

Steps to Recovery

Support for Community Champions

#Steps2Recovery

Funded by:



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Taste of Africa Impact Report



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1. About us

Based in Tees Valley, Taste of Africa (ToA) contributes to community cohesion by organising and delivering Arts, heritage, and educational activities within the community that promote awareness, diversity, and inclusion.

ToA originated in 2004 as a series of events celebrating African culture and the achievements of individuals and organisations who live and work in Tees Valley; all ToA activities were delivered on a voluntary basis through *Cultures CIC*. In August 2020, ToA became a registered charity; currently, it is run by nine volunteers.

Since August 2020, we have served around 45 individuals on a monthly basis (approximately 15 young people and 30 adults). Except in 2020, our main event - Taste of Africa Showcase, has taken place every October (Black History Month) for the last 16 years. This month-long series of activities has provided a great stage and audience for many up-and-coming artists from the region and brought high profile African musicians and performers to Teesside. In 2019, which is the last time our popular ToA event took place before the Covid-19 pandemic, we attracted over a thousand attendees.



2. Our Vision and aims

We want to see the development of the African community (women, children, young people, asylum seekers and refugees, and African and African Caribbean groups). Through ToA, our service users can be free from discrimination and prejudice whilst also having a vibrant platform to promote and celebrate their history, heritage, and achievements. We believe this is a key feature of a holistic approach to supporting the community, because it promotes mental health and wellbeing and community cohesion by raising cultural awareness. ToA is inclusive to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers- we promote financial inclusion for overall economic sustainability aimed at these underprivileged groups and we empower our community by providing opportunities for work experience.

ToA was founded by Sade Sangowawa, who is also the Founder Director of Cultures CIC. Her lived experience – born in the UK, migrating out of the country and then settling back in the UK – prompted her to seek further education and to learn the ways of the British society. During her interview with Gazette Live in 2016, Sade said:

“I started Taste of Africa 13 years ago to break down the stereotype of black people. I thought the best way was to let people make their own minds up after seeing the positive side of the culture.”

Our vision breaks down into the following specific aims:

- **Build relationships within the African community**, and build a knowledge base of African heritage, empowering them to know and feel proud of their identity.
- **Promote social equality**, diversity, and inclusion by building positive relationships between different racial and cultural groups in the community and educating the community on the importance of diversity and empowering the community by enabling them to become economically independent.
- Educate the wider community about African success to change perceptions and **inspire young people**, using our popular Black History Month celebration, engagement via schools, creative writing projects, virtual online heritage museums and music projects.
- **Raise awareness of human rights** within the diaspora and facilitate healthy discussions surrounding these problems in the community and around the globe. We also aim to facilitate debates on holding individuals, local businesses and larger corporations to account for these human rights concerns.
- **To promote racial and religious harmony** (for the benefit of public social cohesion) by encouraging mutual understanding between a range of community groups. By raising awareness and increasing understanding around racial and religious differences, we will advocate for respecting different cultures, faiths, and heritage by acknowledging racial struggles, religious practices, and by celebrating heritage to eliminate discrimination.

3. Our services

We offer a variety of different services aimed at young people and adults. It is important to us that there is something for everyone – a window for each person to celebrate their success and showcase their culture and experiences.

A Taste Of Africa Showcase

Our main event is the A Taste of Africa Showcase, this is a series of activities which take place during Black History Month: entertainment and live performances, including international artists, Bantu arts, African drumming, Cultures Choir, traditional performances, traditional food, an African Fashion show, and youth talent show. The ToA showcase event aims to bring the local community together by showcasing black businesses, providing work experience and empowering black youths through the expression of the African culture.

The ToA showcase event has been running for the past 16 years and every year we see a growth in attendance and participation from people within our community. In 2019 alone, we attracted over 1000 attendees.



Black History Youth Awards Dinner

Our Black History Youth Awards Dinner (BHYA) celebrates the achievement of young black people, which promotes and celebrates positive role models and aims to address young people’s specific needs. By honoring the successes of young black people, this black-tie event alleviates the effect of negative stories and images portrayed in the media. The African adage **“it takes a village to raise a child”** is the ethos behind this initiative.

Our recent BHYA event took place virtually during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions in October 2020, during the black history month. Over 500 people attended via zoom and Facebook.



Irin Ajo Mi – My Journey

The Irin Ajo Mi Heritage project is an intergenerational project that supported young people to chronicle the journeys of older black African and Caribbean people living in Teesside. A virtual celebratory event took place on the 24th of April 2021, we attracted over 280 attendees and it has since been viewed many times over on Facebook.

