

Reparative Resourcing

Building a Community Centred
Abolitionist Movement





An invitation

Synergi has always existed to shift power, knowledge, and resources to grassroots communities. We are movement-led and we are a political home for Black and Global Majority-led organisations who push back against mainstream approaches to mental health care.

During a time of sharp escalation in racial violence and harm **we distributed funding to 61 grassroots community groups doing this work, totalling £318,386.** We call this reparative resourcing, as funds rarely reach Black and Global Majority led communities doing mental health work within the current system. This report represents in depth conversations with the community about what this work entails and what has been possible with these resources.

With the resources received through this programme grassroots groups were able to:

- Access culturally sensitive mental support for refugee communities
- Use a radio show to talk about experiences of mental ill health within the Muslim community
- Create Black-led trauma informed healing spaces rooted in African and Caribbean community practices
- Build a workshop series for young women of Somali heritage on experiences of distress and alienation related to feelings of disconnection from their cultural lineage
- Build anti-colonial education programmes that contextualise mental health distress within the historical context of colonial oppression

Talking to grassroots groups about what it takes to deliver this work shows that:

- Having space to dream of alternative ways of doing things should not be a luxury
- Slowness and intentionality can be tricky within an environment that promotes scarcity
- It is possible to do things differently if we have the time and resources to do so
- Care and accountability must coexist within this work
- Black and Global Majority-led movements need to be cared for and nurtured

The funding and resources Synergi was able to provide as part of this programme is only a small part of what these groups need in order to be able to deliver this work effectively. Through our conversations we identified the following emerging needs:

- Many grassroots groups lack the constitutions and structures that mainstream funders demand from them, and so funders should be more flexible in their requirements.
- The emotional impact of this work is high, particularly as many leaders are facing multiple forms of systemic injustice in a system that does not care for them.
- The mainstreaming and normalisation of anti-migrant and racist narratives takes its toll.
- The work of Black and Global majority communities is often unpaid. Leaders don't want to perpetuate this, but lack of funding can mean they have no choice.
- Systemic racism within funding processes means that many Black and Global Majority-led groups lack opportunities to obtain funding for their vital work.

The report is not just for our community but an invitation to anyone who is interested in what becomes possible when governance, resources and power are aligned with Black Global Majority epistemologies, practices and movement intelligence beyond colonial logics.

This report reflects concrete examples of building as abolition and providing care and stability to the global majority community-led alternative to systems of harm.



Grounding: Democratising Policy

Shifting power and resources in mental health and racial justice is central to our work at Synergi. The work done by people with lived experience within the community is often a vital bridge between traditional policy work and the people most impacted by these issues. But we also know that this work is often under-resourced and under-valued, precisely because it is not seen as traditional policy work and not given the care and support that is needed to make community-based approaches work.

Grassroots campaigns are addressing a range of issues; securitisation and Islamophobia within the Prevent programme, immigration detention and the hostile environment, the criminalisation of distress, surveillance and mental health data, and the gatekeeping of mental health services based on immigration status. Traditional policy silos are often not working in these areas or have the reach or trust within the communities impacted that is needed.

At the same time philanthropic funding for community-led justice work is shrinking. State and non-state funding continues to flow disproportionately towards white-led institutions. Making the operating environment for Black and Global Majority led groups increasingly precarious. These organisations already operate within an environment shaped by structural racism, extractive grant-making practices, and high expectations of emotional labour with little, if any, resourcing in return.

Our Democratising Policy workstream acknowledges that the activism by those who have lived experience of mental ill-health, distress or trauma, who are supporting racialised communities has value. It is rooted in the belief that work done in the community is just as important as more mainstream activism that focuses on reforming the mental health act.

Democratising Policy recognises that policy work is everything that the community does, even when it is not recognised as such. Because the work of building trust and creating space to explore these issues is vital for true policy change.

This is campaigning work that has real energy behind it at community level. Through our Democratising Policy workstream we are looking to better resource, better connect, and amplify this work in a way that is trauma informed rather than trauma led.





Reparative Resourcing: Building a Community Centred Abolitionist Movement

As racialised violence intensifies, civic space shrinks and social systems collapse, community-led alternatives to systems of harm have become essential sources of resistance, safety, dignity and survival. But those very alternatives face higher risks precisely when they are most needed. So Synergi made the deliberate choice to reject mainstream funding logics to resource grassroots movements. We created the Synergi Fund and the (Partnership) Solidarity Fund.

The Synergi Funds is not grant-making. This is reparative resourcing, money moving in ways that repair harm, build community power, and allow communities to survive systems built against them. Keeping frontline abolitionist alternatives alive in a contracting, often hostile, funding landscape that continues to overlook Black Global Majority communities, their labour and their infrastructures of care. These were movement led programmes specifically created to reach those very community initiatives that were being left behind by more mainstream funding approaches.

To reach individuals experiencing heightened racialised distress and exposure to state violence, Synergi also piloted a movement-led micro-granting model through our Solidarity Fund. Partnering with eleven Synergi grantee/movement members to distribute £200–£300 grants directly to their community/movement members rapidly, relationally and with community held decision-making. This shifted “participation” from consultation to self-determined community resourcing. Modelling what resourcing looks like when care, trust and communities most impacted guide decisions, not institutions.

The Criteria

Our criteria for the Synergi Fund and Solidarity Fund were **designed to tackle and counter the historic underfunding of Black and Global Majority led mental health work**.

We know that groups with a high income and those that are registered with the Charity Commission find it easier to attract grant funding. So, we made sure they were open to groups who are not formally registered with Companies House or the Charity Commission.

These programmes exist to support communities who are racialised and have been harmed by the mental health system, incarceration, policing, prisons, psychiatry, forensic settings, and/or the immigration system. We hope to cultivate solidarity and build coalitions across the movement by supporting groups working together to resist and challenge harmful and oppressive systems.

We distributed funds to groups that are engaging within an abolitionist framework, working towards transformative changes, and alternatives to standard service delivery. We wanted to centre abolitionist work and to engage in cross pollination across groups.

Our criteria for the funds were to fund work that benefited people, , and communities who have been impacted by one or more of the following areas:

1. **Prisons and policing** (including forensic mental health settings)
2. **Have lived experience of mental health settings**
3. **Been impacted by immigration detention and removal centres**
4. **Working at the intersection of mental ill health, distress & trauma and racial and/or disability justice using an abolitionist framework**

We also prioritised groups that were led by and for communities from: Muslim communities; trans and non-binary communities; refugees and/or people seeking asylum.



