



Grow Tottenham

Understanding the impact

March 2023



This report was commissioned by Grow Tottenham in summer 2022 to capture perceptions of the impact of Grow Tottenham on the people who were using taking part in activities at the site in its last four weeks before it closed at the end of August 2022.

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Fieldwork was carried out by Izzy Gibbin, Imogen Bullen-Smith, Jonah Rudlin, Nicola Bacon, Kathy Hulme and Susherrie Suki.

Social Life was created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. All our work is about the relationship between people and the places they live and understanding how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas. We work in the UK and internationally.

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1 Introduction

This report explores the social impact of Grow Tottenham, a community garden and multi-use space in North London. Grow Tottenham was set up by Grow London CIC, a social enterprise that turns ‘meanwhile-use’ spaces into places of gardening, learning, and community life. Its site in Tottenham ran from January 2018 until its closure in August 2022. Grow London will continue to seek out new sites for the future.

Our research explored how Grow Tottenham was used, the impact it had on its members’ lives, and its role in the local area.

Summary

- Grow Tottenham was well-used by residents of the surrounding neighbourhood around Tottenham Hale. It attracted visitors from further afield as well as people from the immediate area and newly built social housing.
- Community building was the most frequently mentioned benefit, Grow Tottenham supported the growth of friendships and collaborative relationships.
- Grow Tottenham was a multifaceted site, with many different activities and uses. This encouraged its users to participate in multiple activities and try new things.
- Grow Tottenham’s physical and organisational flexibility supported a self-directed and community-led ethos, and space to meet the needs of vulnerable people.
- Grow Tottenham’s educational programmes provided a safe space for young people to learn, including young people who struggled to access, or who were excluded from, formal education.
- By providing space to community groups, Grow directly addressed local challenges such as social marginalisation and poverty. In particular, the work of community group Homegrown provided valuable services such as an advocacy group and free community meals.
- The availability of free or low-cost space enabled creative projects and careers to get off the ground.
- Many participants feel negatively about the development of the area, and viewed Grow Tottenham as an oasis of natural and social connection in an increasingly inaccessible city.
- While some are optimistic about Grow Tottenham’s future, narratives of loss are strong among people we spoke to, as Grow Tottenham is viewed as a unique and necessary space.



Context

Grow Tottenham was a meanwhile use community garden and social space that operated from January 2018 to September 2022. It was located near Tottenham Hale station, within a major development area, on the 10,000 square foot vacant Ashley House site owned by Notting Hill Genesis. Ashley House was built as a civil engineering depot and had been vacant since 2014. In June 2022 planning permission was given to develop the site for 272 new homes for council rent and market sale.

Grow Tottenham was set up and managed by Grow London CIC, working with local community organisations, small local enterprises, residents and makers. Grow London CIC is a social enterprise that works with local communities and landowners to make spaces for gardening, working, learning and social life. Grow Tottenham grew out of the experience of running three temporary gardens in Southwark. One of these - Grow Elephant - was documented by Social Life in 2017¹. Grow London also ran OK Grow, a communal food growing project based on Albany Road in Southwark, part of the Aylesbury Estate.

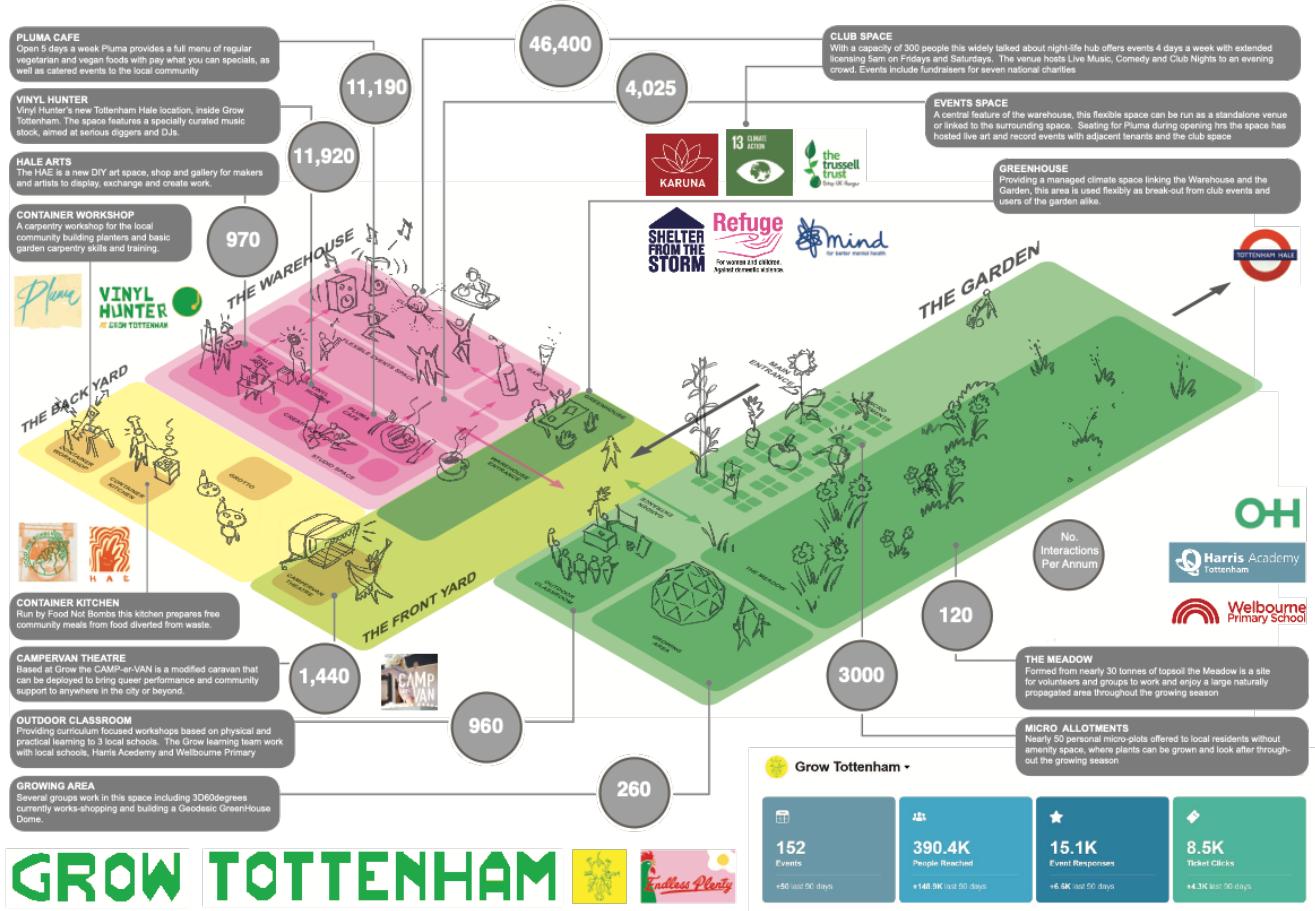
During its time, Grow Tottenham:

