



Impact Report 2024–2025



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Welcome to our Impact Report

Message from our Chief Executive, Rebecca Sycamore

In 2024, Toynbee Hall marked 140 years since first opening our doors in East London. Our anniversary was more than a celebration of our history, it was an opportunity to reflect on how our mission continues to matter today, and on the strength and insight of the communities who shape our work.



Much has changed since 1884, but the challenges of poverty and inequality persist. Tower Hamlets remains one of the most unequal boroughs in the UK, and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis continues to push many households into hardship. In this context, Toynbee Hall's work has never been more vital.

Over the past year, we have stood alongside people facing difficult circumstances, providing trusted advice and support to help them stabilise their finances, navigate complex systems, and find lasting solutions. We've introduced debt advice kiosks and developed new partnerships across London, further expanding the geographical reach of our work, making access to advice easier and more equitable across the city.

Our research and policy work has amplified the voices of people with lived experience, ensuring their insights shape fairer systems and services. And in our community spaces, people of all ages have connected, learned, and celebrated together, building confidence and resilience in challenging times.

This report highlights what can be achieved when people and communities work together. To our staff, volunteers, partners and funders, thank you. Your commitment and belief in our mission continue to make a fairer future possible.



Total Impact

Overview

Working closely with our partners, this year Toynbee Hall supported our community to secure fairer financial outcomes and improved wellbeing. Across our advice services and through our Debt Free Advice partnership, we helped over 16,000 people become £27 million better off, ensuring more residents can navigate financial challenges with confidence. From our advice centre at Toynbee Hall, we have worked directly with 5,000 people to access debt advice.

Our Community Centre remained a vital hub of connection and support, engaging 200 older adults, while our children's play programme provided safe, creative learning experiences for 272 participants.

In Research and Policy, we continued to amplify lived experience to drive systemic change. We trained and supported more than 20 peer researchers, who delivered projects nationally and locally. Partnering with six organisations, we ensured community voices are embedded in the systems that affect their lives.

Together, these efforts reflect our commitment to building a fairer, more equitable society for all.

Looking forward

In 2025–2026, we look forward to building on the foundations laid this year. We will continue to innovate our advice services, including rolling out new projects to reach more people in their communities.

We are seeking funding to carry out research on the impact of policy changes to the welfare benefits system. Working alongside partners, we will ensure that the experiences and ideas of those directly affected are central to shaping responses and influencing policy discussions, something which has so far been absent from government decision-making.

Alongside this, we will develop a comprehensive financial strategy and review our assets to ensure we are making the best use of our resources. This work is vital in securing the organisation's future and enabling us to continue supporting communities through a challenging economic climate.



Pillars of our work



Advice services

Toynbee Hall's advice services provide free support to people facing legal, financial, and day-to-day challenges. Through specialist advice, we help people understand their rights, access essential resources, and regain control. Whether dealing with debt, benefits, or legal issues, we offer a trusted lifeline when it's needed most.



Community work

Our community centre is a welcoming space where people connect, learn, and thrive. For residents over 50, we offer social groups, creative workshops, wellbeing activities, and peer support. Our programmes reduce isolation, build confidence, and help create a stronger, more connected community. For children, we offer nature-based play sessions, helping to tackle play poverty in the city.



Research & Policy

Our research and policy work ensures community voices drive change. Working with local residents and people with lived experience, we gather evidence on poverty, inequality, housing, and access to justice, using these insights to influence policy, advocate for fairer systems, and develop practical, grounded solutions.





Debt and money advice

Why we offer debt advice

For the people we support, debt is not a temporary shock but a sustained condition driven by high living costs, insecure incomes, and limited financial resilience.

Our work responds to this long tail of financial strain. We provide free, impartial debt advice to help people regain stability, prevent escalation, and reduce the wider impacts of debt on health, wellbeing, and employment. We provide three distinct services, each funded for a specific purpose and aimed at different groups.

Our approach

Community-based debt advice

We lead a London-wide partnership providing FCA-regulated debt advice, coordinating a network of 26 charities to deliver advice across the capital.

We also provide direct advice in Tower Hamlets, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, and Greenwich. through face-to-face, phone, and video advice kiosk appointments.



12,051
clients supported

Mental Health Crisis Breathing Space

Delivered in partnership with We Are Group across England and Wales, we help people in a mental health crisis by pausing debt enforcement.

This breathing space gives people time to focus on their recovery, without the added pressure of creditor action. It acts as a legal safeguard that works alongside clinical mental health care.



