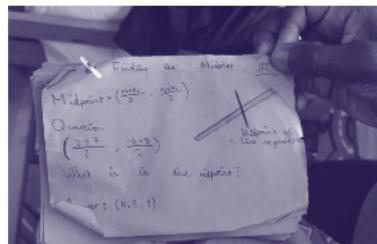


Life in Thamesmead:

An ethnography of families with young teenagers



Foreword

Throughout our history Peabody has strived to deliver the best possible support to those who need it most.

This has meant really getting to know our residents and communities so we understand their needs and concerns.

We do this in a number of ways ranging from the delivery of front-line services to more formal research, such as this important piece of work from The Young Foundation, which was commissioned in conjunction with the Royal Borough of Greenwich.

Studies like this give us a deeper understanding of communities and enable us to shape our services to better support residents and others.

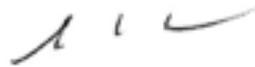
They also help us identify the individual challenges, issues and opportunities that make each place unique. For example, we have learnt that in Thamesmead, residents in The Moorings enjoy the green open spaces and appreciate it being a calm, quiet and peaceful place. They also identify areas for improvement such as: removing barriers to work, keeping people better informed, supporting increased cohesion and addressing safety concerns.

The study also highlights understandable uncertainties about the regeneration activity and large scale change in the area, including what it will mean for the future.

These insights will help to inform the services we provide, the partners we work with and the way we continue to support our residents and the wider community.

We will put a plan in place to ensure local people are regularly updated about developments, have opportunities to be more involved in what happens in their community and access to the tools they need to live healthier and happier lives.

Through the Moorings Children's Community, we will continue to work with the Royal Borough of Greenwich and our partners to ensure families are supported and young people grow up to be successful and aspiring adults.



Stephen Burns,
Executive Director,
Care and Communities, Peabody.



Introduction to Thamesmead

Thamesmead in South-East London was originally developed by the Greater London Council in the 1960s to house London's growing population. It spans almost 760 hectares, 65% of which is owned by Peabody, and is home to an ethnically diverse community of 45,000 people.

Many of the white working class residents, who make up 42% of the population, arrived in Thamesmead and The Moorings neighbourhood in the 1960s and 1970s from the overcrowded terraced houses of East London. Recently, the area has become more ethnically diverse: in the latest census 58% of the neighbourhood described their ethnicity as non-white and 12% of households do not have English as a main language. 36% of the population identifies as black African and 4% as black Caribbean (ONS Census: 2011ⁱ).

Thamesmead has an abundance of green open spaces and direct access to the river Thames. At the same time it faces a number of challenges, including being situated in the centre of the 15 mile gap between the Blackwall and the Dartford Tunnels. Geographic and transport features reduce resident mobility, and may help to explain why only 36% of residents aged 16-74 are in full-time employment (ONS Census: 2011).

The area is classified as amongst the most deprived 40% of neighbourhoods in England (HMRC: 2019ⁱⁱ), with 38% of residents living in social rented properties and 25% living

in private rented accommodation (ONS Census: 2011). Child poverty has reduced in the last five years but is still higher than across London with 21% of children in The Moorings ward living in poverty (HMRC: 2016ⁱⁱⁱ). In terms of education, only 32% of residents have a Level 4 (post-college) qualification or above, in comparison with 38% of Londoners (ONS Census: 2011).

Thamesmead is currently undergoing a regeneration programme led by Peabody whose mission is to make a lasting contribution to the physical, social and environmental wellbeing of the area.

As part of a 30-year plan for Thamesmead, billions of pounds is being invested in repairing existing houses, improving public spaces, building 20,000 new homes, looking after parks and waterways and growing socio-economic activity. Regeneration will also include the connection of Abbey Wood to the Crossrail line.

These changes present a significant opportunity to improve socio-economic outcomes for families and children from disadvantaged backgrounds living locally.

i The majority of the data available at ward level is drawn from the 2011 census. Whilst this data is likely to have changed since 2011, it is currently the most robust data available for The Moorings.

ii English Indices of Deprivation (2019), HMRC

iii Children in Poverty, Borough and Ward (2016), HMRC

The research approach

Life in Thamesmead is a research study jointly commissioned by Peabody and Royal Borough of Greenwich to explore the lived experiences of 18 families living in Thamesmead. This research will be used to inform and shape the Royal Borough of Greenwich's strategic plans and services serving children and young people, as well as the community regeneration programmes supported by Peabody and its partners, now and in the future.

