Community Connections Lewisham
Report for September-December 2020

Executive Summary

The Community Connections Lewisham service was launched on September 1st 2020, taking over from the COVID Hub phone line. The Hub service had been quickly established in March 2020 and responded to over 12,000 requests for help – mostly involving worries about accessing food, anxiety arising from social isolation or practical assistance needs. Age UK Lewisham and Southwark delivered the 'front door' to the project, with a phone line operating 7 days a week for 5 months, taking up to 1,000 calls per week and managing a team of up to 34 staff (including colleagues from Lewisham Council).

As a result of the lessons learnt during the first 6 months of the pandemic, and looking to support community recovery during the next phases of the pandemic and beyond, we launched the Community Connections Lewisham service. We rebranded the service with a new logo, a new website and a new referral tick list that aim to meet the needs of clients aged 18+ (where the previous service had been targeted at clients aged 60+). During the first 4 months of the new service, we have received over 3,500 phone calls and supported 2,800 clients – a major increase in comparison with the former SAIL and Community Connections services, which together supported 2,200 individuals per year. This was partly due to the lighter touch service we offered at this stage – with more 'signposting' and referring to services and less intensive person-centred-planning casework ("Community Facilitation"). The service also employs a Community Development Worker who works with local services to ensure they are ready to meet the needs of local people as expressed by those contacting the service for support.

This report is in three parts:

- The phone line and online contacts:
  - Profile of callers (including numbers and demography)
  - Profile of referrers (including numbers and service types)
  - Profile of needs and services requested
  - Profile of responses
  - Case studies
- Community Facilitation
  - Profile of clients (including numbers and demography)
  - Case studies
- Community Development Work
  - Profile of groups supported
  - Profile of outcomes
  - Case study

Introduction

Community Connections Lewisham (CCL) is a social prescribing project, delivered in partnership with Voluntary Services Lewisham and Rushey Green Time Bank, with Age UK Lewisham and Southwark as the lead partner. The service supports local people to access a wide range of non-medical services and sources of support with the goal of improving their physical and mental health and wellbeing,

motivating them to take greater control over their own health and lives. Social prescribing is based on a holistic view of health, recognising that people's health is heavily influenced by economic, social and environmental factors.

Community Connections aims to:

- Help individuals to stay happy, healthy, well connected to their local community and to make full use of their potential;
- Reduce pressure on health and social care services, (in acknowledgement that around 20% of GP visits are for non-medical reasons and 40% involve mental health issues);
- Build stronger and more resilient communities, with strong links between statutory services and the voluntary sector.

The new Community Connections Lewisham service was established in September 2020. It grew from the SAIL (Safe and Independent Living) and Community Connections services which were repurposed during the COVID19 pandemic in the Spring and Summer of 2020. Lewisham's non-medical response to the pandemic was pulled together very quickly with key voluntary sector partners and the local authority working closely to develop a Community COVID Response Hub which supported those worst affected by the virus and the associated restrictions. From the Hub's start in March 2020 to its formal standing-down in August of that year, it responded to over 11,000 requests for help – mostly involving the provision of food, helping people to combat social isolation and providing a range of practical assistance. Age UK Lewisham and Southwark delivered the' front door' to the project, with a phone line operating 7 days a week for 5 months, taking up to 1,000 calls per week and managing a team of up to 34 staff (including colleagues from Lewisham Council).

As a result of the learning from the COVID Response Hub, and looking towards recovery (as well as managing the ongoing impact of the pandemic), Community Connections and SAIL formally merged to become Community Connections Lewisham (CCL). The phone line that was so integral to the COVID Hub's success became part of CCL, along with a new website that gives people access to information and advice they can use themselves, as well as providing another way to access the assistance and support of the dedicated and expert team.

In the 4 months of operation described in this report, we have been able to rely on the unwavering support of three full time Council staff redeployed to our phone line. Some of them have been working alongside us for almost 10 months now and seeing them go at the end of January 2021 will be a real loss. We would like to thank our commissioners for their support and trust through all the changes brought by this most unusual year.

1. The Community Connections Lewisham phone line and online referral system

The Community Connections Lewisham phone line was launched on September 1st 2020, taking over from the COVID Hub phone line that had been active since the end of March 2020. We have also established a new online referral system and receive referrals and contacts via email.

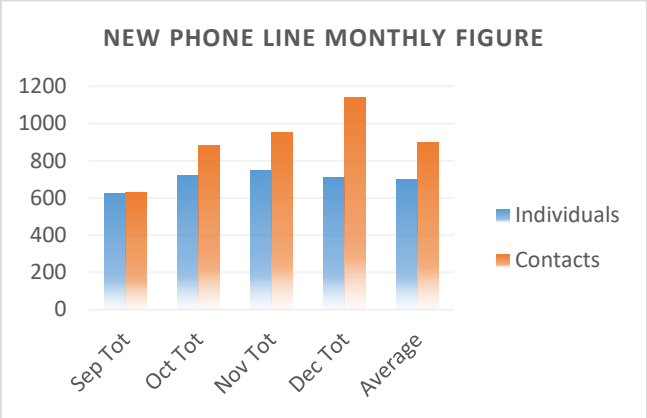
For the first 2 months (Sept-Oct) the project was in its pilot phase, to assess the uptake for the phone line, reorganise the team and database, etc. Since October the service has been delivering in a post-pilot phase, but targets have not yet been agreed for this project. This is due in large part to the pandemic and the changing levels of associated restrictions which mean that there has been no opportunity to establish a "normal" baseline period of activity.

1.1. Traffic on the phone line

The team is divided everyday between people on the phone line taking incoming calls, and people off the phone line, contacting clients who have been referred to us via our online referral form, via email, or following up on calls received on previous days. We have also been working through our waiting list: as both Community Connections Lewisham and SAIL had been closed for over 5 months to staff the COVID-19 Community Hub, we had a waiting list of about 600 clients, some of whom had been waiting to be contacted since January 2020. We have now been in touch with all of them, and they have been very understanding of the unprecedented circumstances that led to such a delay in processing their referral.