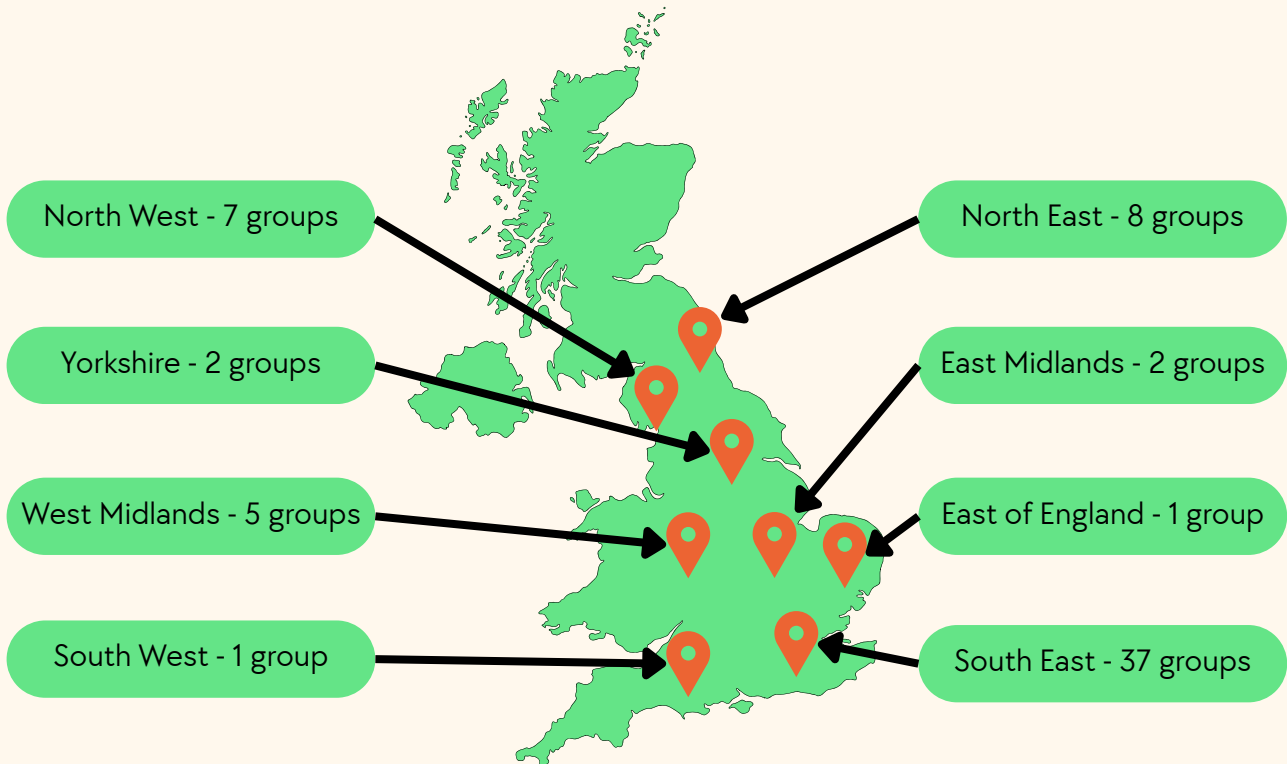
How much was redistributed

Through the **Synergi Fund** we distributed funds to **72 grants to 61 groups**, totalling **£318,386**. In addition, the **Solidarity Fund distributed a total of £106,875**.

In 2023 we distributed £3,500 grants to 37 groups. In 2024 we reflected on the demographics of those groups that received funding, and those that did not. We know from data that anti-Blackness is particularly prevalent within the mental health system and as a result we made the radical decision to invite groups led by and for communities racialised as Black and distributed 50% of the funding to these groups. We also invited 7 groups that received funding in round 1 to apply for more funding in round 2. **We distributed £5,000 grants to 43 groups.**

Where we redistributed resources

We were able to reach groups spread across the nation:



We also funded groups that work on a range of specialist areas and underrepresented groups, such as: Black and People of Colour, islamophobia and securitisation, migrant rights, criminal justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, and Disability justice.

It was important that we created space where groups had the opportunity to work collaboratively in an organic way. To achieve this, we developed a map which shows the geographical location of groups we funded, which allowed groups to connect with each other and collaborate with others in their region or working on similar issues. [Please click here for a full list of who we funded.](#)



What Resourcing Made Possible

We funded the real costs of abolitionist practice undertaken by a variety of groups that were organising around abolitionist principles outside of mainstream services. Groups that are building community, focusing on collective care and working in ways that are more mutual and less hierarchical.

These are some of the activities and topics that groups were able to achieve with our funding:

- **Delivering workshops, events and programmes:** Political education (in abolition, decoloniality, and racial justice); for survivors of FGM; culturally sensitive peer mental health support services; Collective Healing series; Legislative Theatre; Black-centred work-readiness programme; culturally rooted healing programme for Somali young women.
- **Alternatives to mainstream mental health services:** Emotional Emancipation Circle; Reimagining Community Safety; Black trans therapy with appropriate therapist; free menstrual product supplies to refugee people; asylum legal support; ecology somatic healing gatherings for QTBIPOC (queer, trans, Black, and People of Colour); dances as a somatic approach; peer led crisis support group services; Black student Bursary.
- **Community Organising:** Retreats for group members to plan; organising and campaigning against immigration detention; outreach and support initiatives; booklets and banners; collaborative event centred on the ongoing genocide in Sudan; food parcels.
- **Infrastructure:** Physical collection of books on race, gender, sexuality, queerness, diaspora, class and radical political thought; Operational costs; free regular, sustained and accessible spaces for workshops and gatherings; maintenance of sound equipment; creating websites for groups; paying people for their time.

Conversations with the community

We know that groups who do this work are not being paid and that people are doing this work in addition to other responsibilities. We wanted to ensure that processes placed as little burden on people's limited time. We simplified the application process as much as possible. We also rejection the notion of groups providing formal written reports and instead inviting groups to have conversations about the community alternatives to reducing mental distress.

During these conversations we didn't ask groups to quantify what they did, as this is not in the spirit of trust-based reparative resourcing. We wanted the call to be relational. To discover how the fund helped the group to do the much-needed work.

