

*social***streets.**

ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

## FOUNDER'S WELCOME



TABITHA STAPELY  
FOUNDER & DIRECTOR

**Social Streets is unique. We are a local media outlet that reaches mass audiences while delivering social and economic impact. As a not-for-profit organisation, our charitable objective is to increase participation in local community through the provision of local journalism and media training.**

**Welcome** to our annual report for the year ending May 2019, a year that saw particularly strong growth in our flagship community title, *Roman Road LDN*, an encouraging sign that despite the decline in local media outlets there is a strong appetite for high-quality community-focused journalism.

This was our first full year of operation for *Roman Road LDN*, and saw an astonishing growth in website traffic of 95% from 10,156 unique users in June 2018 to 19,766 in May 2019. Given our geographical catchment area is 40,000 people, this means our unique take on community journalism is read widely.

On social media, local campaigns continue to attract the most engagement and heritage is the most shared. On the website, our coverage of the local economy brings in the most traffic.

However our emphasis on human interest is what our readers remember the most. This year's highlights include content that tackled issues around mental health, hostile immigration policy and gender identification.

Our survey on the Social Value of Local Journalism asked readers how local journalism impacted culture, wellbeing, community and the local economy. Results showed our work had the most impact on increasing pride in the area, raising awareness of different cultures and prompting people to shop locally.

As part of our education work, we trained 42 local high street businesses who were digitally invisible. We helped them open 70 new platforms and optimise 44 dormant platforms in our one-to-one sessions.

Working in areas of deprivation means our editorial work is still largely subsidised by our education and digital services, however this year we launched reader donations and advertorial packages.

Looking ahead to 2020, our priority will be to ensure Social Streets remains sustainable by increasing existing revenue streams and testing new revenue models. We will continue to deliver content that celebrates local life, explores the meaning of community and encourages participation.

In the meantime, thank you to all our supporters, particularly the readers who have committed to donating regular amounts on a monthly basis. We are incredibly grateful and moved by this show of trust in our work. With this type of security we can continue to grow and develop our model of sustainable community journalism.

21 June 2019

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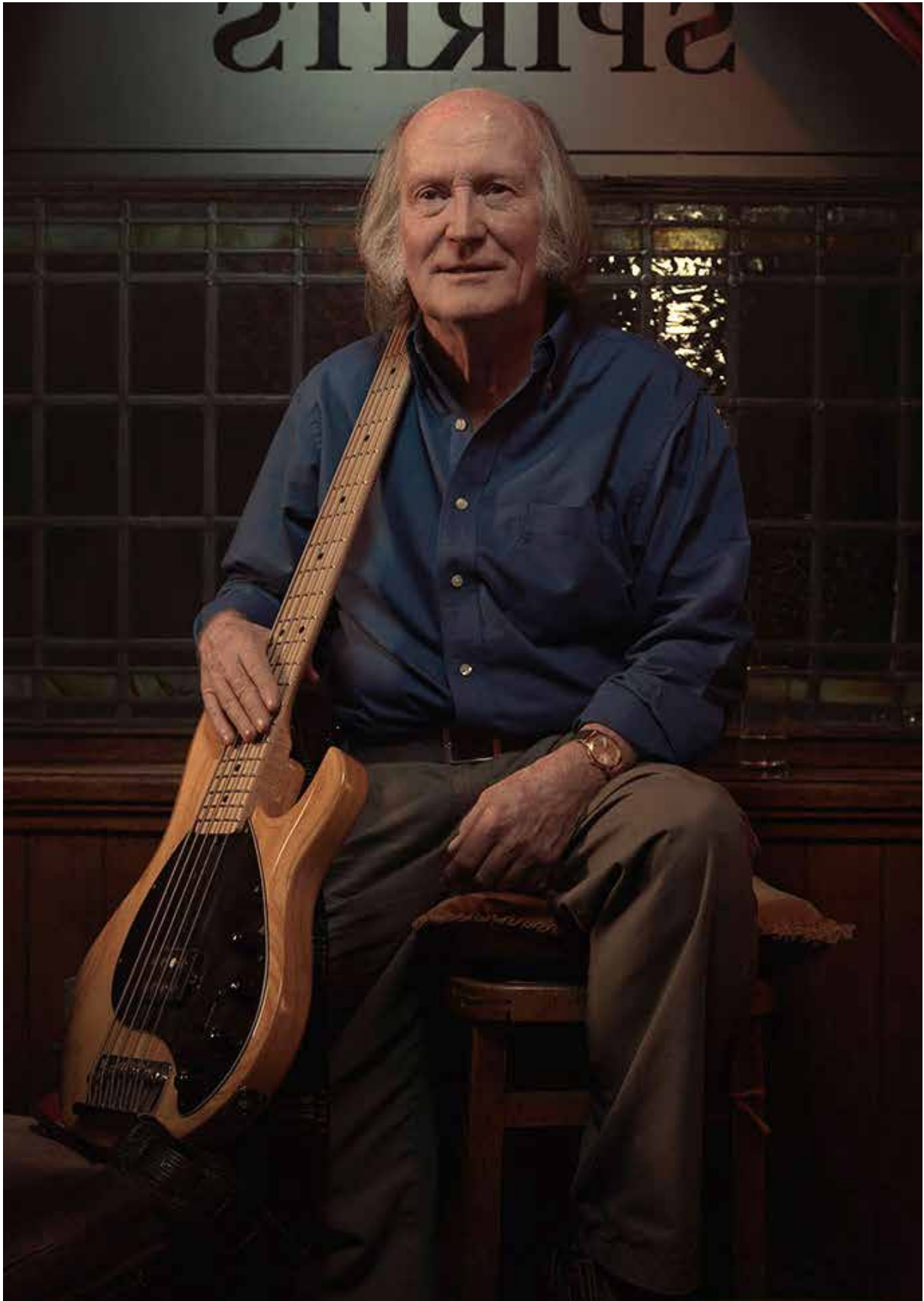
## STRATEGY

