



# SOUTHWESTFEST 16 YEARS STRONG REPORT



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# 1. INTRODUCTION



2020 marked SouthWestFest's 16th year working within the south Westminster community, and for the first time in those 16 years (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) our annual community Festival day and physical events programme could not take place.

Thankfully, we were able to pivot our work and deliver an online Digital Festival instead of our usual festival activities. A year off from our physical events has also offered a time of reflection as to what our festival means to the community of south Westminster and what impact it has had on our audiences.

It can often be hard to quantify the intangible 'feel good' benefits of community events and talk about why a cultural community festival such as SouthWestFest deserves public support and funding. However, from the knowledge and experiences gained over the last 16 years of event delivery, we are keen to show how our festival offers important benefits and long-term impacts to residents of south Westminster.

As such, in this report we have chosen to analyse the work of our festival,

its impacts and benefits including wider research to support our understanding of what community festivals have to offer the people they serve.

Objectives of this report are to:

- 1) Review our work over the past 16 years, drawing on case studies from the festival, plus feedback and evaluation, to better understand where we are today.
- 2) Review and understand our audiences, the makeup of our community and some of the challenges that they may currently face.
- 3) Investigate and understand the benefits and wider impact our festival can offer, looking specifically at the areas of health and wellbeing, community engagement and education, volunteering and participation, placemaking and the local economy.

In producing this report, we have used feedback, case studies and data collected by SouthWestFest over the years, in addition to conducting desk based research and analysing evidence from statutory, industry and academic sources.

## 2. SOUTHWESTFEST 16 YEARS STRONG

In 2004, a group of 3rd sector organisations regularly met as part of the South Westminster Community Network known as SWAN. It was at a network meeting that the idea of a community festival to promote new and local initiatives in the area was born.

From that meeting a steering committee from the network was selected to lead on the development of this new community festival. In June 2004 the inaugural south Westminster Community Festival was launched with the name SouthWestFest.

The festival continued to grow and develop each year, and in 2008 the steering committee set up the charity South Westminster Community Festival, to continue to lead on the delivery of this now important event for the south Westminster community.

SouthWestFest's Festival Day has become a key date in the annual calendar for the local community. This large outdoor event attracts thousands, and was first accompanied in 2010 by the Pimlico Proms which now takes place on the Friday night before the Festival Day on the Saturday, creating a longer 'festival weekend'.

These big events help us launch and promote the festival's 2-3 week long open access programme supported by our 70+ partner organisations and groups, in 25+ local venues and public outdoor spaces.

Memorable events and moments over the past 16 years include our big top circus at Chelsea Art School, an outdoor promenade theatre musical production of Passport to Pimlico, a giant inflatable game of 'It's a Knock Out', community theatre projects with the Royal Court, giant community art installations with Shambush and Tate Britain, a pop up planetarium and street theatre from 6FootStories with The Intergalactic Circus of Truths.

In 2020 we produced our inaugural Digital Festival, involving 26 local partner organisations and groups, working with 8 practitioners and facilitators and 23 local artists. Our final Digital Festival programme featured an incredible 82 online events and activities which took place between the 6th and 12th of July.

Our charity is supported by two part-time year round freelance staff as well as our dedicated trustees and volunteers plus freelance events staff who support each year's festival delivery.

The festival works with local partners, artists and practitioners to plan events, workshops and activities which change each year responding flexibility to the needs and interests of our audiences, so as to continue to engage and inspire residents to come out and take part. We do this through both a curated and commissioned programme of themed festival events, alongside an open access programme of partner events.

# 3. FESTIVAL FRAMEWORK

## ACTIVATE

Our programme of themed in-house events and commissioned projects including our large-scale outdoor festival weekend events, create a 'hook' which activates audiences and inspires them to take part in the wider festival programme.

## COLLABORATE

Through our open access festival programme we collaborate with, and showcase the work of our 70+ partner organisations and groups. We endeavor to develop and maintain good relationships and always look for opportunities to create new ones.