The Young Foundation was commissioned to conduct the research, which focused on three key areas:

1. Families' experiences around parenting, education in school, home learning and homework.
2. Families' views on health and wellbeing; mental and physical health as well as experiences or perceptions of barriers and facilitators to being healthy.
3. Families' experiences of living in Thamesmead and engagement with Peabody and other housing and community services, different aspirations within the community, community cohesion, and where families turn to for support.

The ethnographic research was conducted over a period of six months and aimed to produce rich and authentic insights into the lived experiences of residents in Thamesmead.

Who we spoke to

Our researchers spoke to 18 families from different backgrounds including those with black African, black Caribbean, white and mixed-ethnicity heritage. Three conversational interviews were conducted with each family in their own homes: two interviews with the

parent(s), and one interview with the child. All families involved live within Thamesmead Moorings ward and have a child in Year 7, 8 or 9 at a secondary school in the Royal Borough of Greenwichⁱ. The two interview visits took place a week apart, during which time the child was asked to create a photo diary in response to a series of questions about the area in which they live.

Photos from these photo diaries are included throughout the report.

- Half of families we spoke to are headed by a single mum
- The average number of children per family is 3.8
- The average number of kids still living at home is 2.9
- On average, 4.5 people live in each household
- Over half of mums are 'gap mums' with both teenagers and children under six

ⁱ With the exception of one child, who was currently home schooled but had been previously enrolled in a Greenwich school



Isabella & Faye:
Mum, 4 kids at home (Boys
14 and 7. Girls 13 and 6),
1 son, 19, lives with Grandma



Lara, Mark & Jason:
Mum, Dad, 3 kids at home
(Boy 14 and 2 younger kids)



Keisha, Paul & Leiah:
Mum, Dad, 3 kids at home
(Girls, 12, 8, 6)



Melody, Thomas & Adeyemi:
Mum, Dad, 3 kids at home
(Boys 12 and 6, baby girl)



Kimberley & Chris:
Mum, 2 kids at home
(Boys 13, 7)



Alondra & Marlon:
Mum, 2 kids at home
(Boys 12, 3)



Ruby & Emma:
Mum, 4 kids at home
(Girls 13, 4. Boys 16, 9)



Jennifer, Ian & Brian:
Mum, Dad, 3 kids at home
(Boy 14, two younger kids)



Eva & Liliana
Mum, 3 kids at home
(Girl, 13, 2 younger kids)



Sophie & Ben:
Mum, step Dad, 3 kids at
home (Boys 13, 9. Girl 6)



Laila, Abdul & Halimah:
Mum, Dad, 4 girls at home
(12, 10, 8, 4)



Teresa & Jake:
Mum, 2 kids at home
(Boys 29 and 14)



Claudia, Benjamin & Gabriel:
Mum, Dad, 7 kids at home
(different ages) + 2 abroad



Ashley, Akim & Harrison:
Mum, Step Dad, 2 kids at
home (Boy 12. Girl, 2)
+ 19 year old lives away



Jess & Adam:
Mum, 2 kids at home
(Boy, 12. Girl, 15) + 25
year old living away



Jane & Fran:
Mum, step Dad, 3 kids at
home (Girl 12, toddler,
adult step daughter)



Omotolani & Ifede:
Mum, 2 kids at home
(Girl, 12. Boy, 9) + 20
year old living away



Katie & Shelley:
Mum, 4 kids at home
(Girls 15, 14, 12. Boy, 1)
+ 19 year old living away

Findings

Findings from the conversations with families are organised into five broad themes, detailed below. Before finalising the full research report, interim findings were shared at a 'validation event' with families who had taken part. This allowed them to review and 'sense check' findings before the report was written, as well as answer any remaining questions and correct any findings that did not feel like an accurate reflection of what they had said.

Once the research was finalised, we also held a community share out event in The Moorings. This was open for any resident to attend and allowed the research team to hear further perspectives on the findings. On the whole, residents who reviewed the findings concurred that they reflected their own experiences.



01

Living in Thamesmead



Perceptions of the area

'Thamesmead has got a bad rep but every place has its good and bad bits.' (Sophie)

There was a common consensus across the families we spoke to that Thamesmead is a calm, green, peaceful area which has not yet realised its full potential. Families acknowledge that Thamesmead sometimes has a bad reputation, but everyone asked said they would like to stay living in the area long term.

When it comes to local services and support, most families don't have a full picture of what is available to them or how support can be accessed. When they have accessed services, many have had negative experiences, which leaves them with the impression that the council and landlords don't really care about their residents.



