The Lewisham Local Essentials Grant Impact Report 2023

Overview

The Lewisham Local Essentials Grants Fund is a programme developed and run by Lewisham Local in partnership with local organisations to provide small grants to local residents. It is funded by Lewisham Council. There was a total pot of £40,000 which funded eight £5,000 grants available to distribute as small grants to individuals up to the value of £500. 14 groups applied and eight were funded.

The small grants could be spent on:

- white goods including the cost of installation and disposal of previous white goods
- beds and mattresses
- small essential refurbishments
- ID documentation
- transport- a bike
- IT equipment
- school uniforms
- energy saving devices
- Items essential for work, study or personal development
- The grants must be awarded to:
- Lewisham residents only over the age of 18
- For people on low incomes who are accessing food banks
- Eligible items must fall within the list above

We were keen to fund groups that are supporting some of Lewisham's most marginalised residents:

- Refugees and asylum seekers
- People living with disabilities
- Young adults (18-24 years)
- People facing multiple forms of deprivation

Who we funded

1. Community Advice Works
2. Chinbrook Action Residents Assocation (ChART)
3. Bold Vision (Feed the Hill)
4. St Mary's School PTA
5. LRMN
6. Coco Collective

7. MammaKind
8. AFRIL

The groups funded provided a good geographical spread alongside working with most of our target beneficiaries.

Spend

A total of £40K was allocated to 8 different organisations with 8 reporting back on outcomes.

To date the total, spend by organisations has been £39,943.19, with £56.81 not spent from MammaKind's allocation of £5000.

Details of items provided

Across all 8 projects the following essential items were provided:

- Home Improvements, e.g. paint
- Wardrobes
- White goods
- Gardening equipment
- School uniforms
- ID documentation
- Laptops
- Cooking equipment and Cookers, including energy saving cooking, such as an air fryer, microwave and food blender)
- Beds, bedding & mattresses
- Cold weather appliances (e.g. electric heaters, hot water bottles, electric blankets)
- Cold weather clothing (e.g. oversized duvet coats)
- Low Energy Dehumidifiers and Air Purifier
- Chest of drawers
- Fridge Freezers
- I-Pad & cover
- Washing Machines
- Table, chairs, drawers
- Prams and buggies
- Items for babies and toddlers
- Sofas
- International Sim card
- Well-being activity

Programme Impact

When asked what difference the grant has made, comments made were:

- Helped support some of the most vulnerable service users to meet specific needs promptly
- Lowered service users' heating bills over the winter period by offering cost-effective ways for them to heat themselves

- Broadened service users' cooking abilities and access to food by, for example, purchasing cookers for households who had previously relied on a microwave only
- Improved service users' lives by intervening to stop a misfortune (such as a broken fridge) from becoming a catastrophe (payday loans, debt spiral etc). Small grants were extremely popular
- Enabled increased engagement with the families in most need
- Met their basic needs
- The grant had helped address some of the simple but systemic areas of hardship for food bank members.
- The immediacy of help is the greatest benefit e.g. One group mentioned that a family could meet with them and within 2/3 days they could get beds or fridges delivered into their home.

Quotes from some of the participating organisations included:

"The grant has helped us address some of the simple but systemic areas of hardship for food bank members. We could have spent the grant twice over and not fulfilled the requests. We have had many messages of happy feedback, …"

"Regular feedback from referral partners and direct feedback from families has shown us that the project was a success. The feedback told us the essentials provided to the families have allowed their children to thrive, thereby supporting their wellbeing and health."

"We set out to improve the quality of life and physical and mental well-being for grant recipients. Every grant did this in one or more ways; saving money on fuel, helping families make the most of free fresh vegetables, sleeping better, children having dry, warm feet, and not feeling different from their friends at school because they had the same uniform, or having some quality time with family."

"The programme was a huge success, it made a huge difference to be able to offer small sums of money to residents most in need, something we haven't been able to do before."

"The project has very significantly met the needs of the people accessing our service, by tackling the issues they face and offering a direct and practical response."

"MammaKind relies solely on donations for equipment. Where there are special needs for a family the wait time can be increased while we try and source the item. Being able to buy the items reduces wait times by 90% significantly improving the lives of the families we support. The grants reduced volunteers' hours by 80% on sorting sourcing ,collecting and cleaning preloved equipment allowing time to support more families. New items also help us to reduce storage space requirements as stock goes out of the door immediately. Together, these benefits have allowed us to increase our weekly referral capacity for equipment by up to 40%.' MammaKind."

When asked to what degree organisations felt the grant has helped improve, you can see from the table below that the areas the grant had most impact were alleviating poverty and improving the health and wellbeing of people who access their service, with other improvements to sense of place, access to health and wellbeing and facilitates as well supporting the organisations distributing the grants.

