

The Togetherness Café: Building Community Trust in Redbridge

The Togetherness Café was a 10-week community engagement initiative led by Blossom Group ASA CIC in Redbridge, London. This innovative project created a welcoming space for South Asian, African, and Afro-Caribbean communities to share their experiences with health and social care services.

With cultural competence at its core, the project aimed to gather unfiltered feedback, identify systemic barriers to health and wellbeing, and promote long-term inclusion through a culturally safe environment. The initiative demonstrated that meaningful change requires genuine partnership and shared power with marginalised communities.





Project Overview & Objectives



Increase Community Feedback

Conduct regular feedback sessions and focus groups to gather insights from community members about their experiences with health and social care services.



Enhance Community Participation

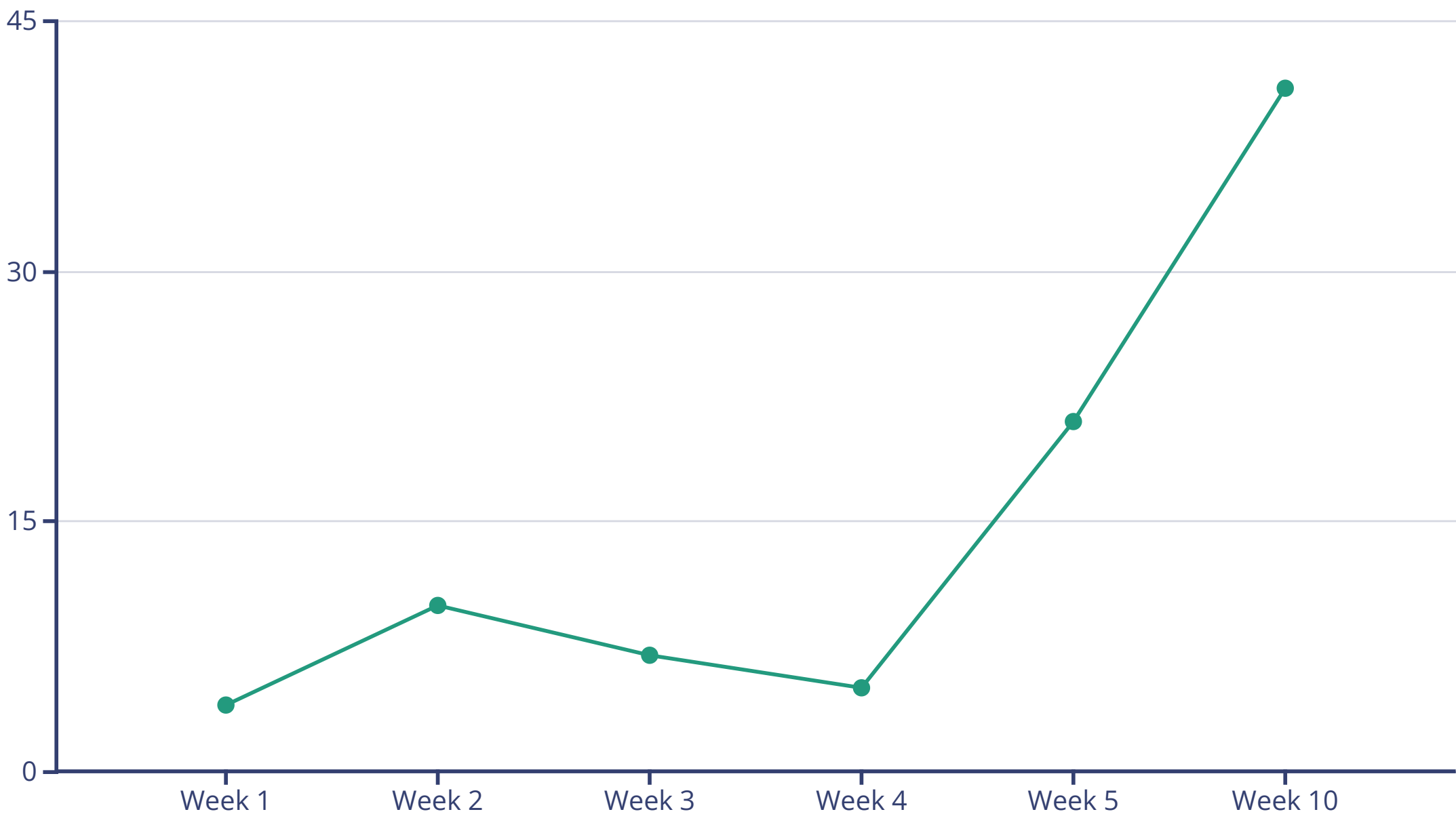
Organize health and wellness workshops to educate and engage the community on relevant health issues and foster active involvement.



