

A New Direction's Listening Project:

THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG LONDONERS

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Foreword

According to the current results found in the London Assembly's consultation "A New Deal for Young People - Impact of COVID 19", 47% of young people (16 - 25) say they don't feel in control of their own lives. However this feeling is not only rooted in the pandemic, young people in London have shared through many listening projects and indeed our own, that the year 2020 has revealed to them "how little [they] matter and how alien it is for [their] voices to be heard or [they] be consulted in a meaningful way".

Undoubtedly 2020 has been a year like no other, 'an unprecedented time' as many have said, "life as we knew it was stripped away and we had no choice but to adapt" a participant explained. We were faced with the reality of the effects of our carbon footprint with the bushfire crisis in Australia, the worldwide pandemic created a humanitarian accountability to stay indoors, we saw and many experienced how viable it is to fall victim to poor mental health, and we also saw evidence of the fragility and disregard for Black lives and unveiled the trauma around this topic. The world became smaller, humanity's failings became more evident and the consequences of them were felt. We saw many people begin to speak up and challenge the powers that be, governments around the world being forced to U-turn in their decision making; all ultimately leaving us more aware of the disadvantages of others and as a result more aware of our own privileges.

Although we (humanity) were all forced to adapt to a new normal, one participant pointed out that young people exclusively in fact needed to learn a whole new skill - independence. With schools closed, university lecture theatres empty, the job market stunted, and check in points limited, young people were not only forced to become more resilient, they simply had to learn how to do things by themselves. Whilst this has come with its challenges young Londoners have also shared the benefits of 2020 and how they have been able to grow during this time and engage in new activities. Arts, culture and creativity has been re-imagined, the definition broadened to include all forms of self expression. Therefore whilst there is a lot for us to resolve in the short to medium term to best support young people, there are key learnings and experiences that we must make every effort to retain.

"Life as we knew it was stripped away, and we had no choice but to adapt."

The Brief

[A New Direction](#) is a London-based non-profit, generating opportunities for children and young people to unlock their creativity. [Aweo Group](#) was one of five organisations commissioned in January 2021 by A New Direction to conduct one of its [Listening Projects](#). Our enquiry focused on the experience of young Londoners.

The events of 2020 have had a significant impact on many factors affecting young people's lives in London. In this conversation, we want to more fully understand the experience now for children and young people in relation to culture and creativity. What would be young Londoners' priorities for culture, creativity and learning in the short to medium term? How can organisations work together to ensure young people's voices are central to our work now and in the future? How do young people see their role in shaping their communities?

Introduction

Through the various interviews and focus groups we conducted, we uncovered five key stand out events, themes and realisations of 2020 for young Londoners. These were: The effects of COVID, the resurfacing of the Black Lives Matter movement, the decline of mental health, the realities of climate change and the new gap in education. Feeding into all of these key issues was the impact of social media, positive and negative, and the acknowledgment that whilst young people dominate this world there is much to be done to ensure their voices are heard in reality.

The Aweo Group partnered with many organisations (acknowledged below) to create a virtual space where young people's voices were at the centre of the conversation. There were no entry requirements to take part, other than age (13 - 25). Some young people were part of established youth organisations and therefore had a strong affinity to the important advocacy, outreach and community relations. Other young people shared their opinions as individuals interested in reflecting on the year 2020 or contributing to the narrative of the creative industry. As we worked to ensure young people participating were as comfortable as possible, we opted out of running round table discussions where young people could have been in virtual rooms with people they were unfamiliar with and rather worked to meet young people where they already gather, in their pre-planned sessions and used the space to run focus groups. We spoke with over 40 young people and held 7 focus group discussions and 8 interviews. Of the 32 London boroughs, 20 are represented by our participants and 10 out of the 13 ages are also represented. As a whole, this group of young people is representative of those who have disabilities, are care leavers, and also has a very healthy representation of young Londoners from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background.

We would like to thank the following organisations for their support in signposting the opportunity to their young people, inviting us to their sessions to run our focus group discussions and in some cases, running them themselves with us present. These organisations were: AFC Wimbledon Foundation, West Ham Foundation, Family Action, HeadStart, Greater London Authority, The Black Card Talks, The Sanctuary Youth Group and of course, A New Direction.



“Adults are deciding our lives for us. We are the future generation and don’t get to decide what happens.”

Theme 1: Covid 19

During conversations with young people about the role they play in shaping their communities, young people reflected on the ‘spirit’ of the first lockdown and the idea that globally we were in this together as staying inside was the only solution. Some young people described this time as “what wider community was all about”, and a clear indication of what was missing in the busyness of London living. Whether it is helping neighbours with shopping, supporting others or volunteering where possible and clapping for our NHS heroes, it was a time where we all came together and also inadvertently got to know our surroundings and neighbours. However overtime, it became apparent that not everyone felt staying inside was the solution, the detractors became louder, the media talked about them more and consequently trust and said spirit was affected. People therefore cared less about maintaining this said spirit and new identity, and thus went back to the groups and spaces in which we all originally and more whole heartedly identify with.