To what degree do you feel the grant has helped improve (Scored 1-5):	**Average Score**	**Success rate %**

The health and wellbeing of the people who access your service	4.9	98%
Help to alleviate poverty	4.6	93%
Increased sense of place	4.0	80%
The access to and availability of health/community services and facilities	3.6	73%
Help the organisation become resourceful and resilient	3.9	78%
Generate new connections between stakeholders in the VCS community	2.6	53%
Generate volunteering roles	2.5	50%
Generate asset-sharing of resources and skills across the VCS community	2.1	43%

Case Studies of People Supported

Below are some examples shared by projects that highlight the difference the small grants made to their clients.

ChART

The lady who received the washing machine suffers from arthritis and having a working machine now means she doesn't have to handwash which has helped her manage her pain.

The household receiving the fridge-freezer are now able to do a big monthly shop and take advantage of offers, it has helped a lot in managing the household's food and the food keeps for longer. As it is an energy-efficient model it is also saving on electricity bills.

The household receiving the chest freezer are now able to batch cook and buy meat which is reduced, this is saving money.

The households receiving the triple bunk and mattress now have enough beds so that all the children have their own bed and don't have to share.

The man receiving the double mattress is now able to have a comfortable night's sleep. None of these households were in a financial position to purchase these items themselves.

A single mum is now able to batch cook and freeze nutritious meals for her family.

A disabled man who was having to hand wash soiled clothes now can wash them in a washing machine.

Children no longer having to share a bed.

A man with severe disabilities having a comfortable mattress allowing him to sleep at night.

St Mary's School

The families in receipt of these items have been in severe crisis and were so grateful for the items. One mum burst into tears and said she was speechless when we told her the fridge freezer was ordered and would be delivered the next day - she had been moved within 24 hours to new accommodation with no white goods. Obviously having a fridge freezer enables fresh food to be stored and frozen which will have a positive impact financially and healthwise on all the family.

Single mum with 5 children (including one with diagnosed special needs) living in terrible housing conditions. After a lot of complaining and pushing from school and other agencies the family were offered new accommodation but had to move fairly quickly.

The family live on the breadline and could not afford to purchase any white goods without getting themselves into deeper debt. Having supported the family so far along the road it was fantastic to be able to ask them what it was that they really needed. The response to this was a big fridge freezer please!

Using contacts recently created at AO making other purchases the Lewisham Lifesaver Project were able to obtain a good quality and well sized fridge freezer at a discounted price for the family and it was delivered within a day or so to the new address.

This helped the family enormously both in terms of avoiding debt and also the speed of accessing the funding meant that there was minimal time the family of 6 spent without access to a fridge which as you can imagine is pretty vital!

Coco Collective

"So the tools l got from coco collective from my grant have really helped a lot, since I don't have to borrow other people's tools. Also the divider l got for my lounge and kitchen has really had a good impact on my life.".

"I am a lone parent on a low income living in Lewisham. My 10-year-old gas cooker was condemned by the gas safety engineer at my recent gas safety check. When he shut off my cooker and told me not to use it....I was filled with stress and worry. Luckily I remembered seeing a whatsapp post regarding Coco Collective's essential items fund. I filled the form and within the week my cooker was ordered and on its way. I am so very grateful as without this help I would have needed to borrow or do without for a considerable longer period of time.
Such a blessing"

"My wife had a stroke and so I've been left to look after our teenage daughter. The Logik tumble dryer has made things a lot easier for me because I can wash and dry our clothes in two hours."

"These items that my family received has really helped make our house a home. Residency has been an issue for us and we have been in/out of numerous accommodations. This has meant that my young children have never had a secure room to call their own, so being able to decorate their room thanks to this company has really help me and my children to feel happy and comfortable. As a single mother items like those given to us would have taken me a long time to provide. I am extremely grateful and so are my children. Thank you so much"

"Hello Ital Community Garden, I am writing this to express how much you have changed my life no cliche intended but you really have. I didn't have a working washing machine for months and had to result to hand washing most of my clothes as I have 2 children and as you know they go through clothes as much as they eat. I managed to get a washing machine with the help of your lovely team and honestly I may have gotten used to not having one but once I got one I realised how hard it really was when i didn't have one, so thank you so much."

MammaKind

The support we give to families can in some cases be life changing. The grant allows us extend our services and target specific needs enabling us to serve families faster with a greater impact. While nearly new and donated goods are part of our core delivery, in some cases it can be hard to match donated goods to the specific needs of families who are often some of the most vulnerable.