Social Streets’s mission is to produce content that celebrates the value of community in all its glorious diversity; to develop a model of community journalism that is sustainable even in disadvantaged areas, and to increase the digital footprint and opportunities of local community.

	Strategic pillars	Implementation	Impact
Revenue Drivers	CREATIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To champion local heritage, culture, economy, people and places</li> <li>To explore the meaning and value of community, raising awareness of different voices and points of view</li> <li>To inspire people to engage, connect and get involved (editorial voice leans in)</li> <li>To have a reputation for excellence and integrity - being best not being first</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positioning/Recognition/Reputation</li> <li>Community groups supported</li> <li>Issues tackled</li> <li>BAME representation</li> <li>Connections made</li> <li>Participation prompted</li> <li>Sense of loyalty/trust/pride</li> <li>Thought leadership on community journalism</li> </ul>
	AUDIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop local communications networks</li> <li>To facilitate local conversations</li> <li>To continually reach out to minority groups</li> <li>To consult with local community</li> <li>To identify and connect with destination visitors (heritage and culture)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No. of magazine titles</li> <li>No. of subscribers/followers</li> <li>No. of page views/unique users</li> <li>Increase in organic traffic/SERPS</li> <li>Testimonials/satisfaction</li> <li>Consultation activities</li> <li>Audience as contributor (engagement)</li> </ul>
	DIGITAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be the go-to community media partner</li> <li>To be at the forefront of digital innovation in local journalism</li> <li>To improve the digital footprint of local community</li> <li>To develop media and digital services that respond to the need of local community</li> <li>To innovate new packages and services that serve the needs of local community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No. of people trained</li> <li>Improved web presence of local organisations</li> <li>No. of media partnerships</li> <li>Media partner to community</li> <li>Known as pioneers</li> <li>Awards, consultation work</li> </ul>
Facilitators	OPERATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To nurture key partnerships to drive procurement savings</li> <li>To develop technology that increases community-generated content and reduces in-house resources</li> <li>To apply best practice governance and policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost savings in premises</li> <li>Community-generated content</li> </ul>
	PEOPLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop strong relations with community stakeholders</li> <li>To attract talent in the field of journalism, creative media and technology</li> <li>To inspire the next generation to be involved in community journalism</li> <li>To support local talent via our Citizen Journalism Scheme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnerships with community stakeholders</li> <li>Co-production with community stakeholders</li> <li>No. of young people supported</li> <li>No. of regular contributors</li> </ul>

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## CREATIVITY

Our creative strategy is to produce high-quality content that supports and strengthens local community while retaining its journalistic independence, integrity and rigour.

