

the  
listening  
place

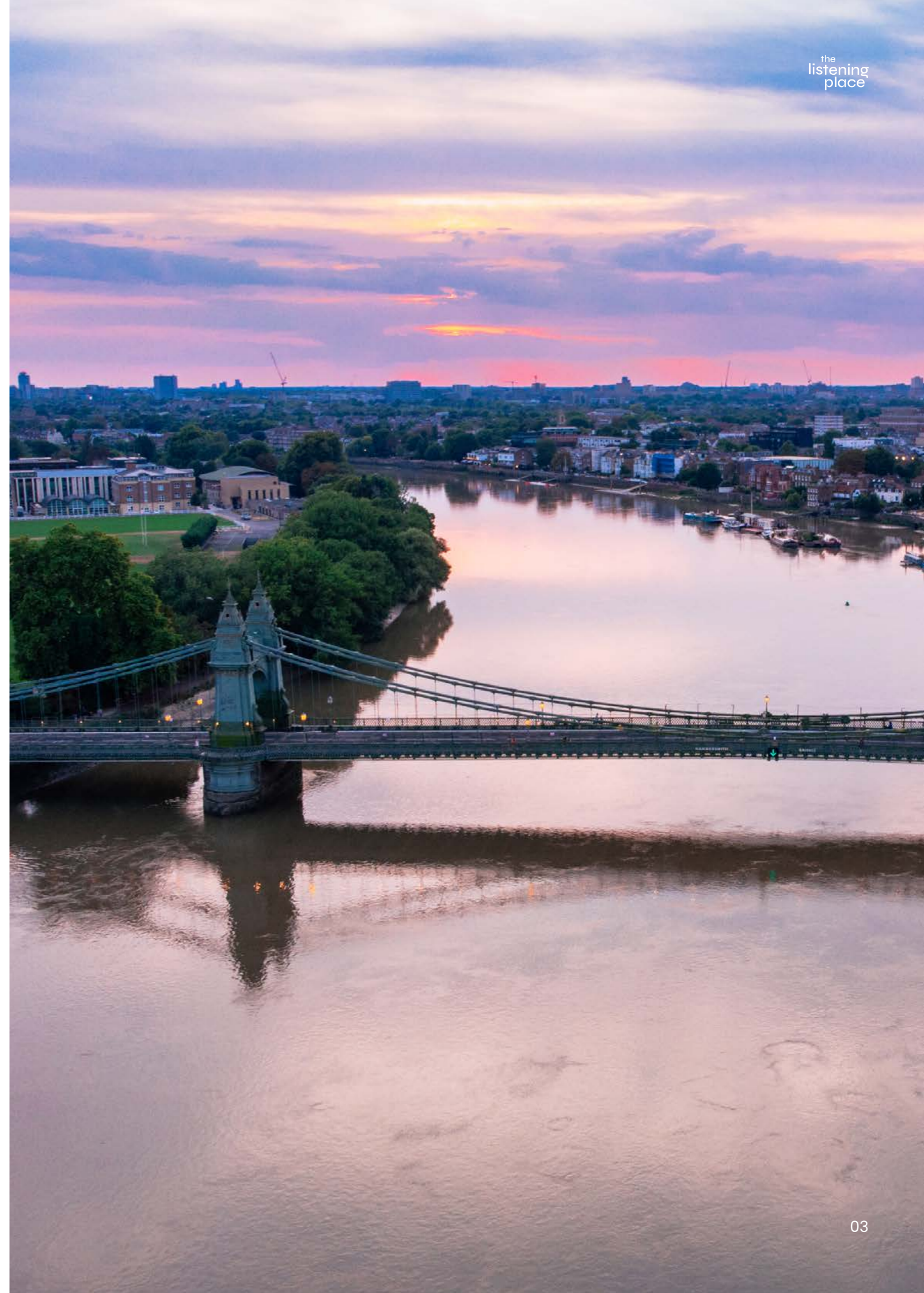
# **Suicide prevention:**

a community-led approach

How The Listening Place has strengthened community resilience to suicide prevention in Hammersmith & Fulham – and the lessons learnt for applying across London.

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# Introduction

In the short duration of The Listening Place's presence in Hammersmith & Fulham, we have become established as a pillar of suicide prevention in the community. This report sets out to detail how our charity has become the local crisis support service for the borough and to explain how and why this should be rolled out in other boroughs experiencing high rates of suicide.

Since opening we have created referral pathways, delivered support to 153 residents and provided training and guidance to other key stakeholders supporting the mental health of Hammersmith and Fulham residents.

Ultimately, our objective with this report is to encourage others to recognise the value in a community response to suicide prevention and to implement this approach throughout London.