Improve Community Wellbeing

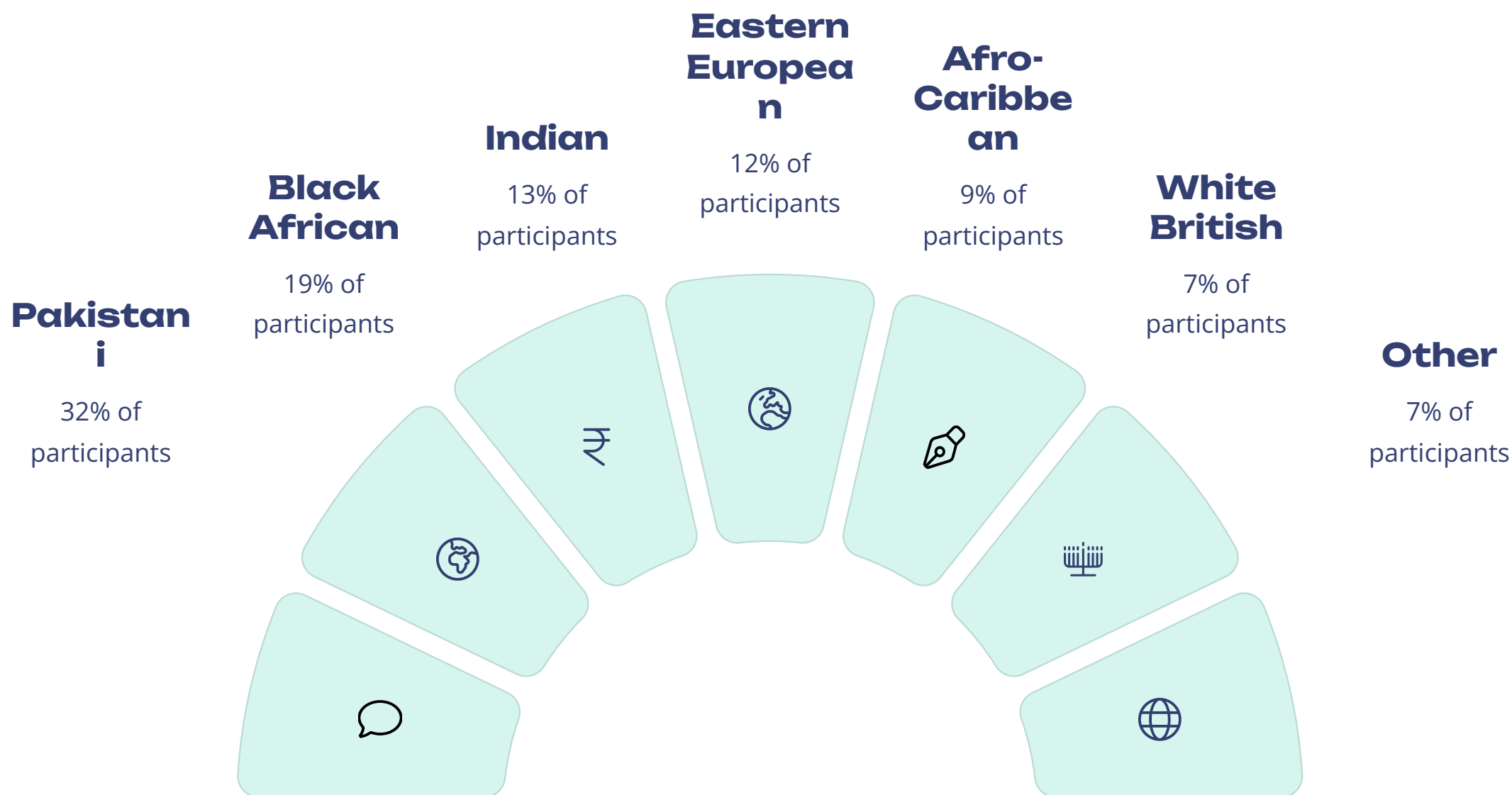
Offer mental health support through peer-led discussion groups and establish a network where community members can connect and share experiences.

Programme Delivery & Attendance Growth



The Togetherness Café held 10 weekly sessions at a central location in Redbridge. Attendance grew significantly over the programme duration, particularly after Week 5 when the Community Box Advice Service was launched. This practical support service helped over 38 individuals with benefits, housing issues, and system navigation, marking a turning point in community engagement.

Participant Demographics



The Togetherness Café successfully engaged a diverse range of participants, with 67% being women. Age distribution showed 15% aged 18-30, 29% aged 30-45, and 56% aged 45-70+. Notably, 42% of participants identified as disabled, highlighting the project's success in reaching vulnerable community members.

