



Southwark Community Response Fund, April-September 2020

Final Report by United St Saviour's Charity: 16th November 2020

1. Southwark Community Response Fund - Overview

Following the announcement of a nation-wide lockdown, United St Saviour's Charity (UStSC) and Peter Minet Trust joined up with the London Funders team, and several other national/regional funders, to inform the development of a 'London Community Response' to the crisis. Over an intensive two weeks, a single application form, criteria, processes, eligibility and a central portal were pulled together – driven by London Funders. The fund went **live on 27th March**.

In Southwark, several members of the recently established Southwark Funders Forum came together to set up a dedicated Southwark Community Response Fund (SCRF). Contributions were also secured from developers and corporates. This fund was aligned to the London Community Response and all applications made through the central portal. At a local level the fund was managed by UStSC.

The overall aim of the SCRF was to support the community of Southwark to overcome the challenges presented by the lockdown, particularly in terms of mitigating the impact on the more vulnerable, socially and economically disadvantaged.

2. The Southwark Partnership

Partners and contributors to the fund were United St Saviour's Charity - UStSC (£150,000), Peter Minet Trust (£50,000), Southwark Charities (£75,000), Guy's and St Thomas' Charity (£250,000), St George the Martyr (£25,000), British Land (£20,000) and Womble Bond Dickenson (£3,750). A crowdfunding campaign (through Spacehive), supported by Southwark council, generated nearly £20,000 from individuals and businesses. By June, the total pooled fund in Southwark was **£593,372**.

3. Governance and Processes

Applicants applied through the London Funder's portal and a single application form, and screened for eligibility by a central team before being available for consideration by participating funders. At the SCRF level, terms of reference and membership for a Working Group and Advisory Group were drawn up and criteria for selection agreed.

The Working Group, comprising of UStSC, Peter Minet Trust and Southwark Charities, identified and assessed Southwark focused applicants. For the first two months, this group had almost daily contact. Applications and assessments were discussed and agreed via Zoom.

Weekly meetings of the wider 'Advisory Group' were also held. St George the Martyr and Guy's and St Thomas' Charity were invited to these meetings to allow for input into the process. While some

parties played a more active role than others in the assessment and approval processes, UStSC had ultimate authority in terms of decision-making.

At the outset, UStSC trustees granted staff delegated authority to approve grants of up to £30,000. This was critical to guarantee quick turn-around and payments; early grants were processed and funds out of the door within 10 days of applications being submitted. £351,000 of the funds were processed by the end of April - only a month from the fund launch date.

Speed was of the essence in getting the funding to local groups so the London Community Response used existing due diligence checks, shared between participating parties rather than initiating a new process. The SCRF applied additional 'light touch' checks for all local groups not known to participating funders. This included assessment of processes to prevent Covid 19 transmission for those involved with food distribution.

Communication between the SCRF partnership and the local authority was maintained throughout the lockdown to ensure co-ordination of efforts and minimize duplication. This involved UStSC participation in the Southwark Covid Hub steering group and regular sharing of information around emergency grants being awarded.

To ensure that funders were kept abreast of needs and developments in the rapid changing environment, fortnightly Zoom meetings took place between UStSC and a group of established and embedded local charities.

Two applicants were assessed and processed outside of the London Community Response portal. Through its local intelligence channels UStSC was aware that these important food banks had not applied through the portal. Quick phone calls revealed that they were in critical need of funds but had no time to apply so they were supported to make a direct application to UStSC and assessed, as others, by the partnership.

Principles woven into the approach of the Southwark partnership were trust, communication and a commitment to minimize administrative burdens for applicants. In practice, this meant that a lot of assessments were done by telephone conversations with applicants. Over 90 applications were assessed by the Working Group overall.

