



Supporting the progression of *all* young people

Learning from One Southwark's first cohort

July 2024

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Introduction

Southwark has been described as a borough of ‘two halves’, with pockets of extreme need sitting alongside considerable wealth and opportunity.¹ The One Southwark programme, launched in March 2022, managed by United St Saviour’s Charity, seeks to address the effects of this disparity on young people in the borough through two parallel routes:

- **Supporting the progression and wellbeing of young people** (those selected to be on the programme) through individualised and holistic support over two years. By mobilising businesses, funders, community groups and residents to give their time, money, networks and influence, to ‘*level the playing field*’ for underrepresented young people.
- **Championing and influencing changes across Southwark** by affecting the behaviours and practices of community stakeholders (businesses, charities, funders, statutory agencies, residents), which remove barriers and strengthen opportunities for young people. Supporting young people to be leading contributors to these conversations.

The One Southwark programme was set up as an alternative to the traditional London Giving model that provides grants to place-based organisations.² Instead, the programme provides a package of support over two years to a group of young people (referred to as One Southwark ‘members’) between the ages of 16 and 25.³ The package includes financial support, mentoring, events and training, and access to an ‘Asset Network’ comprised of local organisations and individuals.

The programme has a full-time Programme Director who shapes the strategy and development of the Asset Network, alongside a Programme Coordinator who leads on the direct support to members. One Southwark is supported by a Coalition of local partners, designed to be ‘*the decision-making body for the giving scheme, and responsible for direction, design and delivery*’.⁴

IVAR has worked alongside One Southwark as a learning partner between July 2022 and July 2024 to help capture One Southwark members’ journeys and the programme’s progress towards its ambitions. The insights shared in this report are based on research carried out over the two years with the One Southwark team, programme participants and Southwark stakeholders providing the training, support and programme governance (Asset Network and Coalition members).

Further details about the research process and methodology are shared in Appendix One.

¹ Walker, C. (2016) [A Tale of Two Southwarks: a needs analysis of the London Borough of Southwark](https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/southwark-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/); Dr Catherine Walker 2016. See also: www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/southwark-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/; www.npi.org.uk/files/6614/7316/1332/Demography_and_deprivation_in_Southwark_and_Tower_Hamlets.pdf

² Southwark’s Giving scheme is part of a wider ‘giving’ movement which has, at its heart, a belief in the power and potential of place, partnership and citizen voice to change things for the better and the long term. For more information, see <https://londonsgiving.org.uk/>.

³ Those young people approaching the age of 25 commented that the great thing about One Southwark is that there are no access requirements, in particular an age restriction, that would prevent them from applying.

⁴ One Southwark Coalition Terms of Reference, 10th September 2021.

Part one: What we learnt about the One Southwark model

In its first two years, One Southwark has supported a cohort of 21 members. Figure 1 illustrates the support package available to each member, the various elements of which were tailored to individuals' specific needs.

