

# 2022 Impact Report

Little Village



# Executive summary

Demand for Little Village's services has never been greater. High levels of child poverty in London have been exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis, and large numbers of families have struggled to meet their children's basic needs over the last year.

Little Village aims to address this need through five pillars of work. This report explores our impact in 2022 against each of these five pillars, and not only sets out our achievements, but also provides us with an opportunity to reflect, learn and improve as we continue to evolve Little Village's work.

Pillar 1  
Essential kitp16

Little Village provides the families we support with good quality, safe items that meet the primary needs of babies and children under five. Our research shows that providing this essential kit has led to six key outcomes for the families that we work with:

- Families feel that they have the essential kit they need for their children
- Families experience fewer difficult spending choices

- The items that Little Village provides support child development and stimulation
- Parents and carers feel supported
- Families are better able to leave their home
- Parents and carers have reduced anxiety

Pillar 2  
Volunteeringp26

Little Village is powered by its volunteers, and in 2022 we benefitted from 32,077 hours of volunteer time given by 1,212 volunteers. This is a 93% increase on last year and has helped us to manage the increased demand from families.

Volunteers benefit from their experience too and our research this year suggests that a large proportion of volunteers value giving back to their local community and experience increased self-worth. Some also report increased confidence and new skills and knowledge.

Pillar 3  
Connections p34

Our connections work is delivered in two main ways; through the Family Liaison team and through the Signposting and Guidance service that offers impartial, free guidance, and signposts families to other services and

support. Our research suggests that the connections we develop with families lead to four key outcomes:

- Families feel heard and supported
- Families are connected to providers who can help with their specific needs
- Families know where to seek guidance in the future and have a greater understanding of what they are entitled to
- Families' practical and financial situations improve and they feel better about their situation

Pillar 4  
Circular livingp38

Little Village aims to look after the planet by championing circular living. It does this by making it easy for families and businesses to donate good quality or surplus items, gifting second hand items to families that need them, maximising the recycling of items that we can't use and using messaging and campaigns to talk positively and openly about reusing baby kit. This work leads to two key environmental outcomes:

- The amount of baby items sent to landfill is reduced
- Attitudes to second-hand items are changed making it more acceptable to receive and donate

Pillar 5  
Advocacy p42

We engage in advocacy work because addressing the immediate material needs arising from child poverty is not enough to achieve our vision of every child being able to thrive.

For this to happen, we need to act as a force for change through both campaigning for policy changes and shifting frames on child poverty. In 2022, we focused our advocacy work on:

- Raising the profile of the challenges faced by low-income families
- Raising the profile of baby banks and the work they do to support families across the country

## Conclusion

This report confirms our daily experience that Little Village is supporting families to keep their heads above water, and providing essentials for their children as well as delivering much needed solidarity and support to parents and carers during very challenging times.

We know that a combination of work at an individual, community and systemic level is necessary to achieve our vision of every child under five having the start in life they deserve, and we'll continue to focus on this during 2023.



What do **parents and carers** tell us about the support they receive from Little Village?

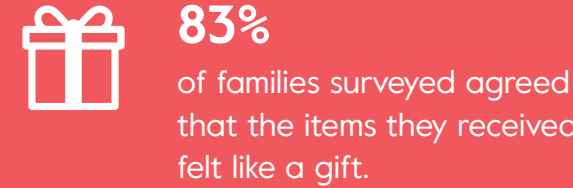
They feel supported



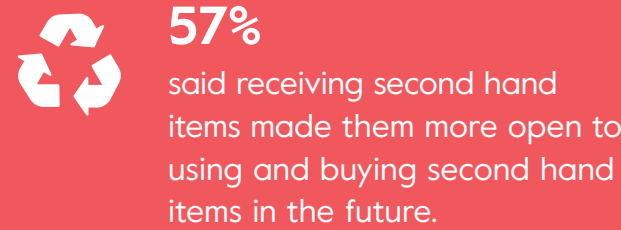
Their situation is changed



Items feel like a gift



Changed attitude to re-use



It frees up money



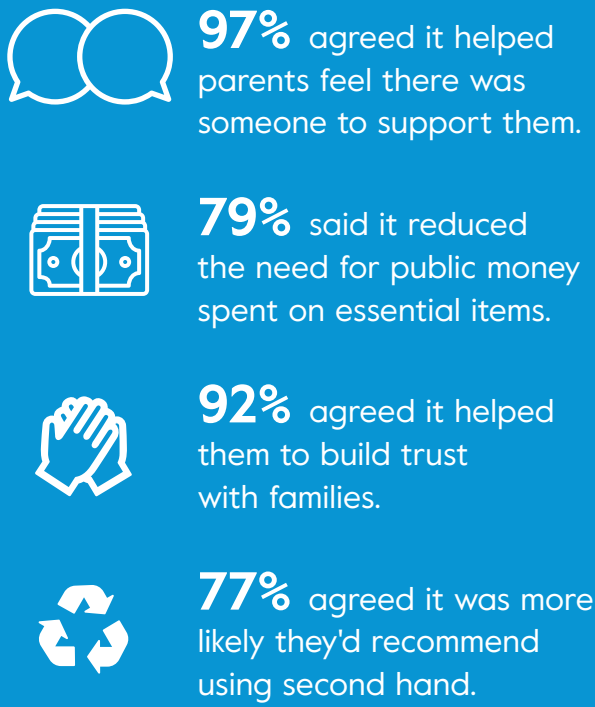
Children are stimulated



What do our **volunteers** tell us?



What do our **referral partners** tell us about our work?



In 2022, we...



If valued as new, this represents over **£2.75m** worth of clothing and essential baby kit.



# Introduction

The significant increase in the cost of living has left huge numbers of families struggling to meet their children's basic needs, particularly as those on low incomes are disproportionately exposed to rising costs.

London has the largest number of young children living in poverty in the UK. Additionally, those in London are living in deeper poverty with average household income at 66% of the poverty line<sup>1</sup>, meaning there are more London families than ever in need of our support.

This is far removed from Little Village's vision of thriving communities where families share their preloved kit and every child under five has the start in life they deserve. However, we're hugely proud of what the whole Little Village community has achieved in the last year, particularly given the level and intensity of demand for our services.

Our work runs across five key pillars (see right), which together guide our activity and enable us to deliver our mission of ensuring that families on low incomes with children under five have the support and essentials they need.

This report explores our impact in 2022 against each of these pillars, and not only sets out our achievements, but also provides us with an opportunity to reflect, learn and improve as we continue to evolve Little Village's work.



## We have five pillars of work

<b>Pillar 1</b> <small>p16</small> <b>Essential kit</b>  Provide Essential Kit to families - alleviating material poverty through our baby bank.	<b>Pillar 2</b> <small>p26</small> <b>Volunteering</b>  Offer opportunities for skills development and personal growth through our volunteering programme.	<b>Pillar 3</b> <small>p34</small> <b>Connections</b>  Create deeper connections to make tangible individual change through our signposting and partner-led activities.	<b>Pillar 4</b> <small>p38</small> <b>Circular living</b>  Look after the planet by championing circular living.	<b>Pillar 5</b> <small>p42</small> <b>Advocacy</b>  Bring people together to tackle the issue of child poverty at a systemic level through our campaigning and advocacy work.
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## Methodology

This year's data collection was designed and carried out with support from an independent social researcher who helped to ensure that the approach was as robust as possible given the time and resources available. Little Village staff were also given training in some of the research methods, including depth interviews, so that this year's methodology can be replicated and built on in future years.

We took a mixed-method approach to measuring our impact, and the data for this year's report have come from five key sources:

- Monitoring data collected as part of our everyday engagement with families and volunteers.
- Annual surveys with families, volunteers and referral partners.
- Data from ongoing signposting and guidance questionnaires completed by families after they have received signposting and guidance.
- Depth interviews with parents and carers who received items from Little Village in 2022.

### Monitoring data

Little Village's data management system collects information on all families, volunteers and referral partners on an ongoing basis.

Family information includes details such as the reason for referral, gender and age of children, ethnicity, first language as well as which items they are gifted and how they receive them. We also collect basic information on our referral partners including the type of organisation they work for. The information collected about our volunteers includes ethnicity, volunteer site and hours given.

### Surveys

Online surveys were carried out with families, volunteers and referral partners at the beginning of 2023, asking respondents to reflect back on their contact with the organisation in 2022. For each survey, all active contacts in each category were contacted and given the opportunity to take part.

### Signposting and guidance survey

When families have received signposting and guidance from Little Village and their records are closed, they are contacted and invited to complete a short questionnaire, either online or by phone. This asks them about their experience of the service and any impacts they have experienced from it.

### Depth interviews with families

Depth interviews, sometimes referred to as in-depth interviews, were carried out with 16 parents and carers who had received support from Little Village in 2022. Interviews took place either by phone or

video call (depending on the participants' preference) in January and February 2023. Parents and carers were selected using a purposive sampling strategy that aimed to reach parents with a range of views and experiences of Little Village. In one case, the parent indicated that English was not their first language and so the interview was carried out with the support of an interpreter.

### WRAP re-use tool

We used a greenhouse gas emissions calculator, to calculate the environmental impact of passing on items for re-use. The Waste and Reuse Action Programmes (WRAP) tool allows the user to calculate carbon emissions and quantifies the potential impact of re-use (rather than recycling). The methodology used is consistent with recognised standards on life cycle assessment (ISO 14040 and 14044) and guidance on Social Return on Investment.