## Section 01

# The background to Hammersmith & Fulham

Over the last decade, ONS data reveals that Hammersmith & Fulham has seen a significantly higher suicide rate than both London and England<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, while rates have declined in London over this time, Hammersmith & Fulham has experienced an increase, from 10.6 between 2011–2013 to 11.0 between 2020–2022. The drivers of higher rates of suicidality in the borough are complex, but reducing rates is a shared priority to many. Through the NHS North West London Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the North West London Integrated Care System (ICS), they encompass a holistic approach to the provision of mental health support and suicide prevention. They work collaboratively to evaluate the needs of the individual and to make the most appropriate recommendations and referrals.

Building on data and information from previous years, the borough has built a neighbourhood model to support individuals with drug, mental health and/or alcohol issues. This has seen services

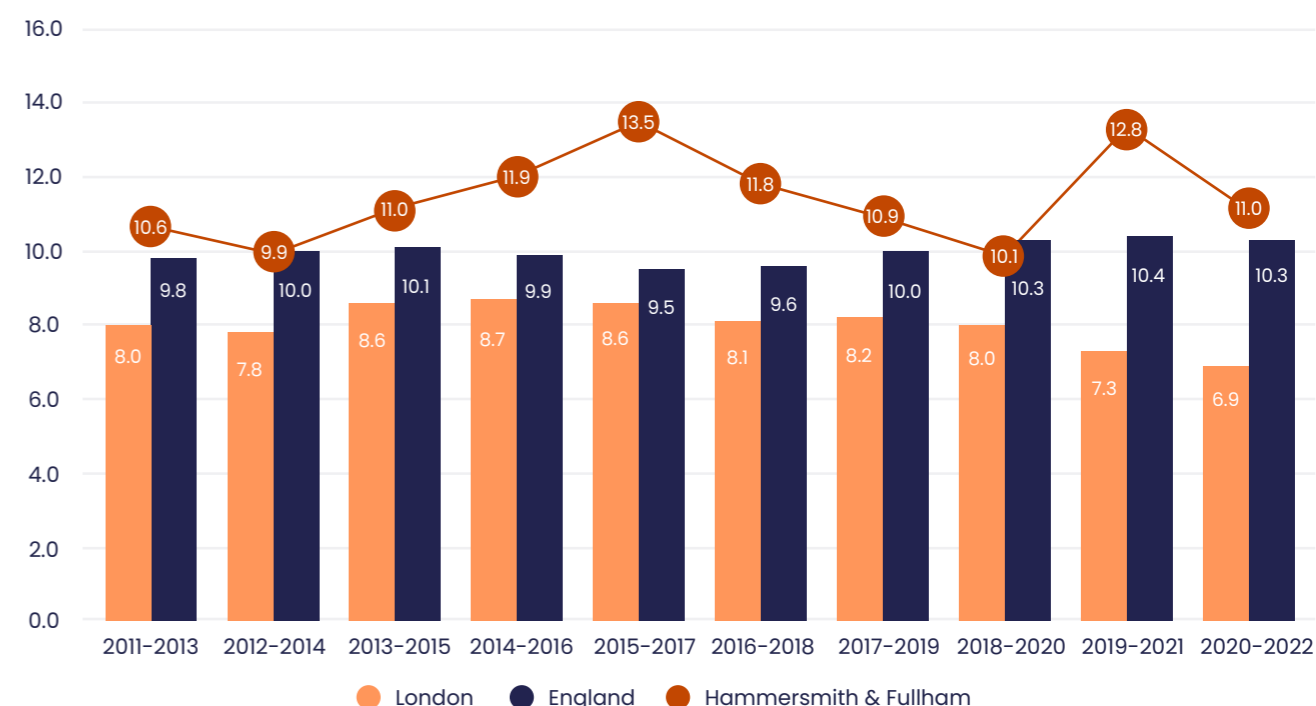
such as The Listening Place, Mind and the NHS work together to construct a network to guide and refer those in need.<sup>2</sup>

Past efforts are outlined in The Suicide Prevention Needs Assessment for Hammersmith and Fulham which details a tri-borough strategy approach from 2013 to 2018 produced by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the City of Westminster and Hammersmith and Fulham<sup>3</sup>. The strategy led to progress in the form of awareness training across the three boroughs, efforts to engage men through the commissioning of Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) by the Local Authority Public Health department and an audit of coroner’s data that set out to identify population characteristics to inform targeted preventative work.

From this, the Towards Zero Suicide: A Suicide Prevention Action Plan was built for roll out between 2018 and 2021. This strategy was overseen by the Suicide Prevention Working Group which consisted of mental health trusts, the local authority public health department, the voluntary sector and clinical commissioning groups (CCG). The group’s primary target areas were reducing the risk of suicide in high-risk groups, tailoring approaches to improve mental health, providing better information and support to the bereaved and those affected by suicide and promoting a multiagency approach.