### SOCIETY

#### HUMAN INTEREST

This year we increased content that documented the lived experiences of local people, celebrating diversity and throwing light on issues that threaten the wellbeing of the community, such as mental health, isolation and discrimination. This is a crucial element of our work to help achieve social change. It also helps us build closer relationships with community partners and to increase our outreach into smaller pockets of the local community.

We worked closely with local charities Praxis, BowHaven and Positive East to tell stories that covered mental health, isolation, immigration and gender identification from a user perspective.

#### CAMPAIGNS

Our distinctive community voice means we cover local planning, development and environmental issues from a grassroots angle. While other publications focus on reporting on Council and court news, we speak to the people leading community-led campaigns.

Our coverage of coffee seller Frank Wang's crowdfunding campaign to raise funds for a new coffee stand after allegedly being wrongfully evicted from his pitch next to Bethnal Green station by the Council brought his campaign to the attention of thousands of local people. What's more, our readers took action - 11% of the total funds raised were from *Roman Road LDN* readers.

### LOCAL ECONOMY

#### BUSINESS

Celebrating the talent, people and crafts that make up our local economy remains at the heart of what we do. Social Streets was conceived as a response to failing high streets, valuing them as an essential element of community wellbeing.

Interviews with a diverse range of local businesses such as Naz Islam, owner of Sweet Treats, and Annette Thompson, the owner of Thompsons Hardware Store, provide insights into the lives of people behind familiar local institutions, challenging perceptions and increasing a sense of shared experience.

Our coverage of new business openings and our local area guides keep our readers informed and inspire them to engage. According to our survey 71% of our readers said that they had been prompted to visit a shop 'very often' due to our content.

#### CULTURE & HERITAGE

Our culture and heritage content celebrates the unique narrative of place found in our local communities. For Roman Road LDN our main heritage verticals include Suffragettes, grime music, the old East End/Cockney, and British Bengali.

Our resources on the ground means we often find local stories that are later picked up by larger media outlets. We were the first to local interview artist Sue Kreitzman who was later interviewed by The Times; local kickboxing champion Ruksana Begum, later interviewed by the Telegraph, and local Grime Gran, since commissioned by Channel 4 for a podcast series.



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## AUDIENCE

We act on behalf of the community and serve all audiences, providing a platform that reflects the diversity of our local communities and gives a voice to those less heard.

### OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

To be the best possible media partner to the local community, we ensure our journalists have enough time and opportunity to spend on community outreach and engagement. By building close relationships with a wide variety of community organisations we can better respond to their needs both editorially and commercially.

This year we set up outreach meetings with St Mary's Church, Tower Hamlets Friends & Neighbours, Neighbourhood Safety Forum, Run4Rene, E33D, St Barnabas Church, London Buddhist Centre, Cranbrook Community Centre, East London History Society, Chisenhale Art Gallery and St Margaret's House among many, many others.

### Consultation

We conducted an survey of 200 local people to assess the social and economic value of community journalism, the results of which will help us improve our content so that it can better support the community.

Results showed that readers believed community journalism had a significant impact on civic pride, community cohesion and supporting the high street.

### WEBSITE

This year we focused on improving the performance of the website with a view to monetising the platform.

We did this by taking the steps necessary to increase the speed of the website, improve our onpage SEO, and maximise content around high volume search terms.

Our Organic Sessions went up 263% from 3,124 sessions per month to 11,327 session per month and formed 54% of our total traffic that year.

Our Unique Users increased by 95% from 10,156 in June 2018 to 19,766 in May 2019, with dips in August and December during holiday season.

### SUBSCRIBERS

Subscribers to our weekly newsletter increased by 39% this year from 2,209 to 3,072. Most of the new subscribers came from competitions for which entrants were required to sign up to the newsletter. Tickets for All Points East generated the most new subscribers.

Introducing a sticky sign-up bottom bar onto all pages of the website resulted in a steady stream of new signups on a daily basis. We also received increased signups during unrelated Facebook Ad campaigns.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram channels are an important way to find new stories, engage with our audiences and drive traffic to our proprietary web platform.

