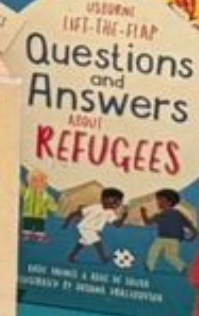
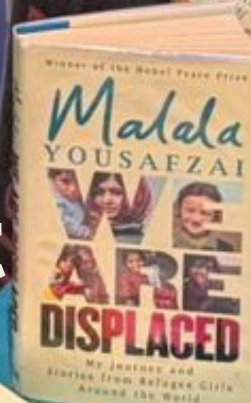




Calico Libraries

Calico is a local charity
dedicated to providing
welcoming public
libraries for people in
Levenshaye

Calico Projects Libraries in Action 2025 Impact Report



Calico Projects

01



The recently re-vamped
Children's Library
at Crofton Park

Calico Projects is a registered CIO based in Lewisham, serving the local population from four public libraries and across a range of services during a challenging period for VCS organisations nationwide.

Calico has a strong reputation for providing the very best service, building strong relationships within the community, and delivering demand-led services to the people of Lewisham.

Our four libraries go from strength to strength. With issue figures and visitor numbers up again this year, we have also now increased our opening hours, with all libraries now open at least six days a week.

With the loss of many traditional front line services, 2025 has seen an expansion of our customer service skillset. All front-line staff and several of our more senior volunteers underwent signposting training delivered by Citizens Advice Lewisham, and we have developed digital literacy support through our partnership with Catbytes. Our 'Above and Beyond' library service has dealt with a huge volume and variety of needs during the past year.

As part of Lewisham Libraries we were delighted to share in the success of the award for best library service in London this year. This 2025 Impact Report provides a summary of achievements and presents an overview of our strategy going forward.

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User Survey 2024

04

As well as our regular feedback forms, every other year we spend two weeks operating a user survey, encouraging all users to feedback so we know more about our service users and their needs, and what they want more of from us. For full details of our user survey please see last year's report, here are some of the highlights.

How would you rate our services on a scale of 0 - 10?



49.6%

Of users rated our services as 10/10.

95.3%

Of users rated our services at least 8/10..

Based on a survey of 232 users April 2024



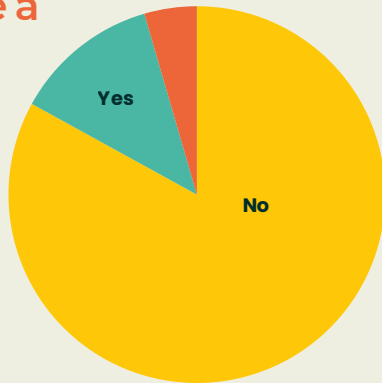
Diversity of users

05

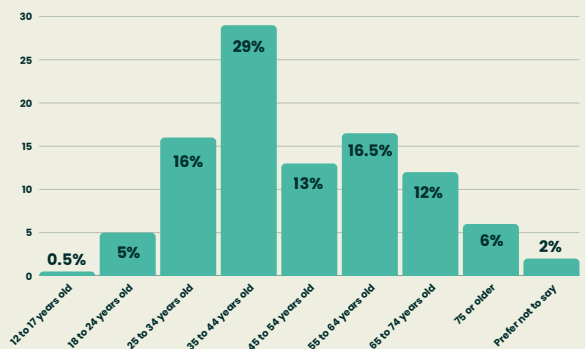
200 service users responded to our questions on diversity.

Do you have a disability?

- No 83%
- Yes 12.5%
- Prefer not to say 4.5%

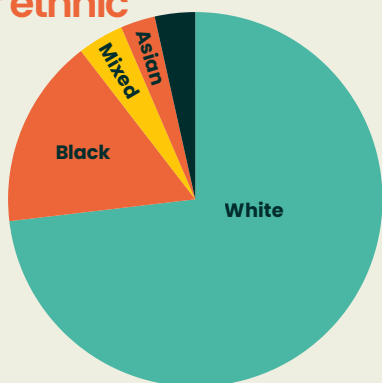


What is your age?