Staying safe

Overall, most families' feelings correlate with official crime statistics - that Thamesmead is unsafe, but no less safe than other parts of London. Most feel comfortable walking around in the day, but few would walk around at night, especially not alone. Some families complain of poor lighting across the neighbourhood, which makes it feel less safe at night time and the area around Gogi'sⁱ is highlighted as a place where antisocial behaviour takes place and drug dealers hang out.

ⁱ Gogi's is the name of a single convenience store but the name is used by families to describe the Arnott Close 'square' outside Gogi's.

Online groups (e.g. facebook) are used by many to discuss and informally report local safety concerns, but can end up exacerbating rumours about incidents or crimes which may not have happened, or occurred differently in reality. A number of parents said hearing about crime online affects the way they feel about local safety and also acknowledged that their perception of Thamesmead being more dangerous than in the past might be influenced by now having children they want to protect.

***'I avoid Gogi's because of the drunk people hanging around there.'* (Lara)**

The past and future of Thamesmead

For parents who grew up in Thamesmead, many miss the things that used to be available to do locally and the sense of community they felt in the past. They say there used to be many free or low-cost activities available like Tavy Bridge Adventure Park, the boat club on Southmere Lake and the golf club where there were events and parties. These families in particular find it hard to engage with the idea of long term change when they simply want more basic amenities that would enhance convenience in their day to day lives, for instance more parking, local banks, a dedicated post office or a cinema.

***'All the social clubs and places are being closed down and replaced with housing.'* (Jess and Katie)**

***'I just want more shops, like a newsagent where I can top up my Oyster card.'* (Jess)**

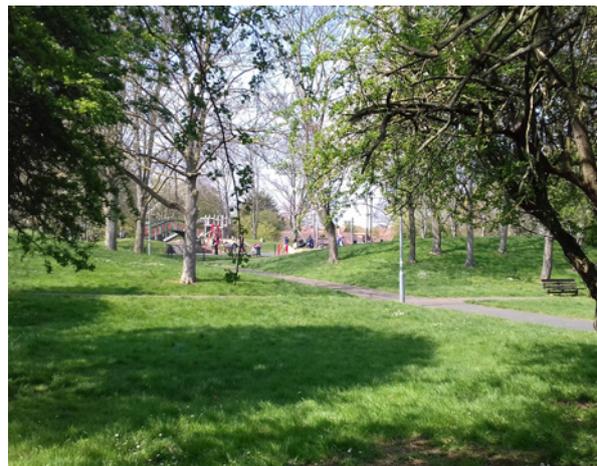
The demographics of people living in Thamesmead have changed over the years and white adults who grew up in Thamesmead worry that these changes have led to divisions in the community. In addition, many black African, Caribbean and mixed race residents have experienced forms of racism. Despite this, there is a genuine desire amongst families for a stronger sense of community and a belief that Thamesmead could be a better place for

everyone. The challenge is achieving this when so many say 'I keep myself to myself'.

***'I have friends from all over the world, like Nigeria and Jamaica'* (Alondra)**

***'I get called racist names on the street but I don't feel too affected by it'* (Paul)**

Whilst families realise Thamesmead has potential, most doubt they have the power to influence local plans or local decision making. Mums in particular say they lack the time or energy to get more involved locally, although the research included a small number of enthusiastic and well-connected mums who are natural 'community champions' linked to larger networks of local residents.



02

Daily life

Home and housing



8 live in Peabody social housing



4 are living in homes managed by 3 other housing associations



3 are in temporary accommodation



3 homes are privately rented

The majority of families live in social housing across The Moorings, usually in two or three storey terraced houses with small back yards and shared spaces in the immediate vicinity, such as small green spaces and squares, as well as parks and larger green spaces nearby.

***When I get off the bus and walk around here, I feel posh.* (Eva)**

Whether recently or in the past, many families have had problems with housing, experiencing slow or unresponsive landlords, poor quality housing, overcrowding and temporary accommodation. Poor quality housing affects families in lots of different ways, causing stress and impacting mental health

and resulting in some children feeling embarrassed about asking friends over to play or stay.

Almost half of the families interviewed live in Peabody housing. One or two residents say Peabody are fairly responsive landlords but other families in Peabody homes shared examples of poor housing conditions and repairs not being dealt with quickly or fully, which then affects their perception of Peabody as a landlord. This in turn clouds their view of the wider Peabody work within the community.

***'The council takes you and puts you somewhere. You don't really have a choice.'* (Eva)**

Leisure time

The families included in the research are larger than average and over half are headed by 'gap mums' who have both teenagers and children under six living at home. Having a large family and children of different ages can make it hard for families to take part in local activities and events as there isn't always something to keep all children across the age groups occupied and entertained.