- Provided a staffed community garden, open daily for residents to use
- Ran a weekly programme of volunteering sessions and gardening workshops
- Ran educational programmes for young people
- Worked with local schools teaching children how to grow food
- Programmed a diverse range of cultural events and classes
- Provided affordable studios for makers and start ups
- Provided low-cost or free event space for community organisations
- Hosted a free community meal, food bank, and advocacy service, run by Homegrown
- Did outreach work to improve the local area
- Ran a bar, cafe and event space.

Grow Tottenham was largely self-funded. The garden was built using the income generated from the cafe and event space, which had a 5am licence at weekends. Money made from selling food and drinks and renting out studio space supported the cost of building and running the garden and subsidised a program of free workshops and events.

Previous sites run by Grow London received a steady stream of small grants, however fewer of these were available to community projects in Haringey than in other areas, although Grow Tottenham was given a small amount of social prescribing funding to run a project to tackle childhood obesity.

¹ Grow Elephant social impact survey, 2017 http://www.social-life.co/publication/grow_elephant/



Different uses of the site, from 2019

The research

Grow Tottenham is an informal, flexible space that encourages an ethos of self-directedness and ‘DIY.’ To understand it on its own terms, we designed a simple survey around three prompts that invited reflection on what the space means to the area and to participants as individuals. We also collected some demographic information, to understand a bit more about the background of the people we were surveying. Surveys lasted anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour.

We surveyed 70 people in total. 40 of these were conducted by a team of four Social Life researchers in person at the Grow Tottenham site. 30 were submitted online. An additional four surveys were carried out with young people who were under 16, with the support of their teacher. Most of these were members of the Language Fun Club on site, run by community organisation Homegrown. Because of their age, their survey answers have been analysed separately to surveys completed by over-16s.

Alongside our survey work, we conducted longer, unstructured interviews with four people who had deeper relationships with Grow Tottenham. They were chosen because they had contributed to Grow Tottenham in important ways, including facilitating classes, hosting events, organising children and young people's activities and renting studio space. These interviews were used to understand Grow from the perspective of makers in the space, and collect recommendations for its future development.

During our field visits we also took some ethnographic notes on how Grow was being used as a space.

Who we spoke to

The timing of the research - as the site was closing and being dismantled - meant that many people who had been regularly involved in gardening and in the foodbank and community based activities were not using the site at the time. This means that fewer people from the local area were engaged in the research than would have been the case if the research had been carried out earlier in the summer.

Our fieldwork took place with people attending at Grow's final events. By the time we carried out this work some activities had stopped, particularly the Homegrown Project's free Saturday school, community kitchen and food hub. This meant that we were less able to spend time with groups that maintained a direct focus on people of colour in the area, including the Homegrown in Tottenham project.

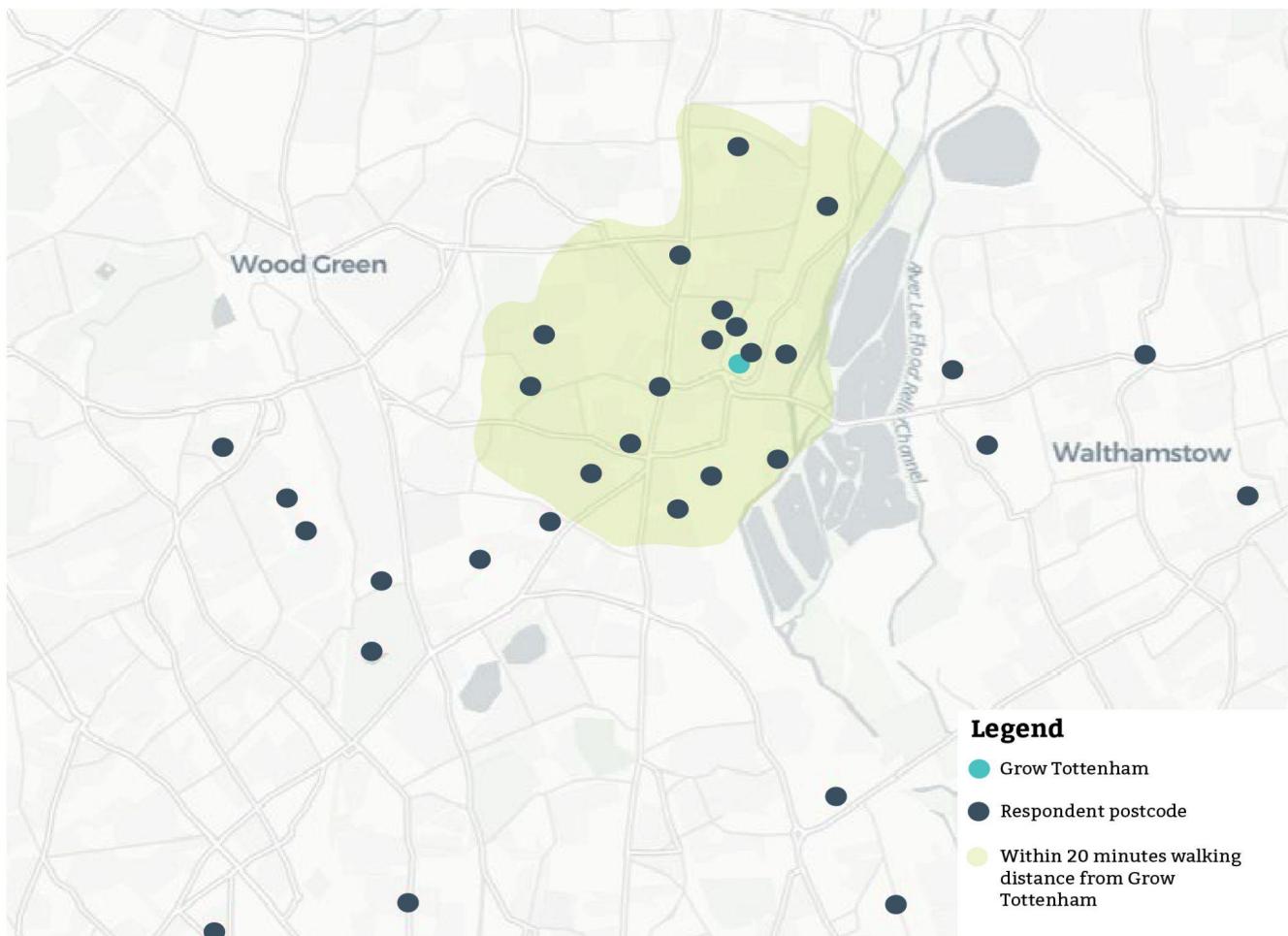
An online survey was circulated through specific networks, including the Axe Ramps community.