In line with the London Community Response, a proportionate and trust-based approach was also applied to monitoring. Only 6 simple questions are asked of applicants and at least 50% of monitoring reports are being done through phone calls or Zoom, with UStSC doing the write-ups. At a London-wide level, monitoring has been shared between collaborating funders, so when an organisation has been jointly funded, they only have to complete monitoring for one of the funders.

4. Funding Waves and Criteria

Between March and September 2020 there were 3 'Waves' of funding through the London Community Response:

- **Wave 1** was for crisis funding in the form of small grants of under £5,000, for food and essentials.
- **Wave 2** was for larger 'Crisis' grants of up to £10,000 and 'Delivering Differently' grants of up to £50,000 for initiatives which sought to reach and support population groups in different ways as a result of the Covid restrictions.
- **Wave 3** was launched at the end of lockdown at the beginning of July. In this wave applicants could apply for small and large grants for crisis activity, 'enable' and 'adapt' activities.

The local partnership selected applicants which were targeting Southwark alone or Southwark and one other borough. The process for selecting, assessing and awarding grants followed that of the London Community Response Fund except in Wave 3. On the back of the Black Lives Matters and the growing recognition that Black and Minority Ethnic groups were particularly badly impacted by the pandemic, a decision was made to prioritize Wave 3 grants in Southwark towards BAME- led, and particularly Black-led, groups. The approach and lessons are elaborated later in this report.

5. Funding Awarded

64 grants were awarded, to 54 different groups, totalling £589,139. Of this:

- £54,150 was allocated in Wave 1
- £417,149 in Wave 2
- £117,840 in Wave 3

The charts below show the distribution of the grants by nature of applicant, and the geographical distribution.

Table 1. Types of Groups Funded

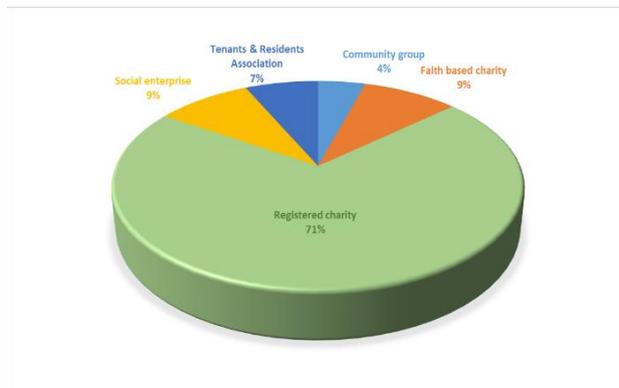
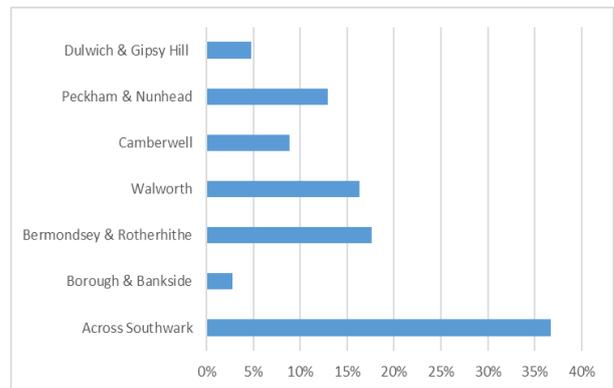


Table 2. Geographical Distribution (£)