Almost all families spend a lot of time indoors and mums say that activities for children are often expensive and there should be more to do that is free or very low cost. Whilst income is a major factor on how leisure time gets spent, mums and teenagers also complained about local green and blue spaces not being designed in ways that appeal to them. Mums would love more parks designed for young children, especially those with disabilities, and believe that existing spaces are not always

safe. Teenagers would like more places to meet friends and more to do when they are in green spaces, including places for recreational activities like BMX biking.

'I go to the park but sometimes it's more boring to do that because I'm just doing it for the sake of it and not because I want to.'
(Leiah, 12)



03

Health and wellbeing

Perceptions of good health

Poor physical and mental health affects many of the families we spoke to. Over half have someone in the household with a pressing physical health issue including diabetes, chronic pain and disease. A number of mums and teenagers have regular doctors' appointments and hospital visits as a result of health problems. These affect ability to work, socialise and regularly attend and learn in school.

When asked to define what being healthy means to them, young people say 'good health' is about diet, exercise and fresh air and can include both your body and mind, living a long life and even spending time with friends. However, very few families included mental health in their overall definitions of health.

'Being healthy means a longer life.' (Jason, 13)



13 families had a family member with a chronic or life limiting health condition



Half of the families had a child of any age with a health condition



Seven families include children with Special Education Needs

Talking about mental health

'Almost everyone has a mental health condition nowadays but I wouldn't talk to anyone about my feelings.' (Ashley)

Many parents and a smaller number of teenagers have dealt with mental health

problems and are comfortable sharing their experiences. When it comes to talking specifically about feelings and emotions, everyone finds this much harder and individuals are less likely to talk to others about these aspects of mental wellbeing, or think this is important to address.

Stigma related to mental health amongst black African and Caribbean families was raised as an issue by several black respondents and was reflected in our conversations, where it came up as a topic much less frequently than with white families. Potentially related to stigma, black teenagers were also much less likely to have been assessed for special educational needs in school compared to white teenagers.

'I thought when people said "you are depressed" they meant I was mentally challenged.' (Laila)

Many families describe living through traumatic events, and almost half of the mums interviewed have experienced domestic violence, regardless of their background. Mums who have been through difficult experiences rarely received formal support and instead focused on staying strong and self-sufficient. Their priority is keeping their children fed, healthy, safe and supported, which often means they have little time for themselves, or deprioritise this in favour of their children's needs.

'Between work, cooking for them, cleaning after them and doing the washing, there's no time for me.' (Kimberley)

'A healthy lifestyle'

'The council are obsessed that everyone in Thamesmead is fat' (Jess)

Health programmes happening in Thamesmead often feel like they are being imposed on residents by the council or organisations that don't understand the reality of people's day to day lives.

For families experiencing health issues, living a 'healthy lifestyle' is a low priority, and even a potentially frivolous idea, especially for those also struggling to make ends meet, for instance those using a food bank. Activities viewed as contributing to a healthy lifestyle, such as a low fat or low sugar diet or doing fitness classes are seen as prohibitively expensive and several families mentioned that a gym membership is not affordable.

'I would like to go to the gym but it's too expensive.' (Melody)

On average, children are more active than their parents and boys are more likely to cycle or participate in after school sports than girls, although a small number of teenage girls take part in team sports like football. When mums do exercise, it is usually incidental, for instance walking to places because they don't own a car.

Food and family

There is a perception amongst all families that healthy and fresh food is generally more expensive. This is also true for international foods, which are not readily available locally. An additional barrier to buying fresh food is regular income and some mums describe stocking up on long lasting convenience foods when they have some spare cash to ensure they will be able to feed the family when things are tight financially.

Approaches to food shopping are usually based on a family's financial circumstances, access to a car and proximity to local supermarkets. Those without cars describe

buying foods that keep for longer, rather than fruit and veg which spoils much more quickly and requires restocking more often.

'I care about healthy food but it's difficult for me to organise having fresh food at home because the supermarkets are far away from our house.' (Kimberley)

For families who have immigrated to the UK, food is a way to connect to cultural roots and an important mechanism for parents to teach their children about their heritage and connect to memories of growing up. Across the board, traditional home cooking is seen as being more nutritious than ready-made alternatives.

'We usually eat Jamaican at home because the children already eat English food in school.' (Eva)



04

Parenting

The importance of rules

Across all families, parents are trying to instil important values in their children such as obedience and respect. Setting rules is a key part of every parent's role, both to protect and keep their children safe and to try and encourage good behaviour. However, parents report that it can be hard to enforce rules when children split their time between two households or where their own rules or values conflict with what happens outside the home or at school.