The table below shows a monthly break down of the number of contacts we have had each month and the number of individuals contacted. We count as a contact all phone calls received and made, as well as text messages, emails and letters sent. We do not count incoming referrals received as contacts.

	Monthly Total		
	Individuals	Contacts	Average contact/indiv
September	626	630	1
October	719	788	1.09
November	750	950	1.27
December	708	1139	1.6
Total	2803	3507	1.25

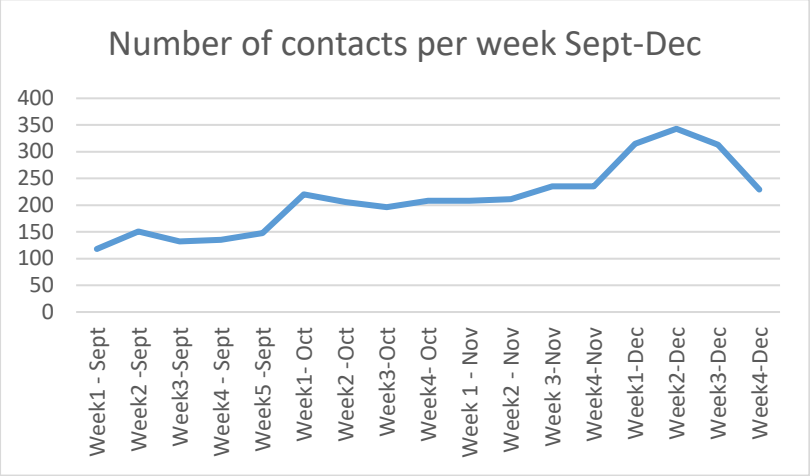


These show an increase in the number of contacts per individual.

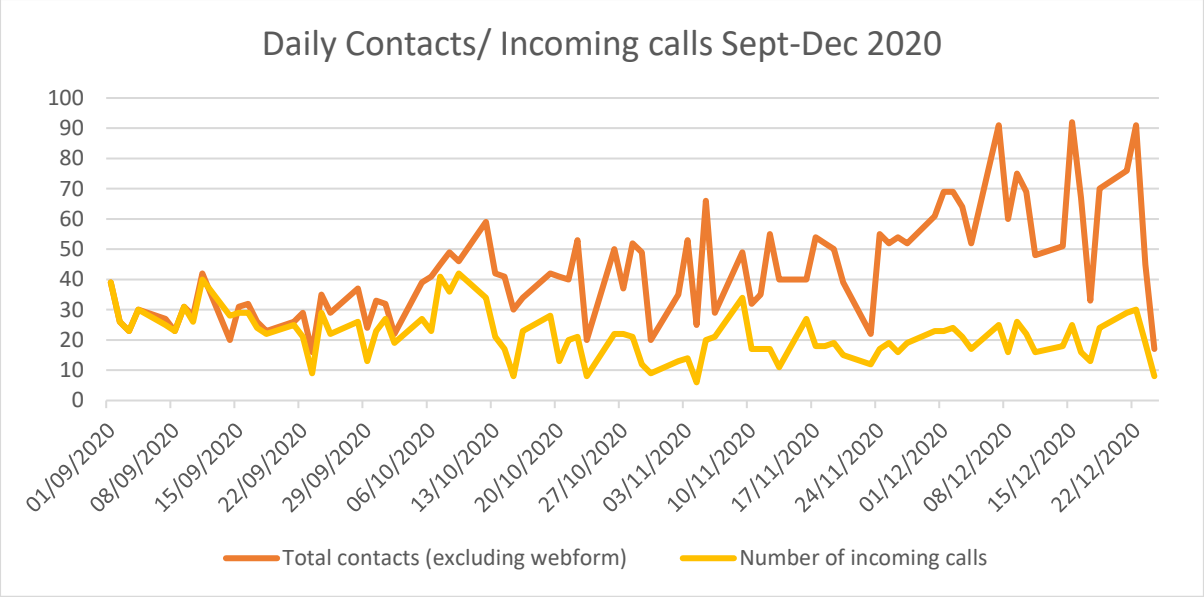
This increase is partly due to the 2nd wave of COVID, as clients who are isolating will have to call us weekly to place a food order, either for a Foodbank parcel or a volunteer shopper. It is also due to the festive period: as our service was closed between the 24th of December and the 4th of January we have been proactively checking on some of our most vulnerable clients to make sure they wouldn't need us during that time. We are monitoring this closely to ensure clients do not build a dependency on CCL, but are being appropriately supported, signposted or referred onto service providers.

The following chart shows the weekly changes in the number of contacts since the opening of the line. (The month of December is usually a slow one for social prescribing services, as clients typically aren't

in the right headspace to think about joining social groups or making other changes in their lives in the run up to the end of year festivities. Despite this year's unusual circumstances, this is likely to the reason for the dip in contacts in December.)



The following chart shows the traffic of incoming calls on the phone line compared to the number of contacts daily, highlighting that answering incoming calls on the phone line is only one aspect of the work that we do with clients (incoming calls are counted as parts of contacts)



This shows how much work the team is doing aside from taking incoming calls, including follow up calls, contacting online referrals and doing longer pieces of casework with clients who need more than a straightforward signpost or referral.

