial opportunity for initial 1-2-1 conversations with young people. Over the summer, this was extended into “walk-and-talk” sessions, providing informal low-level mentoring and social engagement. Young people were also actively encouraged to engage in wider intergenerational community activity, such as recipe bags and trails, especially using local green spaces.



During 2<sup>nd</sup> Lockdown and subsequent transition/recover phase (summer 2021), a number of youth support groups (including Listen Threads and 2 Girls Groups, one for Year 8+, one for young people in Years 5-7) were restarted or formed, starting to re-engage with 8-10 young people by June 2020.

**School and Transition Support** - offer services to enable us to play ‘catch-up’ with a large number of children who needed support with the transition process to secondary school, whose needs have not been met.

Our relationship with 3 local primary schools was integral throughout the pandemic period. *TWC!* team offered ‘on-the-ground’ support to schools, who were able to refer young people and families to us for support which went above and beyond what they were able to provide. This was particularly important for young people at risk of losing contact with the school system and those whose family situation meant they were identified as being particularly vulnerable. As soon as those young people were invited back to school, *TWC!* were able to resume in-school mentoring support as well.

Schools and youth workers were concerned that there were many young people who are about to transition into secondary school, but without the support which would have usually been available to help them adjust to this milestone. We wanted to provide catch-up in this regard, to try to ensure that children did not struggle to adjust and/or fall behind over this key period in their educational journey. Year 6 students we supported were able to benefit from additional mentoring and, for some young people, this mentoring relationship was sustained through into secondary school. We have also designed our group activities to give young people the opportunities to stay connected with friends over the transition period.

### ***Youth Connection and Support in numbers***

- Detached Youth work
  - 20-25 young people each month (min 18, max 49 during summer holidays) engaged through face-to-face sessions (6-8 sessions each month) – throughout 2020-21
  - 80-100 young people engaged through new online detached youth sessions from March to December 2020 (around 8-10 each month), settling to 8 sessions per month over Jan-Jun 2021, reaching 10-15 young people each month (min 8, max 15)
  - Development of spontaneous/unplanned detached youth work in wider community spaces – 25 incidences recorded in June 2021
- 1-2-1 support/mentoring – Mar-Dec 2020
  - 20 young people receiving long-term support/mentoring in schools (100 sessions during 2020)
  - 4 community and 4 online support sessions, outside of school, reaching 16 young people
- 1-2-1 support/mentoring – Jan-Jun 2021
  - Around 10-20 young people receiving long-term support/mentoring in schools (12-24 sessions each month)
  - Around 10-12 young people engaged in long-term 1-2-1 support/mentoring in the community (outside of school)
  - Further 32 supported through youth drop-in spaces (10 sessions)
- Well-being support packs – 29 packs hand-delivered to young people each week during 2020; rising to 146 (total) in January 2021, 116 in total in February and March 2021
- Developing Youth Support Groups, with number of young people engaged growing from around 3 at the start to 8-10 by June 2021

### ***7.2 Youth Connecting Team***

From 2019 onwards, *TWC!* had been developing a Youth Connecting Team, as a group of adults from the neighbourhood moved from having a broad community involvement to realising their passion is working with young people. This core team were also joined by growing numbers of young people involved in leadership in some form – at different age stages, leading in different ways. Working

alongside the Street Connecting team (Section 4.1), this team received training specific to working with young people and began to lead on specific youth-connecting activities.

The pandemic posed particular challenge regarding how *TWC!* continued to develop and nurture the Youth Connecting Team, especially when it was difficult to meet together in person. The YCT were involved in walk and talks, online gaming sessions and 1:1 support, as and when possible. In particular, one of the Claire, one Youth Connectors identified growing issues around mental health and well-being for boys and young men. On her initiative, we sourced additional funding for Claire to design and collated appropriate well-being packs, which also included donations from local businesses, which could be distributed to these groups.

As described above, we were asked to work with the local Community Safety Partnership and our Cross-Community Partnership to ensure that the easing of lockdown does not result in wider issues of anti-social behaviour. This partnership with colleagues from neighbouring areas ensured we were able to have a coordinated youth offer over the summer and autumn of 2020. At the same time by drawing in the YC team, this proposal retains the spirit of the Local Neighbourhood Plan produced by the Firs and Bromford Neighbours Together Group, building on ABCD principles to harness a community-wide response. Adopting this principle will ensure we are better prepared for the recovery phase from Covid 19.

In another an example, *TWC!* were approached by local neighbours who wanted to promote a promising young local boxer, raising his profile and sharing his story as a local young person to inspire others. The YC team helped to facilitate the event in the 'Village Green' space, providing hospitality in terms of access to facilities, operational support and welcome.