There were differences in the demographic characteristics of people who we spoke to in person - who mostly lived in the local area - and people who completed the online survey. Online survey respondents were more likely to be white, and between the ages of 18 and 29, than people we interviewed in person. It is also well recognised that online surveys tend to be completed by people who have more time and digital familiarity.



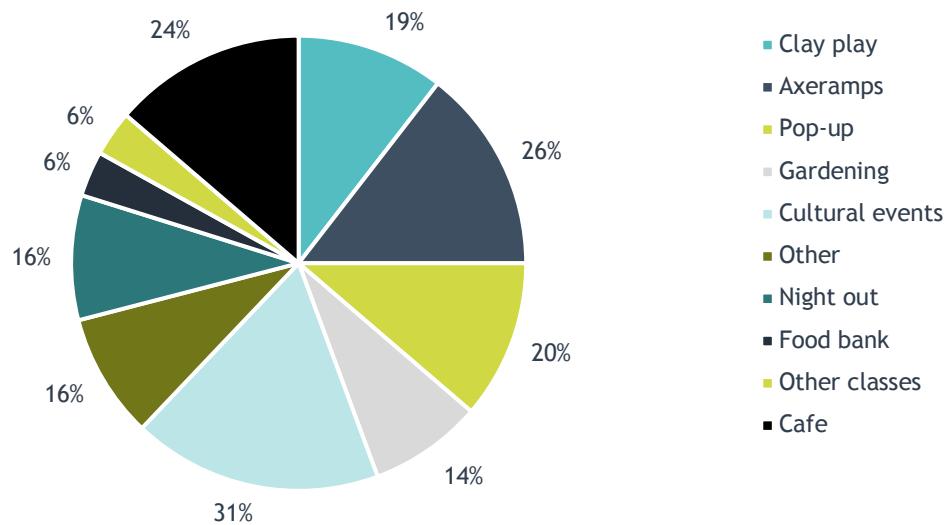
Where they lived

All but one of the people interviewed face to face came from London, mainly north London close to the site. Some people engaged in the online survey came from further afield, as far away as Glasgow and Sweden. Of the 41 people we spoke to face to face, 39% lived within 20 minutes' walking distance to Grow, with participants noting an especially strong relationship with residents of the Haringey warehouse district. Another 35% of people came from elsewhere in London.



2 How people used Grow Tottenham

Grow Tottenham was characterised by its broad range of uses, integrating activities that are usually kept separate into one site. The space was also highly flexible, and continuously shaped by its multiple communities.



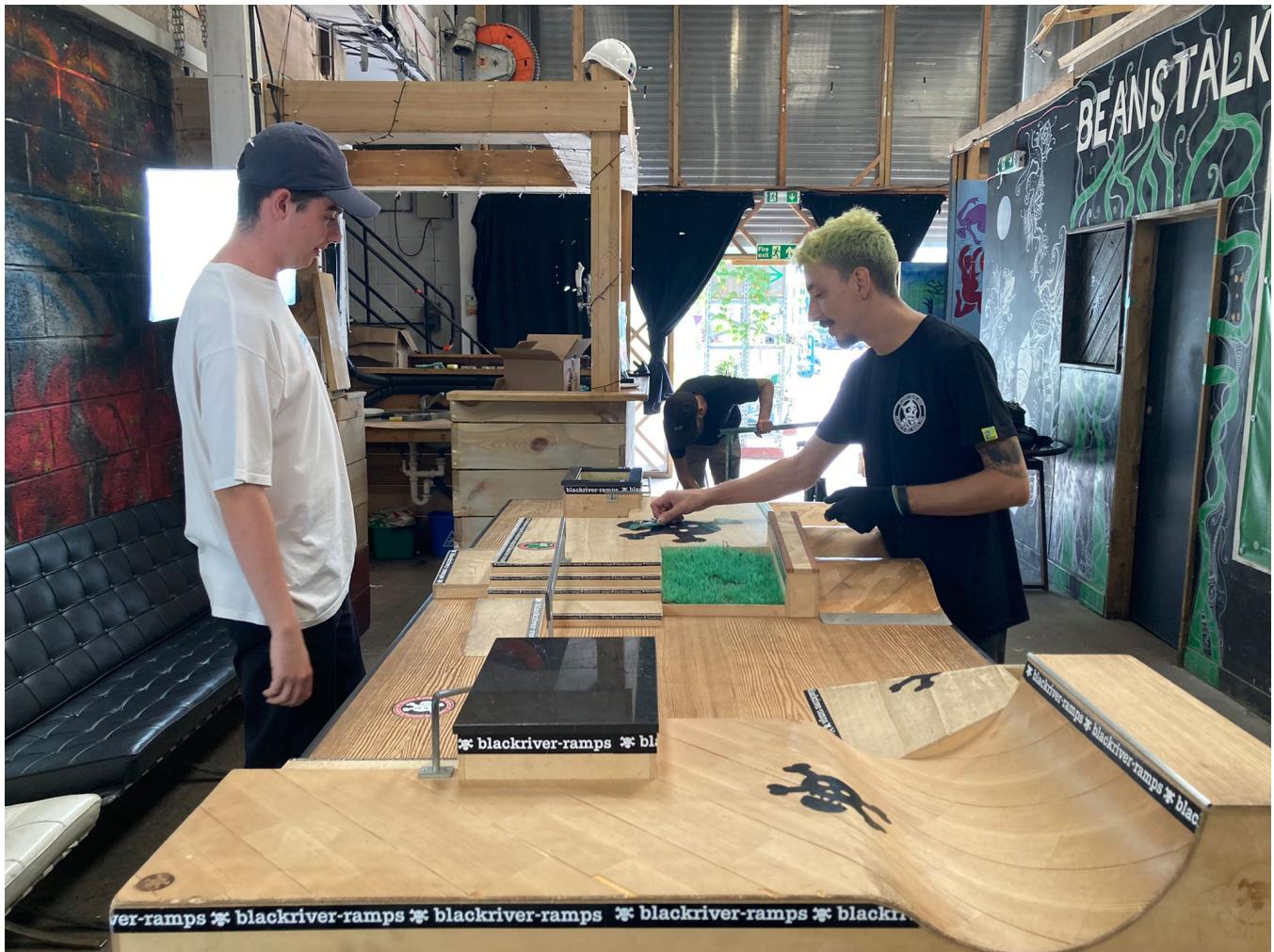
How Grow Tottenham was being used in August 2022, N=70