## PROMOTE

Through promotion and celebration of the festival programme, the festival acts as a tool for our partners, to increase awareness of their venues, services, products and programmes to new audiences across the area.

## ENABLE

We aim to create safe, inclusive and accessible spaces to offer our festival activities, to reduce barriers to attainment, and enable residents to take part.

## INSPIRE

We aim to inspire and engage our audiences and participants to try new creative and cultural activities promoted alongside our festival partners, encouraging ongoing engagement with our partners' services.

Through this work, we aim to support, empower and facilitate grassroots community action and leadership, enabling the people and groups we work with to create innovative projects, engaging events, positive placemaking experiences and opportunities for their communities.



# 4. UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITY



SouthWestFest was set up to deliver a community festival for the area of south Westminster. As such, our work mainly takes place across Tachbrook, Churchill, St James, Vincent Square and Warwick wards, in addition to reaching nearby areas Hyde Park, Knightsbridge, Chelsea and Belgravia.

Westminster offers many opportunities and benefits to its residents with theatres, museums, restaurants, and entertainment right on their doorstep. However, these areas represent a diverse demographic profile, with wards amongst the most and least deprived in London and U.K.

Alongside regularly reviewing demographic data for our local Ward profiles, SouthWestFest also organises regular surveys and open meetings, as well as conducting social media listening, to assess feedback and ensure that our work is led by the voice of our community.

# 4.1 KEY STATISTICS FROM OUR AREA

- Westminster is 6th in the top 25 local authorities with highest levels of child poverty across the UK with 41.29% of children in poverty (Labour Westminster, 2018).
- Westminster's local areas are among both the most and least deprived in London according to the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Including areas of south Westminster which are within the 30-40% most deprived boroughs in the UK for the average overall rank (Westminster Council, 2018).
- Life expectancy is 11.3 years lower for men and 7.9 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Westminster than in the least deprived areas (Public Health England, 2015).
- Housing—30% of housing in Westminster is overcrowded. Poor housing can lead to stress, mental health problems, and poor educational attainment for children (thinknpc.org, n.d.).
- Westminster experiences a high level of population churn, and although the majority of the population in Westminster (69%) speak English, other top languages spoken include 5.7% Arabic, 3.0% French, 2.2% Spanish, 1.8% Italian, 1.7% Portuguese, 1.4% Bengali, 1.1% Greek, 1.1% German, 1.0% Russian (localstats.co.uk, n.d.).
- Westminster has a higher than national average over-65 population, with a high or very high risk of loneliness for older residents (Westminster City Council, 2019). However, overall Westminster has a generally younger population for example data from Churchill Ward shows us that 65% of residents are between 18 - 64, with only 12% over 65. 50% of the ward population are families with dependent children (Churchill Ward Profile, 2018).



## 4.1.2 UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITIES' NEEDS



As seen from the key statistics, some of the main challenges that the communities we work with face, include overcrowded and poor housing conditions, child poverty and isolation due to age, disability or language barriers

In addition, in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, residents face further challenges including job loss, and access to food. IFAN London food banks reported an average increase in need from February to March 2020 of 68% (London City Hall, 2020). As well as reduction in physical access to key services, and barriers to digital services including access to technology and the internet.

These highlight just some of the barriers that our community face and have to overcome.

Over the past 16 years SouthWestFest has seen changing needs in our community and an important part of our ongoing mission is to work with our partners, and local community to respond flexibly to these and the wider issues faced, and support our local community through our programmes of open access and curated events, activities and projects.



# 5. COMMUNITY EVENTS WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Festivals, community and cultural events offer unique and specific positive individual experiences for those attending and taking part. At the same time, they can offer collective experiences, which build on our sense of community and wonder, shaping how we recognise and remember the places we live in.

Our aim for SouthWestWest is to offer a broad range of inclusive and accessible events and activities, which include culture, arts, education, sports and health and wellbeing, programmed alongside our partners in order to connect our community with services, venues and opportunities.