## Challenges and limitations

### Survey challenges

The response rates for the surveys were variable. While the volunteer survey achieved a response rate of 37% and the ongoing survey with families who have received signposting and guidance achieved a response rate of 30% in 2022, the response rates for the family and referral partner surveys were 13% and 7% respectively. This means that while the surveys overall provide a good indication of the views of the three populations included in our research, the findings of the family and referral partner surveys, in particular, should be treated with caution.

### Depth interview challenges

All the sampling quotas for the depth interviews were met meaning that there was good range and diversity in the sample. However, given the low conversion rate at every stage of the recruitment process for the qualitative research from the initial contacting of parents to the successful completion of interviews, it is likely that the sample of parents does not fully reflect the views and experiences of less engaged parents who were less likely to opt-in to the research and participate in interviews.

# Background

## The problem and how we tackle it

### What are the impacts of material poverty on children in London?

Growing up in poverty is shown to have severe long-term effects on children's lives and development in a variety of ways and contributes to a system which traps people in poverty. In 2022, Little Village published a report on poverty rates amongst families with children under five. The report, *It takes a Village*<sup>2</sup>, showed that:

- Half of the 4.2 million children in poverty in the UK live in a family with a child under the age of five
- 1.3 million of the 4.2 million children in poverty in the UK are babies and children under the age of five

Results of the national survey of 1400 parents that informed the report showed that:

- 52% of parents said that housing conditions had a negative impact on their health
- 67% said that the cost of childcare stops them from being able to work or doing the job that they want to do

- 42% said that the lack of available free, local activities and support for children has had a negative impact on their child's development or health

Other reports show that achievement in **education** is likely to be negatively impacted for those who experience poverty in childhood. Notably, those growing up in poverty have cognitive development scores 20% below those who haven't by the age of seven.<sup>3</sup>

**Physical and mental health** suffer too. Children growing up in poverty are more likely to contract illnesses such as meningitis and respiratory disease, often as a result of overcrowding.<sup>4</sup> Longer term, they have increased susceptibility to cardiac disease and certain cancers.<sup>5</sup>

Children and adults living in the most deprived fifth of households are two to three times more likely to develop mental health problems than those with the highest incomes.<sup>6</sup>

Greater inequalities, linked to poverty, disproportionately affect some groups, the *It Takes a Village*<sup>7</sup> report indicated:

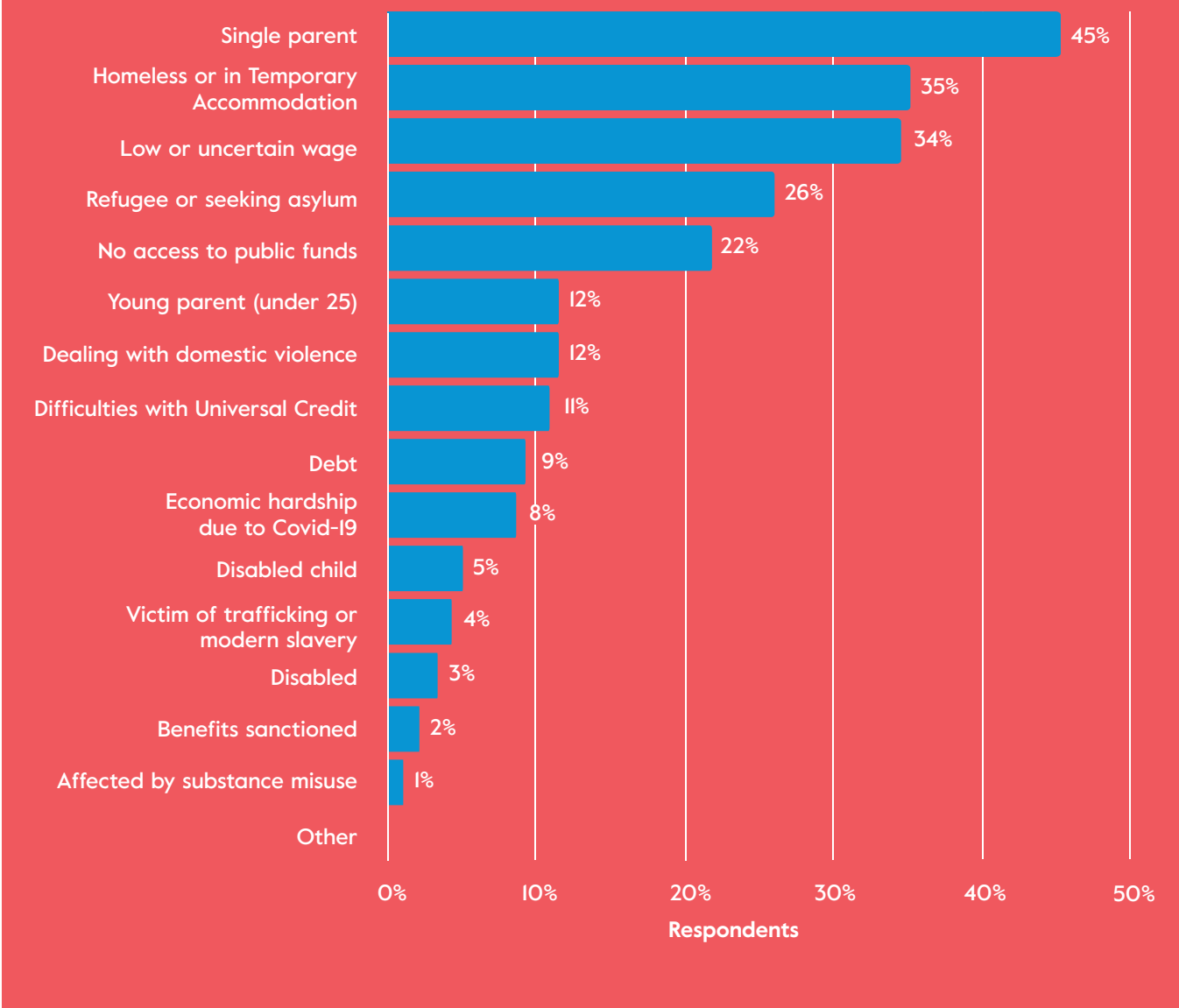
- 47% of racial minority families with a child under 5 are in poverty
- 55% of children in single parent families with a child under 5 are in poverty
- 40% of children in families with a child under 5 and a disabled parent are in poverty

On top of this, **in-work poverty** is rising. Over the past 20 years, the rate of poverty for families with the youngest child aged under five and at least one adult in work has increased by 16%.<sup>8</sup>

While 47% of children living in **large families** (three or more children) live in poverty.<sup>9</sup>

Chart 1: Our families are dealing with a huge variety of challenges

Question: "Which of these criteria apply to the family you are referring? (Tick all that apply.)"





The families we supported represent a broad spectrum of the population of London



Chart 2: Boroughs where the families we support live. From Little Village's data management system

The size of each borough's green circle represents the number of people supported by Little Village.

How does Little Village alleviate the impact of material poverty?

We provide **material items** for children under the age of five.

We offer in-person and phone **consultations** to ensure parents are able to express their needs.

We fulfil services with an ethos of **love and solidarity**.

We encourage re-use of second-hand items to reduce the **environmental impact** of childhood and increase parental self-sufficiency.

This year we supported 100 families arriving into the country from Ukraine following the outbreak of war.

Chart 3: Age of parent/carer

Received support from Little Village, 2022. Salesforce data

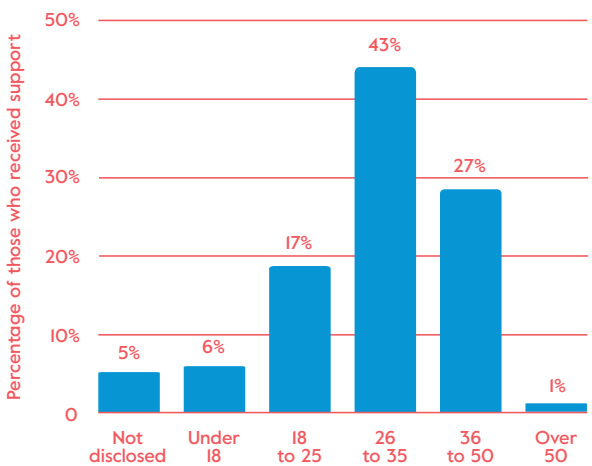
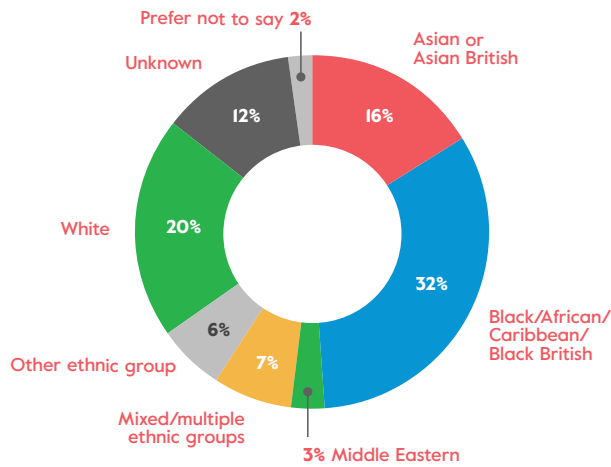


Chart 4: Ethnicity of parent/carer

Received support from Little Village, 2022. Salesforce data



Pillar I

# Essential kit

Little Village provides essential kit and clothing for children under five to families who are referred to us by professional partners. We focus on providing good quality, safe items that meet the primary needs of babies and children under five.