What is your ethnic group?

- White 73.1%
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African 16.4%
- Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups 4%
- Asian or Asian British 3%
- Prefer not to say 3.5%



What is your sexual orientation?

- Straight/Heterosexual 79.5%
- Gay or Lesbian 6%
- Bisexual 2.5%
- Prefer not to say 12%



Diversity of use

06

Based on a survey of 232 users in April 2024

 Borrowing and reading books – 76.7%

 Printing or photocopying – 34%

 Taking a child to an event – 29.7%

 Working or studying – 29.3%

 Using free wi-fi – 28.4%

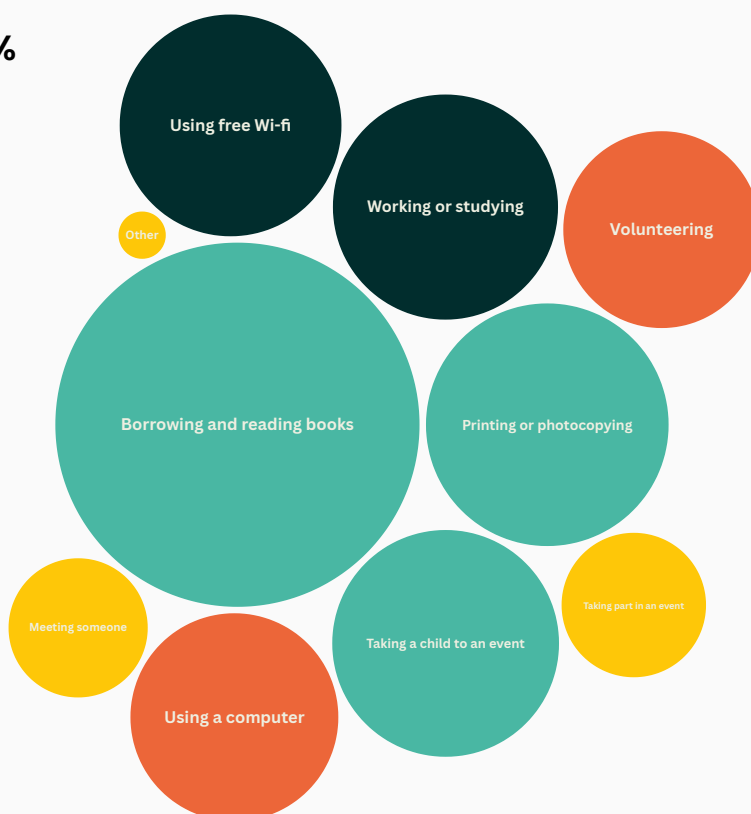
 Using a computer – 25%

 Volunteering – 22.4%

 Taking part in an event – 12%

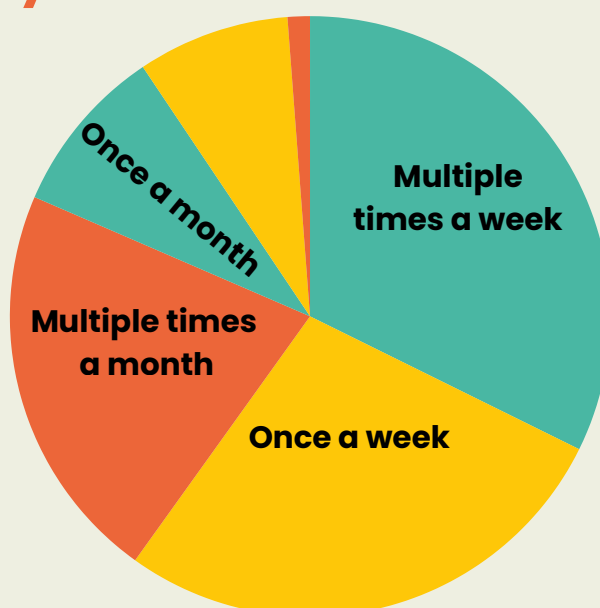
 Meeting someone – 11.2%

 Other – 1.3%



How often do you use our libraries?