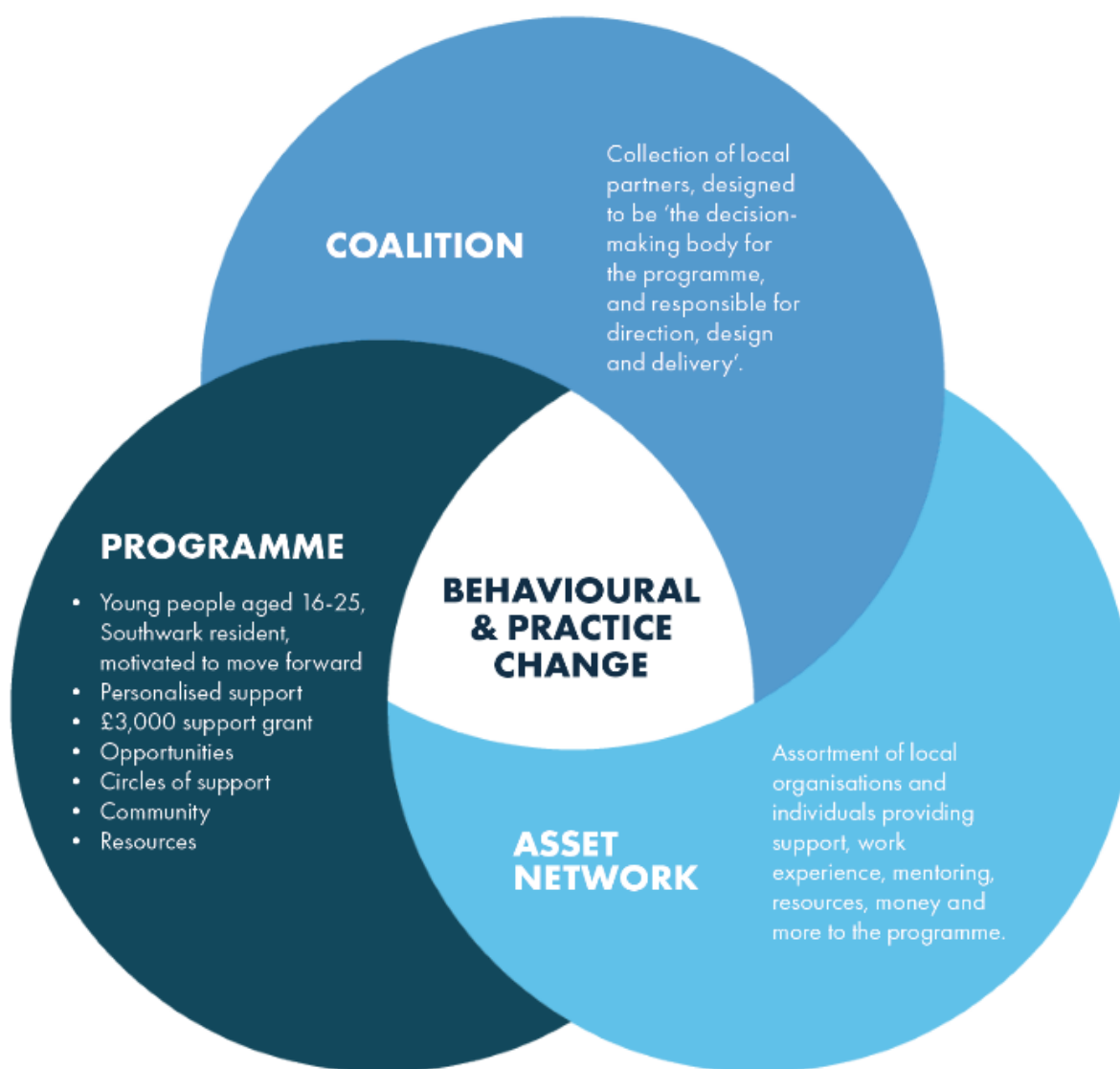


Figure 1: One Southwark's Programme Model (Source: [One Southwark Brochure](#))

The One Southwark theory of change is shared in Appendix Two.

Impact on One Southwark members

For many of the members who took part in the first One Southwark cohort, the programme has had a significant impact on their outlook, their understanding of and confidence in themselves, and their strengths and abilities. In turn, it has contributed to tangible developments in their lives – from having a clearer sense of the next path they want to pursue; through to identifying and putting into practice certain employment or education goals.

The main ways in which members felt the One Southwark programme had impacted them were:

- Able to better understand themselves and explore their interests through person-centred support.
- Able to access support and materials previously inaccessible to them (as a result of the grant).
- Gave them increased confidence, self-esteem and has had a positive effect on their wellbeing.
- Learnt and strengthened practical skills.
- Accessed new networks.

Person-centred support

Once on the programme, members started their journey with a personal plan developed with the One Southwark Programme Coordinator, in which they identified their goals and aspirations. The programme supported members as they approached a point of transition, for example, leaving college, entering the world of work, living independently, etc.

Members were offered monthly one-to-ones with the One Southwark Programme Coordinator to identify opportunities and share challenges:

‘It’s provided the support I didn’t have before. One Southwark is focussed on what you want as an individual and going to people for advice has helped and is ongoing. It makes you accountable and gives autonomy in a positive way. You’re not just told, “You’re responsible for your own life ... there are people to chat with if you need”.’
– One Southwark member

The programme then acted as a broker, connecting people with opportunities provided by the growing Asset Network and organising sessions and workshops to develop skills, meet with peers or build networks. Members really valued the opportunity to be given access to a range of different opportunities, to test out what different environments and workplaces feel like but without having the pressure of committing to a particular course of action:



“

One Southwark is not a work placement programme and its richness is on focusing on the individuals.”

Solomon's story

Programmes like Rise and One Southwark have provided Solomon with crucial support, mentorship, and opportunities: *'One Southwark's regular check-ins and goal-setting sessions have been instrumental in helping me step out of my comfort zone. Through the programme, I've been connected with mentors and given the chance to explore various interests, from animation to boxing.'*

Through work placements and internships, Solomon gained confidence and insights into the professional world. *'My involvement through a work placement at the Old Vic and an internship at Brightsmiths expanded my horizons. These experiences not only boosted my confidence but also provided me with insights into the professional world.'*

The flexibility and individual focus of the program have empowered Solomon to share his journey confidently and pursue new opportunities. *'I've learned that pushing myself out of my comfort zone leads to growth and I'm now more comfortable engaging with others and tackling new challenges.'*

Access to flexible financial support

Members shared a sense of anxiety about the economic situation, in particular the cost of living, as well as a perception that opportunities and access to meaningful employment aren't going to get any easier over the next 10 years. In addition to worrying about generating income, members also said they lack the skills to manage their finances. Some worried about being able to access funding to study, and others thought that they would be at a disadvantage when they got to university because they would have to spend more time than their wealthier peers in paid employment to support themselves.

One Southwark grants are used on the goals for progression identified by members and the parameters as to how and on what they are to be spent are broad.

Uses⁵ of the grant included:

- Purchasing technology
- Wellbeing, e.g., private counselling sessions and ADHD assessments
- Housing, e.g. repairs, arrears for bills, furniture
- Childcare
- Paying bills and buying food
- Driving lessons
- Courses, e.g. 3D animation, security, food hygiene, additional tutoring
- Gym memberships

⁵ Figures accurate as of March 2023

The above were based on members identifying that these were things that were creating a barrier and/or impacting their health and wellbeing, with the grant helping to alleviate certain pressures and help them focus on their progression.

Key to the financial support has been the individuals' ability to determine how they want to use the grant to help them pursue their goals.

