



Pilot site snapshots: Tower Hamlets

To accompany the year 2 evaluation
of The Coordinated Community
Support Programme



Tower Hamlets (1)

Summary of funded activity in year 2

- THCAN Referral System (£17k)
- CAB and Legal Advice Centre School engagement projects (£10k + £10k)
- Mulberry School foodbank supporting vulnerable families (£8k)
- Manorfield school food pantry (£2k)

Position at the end of year 1

Successfully piloted approaches to crisis support involving schools, and reached a consensus about developing a referral systems for the Borough

What Year 2 has focused on

Establishing the THCAN referral system and continuing work with schools, and influencing the wider local authority Poverty Strategy Review

What has been achieved in year 2

- **Establishment of a referral system by THCAN** and growing the membership among advice providers in the VCS and LA. 10 organisations are actively using the system, and have made 267 referrals between March and Sept 2021
- **Referral system has aided specialisation:** lower-level welfare benefit issues have been consistently dealt with by a LA partner, leaving more specialist organisations to deal with more complex issues requiring greater specialisation
- **An improved culture of referring** (where in the past signposting was predominant), because improved ease of referral and 'fewer excuses not to refer'. The referral system has galvanised the wider work of the THCAN network, with new organisations joining to get access to the new referral system. New referral relationships have been developed as a result of the system and school engagement projects have increased access to generalist and specialist advice for vulnerable service users

What has been learned in year 2

- Basic organisational information within the system aids ease of referral
- Having a network in place (i.e. THCAN) is a great foundation for building a referral system. Having a network to ask for feedback and make changes is valuable (i.e. the THCAN meetings)
- The referral system promotes accountability/after care where referrers are able to see when a referral is accepted/actioned by another organisation
- The level of information on a referral is not always enough/consistent, meaning sometimes additional work is required to assess need
- The amount costed for administering the referral system was not enough during the pilot phase, and further funding or user charges will need to be arranged to make the system sustainable.
- Schools have variable processes and approaches to working, which means that establishing partnerships isn't always straightforward and can be quite lengthy. Often there are other issues that slow progress (e.g. responding to urgent safeguarding issues).

Tower Hamlets (2)

How is CCS adding value in Tower Hamlets?

Learning from other areas (e.g. Norfolk) has been critical to the success of the system implementation

CCS have “encouraged networks and people working in a more collaborative way. Less competitive and more encouraging partnership working, sharing funding and raising awareness of other funding streams.” (VCS organisation).

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Poverty Review September 2021

- The CCS Programme has good visibility within the local authority as evidenced in the Poverty Review (2021). In particular:
 - The referral system (funded by CCS) is seen as pivotal to supporting the council’s aspiration of a ‘no wrong door’ approach (p. 34 and p. 45)
 - The work with Mulberry School in year 1 is regarded as good practice and contributing to a more joined-up and strategic approach to initiatives on food poverty (p. 39)
 - The project has increased awareness of the need to build on strong informal networks in Tower Hamlets to develop more systematic referral arrangements for the Resident Support Scheme (Tower Hamlets’ LWA) with a range of advertising routes to reach residents, and to build on the role and commitment of schools (p.44-45)
- “We used the evaluation of [year 1] of the CCS programme to inform the Poverty Review. It was very helpful to give us additional evidence – the main review finding was that more needs to be done to support coordination” (stakeholder, Tower Hamlets)

Work with schools

Work with schools is directly supported by the programme. A partnership between schools in the borough and the East End Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has increased referrals from schools.

- The project has supported 31 families in total during year 2
- East End CAB report that over £130k in income has been gained for families through the project

“After Covid, CCS helped us to begin to come out of crisis mode and think about more strategic stuff. We are in the process of getting onboarded with the referral system. We [schools] recognise that if we can support the community we will have an impact on the children. This has an impact on educational outcomes... We now have good links with advice agencies in Tower Hamlets and a lot of that is down to CCS. The programme has helped us to think about the long term need of families” (Headteacher in Tower Hamlets)

Tower Hamlets (3)

About the THCAN referral system

The THCAN referral system was launched in March 2021.