During 2022, Little Village moved away from solely virtual interactions and the delivery model of the pandemic and began creating a combination of warm “shop” experiences in a number of our hubs where families are invited to choose their own items, while at the same time retaining the popular door-to-door delivery offer. In addition, we strengthened partnerships with organisations that regularly support groups of struggling parents in order to deliver items directly to those organisations allowing them to distribute clothes, toys and essentials within already established communities.

This year’s research suggests that the provision of essential kit has led to six key outcomes for the families we support, each of which are explored in this section.

I) Families feel they have the essential kit that they need for their children

Prior to receiving support, some families report having inadequate access to key items relating to child safety and wellbeing.

Families who completed our survey were asked what items they had before and after they received support from Little Village. Of the families that reported not having, or hardly having appropriate access to key items for their baby or child before being supported by Little Village, the following percentages indicated that they had access to these items after they had received support:

- 69% reported having a safe place for their baby or child to sleep
- 54% reported having a way to transport their children
- 65% reported having a way to feed their children safely
- 86% reported having clothing for their children
- 70% reported having warm coat/ shoes
- 48% reported having a clean space for their child to play (e.g. bouncy chair, playmat)
- 77% reported having stimulating toys and books

Table I  
Families reported on the direct impact that receiving kit from Little Village had had on their family

Helped my children be warm and dry	67%
Helped my children be stimulated, engaged and educated	56%
Helped us all get sleep and rest	28%

A safe sleeping solution is highly valued for all families with babies and young children as it allows rest for the whole family, which is why demand for beds, cribs and moses baskets often surpasses donated stock of these items. Despite such supply challenges, over a quarter of parents who responded to the survey indicated that they were provided with items that helped their family get sleep and rest.

Our research suggests that many of the families Little Village supports simply would not have been able to provide their children with basic items without our support, with 82% of families surveyed agreeing they would not have been able to afford to buy the items they received from Little Village. This was echoed by families we interviewed, some of whom were asylum seekers who had arrived in the country with nothing and were entirely reliant on Little Village to provide even the most basic necessities for their children.

*“I arrived here, I didn't have any support from Universal Credit or child benefit. I didn't have anything. And .... here there was a big pack of nappies, and everything I needed for the first time, I had, so it was very nice.” (Depth interview participant)*

Knowing that they had the basics covered, at least in the short-term, provided a real sense of relief to families who articulated the high levels of stress they had experienced around how they would provide for their children.

*“It's actually saved us so much, so much. Like we would stress over you know, how can we get him clothes... after that we just felt stress free for a while, which was really helpful.” (Depth interview participant)*

Providing families with essential items has knock-on benefits to other agencies too. This year’s survey of Little Village’s referral partners found that:

- 79% of referral partners agreed that a referral to Little Village reduced the need for public money to be spent on essential items for families.
- 92% of partners agreed referring a family to Little Village helped to build trust with families they work with.



2) Families experience fewer difficult spending choices

The financial impact of the support that Little Village provides is evident from this year's research. Not only does the support allow families to access items for their children that they would otherwise have been unable to afford, but receiving items from Little Village means that supported families are facing fewer difficult spending choices and are able to use the little money they have to buy other things:

- 90% of parents and carers surveyed agreed that receiving items from Little Village meant they were able to spend money on other things the family needed.
- 74% agreed that receiving items from Little Village meant that their family didn't have to make compromises on how to spend family money.
- 84% agreed that if they had had to buy the items they received from Little Village, they would have struggled to pay core costs such as food and bills.

Parents we interviewed indicated that having these items reduced a little of their financial burden and made them feel better able to provide for their children. Because some of the essentials were taken care of, they were able to buy other things for their children such as food, formula and toys or even put a small amount aside to contribute to bills in future months.

*"It has saved me a lot of money when it comes to buying clothes for my son because they grow out of them so quickly." (Depth interview participant)*

One interview participant described how they were living off £16 per week and how they would often look at toys for their child and feel tempted to buy one to support their child's development but were acutely aware that doing so would have wiped out their food budget. Receiving toys from Little Village meant that they could use the little money they had for other essentials.

In some cases, Little Village is also able to provide additional items for the parents or carers or even give them food vouchers to provide some immediate relief. These touches were really appreciated by parents who described how this sort of support presented them with options that they wouldn't otherwise have had.

3) Items provided by Little Village support child development and stimulation

Essentials such as clothes and equipment for feeding and sleeping help to meet some of children's primary needs, and support families in ensuring that their children are safe and healthy. However, Little Village also aims to support children's play and development through the provision of toys and books. Evidence shows that the range of materials that children have access to including books and toys – specifically those that provide opportunities

for shared attention and book sharing between parent and child – can support children's development including their language development.<sup>10</sup>

Most families that Little Village supports receive a selection of age-appropriate toys and books alongside clothes and any items that they might have specifically requested, and our research suggests that this is both appreciated by families and felt to have an impact on child development.

21% of the families we surveyed this year reported not having or having hardly any stimulating toys and books for their children before receiving support from Little Village

However, 77% reported having stimulating toys and books once they had received support. Likewise, 80% of our referral partners agree that the items received from Little Village aided child development through the provision of books and toys.

Parents and carers we interviewed who visited a hub to choose items themselves, really appreciated the opportunity to choose toys and books that they knew their children would enjoy and engage with. Similarly, those who had received their items as a delivery also commented on the care that had gone into selecting toys and books that were suitable for their children's developmental stage.

Developmental tools can be even more important for families with a child with additional needs. One parent described

how their child has a speech and language disorder and consequently whenever she was referred to Little Village, she would ask for books that might help with his language development. The parent really appreciated the fact that Little Village would always look for suitable books and send them when they were available, and she felt this was supporting her child's development. Another parent recounted how the first sound that her child had made was from one of the toys that Little Village had given them and how, over time, her child was now learning the alphabet from that toy.

*"It really made a huge difference" (Depth interview participant)*

4) Parents feel supported

*"It makes you feel like you're not alone, there are people there to help" (Depth interview participant)*

At Little Village, importance is placed on not just getting families the right items, but gifting these in a way that means they feel supported. This ethos is designed to deliver solidarity and love to parents and carers who may be feeling isolated, vulnerable, unseen and unsupported.

97% of parents who completed our survey agreed that they felt supported by Little Village. Likewise, 97% of referral partners agreed a referral to Little Village helped parents feel there was someone there to support them.

Parents we interviewed described how the support that Little Village provides helped them to feel less alone and as though there was someone who cared about them. This sense of support was hugely valued, and parents also appreciated knowing that Little Village was there for them to turn to again in the future if they needed it.

*"Somebody was caring about me so I felt, not protected, but really supported, somebody cares about me, I'm not alone, it was very nice." (Depth interview participant)*

*"Being a single mum, it is very hard to be able to do everything by yourself but all this help that I get from them, I feel sometimes that I'm not alone, you know? That support that you have is very helpful." (Depth interview participant)*

Our research suggests that four key factors deliver these emotional elements of the support:

i. The interactions with staff and volunteer team,

85% of families who responded to the Family survey agreed that emotional support from the people they spoke to was important, equally, 89% agreed the conversation they had with the volunteer on the phone or in person was also important. This was particularly valuable for parents who have limited social contact,

and new parents who were unsure what items they needed. 82% of families surveyed placed importance on the fact that Little Village thought about things they wouldn't know they needed or remember to ask about.

This theme was echoed in the interviews with parents and carers who told us that they really appreciated the time that volunteers took to go through things with them, check their situation and what they might need and provide them with things that they hadn't necessarily thought of.

*"I was expecting to go in, them to just be like 'ok here's your bag sorted, take it, go' but instead they was actually there with me, helping me select stuff and bringing out stuff that I wouldn't have thought of but it's like 'ok, I need that.'" (Depth interview participant)*

*"I think the people, whether the paid employees or the volunteers, you wouldn't know who's paid and who's not, which I think makes a big difference and I think everybody enjoys what they do, which again I think makes a big difference on how they interact with people" (Depth interview participant)*

Perceptions of Little Village volunteers were overwhelmingly positive and parents and carers identified the kindness, supportive nature and attentiveness of volunteers as helping to enhance their experience with Little Village.

*"They were so welcoming and I was appointed to a particular person. It's just like you going to the shop and a sales representative has been, you know, allocated to you." (Depth interview participant)*

One parent described how they had been given more items than they could get home on their own and so the volunteers arranged for it to all be delivered for her. Another recounted how they had struggled with the buses on the way to visit the Little Village hub and so had arrived late. Not only had the volunteers delayed closing the hub and waited for her but they then took the time to offer her a drink and a place to sit when she arrived.

*"They really went above and beyond." (Depth interview participant)*

One of the key themes from the interviews with families was that parents and carers felt as though there was no judgement from Little Village staff and volunteers. Parents described how they were treated with respect and valued the fact that staff and volunteers took an interest in their situation, no matter what that might be.

