



# SE17Working

## APPG Evidence Report



### 1. Who we are

**SE17Working is registered charity, Creation Trust's, Employment Programme based in Southwark, London and falls under the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth District.**

Our office is based opposite the Aylesbury Estate. Our clients are either residents of the Estate, going through the regeneration process taking place there over the next 20 years, or come from the immediate surrounding area. Our Active Clients Database numbers 415, of which 96% are BAME.

The Estate originally comprised 2,500 social rented units, and has historically scored high in multi-deprivation indicators. The current poor physical condition and environment has led to it becoming one of the UK's largest regeneration schemes. All its existing local authority social rented homes will become Housing Association properties. The density of homes will double, and 50% will be privately owned.

The L&Q Foundation has supported the SE17Working programme from inception as part of its Added Value commitment when it was named as one of the Aylesbury Estate Developers in 2012. As the project exceeded expectations, it was chosen again in 2019 as part of their Independent Lives initiative.

### 2. Background

#### 2.2 Unemployment and the Local Economy

In Southwark 18.6% of the total population is economically inactive; however in terms of those that *want* to work, at 27% it is higher than the London (19.3) and UK (20.8) averages. The percentage of unemployed male to female is relatively even, though the rate of inactivity in terms of moving on into work is 2.2% higher for males, a figure that's above both London and UK averages.

Those on ESA And Incapacity Benefits exceed those on JSA, with the former being above the total London average.<sup>1</sup> In 2015 about a third of households in Southwark earned less than 60% of National Median Income after housing costs, the fifth largest proportion of households in inner London boroughs. Over 3500 thousand individuals received help from the Southwark Foodbank in 2015 (about 1.2% of the borough's total population).

Creation is a London Living Wage (LLW) employer, and SE17Working strives to put people forward for jobs that pay the LLW. The employment market within Central and Greater London still has a high number of available jobs in the cleaning, construction, care and retail industries for example, that do not pay LLW. There are always vacancies to fill in these industries, and clients desperate to work often apply for these jobs.

#### 2.3 Mental Health

Depression is one of the major barriers to finding employment for many of our clients, though feelings of shame and stigma often attached to mental health mean they rarely declare it at the time of registering with us. Through working with our mental health referral partner South London and Maudsley Hospital (SLaM), we have learned that many of the factors contributing to poor mental health in the first place are also the reasons that make overcoming mental health issues more challenging; these include increased competition for employment opportunities, poor housing and stretched support services.

---

<sup>1</sup> NOMIS – Labour Market Profile Southwark Jan to Dec 2019

In recent years, there has been an increased proportion of unemployed young (20-35 years) and BAME people at risk of mental health issues, with BAME groups 9 times more likely to experience mental health issues, and those of Black Caribbean origin 8 times more likely to experience mania. Some of these are children and grandchildren of those from the Windrush generation, whose current disputed immigration status means they may be out of work and living in fear of deportation, causing stress to the entire family.

SLaM data also shows that often BAME people access SLaM services in crisis and at a later stage in the illness, consequently needing more measures to recover. Over years of working with the community we have dealt with many clients who were either undiagnosed or not declaring their diagnosis.

## 2.4 Literacy and Numeracy

### 2.4.1 Around 32% of our clients have literacy and numeracy needs

We have delivered or referred clients on to formal qualifications in both childcare and youth work, all of which required entry level numeracy and literacy. Of those applicants, approximately 65% did not reach this standard.

Earlier this year Ofsted's London regional director Mike Sheridan stated his concern about "black boys in London" in terms of the numbers excluded from school (resulting in lower standards of literacy and numeracy), and its impact on the wider community. He noted that too many black boys within the school system underperform, and highlighted that they were both more likely to be "the victims of serious violence in London" and "to be stopped and searched by police". Disturbingly, similar findings were found in reports as far back as 1991, and it may also connect to the higher number of unemployed males in Southwark.

### 2.4.2 ESOL

Of the 306,745 people living in the borough in 2015, almost half the community (48%) belonged to an ethnic minority. Nearly one third (29%) of Southwark's population were born in non-EU countries, which is slightly higher than the London average, and significantly higher than the national average of 9%. A quarter of households contain at least one member for whom English is a secondary language (close to London average, but higher than national average at 9%). Of our clients, 51% speak English as a second language. African, East Asian and Spanish are the most widely-spoken other languages<sup>2</sup>.