The system managed by Island Advice and funded by the CCS programme.

Fourteen (14) organisations are on the system including the Resident Support Services team at London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This team is responsible for Universal Credit and Local Welfare Assistance amongst others.

Between March 2021 and September 2021 224 people have been referred.

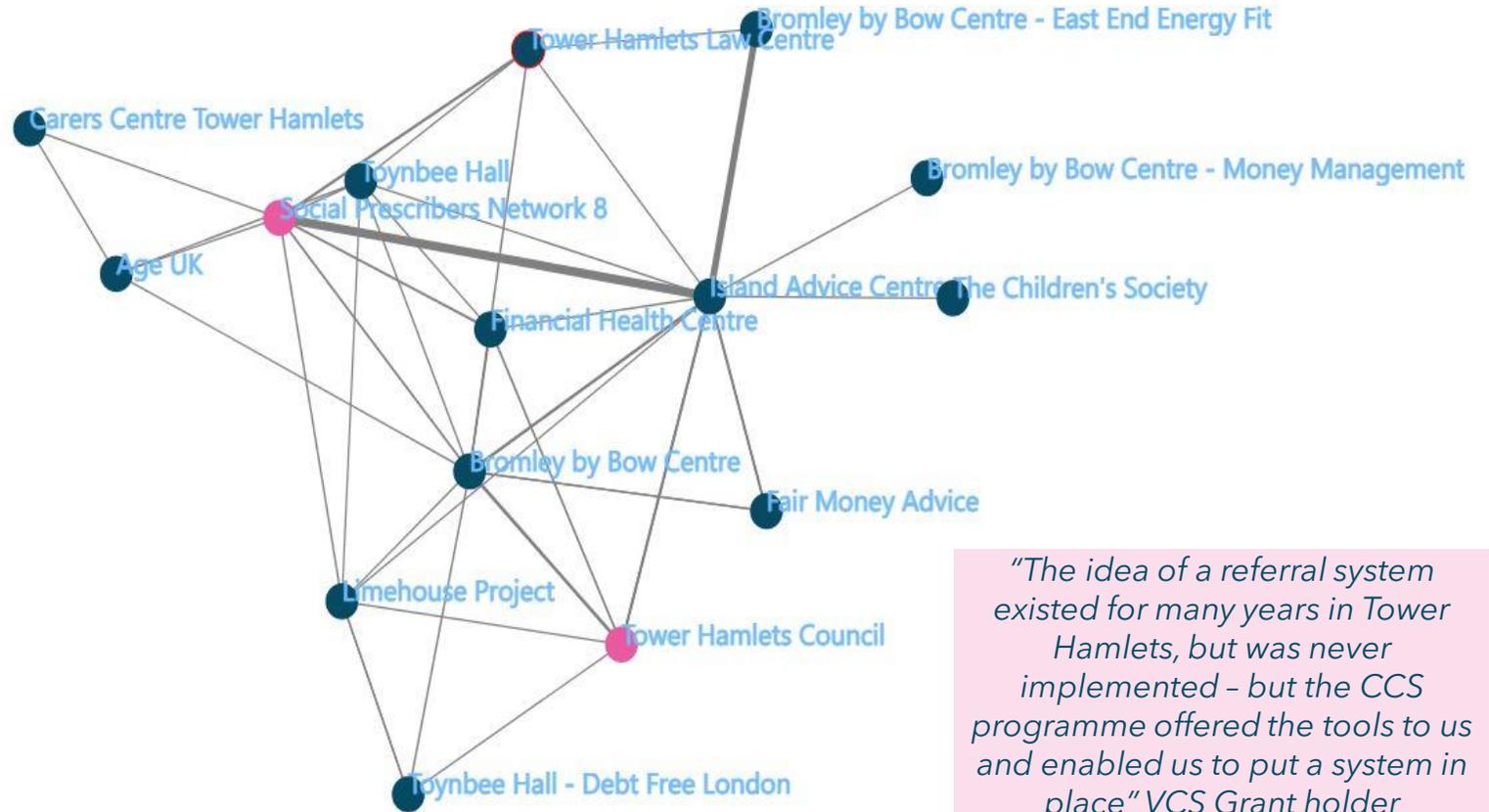
The model for sustaining the referral system beyond CCS is currently unclear although THCAN members are eager to identify a way to sustain it beyond CCS.