A total of 38 participants (14 young people, 19 adults and 10 volunteers) came together to produce a booklet for museums, a foamex exhibition resource, a website and a virtual exhibition. The project established a digital and virtual archive so that there can be an online digital footprint for many years to come, thereby also forming part of the heritage of Tees Valley.



Let's Talk Series

During the Covid-19 pandemic, ToA ran five webinars called Lets Talk Series. These webinars aimed to raise awareness and increase knowledge around issues in the black community concerning Domestic Violence, Mental Health, Covid-19, Diabetes, and young people and Covid.

Our webinars took place in April and May 2021. A total of 135 people attended the webinars collectively. The webinars were posted to our social media platforms and we have received a total of 473 views to date.



Other services

ToA provided various seasonal services prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, many of these events have been on hold and we hope to offer them once the restrictions have been lifted.

➤ Africa in the Mall

This was a weekend-long event hosted inside the Hillstreet shopping centre in Middlesbrough. Members of the African community sold traditional jewellery, food, clothes and other items to promote African culture and Heritage.

➤ Carnival

The Taste of African Carnival was hosted on Albert Road in Middlesbrough. School children worked together to create the clothing and unique African designs, which were then showcased to the community in a positive, inclusive carnival event.

➤ Christmas showtime concert

This uplifting event aimed to bring people together and break away from the devastation that the pandemic has brought to many lives. It offered fun entertainment from the comfort of our homes. It featured local musicians and spoken word poetry while involving the younger generation, who did a fantastic job hosting the event.

➤ Movie Night

This was an event over a series of evenings that featured educational movies showcased to young people to teach them and bring awareness about African history. We hope to be able to offer this in the future.

➤ Choir concert

Taste of Africa brought musicians and singers together from a range of racial and cultural backgrounds in a Choir concert. The concert aimed to celebrate diversity within the local community whilst bringing together members of the Black, Asian and White community to raise awareness of each other's differences; in so doing, it established community cohesion and demonstrated racial harmony.

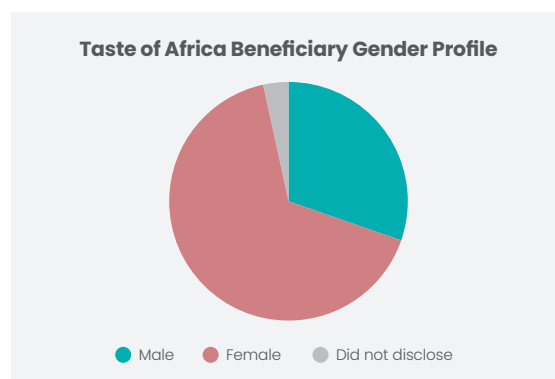
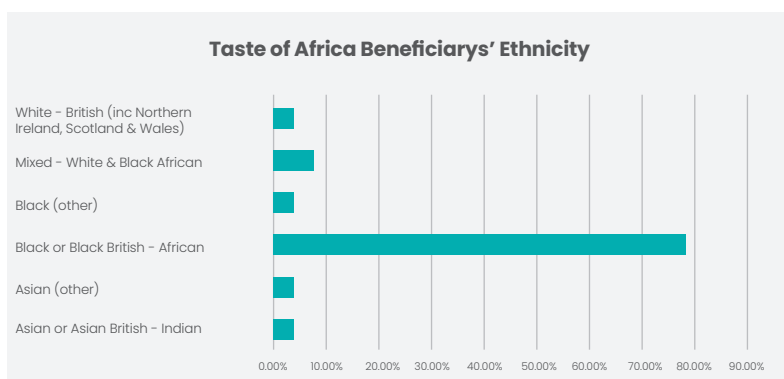


4. Our community

Working in collaboration with the Civil Society Consulting CIC in early 2021, we ran a community engagement survey to document the views and opinions of people in our community. We collected 33 responses over a three month period in order to:

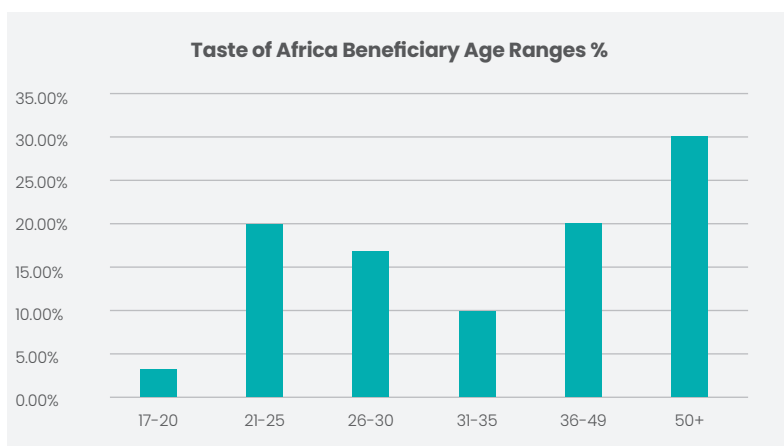
- understand the demographic profile of beneficiaries;
- evidence their needs;
- measure the extent of which ToA services have impacted beneficiaries' thoughts, experiences and interactions within their communities regarding cultural and racial identity (which is elaborated more in the 'Evidencing Need' section)
- collect inputs on the direction we should take in the future.

Around **two thirds of our service users identified their ethnicity as Black or Black British-African**, with the majority of our collective users being **female**. Our users' ages range between under 16 to 50+ years.



Nationally, ethnic minority communities have been affected by inequalities, most notably discrimination and exclusion. Over time, these inequalities have alienated and marginalised these groups within society, rendering them unable to integrate into their community after migrating to the UK. In keeping with these macro trends, **45%** of our service users identified **racism and/ or discrimination** as one of the main challenges of living in Tees Valley. Zooming in further:

- **32%** of users highlighted that prejudice was a main challenge within their community and only of users informed us that they socialise with people from other cultures (outside of work and school) only *a few times a year*.



According to our survey, the majority of our service users live in Middlesbrough (47%), followed by Stockton (33%) and a few from Redcar and Cleveland (3%). The remaining 17%, although having previously lived in Tees Valley, are geographically dispersed (London, Loughborough, South of England, Durham, Billingham).

5. Evidence of need

ToA exists to provide a range of services and events designed to aid in raising awareness of the African culture. Additionally, by educating people on our achievements and celebrating them openly, we hope will lead to greater social equality, diversity and inclusion within our community. To demonstrate why Taste of Africa is a winning model, we captured the experiences of our community members. In particular, we captured the interactions between our beneficiaries and their communities, given their cultural and racial identity.

87% of our users felt uncomfortable, negative and/ or generally socially isolated because of racial and cultural identity within their community; and **more than 81%** sometimes or always personally experienced racism at school or work.

ToA brings together people from black ethnic minority backgrounds to promote community cohesion which is invaluable to our beneficiaries with **over 63%** of our users identifying their involvement in community or charity work as important and a priority in their lives. In addressing our user's needs, ToA seeks to provide new enterprise opportunities for members in our community (which are elaborated further in the 'Our Future' section).

We have identified some of the macro-level factors that lead to this high level of need among our service users, which supports the evidence of need that came out through our community engagement survey:

➤ **Covid-19 has intensified the disadvantage among ethnic minority communities:**

Long standing health inequalities affecting ethnic minorities in England have been made even more visible by the COVID-19 pandemic. Public Health England highlighted that deaths from the pandemic among people from minority ethnic groups were two to four times greater than those of the white population.

There are various factors that make ethnic minorities more likely to contract COVID-19, which include: deprivation, higher prevalence of comorbidities associated with less desirable COVID-19 outcomes, occupational risk and delayed access to healthcare. What's more, ethnicity aside, the Tees Valley area has a reputation for poor health and contains some of the most deprived areas of the UK in terms of health and disability. These intersecting factors leading to poor health outcomes have always been present within society – they manifest in different ways as new problems (such as a global pandemic) arise. For example, a lack of trust can translate into vaccine hesitancy.

To make matters worse, **36%** of our service users said that one of the main challenges of living in Tees Valley was knowing what support is available and which public services you're entitled to- which could create a barrier to people accessing community services (hospitals, GPs) they could be most in need of at an earlier date.

➤ **Racism and Deprivation:** Research shows that migrants (or people perceived to be migrants) experience discrimination due to their ethnicity, nationality, religion, language or accent.

In the North East in particular, there are disproportionate levels of racially- and religiously-motivated hate crimes. Humankind and Teesside University's research into Challenging Youth Racism attribute this to the fact that the North East contains many low- income majority white areas where there are reported to have high levels of hate crimes. The Brexit vote caused a spike of hate crimes towards immigrants or people believed to be immigrants: 4,148 were recorded by North East Police over a 12 month period between 2017-18. Overall, tolerance towards ethnic minority groups is low, yet the North East has experienced high levels of immigration in recent years and it is becoming ethnically diverse.

