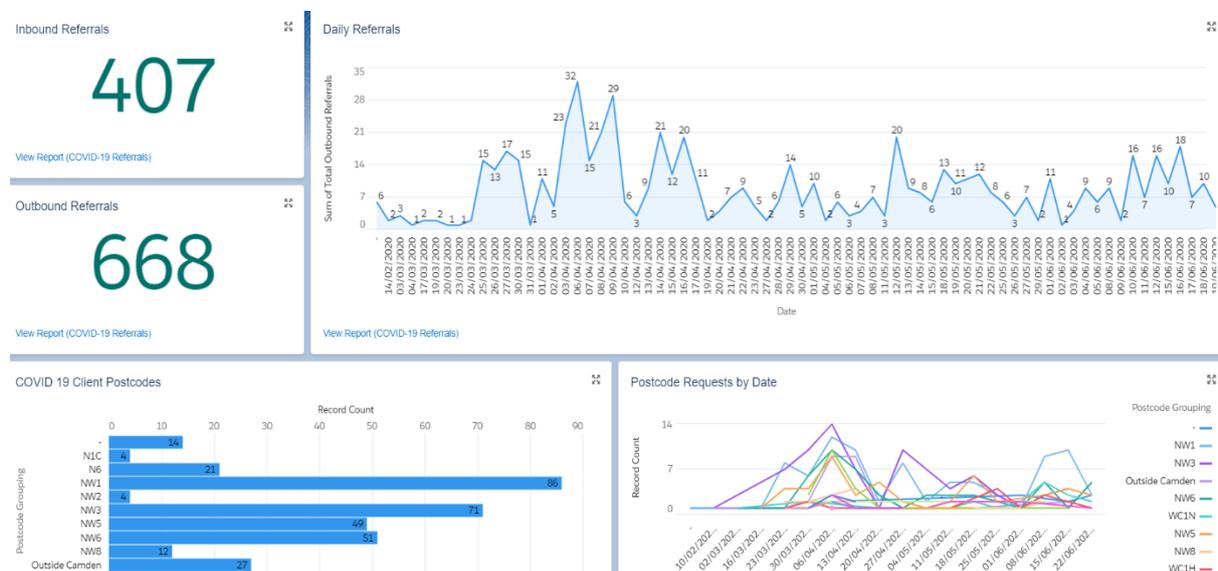


## Voluntary Action Camden: Responding to Covid-19 in Camden

Covid 19 turned our world upside down and inside out. It feels imperative to profile VAC’s leadership and response to Covid 19 in this 2018-19 report at time of publication in 2020. It has been a major part of our recent work to resource Camden’s voluntary and community sector (VCS) to meet the safety and wellbeing needs of our communities. Our concerted efforts in equipping, lobbying for and amplifying the voices of Camden’s diverse VCS demonstrates the vital strategic and operational role of VAC in this time of crisis and positions us well to be part of collective action to ‘build back better’ as something approaching normal life returns.

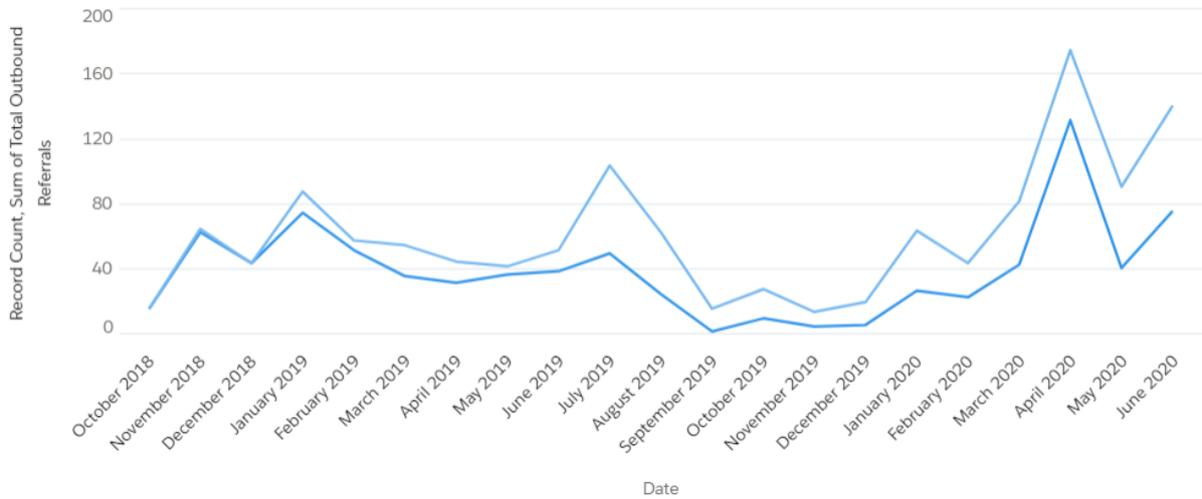
Covid 19 has been life-changing for most, if not all, of the voluntary and community sector and the communities we serve. It has highlighted the resilience, creativity and dedication of VAC and the VCS in tackling the challenges arising from Covid 19 and has been a catalyst for community spirit in the form of volunteering and mutual aid groups. Conversely it has shown the precarious financial position of many charities and revealed the disproportionate impact on BAME communities because of societal and systemic inequalities. It has presented considerable challenges to organisations to mobilise, respond and sustain services especially smaller, grassroots groups who live and work in the communities they serve. It has demonstrated the gap between the haves and the have-nots.