*"They didn't treat me like I was some random person, they didn't treat me like crap, they just treated me like I'm a parent and they know what the struggles are like." (Depth interview participant)*

ii. The degree of choice given to families

Little Village aims to make its interactions with families an empowering experience, and one of the ways it does this is by giving parents and carers as much choice as possible. If a delivery is arranged, this is often preceded by a call from a Little Village volunteer to talk through the family's needs and identify what is most important. If families visit a hub, they are shown a range of items and given the opportunity to choose things that they or their children like.

Families we spoke to really appreciated this element of choice and indicated that it helped them to feel heard and supported.

*"Whenever they'd bring something out, they'd always ask, do we want it, if you don't want it you can say." (Depth interview participant)*

*"They are also all mothers so they understand that you might not like a particular thing and it's not you just being ungrateful, which was reassuring as well." (Depth interview participant)*

iii. The quality of items provided

92% of families we surveyed felt that the quality of the items they received was either very important or fairly important. 53% of parents said that the items allowed them to feel proud seeing their child or children in the clothes they received or using the kit and toys.



There was a strong theme among the interview participants that they were generally surprised by the quality of the items that they had received. This was appreciated, not only because it made them proud to see their children wearing the clothes or using the items but also because it meant that they were more likely to last. Parents commented on how many of the items they had received were actually brand new or looked as though they were new even though they had been pre-loved.

*"Most of the items I have received from Little Village - they don't look like second hand, they look quite good quality. I would not even think that they were second hand." (Depth interview participant)*

iv. The way items are presented, conveying respect.

Little Village aims to present the items it gives families with love and care. Parcels are put together carefully and are tailored to the family based on information included in the referral. Often, additional items will also be included, such as some toiletries for the parent(s) so that they get a small treat too.

This care and attention is really appreciated by the families that Little Village supports. 83% of families surveyed agreed that the items they received felt like a gift. Parents and carers we interviewed and who had received a delivery of items also spoke about how carefully their parcels had been

packed. They described how clothing was neatly folded and arranged by size so they could clearly see which child it was for. Some parents spoke about how they really appreciated that the person who had packed their parcel had left a note in there as it made them feel as though the parcel had been prepared especially for them:

*"Somebody was caring about me so I felt not protected but really supported, somebody cares about me, I'm not alone, it was very nice." (Depth interview participant)*

*"It's really touching and I can read that they do everything with heart, with love" (Depth interview participant)*

Parents also commented on the fact that their parcel included something for them as well as all the items for their children. This was appreciated as it made them feel valued as individuals and more than just a parent.

*"What I like about them as well is that sometimes they give you little surprises. Like a little perfume or little things for yourself...because normally it's for the kids but you don't think they will also give something for you, which is really, really nice as well. I know little things, it means a lot. ....Even though you're not asking for yourself, it makes you feel that you're also valued as a person, that it's not just only for the kids." (Depth Interview Participant)*

5) Families are better able to leave their home

Alongside clothes, feeding and sleeping equipment, Little Village gives out buggies and slings to those that need them. In 2022, 1,365 families were provided with a buggy and 497 slings or baby carriers were given out.

For some families, this means the difference between being stuck at home with their child and being able to get out for walks, to enjoy local green spaces, to attend essential medical appointments, to access amenities or to see friends and family.

*"When she was a bit smaller, the sling was a life saver because like I said I live on the second floor, no lift...so having the sling if I just needed to go to the shop was so much easier than having to carry each thing up." (Depth interview participant)*

Parents we interviewed not only reflected on the importance of having means to transport their children, but also spoke about the benefits of having appropriate clothing for taking their children out in. For example, having warm jackets, or wet weather gear.

6) Parents have reduced anxiety

Concerns about not being able to provide for their families creates a considerable amount of stress and anxiety for the parents and carers that Little Village supports.

Our survey suggests that, prior to receiving support from Little Village, families report high levels of negative emotions (see Table 2, below).

Table 2 Emotions prior to support from Little Village	
Anxious about how I was going to support my child/children	48%
Worried about my child/ children's future	35%
Scared for myself and my child/children	21%
Hopeless	17%
In a bad place with my mental health	27%
Worried that social services or another agency would feel that I wasn't looking after my child/children well	12%
Respondents could choose multiple options.	



While we cannot aim to alleviate this stress completely, Little Village does aim to give at least temporary relief to families for whom the burden of providing for their children has become overwhelming. And there is evidence that this is the case. Following support, we see a notable shift in positive feelings among families (see Table 3, below).

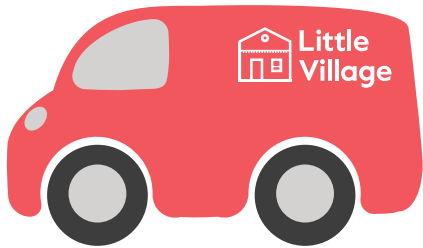
Table 3 Following support we see a significant shift in positive feelings.	
Reduced my worry and anxiety	59%
Gave me 'head space' to think about other things	46%
Helped me feel more confident as a parent	45%
Helped me feel more confident about asking for help	49%

95% of referral partners we surveyed also agreed that receiving items from Little Village reduced anxiety and stress for the families they worked with.

Families we interviewed spoke about how receiving support had reduced their immediate stress and given them some respite from worrying about how they would budget for everything that their children needed.

*"It made me obviously worry less about how I was going to afford those things at that specific time." (Depth interview participant)*

*"I felt a bit relieved, obviously it didn't solve my situation with the housing but obviously my priority is my son, so to get all these items for him and know that I wouldn't be struggling when it came to that, that was really helpful." (Depth interview participant)*





Pillar 2

# Volunteering

*“Volunteering is done to improve other lives, but it was improving mine at the same time” (Volunteer survey respondent)*

Little Village is powered by its volunteers, and providing an excellent volunteer experience is essential. We do this by offering friendly, welcoming spaces for volunteers, providing training and inclusive opportunities and working in partnership with community organisations to encourage a diverse pool of volunteers in the communities where we work and serve.

In 2022, Little Village benefited from 32,077 hours of volunteer time given by 1,212 volunteers (defined as someone who did at least one two-hour shift during the year). This is a 93% increase on last year and adapting the volunteer experience to manage greater numbers has enabled Little Village to meet the need of increased demand for essential kit.

Our volunteers come as individuals, in family groups, and as corporate teams.

I. Volunteer groups reflect the communities we work and serve in

Our individual volunteers are a broad group. The tables below show the range of ages, ethnicities, and social backgrounds that our volunteers come from. For example, 31% are Black and minority ethnic volunteers and over half are parents.

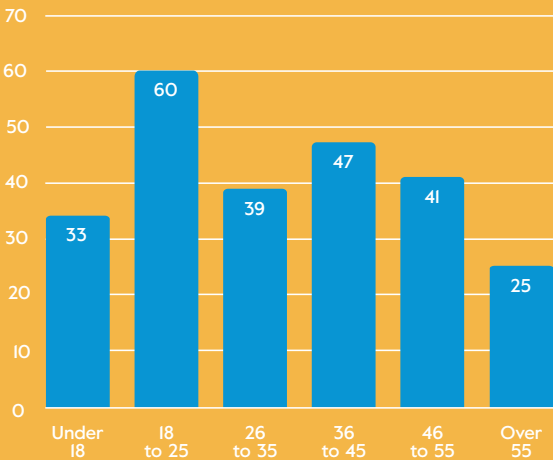
In 2022, Little Village made efforts to further improve the diversity of volunteers by offering a range of inclusive volunteer opportunities where training was provided for all roles.

We believe there is a role for everyone – and offer roles which suit different skills, interests and availability, such as packers, drivers, sorters, shop liaison, warehouse roles, family liaison by phone, signposting and guidance. To reach and retain as many volunteers as possible we have:

- Home-based opportunities for volunteers in need of flexibility or for those less able to leave home

Chart 5: Age of volunteers

Number of volunteers in by age group, 2022. Salesforce data



- Welcoming environments for families we have supported - 14% of volunteers surveyed said they had previously received support from Little Village.
- Opportunities for parents with their children – there have been sessions with creches in Camden and Balham; three sessions with Family Volunteering Club, a partner organisation that facilitates sessions with parents and young children; Saturday family sessions in our Tooting and Brent hubs all allowing families to attend.
- Young volunteer opportunities – we supported 33 young people to volunteer with us in 2022, several of whom were working towards Duke of Edinburgh awards (seven at the Bronze level, one at Silver and one at Gold level).

- Volunteering opportunities for people with learning disabilities. We offer organised supported volunteering at our Hounslow hub for groups needing additional support and guidance to volunteer.
- Corporate opportunities for group volunteering with work colleagues.
- Evening and weekend volunteering opportunities.

2. Developing stronger partnerships to promote a more diverse volunteer base

Little Village is committed to developing stronger partnerships within the communities we work in so that the volunteers are as representative of these communities as possible.