Three members used their grant to obtain ADHD assessments and spoke about the negative impact not being assessed had on their progression. All of them had struggled to obtain free assessments through their GP or school. Using their One Southwark grant, they were able to access private assessments and treatment: *'Obtaining the ADHD assessment has literally been life changing'*, and *'things have started to make sense'*. One young person is now using her platform at work to promote understanding in her organisation and encourage and support others struggling with ADHD.

Across the cohort of 21 members, some of the larger grant amounts were spent on enterprise, with members investing in their business ideas.

Victoria's story

Victoria joined One Southwark whilst studying medicine and is passionate about investing in communities for health promotion and disease prevention: *'We need to empower people to live healthier lifestyles and prevent unnecessary deaths.'*

To realise her vision, Victoria used some of the financial support offered by One Southwark to launch Nurtured, a public health initiative focused on disease prevention through health promotion: *'Through Nurtured, we aim to provide information about various health topics via social media, collaborate with organisations promoting health and wellbeing, conduct research, and offer culturally competent workshops in the community.'* The overall goal is to *'protect, promote, and maintain health and wellbeing, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3.'*

Victoria hopes that Nurtured will benefit people from diverse backgrounds, empowering them to take charge of their health and wellbeing: *'By investing in community-based initiatives like Nurtured, we can create a healthier and more empowered society.'*

Increased confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing

Many members reported experiencing poor mental and physical health, a complex and differently experienced issue for each individual. In addition, members highlighted the negative effects of the pandemic on their confidence and progression, having missed out on many experiences and opportunities. These are issues many are still working through.

Some members felt isolated and lonely because of not having family or friends close by, which was further compounded for those who are single parents.

Members described the prevalence of 'competition' – starting in education and continuing as they enter the job market, while also prevailing in other spaces like social media – as

having negative effects on wellbeing. Poor mental wellbeing was affecting members' ability to make decisions about the future and also made it difficult for some to engage with the opportunities on offer via the programme fully.

One Southwark staff placed emphasis on building trusting relationships. Members said working with someone they trust has helped them find purpose, pinpoint their strengths and skills, identify relevant opportunities (volunteering, work-experience, part-time employment) and translate new ideas, experiences and skills into the next steps:

'Having someone to talk to if I am panicking or struggling or not sure what to do has been good. Even sending a message has helped. I can see that it just helped align me slowly.'

Work experience, mentoring and peer spaces provided opportunities to meet new people. Members reported feeling increased confidence and self-esteem after these interactions. Meeting with peers also helped them feel motivated by each other's experiences:

'I would find these things [networking events] scary initially but I was determined to go and try them even if it was to get support or talk to someone, just one person and leave. After a while, I wasn't scared anymore, and this is the biggest difference One Southwark has made.'

One Southwark offers a flexible and exploratory learning experience for those who are less sure about what they want to do. They can investigate a range of opportunities, pause and focus on a particular life challenge, and then explore a different path. Members said that the programme gave them this headspace to work out what they might want to do and helped them make informed decisions about the future:

'I've learnt to value working on myself.'



Learning and strengthening practical skills

Many young members joined the programme at a crossroads in their personal and professional development, for example, as they approached the end of school, college or university. Others had struggled to access their chosen employment or academic pathway.

Some mentioned that they were frustrated by the lack of practical skills development and practice experience made available in school and felt that there was too much focus on academic experience.

Accessing meaningful employment was front of mind, and members were keen to connect with industry professionals that may be able to support and guide them:

'I know where I want to go but I need the guidance in getting to those places which otherwise I wouldn't be able to access and get support along the way.'

One Southwark organises a range of events focused on building personal skills like financial literacy, CV writing, time management and balancing competing pressures (wellbeing). There are also opportunities for members to join subject and industry-specific sessions on things like project management, branding, comms and web development, as well as connecting sessions with professionals where they can find out more about a particular career or industry.

Networking sessions helped members feel more comfortable in different spaces:

'These small things really add up over time and add to your confidence ... Now I know what to say in networking places ... It's not only about professional skills, but the softer skills that we can apply to different areas of our lives.'

The programme was also able to provide members with access to opportunities they would not normally think to seek out or know existed:

'It is not normally something I would be interested in [cooking session at an art house] but it was one of the most fun things I have done.'

Access to networks

Members were acutely aware of the importance of networks in finding out about opportunities and accessing support and guidance:

'We're in a world where it is not about what you know, it is really about who you know. I think the younger members haven't understood how to communicate to build potential networks that can change their life. Not knowing how to engage with people means you will always be at a disadvantage.'

Access to support and opportunities to socialise across age groups had diminished because of cuts to youth provision and community spaces, like youth clubs. Members also felt that opportunities in Southwark were not well publicised and not reaching or attracting the people they should be.

Some members were clear from the outset about their pathways and wanted the programme to support them in accessing networks that would help them progress their ideas. Others were not sure what they wanted to do, or what opportunities were available, or where they could access support to make informed decisions.

The One Southwark Asset Network is made up of local businesses, charities and residents who provide time, skills, connections and resources. The network offers a spectrum of opportunities ranging from one-off sessions for advice or information about a sector or job role, connecting sessions or signposting, to more intensive support/opportunities like work experience, mentoring and regular check-ins. Usually, the programme staff broker connections between members and the Asset Network, but face-to-face 'Connecting Events' have also helped match skills and expertise with members' needs and interests.