“Grow Tottenham gave me the first club night I really enjoyed in London. It gave me cute dates at Clay Play, lovely days out gardening during lockdown, and a truly wonderful day working at a Burning Man event. Grow Tottenham is my favourite space in London.”

Much of Grow's activity centred around gardening and learning about nature. Until 2022 regular gardening session took place twice weekly, Grow volunteers created a wildflower meadow, kitchen garden, and geodesic dome. These stopped in 2022 as the future of the site became unclear and there were concerns that it would not be possible to have a full growing season in 2023. At the time this research was carried out most regular gardeners had stopped using the space, and only around a minority of the people we spoke to mentioned taking part in the gardening.

The most commonly attended activity among participants was cultural events, which encompassed everything from gigs and record label launches to club nights and arts fairs. Here we met just as many hosts as we did attendees, as participants spoke about meeting and performing with their band or hosting parties.

Another big draw for members were the daytime pop-up events, which brought together stalls, music, food, and workshops. Since our longest fieldwork day took place at a pop-up event, its attendees were well-represented in our sample. Again, many of the people we spoke to were not only participating in the



event but selling things they had made themselves. These pop-up events were characterised as an important source of income and promotion for traders.

Clay Play was one of many workshops available at Grow and formed one of its most important social hubs. Around one in five people we spoke to had taken part in Clay Play.

"The clay making is amazing, get to make something out of it and it feels accessible."

Axeramps met every Monday to fingerboard together and also sold equipment and hosted competitions on the site. Axeramps members were also more likely to have come from further afield, with participants having travelled from Reading, Guernsey, Cornwall, Glasgow, and even Sweden! Several people mentioned that they keep in touch with fellow Axeramps members through Facebook or Instagram. This suggests that a specialised and far-reaching community formed around Axeramps that was less integrated into the general Grow community.

"Axeramps is a fingerboard shop which is the driving force of the UK community. I came to meet other people who fingerboard and skate with them."

A multifaceted space

"It brings an incredible diversity of functions together through a single mission: making a space that is built by, and for, the community."

Grow Tottenham was home to an impressive range of activities and uses, among them a staffed community garden, community meals, a bar and cafe, a food bank, gigs, pop-up days, classes for children and adults, studio space for artists, a veg box scheme, and club nights. Different groups used the space for different purposes: sometimes there were short term conflicts between competing uses.

The list of activities that participants took part in was so extensive that it was difficult to categorise them all. Many activities took place collaboratively; for instance, a pop-up event could combine food, clay-making, gardening, and music all at once. The food hub and Saturday school were described as being used by local families or people with strong connections to the area, from a range of backgrounds: Black African, Caribbean, Turkish, middle Eastern, Polish and white working-class.

"When we did the community kitchen on Wednesdays, it was accessed by other people. Crop drop, some of the builders and construction teams, other people on site, all came to eat."



"So many special and unique events! And it's also so multi-faceted - the plants, the studios, the finger skating, the clay, the workshops, the parties!"

We are in a cage and have a lack of integration with the wider environment of the area. The integration of soil, dirt, and nature with an inclusive rave space is so unusual and so necessary."

Most people we spoke with used Grow for at least one activity, and some people listed up to five different things they did in the space. This multi-use setting had several benefits for participants. A common one was getting involved in Grow through one activity, such as gardening or trading at a pop-up, then being exposed to other activities to try. Others liked that the coexistence of activities that are usually kept separate - such as rave culture with gardening - encouraged 'integration.' For families especially, the multifaceted nature of the space was useful as younger members could take part in activities while their parents did other things on site.



Flexibility and spontaneity

One of the main things participants valued about Grow Tottenham was its flexible, organic approach. Although regular events took place, much of the activity was spontaneous and open to change. This sets it apart from traditional educational, cultural, and gardening spaces that are usually more structured.

“Compared to other community gardens there's more freedom. If you come a few times and get to know someone you can come whenever you like. Other projects are more structured. You have to get on a waiting list.”

People's journey to Grow tended to be informal, normally starting with having an idea or having a chat. There were few formal procedures in place to host events, and participants described a 'DIY culture' that meant anyone could give anything a go. The site would continuously change around its user's creative energies, resulting in a space that was genuinely shaped by the community and allowed members to contribute as well as consume.

“There was something very special about being in a place where you can move things around, can use it for your own purposes, can shift things around – we had pop up events, supper clubs, community parties, BBQs, drama classes, the kids played sports, we did everything there. It was a messy space but it was also one that people felt a sense of belonging to.”

Groups that engaged young people and people from the immediate community spoke of the importance of the flexibility of the space. Being able to access at different times of the day, being able to stay until early evening, having a quiet space to work with young people feeling overwhelmed were cited as having particular value.

“I would describe it as a ‘what you make it’ space. Loads of people would come through and do whatever they wanted to do.” (Stakeholder interview)

The physical flexibility of the site also meant that artists and producers could refashion the space to suit different events; hanging things on the walls, moving furniture around, and reusing materials to create structures and installations. Producers we spoke with compared this to other event spaces they've used in London, which have strict limits on alterations you can make to the space.

“Grow was super flexible - we could come at any time, completely change the look of it...It was so DIY: come as you are, do it yourself, anything you want to do. That's not happening anywhere else in London. Venues in London - even if they say they want to be inclusive, there is always going to be a management that's strict.” (Stakeholder interview)



Some stakeholders related Grow's flexibility to its 'meanwhile use' model, which has transience at its heart. They characterised change as a good thing and hoped that relocating would help the project evolve. One longstanding Grow member said that this model makes it hard to establish long-term projects and relationships, and creates a degree of 'chaos' - but agreed that this is part of the nature of the space.