For this report we have summarised calls with groups we worked with in 2024 which consisted of 24 calls from 38 groups. We wanted to cultivate a transparent environment and maintain group confidentiality to allow for a better sharing experience. Unless a group is explicitly named, feedback has been anonymised.

Below we have shared insights from these conversations. The words belong to the community doing the work, our contribution was crafting the story.



Reparative Resourcing

We distributed resourcing to grassroots Black and Global Majority led groups and practitioners. These are groups that mainstream philanthropy routinely ignore, avoid and/or do not see advancing.

They work in the following areas:

- **Survivor and peer-led safety and care**
- **Mutual aid as harm reduction**
- **Transformational and reparative justice**
- **Healing and somatic work**
- **Abolitionist organising**
- **Cultural and narrative interventions**
- **Resistance organising and anti-detention mobilisation**
- **Lawful protest support and defence**

This is not grant-making. This is reparative resourcing, money moving in ways that repair harm, build community power, and allow communities to survive systems built against them.

It keeps frontline abolitionist alternatives alive in a shrinking and often hostile funding landscape that continues to overlook Black and Global Majority practitioners, their labour and their infrastructures of care.

Synergi Resource Redistribution

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." ("Audre Lorde - Learning from the 60s", Sister Outsider, 138)"

None of the groups who were funded by Synergi were concerned with or worked on 'single issues', rather they intersected across a multitude of lived experiences. However, in some cases there was a catalyst or locus of effort which form the basis of their work. This focus was not static but fluid, and some groups found their work moving in slightly different directions as a response to their community's needs. To reflect this fluidity, we have grouped a small selection of the work under broad headings to protect anonymity but also to show the breadth of the work our community is doing.

Carceral systems: Prisons, policing, surveillance, mental health settings

The communities supported under this area ranged from folks that have been or were hospitalised, incarcerated, or experienced mental ill health and/or distress and trauma. This framing means that for some groups they have deliberately framed themselves as a community-owned alternative to carceral and medicalised responses to distress - creating a safer, ritualised environment where they explicitly say they will not call the police or immigration enforcement on participants.

Navigating the criminal industrial complex

Art featured heavily within this group due to the background of the core organisers. For example, they co-produced a book with people who were incarcerated and ensured they would receive royalties. They also focused on supporting people transitioning out of prison or mental health settings. This support could be centred around caregiving or emotional support to help them gain employment.

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It was noted that some who had been incarcerated did not have a support network of older individuals to provide advice and to help them "plug in" once they were released. For others, this involved navigating a career after being in prison or psychiatric settings with a criminal record. It was possible for this group to demonstrate that they could achieve career success without being career criminals. They aimed to enable individuals to participate in the workplace or to support someone in setting up their own business and reading contracts.

It was common for this particular group to receive referrals via the Royal Bethan. On occasion, those referred did want career advice but also sought guidance on how to navigate the hospital's carceral setting. Unescorted leave, for example, is one of the key stepping stones to being discharged, and peer support and mentoring were extremely useful in helping navigate that transition. Emotional support was also a recurring need, such as helping individuals not become upset with the process by explaining what to expect and how to navigate the system.

Community based support to the unhoused

Another group built on the legacy of the Black Panther Party's free breakfast program for children by providing food packs to unhoused people either directly or through groups working with the unhoused. The groups chosen to assist with the distribution of the food packs had a non-judgmental approach to supporting people who were unhoused. Importantly, they were not working with the Home Office. Some of the people who come to the breakfast club are in precarious housing - for example, using bin bags for their belongings.

They also offered supportive resources such as art, therapy, meditation, and massages to support organisers and collectives who are being criminalised. Organising events was a big feature of their work. They ran events on resisting immigration, social events, know-your-rights workshops. Funding enabled these events alongside the subsequent associated costs—leaflets and bust cards, anti-raids, etc.

Case study: Countering surveillance by building trust

A group whose families are British citizens and who have been unlawfully detained overseas sits at the intersection of immigration, mental ill health, surveillance, and carcerality. Being able to access fundamental human rights while navigating the risk of criminalisation was a central theme for this group. The separation from family members, including children, who are experiencing distress while in prison, and being ostracised from the public and doorstep by journalists, engenders mistrust due to the process of deep disillusionment. Unlike the groups with which we worked, having a shared experience did not initially manifest as a sense of belonging. The extreme levels of trauma left the families unable to share; instead, they all felt isolated within the group. Being subjected to high levels of surveillance meant that the foundation of this group was to build trust.

Over the last three years, Synergi has funded this group, and a significant portion of the first year was dedicated to establishing trust within the group, which shared a common purpose. Being able to meet regularly and consistently served as a gentle introduction that was trauma-informed rather than trauma-led. This regularity was a step toward building cohesion and trust among the families. It was important that this trust evolved organically, allowing them to attend the online sessions with their cameras off and to choose to share what felt comfortable and safe to do so.

In the second year, the focus shifted to trying to build solidarity and a sense of community in this landscape. There was regular attendance at the group sessions—some still do not use their names due to the high risk. Increasingly, the group became more action-oriented, having been established to provide support and solidarity. These meetings also served as a platform to connect with other survivor-led family groups, inviting representatives from other groups to attend as guest speakers. By hearing the experiences of others firsthand, it was hoped that this would inspire and empower the group to achieve their own goals.



In the last year, there has been the introduction of an external expert with community-appropriate clinical advice on how to hold the group and involved unpacking how to share information safely. Some members have felt safe enough to be involved in campaign work, but consideration was given to the group's fear about being in public. A lot of measures and safety planning had to be put in place to facilitate this.

Community: Cultural responses to Mental ill health, distress/trauma

Culturally appropriate care does not simply mean having Black and brown people represented in mainstream services. While representation is important, making sure approaches to wellbeing and therapeutic modalities do not perpetuate harm is vital.

Culturally sensitive care from a Mindfulness Peer Support Worker

It was important for one group to have access to culturally sensitive mental health support in the form of a Mindfulness Peer Support Worker who was from the refugee community and the group hired a sessional worker from within the refugee community of Tyne and Wear. The group were able to offer 1-2-1 support groups and activities that built trust, socialisation and networking. Most of the people who use this service go through mental health challenges have no idea how to seek help. The group was able to offer them a lot of information and help, in preparing a CV and in finding employment so they are self-sufficient. They realised that the 1-2-1 really gave them a safe space to say what is really going on.