Once restrictions would allow, we restarted our popular Afternoon Teas. Local young people, part of our social action team hosted a local 'Nifty Fifty' group of older residents for a tea party. This aimed to provide a space for intergenerational connection and story-sharing about how the pandemic had affected both groups. The *TWC!* approached CAFLO community centre to work in partnership on this project, running the event in their space.



## **8 Reflection and Learning**

When we made our plans for the *TogetherWeCan!* Extension year ('TWC-X') we had no idea what was about to happen or how much our world was going to change. Similarly, at the time of writing our application for emergency funding in Spring 2020, we were (with hindsight) blissfully unaware of what was about to happen or how long it would go on. Our fear, during the early stages of the pandemic, was that a community already facing considerable socio-economic changes could be hit by a "perfect storm" of health, social and economic impacts, described by one staff member as "dark winter, which could potentially last 10-15 years". Given our community already lives with tangible impacts of previous economic downturns, particularly on local employment opportunities, this is not necessarily hyperbole. What we did not know, perhaps fortunately, was that we would be facing another two waves of COVID, with associated lockdowns and limits on social gatherings. At the time of compiling this report (Autumn 2021), the future still looks uncertain. Learning to live with this uncertainty is one of the major challenges we face, as individuals, a community and a project.

At the same time, throughout the pandemic, our workers have also held a real sense that 'by the time this is all over' things would be different. People will have moved on, developed different habits and routines. We sensed the danger of wider impact on social confidence, for individuals and community. It was this isolation, fragmentation and alienation that *TWC!* expressly wished to counter. We have learnt, and demonstrated, the very real strengths and joys of community, but also its very real challenges and tensions.

COVID-19 has been a huge disruption to our work and forced us to work very differently – in at least some ways that will last well beyond the pandemic. Nevertheless, we remain committed to the long-term, intergenerational community-building journey which was well-established pre-COVID. We believe COVID-19 has been a litmus test of that work to date, accelerating it in some respects, even while other aspects of our work have been temporarily paused or adapted. Whilst frank about the challenges we face, we believe COVID has exposed all the more clearly the need for neighbour-led, asset-based approaches which provide a real alternative to needs-based service provision, reliant on external funding. The crisis of COVID-19 has underlined the critical importance of supporting neighbours here to grow in confidence, connections, life-skills and resilience to be better-equipped to face such crises in the future and continuing to support the development of a community infrastructure (in terms of community networks, associations, institutions and the physical place itself) that will be better able to withstand and grow through such crises.

A key part of our *TWC!* response has involved negotiating the challenge of balancing a call (and desire) to respond to rising need, whilst also holding fast to our desire to expand our role as an enabler, facilitating rather than replacing neighbour-to-neighbour responses. The key question we face, as expressed by one staff member, is "*In the face of uncertainty, how do we build/create stuff that is part of neighbourhood resilience, for future crises and going on into the future?*"

### **8.1 What worked well? And what were the challenges?**

Reviewing our progress and learning over the last 18 months continues to be a challenge. But looking back, it is possible to begin to identify a number of key examples of how *TWC!* values shaped COVID-19 response in ways that worked well, whilst also acknowledging the very challenges presented to those values and ways of working.

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## **1. Enabling community response – challenges of doing *BY* or *WITH*, rather than *TO* or *FOR***

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Although an emergency response does necessitate some direct delivery to those in need, our overall response remains that of an enabler to encourage, support and coordinate a wider community response.

This fundamental ABCD principle has been tested by the practical and logistical challenges of the pandemic. Across the team, staff acknowledged some circumstances where time or capacity pressures meant they had “slipped back” into taking a more active role in provision than they would ideally have liked. Tension arises within, but also between, staff as they seek to hold fast to the *TWC!* vision - “not throwing it out because it gets tough” but also engaging with the practicalities and nuances.

In addition, the experience of our ABCD training (held for staff and core volunteers early in 2021) revealed the challenges of introducing ABCD concepts and language to a wider audience, particularly when this involves those who are themselves residents and neighbours.

Both these challenges reinforced the importance of learning and reflection spaces and the value of extending those spaces to include neighbours as well as staff, but also prompted consideration of the need for creation of different spaces for different types and levels of reflection.

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## **2. Negotiating restrictions and loss of ‘normal’**

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As the pandemic went on, it became clear that staff and volunteers had a deep sense of the loss of normal life. Whilst changed routines and new work patterns brought new opportunities (for example, new street connectors, previously not able to take part because working away from the estate during the week) there was also significant loss, particularly in the curtailment of ability to meet freely together. For those working on the ‘connecting’ side, in particular, restrictions on meeting meant they were “effectively no longer able to do our jobs, at least in the way we have done”, as it turned out for a significant length of time. Merging of teams and roles brought great benefits - for example, expanded volunteer teams available to do food provision, which served as street connecting as well as support roles – but also, at times, inter-personal tensions. Whilst everyone has risen to the challenge of new ways of working, the longer-term impact has been deep and draining.