Likewise, one stakeholder told us that the short-term possibility of eviction meant that links with the community, and investments in materials and projects, weren't as robust as they could have been with more secure funding. However they also highlighted some of the drawbacks of more official structures, such as with grants Grow received to work with social prescribers on issues such as mental health and healthy eating. While these projects had some success, the limitations placed by the grant conditions ultimately undermined Grow's open-ended, non-stigmatising approach.

"I got annoyed at how transient it was and it meant you couldn't get anything done. But I like the way Grow is run. It was always left completely to whatever, which meant it was a bit chaotic. But that's the nature of the space."

3 How Grow Tottenham impacted people's lives

For people we spoke to, the name 'Grow' was about more than gardening. It describes the growing 'of people,' supporting the development of communities, creative skills, young people, and wellbeing.

Building a community

"Where do you go, and where do you grow? Grow people, grow nature, grow produce."

Community was the most significant impact mentioned by survey participants. Over half the people we spoke to said that they had found a community at Grow.

For many, this meant making new friends. Spending time with like-minded people and bonding over interests was an important part of this development. Participants also valued the opportunity to meet a broad range of people at Grow, including from different generations.

"I made so many new friends at Grow. The existing friendships that I had were made deeper and richer through having a local space where we could meet and engage with the community."

For others, Grow was a place to run into existing friends that time constraints normally made it hard to see. This sense of spontaneous 'coming together' was evident on our fieldwork days, with people around us greeting each other with surprise and delight.

"Lots of people here are involved with my art collective, it's a space where we can run into one another rather than arranging to meet."

"There are creative friends that I only see here because they're normally so busy."

With a significant proportion of participants coming from the surrounding neighbourhoods, Grow appeared as a local community space for many - a place to hang out at with no particular intention, or where they would run into neighbours. Grow had put down roots in several local communities, including nearby schools, and creatives from the Haringey warehouse community. People moving into the newly built social housing blocks next to the site became involved in activities for families and for young people: although the first residents moved in in April, by the end of August ten to fifteen families from the new block were using the Saturday school or food hub.

The quality of the interactions people found at Grow was noted by several people. Some described the feeling of being accepted into a group. Relationships were characterised as 'supportive,' 'harmonious,'

and ‘hospitable.’ This was contrasted with the impersonality of online relationships, and ‘grind culture’ in London.

“Reminds me of being in a community. It is a space outside of grind culture in London.”

“Grow Tottenham is a true community space. It fosters connection, sharing, and support between locals. I have never seen a place provide such genuine community spirit.”

“It was a lifeline to me, somewhere I felt accepted and looked forward to visiting every week, a social space where I could make new friends and bring existing ones.”

The relationships that formed around Grow were a mixture of friendly and collaborative. There was an informal networking component to the Grow community that created many opportunities for its members. With a diversity of skills and interests present on site, it was possible to ask for help and come up with ideas collaboratively. Most of these opportunities were spontaneous rather than planned. Nurturing contacts and projects at Grow gave rise to jobs, businesses, opportunities, relationships, and housemates for several of the people we spoke to. Some people expressed anxiety about where those networks would go after the Grow Tottenham site was dismantled.

“It's a community. First session gardening I met my housemate, we knew each other at university but finally met without masks and now he's my housemate. One of the studio holders is a theatre manager so he got me a job there. All my jobs come from contact here.”

“It's good to meet local people, spread word about what I'm doing - share creativity and contacts with others. Networking essentially. I'm sure some of those connections will stay but it's not clear where people will go.”

Supporting creative development

Many people spoke about Grow as a place to nurture developing talent and encourage experimentation. Grow was characterised by a culture of *mutual* support, where people could learn from one another and share skills in a non-hierarchical, sociable environment. Materials and tools could be found onsite and shared between people.

“Grow Tottenham has been an incredible event space for local creatives to share their work and build their communities. Painters, sculptors, poets, musicians, DJs and many more have taken the initiative to organise events and share their work with the wider public of Tottenham, and this was only possible because of the space operated by Grow.”

Creativity was an important theme in our research, with participants using a broad definition that moved beyond arts and culture to describe all kinds of activity: gardening, building, cooking, raving, crafting.

"It was a very sociable space. Met lots of people who have studios here. Lots of support to build. It was a much bigger project than I had ever done. We had a lot of help from experienced carpenters, borrowed tools. We stayed on and drank beer until the early hours."

One benefit of this informal environment was that it encouraged participation from people who might otherwise have felt discouraged. One participant we spoke to was in their 70s, and had developed the confidence to share their artworks with others for the first time through being part of Grow. They told us that Grow had ‘suddenly become everything to me.’ Another described the positive effect that being at Grow had on their self-esteem, since it gave them the opportunity and space to try things that they had never done before.

"The impact has been big, it's changed the way I think. I didn't have the confidence to do my art or show it to others, and now I have and I've sold some!"

"It boosted my self-esteem. I'd never run a project before so I got to do that. I got to learn all these new skills, building, using power tools. I didn't have yard space (to build a dome) so it was a place to fulfil a dream."



Objects made at Clay Play

Crucial to this support was the provision of cheap or free space. Grow offered studio space at a comparatively low cost, and provided free space to multiple community groups. This allowed projects and careers to get off the ground. For artists it facilitated the taking of creative risks without facing significant financial pressures. Traders we spoke with benefited from the opportunity to sell their goods without prohibitive overhead costs, in a pleasant environment, and to an audience that one person described as 'engaged.'

"After I left uni I didn't know what to do, and Grow rented me a workshop for ridiculously cheap, and I always had odd jobs to do there which covered the costs. That was completely life changing. I've now got a bigger workshop, I've been self-employed for four years now and now I employ others."

"All my best sales come from here and people engage more than they do online."

"It means being able to find new things and people. It means being able to take artistic risks without financial pressures."

A space for young people to learn and belong

Young people were well-integrated into the rhythm of Grow Tottenham, and one organisation carried out intensive youth and family support work. Young people were involved in gardening projects, classes, Axeramps, music events, educational programmes, and taking part in the general life of the community.

Our interviews with facilitators and teachers highlighted the social benefits of Grow's youth work, much of which directly helps children who face racial and economic barriers in formal education. This was led by Homegrown, whose educational work included a Film Club, a Language Fun club, and a free Saturday School. Many of Homegrown's pupils come from low income families, are seeking asylum, or have no recourse to public funds.

Stakeholders told us that Homegrown seeks to create a safe space for people that are often excluded from formal education, and catered to lots of different ways of learning. Their educational programmes encouraged young people to explore the challenges they were facing, and develop a political lens that is often absent from traditional classrooms.