Members found they got the most out of this experience when connected to people within local organisations who had a genuine interest in them as individuals. For example, two members were bursting with enthusiasm after completing a work experience placement where they were welcomed warmly by the organisation and given a meaningful research task, '*not just shredding [paper]*'. Some network members have also offered mentoring support to develop 'softer' skills, such as overcoming shyness and being more confident.



Ethan's story

Through his involvement in One Southwark, Ethan learned about a work experience opportunity at Advent Capital and discovered a passion for quantity surveying.

'Through this experience, I realised that I didn't want to go into finance because it's not me to be behind a desk every day, I realised I couldn't do it.'

During the three days he spent with them, Ethan connected with a quantity surveyor who shared their career progression, from starting at the bottom to working on diverse projects. This resonated with Ethan: *'I saw how much the quantity surveyor enjoyed their work. I really liked the sound of being able to start different projects, learn something new and different all the time.'*

For him, this experience was a standout of his One Southwark journey: *'At Advent Capital, I received generous support and felt comfortable in a professional setting. The personal touch and approachability of the people I met made a lasting impression on me.'*

Building and strengthening the capacity of an Asset Network for young people in Southwark

During the programme's first two years, it built up an Asset Network comprising 160 local businesses, funders, community groups and residents who gave a combination of their time, money and access to training and support to young people. The Asset Network members who were most engaged spoke positively about the experience. Many saw their involvement as aligned with their own and/or their organisation's ambition to reach a wider demographic of young people and strengthen their local footprint in Southwark.

Motivation

Many organisations said that they got involved because they felt very connected to the vision, mission and values of the One Southwark programme, its focus on local residents, and specifically on underrepresented young people in the borough:

'I believe in the change the programme can have on young people and how it can influence systemic change in Southwark.'

'We want to make a real impact on disadvantage in Southwark. One Southwark looks like a good fit because partly it's about providing young people with knowhow and networks, and we are well placed to do that.'

Some Asset Network members' relationship to the One Southwark programme pre-dated its inception, and/or they had been involved in conversations about its design:

'Our Foundation were one of the first funders of Southwark Giving.'

Experiences

A number of Asset Network members described One Southwark as one of the best programmes of its kind that they had engaged with to date. They saw the tangible value that they were able to bring to the experience of the young people involved and recognised where they might continue to contribute to the programme going forwards.

‘One Southwark is one of the best programmes we have been associated with. Run by real people with real passion.’

The sorts of activities provided by Asset Network members in its first two years included:

- **Delivery of workshops** such as combating stress, business start-up workshops, branding workshops, and masterclass for young entrepreneurs.
- **Training or courses** such as social media training, first-aid, networking course, change management course, short CV writing course.
- **Mentorship and coaching** including individual support around employability activities, business and development support.
- **Consultation sessions** to gain insight and feedback on their organisations’ strategy (as it relates to young people and their experiences).
- **Providing physical space for connecting sessions**
- **Building social capital** by supporting networking, collaborations and sharing in-sight into the real world and work experience.

Describing what they hoped young people would get out of their engagement with these activities, Asset Network members talked about wanting to build young people’s skills and confidence, help them realise their potential and value, and broaden their knowledge of the opportunities available. This aligns with what One Southwark members felt they had gained through their involvement in the programme and access to the opportunities provided by the Asset Network.

Whilst there were a number of ways in which the Asset Network model could be improved (see the section on ‘How the model can be strengthened’), significant groundwork and progress have been made in the programme’s first two years. The network has been formed in response to the different needs and interests of young people in Southwark rather than asking young people to adapt to prescribed notions of what support is needed.

The Asset Network may also come to take on additional value and meaning in the future as One Southwark begins to increase its efforts to have a lasting impact on education, employment and training practices in Southwark.

How the model can be strengthened

While there is clear evidence of the positive impact the programme has had on the members involved, the experiences of the One Southwark team, along with feedback from some of the Asset Network members involved in delivery, highlighted potential areas where the model could be strengthened.

In addition, members highlighted certain external factors, such as housing, that although outside of the programme's immediate control, are important in thinking about how it can be mindful of how they might affect members' engagement.

Members' engagement

In its first two years, the One Southwark team piloted various approaches, themes and partners to deliver events that meet members' needs. Some were well attended, and others not. Members had numerous commitments, and the fact that they could dip in and out, depending on what was going on in their lives, was a real strength of the programme. However, the team needs to know that events they take the effort to organise will attract enough attendance.

A small number of members had very little engagement with the programme since joining. Others engaged consistently and enthusiastically and are made steady progress. Those who made the most progress already had a strong sense of how they want to develop or were some way along their journey to accessing employment, training or building up their business ideas.

One Southwark has taken the following approaches for cohort two (years three and four of the programme) to try and overcome some of the challenges around engagement. These actions are a direct response to feedback from cohort one and the One Southwark team's own experiences of delivering the programme:

- **Recruitment:** Instead of one connecting day, One Southwark ran two half-day sessions, and young people could choose whether to attend one or both. Instead of hosting the sessions at a corporate venue as they had done previously, they chose venues they thought would be less intimidating for young people. One Southwark was also more targeted in who they promoted the programme to, and in whom it was for, and the offer is less fluid than for cohort one. They thought this had contributed to receiving a lower number (40 instead of the 70 received in the previous round) of applications, but out of those that applied, there was a consistent fit between the programme offer and applicants' motivations and interests.
- **Stronger membership agreement:** For cohort two, One Southwark has stipulated their expectations of members and what the members can expect from the programme. Each member must sign this agreement. The agreement includes a mandatory requirement to attend four out of the six learning sessions, to only miss up to two 1-to-1 meetings, and to have submitted receipts for grant costs before they can access additional grant monies. They want to also ensure that members continue to be empowered to give honest feedback about what's working or not working for them and if/how the programme can improve:

'We are treating young people as young adults and viewing them from an asset-based position, i.e. "We see your potential, but this is a mutually beneficial relationship".'

