

Tower Hamlets CVS

Children and Youth Forum Meeting Minutes - Wednesday 16th September 2026

Attendees:

Shamsun Nessa - LBTH, Najma Yousef - Bromley by Bow Centre, Sina Akter - LBTH, Florence Okorocho - Compass Wellbeing CIC, Brian James - Fish Island Social Hub CIC, Fran Rivas – Social Action for Health, Saima Khan – SheWise, Carol Taffinder – NHS, Maria Improta – Toyhouse, Tahmina Choudhury – SEND Parent Ambassadors CIC, Roland Hunter – THSCP, Pip Pinhorn – Toyhouse, Jessica Semedo – Barts Health, Neil Fletcher – Barts Health, Bonnie Mayall – Renaissance Foundation, Joe Hallgarten – Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Abjol Miah – Osmani Trust, Freya Nowell – Save the Children, Valentina Giovanni – Carers Centre Tower Hamlets, Feyi Olawoye – BCYP Neighbourhood Delivery Manager, Shay Rafati – Rich Mix, Rubiya Begum - 16th East London Scout Group, Bridget McGlinchy – LBTH, Tania Sheikh – The Attlee Centre, Kareema Motala East London Children's Hospice, Sarbjit Natt – A Team Arts Education, Sam Crosby – THCVS, Sumayyah Barre – THCVS, Sheba Choudhury – THCVS and Vicky Scott – THCVS.

Welcome and overview

The forum reflected on the VSCYF programme over the previous year and considered how the network could build on the learning, relationships and priorities that had emerged through the 2025-26 forums.

Participants were invited to reflect on what is currently working well across the sector, emerging needs affecting children and young people, gaps in provision, and priorities for collective action over the next 6–12 months.

Review of the 2025–26 VSCYF forums

THCVS provided an overview of the four collaborative forums held during 2025-26:

- **Health & Wellbeing – September 2025:** 16 participants
- **SEND – December 2025:** 40 participants
- **Violence Reduction – March 2026:** 43 participants
- **Girls, Play & Inclusion – June 2026:** 32 participants

Across the four forums, 131 participants took part, with the programme bringing together organisations to share learning, identify emerging priorities and strengthen partnership working across the sector.

Key learning from the forums

A number of common themes had emerged across the four forums.

There was a strong emphasis on ensuring that children and young people are at the centre of the work, with their experiences informing priorities, services and potential solutions.

The forums also demonstrated that the challenges facing children, young people and families cannot be addressed by individual organisations working in isolation. Effective responses require collaboration between voluntary and community organisations, statutory services and other partners.

The programme highlighted the significant expertise that already exists across the sector. The forums provided opportunities for organisations to share knowledge and practice, develop connections and understand what other organisations are seeing within their communities.

A key area for the next phase is ensuring that collaboration leads to practical action and change, including developing joint initiatives and responses from the learning generated through the forums.

Programme reach and impact

Across the VSCYF:

- 131 participants engaged;
- four collaborative forums were delivered;
- four priority themes were explored;
- eight training opportunities were delivered; and
- more than 135 organisations were represented.

The forums have helped develop a stronger network through which organisations can share intelligence, identify emerging issues and work collectively to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Tower Hamlets.

Feedback from participants highlighted the value of understanding what other organisations are experiencing on the ground, connecting with organisations working on similar issues and exploring opportunities to work together.

Participants also highlighted the value of practical support provided through THCVS, including access to funded first aid training where organisations may otherwise have struggled to meet the cost of mandatory qualifications.

Priorities moving forward

Five overarching priorities were identified for strengthening collaboration through the VSCYF:

1. **Amplify the voices of children and young people** – ensuring their experiences and perspectives inform future work.
2. **Strengthen cross-sector collaboration** – continuing to build relationships between voluntary, community and statutory partners.
3. **Address challenges through joint funding** – exploring opportunities to respond collectively to identified needs.
4. **Celebrate collective successes** – recognising and sharing effective work taking place across the sector.
5. **Create lasting positive change** – using the network and collective learning to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Tower Hamlets.

Sector discussion

Participants were asked to consider the current position of the children and young people's voluntary and community sector in Tower Hamlets.

The discussion was structured around the following areas:

What is going well?

Participants were asked to identify good practice, successful projects, partnerships and approaches that are already making a positive difference.

VAWG:

- Communication between council and local organisations, support from VAWG team and LBTH.
- General promotion of VAWG has improved.
- Nari Centre (women only) opening is helpful, lots of activities, footfall is increasing.

SEND:

- A lot of engaged groups/support in Tower Hamlets.
- SEND forum feeds into the SEND improvement board – but organisations not funded to contribute.
- More statutory support available. PAC – other specific organisations are there too.

Health and Wellbeing:

- Health spot model – Langdon Park.
- Young people able to access healthcare in youth-based setting (Hackney, Newham and TH).
- Haileybury youth centre – wellbeing.
- OFSTED regulation updated – inclusion of VCS.
- Family Hubs: best start in life – support of young people from 2+ and adults (new parents).
- Bromley by Bow – co location of social services and health.

Girls, play, sport and inclusive spaces:

- Good practice – dedicated (free) female only spaces including a youth centre in Limehouse.

What is changing?