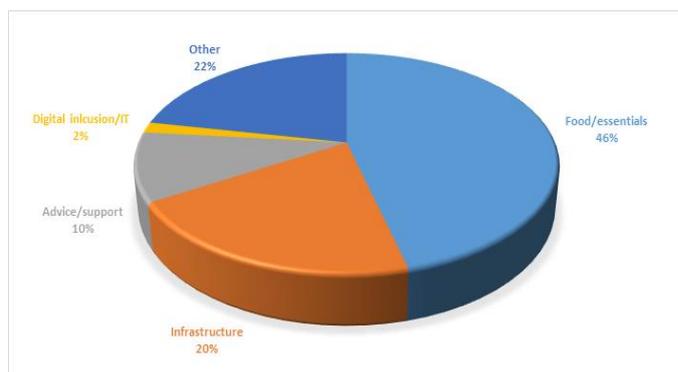


- **Population groups:** 53% of the total amount awarded targeted ‘vulnerable people’, in general. These were primarily those who were financially vulnerable and those isolating at home. 15% was focused specifically on older people and 12% on children and young people.
- **Equalities (racial):** 30% of the total awarded (39% of the grants awarded) went to BAME-led groups. 65% of Wave 3 funds were allocated to small, Black-led groups embedded in Southwark’s BAME communities.
- **Grant sizes:** the average grant size was £9,500. The largest was £42,000 towards the costs of running a large food distribution hub across much of north and central Southwark. The smallest was £1,600 to support a community choir to deliver their sessions (for people with mental health and anxiety issues) online.

Nature of Grants awarded

The table below shows the breakdown of types of activity provided across the 3 waves.

Table 3. Grants Awarded by Activity Type



As noted, nearly half the grants supported food and essentials for people in need. However, some of the funds in the 'infrastructure' category also supported the back office and transformation costs associated with food distribution. Some of the 'infrastructure' investment also supported IT and telecommunication capital costs for charities, many of which found that their infrastructure was insufficient to support the demands of home working and remote contact with clients.

The 'other' category included programmes and support for young people and care leavers, amongst other things. More details are included in section 7 below and [Appendix 1](#) provides full details of the grants awarded.

6. Tackling Racial Inequality - Wave 3

The pandemic quickly shone a light on the huge inequalities in our society, with particular BAME groups disproportionately affected by the virus, both directly and indirectly. The surge of anger following the killing of George Floyd in May reinforced the urgency of action relating to racial inequality. Waves 1 and 2 had highlighted the critical role that small, voluntary, Black-led groups were playing in reaching and supporting some of the most financially vulnerable people through the crisis. At the same time, the funders knew that such groups typically struggle to secure funding; national research shows that 87% of BAME organisations have a turnover of less than £10,000 and 19% have reserves of less than 3 months.

On the basis of the above, the Southwark partnership agreed to prioritise its remaining funds towards small, BAME-led groups. Peter Minet Trust asked that their Wave 3 contribution was specifically directed towards Black-led groups.

The prioritising criteria was that:

- >51% of management committee/trustees or senior managers were BAME (and specifically Black)
- Annual turnover £100,000 or less
- Applying for a grant of £10,000 or less.

Drawing on the lessons from Waves 1 and 2 (in terms of the barriers some smaller, Black groups had faced in applying), the approach to engaging and selecting involved 4 components:

1. Prioritisation in selection (higher weighting to BAME and Black-led groups)
2. Promotion through the recently established BAME network (of Community Southwark)
3. Proactive engagement and support: an online surgery (explaining/supporting how to apply) and phone based support to any group needing it

4. Engaging 'Critical Friends' into the assessment and decision-making process

Following consultation with the recently established BAME Network, two 'critical friends' from, and active in, the Black community in Southwark were engaged and paid to work with the partnership to identify, assess and recommend grants. Working to a clear brief, an induction into the process was given via Zoom, the long list of applications was provided. The two consultants then joined the Working Group to discuss and agree on final grants to be awarded for Wave 3.

65% of Wave 3 was then allocated to Black-led groups (compared to 30% in Waves 1 and 2). Many lessons were also learnt about the barriers that need to be removed and the kind of approach funders should take to ensure that similar small groups have a better chance of securing funding in the future.