Simultaneously, different personal interpretations of, and reactions to, perceived risks of COVID created tensions within the team and wider community. Trying to establish the best way to move forward despite of COVID-uncertainties, and to plan together in a way that works for all, proved time-consuming and at times, near impossible. Maintaining good communication and strong relationships became ever more important, but ever more challenging.

The team feel they have learnt about the positive possibilities, but also the very real limitations of, online meeting. Whilst online working offers positive benefits, not least in the ability to connect people remotely, the *TWC!* team’s reflections over the period emphasise the importance of face-to-face and informal ‘bumping space’ interactions – within the team and in community - which are hard, if not impossible, to replicate online.

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### **3. *Living, and working, with fragility***

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The *TWC!* team – workers and volunteers – have worked incredibly hard, coming together to rise to new challenges and reimagine what it means to work in community. At the same time, there is a very real fear that this might only be the beginning, with the real economic and social impact of the pandemic taking time to be felt, probably in ways which are much stronger and deeper than the immediate manifestations. This sense of inequity and struggle also has wider ramifications. Staff observed that their experiences over the past 18 months had left them both more convinced of the importance of neighbour-to-neighbour support but also more aware of the need to raise issues of systemic injustice and inequality brought to fore by the pandemic and its disproportionate effect on the poorest.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has also illustrated the fragility, of individuals and communities. The *TWC!* team have experienced, at painful first-hand, the impact of bereavement, illness, accident and challenges with mental health. This fragility brings out the best in community, but also underlines the vulnerability that affects us all. Struggle, personal and communal, has inevitably affected project planning and delivery, particularly in limiting the capacity of volunteers. In the words of one team member, “we’re going to have to learn what it means to live with fragility, in the long-term, rather than pretending it doesn’t exist or will just go away with time”. After a period of reflection, the team resolved to review activity levels on an ongoing basis, striving to “do less, well”.

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### **4. *Widening the circles***

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Throughout the pandemic we have worked with the community to use their own personal networks to identify the ‘hidden victims’ of the pandemic who we are not currently engaged with. Growing numbers of people receiving food and well-being packs, transferring to Pantry provision and, to a lesser extent, moving into volunteering with us are testament to the success of this approach. We have seen significant steps forward, with new relationships formed, new people brought into our teams and new opportunities for sharing of stories and life-experiences.

There is always more we can do. We remain very aware of areas of the estates and parts of the communities where we have less presence or contact. Staff also expressed concerns about the dangers of “losing habits of hanging out” and the impact this would have on individuals and community.

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### **5. *Supporting reflection***

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One of our *TWC!* trademarks is to offer opportunities for reflection, for individuals, groups and the wider community. Staff recognised the significance of 2020 and beyond as a time of mourning, dreaming, recreating and back again. Our experience has demonstrated the value of creative opportunities for doing so, but also the challenges especially within social distancing guidelines and different interpretations about safety. This learning has fed directly into the development of a new *TWC!* Learning and Reflection programme, including pattern of bi-monthly team reflective sessions.

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## **6. Collaborating with partners – but being clear about our distinctiveness**

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Our pandemic response has involved a considerable expansion of our work with local partners across the city - coordinating the delivery of food linked to a wider response across Birmingham and working with the Mother Gardens initiative, to give two examples. We have strong working relationships with our local primary schools, adding significant value to their family support 'offers', and working with staff and students on social action projects. We have also developed our relationship with Birmingham City Council and are increasingly working in cross-community partnerships, particularly around sharing learning and other community assets, and developing local green spaces, complementing the strategic aims of the East Birmingham Growth Strategy and the West Midlands on the Move Strategy.

Maintaining constructive working relationships with some other local organisations, ensuring good mutual understanding and complementary, rather than competing, efforts, has not always been easy. Staff have identified a particular challenge around effectively communicating our core ABCD vision and the ways of working which stem from this, to avoid misunderstanding or misrepresentation. *TWC!* actively seeks to "not be just another service-provider" but, in turn, we need to be clear about our own particular offer.