Some young people therefore explained that whilst they are considered to be vibrant and full of life, ideas and bursting with energy, they alone cannot be responsible for the missing sense of community in London or for shaping it. They explained that it is a requirement that we must all be adding to in order to create and maintain meaningful community relationships. Young people explained that at the beginning of the pandemic they felt more of a part of their communities but as time went on they felt targeted by them. “We were the scapegoats, we went from being praised for volunteering to being the reason for increases in Covid-19 cases and our grandparents getting sick”. As such there was an overwhelming expectation from participants that organisations should contribute and support young people in challenging the negative narrative that surrounds them. Young people spoke about creating spaces and mediums for more meaningful conversations across generations, increasing trust and breakdown of barriers built up by fear or misunderstanding. Young people spoke about the importance in bridging the gap by increasing interactions across generations through mentoring programmes, community projects and through school programmes. Admirably, older young people acknowledged the need for them to support younger young people in finding their way, often identifying that whilst they would benefit from their own mentoring, they do have lived experiences that they can share with the younger generation if a space was available for this. One young person said “We have the ability to affect older generations as well as our inner circles and younger generations. Conversations with older generations will evoke a different narrative in their mind to have the power to make these changes. The ability to let older generations know we’re not as ‘little’ as they think we are can be impactful”.

95% of our conversations saw young people identifying that they have become more creative as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Young people shared that having more free time and being in less pressured environments created a want to be more self-expressive, resulting in various forms of creative initiatives. Some young people created community displays and initiatives with their local council, others learnt new skills and began creating skits, writing and learnt how to edit videos on TikTok, final cut and other softwares. Some learnt photography, how to make candles or found a new way to keep fit. The theme across the conversations were two fold; the need to adapt which led to the need to be creative, and also the need to have a “side hustle”. Young people shared that in an environment where people were losing jobs and future prospects were and still are unknown, this created a need for them to become “masters of [their] own destiny”.





When asked further questions about the importance placed on financial security at their age, it became clear that young people did not trust that they will be thoroughly considered in the Covid-19 recovery planning, young people said “adults are deciding our lives for us. We are the future generation and don't get to decide what happens” therefore there is a need for them to take control of their own lives but also to ensure they can be fun and creative while doing it. One young person explained that creativity has been redefined during this time and organisations working in this space should adjust their budgets to accommodate all forms of art, culture and creative practices. They said “young people have started engaging in their own forms of arts practises rather than going out and seeking bigger and more traditional services”.



“If these organisations are really for us they should provide us with the tools to speak, not reimagine our rhetoric”.

Theme 2: The Black Lives Matter Movement

98% of young people who took part in our listening project identified the resurfacing of the Black Lives Matter movement as a significant event of 2020. One young person said,

“Black people are accustomed to experiencing subtle racism so much so that to some extent it goes over our heads. Comments from the elderly like, you look a bit burnt, being targeted by the police because you are travelling home from school with your friends but are assumed to be troublemakers, being told you are too loud, opinionated or aggressive by your teachers. We all already knew it was there, it was the world that woke up to our reality when we saw the brutal killing of a man who wasn't a threat in 4k. The world said wow, maybe this is all linked, maybe this is how little their lives really matter”.

Others reflected on the movement as an awakening for them, a necessary jumpstart for them to use their privilege to shape their communities and peoples around them. However what was the most troubling from these conversations was the unidentified trauma experienced by young people during this time. There was a want to engage with social media, change the narrative and to be kept abreast of the latest news or examples of racial injustice, yet meanwhile a feeling of dismay at entertaining a consistent showcase of structural inequality at the cost of their own wellbeing. A young person said “I knew I needed to put my phone down, but I felt like if I did I would be letting the team down and I just couldn't.” Young people described feeling powerless and therefore needing to do something, protest, petition, post - but most importantly, persevere.

When speaking with young Londoners about whether their voice has been heard, many felt it had but they did not trust whether anything meaningful would come of it. Young people commented that their schools and the recreational activities they took part in had made addresses and asked for feedback, however most felt that it was performative and would lead to little or no action. One young person said “when the government doesn't empathise with reason for the movement, and Priti Patel is calling our protest displays dreadful, it is hard to believe we will see anything change”. When asked how organisations can support young people in ensuring their voice is central to their work now and in the future, young people spoke at length about transparency and the need for accountability. “I feel like they ask us what change we want to see, go away and tell their managers they spoke to young people, and then nothing ever happens.” The focus groups particularly during these conversations talked about the need to close the feedback loop and show young people what has come of their suggestions, clearly explaining what has changed, what hasn't and why these decisions have been made. Through these conversations it became abundantly clear that at times there is a lack of trust between young people and the organisations they work with, one significant enough for organisations to take note of.