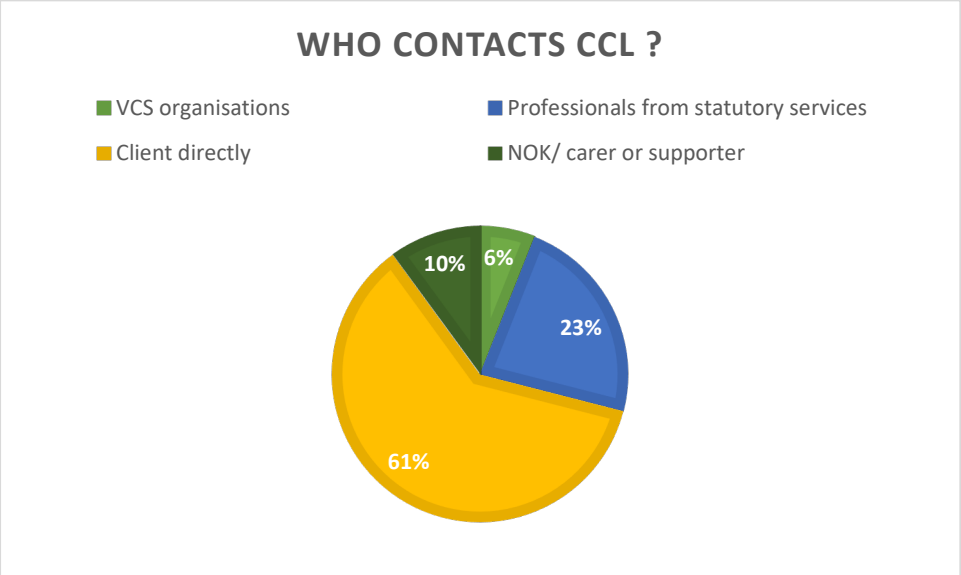
1.2. Callers Profile

Community Connections Lewisham is a ressource not only for invidual clients but also for professional agencies from VCS organisations to statutory services (such as GPs, Adult Social Care, etc).

The majority of calls are from clients directly, or their family, friends and neighbours inquiring on their behalf.

Most professionals call the line or email us to ask what services are available in the community (eg Is the Foodbank still doing deliveries? How can a client be referred to befriending services? Where can we find a fridge for someone who has recently been rehoused?)

We value these calls as they enable us to train professionals in Lewisham, teaching them about the current provision and correct referal pathways so all clients who need community support don't need to be referred to us directly. Sharing our knowledge is a big part of how we manage the demand on our service.

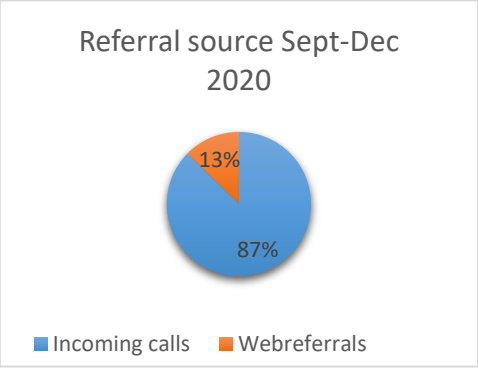


Community Connections Lewisham is represented at all four of the monthly Adult Social Care neighbourhood meetings. We also have a presence at all four of the quarterly Local Care Networks that bring together Health and Social Care colleagues. This enables us to ensure that our Council colleagues know what we can provide and can ask us any question about the service and services available in the community.

1.3. Referrers Profile

- **How are the referrals coming through?**

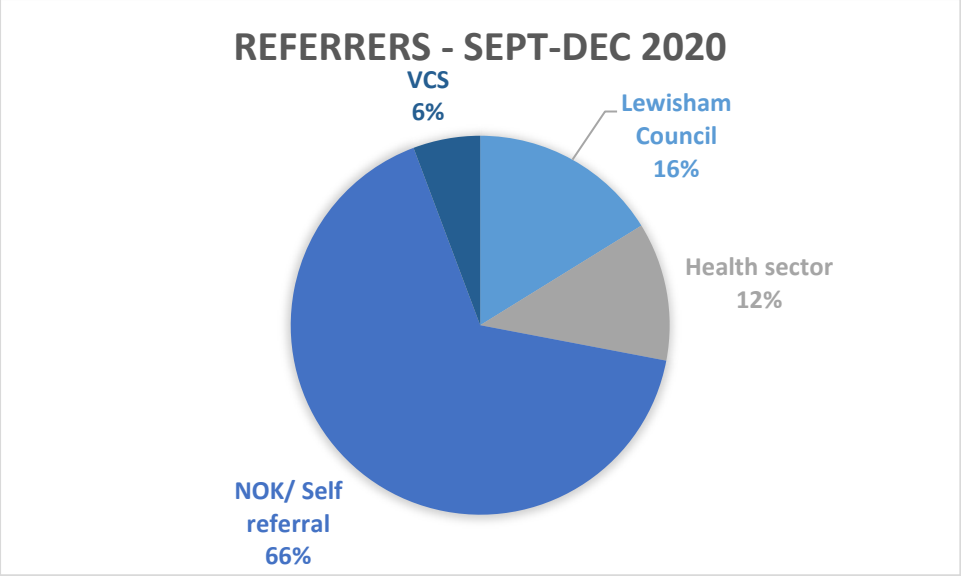
	Monthly Total		
	Incoming calls	Web referrals	Total
September	563	90	653
October	494	48	542
November	373	82	455
December	372	42	414
Total	1802	262	2064



As the table and chart above show, most of our referrals currently come in through the phone line. This has enabled us to deal with most of them immediately on the phone which keeps our waiting list down (and notably lower than the Community Connections and SAIL waiting times, when our waiting list could be as long as three months and was seldom less than one).

- **Who are the referrers?**

The chart below gives a breakdown of who our referrals have been coming from:



As you can see, the vast majority of referrals come from clients directly. This is helpful, as it means that these people are directly looking for help and receptive to it.