Driving this collective care is the concept of a community-led approach which empowers all members of a community to play a role in suicide prevention. Throughout England, London and Hammersmith & Fulham, charities and community-based services exist with the objective of preventing suicide, from the early intervention stage of identifying the factors that may influence suicide ideation, to supporting those who have expressed the intent to attempt or who have attempted suicide. The voluntary sector can work in tandem with NHS and local council provision, to provide a grassroots solution that best meets the needs of the local population.

Figure 1: Number of deaths and age-standardised suicide rates per 100,000 population for Hammersmith & Fulham, London and England, rolling three-year aggregates, 2011–2022



<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics. Suicides in England and Wales by local authority, 2023

<sup>2</sup> SW Londoner

<sup>3</sup> Suicide Prevention Needs Assessment 2021–2024

## Why The Listening Place opened in Hammersmith & Fulham

Despite rates of suicide in the borough remaining high, since the opening of our Hammersmith and Fulham site in April 2022, we have built a reputation and established as a safe and trusted space for those experiencing suicide ideation and intention.

From 2022–2023, annual referrals to our site almost doubled, from 53 to 97 with data suggesting we will receive more

than 300 referrals per year by the end of 2024. The impact is being felt, as Koji Moriya, a Community Mental Health Link Worker from West London NHS, has seen first-hand how our presence in the borough has made a difference. He commented that the opportunity to receive support in person has helped service users feel more comfortable and, from a community service perspective, it has made working with us easier.



*“We are filled with confidence that The Listening Place is a safe and effective support option for our service users.”*

### Koji Moriya

Community Mental Health Link Worker at West London NHS

In his role as a Community Mental Health Link Worker in Hammersmith and Fulham, Koji speaks of the impact of The Listening Place’s presence in the borough and how their in-person offering can make a difference in supporting people experiencing thoughts of suicide.

### Accessibility and in-person support

In his three-year long relationship with The Listening Place, Koji has observed the impact of the service offered by The Listening Place to those in need in the Hammersmith & Fulham community. He believes a significant factor that has enabled the charity’s success is its in-person format. He sees first-hand how the availability of face-to-face support helps those who struggle to cope with suicidal thoughts, commenting, “some of the service users seem to feel content when they are seen and listened to in person.”

Koji also values the pace at which The Listening Place carries out their initial assessment of service users’ needs, stressing “The Listening Place try to communicate with people and conduct their triage within 24 hours of receiving their referral.” With this in mind, Koji is enthusiastic about recommending the service to other NHS professionals.

Koji takes care to inform and update his colleagues who come from outside London about The Listening Place’s operations, as he says, “sometimes they are not aware of the charity, so I regularly update my colleagues about the service and what is new.”

Prior to the opening of the Hammersmith & Fulham site, Koji explains that the idea of having to travel to unfamiliar places was off-putting for service users. Therefore, upon the site opening in 2022, the support offered by The Listening Place has been more accessible and approachable for service users. “It is much easier for us to work with them, for example, meeting the team and seeing how they operate” and ultimately, “it has filled us with greater confidence that The Listening Place is a safe and effective support option for our service users.”



### Who are we reaching in Hammersmith & Fulham?

Regarding the issues affecting visitors to The Listening Place, our data reveals anxiety and depression to be the most prominent concern. Between 2016 and 2023, 32% of visitors reported anxiety and depression as the main issue and this applies to younger individuals to a greater extent.

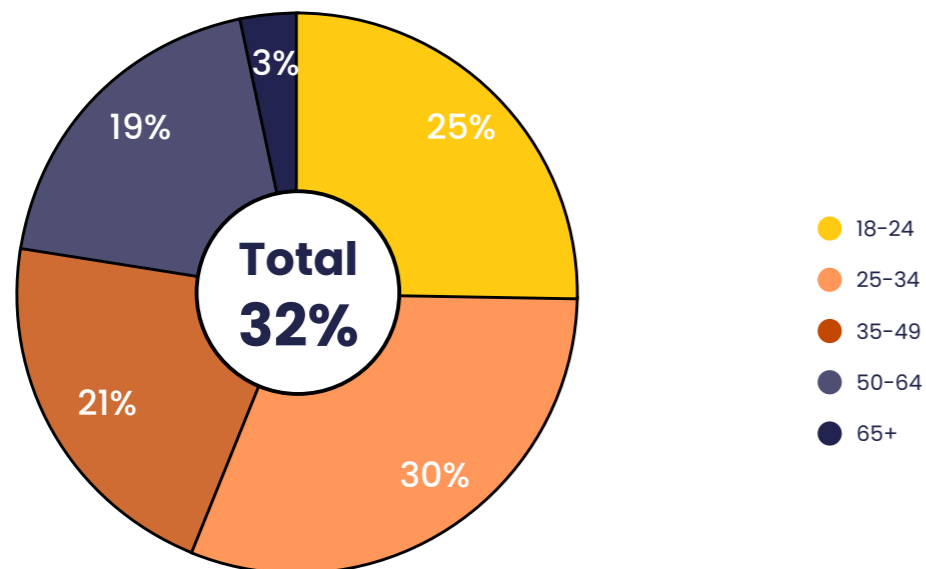
Common mental disorders such as anxiety and depression have become significantly more prevalent in young adults in recent years. A longitudinal

study conducted by School for Public Health Research revealed a sharp increase in rates of anxiety, depression and stress in adolescents and young adults recorded over two decades (2000–2019)<sup>4</sup>. The study speculated about the reasons for this increase and, while it is difficult to pinpoint one sole cause, proposed the generational difference in attitudes towards mental health. As society has become more open to discussing mental health, adolescents and young adults likely feel more empowered to seek diagnosis and help when they feel they need it.