- **Community of learning components:** One Southwark has made these mandatory (must attend four out of six) rather than voluntary activities. They have also spread them across the first six months instead of bi-monthly sessions as the frequency was thought to affect attendance. The first four sessions are pre-planned and the final two are open for members to suggest topics.

- **Outcome Star:** For some members, one of the challenges was knowing what actions to take or try to reach the bigger goals they'd set through the programme. It was suggested that breaking down bigger goals into a roadmap of sorts would help with this. In response, One Southwark will be using the [Outcomes Star](#) with Cohort 2 participants as a way of setting out and tracking more incremental indicators of progress for each member and co-designing this with them.

'When we work with young people to achieve their goals, some become focussed on one goal and others aren't given enough attention. The Outcomes Star ... gives a 3D impression of their achievements and goals, rather than where their head is at that week.'

- **Buddy system and assigned mentors:** Each cohort two member will be paired with another cohort two member for peer support. They will also be assigned a mentor (last time it was optional, but it will now be mandatory) sourced from the Asset Network for the first twelve months.

Additional feedback from cohort one members for One Southwark to reflect on going forward included a request for more assistance to follow up on opportunities at times:

'The app entrepreneur session was amazing but there was no follow up from One Southwark.'

Members also wanted One Southwark to be more directive at points or ask questions that help them to articulate their needs rather than, 'Do you need help with anything else?' which was too open-ended.



External factors

Two external factors that affected a number of the members were childcare and housing issues.

Childcare

Several members of the programme were single parents and/or required childcare to engage with certain One Southwark events. Some single parents had experienced barriers in accessing employment due to their caring responsibilities:

‘Finding work that suits my hours looking after my daughter’.

Individuals could choose to use their support grants to pay for childcare and some decided to use part of their grant for this. This included time to enable them to attend a training course but also, in a few cases, so that they could take some time for themselves to support their mental health and wellbeing.

For cohort two, they can also use their grant to cover childcare costs. One Southwark is also considering whether they could offer to source a babysitting service or similar to support single parents attending some sessions. If additional funding is needed for childcare, some Asset Network members may be willing to provide this.

Housing

Members identified housing as a significant barrier to progression and wellbeing. Thirteen members lived with family, and eight lived independently. Many members lived in cramped or overcrowded conditions and lacked personal space to study and work. They described how gentrification was damaging their communities, changing the face and character of Southwark and pricing them and other low-income residents out of the area. Some members in social housing described being placed in unsuitable locations and properties, being isolated from friends and family, feeling unsupported by local services, and not understanding the housing system.

Although One Southwark is limited in how it can respond to wider housing issues directly, members have the option of using their grant to help with housing issues. For example, some used their grant to help cover bills or pay for repairs to help alleviate the pressure of these costs. In the case of one young person, they used some of their grant to book a hotel room for them so they had somewhere to study, something which their crowded home situation made very difficult.

The Asset Network

Whilst both the One Southwark members and Asset Network members had a positive experience of the support offered – both as recipients and providers – there were also constraints highlighted that reduced or hampered the experience at times:

- **Limited capacity:** Developing meaningful opportunities takes time, and most members of the Asset Network had limited capacity and *‘staff time to develop and sustain youth engagement programmes.’* Financial constraints were a particular challenge for small businesses, charities and freelancers:

‘The staff team are stretched and it makes it really hard to imagine new things as without money we can’t realise those ideas.’

- **Asset Network engagement and management:** Balancing the needs and expectations of members while maintaining the engagement and enthusiasm of Asset Network members presented an ongoing challenge. Some organisations were interested in connecting with members with a genuine interest in their field; others were happy to provide more generic, one-off introductions. Asset Network members might get an introduction to the programme but then have no contact if there isn’t a young person who wants to connect with that industry/profession.
- **Understanding what’s needed:** Network members were not always sure how to best support the programme and were keen to explore how they can add value. For example, they may be able to provide support with specific issues like trademarking a new product, offer some spaces on courses they are already running for their staff, or provide office space for members to use:

‘The more specific the request, the better for us – as we can seek for the right people to contribute’ and ‘leverage in support from different parts of the organisation’.

- **Lack of experience working with young people:** Some organisations or individuals did not always feel confident supporting young people:

‘The only barrier is that we don’t have much experience with this age group and lack the communication channels to reach them’.

- **Gaps in the network/difficulty connecting members to their chosen industry.** Some members were disappointed because One Southwark was not able to connect them to their chosen industry. One member wanted to connect with professionals in the fashion industry, and so far, this had not been possible. Healthcare was also a sector not represented in the Coalition and wider Asset Network.
- **Lack of follow-through from partners.** Some members were frustrated by partners who did not follow through with promised enterprise support.