Madness Under Capitalism workshops

This group developed their "Madness Under Capitalism" workshop and a healing space. They worked with people who experienced the more violent edge of mental health service. They created a collaborative space which allowed them to learn from each other and to model care and responsibility. They explicitly prioritised those with lived experience of mental health issues who were Black and People of colour, trans and/or disabled. For them it was important that it was always a peer space. They also produced Zine.

Peer support for Muslims who hear voices

This group's focus was to create a positive message within the Muslim community, whilst working towards abolition of the mental health system or for a radical redesign. For them, the Mental Health Act is very draconian, and the hierarchy built into the mental health system is racist.

"It is odd how you are assessed based on reports written by other people who don't know you and a psychiatrist will use these reports to prescribe medication."

This group noted that there is no encouragement to better yourself whilst incarcerated in hospital. Some people have been in hospital from the ages of 20 and 21. They have never used a smart phone or used online banking. There is no campaign for upskilling people within the system, instead the system only deskills them. Being sectioned under the Mental Health Act means that the section can be renewed over and over again and as a result you are left in limbo.

They used their radio show, which attracts regular listeners, as a platform to discuss the ways in which language reinforce stigma within the Muslim community around mental health, feeling suicidal and being safe.



Case study: Ubuntu Healing Circle

This is a Black-led, trauma-informed healing space rooted in African and Caribbean understandings of community care, spirituality and justice. They work primarily with Black, Brown and Mixed-heritage people who are carrying racial trauma, many of whom have had difficult or harmful contact with the psychiatric system, policing, immigration systems and/or the criminal justice system.

The free Ubuntu circles are an accessible space created to allow people to process racialised trauma and distress without being pathologised or blamed, and without fear that their pain would be used to justify more control (sectioning, police, immigration enforcement). A space to have those experiences held, named and validated within an explicitly anti-racist and abolitionist framework.

"This political education element is woven into grounding, ritual and body-based practices so that people leave not only soothed, but clearer about why they are suffering and that it is not their fault."

Access culturally-rooted alternatives to statutory mental health support – including ritual, music, somatic practices, ancestral remembrance and collective reflection – which many participants told us felt safer and more meaningful than mainstream services. Building community and solidarity whilst countering isolation and shame. Several people have described Ubuntu as the only space where they “don’t have to explain” their Black or Mixed-race experience and can show up as their whole selves.

Healing through connection with Somali tradition

One group organised a workshop series for young women of Somali heritage, who can experience distress and alienation related to disconnection from their cultural lineage.

Based on the Somali practice of Sitaad - a devotional and spiritual gathering for women - the programme combined traditional Somali cultural practices, education about Somali history and culture and Western psychological frameworks, to explore identity, mental health and wellbeing.

The programme was seen as a major success, described as “beautiful beyond belief”, and “refreshing” in how education and healing were approached through art, creativity and culture. It had a profound impact on staff and participants alike; bringing out “a lot of cries.” and really broadening the organisational understanding of ‘therapy’ and ‘healing’ beyond Euro-centric models of talking therapy.

Supporting Black men’s wellbeing and influencing system change

An intergenerational user-led creative arts & health project which supports Black men’s mental health, provided a radical community-based alternative to systems and services known to be violent to Black men. This included weekly meet ups and creative projects where members explore personal, professional, and collective challenges to foster a sense of togetherness and brotherhood. Having roots in creative arts was an opportunity to use legislative theatre as a methodology within community settings. This interactive approach engages the public in conversations about mental health in real life settings.

Radical education and holistic healing

One anti-colonial education initiative used their reparative resourcing to expand their collection of radical educational materials and expand their healing offerings; covering the costs of training for one additional acupuncturist (to join one already trained) and offer four events combining political education - such as a film screening or essay-reading - with acupuncture treatment. This combination of political education with collective care acts aims to sustain those at the sharp edge of several intersecting systems of oppression to stay in the struggle, whether that’s through their work, activism, or just through their survival.



Responding to emerging trauma

One group that offers radical education and decolonial care to Muslims was able to use part of the funding to respond directly to emerging needs and crises identified in their community. In response to the atrocities being witnessed in Sudan, the group set up a support group for the local Sudanese community.

History as healing

Several groups spoke to how important it is for Black and People of Colour communities to know their history, so that they can contextualise their personal struggles within a systemic picture of systemic injustice and a collective fight for liberation.

One funded group - a youth-led collective of Black and Global Majority Muslims - described how they address the root causes of mental distress and trauma through political education. By contextualising present-day injustices and atrocities within global political history and the ongoing legacy of European colonialism, they support young people to understand how this affects their own identity and wellbeing.

Practical support to navigate traumatising systems

Some groups focused their work on the prevention of mental ill health and distress as people navigate existing harmful systems, such as immigration and the carceral system.

Peer support for those with No Resource to Public Funds

One group - a self-organised community of immigrants with lived experience of the no recourse to public funds (NRPF) policy - provides space for practical advice and emotional support for those navigating the stressful, costly and uncertain path to gaining British citizenship. Their work tackles the root causes of mental ill health among BPOC communities, not only through the support offered in the group, but also with material support such as the 'destitution fund'. They also campaign for NRPF to be scrapped entirely.

They used their Synergi reparative resourcing to organise an in-person strategy day, covering the costs of venue, catering, childcare and other access needs.

A work-readiness programme for Black students

One funded group offers education, community, training and advocacy for Black students and professionals. They used their Synergi funding to run a programme for Black students at the outset of their career, aiming to alleviate anxieties and navigate the common injustices experienced by Black people in the workplace.

The programme offered two in-person and three online sessions featuring guest speakers and facilitators covering topics such as rights and responsibilities in the workplace, the unwritten rules of professional environments, community-building, well-being, and healing.

Radical education and healing

Expanding the collection of Pan-Afrikan radical educational materials and the healing elements of their programme was a key focus of one group. They provided political education - such as film screening or essay-reading combined with acupuncture as a healing modality. This combination of political education with collective care acts as a means to increase capacity for Black and queer people at the sharp edge of several intersecting systems of oppression to stay in the struggle, whether that's through their work, activism, or just through their survival.

"A root cause [of mental ill health and distress] is isolation. People are isolated and feeling really, really lonely. And so these spaces make people feel connected... it was really beautiful to see that. People were really excited about the events that we were making, and that we have been able to attract recurrent people to come."



The funding they received increased the group's capacity and impact both within the library and in the wider community. They have been able to expand programme of healing events across their community.