"Film Club focuses on a radical education curriculum and shows films that are relevant to young people dealing with class, gender etc. The discussions bring forward a lot of issues in their own lives and are blunt, particularly given political discourse isn't allowed in traditional classrooms."

"From a young person's standpoint, there is a creativity that's embedded in the place. You get to think differently about the use of space. Not quite a playground but is interactive.... from a pedagogical standpoint it is interesting what sites like Grow offer in terms of learning, and experience, and being togetherness that comes with sharing with different groups."

We had four conversations with young people under 16, most were taking part in Homegrown's Language Fun Club and the Film Club. Some contrasted the learning experiences they had had at Grow to those they had at school, saying that they were more fun and that they felt more listened to. Grow was described as a place to make friends, keep out of trouble, and evolve as people. One young person, who was helping his Dad with the food bank, viewed it as work experience that might help him find a job later in life.

"The lessons are more fun, teachers listen to you more"

"Alternative education as people learn differently. I feel like we've evolved as people."

We also spoke with several parents who described the positive changes they've noticed in their children through their engagement with Grow, such as making new friendships. A couple of parents told us that they worry about their children's ability to listen and relate to others, especially with so much emphasis put on online relationships. Grow offers an opportunity for young people to form meaningful relationships in person, and develop shared interests.

"It helps get kids off phones I feel."

"It's unique and hospitable, he has made a big group of friends. I like to see him with like-minded kids, talking in real life - and more importantly, listening! There's so much content and ideas being put out but I worry about young people listening and processing."



Supporting wellbeing

Participants talked about Grow's impact on their wellbeing in a general way. A small minority of people spoke of changes in their mental health and reduced isolation and loneliness over lockdown. The benefits of a relationship with nature, and having a 'place to forget about struggles' were also mentioned.

"Lockdown was very difficult, and this place was a lifesaver. It is a space for people to come together and relax and forget about their struggles. It is a vital space."

"Purely positive! Introduces me to new people and ideas, benefits my mental health, offers a space to be creative, to work, or to relax as needed."

"A calm and supportive area which supports mental health in an urban area. Great to connect to new people and things."

A few participants mentioned improvements to their social confidence or a reduction in social anxiety.

"I'm more confident after a health scare a few years ago. You and I would not have had this conversation a few years back. I'm less isolated now, more open and willing to talk to people."

"I have social anxiety but here I feel comfortable, which is good to find especially in London."



4 Grow Tottenham's role in the area

Many of our people we spoke to about Grow Tottenham spoke about the context of London, as an increasingly inaccessible place to live. Against this backdrop, inclusive and community-led spaces like Grow are a lifeline for the city's residents.

Inclusivity and accessibility

Participants mentioned multiple ways in which Grow created an inclusive environment. It was frequently described as 'welcoming,' a friendly environment and a place to be yourself. Grow was financially accessible, offering many free and low-cost activities. It was also described as accessible for disabled people, since it was all on the ground floor.

"You can come even if you don't have any money."

"It's inclusive and allows people with disabilities to feel comfortable."

Grow's intergenerationality was praised by several people, who liked that people of all ages could come together.

"It feels special and rare to have a space which is so accessible to all. Particularly striking was the mix of multiple generations all spending time with one another and learning from one another."

"It is a place that enriches the neighbourhood around it and provides a safe haven for people of diverse backgrounds, many of whom feel shut out of cultural events in more 'mainstream' spaces."

A significant theme was the way that Grow activities addressed social and economic inequalities in the neighbourhood. By providing free space to community organisations, Grow played host to an advocacy group, free community meal, free educational programmes, gardening classes for young people, and multiple other socially. This significantly increased low-cost provision in a place that is experiencing high levels of deprivation and poverty. This connection was made explicit in the outreach work done by stakeholders in Grow's community, especially Homegrown who would engage directly with marginalised groups in the area.

For people who had grown up in the immediate area, or lived there for some time, there was a contrast between Grow Tottenham's flexible, adaptable and sometimes messy space and the rigidity of the new buildings being built around Tottenham Hale. The extent and pace of urban change in an area like Tottenham Hale can be bewildering. Grow Tottenham was described as a place which gave people control over their environment.

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"There was something very special about being in a place where can move things around, can use it for your own purposes, can shift things around – we had pop up events, supper clubs community parties, BBQs, drama classes, the kids played sports, we did everything there. It was a messy space but it was also one that people felt a sense of belonging to."

Some people described the atmosphere of Grow as a political one, which encouraged discussion of power structures and ethical ways of living.

"It allows the creation of social enterprises which target community needs due to the super low costs. Harris Academy kids come here, and people from all over - you can't find a place like this in the community for the same accessibility and price."

"Grow Tottenham is very political and there are very few political spaces left anymore. We talk a lot about power structures, most lefty white groups don't talk about race and that feels very important and powerful. "

A unique space

Participants described Grow Tottenham as a unique space that will not be easily replaced, and talked about the lack of community-focused projects in the area.

"It's the only place left in Tottenham Hale that's community based, alternative and arty."

"It's an urban oasis, much needed especially now. Spaces where people can come together are being taken away. The only alternatives are pubs or the park, but here you can share ideas."

Narratives of loss and sadness surfaced. They highlighted the lack of alternatives both in the local area and in wider London: places for creatives to showcase their work, for traders to sell goods, for the community to come together, and for people to learn about nature. Crucially, Grow's affordability and de-emphasis on profit was characterised as a rare thing in an increasingly privatised city.

These narratives also described the ending of the activities and communities that have flourished around Grow. Some, such as the Crop Drop veg box community scheme, will transfer management. Some of these activities, such as the Homegrown's advocacy service and food bank, represent vital community services that are now under threat.

Others are seeking new premises. For Axeramps community members the sense of loss is particularly strong, since Grow made space for the community that currently doesn't exist elsewhere in London. Homegrown in Tottenham also found themselves without premises to support families and young people.

"A parent called me today crying saying, 'I don't know how I will feed my kid.' Where are we going to take the food bank? What will happen?"

Its emphasis on making, gardening, and general 'hanging out' makes Grow different to other activities available in the area, such as visiting the pub or going shopping. Although Grow had a bar, the rich

availability of other things to do on the site made alcohol less of a priority compared to other social spaces. Likewise, it was possible to spend meaningful time at Grow without having to spend money. Participants characterised Grow as a healthy and cheap alternative to other local spaces.