The benefits of such events go beyond just fun and entertainment factors, and we believe community festivals such as SouthWestFest can be shown to have positive impacts and lasting legacies for their host communities.

Those impacts can include supporting positive health and wellbeing, introducing participants to new opportunities and interests, increasing community cohesion, promoting community and civic pride, boosting local economies and creating place making and shaping experiences.



# 5.1 PARTNER CASE STUDY

## Westminster Abbey

"In 2017 we attended the Festival Day in St. George's Square in partnership with the Abbey Centre. Experiencing the success of that day we took our own stand in 2018 and 2019. In 2020 we contributed to the digital festival by offering a virtual tour of Westminster Abbey.

The short-term gain from our work with the festival, was meeting and engaging with local residents adding to our yearly engagement figures and developing our relationship with the Abbey Centre.

The long-term gain of engagement with the festival has been recruiting local residents into mailing list sign ups and regular attendance at our regular onsite programming.

SouthWestFest is a hugely positive force within south Westminster. It is an opportunity for everyone to broaden their scope, look beyond their usual and create contacts and connections through fun and enjoyment.

People really meet when they dance and play together. The Festival provides a melting pot for charities and services to meet the members of the community they serve whilst being reminded they are also members of that community.

Many of our community contacts have been directly through the festival or because of a connection initially made at the festival. There is a butterfly effect of connections that, with annual repetition, becomes increasingly effective. I am so grateful for how the festival has brought us together."

*Aaron Paterson, Westminster Abbey*



## 5.2 HEALTH & WELLBEING

It is now widely acknowledged that cultural activities can be beneficial in supporting our health and wellbeing. We see this evidenced by the introduction of social prescribing of arts and cultural activities across the greater London area, which has shown an incredible 37% drop in GP consultation rates and a 27% reduction in hospital admissions (Westminster City Council, 2020).

As seen from local ward statistics for south Westminster as well as feedback gained from our festival partners, older people are at a particular risk of loneliness and social isolation, which can lead to serious health complications as well as impacting on quality of life and our overall well-being.

Taking part in arts, cultural and leisure activities such as those offered by the festival and our partners, has been shown to help people feel less lonely (GLA, 2019).

Research conducted in this area has also shown that a higher frequency of engagement with arts, leisure and culture is generally associated with a higher level of subjective well-being (Mowlah et al., 2014).

Participating in creative leisure activities can operate at two levels, firstly at an individual level people can experience improved health and wellbeing and secondly, at a wider community level participating as a group promotes social engagement and therefore inclusion (Bungay and Clift, 2010).

SouthWestFest offers a range of cultural, creative, health, sports and leisure activities within our festival programme delivery.

We partner with local service providers to host events, workshops and activities in local venues, as well as at our Festival Day. Through doing so we aim to increase our audience's knowledge of the local services and support available to them, as well as inspiring engagement in new activities.

For the last 5 years we have partnered with the Abbey Centre Community Health Champions to produce a Health Zone at our Community Festival day, and alongside our Health Zone we have also created a Workshop Zone which hosts space for up to 6 local organisations to share creative activities promoting services, educational and cultural opportunities from across the south Westminster region.

**In 2019,  
98% of festival  
attendees surveyed agreed  
that SouthWestFest  
helps local  
people connect with  
organisations, businesses  
and useful services in their  
neighbourhood.**

# 5.2.1 PARTNER CASE STUDY

## Community Health Champions & The Abbey Centre

“The Abbey Centre has been a festival partner, since the very beginning in 2004.

Over the last 5 years, whilst running the Community Champions Project, we have been heavily involved in supporting the outdoor Festival Day, working with the festival to produce the Health Zone, bringing in Health and Wellbeing organisations to promote their services and health messages through fun and interactive activities, one of the highlights is the giant climbing wall! We also involve the Community Champion volunteers who help and run their own activities too.