From referrer Refugee Council *'Families I support often arrive with little to no possessions and wait up to 6 weeks for any form of benefits payment. Relying solely on donations and second-hand items. Receiving the new Moses basket within a week helped a family fleeing war, feel valued and meant their baby had a safe and warm place to sleep immediately. This service isn't offered elsewhere, not only did it support their immediate needs it is fulfilling for families and creates happiness to receive a new item when they have fled war or prosecution and have little to no possessions'*

25-year-old mum of 8 month of old baby girl, Lewisham Resident - The pram changed our quality of life as I can now carry it up and down the 3 flights of stair and store it easily. It also has handles that raise so my partner no longer struggles with his back when pushing it.

Health visitor ' *The provision of a new cot/bed for this client will mean that the mother and child are no longer co-sleeping; they had moved to co-sleeping due to the baby out growing their crib and being able to pull to stand which created the risk of falling out of the crib; this could have happened during the night whilst their mother was sleeping.*

To reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome, it is advised that babies have their own sleep space which is ideally their own crib/cot according to the Lullaby Trust. Being able to use the Lewisham Local Grant to order a cot/bed, new mattress and mattress protector (and providing a new mattress and mattress protector also follows advice given by the Lullaby Trust choosing the best mattress and bedding for a baby in a timely manner rather than waiting for a cot/bed to become available through donations, will mean that this mother can put her baby to bed in their own sleep space, reducing the risk of cot death and also providing a safe space to sleep as she can put the cot on the lowest setting and the baby will not be able to pull to stand and potentially fall out.'

AFRIL

These grants have addressed mental and physical well-being for clients experiencing extreme poverty and food insecurity. They have helped adults, children and babies AFRIL food bank supports to live with more dignity, comfort, to cook better, healthier meals, and more cheaply, to make food last longer, and to sleep better. Without these grants 1 of our clients would not be able to pursue their long-standing asylum claim and seek sanctuary, and another client's son can go to school with dignity in well-fitting, smart school shoes.

Who we supported

The criteria for accessing support was that people had to be over the ages of 18, a Lewisham Resident and accessing emergency food provision. From reporting, we can see that the grants particularly supported people on a very low income, people who have no recourse to pubic funds, those who are homeless or living in insecure accommodation or had recently moved, and families with children.

This fund supported 498 in total, with 600 cases over the last six months.

Recorded number and % of people worked with (Please see table below)

Worked with	Number	Percentage
All Contacts	603	100
CYP	196	41
Adults	192	38
Families	83	18
Older people	16	3

This data shows that there was a good spread between adults and families supported however fewer projects supported older people. This will be something we factor into future programmes, although we do note that data suggests from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that older people aren't one of the most impacted groups by the cost-of-living crisis.

Geographical Area of Project / Beneficiaries

Lewisham Centre	1
Deptford and New Cross	2
Ladywell and Hither Green	1
Borough Wide	2
Bellingham and Downham	1
Grove Park	1

The programme funded groups operating in economically disadvantaged areas with some projects operating borough wide.

Learning and development

Learning from the pilot project

When asked to share any key learning from the project, comments made were:

- *'Reminded of the true poverty of clients and their resilience'*
- Working with professional referral partners so the project ran smoothly
- Grant has helped create relationships with suppliers who were able to offer more competitive pricing or free delivery
- Helped to address immediate need
- *'Difficult to balance making sure that people knew about the fund whilst making sure that we weren't overloaded with requests/managing expectations'*
- *'Although we have addressed immediate need we know that further help is needed, unless resident's overall financial health is improved, they are only one step away from the next unaffordable big item spend.'*

Projects wanted clients to not just be happy with, but actually like the furniture, white goods and cooking/ kitchen equipment which often meant that they researched several suppliers and gave

choices within a budget. Organising delivery time and where there were issues with the items delivered also took additional time. At the midway check-in, grantees shared their recommendations for good suppliers for key items such as beds, bunk beds, sofas, furniture, white goods, kitchen equipment. Upon reflection, connecting projects sooner to share learning alongside tips on the best way to manage ordering etc./ deliveries to improve the logistics and administration of the project may have better facilitated the process.

'We have only just scratched the surface; so far these grants are helping people to save money through the way they store food and cook meals. So many of our families are relocated to new housing by local authority landlords without basic furniture or white goods, making sleeping studying and eating healthily almost impossible. We are also looking into different bike schemes to answer requests for bikes to improve exercise and save travel costs. We would also like to run a pilot with willing female food bank users to provide each with 2 or 3 pairs of 'period pants' - this would save high costs spent on sanitary towels and also the impact on the planet re their disposal. We would also like to run similar pilot of providing mum's who we currently buy nappies for with 2 or 3 reusable nappies as a backup. Again, this is an experiment. Could these pilots be eligible in this scheme as cost-saving, climate friendly alternatives? We have other unmet client needs like prescription spectacles, mobile phone top up cards (international) to help clients keep in touch with family they are separated from due to forced migration to the UK.' AFRIL