This can explain the differences in the percentage of visitors over the age of 65 compared to the population of this age group in Hammersmith & Fulham, according to 2021 Census data<sup>5</sup>. For the percentage of residents aged 65+ (10%) in the area, the percentage of The Listening Place visitors belonging to this

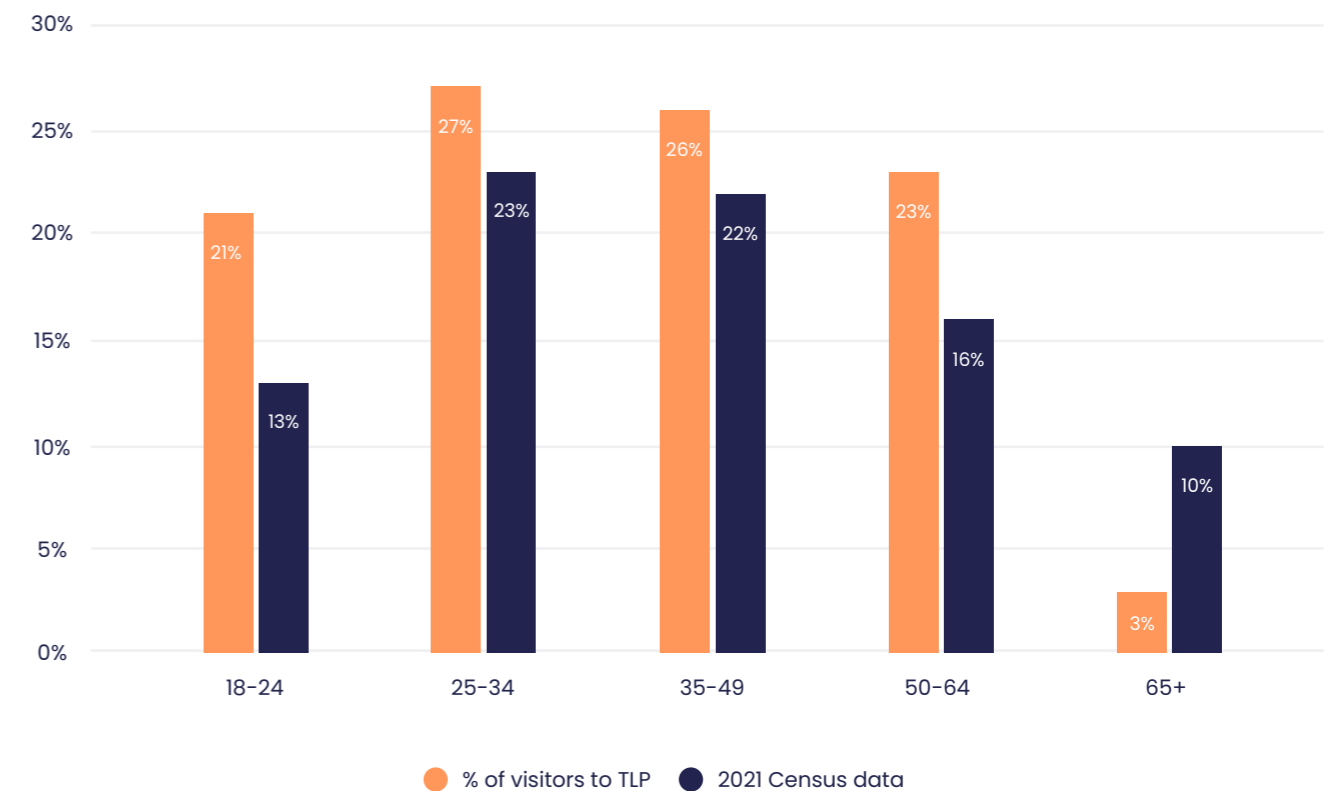
cohort is considerably less (3%). Older residents, particularly those with long-term anxiety and depression, may be less likely to seek diagnosis and support due to the more reserved attitudes that surrounded them at the onset of their issues.