-  Multiple times a week 32.3%
-  Once a week 27.6%
-  Multiple times a month 21.6%
-  Once a month 9.1%
-  Multiple times a year 8.2%
-  Once a year or less 1.2%



Arts, Music and Literacy

07

10,000*

under 12s have attended group activities at our libraries aimed at arts, literacy and creativity in the past year.

15,000*

adults have attended classes, group work and sessions centred around arts, crafts and literacy in our libraries, and in the next year we expect this number will more than double.

25,000*

people attended other community events and support groups, with more than half of those related to personal health and wellbeing.

Storytime session at Forest Hill Library, using the Library Garden space for this years 'Story Garden' themed Summer Reading Challenge



Always busy, Rhyme Time at Sydenham Library

As well as all of the free sessions listed above, we also offer space for charities, not-for-profit and small businesses offering paid-for sessions in our community rooms, designed for children, for health groups and for family resources, serving a further 15,000 people from the community each year. *All of the figures on this page should be prefixed with the words 'at least' as some attendance figures have been averaged with conservative estimates!

Libraries in numbers

2024/2025

08

Visitor stats – Visitor figures were up again this year as they have been every year since the end of the pandemic, rising from 346,902 in 2023/24 to 422,817 in 2024/25; maintaining this level of growth should see us start to punch through pre-pandemic levels within a year. Visitor figures are roughly 15% lower than ten years ago, however, this is very much above national average line of decline according to data from CIPFA.

Issue Figures – Issue figures present an even healthier picture for Calico Libraries, with overall borrowing rising from 274,932 in 2023/34 to 282,855 in 2024/25. Indeed the 24/35 figure shows the highest number of issues at our libraries for over ten years, with our share of books issued in Lewisham rising to 41% of all books in the borough from 28% a decade earlier.