'I'm a protector and if I wasn't protecting my kids, I would be protecting other family members' (Isabella)

For first generation migrant parents, parenting and rules are often based on experiences and traditions from their home country and it can be difficult to balance cultural differences and find a set of rules that fit with their own values and their children growing up in the UK.

'Gap mums', who have both teenagers and young children, face challenges trying to set different rules for different aged kids. Some find they have become more relaxed with the younger children (or children born later) after having children later in life.

'With the first kid it's your rules, with the middle one the rules go out the window and with the youngest it's their rules!' (Ashley).

Safety is a major concern for all parents and the majority of mums talk about the curfews they have in place for their children. Mums with sons particularly worry about them getting caught up in gang activity. This can affect what boys are allowed to do and where they can go outside the home, with

some mums commenting that they no longer let their sons go to parks or clubs where they have heard about violence happening.

'I worry about him falling in with the wrong crowd and remind him every day that drugs will only kill him or mean he ends up in prison' (Sophie, mum of Ben)

Due to parenting large families, mums spend the majority of their time looking after children, especially when children have additional needs or challenging behaviour. This leaves them with very little free time. However, most mums pride themselves on being highly self-sufficient and can find it hard to admit when they are struggling or need extra support and few are able to prioritise time alone or away from their children. Despite this, the majority are open to the idea of learning new parenting skills and strategies from other parents who have had similar experiences, but do not want to be told by 'officials' how to parent.



In half of the families involved, women are single parents with no dad living at home



Five of the children in Year 7-9 were living with their biological father



Four lived with a stepdad or their mum's partner

The involvement of dads

In the families we spoke to, fathers and male role models seem generally less present than mums in children's lives and over half live separately to their children. Dads who are around often take on the role of supporting the family financially and in families where dads live at home there are particular areas where they will get involved, for instance helping with maths homework or doing activities like fishing with sons.

When dads who live separately are taking part in parenting, they are not always a consistent presence. Irregular contact and the absence of dads has a particular impact on sons, with mums struggling to talk to them about topics like growing up and mental health, and worrying that they might be influenced by other males, for instance in gangs, as they grow up.

'I explained [to my son] that he's going to start to get hair "here and there". He pleaded "please stop Mum!"' (Alondra)

Work and motherhood

Of the eight mothers in work, all are employed part time with just one working four days a week. Those in employment are working their jobs around childcare and are sometimes restricted to working under sixteen hours per week due to benefit caps.

There is a sense amongst mums that motherhood is their vocation. Many say their identity is first and foremost as a mother, so any criticism of their role is a criticism of who they are at their core. Mums can find it hard to balance motherhood and work and many believe work presents a direct challenge to their role of being a mum.

***'It's so sad for the children whose mums work and never come to a school play. I go to all the performances.'* (Ruby)**

***'If I wasn't a mum, I'd be dead'* (Laila)**

Many mothers who want to get back into work or do more hours noted the lack of available local jobs that fit around childcare, especially when children have complex needs and require full-time attention. They felt there were few opportunities locally for mums to gain the skills and experience needed to return to work or find higher skilled jobs and many lack confidence as a result of trauma, health issues or due to being out of work for a while.

***'In the job centre they told me that as a mother, I have all the qualifications but they are not official.'* (Lara)**



10 of 18 mums we spoke to are currently out of work



Four of the unemployed mothers are unable to work because of health issues



Eight mums are in part time work

05

School and learning



Over half of mums say they struggled at school or dropped out early (8 are white British)



Five have been to college or university (all are black African or Caribbean)



Two mums have recently completed adult education courses to try and gain skills they missed at school

The views of parents on the importance of education and the schools their children attend can often be shaped or influenced by their own educational experiences. In particular, there appears to be a correlation between parents who themselves did well at school and children who are currently succeeding academically.

On the whole, parents say there is good communication between secondary schools and home and give many examples of positive relationships with individual teachers and administrative staff who go 'above and beyond' to support children who struggle with learning or attendance.

The transition to secondary school

Generally the idea of going up to secondary school was scarier for children than the reality and most enjoy the broader variety of subjects and activities available compared to primary school.