Economic & Housing Challenges

88%

Rented Housing

Living in poor conditions

61%

Benefits

Reliant on welfare support

43%

Serious Debt

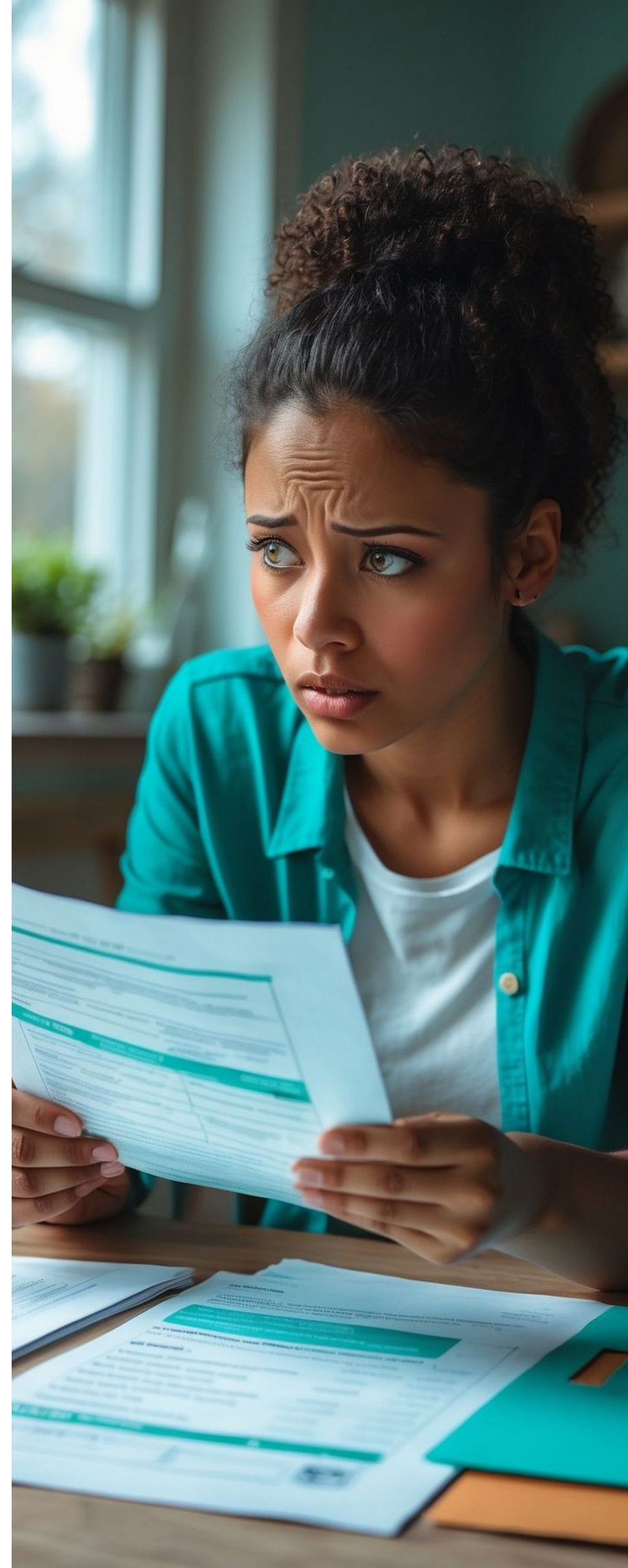
Facing financial hardship

41%

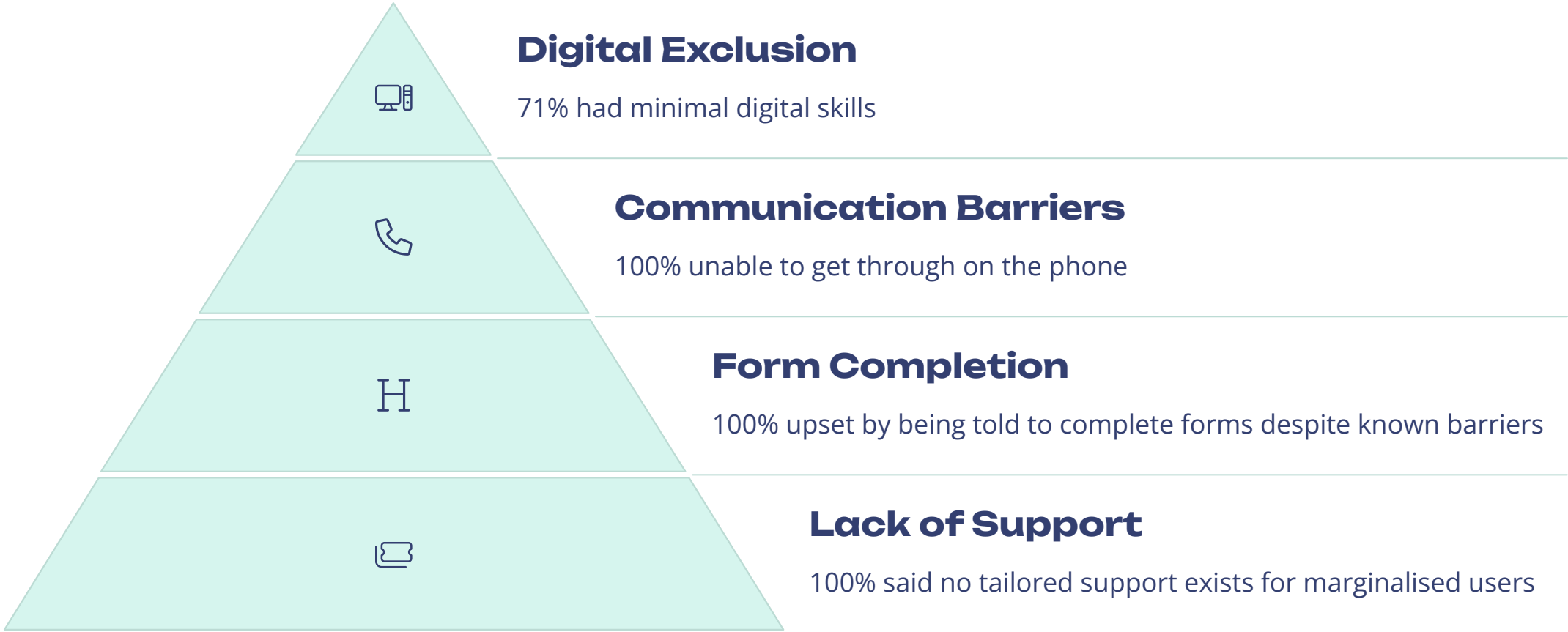
Unpaid Carers

Providing care without compensation

The economic profile of participants revealed significant hardship, with only 11% owning homes and 13% living in temporary accommodation. Strikingly, 91% believed they would never own property. Additionally, 11% had No Recourse to Public Funds, creating further barriers to accessing essential services.



Digital & Systemic Access Barriers



Participants faced significant barriers to accessing services, with 10% having limited digital skills but unable to complete forms independently. All participants reported that the local authority website was unworkable and that they could not get through on the phone, creating frustration and disengagement from essential services.

Mental Health Crisis & Systemic Mistrust



Trust Deficit

100% did not trust the local authority



Perceived Discrimination

88% believed discrimination was embedded in services



Mental Health Impact

87% reported very poor mental health

The mental health crisis among participants was severe, with 87% reporting very poor mental health and the remaining 13% reporting low-to-moderate poor mental health. Notably, 88% linked worsening mental health directly to interactions with local authority and health services, causing many to avoid seeking help altogether.

Trust in institutions was alarmingly low, with 100% distrusting the local authority and only 12% trusting health services. Many participants (73%) cited historical trauma, colonisation, and vaccine inequity as causes for mistrust, with COVID-19 creating larger divisions.

Systemic Discrimination and Mistrust: Key Findings

- **100%** did **not trust** the local authority; only **12%** trusted health services.
- **88%** believed discrimination is **systemic** in health, housing, and access to services.
