

**COMMUNITY HEALTH AMBASSADORS NETWORK****Introduction**

Southwark Council has worked in partnership with Community Southwark to build a network of Community Health Ambassadors to help us reach more residents with our messages from trusted voices in the community.

There are currently 66 local residents and workers who have completed the induction training and are now registered as Community Health Ambassadors in our Southwark network. Ambassadors have signed up from across all areas of the borough, and the Network has especially strong connections and influence in the Peckham and Nunhead area.

There is a spread of ambassadors across ethnic groups, with 41 (68%) of ambassadors who have provided ethnic background information, identifying themselves from BAME groups. Ongoing recruitment of additional ambassadors is targeted to support priority and underrepresented groups.

**Role of Ambassadors**

The Community Health Ambassadors Network empowers and supports Southwark residents to protect themselves and their communities. The main role of Ambassadors is to share accurate COVID-19 information with their networks, including messages on how to prevent transmission and stay safe, testing, NHS Test and Trace and vaccines.

Ambassadors also sign-post residents within their network to support resources which are available in different formats, languages and in relation to a range of different topics (e.g. COVID-19 guidance, financial support, food, medicine or other delivery support, mental wellbeing)

The role also encourages Ambassadors to provide feedback from their community, in terms of challenges facing their communities, and potential solutions and support required.

**Ambassador criteria and expectations**

The network is open to everyone living or working in Southwark and everyone's voice is important. Ambassadors include local residents, faith groups, voluntary sector workers, volunteers, medical professionals, teachers, TRAs, and Councillors. Even if Ambassadors only pass on the information to their closest friends and family, they are still encouraged to join the network, as they will still be having an impact.

In order to sign-up as an Ambassador, individuals are required to complete an expression of interest form, and attend a 90 minute induction session to meet the Network leads and to better understand what the role entails.

Once on boarded, the role of an Ambassador is to engage with their networks and local communities on the topic of COVID-19. There is no set expectations on time or engagement commitment. Ambassadors do not need to be (and are not expected to be) COVID-19 health experts, medical professionals, social workers, therapists or enforcers.

### **Support for Ambassadors**

Ambassadors receive regular updates on COVID-19 prevention and guidance through a weekly newsletter, a detailed induction pack, online ambassador network meetings and the network's WhatsApp group, as well as having access to an online catalogue of COVID-19 resources on different topics and in different languages and formats. The weekly newsletter also includes details of relevant events, training and grant opportunities, and support services and schemes.

Through the network, Ambassadors have access to public health professionals and experts (through direct links to the Southwark Council Public Health team), who can respond to specific COVID-19 queries.

### **Ambassador Feedback**

From monthly monitoring survey data, 212 messages were sent out on average per ambassador in January, with printed and direct messages being the most common message types.

Ambassadors have also provided qualitative feedback about the network, with comments appreciating the timely response from network leads to queries raised, finding the network meetings informative and supportive for the role, and an increased level of confidence about sharing accurate messages with communities and addressing barriers in their communities.

### **Next Steps**

The intention is to accelerate the growth of the network to maximise the impact and reach into communities to prevent the spread of COVID-19, by further utilising existing networks, groups, communication channels and community organisations to help promote the scheme to encourage residents to sign-up as Ambassadors.

The plan is to also sign-up more multilingual Ambassadors to better support communities impacted by language barriers, and to expand the reach of the network into priority groups and underrepresented communities.

Longer terms plans are considering progressing and transitioning the scheme, by broadening the role of Ambassadors from a COVID-19 prevention focus into wider health prevention themes to support population health and wellbeing recovery.