Observations and findings:

- There are a large number of small, passionate, voluntary groups who are serving the needs of particular population/cultural groups within the Black community in Southwark. Many are motivated by Christian values. Another motivating factor is the perception that they need to help each other because no-one else (the authorities) will do so.
- These small voluntary groups often require investment and improvements in governance/policies/processes; this will increase their success securing mainstream funding.
- Because many of them are local and run by volunteers, they tend to be less connected with services and other organisations whose input could be beneficial to users.
- For some – especially user-led, new migrant groups – making a funding application can be challenging. This can be because of language and writing skills. Online application forms can create yet another barrier.
- It is simplistic and naïve to consider the Black community as 'one'; there are many different cultural identities, groups and ways of operating. This needs to be better understood by the voluntary sector and funding community if engagement and support is to be affective.
- There is definitely value in ring-fencing or prioritising funding specifically for Black or particular BAME-led groups in order to level the playing field and ensure reach. Using resources to provide additional support those who need it, was beneficial.

7. Activities and Impact

Headlines

Across all waves, the SCRF helped to ensure that:

39,000 Southwark residents received support (of various kinds) to mitigate the impact of the lockdown. This included the following:

7,700 families and 9,030 individuals in need received weekly food and essentials, distributed by an army of volunteers. They were 'in need' because of isolating at home or financially struggling because of the lockdown.

750 refugees/asylum seekers and around **4,400** new immigrants – received regular food parcels, essentials and support. Many of these groups were very hard hit by the lockdown. This figure includes advice in Spanish for Latin Americans, befriending and other support for the Somali community.

30,000 cooked meals were produced and delivered to older and vulnerable people who were not able or wanting to leave their houses over lockdown (many of whom would normally be attending community or day centres).

6 of Southwark's food distribution hubs received funds to cover staffing, infrastructure and food supplies. This enabled them to secure food and distribute food to thousands of people in need. The funding was particularly critical given that many of them had to close their buildings and forfeit the essential income.

5 frontline organisations were funded for essential IT or phone improvements so that they were able to continue to deliver important community and 1-1 services to around 6,500 users.

1,600 children and young people were engaged and supported in various ways, from provision of computers to homework support, mentoring and youth club activities (after July) and online activities.

A helpline for homeless people was set up with start-up funding and received 600 enquiries over 12 weeks.

120 tenants in financial stress and/or at risk of eviction because of the lockdown have been funded to get legal and other advice (a 12 month service)

80 care-leavers, a particularly vulnerable group at this time, were supported with an online helpline and therapeutic support

500 people with mental health and anxiety concerns, were able to take part in an online community choir and received online peer support.

1,850 local residents benefitted from online community quizzes and events, exhibitions, socially distanced fetes and cycling projects during the covid-19 restrictions.

Case Studies from the Southwark Community Response Fund

Case Study 1: Pembroke House



Pembroke House is a historic ‘settlement’; a multi-purpose community centre located in the heart of Walworth, one of Southwark’s highest deprivation areas. At lockdown, they responded quickly and radically to the crisis, redeploying their staff and turning their building into a food distribution hub to respond to the explosion of need. Using volunteer packers, sorters and cyclists, they organized the delivery of food across the centre and north of Southwark. Delivery continues in November as the country enters a second national lockdown.

The SCRF awarded Pembroke House **£41,700** to cover infrastructure and staffing costs relating to the food distribution hub. This supported costs of the Distribution Centre Supervisor, the Referrals Manager, Rider Liaison and Dispatcher, Administrator and Cleaner. It also contributed towards equipment and consumables.

For 6 days a week, food – much donated by Fareshare and some purchased – was delivered to the Pembroke house building. It was sorted by volunteers and packed into parcels which were delivered by volunteer bike couriers across Walworth and surrounding areas (from Peckham to Surrey Quays). Across the 4 year grant period, over 105 tonnes of food was processed and delivered, in the form of 12,300 food parcels.

Nearly 200 volunteers were recruited and inducted, contributing 8,651 hours to the Hub, with around 100 cyclists working several shifts a week during the peak of lockdown. If each of these hours had been paid at the London Living Wage, the cost would have been almost £93,000. Volunteer couriers cycled c. 37,700km. At the start of the grant period we were receiving referrals from 19 partner organisations, which had risen to 31 by the end of August. Around 2,300 families were supported over the period.