8379

Open library
hours
across sites

0

Unplanned
closure days

41

Service user
PC's across
sites

282,855

Books issued by
Calico Libraries

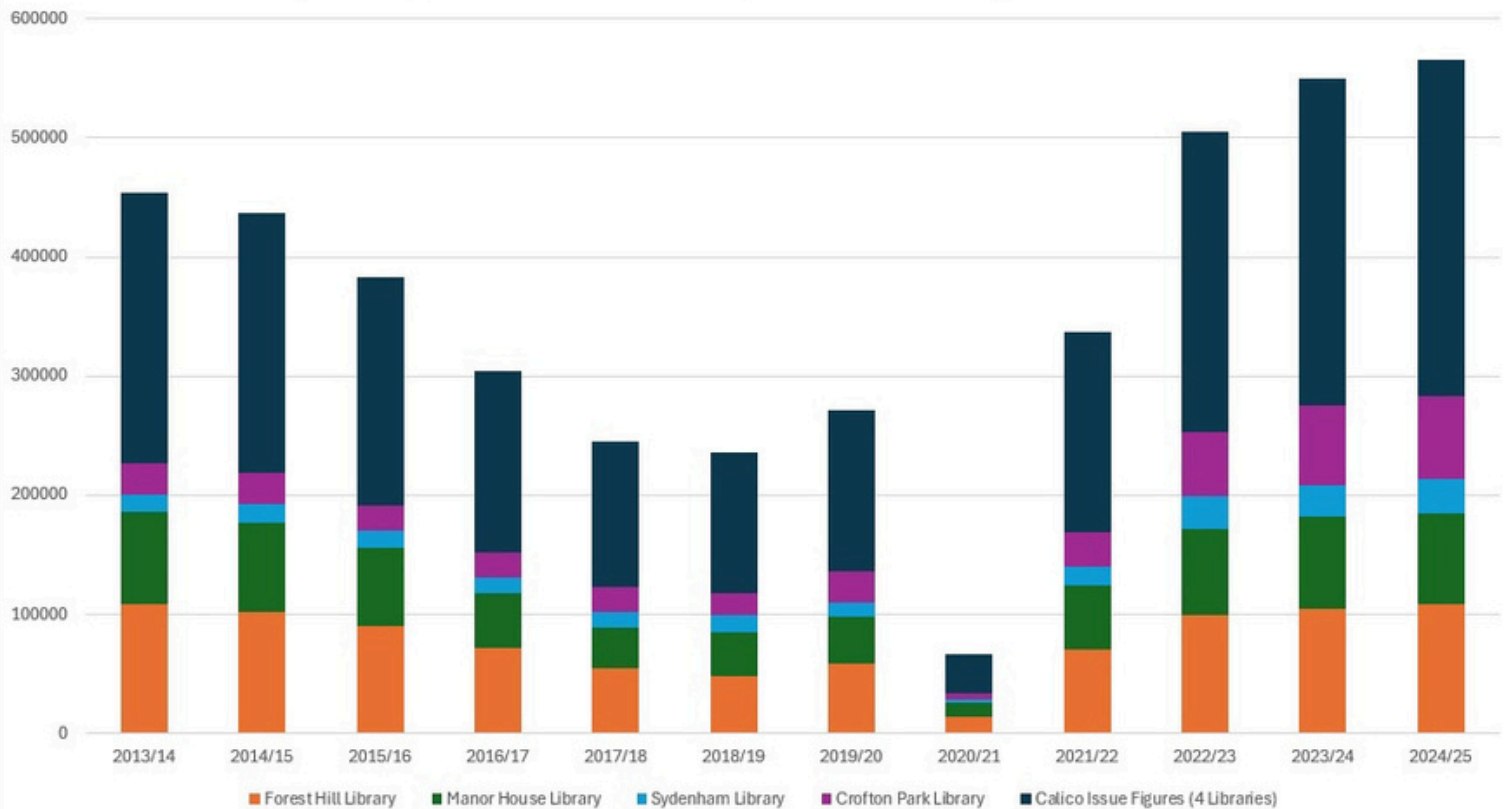
422,817

Visits to
Calico Libraries



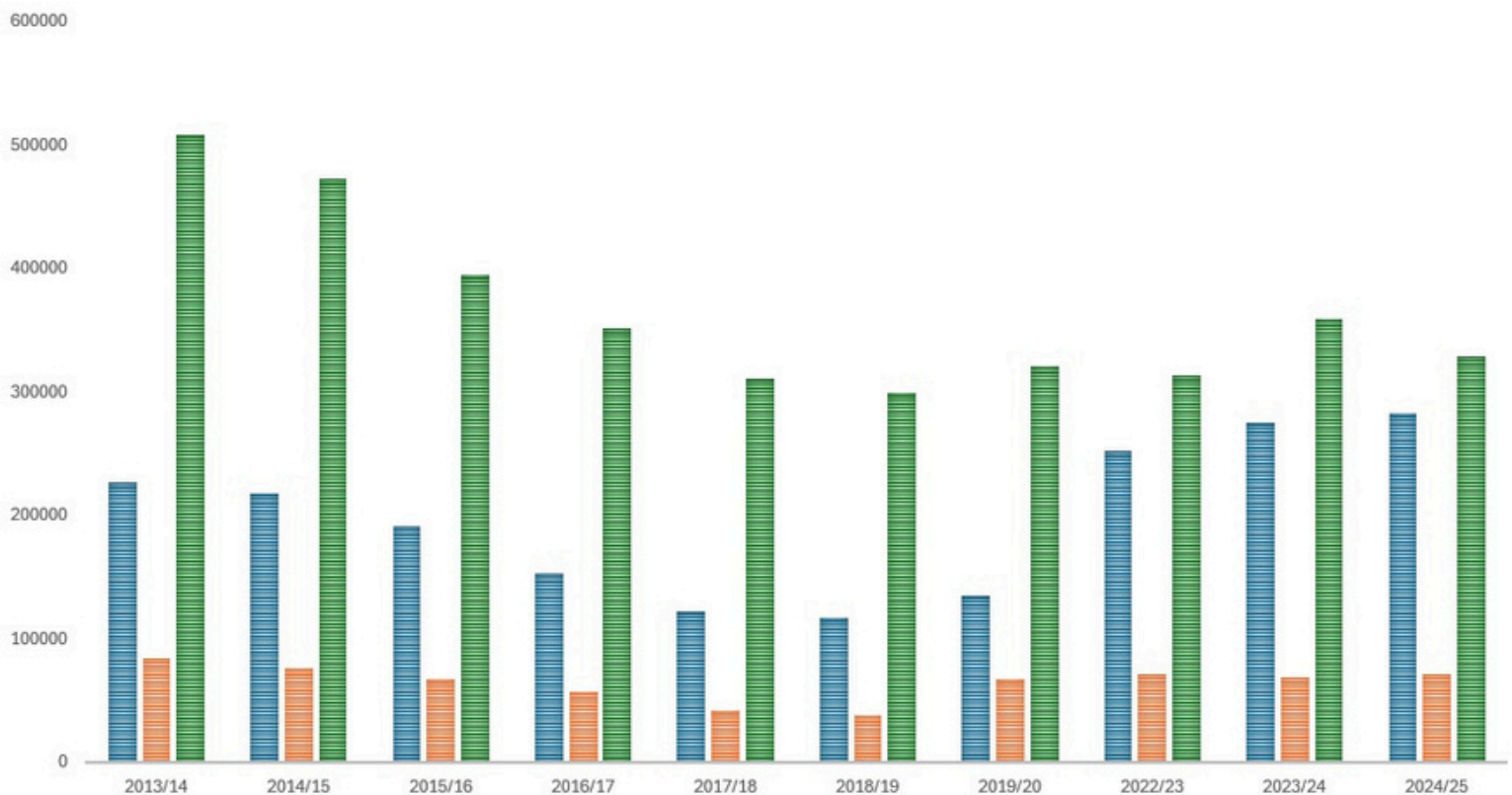
Calico Libraries Issue Figures

We took over our first library at the end of 2016 and our second in 2017. Covid aside, I think the data speaks for itself as we post a record year for the third year running! Each of our four libraries show similar improvement, with all four libraries issuing at least twice as many books as in 2018/19.



PERFORMANCE

CALICO'S LIBRARIES (IN BLUE) COMPARED TO THE OTHER FOUR COMMUNITY LIBRARIES AND THE HUBS (WITH THE TWO COVID-HIT YEARS REMOVED). WE TOOK ON OUR FIRST LIBRARY AT THE END OF 2016 AND OUR SECOND THE FOLLOWING YEAR



Powered by