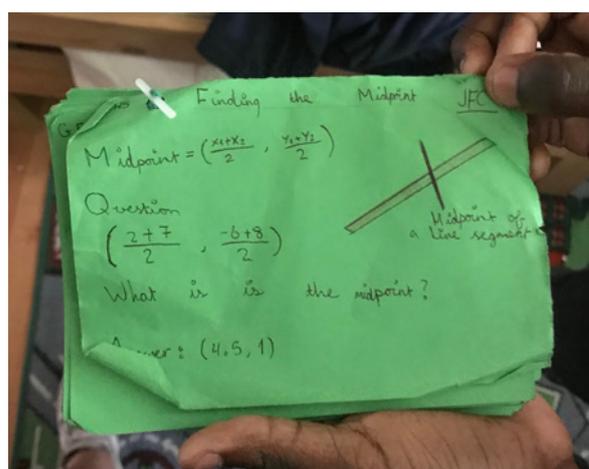
'Secondary school is both quite hard and really nice.' (Adeyemi)

However, secondary school is described by many children who have made the transition as much more 'stressful' than primary school and a place where you need to learn to be independent, find your own way around and manage your own time.

Violence and bullying is more common in secondary school and is accepted as part of the school experience. Young people describe having two choices - act tough and join in, or avoid attention to try and steer clear of confrontation.

'To avoid getting involved in fights I stay close to the classroom door and sit with my friend Tom.' (Adeyemi)

Despite some positive experiences, schools are sometimes seen as failing children in different ways. Some parents and children report bullying, racism and unfair treatment at schools, which affects children's ability to grow and learn.



Gabriel, who does well academically at school displays key cards he has made to help study for maths

Support in school

A high proportion of children had previously been diagnosed with, or were awaiting assessment of special educational needs. These were more commonly, and openly discussed, by white families

For children with special educational needs, primary school was seen as providing a more caring, friendly and supportive environment, whereas the scale of secondary schools means there is not always enough individual support for those who are struggling.

'If I got one to one support in my class I'd go back to school' (Emma)

The differences in the way black African, Caribbean, mixed ethnicity and white families experience living and accessing services in Thamesmead is most pronounced when it comes to school and home learning. White parents of children with special educational or behavioural needs felt that those who 'shout the loudest' are likeliest to get the most help and describe the struggle to get their children recognised as needing additional learning support. Conversely, very few black parents talked about their children's special educational needs and one Caribbean mum described how stigma associated with SEN is a challenge that prevents black parents seeking assessments for their children.

For a few families, pushing for support has been successful, but the process is arduous and emotionally draining. On the whole parents who are seeking additional support for their children also recognise that schools are under-resourced and unable to offer one to one support to all students who need it.

In some instances individual teachers and Heads of Year are going above and beyond to keep children in school and support parents, for instance picking children up when mums are struggling with mental health issues or making regular phone calls to support a parent trying to get her son to attend school.

'When I was struggling, the school sent staff to pick the girls up every day' (Laila)

Views on homework

Homework is mainly assigned via digital platforms like Doodle and accessed via children's phones or laptops. The majority of kids say they do their homework on their phone and that it doesn't take too much time. Even when homework is not completed, children say there are very few consequences in school and there is a sense that it is somewhat optional.

Almost all children in this study share rooms with siblings and there is very little dedicated or quiet space at home for them to do homework when they have it. In some families with multiple children, priority for using the computer was given to the oldest child, or the one currently doing GCSE coursework or studying for exams.

'I get it through Doodle and do it myself, mostly while lying in bed. The desk is more to put stuff on than to do homework! (Adeyemi, 12)

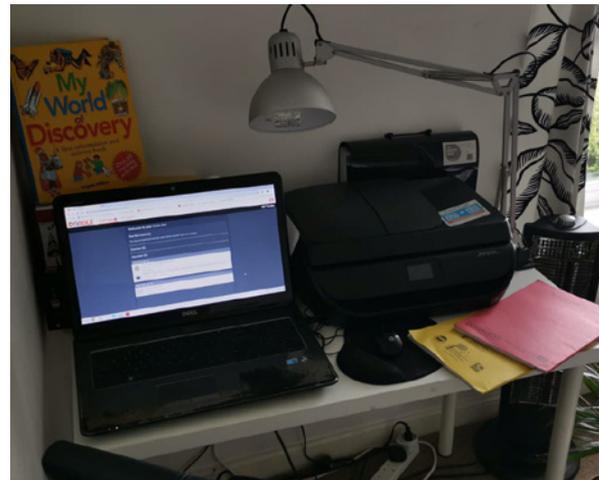
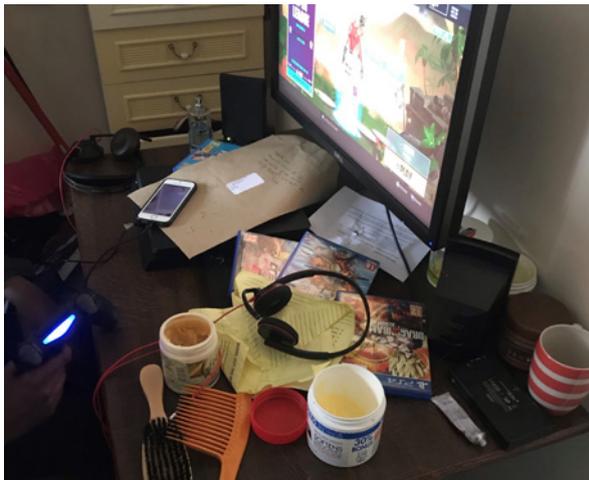
Parents with more education themselves try and support more directly with homework than those who struggled at school. For others they will sometimes perform a check by asking if the homework is complete, but rarely ask to see it, particularly because it requires logging into a digital platform and logins for parent profiles are often forgotten.