Quotes from users and referral partners:

‘I just want to let you know how pleased I was with the food parcel delivery today. The food is, as always, excellent. I was very happy to receive it.... It’s not just receiving the parcels though, Christmas-like as that can seem, it’s the break in routine, the nice people who make the deliveries, and feeling grateful to be remembered at this time of difficulty ... I ask that please would you convey our thanks for this kindness.’

'We referred the family for regular food deliveries from Pembroke House at the start of the lockdown, knowing that feeding 5 children who would be at home every day for weeks on end would be impossible for them to do without help. This has truly been a life-line for them. School staff contact parents every week, and every single time, the parents express their gratitude for the food deliveries.'

Case Study 2. Elim House Community Association



Serving: Oxtail, rice, potatoes, green salad and yagot



Elim House Community Association is a day care organisation for the elderly based in Peckham. Formed back in, 1980 they are a facility and social club for primarily (but not exclusively) Caribbean elderly people in the area. The organisation runs a full time day centre which provides leisure time activities and day time community care. In normal times they do lunches, games, exercise classes and a variety of activities for over 60s.

They were awarded **£14,856** in two separate grants (in Wave 1 and Wave 2) to provide outreach support to elderly people and a 'meals on wheels' services in the form of a culturally appropriate lunch for Caribbean elders. In addition, they delivered food and other daily necessities given to them by a local supermarket and ran a small a food bank, to those who needed it.

Using a small team of volunteers, the first grant enabled them to provide and deliver lunches 3 days per week for the 30 elderly people who could not attend the Day Centre because of lockdown. But word spread across the community and the second grant, a slightly larger amount, allowed them to extend their meals on wheels service for to another 20 elderly people.

They ended up delivering meals over a very wide area, including Peckham, Jamaica Road, New Kent Road, Brandon Estate, Nunhead and Upland Road in East Dulwich.

One of the surprising things that the team reflect on is the large number of elderly people in the community needing help – and who are not connected with family or any other groups. 20 of the people receiving meals on wheels were first time users. As we approach a second lockdown, the team are very concerned about the exhaustion of staff and volunteers.

Feedback from an Elim House referral partner.

'Hello Team. Faye has asked that I pass on a message saying 'complements to the chef'. She says that she thoroughly enjoys the meals as it takes her back to her childhood. Faye says that the meals drag up a lot of memory and she would like to have the service for as long as it is in existence. She says that the person who delivers her meals is also very lovely'.

Case Study 3. Home Start Southwark



Home-Start Southwark provides high quality practical and emotional support through programmes and group work to struggling Southwark parents who are often experiencing social and emotional problems. Their input enables families to create happier lives for their babies and children under the age of 5. Since 1995, Home Start Southwark has supported over 2,700 families and 7,500 children, and recruited and trained around 640 local volunteers.

They were awarded **£31,440** in two separate grants (in Wave 1 and Wave 2). Home-Start recognised that a coordinated response to emergency food packages would not be in place immediately at the start of lockdown and that made it's many families quite vulnerable. Its first grant provided 30 families with emergency vouchers for a local supermarket (specified not to be used on tobacco or alcohol) every week for four weeks during lockdown. The families, most of whom are lone parents without support networks, had expressed concern over affording essential supplies including nappies, food and baby milk. This was a hugely welcome and timely intervention.