As a result, 45% of our service users find that racism and/ or discrimination is rife within their community and over 67% felt uncomfortable, negative and/ or generally socially isolated because of racial and cultural identity within their community.

- **Asylum Seeker and Refugees:** International migration to Tees Valley has been happening since 1945. However, it recently accelerated when the area was designated as a 'dispersal area' for asylum seekers in 2021. In fact, Middlesbrough, where most of our activities take place, became the only local authority in the UK where asylum dispersal exceeded the Home Office's 1:200 cluster limit.

The Institute for Public Policy's research 'Regionalising Migration' said the North East 'as a case study' highlights the challenges faced by asylum seekers: poverty, social exclusion and increased vulnerability to poor physical and mental health. This is especially worrying as the North East in general is one of the most deprived areas in England with poor health outcomes across most groups. One of the root causes is that refugees are prevented from working; instead, they receive very low weekly income for essentials, and this leaves them vulnerable to adverse health and social outcomes and stigmatisation.

ToA directly engages with asylum seekers and refugees; and the stigma against them affects the whole minority community by association. Notably, a **third** of ToA respondents reported that knowing how to navigate British systems and culture was one of the main challenges they faced living in Tees Valley and further responses highlighted that ToA was best placed to support them in areas of "cultural awareness training for understanding of British culture".

- **Regional Deprivation:** As mentioned, Tees Valley experiences higher than average levels of deprivation. Middlesbrough, the main metropolitan area which we serve, is the fifth most deprived local authority in England. Stockton-On-Tees, where a large number of our users are based, is among the 20% most income deprived areas in England; Redcar and Cleveland is also in the 10% most income- deprived areas in England. In Stockton-On-Tees, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland, 21%,31% and 24% of children respectively are said to live in low income families.

With approximately 81% of our users having highlighted that a lack of employment and career progression was a challenge in Tees Valley, further responses highlighted that ToA's support is needed to help the community especially in areas of "mentoring, employment workshops and networking" to address future hardship amongst the black community.

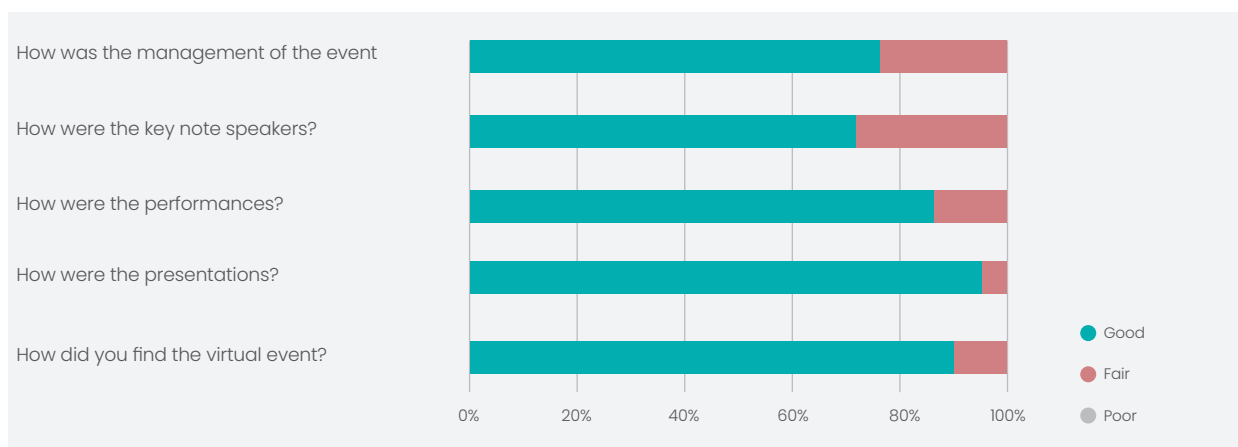
6. Our impact

To date, ToA has supported, celebrated and involved over 3,000 community members - ranging from young people to community elders. These estimations are conservative (as we were limited in how accurately we could track attendees and participants at every event); this figure also does not capture the people who benefit from the knock-on effect of ToA's positive outcomes at the community level - which are considerable! For example, ToA increases white British residents' understanding of Black, African and Caribbean culture, and the whole community benefits from this, not just the direct participants.

Since becoming a registered charity in August 2020, **64 community members have been active and regular recipients of our monthly support** and this number is steadily increasing. 73% of these active service users strongly agreed that ToA has helped and motivated them to develop their knowledge and skills.