261
clients supported
(service began in Jan 2025)

Money Coaching for NHS Staff

We deliver a Money Coaching service focused on financial inclusion and financial wellbeing for NHS staff. We do this through:

- Practical financial education and coaching
- Early intervention for money worries
- Free and impartial support, including debt advice where required



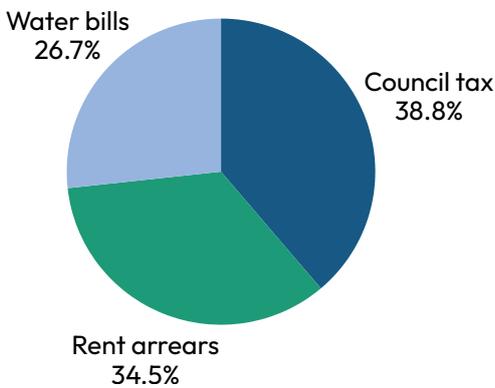
164
clients supported

What we're seeing

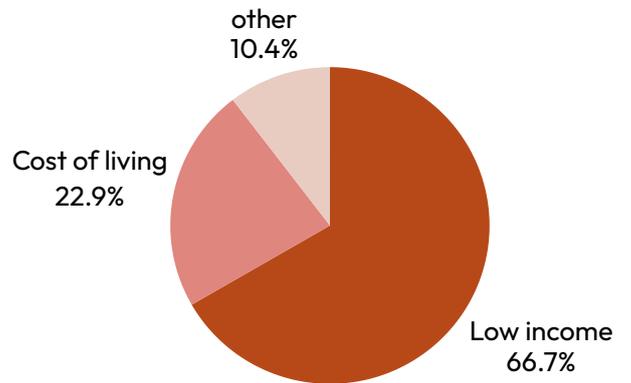
Debt doesn't impact everyone equally. In Tower Hamlets, over 40% of households live on low incomes, despite many people having more than one job. We see our clients facing many overlapping pressures ranging from ill health and caring responsibilities, to language barriers, benefit uncertainty, low pay, and challenging working conditions.

Our Debt Free Advice service provides free, expert guidance to people who might otherwise struggle to access support due to their backgrounds and situations, helping to close equity gaps and giving residents the breathing space they need to rebuild stability and dignity.

Most common debt types



Top 3 reasons for debt



Ethnicity

- 47%** Ethnic minority
- 34%** White
- 14%** Other
- 5%** Prefer not to say

Housing type

- 50%** Social Housing
- 28%** Private Renters
- 14%** Prefer not to say
- 8%** Homeless

Household

- 70%** Single adult household
- 1/3** of which are single parents

Employment

- 51%** Economically inactive*
- 29%** In employment
- 19%** Seeking work

*student, retired or unable to work



John's story

"I was really nervous about contacting Debt Free Advice, thinking nothing could be done to help me. But I was wrong. My advisor, Shabana, was incredibly polite, patient, and professional. My case was complex but she supported me through every step - handling emails, phone calls, and even helping me deal with bailiffs. I truly felt like someone had my back. Thanks to her, my Debt Relief Order was approved, which means my debt was written off. I finally feel less stressed and more in control. I'd 100% recommend this service to anyone struggling - it made a huge difference."



Why we offer legal advice

We're home to the oldest continuously running Free Legal Advice Centre in the world, providing confidential advice. Our service tackles the dire need for professional legal assistance in the UK, with an estimated two thirds of adults in England and Wales facing a legal issue in the last four years, and a quarter of adults reporting that their issues were exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. With funding cuts and systemic barriers, more and more people have been left without access to justice. For example, 44% of adults in England and Wales do not have access in their local area to legal support for housing issues, an increase of 7% since 2019.

Our approach

Our Free Legal Advice Centre, run in partnership with leading law firms, addresses the need for accessible legal advice. We run regular legal clinics addressing a range of issues including housing, employment and consumer law, including a clinic exclusively for women clients. With the generosity and expertise of our pro-bono volunteers, we're able to provide equal access to justice for those who need it most.

296 clients helped

What we helped with:



Housing

51%

Up 38% from last year



Employment

25%

No change



Consumer

16%

Up 13% from last year



60%

of all clients we supported were female or gender minority



Why we support people in the City of London

Over 678,000 people work in the City of London, a workforce up 25% since before the pandemic. There are also 8,500 residents in the City, many of whom live in the 3,700+ social housing properties managed by the City of London Corporation. City Advice helps residents and workers with benefits, housing, employment, and family issues.