Going into cohort two, One Southwark hopes to engage more Asset Network members in discussions and the process of co-designing activities/support for young people, for example, by hosting in-person coffee morning networking sessions. The programme is going to start with a mapping exercise to understand the support available and the gaps and whether any of the asset members are interested to support specific activities, e.g. apprenticeships.

Additionally, for the Asset Network members involved in the mentoring project, the programme will provide a 2–3-hour training for mentors and offer bi-monthly check-ins. This is aimed at taking away any anxiety from mentors with limited experience working with young people. The programme will also provide an online space where mentors and Asset Network members can share tips, good practice or feel-good stories, allowing others to benefit from this too.

Another idea is to set up working groups linked to specific barriers that young people have identified that asset network members also join.

Exit from the programme and alumni network

When asked how they would like to stay connected, members had a range of suggestions:

- Be kept informed about relevant job opportunities
- Join an alumni network
- Provide support (as a peer) to the new cohort, e.g. as mentors
- Stay involved in the wider change work around education, employment and training
- Share the impact the programme has had on them with others
- Provide content for a One Southwark newsletter
- Deliver workshops as part of the One Southwark offer for future cohorts

One of the main recommendations from cohort one that One Southwark acted on is setting up an alumni network. The new network has seven members involved, each of whom are paid £15 per hour for their involvement in two projects over the coming year:

- **Employment, education and training advocacy:** Work to deepen insight into the barriers for young people in Southwark and to explore what the alumni network and One Southwark members and wider stakeholders (asset network) can do to influence positive change. The alumni network and cohort two members will receive skills training through future collaborations with organisations, and youth organisers who provide training to young people on how to achieve systemic change for themselves and their communities.
- **My Ends 2.0 Project:** The alumni network will be a sounding board for a project on knife crime (there is funding attached to this), including training on how to be young grant-makers.

In addition to the above, the seven alumni leads will be the contact points for all cohort one alumni and there will be two opportunities a year for the whole network to take part in sessions on a particular topic. One Southwark alumni can also ask for support on an ad-hoc basis via the alumni network that can refer them to One Southwark or directly to asset network members.



Governance and strategic support

One Southwark is supported by a Coalition of local stakeholders.⁶ In addition to acting as an advisory board for the programme, coalition members have also been very engaged with the direct support needs of members and helped to connect them to opportunities and expertise in their organisations and networks. Some have also provided practical support, e.g. meeting rooms and/or funding for different elements of the programme, e.g. funding a learning partner to work alongside the programme in its first two years.

‘Where we felt we could have a big impact is helping young people with employment skills.’

‘As business leaders in the borough, we are a trusted information source ... and we can share and amplify.’

More challenging for the Coalition, has been providing the time and expertise to support programme strategy and governance. Several members said they felt the Coalition’s role in relation to governance had not always been clear. This was particularly the case when it came to getting involved in conversations about the programme’s second objective to influence wider issues in Southwark. Coalition members referred to their interests and specialisms not always being aligned with these conversations:

‘I couldn’t tell why I’m in a Coalition meeting. I’ve no idea on housing ... it felt very random.’

Going forward, One Southwark is reviewing the Coalition model, in particular its role in relation to providing support for strategy and governance. Both Coalition members and One Southwark see its value as a group that could provide critical challenge and space to think through the programme’s second objective to influence wider practices in Southwark, if the right individuals are involved. Coalition members suggested that One Southwark approaches individuals and organisations whose interests are aligned with the programme’s and who can bring additional insight to the areas that affect young people’s progression, e.g. education, training and employment, housing, and mental wellbeing.

‘We could all contribute in some ways e.g. businesses could look at their recruitment processes. We should identify if anyone around the table [Coalition] currently wants to take a more active role and then look who is missing.’

This could include skills around how to do this work as well:

‘I think we want support for the behaviour change work. Support from a somebody that can help Will through the process. What needs to change and how can we get there.’

⁶ According to the One Southwark Coalition Terms of Reference, the Coalition model aims to provide the following:

- Strategic support and direction for One Southwark
- Access to expertise in the relevant areas of need identified by young people
- The ability to broker access to wider networks of support and influence within Southwark

Now that One Southwark is beginning to carve out a clearer picture of its role in influencing wider issues related to young people's progression (see Part Two), it is a good time to begin looking at the possible role of a Coalition or alternative structure, alongside this.

Other suggestions

Members also offered the following suggestions for how the model could be strengthened:

- Providing a space(s) where members can go to work on their One Southwark projects and business plans and/or to study and can also access light touch support from a One Southwark team member or peer.
- Access to an independent life coach (as part of the programme model rather than using their grant).
- Could the programme support older age groups, e.g. 25yrs+? This was in acknowledgement of the fact that underrepresented groups sometimes come to certain opportunities later than others.
- Open up some of the training and other sessions to a wider group outside of the programme and host networking events for bigger groups of members.
- Make more opportunities to celebrate people's achievements.

There was also a general consensus among the members that attended the final workshop that they would have liked the programme to expect more of them at times. Noting the multiple competing priorities they are managing, they felt it would have helped to have 'more follow ups and reminders' to get them to action the things they had committed to:



Get our permission to push us more, motivate and remind us, be on our case!"



Part Two: Influencing employment, education and training in Southwark

For United St Saviours, a longer-term goal of the One Southwark programme and the learning generated through it is to influence the wider system in Southwark that impacts on the lives of underrepresented young people.