In 2022, the following programmes offered targeted volunteer opportunities and

Chart 6: Ethnicity of volunteers

Ethnicity of volunteers in 2022. Salesforce data

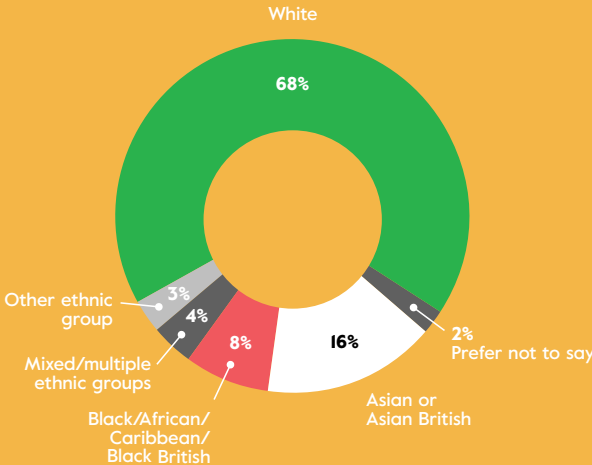
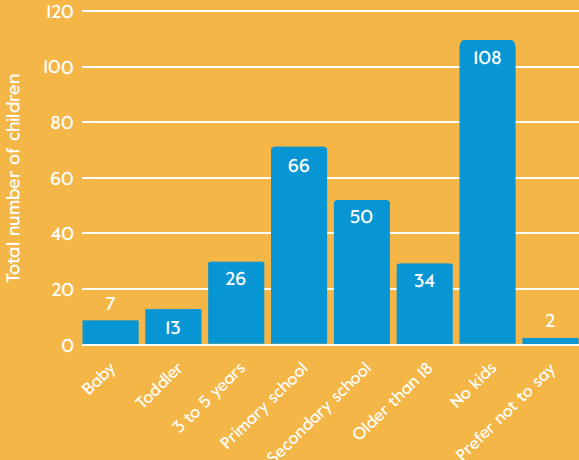
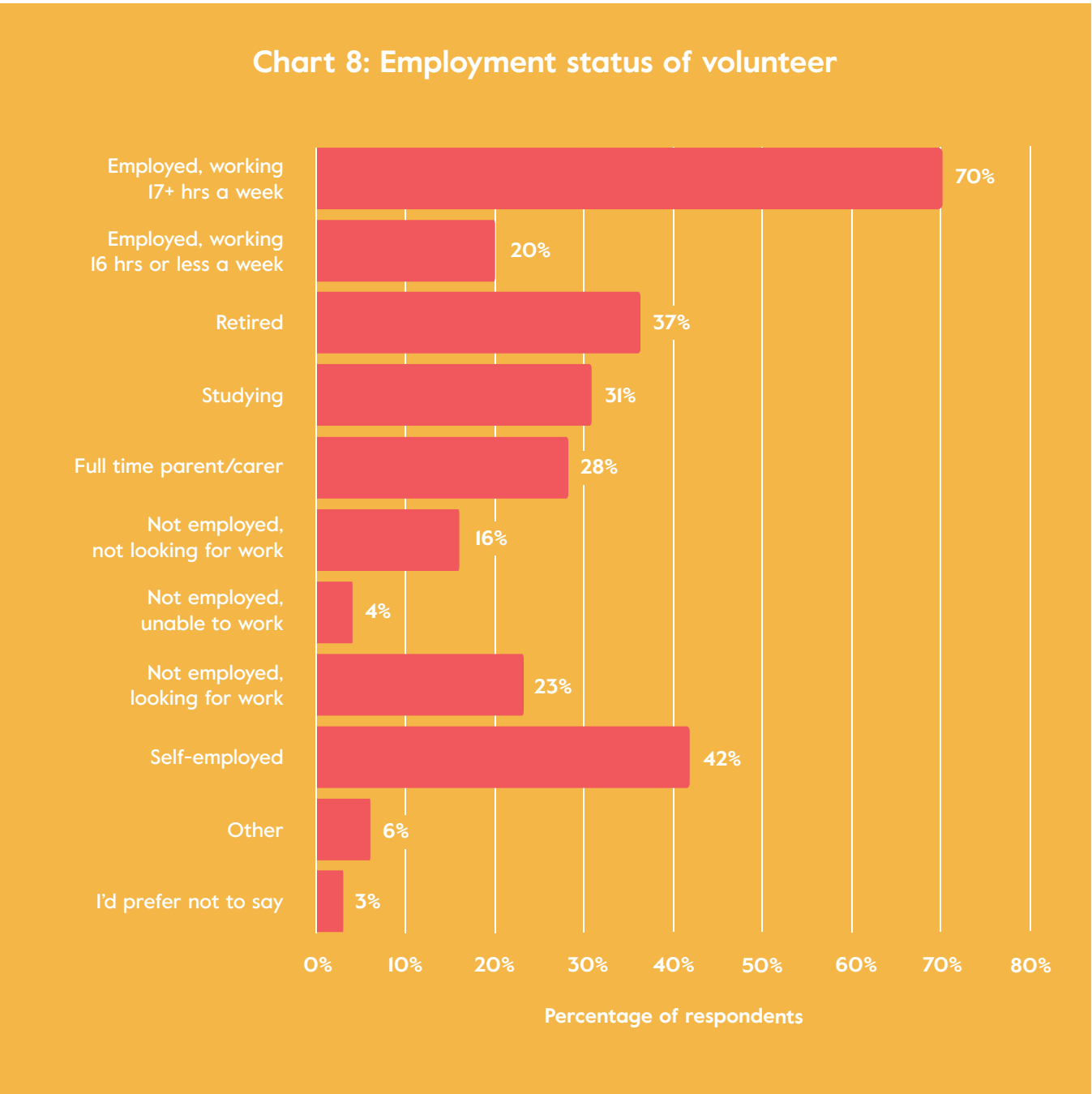


Chart 7: Age of children

Question: Do you have any children at home? (May choose more than one option.)





allowed us to welcome a greater breadth of volunteers:

- A scheme for nursing students from Kingston University pioneered in the summer of 2022 in partnership with Kingston University’s school of nursing which involved 18 students having study placements with Little Village for 8 weeks during the summer. Each student worked 37.5 hours a week within Little Village hubs and calling families. Overall, they volunteered a total of 2,250 hours as a cohort. This partnership has been shortlisted in the Partnership of the Year category for the Nursing Times Awards 2023.
- We worked closely with Luminary Bakery, a London-based social enterprise, providing volunteering opportunities to women experiencing multiple disadvantage, to break down barriers, improve confidence and skills and help them take the next step in their lives
- Through CAS (Community Adult Services) Hounslow, a group of approximately 10 adults with learning disabilities attended three supervised group volunteering sessions
- Other colleges whose students are currently carrying out placements at Little Village for their Health & Social Care courses include:

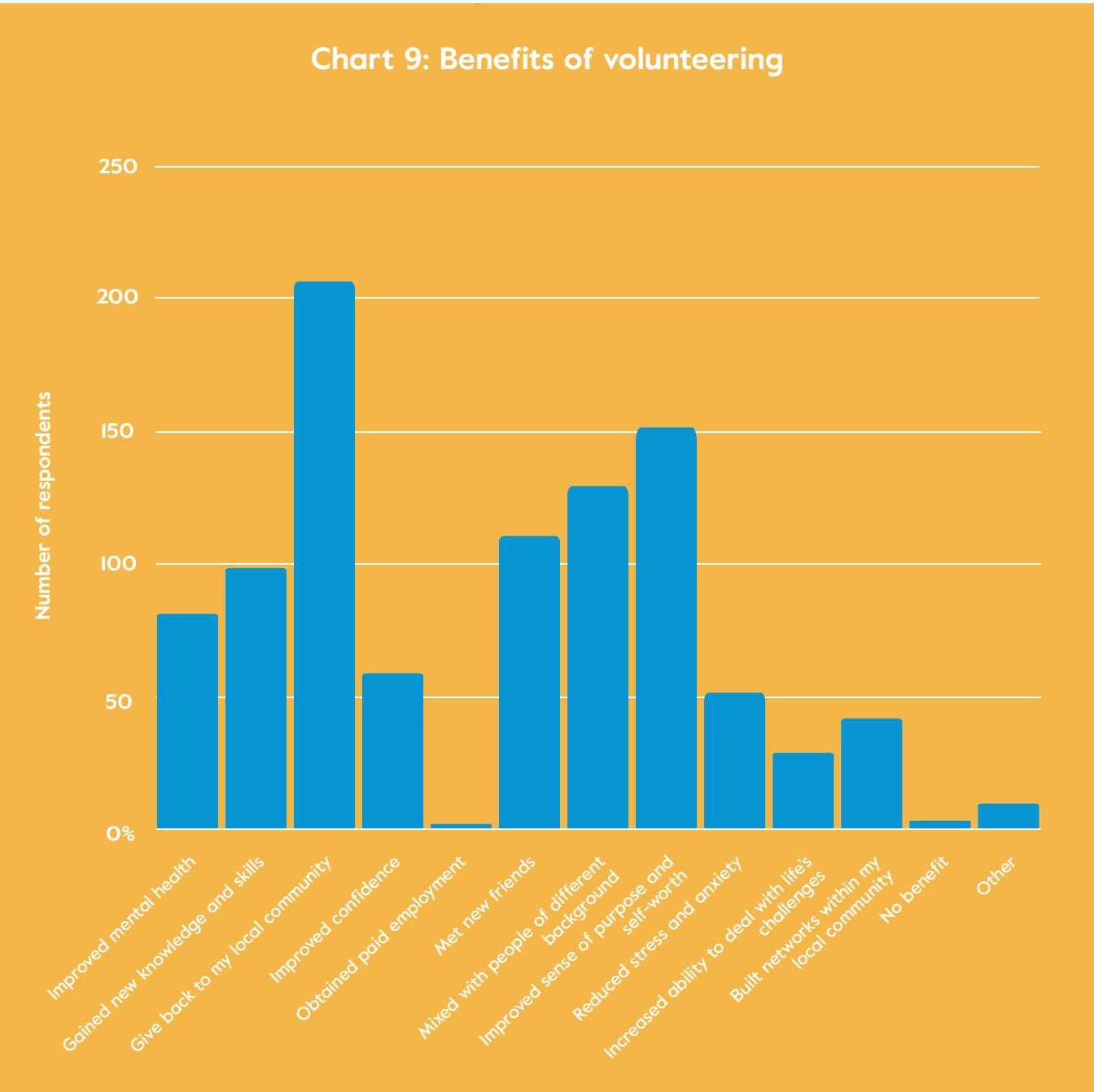
— College of North West London West Thames College

— Richmond College

Volunteer partnerships were also developed with organisations that support people with independence and into employment, for example, we created a partnership with Igneus – Restart who support job seekers to gain experience of a working environment through volunteering and team-working. This helps to build to job seekers’ reliability and communication skills and boost their CV. The partnership is helping increase employability and reduce unemployment in the community.