- **96%** said council staff were **rude and officious**, reflecting a **top-down, faceless culture** — not individual attitudes.
- **100%** viewed local authority visits to faith centres as **performative** and **tokenistic**.
- Officials spoke to **perceived faith leaders**, who represented **mosques, not communities** — ignoring diversity and individuality.
- **76%** said they had **nothing in common** with faith leaders, who were often **imported** to fulfill symbolic roles.
- **87%** said health initiatives **failed** because communities were **excluded as equal partners**.
- **88%** said health professionals lacked **trust-building** and offered **superficial solutions**.
- **73%** cited **historical trauma, colonisation, and vaccine inequity** as root causes of mistrust — all deepened by COVID-19.
- **100%** believed terms like “**vulnerable**” and “**marginalised**” are used to **pacify and disempower** communities.
- **100%** said real change requires **genuine partnerships with real power**, not **focus groups or tick-box exercises**.
- **Tick-box exercises** were condemned as **extractive** — collecting data but **ignoring lived experiences**.
- Officials were criticised for showcasing diversity as a **political performance**, using people as **political footballs and circus animals**.

The Trust Deficit: By the Numbers

100%

No Trust in Local Authority

Complete absence of trust in local government institutions

12%

Trust in Health Services

Extremely low confidence in health service providers

88%

Perceive Embedded Discrimination

Strong belief that discrimination exists across services

96%

Experience Staff Rudeness

Report negative interactions with council staff

These stark figures reveal a profound breakdown in community-authority relations. Trust forms the foundation of effective service delivery and community engagement, yet our research shows this foundation is almost entirely absent. Without addressing this trust deficit, even well-intentioned initiatives are likely to fail.

Trust Metrics



Security



Privacy



Reliability



Reliability



Transparency