This year referral traffic from social media platforms accounted for 42,697 sessions to the website, providing 35% of our total annual sessions.

Out of the social platforms, Facebook experienced the strongest growth with a 23% increase in followers. This was led by timely coverage of local news (events, shop openings and campaigns) and heritage posts that went viral. We also extended our presence and engagement in local Facebook groups.

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## DIGITAL

We are digital-first and committed to accelerating digital growth within local community through innovation and education.



### INNOVATION

#### PUBLISHING APP

We are in the process of developing the technology that will support our vision for community journalism. This year we worked with social enterprise Founders & Coders and their Gaza-based Sky Geeks team to develop a working prototype of a publishing app and this will form the basis of further funding applications next year.

#### MEDIA PARTNER

Our investment in digital along with services that suit the needs of small community organisations means we are the digital media partner of choice for local community.

This year we worked closely with Globe Town Assembly, Greenwich+Docklands International Festival and Roman Road Trust and helped these local initiatives leverage our platforms to promote their activities to a local audience within their budget.

Facebook advertising has been particularly effective with partners, successfully reaching 10,000 hyperlocal people during 14 day campaigns at a cost per result of on average 10p.

### EDUCATION

#### LOCAL BUSINESSES

In the last year, our education work has provided digital marketing training to 42 business in three town centres in Tower Hamlets: Bow, Globe Town and Bethnal Green.

Targetted business had a very low digital online presence and our aim was to reactivate dormant accounts, create new accounts and provide the training to allow the businesses to continue developing their online presence. We opened 70 new platforms and optimised 44 existing platforms.

"Really helpful that the trainer could come to the office and training was tailored to our needs. Really practical and accessible." - Wish Charity

"I enjoyed learning so many new tricks and it was very helpful!" - Magpie's Loot

"I learned how to use social media without any struggle" - Tony's Hair Stylists

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## PEOPLE

As a social enterprise working to strengthen local community, we nurture and develop local talent, and offer a model of community journalism that is co-created by local people.



Citizen Journalist, Lizzy Mace

### CITIZEN JOURNALISM SCHEME

Our Citizen Journalism Scheme ensures our work is not just for but also by the local community.

Thanks to our profile, networks and training we are able to offer our 'citizen journalists' opportunities to develop their media skills and experience and promote raise the profile of their work. The scheme also helps broaden the range and quantity of community content that we produce, allowing in-house staff to focus on more specialist journalism work.

Over the last 12 months we have worked with 16 local citizen journalists who have generated a total of 35 features for the website.

*Case study: Local resident Lizzy Mace, has become our Environmental Correspondent and writes a monthly column about local environmental issues, raising the profile of her own projects, namely Plastic Free Roman Road and the Borrow-a-Bag scheme.*

### GRADUATE RECRUITMENT

We provided a three-month internship to **four** recent graduates: Megan Agnew, a recent graduate from City University's Journalism MA; Dominika Kubinyova, also a recent graduate from City's Journalism MA, Natasha Forrest, a recent English graduate from Queen Mary University London; and Anna Lezard, a New Media graduate. We provided a study placement to **one** City journalism student Georgina Roberts.

**Two** of our regular citizen journalists are currently students at Queen Mary University London, which is located within *Roman Road LDN's* patch.

Social Streets founder and director Tabitha Stapely teaches an online journalism module to students at City University Journalism MA.

### YOUNG PEOPLE

In the last year we offered work placements to **two** local young people: Maud McLaughlin (17) and Georgia-Amalia Kossiva (15), who both worked with our *Roman Road LDN* editorial team for a week.

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## OPERATIONS

We are committed to developing a model of community journalism that is sustainable in disadvantaged areas. This means deconstructing the publishing process to reduce operational costs.



Co-Lab, our editorial offices and community collaboration space on Roman Road, February 2019.

## PREMISES

We were grateful to Mulberry UTC for providing us with an office space at their college on Parnell Road from January 2018 to December 2018 in return for working with their students.

We found new premises in an empty shop on the local high street and secured peppercorn rent at 30% of market rate, providing us with affordable temporary office premises for six months from January 2019 to June 2019. This highly visible location helped raise our profile to passers-by.