We also pursued relationships with universities that seek to increase social responsibility amongst students and promote voluntary work and the voluntary sector. We partnered with University College London & London School of Economics (LSE) by hosting large group sessions for their students. LSE has also appointed champions who advocate for Little Village, campaign against poverty and help us to recruit volunteers from amongst the student body.

*“Volunteering with Little Village provides a crucial moment in my week of doing something completely different and for someone else other than myself, my family or a client! It is a chance to feel a sense of achievement, whether that is sorting a pile of donations and creating some much-needed space in the centre or setting a new mum up with a box of lovely things she can look forward to using with her baby.” (Volunteer survey respondent)*



3. Volunteers experience personal growth

The survey drew out several themes relating personal growth. For example, 60% of those surveyed reported **feeling an increased sense of self-worth** and 23% reported **improved confidence**.

In terms of their mental wellbeing, 33% of those surveyed felt their volunteer experience **improved their mental health**, and 21% felt it **reduced their stress and anxiety**.

*“I love volunteering for Little Village. It’s so rewarding, great way to meet people and chat. I find it quite therapeutic, far less stressful than my other job” (Volunteer survey respondent)*

*“My favourite part of volunteering is that it truly helps you remember how there are so many good and generous people in the world! It definitely helps to improve my mindset and see society in a different light.” (Volunteer survey respondent)*

Respondents also felt the volunteering experience had broadened their connections and relationships within the local community with 44% indicating that they had **met new friends**, 52% stating they had **mixed with people from a different background** and 17% confirming they had **built networks within their community**.

*“I love the work Little Village does. I enjoy helping and making new friends. It helps me have a sense of community.” (Volunteer survey respondent)*

4. Volunteers develop new skills and knowledge

As well as personal growth, 39% of survey respondents reported gaining new skills. One survey respondent commented “it had helped me build many new skills and confidence” another said that the experience was a boost to confidence and that “my skills are upgraded in terms of expressing myself to people”

**All volunteers receive training to carry out their role.** The depth of training they receive depends on the role they undertake.

*“I thought the quality of training offered was very good and the ongoing supervision and guidance from staff members has been excellent.” (Volunteer survey respondent)*

*“I thoroughly enjoy my volunteering - meeting new people, making friends, doing something for my local community, supporting those who are in need and doing a little to reduce landfill and improve the environment. Win win!” (Volunteer survey respondent)*

*“I love that donations go straight to the people who need them—there is complete transparency. Little Village runs on love and kindness...and is wonderful for the environment as well!” (Volunteer survey respondent)*



Pillar 3

# Connections

Our connections work is delivered in two main ways; through the Family Liaison team and through the Signposting and Guidance service. These provide a listening ear to families facing complex challenges, offer impartial, free guidance and signpost families to other services and support.

The teams are made up of highly trained volunteers who help build deeper connections with the families through phone calls, interpreting services and text message conversations. They recognise the complex challenges faced by families and understand the importance of a deeper level of support.

This contact with families aims to help them feel heard and supported, connect them with services who can help them, provide them with a greater understanding of their rights and what they are entitled to alongside the knowledge and confidence to seek support and guidance in the future.

1. Families feel heard and supported

Speaking with families over the phone is an important part of what we do. Contact from the Family Liaison team, made up of 48 volunteers in 2022, provides a personal connection with families, to either introduce Little Village or to review the support we can offer and refer to our signposting and guidance team if appropriate.

During 2022, Family Liaison volunteers contacted 2,415 families following their referral to Little Village to explain the service, offer solidarity and ensure their needs were understood so the right clothing and equipment would be delivered.

Families who received a delivery and did not see anybody from Little Village in person were contacted afterwards. The Family Liaison team followed up with 3,082 families after they had received their delivery to check in, make sure the family understood how to get further support from Little Village in the future and, where necessary, provide initial signposting and information on other issues. In all, 103 families were signposted or introduced to further support outside Little Village. Many others were referred to the Signposting and Guidance service within Little Village.

Parents we interviewed really appreciated the contact they had from Little Village volunteers who were described as being friendly and supportive. Parents and carers

who had received a call or email from Little Village volunteers described how this helped them to feel heard and supported. Volunteers talked through their situation with them and really listened to what the parents needed for their children.

*"I actually felt like I was being understood by people for once."  
(Depth interview participant)*

Parents that had visited a hub were also grateful for the way that volunteers engaged with them in that setting and provided gentle support and respect throughout their visit.

*"Really respectfully actually... nobody spoke to me any different...conversations were really nice, very understanding, took everything I said on board and really just respected me." (Depth interview participant)*

Some parents were grateful for the warmth that volunteers demonstrated towards them and were pleasantly surprised that the hubs did not feel clinical. They described how volunteers offered to hold their baby or sat with them and offered to help with paperwork. Some parents spoke about how the volunteers had offered them advice about their baby based on their own experience as parents or took the time to explain how the items they were being given worked and they really appreciated this tailored and friendly support.

2. Families are connected to providers who can help with their specific needs

The Signposting and Guidance service accepts referrals from within Little Village for families who need support around issues beyond our core offer of clothes and essentials. Signposting and Guidance volunteers, alongside staff, are able to review needs, provide guidance and signpost families to further services. The service has grown since its inception in 2021, with further funding from the Mayor of London to offer a broader service at greater depth to more families as part of the Advice in a Community Setting Programme, which funds advice partnerships to support Londoners experiencing, or at risk of, financial hardship.

In 2022, the service continued to respond to inequalities and supported Londoners who were less likely to access advice. More than half the families supported (273) had English as a second language, making it more difficult to access services. Black and minority ethnic families accounted for 69% of families accessing the service. In addition, 84% of families surveyed had not accessed a signposting service before.

In 2022, the service accepted 521 signposting cases, supporting 467 individual families, who received impartial, free guidance and signposting, some on more than one occasion.

The Signposting and Guidance team supported or signposted families to access support about a total of 1,046 issues, regularly connecting them to providers who can help with their specific needs. The most common issues for which families sought support were food (27%), benefits (19%), housing (12%) and sources of other children's or household items (9%). Questionnaire respondents expressed relief at being able to access these services:

*"Relieved because if you didn't ask questions, I wouldn't have got what I need." (Signposting and Guidance impact questionnaire respondent)*

*"Like someone was really trying to help me and understood my situation." (Signposting and Guidance impact questionnaire respondent)*

In the depth interviews, families who had received signposting and guidance described how this was unexpected but very welcomed. One parent spoke about how the information that Little Village was providing them with was helping them work out whether they would be able to go back to work, as well as helping them access other, immediate support.

*"So helpful because, being a first-time mum, the internet can only do so much and it's so mind boggling because the calculators things that were online are inaccurate, so having somebody there who can refer you to foodbanks or just*

*know where to point you to get the help that you need makes all the difference." (Depth interview participant)*

Families that need extra support from the Signposting and Guidance service often have complex needs requiring support about a range of issues. The service made 613 referrals to specialist partner charities for further support in 2022. This included 392 external foodbank referrals (equating to a value exceeding £29,000) and 78 referrals for benefits advice.

**3. Families know where to seek guidance in the future and have a greater understanding of what they are entitled to**

Contact with families aims to provide them with a greater understanding of their rights and what they are entitled to and the knowledge about where to seek support and guidance in future.

*"Made me feel so at ease cos I was really stuck. having that support eased my mind especially with having the baby. Now I know the places to go in future when I need help" (Signposting and Guidance impact questionnaire respondent)*

Among parents who took part in the depth interviews were some who indicated that they were provided with information that they wouldn't have otherwise had. One

parent, for example, spoke about how she was referred to two organisations that could support her with accessing food and described how this not only helped her in the short term, but made her more confident that she would know where to go for help in the future.

The service strives for families to be able to make changes to their situations using the knowledge and empowerment they have gained. Families completing impact questionnaires have reported feeling more confident about chasing services for help. Others have a better idea of where to go to seek help.

*"I was able to contact the MP who is pushing my immigration case. I can push my case to the next level because of your guidance." (Signposting and Guidance impact questionnaire respondent)*

**4. Families' practical and financial situations improve, and they feel better about their situation**

88% of parents and carers who responded to the signposting and guidance impact questionnaire said the guidance given had helped their situation. This includes 66% of respondents who sought information and support on the issue of money who were then able to get extra money or save money because of Little Village's support.