To demonstrate the quality of ToA's service, below is some of the overwhelmingly positive feedback from ToA beneficiaries:

➤ **Virtual Black History Youth Awards Dinner 2020**



(based on 53 attendees' feedback)

➤ **Irin Ajo Mi – My Journey**

'I have learnt how to cooperate within a team, building a project where everyone has their different roles and work together. Also, knowledge on how to conduct an interview – as this was a new experience and I gained multiple transferable skills.'

- Young participant

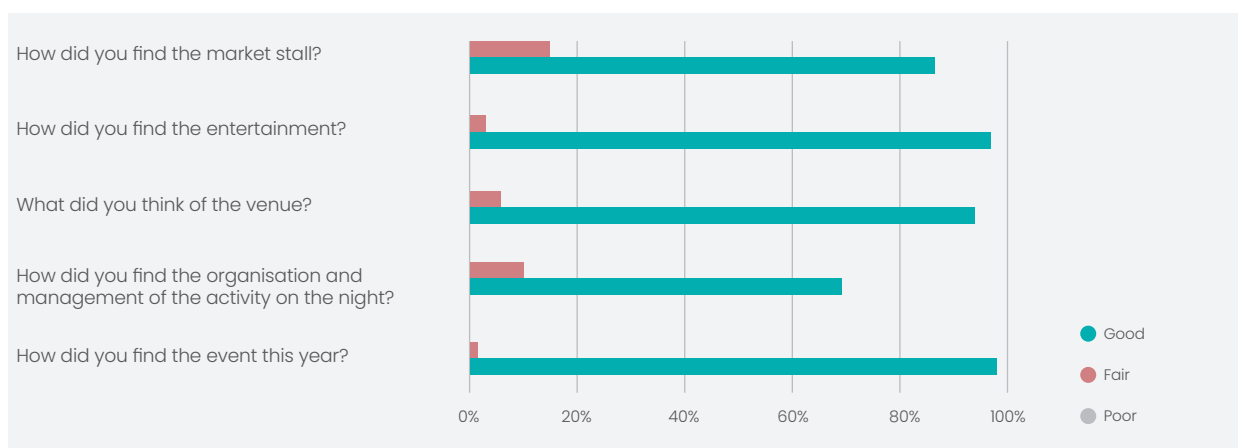
'It was informative and the project made me aware of other people's challenges and how they overcame them. I believe it would encourage our young ones not to give up or allow circumstances they face to limit them.'

- Adult participant

'The Irin Ajo Mi project filled a much needed gap in Teesside. Collating the stories, experiences and contributions of black people on teesside is something I have not seen in my 20 years of living here. I think the program instilled a sense of pride and was a real eye opening for those who watched the celebration. I love that it is now a digital archive that can be added to over the years and accessed forever. I was extremely proud to take part in this project.'

- Georgina Chinaka, Irin Ajo Mi participant

➤ **Taste of Africa Showcase 2019**



(based on 151 participants' feedback)

7. Our response to Covid-19

The Impact of Covid-19 and Gaining Funding

ToA became a registered charity during the Covid-19 pandemic – before this, it operated as a project run by *Cultures CIC*. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have faced difficulties in gaining support from funders as most of our face-to-face activities that could raise our profile have been on hold. Furthermore, we have struggled to approach potential sponsors to pitch our proposals and encourage involvement, especially attracting local businesses to support us as their charity of choice due to the adverse impact businesses have faced during the pandemic.

Transitioning from Face-to-Face to Zoom Activities

Because of lockdown, we have had to resort to using zoom. In some ways, this has been good: we tailored some of our services and we could deliver them online; it has brought on new opportunities such as our 'Let's Talk Series', which we might not have delivered under normal circumstances.

The Impact of Covid-19 on our Young People

However, we found that in working with our young people, the personal touch of face-to-face support is paramount. Without it, we are concerned about how we can support their mental health. It is well-documented that young people's mental health is under threat at this difficult time; we also have evidence of our own in that we have received a high volume of calls from parents and guardians trying to find out what to do with and for their children who are suffering loneliness. To try and meet these needs, we have forged new partnerships with Kooth – an online mental health organisation that supports young people. We now refer to our young people who require support to Kooth in the spirit of our founding principle **“it takes a village to raise a child”**. During these difficult times, we have experienced the importance of this ethos first hand: it has been invaluable collaborating and forming partnerships with the community to support young people.