Next year we will be located on the first floor of the Abbots building on Roman Road, where we will benefit from free space in exchange for digital marketing services for Abbots Flooring.

## CO-LAB

While occupying an empty shop on Roman Road high street, we launched Co-Lab, a community collaboration space that served as both our editorial offices and as a space that could be hired by local people and community groups.

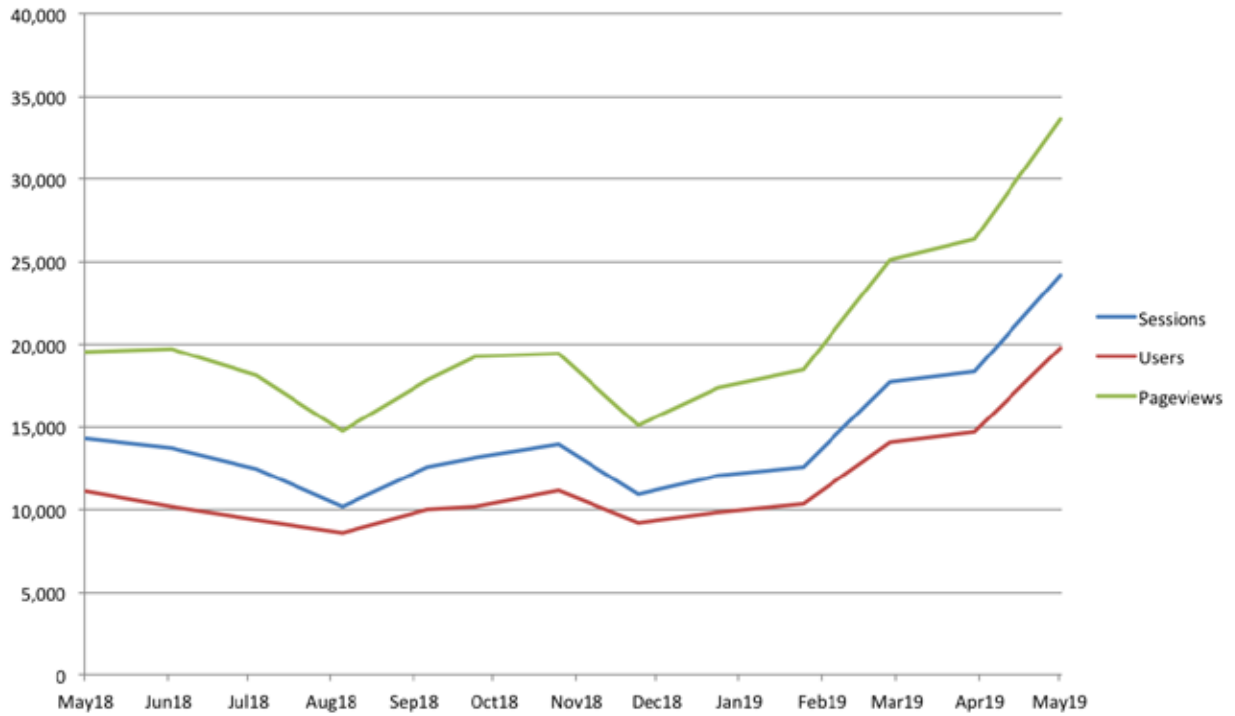
During the sixth month residency, the space was used regularly for workshops and meetings by Roman Road Trust, Roman Road Bow Neighbourhood Forum, Plastic-Free Roman Road and DIY Skills for Women. We also used it to deliver Social Street's digital marketing workshops to local businesses.

Key learnings from this was that there was a strong demand for space for evening meetings, community events and workshops but less appetite for paid co-working space.