Figure 2: Age breakdown of visitors to The Listening Place whose main issue is anxiety and depression, 2016–2023



<sup>4</sup>School for Public Health Research

Figure 3: Age breakdown of visitors to The Listening Place and comparison to 2021 Census data for Hammersmith and Fulham, 2016–2023



<sup>5</sup>Hammersmith and Fulham Local Authority

Figure 4: Employment status of visitors to The Listening Place



Employment data reveals that similar percentages of our visitors are employed (25%) and unemployed (23%). Both statuses can impact an individual's wellbeing, though in different ways. For those in employment, pre-existing issues, not limited to mental health, can impact their ability to work which further emphasises the need for a holistic approach to suicide prevention to ensure all of the individual's needs

are addressed. On the other hand, unemployment can perpetuate the stress of being out of work and thus make it more challenging for the individual to enter the workforce and remain in the workforce. The impact that being in a circumstance of job insecurity can have, financially and otherwise, can have an accumulative effect on an individual's mental health.

Within the Hammersmith & Fulham borough, Richmond Fellowship has been working for over six decades to support individuals with their mental health and improve their access to employment and housing.<sup>6</sup> The recent merger with Humankind has seen the two charities combine their values, ambitions

and resources to provide support to individuals facing issues related to substance use, mental health and/or housing. As a service overseen by Recovery Focus, the merger is a valuable example of a collaborative endeavour to strengthen community-focused support.



<sup>6</sup>Richmond Fellowship x Humankind

## Section 02

# Outcomes and impressions

### Training

Since the site opening in April 2022, almost two-fifths (38%) of visitors to The Listening Place have had their risk of suicide reduced and no longer want or need support. This speaks to the quality of care delivered, including the quality of training given to our volunteers. Active listening and a compassionate visitor-focused service are central to the environment fostered by The Listening Place.

Underpinning this quality is the guidance offered by our voluntary advisory team which is comprised of 12 professionals who specialise in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy. These individuals provide the training, supervision and practical advice that continuously informs the provision of care.

The structure of the service we provide embodies a community-focused approach. The training and guidance provided by qualified professionals

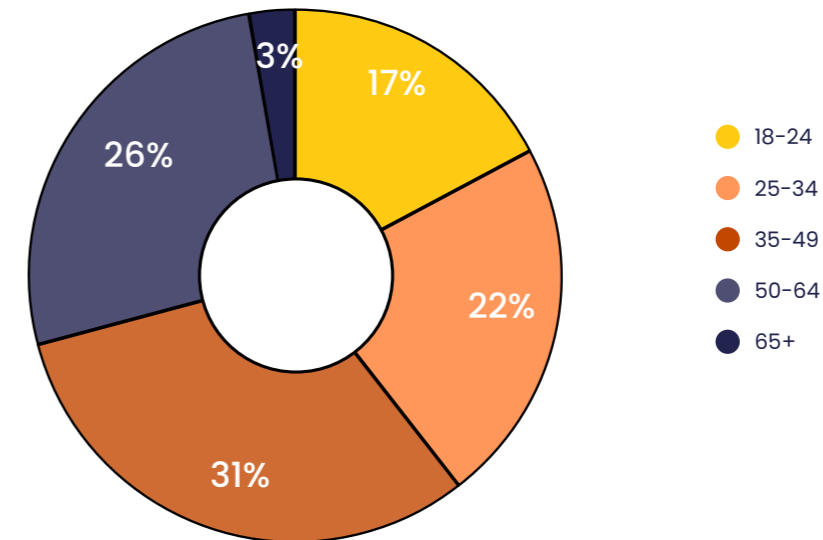
and the readiness of members of the public to become volunteers clearly demonstrates a community that is passionate about participating in building suicide resilience in a holistic way.

The quality of training has been recognised by the visitors themselves, as 86% strongly agree that their volunteers appear to be well trained and skilled in what they do.

### Outcomes

Of the 38% who have had their suicide risk reduced, there is a relatively even spread across the age groups. The balance achieved across individuals of various ages who have had their risk of suicide reduced further emphasises the quality of care provided by The Listening Place. This finding indicates that the care is tailored to the individual regardless of any generational differences.

Figure 5: Age breakdown of visitors to The Listening Place who have had their risk of suicide reduced and no longer want/need support, 2016-2023



While it may be premature to comment on the long-term outcomes of The Listening Place, stakeholders within the Hammersmith and Fulham community advocate for the role that the charity has come to play in suicide prevention. The borough's Public Health Update on Suicide Prevention has outlined improving referrals to The Listening Place's services as a priority.<sup>7</sup>

The community has observed the value in the in-person format that The

Listening Place offers but also in how it supplies suicide prevention training to other services and organisations. The Public Health Update states the intention to facilitate introductions between The Listening Place and other agencies which will enhance referral pathways and enable the arrangement of intervention training sessions for resident-facing staff and stakeholders. This will place the charity in the position to best drive a community-led approach to suicide prevention in Hammersmith and Fulham.