The Increased Demand for our Services

We have experienced a 100% increased demand for our services as a result of COVID-19. ToA has been taking a large number of phone calls from beneficiaries especially those that attended our 'Let's Talk Series' webinars. In addition, we have received a high level of calls concerning domestic violence; we are well-placed to signpost and refer beneficiaries to specialist services for support, since they trust and know us. More generally, we have found that the pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities previously faced by minority communities (especially migrants and young people from refugee and asylum communities) and it is only getting worse; the vulnerability of our beneficiaries is heightened and they are **needing our unifying energy and direct support more than ever**.

ToA has coped well with the increased demand for the services. However, it has not been easy, since money, resources and infrastructure are all limited. Going forward, for this high-level of support to be sustained, ToA needs reinforcements.

8. Lessons learned

In the production of this report, we have reflected on our progress. We are proud of the following assets that have helped us to succeed in the face of many pandemic-related obstacles:

1. Our diversity: our organisation has a diverse steering group panel (young people and adults of different age groups). Furthermore we ensure that all decisions and delivery of our services are made taking into account a range of opinions which are respected and valued.
2. Convening power: ToA has shown in the past and recently that we have the ability to pull people together
3. Our dedicated volunteers and the strong camaraderie between them: we have a dedicated team of volunteers that make our organisation what it is today. We work effectively as a team and we value the different skill sets and unique individuals that represent ToA.

Nevertheless, we need to build more systems to increase our capacity and sustainability. As our organisation is run by volunteers, we believe ToA would benefit from having a dedicated paid member of staff to handle the day-day charity administration and project development tasks. This is key for capitalising on our most precarious strength (#3): by ensuring that the volunteers are well-coordinated and fulfilled, we will be able to sustain their much-needed energy. In addition, it would tighten up delivery and free up the senior leadership team to focus on our growth.

Secondly, and as mentioned already, face-face support with our beneficiaries is invaluable. Zoom is the next best thing. However, when supporting those who need our services but are digitally excluded, there are further barriers, and we have resorted to providing support over the telephone. However, it has not had the same impact and building rapport has been difficult. As an organisation we envisage that we will need to go out and do a lot of engagement work with our community to get back to the levels before the pandemic.

9. Our future

ToA is looking to establish a funding stream that will enable us to continue to develop and deliver our services in a sustainable manner. We are looking to gain support from potential sponsors and small grants, who/which appreciate the numerous benefits of supporting a new and growing charity like ours. We would like to engage a Project Development Officer (paid staff member) who will manage the administrative and engagement processes of ToA, to allow the senior leadership to focus on strategic approach and organisational growth. Including the costs of a new staff member, we estimate that ToA will need to raise up to £50,000 during the next year to help us to be able to continue our growth and services. In particular, we want to devise a systematic but informal mentoring programme for young people.

➤ **Hiring a Project Development Officer:**

Capacity is our greatest limitation going forward, which restricts our ability to develop and grow. Crucially, we cannot boost our entrepreneurial activity whilst solely operating on our volunteers' capacity. By employing a Project Development Officer on a part time basis, we can begin to build up this capacity. From past experience, we know our beneficiaries have been willing to pay entrance and participating fees for past events and activities.

The Project Development Officer would provide administrative support to sharpen-up our operations so that we could reintroduce small fees; plus, the new team member will develop sustainable enterprise opportunities from our current services so that we can generate our independent income alongside grants.

The Project Development Officer will be passionate about ToA's objectives and ambitious to develop their own skill set. The activities we would like to focus on are:

- A Taste of Africa Showcase
- Black History Youth Awards dinner
- Formal Mentoring and Youth Outreach Programme
- Educational resources to address racism and discrimination in schools

➤ **Developing an informal mentoring and youth outreach programme:**

Our community engagement survey highlighted that **75%** of our beneficiaries wanted us to run a service offering formal mentoring, coaching, training, employment workshops etc..., to best support them in achieving their goals and priorities in life. With this in mind we would like to develop a formal mentoring and youth outreach programme offering the support identified in our survey. With a formal mentoring service that offers young people career support and advice, ToA can build confidence and support the upskilling of young people, whilst also serving as a gateway to other types of much-needed support e.g. signposting to benefits, apprenticeships etc. This would be invaluable to the 46% of users that prioritised learning new skills when asked what their goals and priorities are in life, and the 50% who identified employment as a high priority personal goal.



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Support to help faith & civil society organisations from communities in high COVID-19 areas that are engaged in frontline social action projects



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