Break down of referrals from Lewisham Council:

Adult Social Services	89
Lewisham Council CEV Team	81
Lewisham Visual Impairment Team	3
Lewisham Children & Family Centres	2
Lewisham Children Social Care	2
Total	177

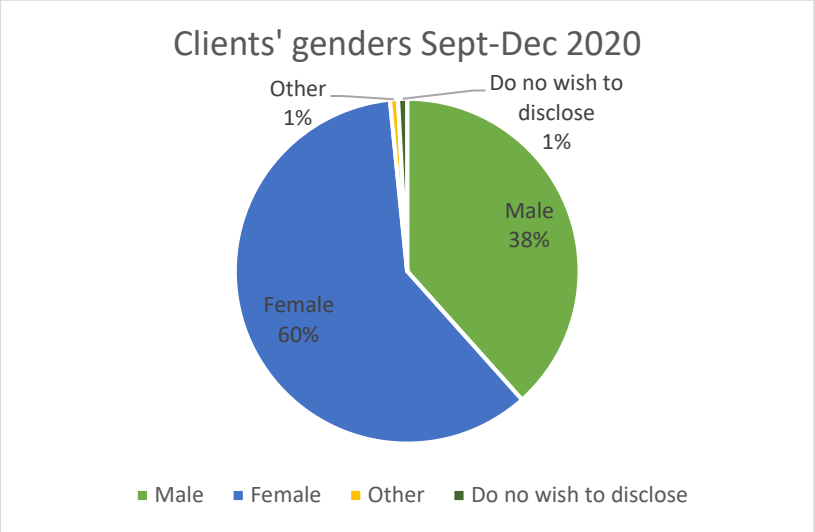
Break down of referrals from the Health sector:

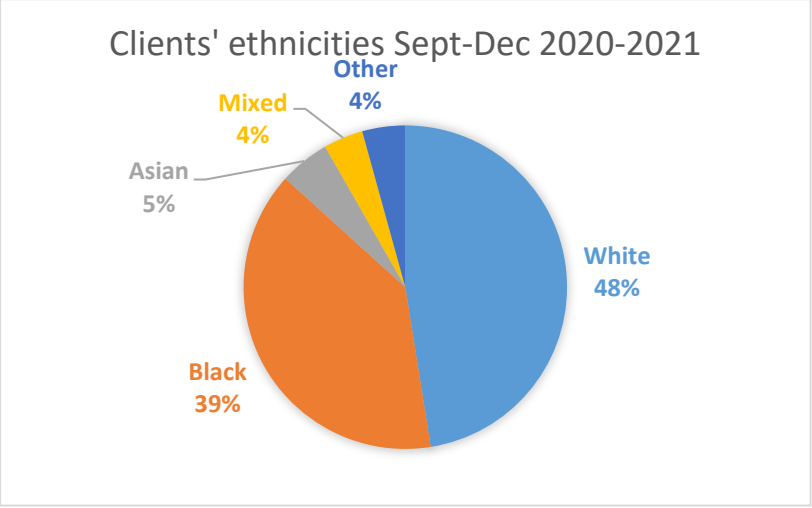
GP	41
SLAM	19
IAPT	13
Lewisham Enablement	10
Lewisham Hospital	10
Community Mental Health Team	9
Lewisham Adult Therapy Teams	7
Care Home/Agency	6
Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital	5
LIMOS	3

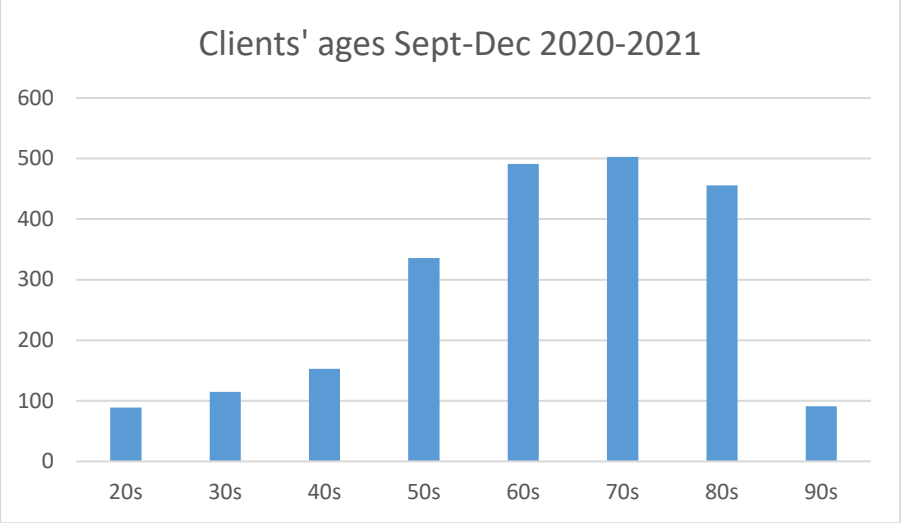
Primary Care Mental Health Service	3
Community Midwife	2
Kings College Hospital	2
Learning Disability Nursing Team - Lewisham	1
Lewisham Community Forensic Mental Health Team	1
Total	122

We received referrals from 23 different Voluntary and Community Sector organisation, including Advice Lewisham, Athena, the British Red Cross, the Diamond Club, Lewisham Community Wellbeing, the Trussell Trust Foodbank, SELCE and VSL.

1.4. Clients' demographics

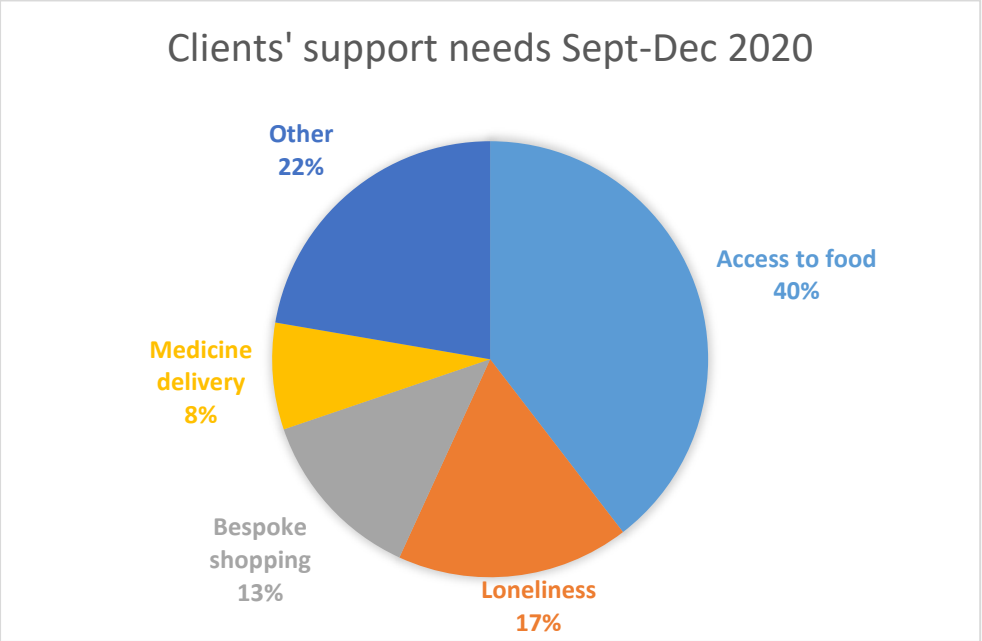






1.5. What did clients want support with?

The chart below shows the reason for the referrals received, and the issues clients have presented.