<sup>7</sup>Public Health Update on Suicide Prevention in Hammersmith and Fulham



*The Listening Place is unique in providing complex clinical support in a way that doesn't feel clinical."*

**Lourdes Colclough**

Head of Suicide Prevention at Rethink Mental Illness

In her role as Head of Suicide Prevention, Lourdes Colclough is an advocate for the role of the voluntary sector. In this conversation, she shares her experience of The Listening Place on the service it provides to the borough of Hammersmith & Fulham and promotes the value of community resilience in suicide prevention.

**Creating a social response to suicide**

In our conversation, Lourdes describes the work of The Listening Place as giving people a vocabulary around suicide prevention. "You are giving them an understanding, of knowing where to signpost", she says and notes that the charity's visitor numbers and reputation are proof that it works. What makes The Listening Place unique, Lourdes believes, is that "they can provide complex clinical support in a way that doesn't feel clinical. It has a community feel and doesn't have the stigma and taboo usually connected to suicide."

The Listening Place's appreciation for the value provided by the lived experience of local people when supporting others is shared by Rethink Mental Illness and NW London ICS, through which they were granted funding as part of the NW London Suicide Prevention Programme. Lourdes says it was this that stood out to her when she first came across The Listening Place; that "where they sit has taken up a space that clinicians often deem high

risk". She explains, "The Listening Place has been really brave in the way they train volunteers. Under the banner of a social response to suicide prevention, the work they are doing is often complex but delivered in both a safe and professional way."

**A community appetite for a social response**

Lourdes elaborates that there is a community appetite for support, both from those in need and the general public. She recalls the waiting lists and appetite for training by the public for past suicide prevention programmes, stating, "They want these tools, they want to learn how to talk about it, they want to learn what is happening. And I think the voluntary sector have got the place to do that." Lourdes touches on the impact of the ongoing cost of living crisis, stating that suicide rates have increased, as they have done during past crises, and emphasises a need for a new way of providing support.

For those in need of support who do not

feel comfortable approaching traditional health services, Lourdes advocates for the value in organisations such as The Listening Place. This, she says, is a specific part of the issue; that the connections held by the voluntary sector are the vital bridge between coalitions and helping people, and this requires funding. She concludes that the service and

training provided by The Listening Place, and other organisations within the voluntary sector, can absolutely be replicated but only with long-term funding. She concludes, "given the funding to capacity build and support local services, I think that this is absolutely the way forward."

**Section 03**

**Targeted engagement for those at risk**

Although the Hammersmith & Fulham site has served those who have had their suicide risk reduced, there is a noticeable absence of men being referred to The Listening Place despite the number of men living with mental health problems and experiencing suicidality.

Men are a notably underrepresented group in our data, accounting for approximately one-third (32%) of all visitors to The Listening Place between 2016 and 2023. This appears particularly skewed in comparison to 2021 Census data for the borough which reports that men account for 47% of the population in Hammersmith & Fulham<sup>8</sup>. It should be noted, however, that the data could also be skewed, as one of The Listening Place's key referral partners in

Hammersmith and Fulham is Advance Charity who support people experiencing domestic violence (this tends to be women).

While it is acknowledged that men are less likely to seek support for their mental health, and for their health in general, the reasons why are often underexplored. However, the Suicide Prevention Needs Assessment highlights that reducing suicidality in men often requires addressing and supporting the multiple issues that influence their likelihood of attempting suicide<sup>9</sup>.

Samaritans found that support that explores all of the contributing factors is more likely to effectively engage men<sup>10</sup>. This can be linked to a gender-based

<sup>8</sup> Hammersmith and Fulham Local Authority  
<sup>9</sup> Suicide Prevention Needs Assessment 2021-2024  
<sup>10</sup> Samaritans. Supporting less well-off, middle-aged men

stigma that often leads to male mental health concerns being overlooked and downplayed<sup>11</sup>. This then results in men being less proactive when approaching health services and thus flying under the radar which can cause their issues to exacerbate. The consequences of this are evident in the finding that, in 2022, male suicides accounted for 75% of all suicides in England and Wales<sup>12</sup>. However, this data should be caveated that it is widely understood that the data is skewed by differences between men and women in the methods employed rather than in suicidal intent. Men are more likely to use violent methods which result in death whereas women are more

likely to attempt suicide but less likely to die from it, opting for means such as overdose where there is a much higher chance of survival.<sup>13</sup>

Efforts to empower men to engage with support services are widespread throughout the UK. Dr Nicola Lang, Director of Public Health for Hammersmith & Fulham, has looked into targeting men in specific groups in an effort to engage them. She spoke of appealing to men in universities and gyms to facilitate a conversation around their mental health and this targeted approach can also be observed in other support services directed towards men.

*“The Listening Place is gold standard. They offer a good base to the voluntary and community sector.”*

**Dr Nicola Lang**

Director of Public Health for Hammersmith & Fulham

During her time as Director of Public Health for Hammersmith & Fulham, Dr Lang has worked to reduce instances of suicide through a community-focused approach. In our conversation, she speaks about facilitating the suicide prevention training offered by The Listening Place to various groups within the borough.