One Southwark has begun to explore its potential as a broker, connector, convener and advocate for and with young people in Southwark. It has decided to begin with a focus on barriers to education, employment and training. This is due to the rich insights into these topics generated through the experiences of the programme and its members and the programme's existing connection and knowledge into wider networks and conversations focused on education, employment and training.

In a final workshop with nine members, we began an initial conversation about their experiences of education, employment and training in Southwark. They were asked to think about their One Southwark journey and their journey through education and training or applying for a job and being inducted, and discuss what they thought businesses, training providers, and educators should be thinking about to better support members in Southwark.

Members's experiences and recommendations

Education and training

Members felt that the school system does not prepare you for all the possibilities that are available to you as the focus is on academic grades and goals, e.g. university etc.:

'Students and the schools are often evaluated on the grades that students get, not on how prepared for real life the students are.'

Similarly, the perception was that entrepreneurs and others interact with schools because of the school's academic ratings. They thought that instead, access to resources and networks should focus on schools with limited resources and lower academic ratings.

They also highlighted that, even if you do decide to pursue further education opportunities, educational journeys do not have to be linear and there are so many other opportunities outside of what school tells you about.

*'One Southwark provided a space away from school that **did** focus on my education but in a different way.'*

Recommendations for policymakers, educators and trainers

- **Help make students aware of non-academic routes.** For example, gap years are often looked down upon, but these can provide a really valuable opportunity to develop yourself and learn/do, etc., at your own initiative.

- **Schools' status should be less dependent on academic credentials** and more dependent on their ability to respond to a range of students' needs. Consider different metrics for measuring how schools are set up students for success, for example, rating them according to pupils' readiness for leaving school and accessing opportunities outside of academia.
- **Schools need to provide students with access to a wider variety of role models**, for example, invite people from arts spaces to speak to students to let them know that these career spaces exist. One Southwark was able to do this and signpost to lots of different organisations, how could schools learn from the approach the programme has taken?
- **Schools should do more to signpost students to opportunities outside of academia**, e.g. by signing up to local newsletters and networking with local organisations.
- **Provide more support to 'middle achievers'** based on their experience of being left out as the focus is on those achieving the highest or lowest grades.



Employers

Many of the members involved in the One Southwark programme are at the very start of their employment journey. One Southwark has helped expose them to a range of industries, careers, job roles and employment opportunities they were previously unaware of or had little knowledge of. Members would like more forums and spaces to be made available to them where they can explore and discuss a range of possible career pathways and share learning and challenges with their peers in the same way they have been able to through One Southwark.

From their employment experiences to date across a range of industries, several members had observed the limited knowledge and understanding among employers on the topic of neurodiversity. They would like to see more employers empowered to have conversations about neurodiversity and the skills to manage conversations with employees about how to be an accessible employer. At the same time, members need to be empowered and supported to have conversations and directly discuss their needs with employers.

The members that had been involved in paid opportunities through One Southwark, like those paid to be researchers as part of IVAR's research on the programme and as Peabody researchers, wanted to see more organisations put this kind of faith in members who don't yet have the experience but are keen to learn.

Recommendations for employers

- **Create spaces for young people to have a say** within the workplace.
- **Make sure you understand who you are working with** when you decide to work with young people, and tailor your approach accordingly.
- **Focus on the social value:** *'You may not make money from it but you are part of someone's dream and journey.'*
- **Think about tapping into your networks to bring maximum value to the young people** you work with.
- **Think about what more you can do to make young people feel welcome.** For example, being aware of how welcoming/accessible your office space or working environment is for a young person coming in for the first time.
- **Consider whether you are an accessible employer** in terms of providing an inclusive and accessible environment for individuals (not just young people) who are not 'neurotypical.'

One Southwark's role

In thinking about their role going forward, the first stage for One Southwark is likely to be mapping out the groups, organisations and institutions – in Southwark, London and/or nationally – that are already taking positive action in response to many of the issues experienced by its members. For example, there may be existing alliances, networks or campaigns that One Southwark and its members can contribute their experiences and voice to.

In addition, through the networks and relationships that One Southwark has built, there is an opportunity to explore other potential routes to directly influence education, training and employment practices in Southwark.

These were some initial thoughts on the possible role(s) One Southwark could play, suggested at the final workshop:

- **Educational reform:** Join conversations and campaigns about educational reform or try to develop relationships with schools to encourage them to broaden their support to members and not just focus on academic achievements. Find spaces for members to have their say on this too.
- **Alternative pathways:** Use One Southwark/United St Saviour's platform to talk about/give members a platform to talk about alternative pathways to academia, share stories about organisations doing great work with young people – sharing good practice and ideas.
- **Training and development support:** Leverage resources to provide further support for training and development, e.g. a fund for internships, access to co-working spaces, grants for equipment, micro-grants etc.
- **Role models:** Facilitate different role models going into schools. For example, One Southwark alumni.
- **Neurodiversity:** Promote awareness about neurodiversity via the One Southwark platform.
- **Leveraging networks:** Encourage businesses to leverage in their networks and resources to support young people.