This year we joined SouthWestFest’s Digital Festival, for which we created a healthy cook and eat online video class, and ran a healthy cooking competition. Over the years, The Abbey Centre has also supported the festival with providing a venue to run their photography sessions and exhibitions.

Working with the festival gives the Abbey Centre and the Community Health Champions the opportunity to promote health and wellbeing messages to a huge number of people living in the local area.

The longer-term outcome of our partnership with the festival is that we have been able to build relationships with residents and families who come to our regular activities, that without the festival we would not have been able to reach.

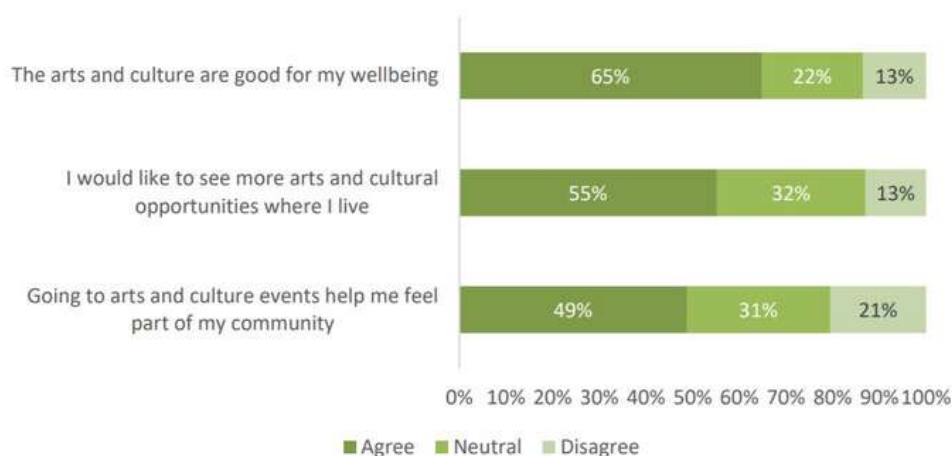
We all look forward to it every year; the festival is a great way of bringing the local community together and for me signals the start of Summer!”

*Ian Corpuz - Community Champions Project Coordinator*



# 5.3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & INFORMAL EDUCATION

Views on impact of the local arts and cultural offer in their community



**Figure 1 : The Value of Arts and Culture in Place-shaping - National Survey Findings - Research Report Arts Council (Parkinson et al., 2019).**

One of our aims for the festival is to bring together local residents from diverse backgrounds and communities, to create shared experiences, which support residents in making new connections, friendships and strengthening community relationships.

As well as our festival weekend, which includes an outdoor free Proms event and large-scale community Festival Day, we also commission artists, performers, sports and creative practitioners to create outdoor theatre, arts and other cultural and leisure activities that are held outdoors across local estates, parks and shared public spaces.

These programmes draw residents to explore the area and meet neighbouring communities, they have the power to attract audiences who may not otherwise be particularly culturally engaged.

Research conducted by the Audience Agency (2018), focusing on outdoor arts events, shows that these kinds of activities

achieve high attendance and responses across all High (35%), Medium (33%) and Low (32%) engagement levels. In contrast, only 17% of audiences for indoor, ticketed arts are low cultural engagers.

Outdoor arts and cultural activities can have a significant impact on civic life and act as a driver of community creativity. As seen in Figure 1, in a recent survey conducted on behalf of the Arts Council, 65% of those surveyed felt that arts and culture were good for their wellbeing, and 49% said that going to arts and cultural events made them feel part of their community (Parkinson et al., 2019).

This also is reflected in feedback collected over the course of running the festival, in which 98% of festival participants surveyed between 2015 - 2019 agreed that SouthWestFest encourages community spirit and connectivity.

# 5.3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & INFORMAL EDUCATION



The festival regularly partners with local youth work organisations to support local youth initiatives, and work with these organisations and the young people who attend them to shape our programming and commissioning of event activities.