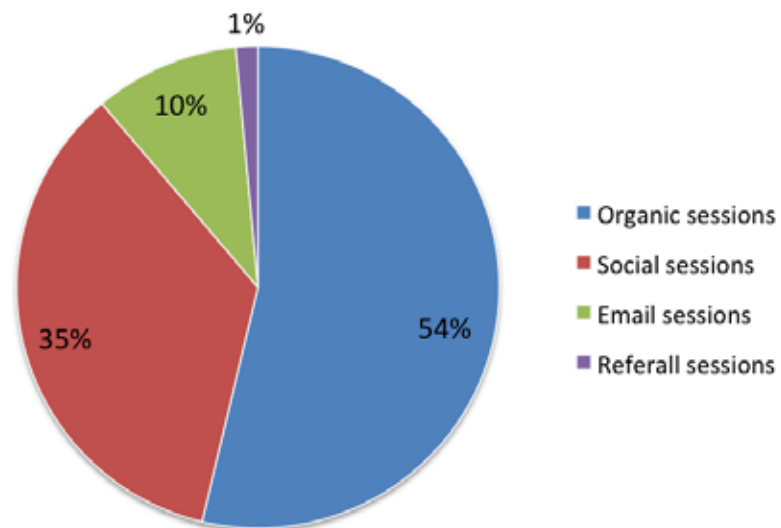
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## PERFORMANCE

### Roman Road LDN Website Traffic 2018-19



### Roman Road LDN Website Acquisition 2018-2019



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## REVENUE

Working in disadvantaged areas in a failing sector means we are continually looking at new ways of making community journalism sustainable.

Advertising revenue from local businesses, once the mainstay of local publishing, has been decimated by the new digital landscape resulting in the closure of local media outlets nationwide.

As a social enterprise working in disadvantaged areas, we want the benefit of high-quality community journalism to be freely available to everyone. This means we will not put our content behind a paywall or membership scheme that limits the amount of content that can be consumed.

Instead we must develop multiple revenue streams, investing more in those that are aligned with our values and that can be

### DONATIONS

As a community-led organisation it is important for us to be accountable to our readers first and that's why our donation functionality was the first revenue model to be launched.

In March 2019 we launched our donations scheme offering readers the option of donating £2, £4, £8 or £16 per month on an on-going basis. We also give the option of one-off donations for those who do not want to commit to a monthly direct debit.

By the end of May 2019 income from monthly reader donations was £100 per month, mostly made up of £2 micro-payments.

Given the small numbers involved, income will be slow to build but we expect this to be one of our main, and most reliable, forms of income by year three.

### ADVERTORIALS

Following a year of strong growth in website traffic, we consulted with local community organisations to develop an advertorial package that would suit their needs. This will help us to position ourselves as the media partner for the local community.

Our first Community Outreach Package was delivered in May 2019 for Globe Town Assembly, and offering a three-pronged marketing campaign on mail, web and Facebook.

The advertorial package is targeted at larger organisations such as local charities, arts and cultural bodies who want to reach local audiences for their community projects.





## IMPACT IN NUMBERS

Number of businesses receiving digital training	42
Number of hours of digital training provided	84
Value of digital training provided free-of-cost to local businesses, including assesement and reporting *	£8,400
Number of young people aged 15-25 receiving work experience	7
Number of local voluntary editorial contributors	16
Number of editorial features contributed by local volunteer contributors	35
Value of voluntary editorial contributions**	£12,250

\* Value based on £50 per hour trainer

\*\* Value based on a feature being worth £350

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## FINANCES

### COMPANY ACCOUNTS

Turnover	£60,707
Staff costs (inc. other director's remuneration and staff recruitment/training)	£9,005
Depreciation and other amounts written off assets	(£1,675)
Other Charges (including sub-contractor and editorial staff costs)	£38,442
Tax	(£1,887)
<b>Profit/(loss)</b>	<b>£9,698</b>

### PROCUREMENT SAVINGS

Savings in rent* by exchanging services for rent at Mulberry UTC for 7 months	£4,200
Savings in rent* by taking empty shop unit for 5 months at 60% rent discount	£1,000
Value of editorial content provided by voluntary contributors	£12,250
<b>Total savings</b>	<b>£17,450</b>

\* Based on value of serviced office for four to six people being valued at £600 per month

### REVENUE BREAK-DOWN

Donations, Roman Road LDN	£214
Advertorials, Roman Road LDN	£1,835
Grants, Roman Road LDN	£35,500
Sponsorship, Roman Road LDN	-
Training, Social Streets	£21,120
Consultancy, Social Streets	£1,600
Services, Social Streets	£340
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>£60,609</b>