Community: International solidarity

Community: International solidarity

One group organised a collaborative event centred on the ongoing genocide in Sudan. They offered internationalist solidarity towards ending violent regimes while holding space for grief and mutual care. Aimed at Sudanese folk and allies, the event was a space to amplify voices and learn from those in the Sudanese diaspora, to raise awareness, and to build solidarity. It was also a chance to express grief and to acknowledge the resistance in Sudan and beyond. The event also included a celebration of Sudanese culture through the involvement of Sudanese performers and artists, offering this sharing of artistic practices as another form of learning and processing.

"Allowing there to be joy alongside the grief as the wholeness of Sudan. Allowing for the space to hold the complexity of people's lived experience."

They wanted the event to be as accessible as possible and offered an access bursary for attendees (to cover any expenses that might pose barriers to attending) and access to BSL interpreters. They ensured proper compensation for all involved, especially since these would be Sudanese artists and thinkers. They co-created an intentional community of care and solidarity by offering free food and refreshments to all attendees. The space was an intergenerational environment designed to amplify diverse voices. It became an outlet for rage and community strength. There was a focus on the intersection of distress, trauma, disability justice, immigration, prisons, and policing, which allowed them to provide support and a platform. People were able to participate in Sudan via live recording.

Community: Women

Case study: Gathering for community organisers

A group of organisers arranged a retreat for their members as they needed time together, beyond an afternoon or evening, where representatives can explore possibilities for the collective to support grassroots responses to experiences of (in)justice.

They rented a house near the beach and had structured sessions as well as dialogue for three days. They acknowledge that some members had caring responsibilities and would only be able to attend for one day. It was also important to break barriers on participation by covering travel costs. They were able to practice what they envisioned and created a nurturing, joyous space for members to engage in dialogue, dreaming and care. This group understood that they hold collective power to challenge institutional failure and policy harms affecting racialised and other marginalised girls and women. The retreat was structured and inclusive space to recognise and explore this power. The dialogue started on the journey to the retreat and the space they dream of to do the necessary dreaming.

"The whole period together and the conversation didn't stop and began as we travelled together, so we recorded all of the ideas and plans."

The retreat was multilayered, including not only rest, but a deepening of the relationship of the members. Having the time away meant days of living together and having longer unbroken conversations. This created space for them to bring that vision to life whole heartedly which is difficult without resources. For this group they found it frustrating that funders believe in the dreaming and relationship work, but don't necessarily fund this type of work. They benefited from the time delivering of the vision that that they hope and work for. It allowed them to ground themselves in care.



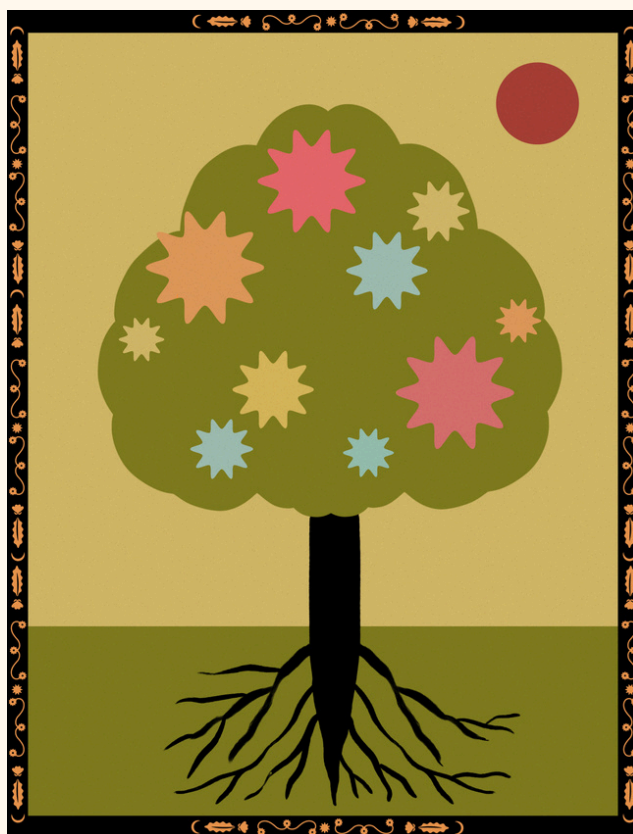
Giving dignity to those who menstruate

The fund proved to be vital in the distribution of period products and an outreach service to people currently located in “hotels” used to house migrants as they have no distribution service. The women housed in the “hotels” have limited amounts of toilet roll. This impacts their mental health and wellbeing as they do not have the funds and access to care. The funding also supported wellbeing sessions of yoga and reiki, sound healing, educational workshops that work to inform refugee people who menstruate of inclusive reproductive health anatomy, symptom management, risk assessments, signposting and reproductive self-empowerment, and the rent to cover accessible spaces for refugees when required. The funding also helped cover shipping costs to deliver vital menstrual products to refugees in temporary accommodation or refugee people who are homeless as they do not have necessary equipment such as a printer, to print recurring shipping address labels for menstrual product parcels. The period products are stored in the house of the lead applicant. Without this funding the group would have had to say no to those who reached out for support.

Community: LGBTQI+

Centring care within the LGBTQI Community

The freedom of the fund this group a level of autonomy and challenged the inherent power relations between funders and those receiving funds. An LGBTQI group said that the Synergi funding was really helpful in continuing the project which had been going for 7 years. All of the members have mental health challenges and hardship in accessing service. The focus of the fund was on creating a Black-led approach to wellbeing. There was no requirement for the group to provide quantitative statistics to Synergi in terms of who accesses the service. In reality this meant that the group “appreciate that we know our community and what they need”. Providing statistical information increases the labour of groups who are already stretched.





A Movement-Held Response to Systems of Oppression

Synergi's movement learning and evidence is also increasingly demonstrating that across multiple interlocking systems "care" is increasingly weaponised as control - emerging as a regime of carceral governance of Global Majority communities.

Global Majority communities often avoid seeking help because mental distress is routed through coercive statutory systems that engender surveillance and punishment; vulnerability becomes a pathway into state scrutiny rather than support. As a result, disproportionate levels of mental distress, trauma, bereavement and grief are lived realities for ever increasing numbers of Black and Global Majority communities. These harms are systemic and political yet are consistently reframed within neoliberalism as individual pathology.

Racial justice efforts are facing intensified backlash - from overburdening regulatory constraints to targeted hostility undermining the very initiatives working to address these harms. In this climate, Black and Global Majority communities are increasingly reconstructed within the public imagination as ungrievable subjects: a social and political process that marginalises Black and Global Majority life and positions it as less grievable, less worthy, and less human than others.