525

clients helped

£678,780

financially better off

Our approach

Funded by the City of London Corporation, City Advice offers free, confidential support for anyone living, working, or studying in the City of London. Most people come to us struggling to understand their entitlements, or how and what to claim. With tailored guidance on tax, benefits, and living costs we help residents and workers challenge benefits decisions and unlock new funds. Help is available at Toynbee Hall's Advice Hub, the Golden Lane Estate and other City locations.

Who we've helped



66% above the age of 50



80% live in the City of London
15% work in the City of London



64% from an ethnic minority



42% had a long-term illness or physical disability



Mrs A's Story

Mrs A came to City Advice needing support to complete her Personal Independence Payment form due to long-standing mental health challenges and severe anxiety. Having previously been too anxious to enter the building for an appointment, she returned seeking the same adviser who had helped her feel safe in the past. The adviser spent time guiding her through the form step-by-step, providing clear explanations and written guidance she could use at home, and arranged a follow-up appointment to review and photocopy everything before submission. Mrs A later said she could not have completed the process without the adviser's patience, kindness, and understanding of her mental health needs.



Why we offer advice in Tower Hamlets

Tower Hamlets remains one of the most income-deprived areas in England, with around 71% of children and 61% of older residents living in low-income households. As the cost-of-living crisis deepens, many face overwhelming pressures, from high housing costs and unstable incomes to disability-related expenses and limited support. Our free, expert advice services help people navigate complex benefits, debt and entitlements at moments when other support feels out of reach, giving residents a pathway to stability and dignity.

Our approach

Our Tower Hamlets Advice team at Toynbee Hall supports disabled residents in accessing financial help, from applying for Personal Independence Payments (PIP) to local grants and budgeting support. We offer holistic advice that provides immediate relief and builds long-term financial confidence.

397
clients
helped

£1,208,890
financially
better off

Who we've helped



85% from ethnic minority
backgrounds



70% were social housing tenants
12% were private renters
7% were homeless



38% were aged 35-49
32% were aged 50-64



39% were unable to work
19% were employed
14% were retired

Insight from one of our advisers

“Most of the work we do is helping people claim disability benefits such as Personal Independence Payments (PIP), Attendance Allowance, and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for disabled children. These can make the difference between just about keeping your head above water and being able to afford to pay bills. It can relieve stress and anxiety knowing you are no longer living on the bare minimum.”



Why we offer benefits advice to people with cancer

When you receive a cancer diagnosis, treatment can start within weeks, but accessing benefits can often take months. We regularly see people worrying about their finances instead of being able to focus on their treatment. Our advisers step in to take away some of the financial worries. Around one third of cancer patients have to stop working, and 83% find themselves financially worse off. With cancer cases expected to rise from 2.5 to 4 million by 2030, the need for specialised financial support is growing.

1,075

clients helped

£5,160,459

financially better off

Our approach

In partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support, we help people with a cancer diagnosis access benefits, tax credits, and grants. Our service is available to patients at hospitals within the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney, and City of London. We also provide outreach to patients at St. Bartholomew's, Newham University, Whipps Cross, Royal London or Homerton Hospitals.

Who we've helped



55% from an ethnic minority background



79% over the age of 50

How we've helped



667 people referred from London-wide hospitals



849 people helped through digital sessions



123 people helped in face to face meetings

What we're seeing



51% living in single adult households, of which **15%** have dependant children



32% living in social housing, **29%** were homeowners

What our clients say

Mr P's Universal Credit claim was refused in June 2024 after the DWP wrongly decided he'd failed the Habitual Residence Test, saying he hadn't shown recent "genuine and effective" work to qualify for benefits whilst being treated for multiple cancers. Mr P had very limited income, and faced thousands in rent arrears, and was at severe risk of homelessness. With tribunal waits extremely long, we referred him to social services and secured charitable help. At his video hearing in December 2025, we showed evidence that his agency shifts, CIS labouring and cash-in-hand decorating met the legal test for worker status. The tribunal overturned the decision, backdating his Universal Credit and preventing homelessness. With his family saying "We couldn't have done it without your support – services like yours are so, so important."

Community Centre

Toynbee Hall's community centre sits at the heart of our work, offering a welcoming space where residents can access support, connect with others and strengthen their wellbeing. It plays a vital role in tackling the inequalities facing residents of Tower Hamlets.

For adults over 50, our LinkAge Plus programme – a partnership delivered across five hubs in Tower Hamlets, including Age UK East London, Neighbours in Poplar, Sundial Centre, Sonali Gardens and Toynbee Hall – offers yoga, ballet, IT support, seated exercise, singing, bingo, upcycling and painting. Helping older residents stay active and socially connected.