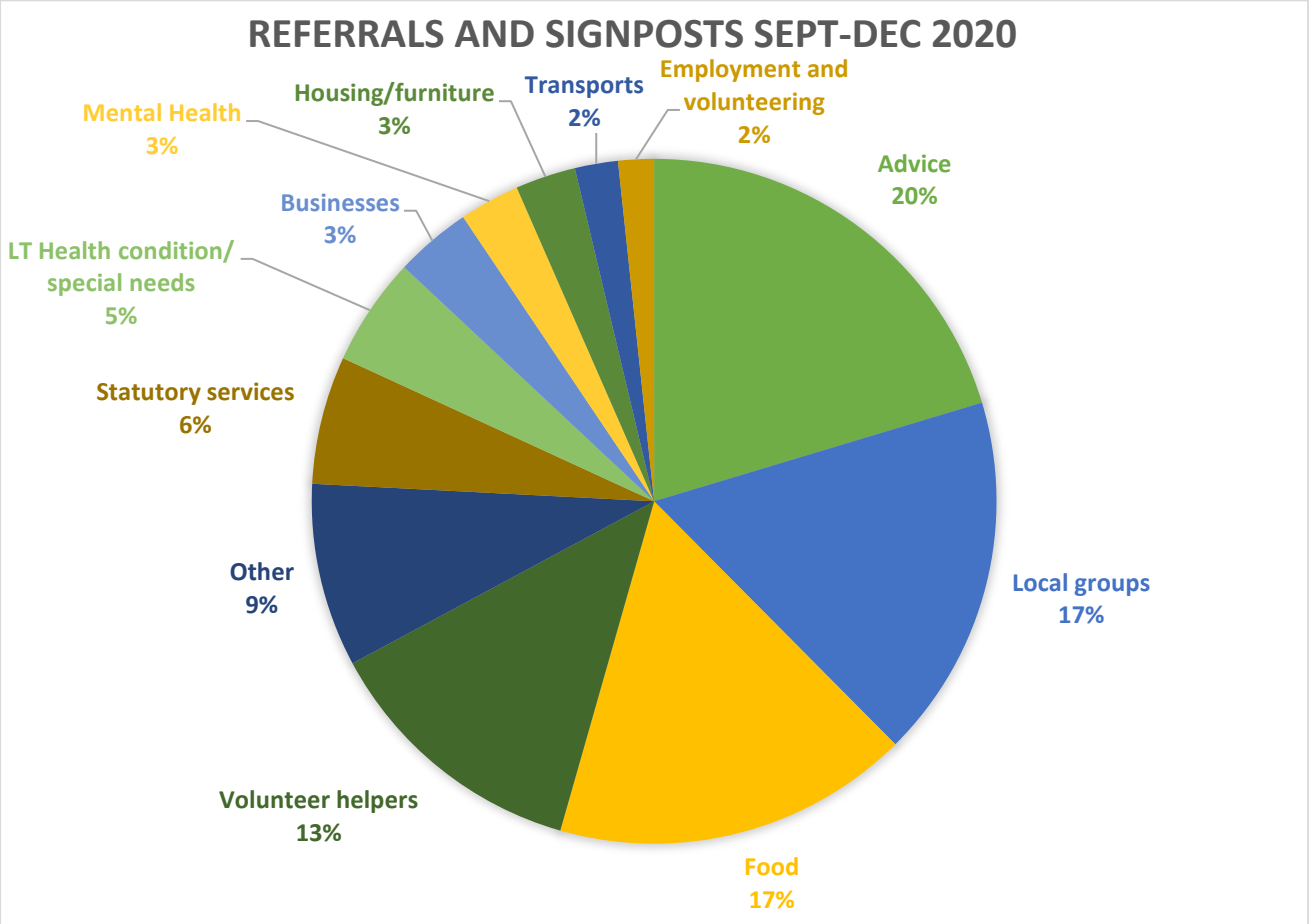
Because our referral method and form have changed over the period, it's not possible to produce consistent data for the whole quarter. Processes were largely different during the first two months of the service so this data doesn't reflect everyone we supported in September and October, though it gives a good idea of the trend.

Next quarter we will be able to report in more detail on the reasons for referrals as processes have become formalised, including via the implementation of our full online referral form on the Community Connections Lewisham website: https://communityconnectionslewisham.org/make-a-referral/.