Within this environment, groups we resourced had the opportunity to build, grow and experiment with their approaches at larger scales - from individual, to community, and systemic level. They were able to build new approaches to heal from the impacts of shrinking civic space and funding. While the impacts on individuals and communities are numerous, there are a few stand-out themes which demonstrate Synergi's unique and important role in the funding landscape.

1. Responsive resource redistribution by and for BPOC communities

In contrast to most mainstream mental health systems and services, the projects resourced by Synergi were born out of the genuine needs identified by racialised communities and developed directly by members of those communities. This means each project is led by those with the inherent wisdom of lived experience, deep connection to the community they are serving, and extensive first-hand knowledge of the injustices they are tackling.

This work goes beyond funding alone, groups we partnered with were able to explore more experimental and expansive approaches to healing - from holistic approaches to healing, drawing from cultural traditions, political education, and more. Synergi's approach to working with and for racialised communities meant groups were able to put community needs first rather than have to fit around strict funding criteria.

Striving to do things differently meant that we were not prescriptive with our approach to impact. We wanted to support decolonised and abolitionist approaches to mental health for racialised communities, which in this case meant trusting our partners and acknowledging that they know best what their community needs. Activities that partners used the funding for varied from group to group, but what they all had in common was a deep desire to build alternatives and changing the ways in which people navigate hostile environments.

Groups had the space to reimagine different ways of tackling the root causes of mental ill-health, trauma, and distress for Global Majority communities. They built spaces rooted in joy where communities could discuss the problems they face and co-develop solutions.



2. A lifeline for small and unconstituted groups

We know that small and unconstituted groups struggle to access resourcing. So Synergi's approach to reparative resourcing created an environment where many activists and healers could breathe and recharge. Where they could build up their confidence and take leading roles in serving their communities.

Synergi's ethos is one of trust. Funded groups have agency to make executive decisions about how to deploy funds, how to respond to the needs of their community, and what feels important as indicators of success. Not only does this relieve the burden of application, monitoring and reporting placed on organisations by most funders, but it also helps to consolidate in those funded groups a sense of confidence, capacity and a belief that the changes they want to see can actually be realised.

3. Supporting diverse approaches to abolition

While some groups focused on more direct approaches to abolition, such as campaigning for prison abolition, others worked to build abolitionist infrastructure through developing alternatives to carceral systems.

Some funded groups have built community-led approaches to safety rooted in abolitionist practice within culturally diverse neighborhoods heavily affected by policing, mental health injustice, and structural violence. Other groups have used funds to build more equitable relationships with their communities, rejecting mainstream terms such as 'service user' and instead seeing people as partners. Some groups have used resources to build spaces where communities can reflect on and acknowledge diversity and difference within their communities. They created regular community circles that specifically name racism, colonialism, austerity, policing, immigration violence and psychiatric racism as structural causes of distress – not personal failings.

"This political education element is woven into grounding, ritual and body-based practices so that people leave not only soothed, but clearer about why they are suffering and that it is not their fault." Some groups have taken steps towards abolition of statutory mental health services through activities that tackle and counter their logic. For example, a group provides packs to unhoused people that the state should be providing. Where the state relies on means testing and other approaches to restrict who gets helped, these packs are given freely to all that need it.

4. Improved access to and understanding of radical alternatives to healing

As part of its expansive approach to abolition, Synergi's resourcing has supported groups investing in and experimenting with approaches to healing that go far beyond the Euro-centric norm of talking therapy. Building radical community-based alternatives to healing, mental health and wellbeing came in different forms for many of the groups.

One group which has developed a wellbeing programme for young Somali women rooted in Somali tradition described how the freedom to blend cultural and ancestral practice with modern psychology had really expanded what they saw as possible, and what they saw as 'therapy'.

Abolitionism means growing infrastructures of care that reduce reliance on police, prisons and coercive psychiatry. Collective care practices such as co-regulation, mutual aid, shared leadership, ritual and spiritual practices - which people can take back into their families and communities.

"Creating a level of safety within these communities is much higher and the level of trust when people walk into these spaces and be safe in the knowledge for that time they won't have to deal with the other complication of being racialised as black queer and PoC"



5. Space to be, to breathe and to dream

The groups Synergi works with are often doing this work unpaid and in addition to their paid work. They do not have the luxury of and access to 'work retreats' or 'away days'. It should not be underestimated how enriching it was for groups to be able to take time to be together, to bond and build trust, to develop central infrastructure to support their work, and to dream about their future.

Time spent together planning has helped groups build strategies that better pace their approaches towards change - where their ambitious dreams for radical change remain alongside an understanding that change takes time and collective action. For example, a group working on abolitionist approaches to reproductive health created a directory of services accessible to people seeking asylum despite their limited capacity by sharing the workload across the group.

Synergi funding has helped build confidence amongst many groups. The recognition that came from receiving funds helped many build infrastructure necessary to continue their work. For example, a Muslim youth led group was able to solidify their plans for the next six months through better approaches to planning.

"Because we knew we had this funding, we've been trusted with it, we took it really seriously... I think it allowed us to start developing some of those accountability practices, [exploring question like] 'how do we keep transparency with our community?'"

Relationship building was key to dreaming and planning, and funding enabled many groups to create spaces for intergenerational dialogue. A retreat for racialised and marginalised women and girls helped build connection through activities that prioritised relationship building and connection - this rest ultimately helped the group build better plans and strategies.

"Collectively we considered "Justice for women" and what it means to be a mother or a sister engaging in sectors such as housing welfare. As humans we function as part of complex communities and the collective work across various sectors. The space created a wider lens and deeper thinking. Looking at our own identities and being able to survive and support other people."

6. Creating an eco-system

One of our goals for the Synergi fund was to help build an eco-system of grassroots Global Majority-led organisations across the country, but we also wanted these to emerge organically. So we focused on creating spaces that encouraged collaboration between groups.

Groups in the North of the UK do proactive outreach work to older Black and Global Majority people to tackle loneliness and isolation. These groups have partnered with organisations such as Age UK, Teakisi UK, and The Angleo Centre to increase the number of people they are able to reach and grow their movement. Groups in big cities such as London and Manchester have built strong relationships with groups in other parts of the UK, learning from each other and collaborating on their work.