The group considered emerging needs, challenges and issues currently being seen among children and young people.

VAWG:

- More workshops for men.
- Trust is changing, people are talking more, less taboo.
- Tech and safeguarding e.g location tracking apps like Life360 – used for safety purposes but can cause potential issues too.
- Tech = cyberbullying and sexual crimes like deep fake.
- More visibility on work (on health relationships) that is happening within schools and youth clubs.

SEND:

- SEND reforms – more responsibility on schools – EHCP's only for highest level need.
- Integrated neighbourhood teams – but hard for VCS organisations to input, not well funded.

Health and Wellbeing:

- Integrated neighbourhood teams, funding given – NHS initiative.
- More young people moving into adult care with complex health conditions – gap identified.
- Increase in young people/babies mental health presentation, emergency apt – is this the right place?
- Enhanced training offer coming from safeguarding partnership.

Girls, play, sport and inclusive spaces:

- Getting parents on side.

Where are the gaps?

Participants were asked to identify services or support that are missing, difficult to access or not currently working as effectively as they could.

VAWG:

- Men running workshops for men and women.
- Not enough funding.
- Educating and focus on MALE only sessions about relationships.
- Lacking strategic direction for what the goals are.
- Education for young men around pornography.

SEND:

- Lack of coordination/joint up approach – not working together, duplication but don't know.
- Too much information and misinformation.
- Services exist but do not get referrals.
- Children with highest needs struggle to engage with education.

Health and Wellbeing:

- Great offerings from VCS – not getting many numbers – why?
- Communication from ICB, getting VCS voices at the table.
- Paediatric end of life care in Tower Hamlets.

Girls, play, sport and inclusive spaces:

- Free spaces getting booked up quickly.
- Specialised staff for learning needs.
- Travel bursaries.
- Sessions being available at different organisations (safe space).
- Pre-school sessions during term.
- Funding issues in schools creating a gap in access to creative arts – can partnerships plug this gap?

What does the sector need?

The discussion considered what would help voluntary and community organisations respond more effectively to emerging needs and challenges.

SEND:

- Support during the 'waiting time' / borderline cases.
- Better relationships/investments in connecting with community and faith groups/settings. Sharing best practise between groups.
- More connected working.

Health and Wellbeing:

- Improved communication.
- Professional networking.
- Funding – including longer funding cycles.

Girls, play, sport and inclusive spaces:

- Protection of outdoor play spaces.
- Provision for specifically 'male' (traditionally) play/spaces etc – what about the girls?
- Awareness, capacity, funding, young people feeling safe – young girls feeling safe.
- Partnerships meeting to discuss/identify all provision and promote the offerings in Tower Hamlets – how can we signpost more effectively? Shared calendar? Website page with links? Cross promotion within services?

Who needs to be around the table?

Participants considered which organisations, services and partners should be involved in addressing identified issues collectively.

SEND:

- More faith leaders.
- Voluntary / statutory groups
- Health/NHS
- Councillors
- Schools / family hubs
- Local charity organisations

Health and Wellbeing:

- Patient voice.
- Parents/families.
- VCS organisations.
- ICB/NHS.
- Public Health.
- Amplifying lived experience.
- Local authority.

Girls, play, sport and inclusive spaces:

- Schools.
- Parents.
- Girls themselves – focus groups (why go to Limehouse and not Haileybury?)
- QMUL researching gender inclusive spaces – what is the research outcome? Use this information to inform.

Moving from discussion to action

The forum was encouraged to identify practical next steps rather than limiting the conversation to identifying challenges.

Participants were asked to consider one realistic action that could be taken forward collectively, alongside the support that organisations would like to receive from Tower Hamlets CVS.

The group was also asked to consider which issues or areas of work should be prioritised by the VSCYF over the next 6-12 months.

VAWG:

- Put forward ideas/offerings for VAWG – partnership meeting/sharing.
- Conference with charter? Include education leaders, healthcare and voluntary sector. Education of parents. Informed with data – positive patterns to repeat and negative patterns to avoid. Violence reduction unit insights.

SEND:

- Free training for volunteers/organisations to work with young people with SEND.
- Parent led projects where they are invited to help.
- Funding to add help to capacity at organisations.
- Signposting parents who are not educated in looking after their SEND young person (realistic way of access).

Health and Wellbeing:

- Better collaboration between health and VAWG that CVS can take on.
- Fisher Island – lots of new builds but not enough children's centres in the area.
- Funding support.
- Bringing people together.
- Meaningful consultation.
- NHS – co creation – don't just say it – make it.

Girls, play, sport and inclusive spaces:

- Better connection into the services of spaces that do exist.
- Evaluating use of services and identify who is excluded and figure out what people need.
- Let girls lead interventions and decide what they want (not all girls want sewing classes).

- Free/low-cost activities.
- Look into mobile offer.

Next steps

The feedback and priorities identified through the forum will help inform the future direction of the VSCYF.

THCVS will continue to support opportunities for organisations to share intelligence, strengthen connections and explore collaborative responses to issues affecting children and young people in Tower Hamlets.

Future activity should focus particularly on turning shared learning into practical collaborative action, strengthening the involvement of children and young people, and identifying opportunities for joint approaches and funding.