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## **7. Spaces for belonging, connection and support – and the challenge of place**

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We have always been aware that of the fundamental importance of community spaces (both physical venues and particular gatherings) to our work and to wider community. Developments over the last 18 months have highlighted the importance of buildings and places, but also the politics of space. Our experience is that connecting needs the 'right spaces' – not only welcoming and suitable (for group size, age groups and nature of activity), but also perceived to be accessible, physically but also psychologically - "places where people will go". At times staff have felt that "our hands have been tied" by lack of space – specifically the small size of the Hub and the way this limited its usefulness as a 'covid-safe' space, but also the ongoing issue of a lack of places to hold activities on the Firs Estate (felt to be particularly important because of number of isolated young families). Hodge Hill Church has become a considerable community asset - providing a base for the food programme and later Pantry, as well as being useful for bridge-building with the wider church community. Without that space, which is located just off the Firs and Bromford estate, those projects would have struggled to be viable. However the psychology of the boundaries of neighbourhoods and estates continues to be a challenge.

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## **8. Reviewing 'Barrier Removal'/'Crisis Support' roles**

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Over the last 4-5 years, what had been originally designed as low-level volunteer-led support delivered around the edges of the Open Door 'Place of Welcome' has increased in intensity (number of people and nature of support required). In addition, it has not proved possible to refer people on to other agencies in the way we had originally envisaged: other agencies either did not exist, did not have capacity or were not local (so added in travel support needs). As a result the burden of this support work gravitated towards the paid worker(s), needing additional 1:1 support outside of open sessions

– work, which was often intense, time-consuming, unpredictable and emotionally draining. Attempts to develop wider community mutual support spaces have been eclipsed by 1:1 demands, but also found to be slow to build and fragile. We have also found that wider community-support spaces, whilst valuable, often do not remove many of the crisis demands (e.g. housing, money, benefits, legal) which require more specialist support.

These challenges pre-date COVID-19 but have been exacerbated by the pandemic. In particular, challenges have arisen around multi-site working (see above) and staff capacity. The pre-TWC2 listening process over summer 2021 identified the challenges of the role, the struggle to ‘fit’ with ABCD model and tensions around capacity. This has led to a review of how ‘crisis support’ is envisaged within the TWC! model, shifting towards a wider, but less intensive, understanding of ‘support’ offered across the whole programme. This has implications for individual worker role descriptions and whole team-working, particularly around the Hub venue. It also raises consideration of a very real gap which exists in local community provision, which goes beyond that which the TWC! project is able to fill alone. At time of writing, this review process was ongoing.

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## **9. Strengthening how we work together**

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*TogetherWeCan!* began in 2017 as a complex project and has grown in scale and complexity in the years since. Management, oversight and leadership with limited resources is challenging at the best of times – challenges which have intensified through the COVID pandemic. Navigating our way through is made possible by the strong, overlapping, and in many cases long-standing, relationships between members of the team, between team members and other key neighbours, and between the three organisations. In mid-2021, we commissioned some external support to help us review and develop our management, oversight and leadership structures. This review, led ably by Jo Bagby (an independent consultant) is leading to a wide range of insights regarding how we work together. Work on the implications of this is ongoing.

### **8.2 What happens next**

In the wake of COVID-19 and its longer-lasting economic, social and mental health impacts, and in the light of all we have learnt, we remain determined to support Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together’s long-term vision and priorities, including this statement of intent for FBNT’s ‘legacy’ here:

***‘We wish to develop our community into a place of creativity and compassion, where all feel welcome, all feel connected, all feel they belong, and all feel that they can flourish’***

(Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together vision/legacy statement, updated 2020)

Having secured funding for a further five years of our work – Together We Can 2 - we anticipate working in 3 (overlapping) PHASES over the project’s duration from 2021 to 2026:

- CRISIS – enabling particular residents and households, and the community as a whole, to access practical, emotional and financial support when things are toughest (during COVID-19 and beyond).
- RECONNECTION – as COVID-19 restrictions relax, working with neighbours to re-start groups and activities, encouraging neighbours to re-engage, and drawing in new people.

- RECOVERY / DISCOVERY – in the wake of COVID-19, working with neighbours to reflect on what we’re learning, and to continue to shape, develop and strengthen the capacity and resilience of the neighbourly activity and community infrastructure (both institutional and physical) that are emerging.

We remain clear that the role of *TWC!* staff is to support neighbours to identify and share their gifts, to support each other, to realise their ideas, and to take the lead in building a resilient and flourishing community locally. We are very intentionally building a resilient ‘community ecology’, where power and agency in the neighbourhood is built, ‘at the speed of trust’, among local residents, with the involvement of (and need for) paid professionals simultaneously being reduced, and local neighbours taking on both voluntary and paid roles in the ongoing work.



*A final word of thanks goes to our wonderful volunteers, neighbours and friends – we couldn't be TogetherWeCan! without you!*