Concluding remarks

In its first two years, the One Southwark programme has made a tangible difference in the lives of a group of young people, leaving many of them with a clearer sense of the ambitions and ideas they want to pursue and greater confidence in their ability to do so. For some, they have already started to put these goals into practice, from setting up their own business to starting a new public health initiative and gaining experience in particular fields which has helped lead to permanent employment.

The combination of *flexible* financial support and learning and development opportunities, along with consistent relational support from the One Southwark team has been key to enabling members to use the grant to meet their particular requirements and take what they need from the learning and development opportunities to help them further their individual goals. In addition, the Asset Network of local partners established by One Southwark and additional support provided by its Coalition members has provided a growing and expansive range of opportunities and support that members can tap into.

Since its inception, One Southwark has been proactive in seeking feedback from its members, the Asset Network and Coalition about where and how the programme model can be improved. A common challenge has been meeting the programme's aspiration to provide tailored support to all its members. In some cases, they have struggled to engage Asset Network members from certain industries, e.g. fashion, or organisations have found it difficult to provide the appropriate support to the young person. This has been due to a combination of a lack of experience working with young people or a lack of time and capacity to provide sufficient support. Suggestions on how to improve this experience that One Southwark are actioning in advance of cohort two were:

- **Being clearer at the recruitment and set-up stage** – with both participants and Asset Network members – about what to expect from their involvement with the programme (what they will get and what they will be asked to give).
- **Helping members identify incremental indicators of progress** as well as bigger end goals.
- **Having open and honest dialogue with Asset Network members** about what they can offer in terms of time/capacity, and the nature of support. One Southwark hopes to do this by engaging more Asset Network members in discussions and the process of co-designing activities/support for young people.

Over time, the One Southwark programme has generated significant, in-depth insights into some of the wider behaviours and practices impacting the lives of young people in Southwark. In particular, it has helped build a more nuanced understanding of young people's experiences of the barriers to education, employment and training. By using its position as a connector and convenor and providing a platform for its members to share their experiences, the programme hopes to begin to champion and influence changes to wider practices within Southwark. The start of this process has been setting up an alumni network that will deepen insights into the barriers to education, employment and training and begin to design an advocacy strategy in response.

At a final workshop with the 'cohort one' members, they also shared some recommendations for educators, trainers and employers in Southwark and suggested what One Southwark's role might be in pursuing some of these.

Shifting systems and practice is not work that can be done alone, and others may have laid some of the groundwork. It is therefore going to be important for One Southwark to start with mapping out the groups, organisations and institutions already taking positive action on these issues and looking at if, how and where the programme might add strength and support, in particular through the direct experiences of its members. In addition, the Coalition, or a similar structure designed to provide strategic guidance, could act as a key sounding board to the internal (United St Saviours) programme team in relation to One Southwark's influencing work. To fulfil this role, it will be important that Coalition members' interests and specialisms are aligned with the programme's own objectives.

For its members, the One Southwark programme came along at an important juncture, with many suffering the after-effects of a perfect storm of events – the lasting effects of the Covid pandemic on education, employment, and wellbeing; the rising cost of living; and cuts to youth services. The programme has provided a model of flexible support that is well suited to helping create clearer pathways and routes for progression for young people in Southwark who might not otherwise have access to this kind of financial support, skills investment, or social capital. In doing so, it also generates valuable learning for practitioners and policy makers as to how educators, trainers and employers can be better equipped to support the progression of *all* young people.



Appendices

Appendix One: Methodology

IVAR worked alongside One Southwark as a learning partner between July 2022 and July 2024. The focus has been on learning what works about the One Southwark approach so the programme can adapt and also share learning more widely by capturing One Southwark members' journeys and the programme's progress towards its ambitions.

The insights shared in this report are based on research carried out over the two years with the One Southwark team, programme participants and Southwark stakeholders who provided the training, support and programme governance (Asset Network and Coalition members). This includes:

- **Interviews with the One Southwark members** to understand whether the support they have received has made a difference, the barriers to their progression, and what wider changes are needed.
- **Interviews and regular check-ins with the One Southwark delivery team** to share members' feedback and hear the changes they are making to the model.
- **Interviews with some Coalition members** to understand their experiences of being on the Coalition and their feedback on the model.
- **A survey for Asset Network members** to understand their motivation for supporting the programme, their experiences and level of engagement and support or resources needed for future engagement.
- **In-person participatory and learning workshops** with One Southwark members, Coalition members and One Southwark delivery team (including United St Saviour's Charity) aimed at sharing learning and developing joint recommendations for the role/priorities of the One Southwark programme,
- **Research led by One Southwark members:** IVAR trained up One Southwark members to carry out interviews with asset network members aimed at capturing their experiences of being part of the programme, what actions they are taking to support young people, and understanding the barriers in engaging with young people in Southwark and their perceived barriers for progression for young people. IVAR organised two training sessions – one focused on research methods and another on analysis, alongside one-to-one mentoring and support as needed.

All One Southwark members who participated in the workshops and research were paid £15 per hour for their time. Additionally, those who participated in the research received a reference letter or certificate that can be used for future work or educational applications.

IVAR analysed the data at regular intervals since the programme began. In addition to the above activities, IVAR held two focus groups, ran a learning workshop to share back and sense check emerging findings in March 2024 and produced blogs sharing the learning and insight from One Southwark's journey. Anonymised quotations from interviews and workshops are used throughout the report to illustrate key points with consent from the participants.

Appendix Two: One Southwark theory of change