## 3. The SE17Working Programme

### 3.1 About us

**Our programme is specifically for previously long- term unemployed, those who have been difficult to engage and/or are socially isolated.** The project features high level support; Self-Assessment (the Triangle STAR assessment); an agreed 6-month Action Plan; and tailored workshops guided by need and local intelligence.

Staffing comprises two Employment Advisors – one specialising in one-to-one and job search, the other specialising in group applications/activities and employer engagement. Both are managed by a director with over 15 years' experience of working in the Welfare to Work field at Senior Level. The workshops are held at our training facility, The Giraffe House, 285 Albany Road, SE5. The building also houses a pre-school childcare facility, and we provide a hot lunch which clients often say is the only freshly-cooked meal they may have that day.

Once a client is registered with the SE17Working Programme, we are committed to ensuring they are equipped with the skills not only to get them into sustainable employment, but also with the life skills they may have lost through various socio-economic factors which have made them feel that they are not contributing to society. Through our bespoke delivery of one-to-ones, self-assessments and workshops, we have found a formula which helps them to get back on track, and this is further evidenced by our success in getting people into work.

---

<sup>2</sup> Community Southwark – Overview of Southwark 2015

**Since July 2019, the SE17Working Project has helped 354 residents to live more independent lives through:**

- Helping 150 clients into jobs (full time 82: part time 59: self-employed: 9)
- Supporting 55 clients that are employed for less than 16 hours, or on low pay or employed in sectors with contracts that pose a risk to them sustaining their tenancies
- Supporting 250 clients with training and advice to move on to the next job on a career path, or to increase their earning potential

## **3.2 Challenges**

We have found that clients who are long-term unemployed want to work, but often feel they are no longer capable. They may be disillusioned because of their own work experiences or those of family and friends, and/or information gleaned from the media. This may cause them to 'self-sabotage', including not turning up to interviews or appointments (or even the first day of work), or not presenting themselves professionally at interview through what they wear or say, despite interview guidance.

We guide our clients to research companies that they want to work for, which includes looking at websites, but sadly they do not often see themselves represented in the staffing or board level in those companies, which can lead to loss of confidence and motivation in finding work.

We also find that clients sometimes have unrealistic views of the employment roles for which they may be eligible. Those who have been out of work for some time and wish to return to the same field are often surprised at the need to upskill and the financial cost of doing so; for example, we have worked with clients who wish to take up administrative positions but have limited IT skills, so they cannot fulfil the job requirements.

## **3.3 Workshops**

### **3.3.1 Overview**

We have a suite of 16 half-day workshops, with 6 that we run as part of core activities and when demand is high. All qualified tutors are from BAME households. The team members also hold various project management, health and counselling qualifications.

### **3.3.2 Core workshop delivery and outcomes**

**Interview Techniques** (50% of Active Clients Database have attended, 40% of whom went into work)

Using the STAR technique 'Situation – Task – Action – Result', we give clients real-life scenarios and skills to ensure that they master the art of presenting themselves professionally when they are asked to attend a job interview. Clients tell us they lack confidence when speaking to someone they meet for the first time, and suffer from interview nerves. Often they lack awareness of what employers are looking for, and how to present themselves physically at interview, both in terms of what to wear and how to articulate themselves so that they come across in the best light in a more formal environment. Sometimes clients feel guarded as they believe employers may have prejudicial views.

**Case study:** *AK, a 51 year old black African male, had been made redundant from a catering manager role where he had worked for 15 years. Without recent interview practice, he felt he did not know how to answer questions concisely and appropriately, which made him hesitant to apply for work. He also felt self-conscious about his age going against him. We taught him how to structure the answers he gave, and helped him overcome his confidence issues through interview scenarios and role play with other workshop participants. AK managed to perfect these skills, and is now working as a Case Advisor for Job Centre Plus.*

**Representing Yourself** (12% attendance from Active Clients Database - 40% into work)

Fear of authorities often means that our clients sometimes lack confidence in being able to articulate themselves in formal settings. We actively signpost them to specialist legal and benefits advice agencies if

required. 26% of our clients are also working with other agencies, such as Citizens Advice or immigration lawyers, and 43% of our clients have had housing or debt management issues.