1.6. Referrals and signposts

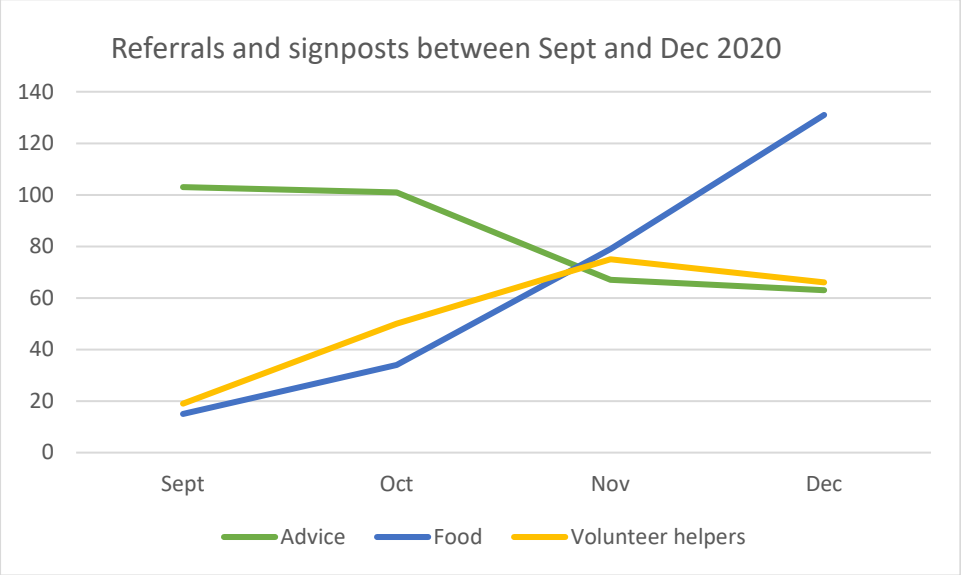
Between September and October, the Community Connections Lewisham team made 1092 signposts and 628 referrals to 190 different places in Lewisham. A "signpost" refers to informing clients about a group or service in the borough and telling them how to access it – eg giving them the Advice Line phone number. A "referral" is sending a group or service a client's details (with their consent), so that the client is contacted directly. Some services are only accessible through referrals, like the Foodbank or Good Gym.

The chart below shows a breakdown of the different types of services we referred people on to. "Food" includes free food options as well as paid-for ones (e.g. supermarket deliveries), but all paid-for shopping trips done by volunteers through GoodGym, GoodSAM and VSL and RGTB's Practical Assistance Scheme have been grouped together under the Volunteer Helper category. This is because volunteer helpers can also perform a variety of other tasks alongside shopping, ranging from picking up a client's prescriptions, to clearing leaves from of a slippery doorstep in the Autumn, to picking up or dropping off parcels.



Comparing this chart to the previous one, which outlines the reasons for referrals, shows how much the Community Connections staff can achieve through conversations with clients, making them aware of the full breadth of the provision in the borough and addressing secondary needs as well as the ones clients are initially presenting with.

The next chart shows the changes to referrals and signposts to Advice, Food and Volunteer Helpers over time between September and December. Food and Volunteer Helpers request numbers grew at the same pace up until November, as a lot of what the Volunteer Helpers do is food shopping. From December, the requests for food kept rising while the requests for volunteer helpers stabilised. This is likely to be due to the financial pressure of the end of year, when more and more clients needed Foodbank assistance. The slight drop in signposts to Advice services is likely due to the fact that we keep track on clients records of where they have already been referred of signposted to, and whereas we might be referring a client to food help for a few weeks in a row, we wouldn't do that for Advice as we know that the situation might take a while to get resolved. (In these cases, we would simply follow up by asking the client if they have been in touch with Advice Lewisham, have had an appointment yet etc., to ensure that they have taken the steps for their financial situation to be resolved.)



1.7. Case studies

Case studies enable us to give context and meaning to the numbers by describing the work done with a few particular clients this quarter. These two case studies have been written by Lewisham Council colleagues who were redeployed to help us on the phone line since September and without whom the scope and quality of support that we have achieved would not have been possible.

These case studies also illustrate how complex and varied the situations handled on the phone line can be, and how much work contacting services directly to resolve these situations can involve.

- **Christmas rescued**

A client called the CCL line late on Friday a week before Christmas. A young family with 3 children under 11 were all self-isolating due to catching COVID-19 and would have to self-isolate until Christmas Eve. The caller was clearly unwell on the phone call and very distressed. They were struggling financially due to losing work as a result of the pandemic, and their Universal Credit claim had not yet been paid. They were facing a Christmas with no food in the house and no toys or gifts for the children. No-one was able to collect either food parcels or toys due to the requirement to isolate.

A referral was made to VSL for a Food Hamper and toys for the children, to be delivered to the family's home. As the CCL responder was aware it was past the deadline, and, in addition, deliveries were not normally made, an email was sent explaining the circumstances. As it was past the deadline, initially VSL responded that no food hampers were now available, but they did have toys and could deliver these. In the event, toys AND a food hamper were delivered early the following week. The client called the line to say how grateful and delighted they were and to thank CCL for the support. An email was sent by the CCL responder to VSL thanking them for going the extra mile for the family.

● A complicated problem solved

A client called the line to request help disposing of a large number of waste bins full of syringes. These were collecting in their flat due to their long-term health condition which required them to inject regularly. This was starting to cause a serious problem of storage in their small flat, and of course the client was also concerned about the risk of contamination. A detailed conversation took place, in which the CCL responder worked to understand the background and teased out the details. The situation had arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had led to the apparent cessation of the normal collection arrangements. The client was extremely anxious about catching COVID-19 and had not felt able to go out to deliver the bins to a collection point themselves, in addition to which, when the normal arrangements were suspended the client was unsure where they should take the bins.

A number of phone calls were made and emails sent by the CCL responder to establish who was responsible for collecting the bins. Her research revealed that a specialist service would be provided by the council on receipt of a referral by the GP surgery. Several contacts were made to the GP surgery in an attempt to explain their role. After several days, this came to nothing so the CCL responder then contacted the council waste and recycling service herself by phone, and explained the situation to them. This was followed by an email giving all the relevant details. The CCL responder called the client 24 hours later to explain the actions that had been taken, and found that the council environment services had already collected all 20 bins in one trip. The client was thrilled. An email was sent to environment services thanking them for their prompt action. The client is now registered with the environment service for regular collections of the bins in future.

2. <u>Community Facilitation</u>

Whereas the phone line aims at signposting clients onwards as quickly as possible, the Community Facilitation part of Community Connections Lewisham offers longer support (up to 6 weeks) to help people address their key needs. Community Facilitators normally meet with clients 1:1 in their homes and use the tools of Motivational Interviewing to encourage clients to make healthy life changes: learning a new skill, joining a social group such as a local lunch club or a befriending group, starting exercising again, volunteering their skills in a community garden, etc. This work has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst many groups have moved their services online, a large number of our clients have no access to the Internet. We have also found that many people's mental health has been adversely affected by the successive lockdowns, making it difficult for them to make healthy lifestyle changes.