Our play programme gives almost 300 children safe, creative spaces to learn and have fun through activities like Art Club and nature-based sessions in Christchurch Gardens. Together, these programmes support people of all ages to overcome barriers and build meaningful community.

LinkAge Plus



020 3856 9721

At Toynbee Hall, we believe later life should be rich in connection and purpose. But many older adults in Tower Hamlets face isolation and limited access to support, with the borough seeing the highest rate of deprivation among older people in the UK. This year, across the partnership, LinkAge Plus supported over 1,500 residents over 50 to stay active, healthy, and connected.

200

Older adults attended in-person activities at Toynbee Hall with over 2,000 attendances

74

Older adults took part in physical activities with 1,985 attendances – 317% above target

127

Older adults received 1:1 support to navigate challenges in housing, health and finances

24

Older adults gained digital confidence through bespoke 1:1 support and training

143

New users were registered over the year

109

Older adults attended in-person social activities

Tackling isolation, celebrating diversity



From coffee mornings to art classes, LinkAge Plus created safe, welcoming spaces for older people of all backgrounds – including LGBTQ+ elders, people living with dementia, and ESOL learners. Across the partnership, 15 user-led groups were supported by staff, ensuring activities reflect the needs, interests and cultures of our diverse community.



A story from an outreach worker

"When I met Pat, she was struggling with multiple challenges - from mobility issues and financial strain to feelings of loneliness. By helping her apply for a Blue Badge and connecting her with the right benefits advice, we were able to lift some of that burden. Seeing her now, attending social activities, making new friends, and regaining a sense of independence, has been incredibly rewarding. It's a reminder of how vital the right support at the right time can be."

What older people say



"The activities held in centre help me so much with my mental health and wellbeing, and the staff there are wonderful and always going the extra mile in their role. Highly respected and a big thanks."

Bringing health and support closer to home

By working alongside partners, we brought vital services into local spaces:



NHS health checks



Advice services



Health education

LinkAge Plus continues to bring health and support closer to home by delivering preventative health initiatives directly within the heart of the community, reducing accessibility barriers for older residents. Through workshops and pop-up events (Diabetes Management & Prevention, Vaccination Clinics, Cancer Screenings) and close partnership with Public Health and Primary Care Networks, the programme enables residents to stay connected, informed, and independent.



Playful Tower Hamlets

Building resilience, joy, and stronger communities

At Toynbee Hall, we believe every child deserves the chance to play, learn, and grow. Yet in Tower Hamlets, many families face barriers to accessing safe, inclusive spaces for play. High-density housing, limited green space, and financial pressures mean opportunities for outdoor, creative play are too often out of reach.

Through Playful Tower Hamlets, we're changing that. Our programme provides free, welcoming play sessions where children can thrive, and families can connect and build resilience together.

Our Impact



272 children joined us for outdoor play sessions and art classes



Three weekly programmes at three venues



Weekly art classes



Entire families supported: parents joined as volunteers



85% of families built stronger relationships & improved wellbeing

What we're hearing

"We feel less isolated – this is the only place my child feels confident to join in."

"My child is happier and sleeps better after playing outdoors here."

"This isn't just play – it's a lifeline for us. My child feels confident here and we feel part of a community again."

"I've made friends I can call on for help."

Looking ahead: building a more playful borough



As demand for safe, inclusive play spaces grows, Toynbee Hall is committed to expanding Playful Tower Hamlets. Together with our partners and funders, we can help even more children and families access the vital benefits of play – healthier bodies, stronger minds, and connected communities.

Funded by



Research & Policy

Community-led change in action

In 2024–25, Toynbee Hall strengthened its commitment to Participatory Action Research (PAR), a type of research that puts people with lived experience at the heart of understanding and transforming the issues affecting their lives. By centring the experiences of those most affected by social injustice, our research builds power, amplifies voices, and drives real impact, beyond our local area.

Our peer researchers co-designed a national survey of 1,515 young people, creating one of the most comprehensive datasets on youth emotional support during the cost-of-living crisis. They helped present the findings to the Department for Education's London mental-health team, the GLA, MPs, universities, and child-poverty coalitions. The research was published in the *Journal of Public Mental Health*.

We also strengthened our national partnerships. With Switchback, we delivered participatory research on the probation recall system, with peer researchers directly influencing the Chief Inspector of Probation. The final report was published in June 2025. We worked with the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute on the experiences that people with mental-health problems from minoritised ethnic groups have of financial services, as well as with the University of Surrey on age-inclusive hospitality, and with Disability Rights UK on Disabled people's experiences of temporary accommodation.