Key

● LA/Statutory organisations

● Voluntary and Community Sector

— Line thickness indicates volume of referrals



"The idea of a referral system existed for many years in Tower Hamlets, but was never implemented - but the CCS programme offered the tools to us and enabled us to put a system in place" VCS Grant holder

Data shows all referrals made (both accepted and declined in 2021) Source: Cloud Chamber analysis of THCAN referral data

Programme-level recommendations to inform Year 3

The year 2 evaluation recommends that the CCS team should consider the following recommendations for the programme.

Referral system recommendations

Resourcing referral system as a focus for year 3. Clear progress can be evidenced around building network capacity and setting up digital referral systems. However, the long term resourcing of such networks and systems remains unclear. The long term sustainability of the referral system is critical in encouraging partners to work together. Without it, there is a high likelihood that organisations will fall back to siloed working. It is recommended that options / models for funding the referral system are clearly articulated with partners (and potential funders) in each pilot site.

Training on the referral system. Partners involved in the CCS programme stress that the sustainability of coordination is about more than funding for the referral system - there is a need to continue developing the network and quality of the work. Notably, there is a need for ongoing training costs to be built into any sustainability funding. It is recommended that any longer term funding for networks and referral systems ensure that ongoing training for system-users is part of the funding package.

Other local-system recommendations

Build upon work with statutory services, especially schools. The CCS programme focused primarily on the advice sector in the 4 pilot sites. This is where there has been most traction with the concept of coordination (when compared with other sectors such as food provision, statutory services and others). It is possible that other types of crisis-support providers will engage with the initiative in the future. The increased collaboration between advice services and schools in Tower Hamlets has, up until recently, taken place without a digital referral system (longer term there is an aspiration for at least 1 local school to be on the system). It is recommended that the programme promotes

the lessons learned around increasing collaboration between advice agencies and schools. This will be of interest in areas both with and without plans for a referral system. It is recommended that CCS identifies opportunities to collaborate with schools and leverage funding for specific school-focused collaboration projects both within and beyond the 4 pilot sites.

Long term ownership of local coordination. At the inception of CCS, it was assumed that local steering groups would be set up in each pilot site and would take ownership of the coordination agenda. To some extent, advice networks are fulfilling this role although there is heavy reliance on the capacity and skills delivered via CCS. Setting priorities has been facilitated (and on occasion, directed) by the CCS team and this function has been welcomed in localities. This indicates that coordination work can be facilitated by experts based outside of the area. It also points to a risk that once CCS funding ends, there could be a leadership void. It is recommended that steps are taken to mitigate this void (e.g. pilot-site leaders coaching / shadowing CCS colleagues).

Engagement plan for local authorities. Learning from years 1 and 2 illustrate a somewhat piecemeal approach to engaging local authorities in the programme. For many local authorities there are communication challenges within the organisation and efforts for an “authority wide” commitment to coordination (and associated referral systems, for example) has been unmanageable. Furthermore, the CCS team have had no mandate to incentivise change at this level. For year 3 it is recommended that each of the 4 local pilot sites has an engagement plan for each pilot site local authority which includes:

- Mapping out which teams are interested in the programme and what their needs are in relation to the referral system. Inviting them to join the network.
- Identification of senior stakeholders (revisiting signatories on the initial application to be part of CCS) to remind them of their commitment to the programme.