**Value in the community**

Dr Lang is vocal about the valuable service provided by The Listening Place, she comments, “It’s gold standard. This is what everybody needs, they are great partners to work with. They offer a good base to the voluntary and community sector.” She

credits the charity with creating a true safe space, that feels personal and open-ended.

Dr Lang values the challenge that The Listening Place presents the mental health community, commenting that it has made the whole system improve itself. She says,

“knowing that The Listening Place is there is a stabilising mechanism. Sometimes statutory services cannot be as quick or as patient focused or have the patience that The Listening Place does.”

In our conversation, Dr Lang shares that the H Bridge Project was effective in reducing the frequency of suicides that occurred from Hammersmith Bridge in 2023. After noticing that construction workers, who were working on the bridge, were intervening to “do life-saving operations in amidst trying to do their engineering work”, she contacted The Listening Place to request suicide prevention training for the staff. During the training, Dr Lang was struck by the fact that the construction workers were so willing to participate and mobilise to prevent others from harming themselves. She says, “What was sad, but really touching, was that so many had had a family member or friend affected by suicide.” Their motivation to participate

in the training likely stemmed from these personal experiences and “they got a lot out of the training. [The Listening Place] did a wonderful job and delivered it very sensitively.”

**Engaging men through different channels**

Dr Lang touches on the need for better engagement with men. She voices concern that, of the total suicides completed by men in 2023, almost half had been in contact with mental health services and two-thirds had been known, at some stage, to mental health services. She explains that identifying themes in the male population is difficult and mentions specific groups that they have sought to target, such as universities, gyms and those who have had contact with the criminal justice system. “There are probably lots of things we need to do rather than just one thing, but we’re open to ideas.” – she concludes.

For example, Men’s Sheds provide a space for men to talk while carrying out varying degrees of manual labour, such as woodworking, repairing and restoring, car-building and model buildings<sup>14</sup>. The Lions Barber Collective provides a talking therapy service for men set in the premise of a barbershop. Upon recognising it as a safe space for men to talk, the charity now operates an online

platform to train other hair professionals to “Recognise, Ask, Listen and Help those in their chairs.”<sup>15</sup>

This indicates that tailored approaches may be key to engaging men with their mental wellbeing.



For men who have experienced suicide ideation and intention, The Listening Place has been an effective source of support for more than two-fifths. Our findings show that, of the 84 men with reported outcomes, 42% have had their risk of suicide reduced. This finding, that the service is effective for almost half of men who engage with the support, contributes significantly to the need to do more to connect with them.

At 29%, another popular outcome amongst men is that The Listening Place is not suitable for them. One of the main reasons for this is because not all people who are referred to The Listening Place are suicidal. Whilst the charity works to

ensure its referral pathways are effective in reaching out to the appropriate people, there remains a proportion of referrals who are not suicidal or who do not want face-to-face support. This does not negate the need for support for men but suggests that they may benefit from a different type of care or care that addresses multiple issues. This reinforces the need for mental health services in a variety of formats and settings that can maximise opportunities for engagement. Creating a selection of environments in which men feel comfortable sharing and discussing their mental health could be the best effort of the Hammersmith & Fulham community to appeal to men.