Future aspirations

The future feels very far off for many children and parents, potentially because around half are currently struggling with basic attendance and learning in school and find it hard to think beyond their existing challenges. Most parents have limited knowledge of the subjects their children will select for GCSEs, even when they are currently doing well academically and the majority of children are unclear about what subjects they will select or how this process plays out.

When it comes to thinking about the future, parents who have been let down in life or feel they have not achieved their own dreams are focused on making sure their children's aspirations are realistic.

'I don't like them looking too high of themselves. I like them to cut their coat according to their size.' (Laila)



Observations

The insights shared by 18 families as part of this research reveal opportunities to better support families living in The Moorings facing different challenges, in particular related to health and wellbeing, confidence, resilience and ability to access employment, education, services and local activities and events.

For those working with and providing support to residents and students, striving to understand the unique experiences of different types of families and tailor to their needs will be essential to building trust and creating lasting positive impact against the five thematic areas that emerged during the research.

The observations that follow are a combination of those made directly by residents and those that emerged during analysis of conversations with different families.

1. Make the most of skills and expertise within the community

Within Thamesmead there are a number of existing 'community champions' with connections to networks of families who are not currently linked with formal services and who do not attend activities and events happening locally. Investing and building a network of these community champions could unlock access to other families who are traditionally hard to reach, especially those who are distrusting of formal service providers like Peabody and the Council. They could also be a way to bridge the gap between different groups, building much needed community cohesion.

Parent peer-to-peer learning groups may be a viable mechanism for supporting parents, especially those who are reluctant to attend 'council' or 'official' training or courses. Parents are keen to learn from others who have had similar experiences, for instance those with children who have behavioural challenges or struggle in school due to special educational needs. Working with community champions with links to networks of black Caribbean and African families could also provide a means of overcoming stigma to reach and engage families in conversations around mental health and SEN on their own terms.

Peer support groups for local women could enable them to connect and share experiences. These could be for women who have been through domestic violence or who have mental health issues, but should not focus solely on 'problems', rather on talking and spending time with other women in a welcoming environment. These could be especially effective for mums who currently feel socially isolated and unable to ask others for help.

Community-led mentoring projects could provide appropriately trained and matched mentors for studentsⁱ. These mentors would provide tailored support to the student. This might mean, for example, working with students to raise their aspirations and encourage better school attendance, or supporting black students tackling issues of racism at school. A number of teenagers also suggested being matched with older student peer mentors in school as a way to share experiences and seek guidance from someone who understands their perspective better than an adult.

ⁱ As recommended in the report Black Caribbean Underachievement in Schools in England.

2. Tailor and diversify ways of communicating with residents

Across all services and activities happening locally, there is clear potential to shape communications and information to meet the needs and preferences of local residents. Respect and transparency must be at the heart of communications and organisations should design messaging to overcome literacy and language barriers that can affect the uptake of information.

Regular, accessible and direct communication of what is happening locally is essential to ensure that families realise what is available to them. It is important not to assume that residents who have participated in activities or used services previously will return or seek out the same opportunity in future years, particularly if it requires them having to update information themselves, which can be difficult when you have little free time on your hands.

Communication about local change, regeneration, events, activities and services needs to be improved. This includes sharing accessible information for the wide range of residents across all tenures and being open with them when plans change. Families would prefer to be told if local plans are cancelled or delayed and the reason for these changes, rather than feel like problems are hidden from them, which makes them lose respect for, and trust in, local institutions. Different families trust and access different communication platforms so creating a 'patchwork' of messaging utilising digital, paper, audio-visual and face to face methods will maximise reach.