“Most British culture is drinking. But here it’s a wholesome place.”

“We need places to spend time, do activities, meet new people. Not shopping.”

A counterpoint to development

The development of the local area was an important theme for survey participants. A significant proportion commented on the ‘monotonous’ towers being built in the streets surrounding Grow, rendering the area ‘unrecognisable.’ They described a feeling that such changes are being imposed, rather than driven by the community. Against this backdrop, Grow represented a grassroots and organically run community space.

“Having places like grow reassures me in a changing built landscape that we can have spaces that feel more organic in literally what’s grown and also what it provides for the community who use it.”

“This is a community space. In an area that has been developed beyond any previous recognition there is little space for community events and action to thrive.”

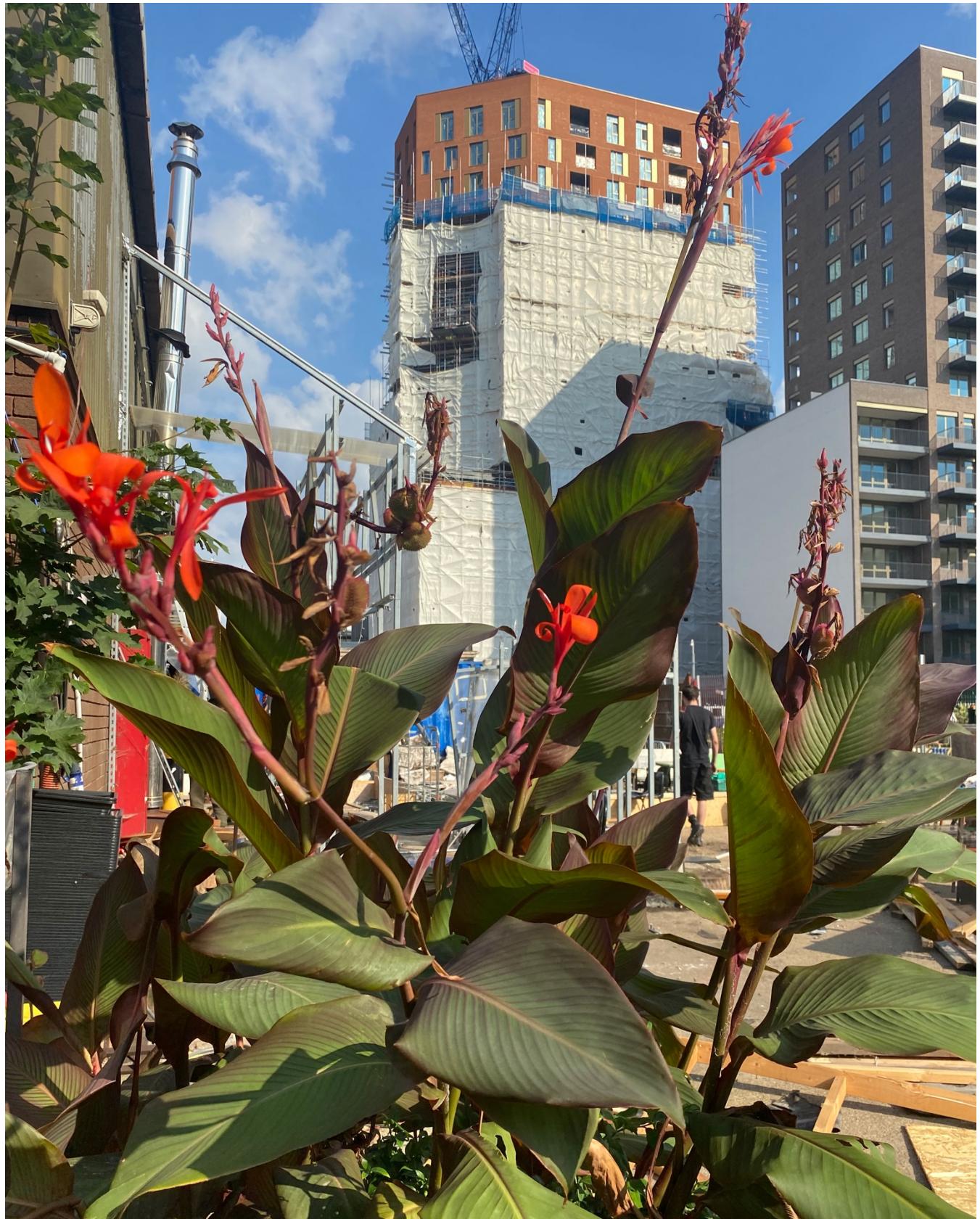
Two people mentioned concerns about longstanding communities in the area (such as those who visit Grow) being pushed out by development projects that raise local prices. The negative effect that this has on longstanding communities, and especially on people of colour, was noted.

“By the looks of it Tottenham Hale is in the gentrification crosshairs. Old communities like this one are being pushed out.”

Participants identified a general trend in London towards large-scale development without due consideration of community and green space. Many felt that developers do not give enough priority to these valuable assets, and worried about where the new arrivals to the buildings would go to be in nature and socialise. New council blocks have been built next to the site and concerns were voiced about where these families - many with children with high needs - could go to play and socialise. Against this backdrop, Grow presents a green oasis and a place for people to ‘grow together.’

“The new buildings have no green space. Research proves the benefit of green space, we need to grow together. There’s a mental health crisis and new expensive flats will not help that.”

"Look at those flats - there's no garden. Where are people going to meet each other? In London they keep funding things that keep us apart and taking funding away from things that keep us together."



Conclusion

Feedback around the impact of Grow Tottenham was overwhelmingly, and nearly unanimously, positive. This research demonstrated the positive benefits that Grow Tottenham has had on people's lives, most notably by building a community, supporting creative development, and fostering an accessible, inclusive environment. These benefits offered respite from what participants view as worrying effects of top-down development in the area, including a lack of green space and community provision. Grow Tottenham also directly addressed local needs through its educational work and provision of free space to community groups.

The research raised an interesting tension between the benefits and drawbacks of Grow Tottenham's flexible, transient model. Having a place that can be shaped and reshaped meant that Grow Tottenham was a genuinely community-led project that reflected the skills and needs of its users. Visitors were encouraged to try multiple activities, and to develop projects of their own. However, the inevitability of its closure and relocation has left great feelings of loss in Grow Tottenham's community, many of whom will feel the lack of important services and spaces.