Project overview

Informed by our previous research, *The Crisis Makes Us More Alone*, this year we ran a wellbeing pilot. Funded by Compass Wellbeing, the project brought together 34 Bangladeshi women (aged 18–24) from low-income Tower Hamlets families, with the aim of co-designing and testing a culturally grounded model of emotional support. Sessions were held locally with Bangla and Sylheti interpretation.

The project ran in two parts: co-design/trial, shaped by peer-researcher feedback on language, generational dynamics, and trust; and fortnightly community sessions building wellbeing, confidence, communication, and financial resilience. In 2025–26, the programme will expand to reach more families and deepen work with local services.

Impact



Stronger support networks

80% of participants said they had someone to turn to by the end



Confidence and resilience

Participants reported feeling “seen,” and more connected



Better access to support

Families learned to self-refer to mental health services

Key learnings



Co-design is ongoing

Feedback led to real-time changes throughout the project



Joy matters

Playful, creative sessions built trust more effectively



Consistency is key

Participants want the programme to continue and grow



“After a long day at work, I come here to connect. It lifts my mood. I feel joy.” – Young participant

“This is the only day I have for me. It’s not as a mum, not as a wife. It’s just me.” – Parent participant

Our Spaces



020 7392 2920

Venue hire

In addition to being home to our advice and community services, our historic halls are used for high-profile events by universities, political bodies, institutes, NHS Trusts, leading companies and foundations. The income generated by our venue hire goes directly into our charitable work and contributes to making East London a more equitable place.

Key stats

416

Events hosted
in our spaces

111

Testimonials
from clients

92%

Would recommend
booking our spaces

Highlights

This year, as part of our 140th anniversary, we held a series of events welcoming people to Toynbee Hall. We were excited to hold two brand new comedy nights for Pride and Black History Month welcoming new guests for lively evenings filled with laughter. We hosted a networking event for female students to meet with women in leadership which was an opportunity to share aspirations and goals, and learn some handy tips. In September, we also held an Open House celebrating our 140-year presence in the East End, followed by a celebration event in December where we were joined by some of our amazing supporters and collaborators.

“As always the team at Toynbee Hall have been extremely friendly, helpful and flexible- from booking and finance, final arrangements, catering and help on the day. Everyone I’ve met has been incredible!”

“The day was a huge success, well catered food options and the space worked well for our needs. The staff were friendly, accommodating and hard working, would recommend to anyone.”

Thank you to everyone who helps make this work possible

Everything we achieved this year - and the insights we gained from working closely with our communities - was made possible by the generosity of our supporters and their shared belief in a fairer, more just society.

From joining us at our inaugural comedy nights and taking part in the Big Half, to stomping through the streets of London on the London Legal Walk, to those who chose to remember Toynbee Hall with a gift in their will, and those who rallied with us during the Big Give Christmas Challenge - each contribution has played a vital role. We are so grateful to all our supporters for their commitment to creating a fairer society, here in East London and beyond.

29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
Advice UK
Aldgate Connect
Ashurst
A&O Shearman
Childhood Trust
City of London Corporation
Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton
Compass Wellbeing
Dentons LLP Charitable Trust
Derek Shuttleworth Educational Trust
Disability Rights UK
Dudley & Geoffrey Cox Charitable Trust
East End Citizens Advice Bureau
Eastern City Business Improvement District
Fair4All Finance
Farrer & Co Charitable Trust
French Huguenot Church of London Charitable Trust
G C Gibson Charitable Trust
Gladys Jane Wightwick Charitable Trust
Hampstead Garden Suburb Fellowship
Health Foundation
Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer

Homestead Charitable Trust
Impact on Urban Health
J E Posnansky Charitable Trust
John & Ruth Howard Charitable Trust
London Borough of Tower Hamlets Council
London Legal Support Trust
Lord Faringdon Charitable Trust
Maitlands Fund Charitable Trust
Michael Watson Charitable Trust
Money and Pensions Service
Ofenheim Charitable Trust
P F Charitable Trust
Patrick & Helena Frost Foundation
Proms at St. Jude's
Queen Mary, University of London
Salisbury Pool Charity
Souter Charitable Trust
Spear Charitable Trust
Switchback
Three Hands
Tower Hill Trust
Vera Outhwaite Charitable Trust
We Are Group
Worshipful Company of Coopers





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 14 Years
Toynbee Hall