Lockdown also meant that, like many other charities, Home-Start had to change how it delivered its face-to-face services and group work. So the second grant enabled Home-Start to transform its service delivery and support be delivered remotely. The programmes were modified and set up so they could be used by families and volunteers through online platforms. 80 families benefited from this shift and Home-Start sees this as something that will be beneficial in the long term – supporting but not substituting face-to-face and group work

The second grant also allowed them to purchase smart phones and iPads for staff to run courses remotely, host interactive groups and design ongoing training and volunteer supervision groups digitally. Kindle Fires were purchased for volunteers and families so that they could use video conferencing to stay in touch and provide emotional support, and some families and staff received upgraded broadband packages. Physical resource packs were compiled for children and families that could be used in the online groups as well as independently, and women with mental health issues took part in an online CBT course to develop their coping strategies.

Cheryl Rhodes, Director, Home-Start Southwark, said (of the Wave 1 grant):

'The difference this makes to families cannot be overstated. This funding gives them some security they can look after their children in the immediate future and it gives people a sense of self-direction and personal autonomy at a time when this is largely removed from them.'

8. Reflections

The impact of the lockdown

- In line with the national picture, the crisis starkly highlighted inequalities in Southwark's society, with certain population groups disproportionately affected by the virus and lockdown.
- The lockdown revealed the inadequacies - often absence - of a welfare safety net. New immigrant communities were very vulnerable and the large numbers of people with No Recourse to Public Funds had nothing to fall back on. Southwark clearly has greater numbers than anyone was aware of.
- It revealed the widespread lack of financial resilience for many who lost their jobs overnight and were unable to feed their families. The Latin American community, present in large numbers in Southwark and Lambeth, and working in insecure, low-paid work, were (and still are) badly impacted.
- The crisis also highlighted how many residents had limited social connections and networks and turned to the communit/voluntary sector for help.

The local response to the crisis

- The voluntary sector played a critical role in responding to the crisis and supporting those who were vulnerable. Many charities repurposed themselves overnight to become food distribution hubs, acting with extraordinary speed and efficiency to get food to people across the borough. There was great collaboration and sharing between groups.
- The crisis has also highlighted the critical role of very small community groups and faith groups in ensuring people got food and human contact through the lockdown (including many Tenants and Residents Associations and newly established Mutual Aid Groups).
 - There was a surge of volunteering and giving across civil society. Thousands of people gave their time (through charities and Mutual Aid Groups) and many local businesses teamed up with the social sector to produce and distribute food for those who needed it. Several successfully fundraised to cover the costs.

Impact on the charity sector

- The lockdown and response has had a mixed effect on charity sector finances. Those with diverse income streams were (ironically) most negatively affected, with budgets hit by falls in trade or room hire. Some food banks/community fridges were overwhelmed by demand just as they were forced to furlough staff due to hall hire income.
- In contrast, some charities who managed to secure crisis/emergency grants have found their budgets are in a better position this year than previous years. However, the looming crisis is 2021 when the financial picture is bleak, and many funders have not yet opened their normal grants programmes. This financial stress will come at a time when demands for services will be huge due to the economic situation.
- The pressure on frontline staff and volunteers has taken its toll. While systems and co-ordination are much improved, many in the social sector talk about the emotional and exhaustion they feel as they face the prospect of having to respond again.

Collaboration and partnership

- The crisis catalysed extraordinary collaboration and partnership working across and between sectors. Relationships were both forged and strengthened through the SCRF. The

practicalities of delivering such a large and urgent programme, in such challenging circumstances, demonstrated the viability, potential and impact of working together (going so far as to pool funds) around a particular issue.

- Early agreements on delegated authority proved essential to the speed and success of the fund. Participating trusts delegated decision-making to the Working Group and trustees largely delegated decision-making largely to officers; this enabled quick and smooth turn-around of funding. Similarly, participating funders (St George the Martyr and Southwark Charities) were sensitive to the need to get funds to the right places, and helpfully found ways to ensure compliance with their grant-making restrictions but without restricting the process.