Affordable workspace and the creative community.

10



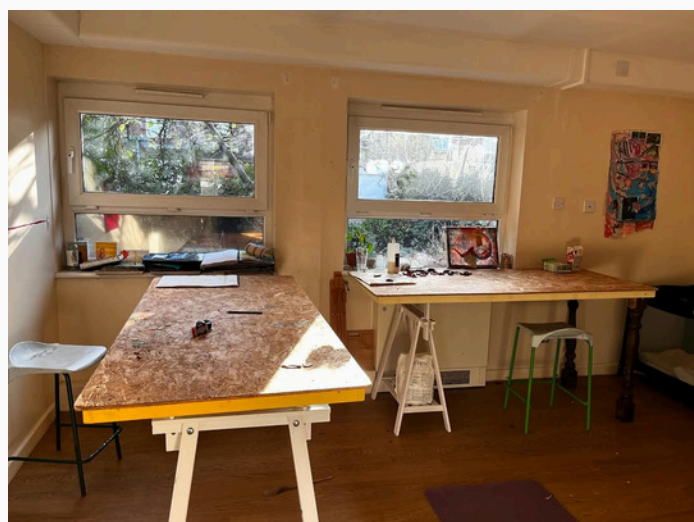
New studios at
Calico
Deptford, SE8

In 2025, Calico Projects has expanded to 67 affordable workspace units across six locations in Lewisham, including our newest site in Deptford. Our 2023/24 accounts report a turnover of £288,000, with well over half of this income generated through letting affordable workspace, an approach rooted in the V22 group's 20-year model of supporting creatives across London.

Affordable workspace is valuable in itself, providing accessible opportunities for local people and small businesses. However, at Calico, that value is even greater; every penny of rent is reinvested into sustaining the community library service, creating a long-term, sustainable way of keeping libraries open and thriving.