Recent projects include producing community fun days with The Pimlico Million in Churchill Gardens estate, aimed at young people, children and families, featuring creative and educational activities co-delivered by local youth organisations, including a pop up planetarium, parkour courses and street theatre.

In 2020 we also partnered with City Lions on our Digital Festivals which included co-commissioning online stand-up comedy workshops for young people aged 13 - 16.

These kinds of events offer further benefits to residents of south Westminster, including supporting positive engagement with young people, which can contribute to reducing social exclusion, and making communities as a whole feel safer (Taylor et al., 2015). We also see 'deferred' and longer term benefits from young people participating in our events, workshops and performances, these include talent development, skill, confidence and career building.

# 5.3.1 CASE STUDY

## City Lions

“In 2020 City Lion’s and SouthWestFest formed a new partnership, as part of SouthWestFest’s Digital Festival.

At the same time, City Lion’s was also producing our own Digital Festival, which was a week long careers festival for young people educated or living in Westminster helping them to explore careers in the creative and cultural sector.

Both City Lions and SouthWestFest saw this as a great opportunity to join forces, widen our audiences and support each other in quite uncertain times!

We co-produced two workshops, one was led by the SouthWestFest team – a bespoke session for students at Westminster Academy about event and festival production and the other was a workshop with the wonderful Comedy Club 4 Kids which was advertised as part of both festivals.

In addition, we featured other events from our City Lion’s Digital Programme within the SouthWestFest Digital Festival Open Access Programme.

Working with SouthWestFest enables us to continue to provide opportunities to Westminster’s young people right on their doorstep and offers an opportunity to engage them with other cultural activities in their local area. With an established relationship we will be able to continue supporting each other and collaborating on projects that benefit both our audiences.”

*Sisley Hamer, Senior Project Development Officer,  
Westminster City Lions, Innovation & Change*



# 5.4 VOLUNTEERING & COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

It would not be possible to produce SouthWestFest each year without the input, support, experience and dedication of local residents, community groups and organisations who volunteer their time towards the festival.

We have calculated that our volunteers support the festival through 500 hours of volunteer work each year, time which would be worth £5,375 based on London Living Wage.

Volunteering should always be as beneficial to the volunteer as it is to the organisation or project they are volunteering for. Volunteers can take part in SouthWestFest in a number of ways; from joining our steering committee and potentially becoming a trustee to help us lead the festival plans and programme each year, to joining us at events as event assistants, street promotion team members and community stewards or by producing and leading their own community events.

Through these types of volunteering we hope to offer our volunteers the opportunity to gain confidence, widen their networks, learn new skills and take part in interesting and fun activities and experiences.

In the Time Well Spent survey conducted by the National Council for Voluntary organisations the most common benefits volunteers reported were: enjoyment (93%), a sense of personal achievement (90%) and feeling that they make a difference (90%) (McGarvey et al., 2019).

From our own volunteers' feedback, we know that people decide to volunteer for different reasons including: meeting new people and making new friends; as a way of becoming more involved in the community they live in; or as an opportunity to learn new skills and widen their career opportunities.

Volunteering also offers wider benefits and longer-term impacts to society. There is now growing evidence that young people's engagement with cultural projects has a positive knock on impact on their wider social and civic participation (Mowlah et al., 2014), leading to a higher likelihood of volunteering in their local communities for other causes.

Volunteering and cultural participation also facilitate a reduction in social exclusion, and can increase community cohesion, contributing to communities which feel safer and stronger (Westminster City Council, 2020).