By linking up groups from across the country we have helped them share their experiences and learnings with each other. Through this, groups have learned to grow their core organising teams, build relationships with disability justice activists, link up to Sudan solidarity movements, and more. Opportunities for collaboration have also emerged from this work, for example the Black South Network based in Bristol was invited to participate in the first Mad Pride in Sheffield. Most importantly groups have been sharing their experiences on wellbeing and safeguarding practices, in order to build wellbeing and safety into the heart of their work.

Synergi has also created reflective programmes for the activists we partner with. Through the Abolition in Practice programme groups have a space to reflect on what abolition means to their work and to their approach to leadership. Through other programmes we have helped groups learn how to create zines and how to create cultural archives.

"[The grant] really let us define what our offer was...that attracted a lot of other groups to us, and we started to form networks that way"



Building capacity

We asked groups for honest feedback on whether Synergi has improved capacity and sustainability of their groups. Given the diversity amongst groups that received funding we wanted them to define what capacity and sustainability mean to them.

Immediate changes

For many groups these funds helped them put on events and activities in more ethical and accessible ways - such as hiring BSL interpreters and being able to pay speakers for their time. For one group the increased profile from Synergi's work helped secure additional funding.

"Funders want to see that they are established."

Being responsive

The increased stability from these funds also helped the groups respond to the needs of their communities more effectively. The funding enabled groups to grow their organising teams, to pay for facilitation time, buy more equipment for the group, evaluate activities, or just keep their programmes open and accessible to the community.

Increased racial violence in following the Southport stabbing in July 2024 left many racialised communities feeling unsafe. The flexibility of Synergi funding meant that groups were able to focus on making their community feel more safe by implementing walking groups so that people didn't have to walk alone at night.

"We had to remove single females living in the area and were escorting people to go shopping"

Capacity

Many of the groups we worked with had a tendency for the work to be led by one person or a small core group of often overworked and exhausted people. The grants they received enabled many of these groups to expand their core team and share the workload across the wider group. This helped to deepen relationships across the group and build stronger relationships where everyone helps. "rather than everything resting on one person."

For many groups this has been transformative, with many now having a clear vision for the next two years of work. Funding and planning has helped these groups be seen as more credible, increasing opportunities for collaboration. For example, a breakfast club that was organised by one group is inspiring other groups to create their own breakfast clubs in their community - meaning that even more people are reached by this programme.

The biggest impact of the Synergi grants is increased confidence amongst Black and Global Majority led activists' groups working on mental health. The simple application process we developed encouraged many to apply that would not usually go for funding. The learnings and experiences from this programme has helped many build up evidence and confidence needed to apply for further funding with more mainstream funders. Demystifying the funding process has helped many apply for funding despite being a non-registered group. Dreaming of abundance and sustainability has helped many others build alternative approaches to resourcing within the community.

Synergi funding meant that groups were able to be financially compensated for their work, enabled them to expand their offerings, it helped them grow their knowledge and skills. However, given the short-term nature of the Synergi grants and limited funds means that many of these groups this respite was short lived. The environment is still challenging for Black and Global Majority led grassroots groups.

"We held on because of the funding, but now back to where we were. It will feel even lonelier if Synergi is not here. We are the only organisation that provides menstrual products for those seeking shelter"



The unexpected outcomes

“Several people have reported that attending Ubuntu gave them the courage to challenge racism and ableism in services, workplaces and families, or to make different choices around calling the police / mental health services in a crisis.”

We wanted to understand what the unexpected outcomes were for groups that received funding. A few groups talked about how Synergi were the first organisation to fund their work, and how this enabled them to secure additional funding from other sources as they were now able to show mainstream funders that they are not a risky organisation to fund. One group was able to secure a grant of £150,000 over five years. Whereas others took intentional steps towards self-financing by creating merchandise and other avenues for income generation.

Increased profile and visibility that came from working with Synergi meant that groups were contacted by other groups and activists working on the same issues, helping groups build their own eco-systems and expand communities. New alliances and partnerships helped grow their influence. Working collaboratively with their communities to plan how to use the grant money created opportunities to deepen engagement of community members. Which both helped the groups create new programmes based on ideas from the community as well as helped individuals get more involved in organising work.

Emerging needs: challenges, barriers and what’s still needed

Whilst there is plenty of appetite for grassroots community led groups to work collaboratively, many group leaders spoke of the barriers that exist to doing this work:

1. Being small, grassroots and unconstituted

Synergi’s reparative resource funds go to many groups that are truly grassroots, led by-and-for BPOC communities facing multiple intersecting injustices, and who are typically unconstituted. The nature of these groups is both a strength and a challenge. Many reported facing a steep learning curve, as this was the first time they’d received and had to manage any funding.

“The sector has its own system... we learned everything by ourselves; [things like] googling ‘theory of change’, or what sort of policies that we need to have.”

Being unconstituted means that many of these groups lack the typical structures and policies that would be found in a charity or organisation. This means these groups need to develop their own infrastructure for decision making, accountability, and safeguarding. And this further restricts their access to funding, as mainstream funders ask for these sorts of structures to already be in place. So many groups used some of this funding to create strategies, policies, or to start the process of registering as charities or Community Interest Companies. The Synergi grants enabled them to build the foundations needed for further growth. But this can be a long process, and many groups need further support in developing and growing their organisations beyond these grants.

“Being able to dedicate a lot more time to do the work. It was tricky, as we then had to get on with the work. This took time away from setting up the foundations of the group and ultimately, we didn’t have enough time.”

2. Intersectional injustices and emotional impacts

These groups and communities are all navigating the sharp edge of racialised, ableist, and carceral justice systems. Both community members and community leaders have direct experience of dealing with systemic injustice and oppression. The emotional impact of this work is very high, with a high risk of burnout as leaders and organisers navigate this often-unpaid work alongside jobs and caring responsibilities.



One leader talked about the lessons they learned when delivering a work-readiness programme for Black students. The sessions could be emotionally activating, and whilst aftercare and safeguarding protocols were in place for participants self-care as a leader with lived-experience was also needed. "I think the recurrent thing that I'm always finding is, you know, lived experience leadership is really important, but it's really hard. Because I am fundamentally trying to help people heal from what I'm still healing from. And that is always going to be a challenge, you know?"