Make Mee Studio offer classes and workshops



Mother House studio space in House on the Hill

The Power of Volunteers

11



Volunteers and staff from across Calico at our 2025 summer party

Another benefit for the community is that of volunteering; we have volunteers from 14-88 years old, many of them people in retirement, but lots of others are between jobs or unable to work due to a disability. We have volunteers from all backgrounds and they volunteer for all sorts of different reasons. At least eight of the volunteers we have had in the past few years have gone on to become professional library staff at Lewisham, other boroughs, or in other fields, including academic libraries at universities and museums.



Crofton Park Library volunteers Pat and Lina very happy with their new reception desk after the recent refurb.

Some of our volunteers come to us from various groups and charities, including Mencap (supporting those with learning disabilities); St Giles Trust (supporting those in rehabilitation after being released from prison) and on schemes such as college or school placements, or the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. We have also taken young people on placements via the job centre to resolve long term unemployment, one of whom is now working for Calico in a managerial position. We estimate to have helped at least a dozen refugees and displaced people with work experience, which helps them improve their English and understanding of life in the UK.

Development Strategy ¹²

2026 and beyond

If it ain't broken... our results speak for themselves and our main strategy for the future is do do more of the same. Libraries should continue to be primarily about book-lending, but we also recognise that libraries are uniquely positioned to appeal to all sections of the community and it would be a dereliction of duty to ignore the opportunity we have to improve people's lives and signpost them to specialist help they might need.

We will continue to train our staff to help people, and to know how and where to send people for help. We will continue to develop new services and make new partnerships with service providers so that we can serve the communities surrounding us.

We do not intend to expand our section of libraries, instead concentrating developing the services we offer inside our existing buildings and becoming more involved in supporting and operating community spaces either or directly or in partnership with the local authority and VCS stakeholders.

We now employ a Funding Officer and an Events Programmer, helping us to expand our offering and develop new solutions that work within our spaces.

Our most recently published set of accounts show a turnover of just over £280,000; for the year ending June 2025 that figure will be in excess of £450,000 and for the year we are now in we expect to tip half a million pounds.

We are proud to say that all our staff are paid at least London Living Wage and that we do not use zero hours contracts unless requested by the employee.

Full details of our staff and trustees can be found on our website.



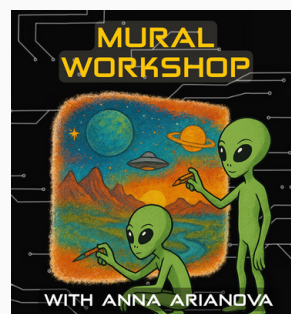
Project Development 13

Since our last report we have taken on a new venue in central Catford. Under construction at time of writing, we are developing a rehearsal and shared workspace to compliment theatre and dance partners in collaboration with The Broadway Theatre.



Our 'Art in Libraries' project is developing well, with donations from the V22 Collection sitting alongside work being developed in an increasing number of art classes for adults and children alike in our community rooms, led by our two Artists in Residence.

Our work in creative writing is also underway now, with teen writing workshops and a competition as part of the Imagined Worlds programme for a short story award on a sci-fi and fantasy theme.



Community Values

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Calico is increasingly embedded within the communities in which we work. Having been born out of a joint partnership, we have always understood that we want and need to engage with our fellow VCS organisations across the borough. This year we were involved in more partnerships than ever.

Whether it's Manor House offering free space for local community groups, Sydenham and Forest Hill Libraries joining in with the Sydenham Arts Trail, or Crofton Park taking part in a host of Brockley Max events, our involvement runs deep. We also provide materials and funding for a wide range of workshops, activities and services across South East London, from arts and crafts to sports, learning, befriending, digital skills, and vital support for people with health conditions, neurodiverse needs or additional learning requirements.

We continue to develop new and innovative services, often prompted by noticing a need or desire in the community. Not everything works, some initiatives don't last, but the successes of those groups and sessions that go on to thrive are reflective of our demand-led approach and help to lead a greater diversity of people welcomed into our buildings.