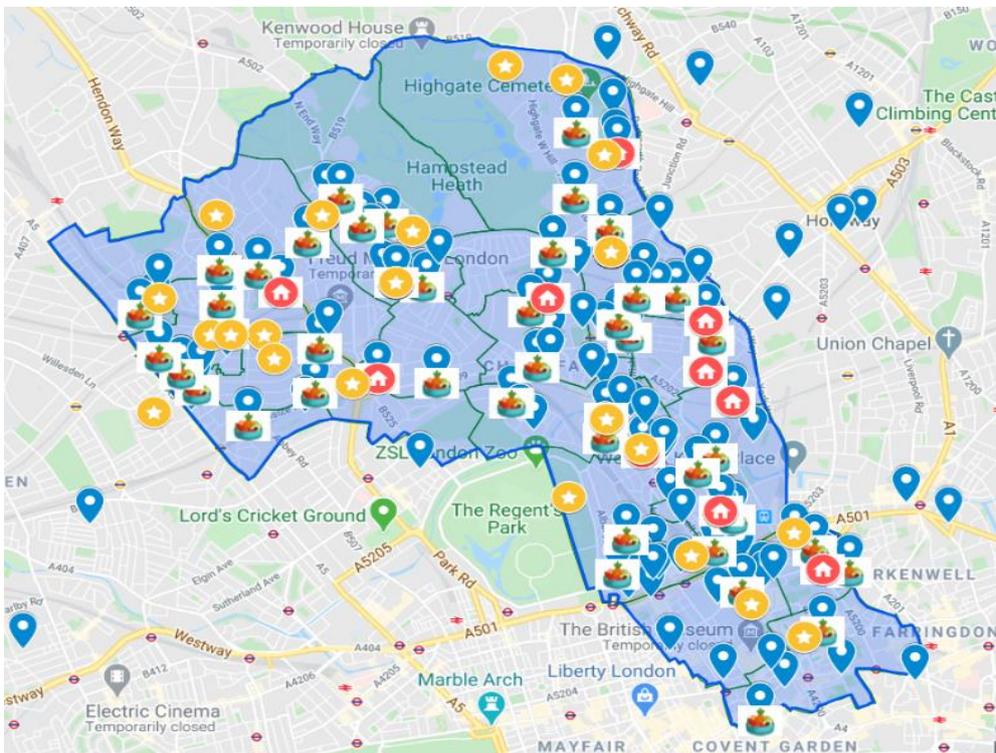
Snapshot of Social Prescribing referrals during Covid 19

As the local expert and leader of Camden’s voluntary action, VAC has been a central point of information and local intelligence. VAC has provided free and accessible up to date Covid 19 resources through the Covid 19 Community Directory and Map that represents the big picture of Camden’s growing voluntary activity in emergency and ongoing response to Covid 19. It has proved to be an invaluable tool to our partners, groups and residents providing the right information at the right time to meet their needs. The disproportionate impact on BAME communities was highlighted in our joint report on Care Navigation and Social Prescribing with Age UK Camden and presented to the Camden Clinical Commissioning Group and Camden Council to influence future service development.

BME Referrals during Covid 19



Graph showing spike in referrals from BAME residents during Covid-19



Google map of support provide by community groups during Covid 19.

Income streams for the VCS have been hit hard throughout Covid 19 and VAC has responded with

comprehensive information on funding sources and government support, and collaborating with local and national partners to highlight the financial struggle of many charities to decision-makers. The VCS has experienced massive reductions in earned income, planned community fundraising all but ceased and institutional funders suspended normal grants programmes as they became overwhelmed with requests for emergency funding towards Covid 19. VAC has run regular surveys with our members and users to understand more deeply the financial challenges and how might VAC capacitate the VCS to manage those challenges well. It has given us valuable intelligence on the future development of our capacity building service for Camden to build back better.

- 87% of groups spending more than 60% of their time on Covid-19 related activities rather than normal service delivery.
- 22% have no grant, contract or direct funding at all to support these activities

*“This survey will be useful in informing the direction of the Trust’s grant making policy which is due to be discussed at the next meeting of the Grants Committee.”*



The digital deficit has loomed large from the beginning of Covid 19 and lockdown. Many groups that have turned to us for urgent help with IT do not have access to technology for remote working and similarly their clients are without the IT resources or skills to live their lockdown lives online. VAC has stepped up to provide trusted guidance through a weekly IT and Tech Q&A sessions to the VCS and supported organisations to secure funding for much needed new IT and upgrades.

*“Thanks for setting up and running the sessions so far, they're definitely a really valuable resource!”*

Looking to the future, VAC is focused on medium term goals of enabling the VCS to come through Covid 19 towards new sustainable ways of working and improved financial resilience. In the longer term, VAC will build on its reputation as a trusted charity to continue to advocate for better funding for the VCS, systems change that will end discrimination particularly in community health, amplifying the voices of those communities that struggle to be heard by decision-makers and protecting accessible, affordable civic space in Camden.