*"So so happy, deep down knowing that I am saving an absolute fortune each month. Now I can put money aside." (Signposting and Guidance impact questionnaire respondent)*

*"I was crying with the relief over what happened. Got gas, elec, water fixed for two years at very low rate. It's made a huge difference to my life.. Would never have known if you hadn't told me." (Signposting and Guidance impact questionnaire respondent)*





Pillar 4

# Circular living

Little Village aims to look after the planet by championing circular living. It does this by making it easy for families and businesses to donate good quality or surplus items, gifting these items to families that need them, maximising the recycling of items that we can't use and using messaging and campaigns to talk positively and openly about reusing baby kit. Our aspiration is that changing people's approach to the reuse of clothing and essentials will result in greater financial resilience as well as normalising community sharing and reuse in support of treading more lightly on our planet.

This approach leads to two key outcomes that support environmental sustainability which are explored below.

1) The amount of baby items sent to landfill is reduced.

To encourage donation of items, and therefore divert them from the waste stream, it is essential to make it as easy as possible to donate items. As well as having regular donation points at our hubs, we worked in the community with partners such as corporate supporters, schools, nurseries, and faith groups to increase the

number and geographical reach of donation points. In addition to accepting donations at our hubs, there were 110 other donation locations around London during the course of 2022 (see map on p38).

In 2022, we gifted on 100 tonnes worth of items to families, including over 41½ tonnes of clothing, 39 tonnes of larger items such as cots and buggies, 5½ tonnes of small electricals, 12 tonnes of books, and 1½ tonnes of small plastics which may otherwise have ended up in landfill (see chart 10).

Using the WRAP Reuse Tool, we calculated the following benefits from gifting to families when compared to the impact of these items going into landfill, using the assumption that items will be used for a further two years:

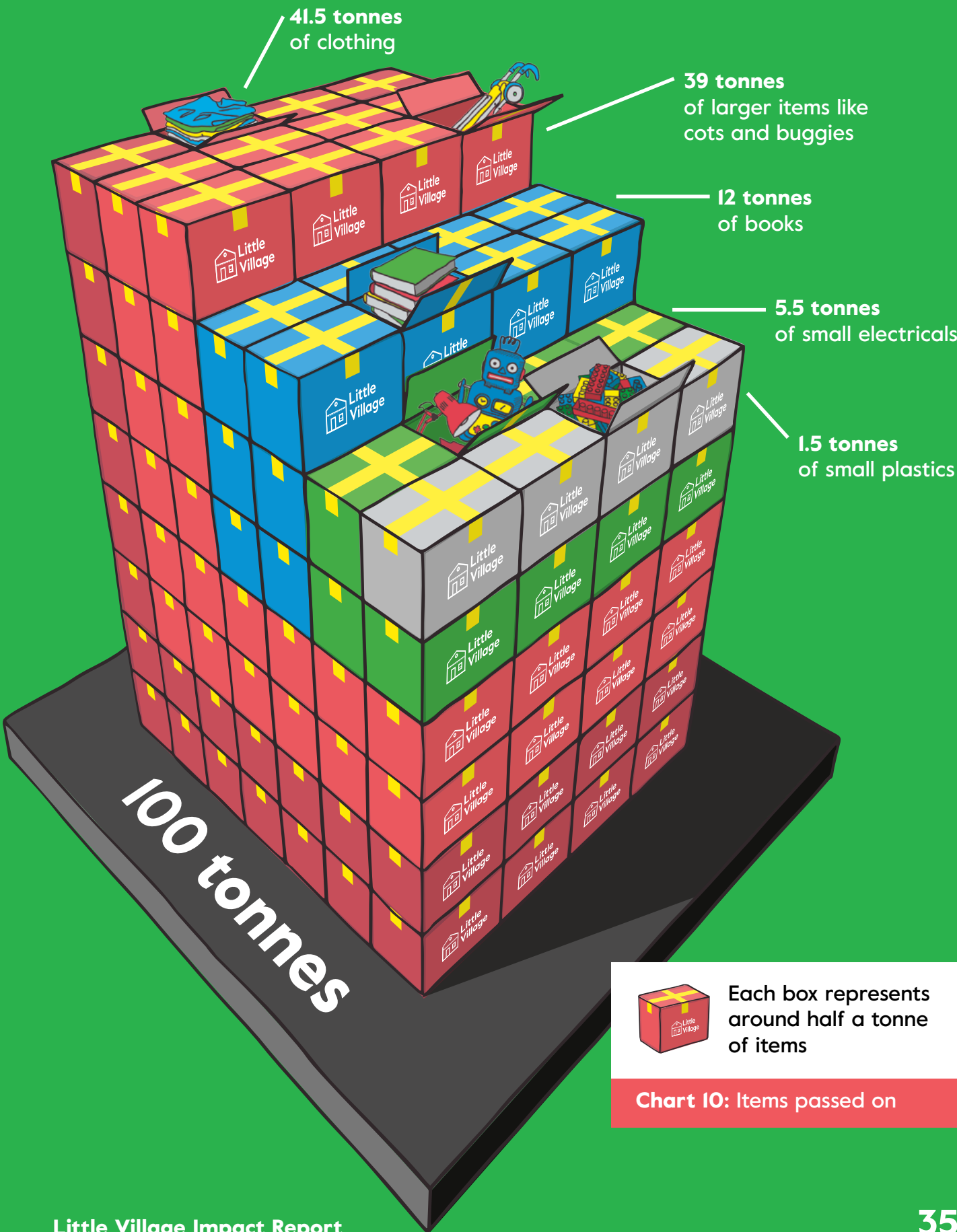
- 136.5 tonnes of CO2-equivalent emissions.
- 1,112,116.1 MJ-equivalent saving of fossil fuel energy from production of new items.
- 0.8 Sb-equivalent saving of other natural resources from production of new items.

This saving of carbon emissions is the equivalent of taking 30 cars off the road for a year.<sup>11</sup>

2) Attitudes to second-hand items are changed, making it more acceptable to receive and donate

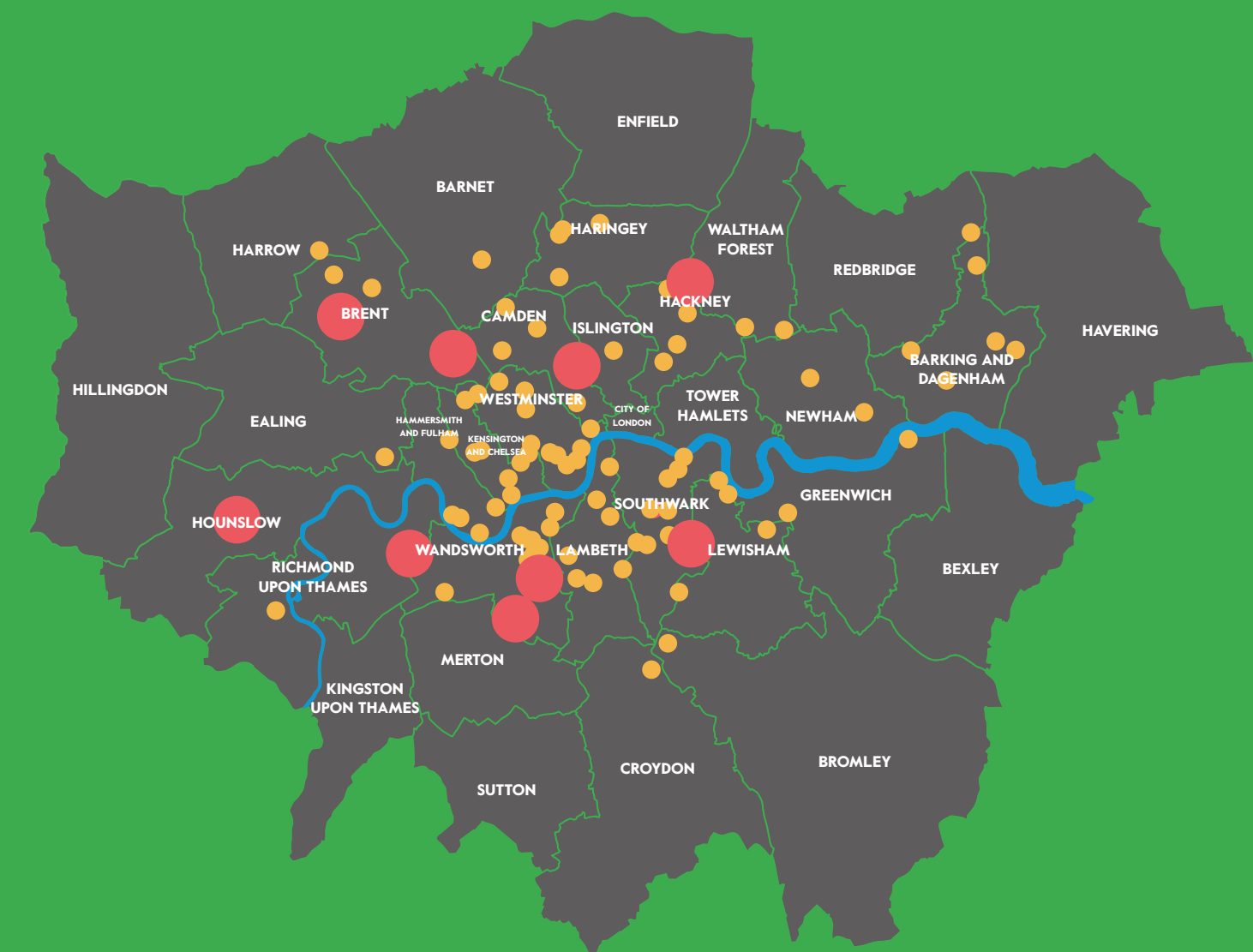
The majority of items that Little Village gifts to families are pre-loved. Many of the families and volunteers that we work

# In 2022, Little Village passed 100 tonnes of items on to families





# Little Village supporter donation locations in 2022



**Chart II: 2022 donation locations**

- Little Village hub
- Community donation point organised by a Little Village volunteer or supporter

with are already comfortable with the idea of using second-hand items before they come into contact with us. 91% of volunteers surveyed already used second hand and supported recycling/reuse before volunteering with Little Village. Likewise, 80% of families we surveyed said that they felt glad to be helping to reuse and recycle things.