Schools should find ways to communicate with harder to reach parents about expectations and their children's future. Engagement with parents needs to be done in ways that feel unthreatening and non-judgemental, especially with parents who had negative educational experiences themselves. One solution could be to provide regular drop in sessions with trusted teachers and counsellors for parents and children, ideally at accessible local spots like Hawksmoor Youth

Club. These sessions would provide a means to explain school rules, homework, GCSE selection process etc. to parents. It must be noted that parents will only engage fully with the content if childcare/ activities for small children are also provided.

Programmes to improve digital and adult literacy would benefit some parents. This would assist both their ability to support children's homework and find information online, as well as improve their own job prospects.

Recognise that communication can impact community cohesion too. There would be value in exploring ways existing community groups and activities can be structured to allow residents from different backgrounds and with different levels of English fluency to build connections, for example at children's or youth centres. Creative and game based activities may be routes to promote collaboration between those who do not normally find opportunities to interact locally.

3. Design and deliver services and programmes with end users in mind

From housing management to home tutors, there are a wide range of services that residents in The Moorings currently interact with or may access in the future. It is important that service providers and organisations working within Thamesmead recognise the complex and chaotic nature of many families' lives and adapt programmes and processes in light of their circumstances and needs.

Whilst resources are required to make significant changes to existing services or create new ones, there are opportunities for service providers to engage potential users in co-design initiatives that could result in greater uptake and therefore reach and impact on residents' lives.

Co-designing with residents:

Co-design initiatives are already underway in The Moorings but there is potential to involve less engaged residents in future. Working with community champions could be a way to identify and encourage 'less heard' families to take part in planned co-design sessions and all service providers should be striving to involve and consult a diverse range of residents in design and decision making.

Health and education programmes should involve and test new approaches with users, particularly in relation to language used for communications which can feel 'top down', judgemental or alienating for residents.

Involve young people in designing their own services, places and activities, particularly those related to spending time outdoors. Handing over some control of the programme of activities available through local providers (perhaps modelled on a participatory budgeting process) could help to ensure maximum buy-in from young people. This would lead to better uptake and use of local services, places and activities, and hence the likelihood of positive outcomes for children and young people.

Adapting what already exists:

Consider ways to lower thresholds to participation. Local activities, events and services should be designed for larger families with children of different age groups. Making it possible to bring more than two children along, and providing childcare if targeting parents, would encourage attendance by families who are usually more reluctant to take part and potentially grow their social networks through meeting others. Making activities free or very low cost would also open them up to all families.

Schools, youth and children's services should consider the needs of specific groups of children and young people. For instance, the absence of dads in lots of households means boys can struggle to find someone to talk to about growing up, which could be addressed with tailored programmes of

support focused on boy's mental wellbeing, growing up, aspirations etc. When targeting pre-school children, considering the needs and preferences of mums is just as important as delivering a good service for their children.

Creative arts events and activities need more careful thought and planning. Residents can feel as though events are not 'for them' and that funding should be invested in more important, practical solutions for improving the area. As harder to reach and second generation Thamesmead residents are more likely to look to the past than think about the future, reflections on the past and ideas of tradition could be interesting concepts to explore with creative events.

Mums want flexible, local jobs and would be willing to gain new skills if courses and training fitted around childcare and household management. There is potential for a local careers and jobs advice service targeted at mums, which could be combined with advice on how working will affect benefits. Any training targeting out of work mums should make provisions for on-site childcare to allow more women to take part.

The design of public and green spaces should respond to how different groups want to utilise them. Whilst mums of children with disabilities are concerned about a higher standard of safety and the accessibility of parks, young people feel there is little to do other than 'hang out' in open spaces and would welcome their transformation into places they want to spend time with friends.

About the Young Foundation

The Young Foundation's mission is to develop better connected and stronger communities across the UK.

As an UKRI accredited research organisation, social investor and community practitioner, we offer advice, training and delivery support to:

Understand Communities

Researching in and with communities to increase our collective understanding of community life today.

Involve Communities

Offering different methods and approaches to involving communities and growing their capacity to own and lead change.

Innovate with Communities

Providing tools and resources to support innovation to tackle the issues people and communities care about.

About the Moorings Children's Community

The Moorings Children's Community is a holistic, long term, partnership programme that aims to improve outcomes for children, young people and families living within the Moorings area of Thamesmead by working collectively across home, School and community. The programme is governed by a strategic group established in 2016 made up of representatives from Peabody, Royal Borough of Greenwich Public Health and Children's Services, Local Councillors, Local

Schools, Voluntary Sector partners Early Years and Youth Services.

This piece of research was commissioned by Royal Borough of Greenwich and Peabody through the Moorings Children's Community partnership in order to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of families living in the neighbourhood to further inform this work.

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