**97% of SouthWestFest volunteers surveyed agreed that volunteering with SouthWestFest helped them gain new experiences and make new connections in their community.**



## 5.4.1 VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK



**“I have been volunteering for SouthWestFest for 6 years now. I saw the SouthWestFest banner across the road and went to the square and volunteered to help.**

**I like volunteering for SouthWestFest and working with the organisers and as I live within the area it's good to help where I can when needed. Through volunteering I have met a lot of interesting people.**

**In the long term through volunteering for SouthWestFest I would like to continue and help as much as I can and also be able to get more people to attend this wonderful event.**

**It is something to look forward to and always a pleasure to see so many people attending each year.”**

*Maria Liutai, Volunteer for the Proms and Festival Day*

# 5.5 PLACEMAKING AND SHAPING

Festivals such as SouthWestFest, can help people get to know their local area, and inspire conversations around how communities are perceived and perceive themselves. Community events can play an important role in supporting urban planning policies, renewal and regeneration, creating a desirable place to live and building stronger communities.

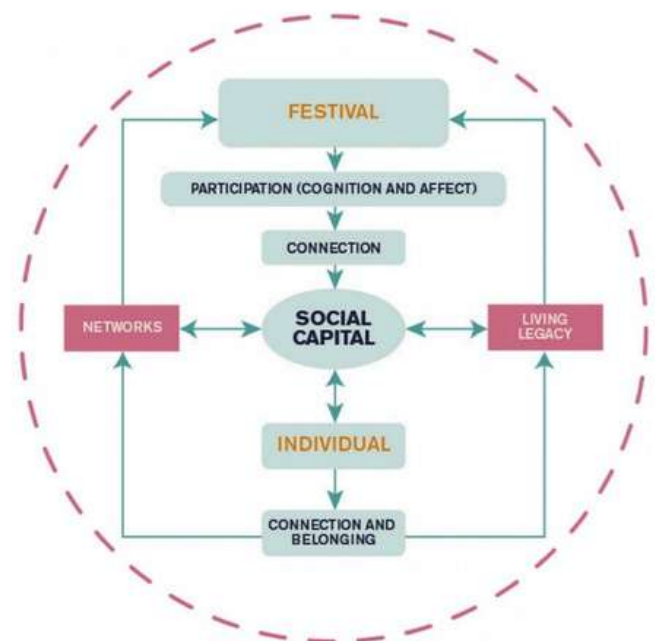
As seen in figure 2, from research conducted by Brownnett and Evans (2019), community festivals offer the opportunity to create both physical and emotional connections and long lasting memories which lead to a sense of belonging to the places we work and live in.

In 2019, through our commissioned and open access programmes SouthWestFest hosted 80 events, across 22 local community and cultural venues in collaboration with 30 producing partners, our biggest and most collaborative festival to date. Cultural activities such as those hosted by SouthWestFest, can act as a useful tool in engaging communities and preserving the local character of our neighbourhoods, benefiting wider regeneration (Westminster City Council, 2020).

When commissioning projects SouthWestFest actively works to ensure projects take place in accessible indoor and outdoor spaces at the heart of our communities and neighbourhoods.

Between 2017 - 2019 our inter-generational outdoor art projects facilitated by Shambush Arts collective have been held across Tachbrook Estate, Lillington and Longmore Gardens, Churchill Gardens, Millbank, Peabody Avenue and Close, and Ebury Bridge.

T. Brownnett and O. Evans



**Figure 2 : The psychosocial processes of festivals linking the individual to the community (Brownnett and Evans, 2019).**

In 2020, our Digital Festival also featured our first ever online and on foot Art Trail, which offered a socially distanced guided trail around the area alongside an online exhibition that featured the work of 25+ local artists.

Through these projects, the festival has introduced its audiences to new venues and community spaces across the area of south Westminster, facilitating community conversations, social interactions and a deeper understanding of community roots and heritage.

SouthWestFest creates for south Westminster an exciting and vibrant cultural offer, bringing communities together and contributing towards stronger attachment to our area and creating a sense of collective identity.

# 5.5.1 PARTNER CASE STUDY

## Shambush

“Between 2017 and 2019 we worked with SouthWestFest on three intergenerational outdoor art and performance installation projects; Room and Board (a cardboard box house, art installation), The Giant Paper Caper (a supersized giant paper chain installation) and Space Camp (creating a space station through arts, science and performance).