Partnerships developed within the last year include Concrete Youth; Black British Book Festival; Citizens Advice Lewisham; Catbytes; Africa Advocacy; Make Mee; Ignition; Brockley Max; SLAM; Sister Midnight; Spread the Word (upcoming in 2026) and Spontaneous Productions.



Community Care

15

Across our libraries this year we will help:

1500

People helped
with one-to-one
digital support

4400

People with
signposting and
personal support

Catbytes CIC digital drop-ins at Sydenham



Calico Projects continues to champion digital inclusion, ensuring that all members of our community have the tools, skills, and confidence to engage with essential online services. In partnership with Catbytes CIC, we host regular Digital Drop-Ins across our libraries, providing hands-on support for residents to navigate devices, apps, and digital platforms.

In 2025, Calico Libraries partnered with Citizens Advice Lewisham to launch an advice booth at Sydenham Library, giving residents confidential access to guidance on debt, benefits, housing, employment, and consumer rights.

The booth features an easy-to-use tablet for exploring CAB's Self-Help portal and can connect directly to an adviser for complex queries. Fully soundproof, it ensures private conversations for sensitive matters.

Alongside our Digital Drop-Ins, this initiative boosts digital access and connects the community with essential support, helping residents navigate both online and real-world challenges with confidence.

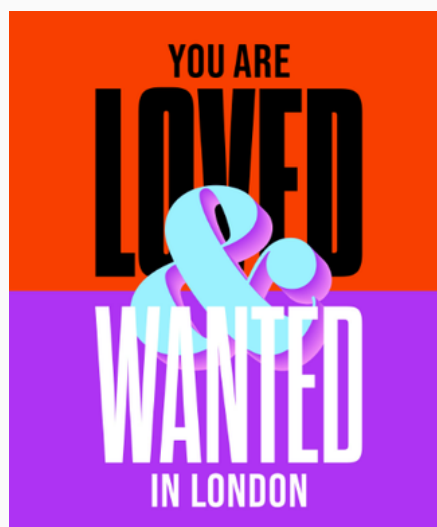




CEO Simon Higgs with Ellie Reeves at Crofton Park Library with the 'Welcome Mat'

Over eight weeks in the autumn of 2024, all four of our libraries proudly hosted the Welcome Mat, a project by Brighton-based charity The Launchpad Collective. Created by over 250 people from across the world, the mat carried a bold and uncompromising message: "WELCOME".

Lewisham is the UK's first Borough of Sanctuary, and libraries play a vital role as welcoming spaces for new arrivals. Meanwhile, the Mayor of London's 'Loved and Wanted' initiative launched in 2025 and we were very pleased to join in the campaign.



The Welcome Mat display resonated strongly with our communities, with library users describing it as "amazing", "incredible", "huge", and "a powerful message, beautifully done." Since having its time in Lewisham, the mat has continued its journey across the country in partnership with Migrant Action, visiting areas affected by the racist violence of summer 2024.

Calico Projects

People in Action

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Our Board of Trustees consists of founders Tara Cranswick and Michael Abrahams; along with Meriel Beale, Eloise England, Julia Farr, John Firmin and Kerry Pimley.

Previous Trustees include Dr Ole Petter Anfinssen, Des Reid, Taz Khan and Dr Ralph White.

We are also forever indebted to Earl John Russell, Bruce McRobie and Pauline Wright, all of whom helped us in our early days to take on the challenge of our first library by being part of our first management committee.

Calico would not be able to operate without the 350+ volunteers it has annually, many of whom volunteer several days each week.

Our Senior Management Team - Andi, Charlotte, James and Simon - and the rest of our fantastic front line staff are admirably supported by our dedicated facilities management team, our artists in residence and our IT support guru. All of our staff help us to provide a clean, safe and welcoming set of buildings and much valued service that is open to all, seven days a week.

Over the past few years we have been blessed with some amazing Trustees and we are indebted to the hard work and support of the Lewisham Libraries staff and management and partners in the Business Development and Communities teams at Lewisham Council.

Simon Higgs
Calico Projects CEO