Challenges

- There were great benefits to being part of the shared 'London Community Response' programme. The London Funders team were efficient and dynamic; they mobilised £millions in a very short space of time and developed systems, processes and forms fast and collaboratively. However, the London-wide portal, with over 60 participating funders, sometimes restricted the speed and flexibility of the SCRF. The (inevitable) processes introduced to structure the programme occasionally worked against the principle of relational funding which some of the place-based Southwark partners value highly.
- Running a high pressure grants programme during lockdown, when most people were working from home, was hugely challenging. Grant-making is more an art and a science and assessments by the participating funders are typically made on the basis of meetings and visits. This was generally not possible and resulted in increased financial risk, amongst other things. While decision-making and discussion between funders can take place extremely well online, there is no doubt that grant-making is better done through visits and face-to-face discussions.
- The lockdown meant that the 'business as usual' grants programmes of many funders were paused and all available funding diverted towards the crisis. Inevitably much of the funding went towards food and essentials, or services addressing urgent concerns (such as the threat of homelessness). This will inevitably have had a negative impact on many organisations not able to secure funds because of the nature of their work. For example, many arts and cultural organisations applied for funding but were rejected on the basis that their applications were 'not urgent' (and resources limited). It will be critical for local funders to analyse the impact of this, and carefully consider where future funding is directed.

The value of being place-based

- The impact of the lockdown, and the local responses, were unprecedented, quick and complex. As things unravelled, the situation was changing on an almost daily basis. In this fast moving environment, the value of being embedded in the community and in the ecosystem of Southwark, cannot be over-stated. The allocation and prioritisation of the SCRF was informed by ongoing communication with local groups, charities and local authority. This was supplemented by observation and occasional visits, easy for UStSC staff and trustees who live in Southwark. This helped the wider SCRF partnership understand what was happening on the ground.

9. Conclusions and the Future

The SCRF was the first time that several local funders have come together to pool their funds in Southwark. Much was learnt and many relationships cemented in the process – paving the way for more collaboration or aligning of funds in the future. The most salient lessons are below.

Leverage. The SCRF clearly demonstrated the potential and power of leverage, with a fourfold increase on the initial contribution ultimately achieved. The very early agreement between UStSC and the Peter Minet Trust convinced others to contribute and Southwark Charities quickly signed up, followed by GSTC. This important early message of collaboration was supported by good personal contacts at different levels between organisations.

Leadership. Three levels of leadership were central to the success and wider impact of the SCRF. Firstly, the extraordinary leadership demonstrated by London Funders in setting up the London Community Response. This kick-started an unprecedented programme of collaboration in extremely challenging circumstances. Secondly, the early agreement of UStSC to lead and manage the funds brought others to the table in Southwark. Thirdly, the leadership modelled by the SCRF core partnership resulted in the setting up of a Lambeth Community Response Fund. Led by the Walcot Foundation, this followed and adapted the SCRF model.

Collaboration and partnership. The SCRF clearly demonstrated the potential and value of funders working in partnership to address a particular issue. Strong relationships and trust between different parties have been developed. This will - hopefully – result in further alignment or pooling of funds for greater impact at a time when it is most needed. However, the resources required to make such a partnership a success cannot be under-estimated. Behind the scenes there was a huge amount of work carried out by the UStSC team who managed the funds, the grant-making, and reporting. Only because ‘business-as-usual’ grant-making was put on hold was this possible.

Local knowledge and connections. The other thing that cannot be over-estimated is the value of local connections, knowledge and ‘on the ground’ presence. In the fast moving environment, UStSC insights and knowledge of impact, responses and developments, was critical in ensuring that the funds were deployed to best effect. This was also an important element in the drive to bring others on board and contribute their funds.

The lens of equality. Finally, SCRF made some important first steps in addressing issues relating to racial inequity in grant-making in Southwark. The approach that was applied was simple but effective and many more small Black-led organisations were awarded SCRF funding in the last wave (65%). The lessons learnt from this approach – especially involving representatives of the Black community in the assessment and decision-making processes – will form the basis of further action in this important area.

Sarah Thurman, United St Saviour’s Charity