We assist clients with skills on getting their point across to others in situations when they need to obtain positive results or are engaged in a conflict, such as dealing with landlords, councils, medical professionals and police. This includes how to file important letters and identification papers, improving their time management, acting on letters from banks and debt collection agencies, and making notes to be better organised to tackle issues effectively.

**Case study:** *NG, 27 year-old black Caribbean male, had huge concerns about accessing support services. He had previously been homeless and although staying at a residence, it was short term, and this then led to issues with finding work. Having to go to the Housing Office on a regular basis meant that he was starting to feel demotivated and defeated in being able to make progress, so we talked him through the housing process and helped him develop the skills to record and create evidence so that he could speak with housing officers confidently. NG eventually found secure housing, after which we gave him job search support to find work. He is now working as a Teaching Assistant for Protocol Education.*

**Family Dynamics** (56% attendance from Active Clients Database - 32% into work)

We refer clients to this workshop to explore how the dynamics of their family culture might influence their employment-related decisions, and examine methods to establish boundaries and stay on track with their decision-making. Our clients state that their aspirations and confidence are influenced by their cultural belief systems and circumstantial conditioning such as child-care, male/female traditional and cultural roles. They are encouraged to build networks and learn how to ask for support with their job goals.

**Case study:** *SR, a 30 year-old Black African female, was finding that her life was very challenging as a lone parent of an infant under 2 with learning difficulties. She was estranged from her family, and this left her feeling 'sad' and 'a failure'. While attending the workshop she realised that the feeling of being a failure was partly cultural - intergenerational standards, values, and ethics - and she was then able to set goals from a more personal-centred intention rather than the expectations of others. One of her goals was to find permanent employment in retail, which she achieved within the same month of attending the workshop.*

**Eating Healthily** (48% attendance from Active Clients Database - 35% into work)

Food poverty massively affects community health and wellbeing. The Aylesbury Estate is based in the Faraday ward that has higher than average childhood obesity levels, and sits in the poverty corridor through London that tracks how low-income families suffer from poorer health. We have discovered that many of our clients opt for low budget takeaways such as chicken and chips, as they are more convenient in terms of cooking time, and save on the cost of utilities needed for cooking. Clients attend this session to find out how to get more out of what they eat and how to shop effectively, and they receive a take-home guide to eating healthily on a budget.

**Case study:** *SK, a 21 year-old Black African male, needed support to improve his lifestyle and food choices. Unemployed since leaving full-time education, his average daily meal was a £2 chicken and chips meal box costing on average £48 a month. We taught SK to look at healthy meals on a budget and helped him compile a tailored daily food diary with a combination of protein, carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables. We found SK employment as a part-time retail assistant and talked him through home-cooked foods that he could take into work for lunch. He is now enjoying cooking rather than going to the chicken shop, and states that he has been able to both save money and eat fresh and healthy food which has helped his quality of life while working.*

**Fitness and Wellbeing** (61% attendance from Active Clients Database - 57% into work)

This session is run by a qualified Yoga and Meditation Practitioner, providing information about the importance of fitness and its impact on daily life, including tips on how to make the most of what's available for clients in the local area.

One challenge is that our clients don't always make use of some of the available activities such as the free swim and gym. These activities are available Friday 7am to 10pm and weekends 2pm to 9pm, but the times available are not always the best for residents. Several clients also have underlying health issues such as diabetes, arthritis and heart conditions, which again make them less likely to take up physical activity.

**Case study:** AR, a 46 year-old Eastern European female, was referred from SLaM with clinical depression and anxiety. At her registration she spoke of her intention to get her "mind and body right" while looking for employment. AR attended the Fit and Well workshop and said that she was "blown away" by the breathing techniques she was taught, and learning the importance of being in the present. She has since found full-time secure employment as a care worker, and says that through using her learning, especially when she feels under pressure or stressed, she has her anxiety under control.

**Confidence and Motivation** (82% attendance from Active Clients Database - 44% into work)

This is by far the most popular workshop, where we help clients to explore what they need to do to become successful in life, how they can develop skills to address challenges, and become more positive about their life journey. It's especially popular for those who have undergone redundancy; been out of work for a long time, for example because of childcare; those who have bad experiences within the workplace such as tribunals; and clients who feel that they do not have the chance of employment due to preconceived notions about their ethnicity.