As a result of Covid, and as outlined above, the Community Connections project was closed for 5 months whilst the team focused on supporting people's immediate needs during COVID so a sizable waiting list needed to be worked through this quarter.

As a result of the pandemic, and the long delays many of the clients on this waiting list told us that they no longer needed our support, or only needed a brief intervention as provided by the phone line.

We expect the numbers of clients receiving this part of the service to change significantly when the backlog of clients is worked through and when people once again feel able to address their underlying needs and concerns. We currently have approximately 60 people on the waiting list but these are all quite recent referrals, so we expect that they will be more likely to benefit from this element of the service in the next quarter.

2.1. Numbers

The table below shows how many people were added to the Person-Centred Plan (PCP) waiting list between September and December:

Month	Number of clients added to the PCP waiting list
September	131
October	48
November	25
December	15
Total	219

The high numbers in September can be explained by the transfer of clients from the previous waiting list onto the new project. In total the SAIL and Community Connections waiting list had 600 clients. Only 131 were transferred onto the new PCP project template because all others could be dealt with through a brief intervention over the phone. The low numbers of referrals making their way through to PCP in November and December are due to the fact that all PCP referrals are now screened by the phone line team. Throughout the pandemic, the phone line staff have been skilled up more and more to handle complex cases and have completed more in-depth case work with clients. They will now find it difficult to stick to supporting clients solely by brief referrals and signpost, and pass on the casework to their Community Facilitator colleagues.

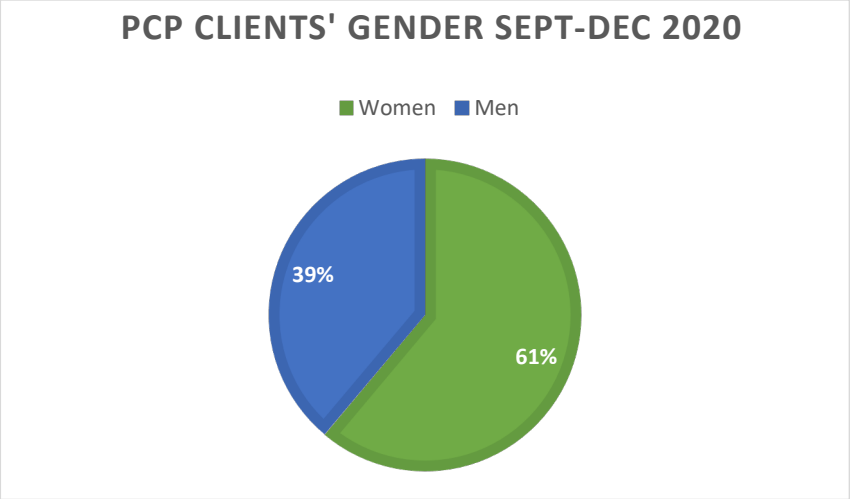
The table below shows what happed to these 219 referrals received in the past quarter. At the end of the quarter 52 cases had been successfully closed, 55 cases were still open and a further 62 people were on the waiting list.

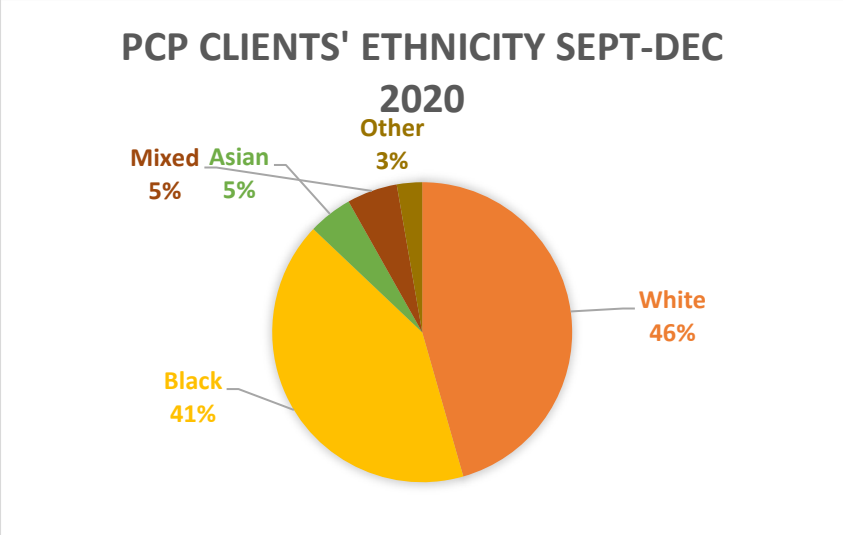
Referrals received	219
Ongoing casework	55
Client declined the service	42
Inappropriate referral	8
Contacted referrer and case closed	**52**
Still on the waiting list	62

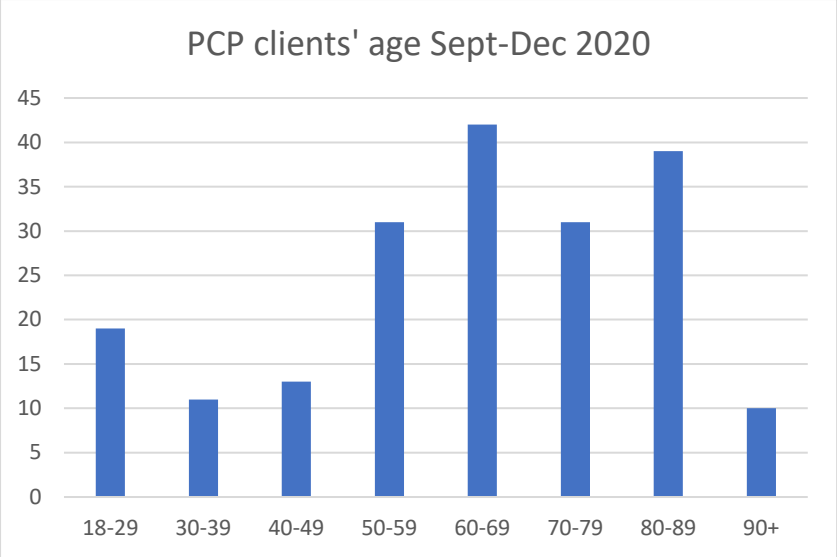
To understand these numbers, it is also important to take into account that the Community Facilitator team was down by two staff members for most of the quarter. We have now successfully recruited their replacement sand expect this to be reflect in next quarter's numbers.