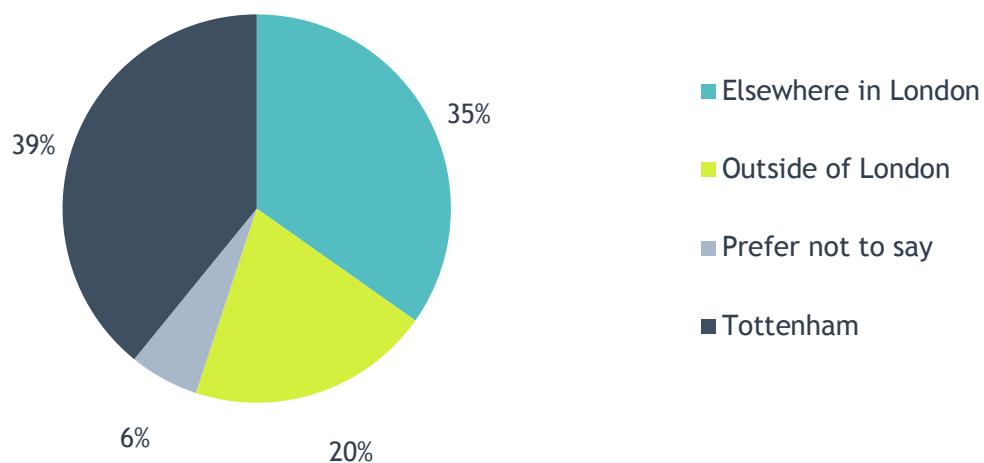
"It was a home of growth in every way: connection with nature, flourishing ecology, cultural expression, nourishing food, and a home for creatives."



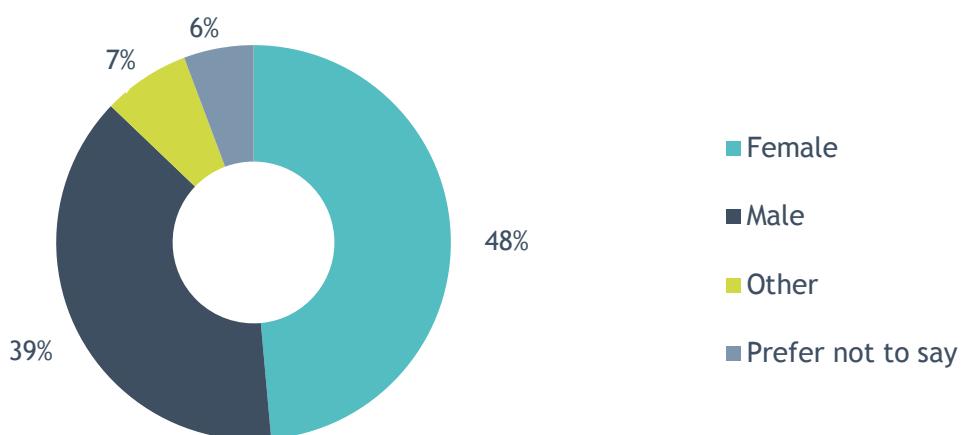
Appendix

This appendix documents the differences in age and ethnicity between in-person survey participants and online survey participants

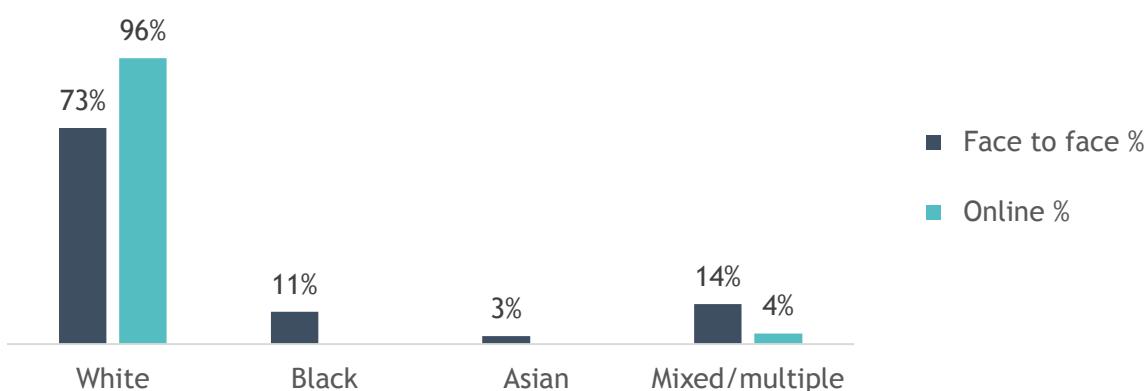
Place of residence (N=70)



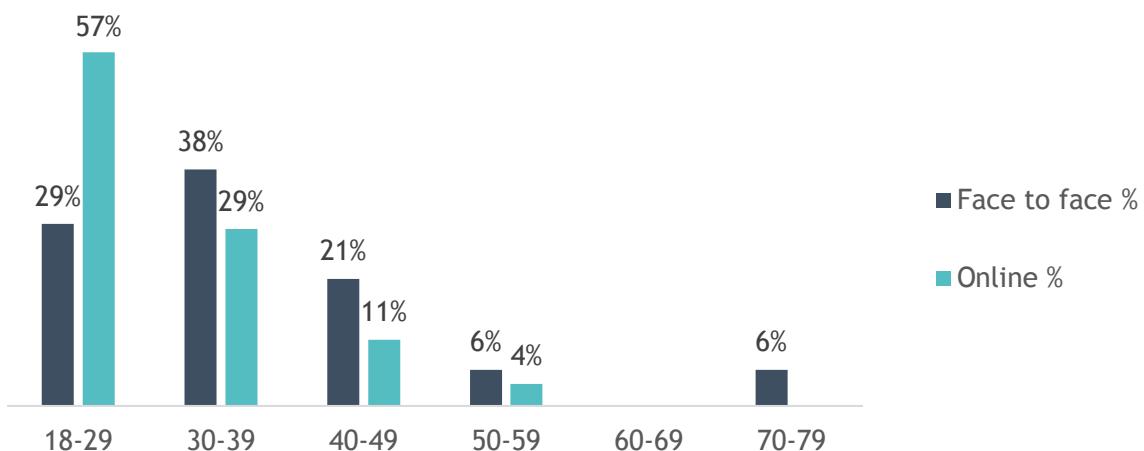
Gender (N=69)



Ethnicity (N=65)



Age (N=62)



Social Life was created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. All our work is about the relationship between people and the places they live. We work in the UK and internationally.

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