Each of these projects took place across estates and outdoor spaces in south Westminster over the 3 weekends of the festival programme. Each offering consecutive creative learning opportunities, leading participants to join the project each week in different locations across the area, ending with a public installation of all the completed work presented in the community garden and in the Duffield Room of Clore Gallery at Tate Britain.

It has been great to meet members of the community of all ages, and get to know them as they return each week to further take part in our projects.

The best outcome however, has been seeing how proud the project participants are when they see their own artwork installed at Tate Britain, many of whom have never previously visited the art gallery, despite living just a few streets away.”

*Anna Whelan, Artist & Project Leader,  
Shambush*



# 5.6 BOOSTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

SouthWestFest is a charitable organisation and all the events we commission and produce in-house are free for audiences to attend. We do this to reduce barriers to engagement and encourage our audiences to take part and get involved.

However even as a small charity, SouthWestFest still offers a positive economic impact on our local area.

These impacts are reflected in those highlighted by the Local Government Association's (2013) report driving growth through local government investment in the arts, which identifies five key ways that arts and culture can boost local economies:

- attracting visitors
- creating jobs and developing skills
- attracting and retaining businesses
- revitalising places
- developing talent

Each year SouthWestFest draws around 10,000 people to our events, workshops and festival programme activities. Although many attending are local residents, the festival also attracts visitors from further afield with postcode data (2019) showing audiences from Croydon, Barking and Wimbledon.

The festival creates freelance job opportunities, as well as supporting London based contractors and suppliers, in addition to offering volunteering opportunities, training and experience for those looking to build their work experience in the sector.

SouthWestFest also works to promote and support local businesses and organisations, many of which take advantage of advertising opportunities in our programme, hosting stalls and areas at our Festival Day as well as offering the festival in-kind goods and services.

We also have a popular sponsorship programme, which sees organisations come back year on year, taking advantage of the opportunities that festival sponsorship offers them.

In 2018 100% of participating organisations surveyed agreed SouthWestFest provides an opportunity for charities, businesses and community organisations to reach out to a wider audience in their area.

2020 has seen a difficult year for local businesses and organisations, many of which (including the festival) have struggled to stay open and continue to offer services due to lockdown rules relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

As we continue through this year and into 2021 facing a national recession, SouthWestFest is looking at how to 're-imagine' our work and services so we can continue to meet our communities' needs as well as supporting our partner organisations.

Our aim is to be part of the local economic recovery strategy, and through the festival we want to continue to create opportunities to reconnect residents with vital businesses and services.

## 5.6.1 SPONSOR FEEDBACK



**“Leyf Nurseries have taken part in SouthWestFest for over 10 years, regularly taking up the opportunity to become a sponsor of the event.**

**The partnership we have with SouthWestFest is very important to us as an organisation. It’s important to our organisation to stay connected with the local community and there’s no better way than to work with SouthWestFest.**

**The festival allows us to connect with other organisations and build relationships with families in the community.”**

*Tania Costa, Marketing & Communications  
Executive, Leyf Nurseries*

## 6. SOUTHWESTFEST'S FUTURE



SouthWestFest acts as a driver of change, each year inspiring the community to come together, and create new opportunities for local people, increasing the uptake in local services and generating long-term partnerships.

Taking onboard our recent experiences, we plan to embrace both digital and physical spaces to create inclusive cultural community events for all ages.

We will also work with our partners and wider networks to share best practice for delivery of high quality events, activities and experiences, which champion communities and culture within south Westminster.

Looking towards 2021 and the future of the festival, we endeavor to build on our experiences and continue to serve our community in new, fun and innovative ways, to ensure ongoing impacts through our charitable work.

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Figure 2: Brownnett, T. and Evans, O. (2019). Finding common ground: The conception of community arts festivals as spaces for placemaking. *Health & Place*, 61, pp.102–254.

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This report was written and produced by SouthWestFest in 2020.

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