2.2. Clients' demographics

The demographics of PCP clients is not that different to the demographics of other online callers. There is roughly the same 60% of women vs 40% of men. The PCP clients are slightly more diverse than the average CCL clients, with 46% of PCP clients identifying as white vs 48% of callers overall. The data on age, however, is more diverse, showing more people at the extreme for PCP clients, i.e. proportionally more people in their 20s or 90s.







2.3. Case study

The case study below gives a sense of the more in-depth work done by Community Facilitators with clients, and of the scope of knowledge of the local provision that they need to hold.

Chris contacted the helpline as he was struggling financially due to a delay in his PIP appeal process & was requesting support to access the Foodbank. I made a referral to St. Peter's Church, Brockley, who have set up a Social Supermarket. This has given Chris a reliable way to access food at affordable prices.

Whilst chatting to Chris about how he was coping during the pandemic, he mentioned that he would be interested in meeting more people & learning new things. Chris has struggled with mental health difficulties in the past but was feeling ready to build up a daily routine & learn practical skills regarding day-to-day tasks. Chris' main interests were to learn more about computers and cooking. He also likes music & film. I was able to make a referral to Catbytes, who loaned a laptop to Chris & supported him to set up an affordable Wi-Fi tariff. A volunteer worked with him to teach him more about computers, particularly filling in online forms, and attending groups via Zoom.

Thanks to Catbytes, Chris now has a sustainable way of connecting with his community throughout the pandemic. I signposted him to online groups such as GCDA Cooking groups, & to the Deptford Cinema, which have free films & podcasts available online. I also signposted Chris to Mindlift at Adult Learning Lewisham – he has contacted the Course Lead and enrolled in a face to face cooking course for the Spring term.

3. Community Development work

Our Community Development Worker's role is to support the groups to which our Community Facilitators refer, i.e. the smaller, local lunch clubs, craft groups, community gardens and others that will make a difference daily in the lives of our clients. The CDW is a link between the local groups, our team and the statutory sector, attending regular meetings and maintaining relationships to make sure everyone is aware of the current provision - invaluable this quarter due to COVID-19 uncertainty.

3.1. Building capacity in the voluntary and community sector

We have a mailing list of 423 local contacts. This quarter, our Community Development worker has had **122 meetings with local groups**, 93 of these remotely and 29 in person. The discussion topics covered in these meetings are presented in the table below:

Conversation topic	**Number of groups it was discussed with**
Connecting one group to another / Building partnerships	29
Introducing self / project	28
Publicity	18
COVID 19 opening / rules	15
Recruiting volunteers	13
Applying for new funding	12
Policies and procedures	12
Recruiting staff	6
Premises	5
NCDP funding	4
Legal structure	2
Risk assessment	2

These meetings have taken place with 81 different groups, whose activity we have attempted to classify below:

Church / community centre	19
IT	16
Older people	11
Arts	10
Borough-wide	8
Mental Health support	7
Neighbourhood-wide	7
BAME	5
Befriending	4
Mutual Aid	4
Refugee	4
Credit Union	3
Environment / green / nature	3
Men	2
LGBT	2
Disability	1
Drug and alcohol	1
Employment	1
Food	1
Health (physical)	1

Some of the outcomes of these meetings are:

- The Diamond Club is a social group for older people in South Catford. The CDW linked them with two enriching activities. The first is the Horniman Museum, which has so far delivered 5 regular Zoom-based participative music sessions, after which Diamond Club leader, Lesley Allen, reported 'joy on [participants'] faces'. The second link was made with the Quaggy Community Choir, which delivered a session with a view to Diamond Club members joining the Choir permanently. This latter fulfils a key aim of the Choir to diversity its membership.

- Having worked on the Personal Assistance scheme, the CDW used these connections to link a volunteer holding professional qualifications with St Christopher's Hospice. She is now working as a clinical supervisor for 2 teams of 8 medics for 90 minutes monthly.

- The CDW is supporting Stanstead Lodge, a community centre for older people in Forest Hill, to restart a dementia group. The reception worker at Stanstead Lodge is the only paid worker outside the café staff and keen to increase her skills and learn to fundraise. The CDW has identified a funder and is supporting her to draft her first funding application. He also facilitated her to meet the manager of the Ringway Centre, having identified that they are both sole workers sharing similar challenges.

3.2. Supporting the wider Social Prescribing Team in Lewisham

Our Community Development Worker has sent 78 pieces of information around to the 29 Social Prescribers working in Lewisham (CCL, OHL, Modality and LCW), providing updates on groups and services ranging from IT support, food bank and advocacy services all the way to online Zumba and Yoga classes and suicide prevention services. This information is also shared with 16 community groups, ensuring the information we collect about local provision is spread as far as possible and reaches the clients who need it.

3.3. Linking the statutory and voluntary sector together

Another key part of the Community Development Worker's role is to make sure our Adult Social Care colleagues know about the local VCS provision and to share our knowledge of safeguarding and ASC client's needs with the VCS to make sure the needs are met.

This quarter, a partnership opportunity has arisen, that would not have been possible without this role, as described in the case study below:

The Lewisham Refugee Café project is looking for premises to open a permanent public facing café. The CDW connected them with an opportunity to trial using the unused Ladywell Day Centre kitchen with view to ongoing use. He advised the Refugee Café on setting up, including linking them with:
- Council staff responsible for business and town centres
- the Lewisham BAME Network for further publicity to find premises;
- Trust for London for social enterprise funding; and
- other refugee catering projects in London;
He also shared lessons and insights gained from his experience of having set up a refugee catering project personally.