**Case study:** AS, a 19-year-old black African female, had not worked before and so was unsure about what working would actually mean in a practical setting. She felt nervous about how to interact with people on a professional level as she did not have any experience, having only ever been in a school environment. We taught her how to overcome her fear, how to interact with others, and how to perceive herself. We noticed her improvement almost immediately by how proactive she was in speaking with people and expressing herself in a group setting. Following the workshop and regular job search sessions, she was offered a position working as a warehouse operative.

### 3.4. Additional support

The programme is supported by a regularly updated website listing the workshops and job opportunities locally available, and a text message service reminds clients to turn up for workshops and interviews, or just to keep in touch. 98% of those we have helped find work have also benefited from an essential aftercare package to help keep them in work, including laptop loans; bursaries of up to £250 for courses; purchasing of PPE; travel costs for the first month of employment; help to find affordable childcare; debt management advice; and regular calls from our advisors to check they are sustaining their employment.

We also provide incentives for workshop attendance; for example when attending 'Eating Healthily', clients receive vegetable plants or seeds that they can grow at home. 'Representing Yourself' clients receive a document holder, and for 'Interview Skills', clients are given toiletries to be used in preparation for an interview. We hold an annual celebration event to recognise the clients' achievements, giving us the chance to see them socially and reflect on their progress.

### 3.5 Referrals and Recruitment

Most registrations have been self-referrals and 'word of mouth'. We believe that this reflects Universal Credit processes which unemployed clients are expected to fulfil, involving more self-sufficiency in using DWP online portals and accountability. Clients have opted to find employment rather than continue this process, and not to be accountable to JobCentre Plus (JCP). From our database, 58% are receiving benefits, and 24% are either not signing on, not working, and/or have no recourse to public funds. The remaining 18% are low waged and/or are supported by their spouse or partner.

We are seeing an increasing number of referrals from JCP and SLaM as our employment partners. These partnerships with external agencies have been brokered for many years. We also see a steady stream of

referrals from our Resident Support Team which comprises 3 caseworkers and a benefits advisor who support the SE17Working advisors, a network which helps families on the Estate who are in crisis.

## **4. Conclusion**

### **4.1 We believe that the SE17working programme works because the services we provide incorporate cultural dynamics into the journey into finding employment.**

With our staff also being from BAME families, we directly identify with our clients and we are able to have a full understanding of their emotional and physical barriers to employment. The team can ask the right questions, respect boundaries, and get to the 'bare bones' of what the client needs. This may be lack or loss of identity, and an inability to articulate feelings without having to lose their pride in the process.

### **4.2 We provide a culturally-themed hot meal at all workshops we deliver to align with the BAME culture of eating and engaging, and have a well-equipped and conveniently located training space.**

This helps to aid retention for the duration of the activity, which in turn maximises learning. It also encourages conversation, helping to build relationships for those who are feeling isolated and giving them strength and stamina to stay on their path into work.

### **4.3 We're committed to working with lone parents, a key target group in our community**

We see the economic and emotional effects that family breakdown and absent fathers have on a household. These hard-working women often have a complicated relationship with their sons as a result. Many of our black female clients go into care roles, mainly as there is a high demand and there are always vacancies. This type of work includes long shifts, so they are not always at home to spend time with their children, supporting them with homework, or eating and socialising together.

### **4.4 Welfare to work delivery must be delivered through an established third sector body such as ours, which already has a connection with the community it serves.**

In our experience this body needs to offer the following to get positive, sustainable results:

- flexible service delivery in a space close to clients' homes
- the ability to support with childcare needs
- recognition of client diversity by employing staff and trainers who reflect it
- recognition that clients have differing needs and barriers to employment
- a supportive and safe training environment with hot food and drink
- incentivising and celebrating client success
- support for clients while in work, including travel bursaries and help to buy work-suitable clothing

## **5. Information**

<http://www.se17working.co.uk/about/> and <http://creationtrust.org/>

**Author:** Patrischia Warmington Director – SE17Working

### **Contributors:**

Charlotte Benstead Chief Executive – Creation Trust

Nils Bendle Employment Advisor – SE17Working

Janine Jauvel Employment Advisor – SE17Working

Sarah McCarthy – Communications and Engagement Manager – Creation Trust

*The New Aylesbury Trust Ltd, registered charity 112252, is the official name of Creation Trust*