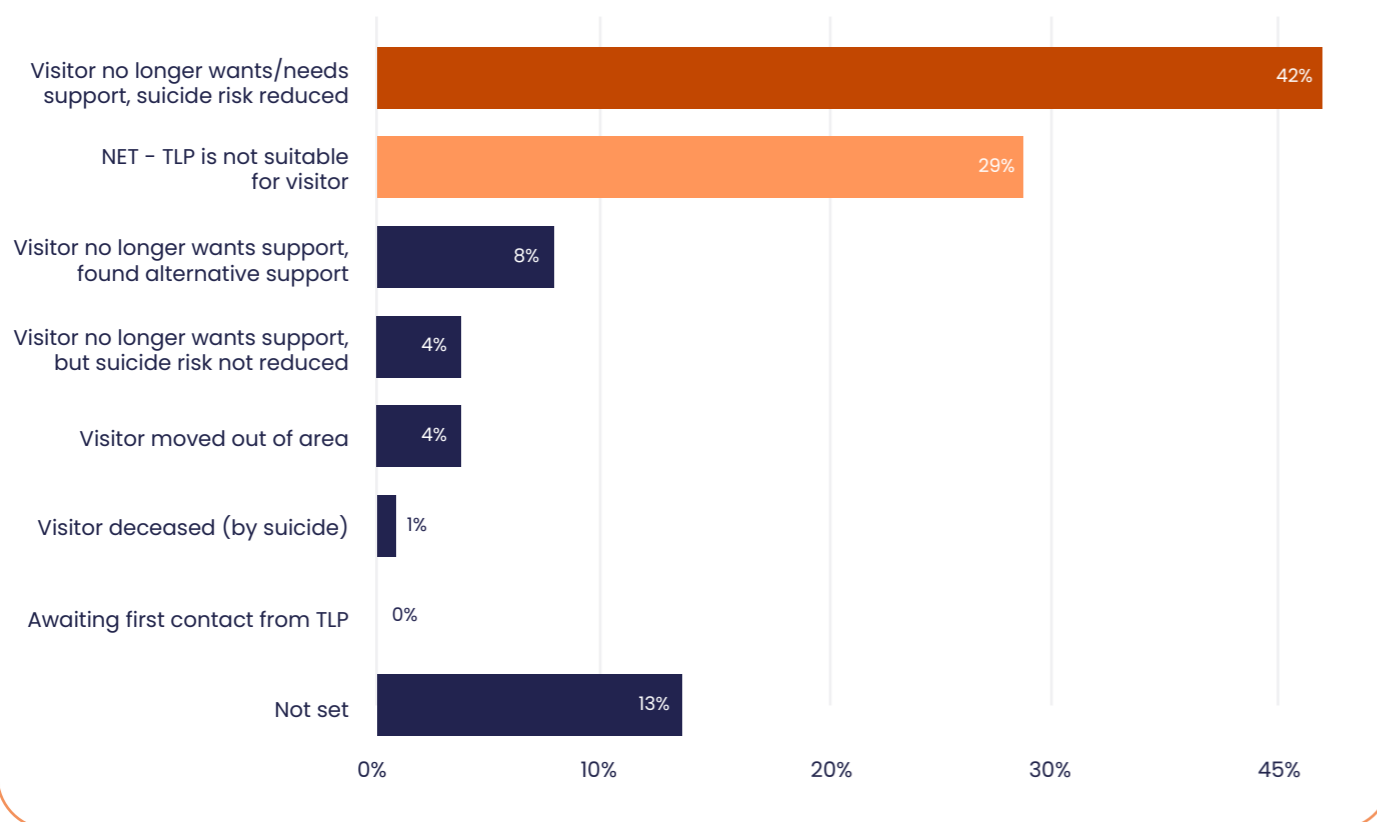
Providing and promoting a selection of safe spaces that are facilitated by compassionate individuals who are equipped with the resources to be able to signpost those who require further support encompasses a community approach. This speaks to the value of charities such as The Listening Place in the provision of training to different groups of people to ensure their awareness of the relevant services which will ultimately build community resilience to suicide.

This is also true for the overall cohort of visitors to The Listening Place – the charity is not suitable for 29% of visitors. To ensure the individual receives the appropriate support, and to ensure a truly collaborative community approach, streamlining communication between

the various services in Hammersmith & Fulham can act as a safety net by reducing the risk of someone slipping through the net as a result of the initial care not being appropriate for them.

The Listening Place allocates a significant amount of resource to contacting, triaging and signposting visitors who, after their first appointment, make the decision to look elsewhere for support. Providing volunteers and training groups with an established network of the support services present in the borough can facilitate smoother signposting and referrals and ensure the individual has the best possible opportunity to receive the support they need.

Figure 6: The Listening Place outcomes for men, 2016-2023



## Section 04

# Hammersmith & Fulham: A blueprint for how The Listening Place can support other boroughs across London

The borough of Hammersmith and Fulham has made suicide prevention a public health priority and, with this, has called for a community response to address the issue. The inclusion of The Listening Place and the surrounding community network can be replicated to build resilience to suicide in other areas of London experiencing high rates, such as Wandsworth, Southwark and Westminster.

Implementing the following recommendations can help ensure a sustained active response to suicide intervention that places those in need at the centre of this holistic approach.



### Encouraging best practice

The Listening Place, while primarily focused on delivery, is constantly building knowledge and best practice in supporting those struggling with suicidal feelings. Sharing this best practice with relevant organisations could foster community resilience to suicide.



### Empowering the general public

A significant element of a community-led approach to suicide prevention is literacy among that community. Equipping members of the public with the vocabulary and knowledge to talk to those struggling with suicidality can facilitate an important conversation that can lead to impactful signposting and that person seeking help.



### Enacting a 'We see you, come see us' approach to engage men

To encourage men to engage with mental health services, we must first empower them to take the first step and acknowledge their own problems. Providing a space for them to process their thoughts and to recognise the weight of their issues can enable them to adopt a more proactive stance in accessing and receiving support that addresses all their needs.



### Expanding the network to ensure the appropriate type of support

While The Listening Place is an effective suicide prevention service for some, others may be better suited to a different type of service. Therefore, efficient communication and collaboration across the different support services in each community can reduce the risk of someone in need being overlooked.



The background is a solid orange color with a pattern of overlapping, semi-transparent circles and thin white lines that create a sense of depth and movement. The circles vary in size and are scattered across the frame, with some appearing as simple outlines and others as filled shapes. The overall effect is a modern, organic, and warm aesthetic.

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