However, there is also evidence that our work is having an impact on attitudes towards second hand items. 57% of families we surveyed this year, stated that receiving second hand items from Little Village made them more open to using and buying second hand items in the future.

Interviews with parents and carers revealed that some were pleasantly surprised at the quality of the second-hand items that they had received. They indicated that they may not even have known that they were pre-used had they not been told.

*"Most of the items I have received from Little Village - they don't look like second hand; they look quite good quality. I would not even think that they were second hand." (Depth interview participant)*

One parent who was living in temporary accommodation spoke about how, previously, they would not have wanted to use second-hand clothing. But when she saw the quality of the items from Little Village and how clean they were, her attitude shifted.

*"Honestly, before we fled from home, I would never feel like I would use something [that was used] especially when I don't know who the person is. However, when I actually received them and I found they are, they're all high quality, they're not just handed over to you and I can tell they have washed them properly and it's all hygienic to a standard that a person can use it straight away cos at the moment I do not have a washing machine." (Depth interview participant)*

Little Village volunteers come into contact with a large number of second-hand items and can not only see the quality of these items but how they are helping the families who receive them.

This leads to some volunteers having a change of attitude towards second-hand goods and the value that they hold.

*"Since volunteering with Little Village I have changed my behaviour to find more ways to pass on / recycle items that I no longer need" (Volunteer survey respondent)*

There is also evidence that Little Village's approach is shifting attitudes among referral partners too with 77% of referral partners agreeing that referring to Little Village made them more likely to recommend using second hand to the families that they support.

Pillar 5  
Advocacy

We engage in advocacy work because addressing the immediate material needs arising from child poverty is not enough to achieve our vision of every child being able to thrive. For this to happen, we need to act as a force for change through both campaigning for policy changes and shifting frames on child poverty.

A key facet of our advocacy work is the principle of “nothing about us, without us” – our families themselves are the most powerful voices to tell the impacts of living on a low income, and our work strives to create an audience for their stories.

Our work in 2022 focused on two areas:

I. Raising the profile of the challenges faced by low-income families

We launched our second report supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'It takes a village', on poverty rates amongst families with children under five. As part of this report, we conducted focus groups with families to gather their stories and conducted a national survey of nearly 1400 families. Some of the key findings are outlined earlier in this impact report.

147 people signed up for our webinar launching the research and speakers included Emilie De Bruijn, Chair of the Hartlepool Baby Bank, Sonia Sodha, Chief Leader Writer at the Observer and Guardian Columnist, Karen Wells, Professor of Childhood Studies at Birkbeck College, and Anneka Russell, Early Years Educator and Consultant. The event was well attended and generated discussion on the prevalence of child poverty among families with under fives.

The report was covered in ITV London News, Sky News, Newcastle World, Northeast Bylines, and the trade publication 'Nursery World' among others. The report was also named the Work Foundation's 'Research of the Week'.



Above: Filming at Little Village

The Channel 4 News Home Affairs Editor, Jacqui Long, visited our Tooting hub in May to interview families as part of their coverage of the Government's additional cost of living package.

Following her support for us during Covid, HRH The Princess of Wales visited our Brent hub in June, meeting a parent we'd supported as well as volunteers and staff. This attracted a wide range of national media coverage, including Sky News.

HELLO! magazine adopted us as their charity partner for Christmas. This involved pieces in the magazine and online, and the support of Strictly star Kym Marsh, who was a single parent at 19, and struggled

to make ends meet. This was a great opportunity to bring our work, and families' circumstances, to a different audience, via a celebrity with a similar story.

During 2022, 4in10 London's Child Poverty Network and Little Village gathered the views of a group of Little Village parents to submit a report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) ahead of its 72nd pre-Sessional Working Group taking place in 2023. We hope the report will help the Committee to formulate its List of Issues as part of its review of the UK Government's performance under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).



Above: HRH Princess of Wales visiting Little Village



2. Raising the profile of baby banks and the work they do to support families across the country

Child poverty is a national issue, and while Little Village's operations remain focused on London, we know that changing the situation for families will require national attention. This led us to explore the potential for creating a national alliance of baby banks to better capture and collaborate on the impact being made to support families.

This work has been in partnership with Ark, Save the Children and Baby Bank Network Bristol, and 2022 saw this evolve to a more formal 'incubation' of an alliance, with activities including:

- Updating the UK baby banks map to create an accurate picture
- In depth visits and meetings with baby banks around the country to better understand their challenges, support needs and appetite for an alliance
- Well attended Learning and Sharing calls to explore best practice, build understanding and collaboration
- Work to identify and apply to potential funders

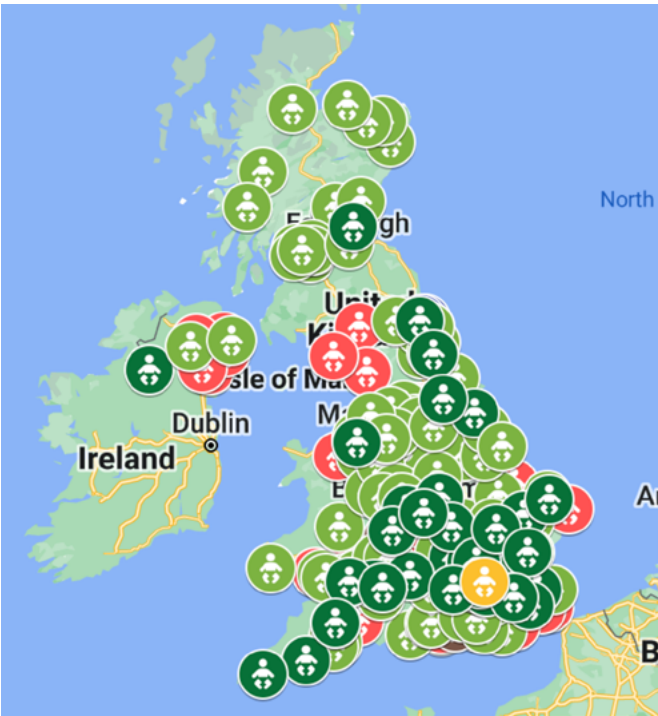
We co-ordinated a national survey of baby banks which generated an exclusive ITV News feature and online coverage which promoted the UK map of baby banks. The map has been featured in other coverage,

including via HELLO! magazine and on the BBC News website.

At the end of 2022, Walthamstow MP Stella Creasy secured an Adjournment Debate in parliament during which she called for a baby bank in every constituency, citing Little Village and our work to create a national alliance.<sup>12</sup>

Anecdotal evidence from baby banks across the UK is that this growth in profile is leading to more local enquiries from prospective volunteers, donors and referral partners.

We have also seen an increase in enquiries from people interested in starting up their own local baby bank.



Above: A map of UK baby banks

Conclusion

Little Village's work has both expanded and deepened during 2022, and this report highlights the critical nature of both, particularly in the face of the cost of living crisis.

It confirms our daily, on the ground, experience that Little Village is supporting families to keep their heads above water, and providing essentials for their children as well as delivering much needed solidarity and support to parents and carers during very challenging times.

We know that a combination of work at an individual, community and systemic level is necessary to achieve our vision and we'll continue to focus on this during 2023.



Endnotes

1 <https://wp.littlevillagehq.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RLTV06-It-Takes-a-Village.pdf>

2 <https://wp.littlevillagehq.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RLTV06-It-Takes-a-Village.pdf>

3 <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/effects-poverty>

4 <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/effects-poverty>

5 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/psychological-perspectives-poverty>

6 <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/mental-health-statistics/poverty-statistics>

7 <https://wp.littlevillagehq.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RLTV06-It-Takes-a-Village.pdf>

8 <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Changing-patterns-of-poverty-in-early-childhood-Nuffield-Foundation.pdf>

9 <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/key-facts/>

10 Asmussen K, et al. (2018) Key competencies in early cognitive development: Things, people, numbers and words. London: Early Intervention Foundation. <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/key-competencies-in-early-cognitive-development-things-people-numbers-and-words>

11 Using EPA standard of a car producing 4.6 metric tonnes of CO2 per vehicle per year

12 <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/stella-creasy-2022-speech-on-government-for-baby-banks/>





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**Little Village**  
It takes a village

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