***'**Grants are essential to support vulnerable families with significant need and meet the growing demand on our services. Approx 20% of referrals include refugee families, families with difficult access to their home, living in home with mould or have medical problems which benefit the most from this grant.'*

'Families have individual needs. Stairs (e.g., third floor, no lifts), health issues and/or space and storage issues can present big challenges for parents and the wrong pram or bed can cause more issues than they solve. Mould in homes is common and a cost-effective dehumidifier can improve the health of all family members without creating expensive energy bills. This grant has allowed us to buy equipment to meet individual family's individual and immediate needs and fills a gap in existing service provision. New items mean something different to a refugee family. Lewisham is a sanctuary borough. welcoming thousands of refugees and those seeking asylum, often with no possessions at all. MammaKind, with the help of this grant, was able to respond immediately to requests for support for refugee families, providing them with vital necessities and helping to avoid further distress for possibly traumatised people.'

'The key learning has been that this process has given us a greater insight into individual situations. It has allowed us to gain further trust with our service users and this has enabled us to signpost and meet further needs. We now have a financial advisor working on site and many of these households are receiving in depth assistance with claiming benefits and tackling debt. We have also been able to signpost to local councillors, Catbytes and Phoenix and provide a more holistic service for our users.' ChART

Challenges

There were a number of challenges that groups reported with administering a new project of this kind.

- Need to factor in admin time for reporting as this takes time to collate

- Need time in advance to work out the logistics of how the project would work, what the criteria would be, how they would make sure we were publicising well and the information they would need to assess need to make sure the process was seen as fair and transparent.
- Finding delivery slots to suit clients wasn't always easy.

"Research and purchasing were both more time-consuming than expected, ie understanding whether we could fund a particular item and then dealing with item returns/swaps etc."

"Our difficulties were being as equitable as we could so we responded to as many families as possible. The families of course had a long list of urgent requests, which were reasonable but well beyond our budget. We spent a lot of time helping them to decide on the item/s most needed. The online ordering and delivery process was at times a challenge."

"We also found we didn't have a full understanding at the outset of other funds available, to which our service users ought to have turned to first (eg Lewisham Homes for appliances/furniture). This caused some delay in delivery."

Navigating how to find what existing support is available to avoid duplication.

For smaller projects the administrative burden was greater than the administrative costs factored into the budget.

Recommendations for future funding programmes

All organisations stated that they would reapply if Lewisham Local ran a similar programme. This is extremely encouraging and demonstrates the need for a project of this kind.

Comments made regarding what we could do better were:

Allocate a larger fund for project management and administration and to roll out again for a larger number of people to help as we had to turn away quite a few people.

Next time, please include a donation hub alongside a foodbank for people in Lewisham hotels who don't access our foodbank but need support.

As part of the monitoring report, we ask what additional support organisations would need. They reported the following:

- Funding to support core costs
- General Funding
- Volunteers
- Additional funding for a similar scheme.
- capacity building.
- Information on similar grants/schemes

Lewisham Local is currently looking at how to address some of these needs and will factor into future grant making programming.

Further Feedback from Grantees

- This grant has had such a positive impact on the team. Seeing the impact, it has had on families and young children it has been a privilege to be part of the project. Thank you for supporting our work and alleviating the pressures of meeting demand by working together.

- Thank you from us and all the families who have been helped. Disbelief and relief has been a wonderful reaction from families to whom we have been able to offer support!
- Thank you for leading and facilitating this project. It has made a tangible difference to the people we support.
- Post covid I feel there is a lack of spaces for people to get together and socialise. Funding that would allow us to rent a space and hire someone to run a social group would be great. Especially if this could overlap with ESOL.
- Creating a hub for migrants and asylum seekers that brings different services together, one space for clients to access support
- Support for people in asylum hotels.
- To roll this out again under a larger offering as we had to turn people away due to not having enough funds and lots of people need cash first help. We prioritised families and single mothers
- Thanks for the support, a great project that has really helped on the ground.
- It would be good for participants to share their recommendations for good suppliers and how to order key items such as beds, bunk beds, sofas, furniture, white goods, kitchen equipment

Conclusion and Next steps

The Essentials grants have been extremely well received by the groups funded and the residents they support. We have been able to fund a good spread of organisations who represent a variety of the target groups we had set out to support. These grants came at a particularly crucial time during the cost-of-living crisis. Given then success of the programme, Lewisham Local is keen to identify future funds to deliver a similar programme and is currently working with Lewisham Council's benefits team on this.

We are grateful for Lewisham Council for funding this initial pilot, and for all eight groups who worked extremely hard on the set up a delivery of this project.

Report Written

July 2023

Lewisham Local