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The Baytree Centre: Women's Service

Supporting women in Brixton to improve their life chances and to flourish

CASE STUDY

Prepared by Sarah Frost for The Mercers' Company, 2022.

The Baytree Centre: Women's Service

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In a Nutshell

The Baytree Centre is a social inclusion charity for women and girls in Brixton, South London. Baytree's Women's Service offers one to one support, coaching, workshops and tuition in a friendly, supportive women only space. Women from all backgrounds are welcomed and the approach taken aims to equip them with the resources, skills, and sustained behaviour changes needed to improve their life chances and to flourish in life.

Making a Difference

The projects outcomes relate to five main areas:

Reducing isolation and increasing networks through numerous opportunities for women to connect with each other and with staff / volunteers. Through activities such as wellbeing Wednesdays and celebration events, women build friendships and increase their social networks. Women say that Baytree, **“keep us close and hold us... like a big hug”**. Many people describe it as an ‘oasis’, **“they feel it is a safe place... the women that come here are really very, very, very far from accessing anywhere else.”**



“Women feel comfortable... and at home and confident... I think that's one of the advantages of being a female only space. Women feel that they're, they're able to speak that they're listened to, they feel able to laugh and be themselves.”

Worker

Improving literacy and numeracy through weekly ESOL and literacy classes (with 298 women attending last year). Digital literacy has been improved through ICT courses and training. During lockdown, the project lent out IT equipment to enable families to stay connected and continue with education.

Improving family stability through providing support with issues related to home and family lives e.g. Parenting; housing; children's education; foodbank vouchers and school uniform vouchers.

Improving resilience and wellbeing through the 1-2-1 coaching and mentoring programme.

Improving financial stability through helping women improve their financial situation and gain money management skills through advice, training and 1-2-1 support.

“I'm very thankful to Baytree... I've been here for 3 years and now I can do a lot of things... I'm now so confident... now I know everything – I'm very thankful and I feel free here.”

Parent

“I'm supported with everything in my life.”

Parent

How Mercers' Support Helps

Baytree were awarded £75,000 of funding from the Charity of Sir Richard Whittington over three years from October 2019.

“We have found Mercers' to be a very approachable, supportive, interested and sensitive funder. The three-year funding period is particularly helpful, as it allows sufficient time to really make a difference to the families we serve... it was critical in enabling us to support families to navigate and survive COVID-19.”

Project Lead

“Baytree gave me a lot of support in my life and got me more confident in English and when I had a problem with my house... they gave me support... with immigration status... this is my 2nd home.”

Parent

How the Work is Done

The project delivers 3 main strands:

- **1-1 support / Social mobility coaching**
- around 5 pillars of family, finance, employment, education and well-being
- **Workshops and activities**
- **Tuition** in literacy, ESOL, financial upskilling, digital literacy.

The work is delivered by paid qualified staff with some support provided by volunteers. The coaches work in a client-centered way, focused on the women's individual needs, **“we look at their particular situation and support them how best it serves them.... we're very much led by what women want to focus on.”**

Coaches have supported women to address a range of challenges related to housing, domestic violence, education, and children's needs.

Baytree is a Christian organisation but everybody is seen as very important to the staff, irrespective of faith, there is **“complete respect for each of our users.”** Building relationships, focusing on people's strengths and a thorough understanding of needs are all central

to the approach. The work is flexible, trauma informed, responsive, relational, inclusive, enabling, holistic and long term. The workers seek to be empowering, persistent and flexible. The women, **“definitely feel that it's their place... like they're just part of this big Baytree family... it's a very diverse and inclusive environment.”**

COVID-19 and Other Challenges

During the pandemic, Baytree continued to operate and adapted to deliver their services remotely: **“we have learned ... that there are some services which we can deliver remotely... particularly reaching some of the women who might not otherwise be able to come into the centre.”**

A related benefit from this remote delivery was increasing digital literacy amongst the women supported as much of the teaching moved to Google classrooms.

The impact of the pandemic meant that the work of the project became very reactive and more crisis led - responding to immediate needs such as food and domestic violence.

Working remotely and maintaining boundaries between work and home life was challenging for staff and there were high rates of staff turnover and exhaustion.

Managing staff and volunteers remotely during the pandemic was also challenging, ensuring they were well supported. On a positive note, adopting new working styles has made their service more flexible.

“We’ve become more and more embedded... it means we are in contact with cohorts of women who we might not otherwise have been in touch with.”

Project Lead

The Future

The Women’s Service is proving to be really successful and funding to continue its delivery is being sought. Partnerships with other agencies have broadened and strengthened during the pandemic and the diversity of the project’s reach has widened.



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The Mercers' Company is a Livery Company focused on being a philanthropic force for good

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