A group of migrant women with no family in the country spoke about how they would support each other with childcare so they could attend meetings and access support. Leaders of this group spoke about how collective care is self-care, but doing this alongside personal hardships can still risk burnout:

"While we're fighting, we're having to live that experience - we all have other jobs. Helping others gives you that strength, but it puts you in a heavy place, we don't think about ourselves - it's like an escape route so we don't think about our own struggles. It would be nice to take care of yourself, but we don't have that luxury."

3. Political landscape and political awareness

The political climate and the mainstreaming of hateful anti-migrant, anti-Muslim and racist rhetoric takes its toll on the wellbeing of racialised communities. This impacts on both the need for these community groups, as well as on their ability to provide support when they are themselves experiencing fear, distress, grief and burnout.

Some group leaders have observed how political narratives rooted in racism can become adopted by Black, People of Colour, and migrant communities. One particular group working on the No Recourse for Public Funds (NRPF) policy discussed how they were shocked that one member of their group said ***"they do understand where Farage is coming from" when it comes to 'illegal immigration'.***

This shows that there is a need for more conversations in communities to build a deeper understanding around the immigration system and the racist connotations of much of current political discourse.

4. Physical space

Some groups spoke about challenges with finding suitable, affordable space to hold in-person events. Often venues are not accessible, and/or not safe for BPOC people with intersecting marginalised identities.

5. Holding contradictions

Some groups also spoke about the challenge of holding or navigating contradictions in their work. For example, being abolitionist in principle, while operating within harmful systems. Or being community-based and community-led, while also being rooted in quite complex academic philosophy.

"so much to do so many ideas where we start can be overwhelming, but we can hold that. Intentionally moving slowly without pressure. "

6. Expectations of unpaid labour

In a society where racism is built into the very systems we live and work within, the reality often is that the work of Black and Global Majority people (and particularly women) is often not paid for or valued. For community-led groups doing this work this can be a very tricky thing to navigate, as leaders do not want to perpetrate this reality but also often do not have the funds to properly compensate people for their time.

Synergi grants enabled some of these groups to not just invite facilitators and collaborators into the space, but to actually pay for their time. However even with funding they still could only afford to pay relatively low amounts in comparison to what consultants can get for doing the same work.

7. Lack of funding opportunities

Many of the community-led groups that received funding through the Synergi redistributive resourcing programme face uncertain futures because the funding landscape and infrastructure is just not designed to accommodate groups like them.

"Systemic racism in commissioning and funding: Black-led, spiritually-grounded, abolitionist projects are often seen as "niche" or "too political", which makes long-term funding difficult."

Mainstream funders who do fund work in racial justice, mental health, or migration often opt to work with established, white-led organisations over grassroots community-led groups like the ones Synergi funded through our programmes. Sometimes partnerships with these white-led charities can help these groups access funds, but the relationship can have unequal power dynamics and leaves community groups reliant on other organisations for the resources they so desperately need.

The Synergi fund has given evidence of the transformative community work that is possible when these groups are resourced. But it has also highlighted the uncertainty and precarious futures many Black and Global Majority community-led organisations face if the funding sector doesn't step up and make funding more accessible to these vital organisations.

"The unexpected impact has been, like, I've done this - I've delivered this great program, the feedback has been great, the students want more. But now we've fallen off the cliff, and there's no money! ...I thought that once you've secured your first reparative resourcing everything is smooth sailing from there."





Solidarity Fund: Democratising Resources for movement led micro granting model

We know those we work with know their community and we wanted to enable them to reach groups. Our approach was community-driven – placing the decision-making power into the hands of those who are directly impacted. The remit was to distribute between £200 and £300 to their community.

As this was a new approach, we asked the following questions:

1. How did you find the process?
2. Were you able to distribute the funds in the ways you imagined?
3. Have there been any unexpected impacts?
4. Would you like to share anything else?

Below are some of the reflections from our Community Partners.

The Conversations

Not having to go through an application process was great. The community partners in various ways gave thought and consideration on how to distribute the funds. Some started a steering group on how to allocate the funding. There were some slight challenges in thinking they may not be able to do it in the right way, but in the end it was fine. Having a hard deadline of when we wanted to spend the money helped but it did mean that a couple of people may have missed out. Even though Synergi provided additional funding to cover the administrative costs, one group felt that the “admin was more than what was allocated for it”. One Community Partner used a basic form for people to explain what they wanted to use the money for. Others already knew who they wanted to give the funds to in such a way that everyone was able to benefit. Overall, we heard that it was a really good clear process.

“It felt like a collaboration in terms of thinking through how we were going to distribute the funds.”

“Being able to invest in yourself can be a luxury”

The funds were used for a lot of different things. Funds were allocated to smaller lived experience groups. Younger members used the funds to invest into their career by purchasing equipment. Others used it to pay bills, purchase food or for immediate transport costs. For one group the partnership model helped to get funds to people into the hospital directly, which is not an easy process.

Having an awareness that for some groups this was a new process, and we were mindful of the possible shift in power dynamics inherent in distributing funds. As this was a new process for some groups, they chose to speak to volunteers and charity partners to sound out ideas. Others contacted community group leaders who put forward two people who were interviewed and then distributed the funds. Others were concerned that what they would do if they were oversubscribed as they opened it out to anyone from the group but found it “worked out quite well”.

“Don’t make the funder think man is taking money and not saying thank you”

There were a lot of unexpected things that happened, and a through line was one of suspicious. People found it hard to accept that there was no expectation attached to receiving money. “The families did feel trapped as they couldn’t think that they would be given money in that way”. One group’s sense of internal solidarity was such that they gave thought to not reproducing a sense of competition and split the fund between wellbeing and finance. Despite this they noticed that ***“A lot of members don’t want to apply for money as they thought there is someone else within the collective who needs it more.”***

And time was spent reassuring people that everyone within the collective would receive some money.

Being able to meet short term needs was quite huge for the groups we spoke to and some felt overwhelmed and grateful of being able to purchase food without the usual financial constraints.

“Healthy families that were really struggling to fund healthy food and cultural food – food from home with love. They were able to get ‘food from home’ food that they connected with. Food transcends all languages. Some of them were emotional and really loved being able to cook and eat what they purchased. The feedback from the funds was really amazing. Being able to go into a shop and be able to buy things was big. Funding we usually receive doesn’t include food and when it does it is vouchers for things like Aldi.

We are celebrating their culture with this, food and culture are intrinsically linked and all of our work is centred around food and we can see how they open up. Just having money in their bank account is massive.”

Overall the flexibility of the reparative resourcing created space for funding things that are overlooked in the majority of funding received.