Young people expressed a want for cultural and creative industries to not allow this social movement to become a moment in time. They raised the need for initiatives, funding and space to be made available for young people to be able to express themselves, their stories and showcase them accurately and widely. They talked about being in control of their own narrative, especially creatively, and not allowing this to be interpreted, moulded and ultimately “simplified or pacified,” but for it to be raw, real and representative. One young person said, “if these organisations are really for us they should provide us with the tools to speak not reimagine our rhetoric”.

“There needs to be more of a focus on community-based support in London for young people and mental health”.

Theme 3: Mental Health

100% of young people that took part in the focus groups and interviews identified that 2020 had some kind of impact on their mental health. A combination of Covid-19, BLM, social isolation and social media has taken its toll on how young people feel about themselves and the community around them. A lack of social interaction and time with loved ones has impacted young Londoners ability to sustain meaningful relationships and has made them appreciate people and events a lot more than they did before. A number of young people commented on how 2020 has given more time and reflection around the importance of mental health and self care, with one young person saying “2020 made me realise that being happy is the most important thing in life,” and has also demoralised the pre-Covid norm of “always running on empty in a busy world.” Young people have noted how mental health has been a key talking point during lockdown, and how this needs to carry on remaining a focal point whilst we think about and start living our new ‘normal’ after Covid-19. Others also identified that social media played a role in both aiding but also heightening mental health issues, with one explaining “social media made me feel even more isolated,’ due to the overwhelming amount of information but also ‘fake news’ and inaccurate lifestyles that are posted on social media platforms, mainly being Instagram.

There is a want and need from young people to actively carry on having open and honest conversations around mental health, whether it’s on social media or in real life. They spoke of encouraging the break down of the stigma attached to mental health - specifically how the older generations view this and the lack of understanding and empathy towards young people who suffer from mental health issues. From these conversations across the different focus groups and interviews, young people see their role in shaping their communities through the use of social media and other tools to have their voices heard about the importance of mental health and how to encourage others around them to have open conversations around this.

When speaking with young people around the amount of support they have received for mental health or interactions they have had with organisations around this issue, the majority response was little to none. Young Londoners have explained how little access they feel they have to youth organisations and mental health services, especially during the pandemic. The long waiting times for mental health services such as counselling and therapy, on top of this being on a virtual basis due to Covid-19, has meant that young people have had limited access to resources and services to aid their mental health, with one young person stating they had to wait over a month to be referred to counselling after their first initial appointment. There was a strong emphasis on the government needing to prioritise healthcare and mental health going forward; young Londoners identified this support is needed not only for themselves, but also recognised this should be for all Londoners in general, asking that these services be made more accessible, inclusive and affordable and are provided on a local level rather than seeking national services.

When discussing what these priorities should be and what they can look like, there was a strong agreement on the education and support around mental health needing to last a lot longer than just a ‘hot topic’ of conversation during the pandemic. Young Londoners have expressed the desire to use the energy and momentum of lockdown on social media to keep the fire burning on open conversations around mental health and how social media is a good creative platform to utilise in order to educate, inspire and learn on an ongoing basis. Majority of young people agreed that having a source and space for a creative outlet, whether it be via opportunities, clubs or young person forums, would allow young people to express themselves and find different creative interests to relieve stress and aid in their mental health. These creative outlets included music, art, sport and culture. Young people explained that if there was increased availability and access to these outlets through clubs, spaces and events, it would allow a more communal support feel on local levels rather than just accessing 121 support through national services.



“The slowing down of life has helped people realise what small steps they can take to make a change”.



Theme 4: Climate Change

Some young Londoners noted how climate change became a rather prominent topic throughout the different stages of the pandemic, as the first few months of 2020 saw a ‘climate reckoning’ as one young person described it, with major events such as wildfires, locust swarms and various documentaries that brought climate change and the environment to the forefront just before Covid-19 struck. Another young person described how being forced to stay at home allowed young people to transition into a ‘what can we do mindset’ towards the environment, with the lack of travelling, flying and taking holidays enabling people to cut back to help make collective small changes in helping the environment.

One young person explained that “2020 saw a lot more active engagement around climate change whilst people had the chance to see the planet start to heal.” Coming out of the pandemic, young people have expressed that the momentum of tackling climate change is essential in order for our planet to recover, and feel that they now have more motivation and knowledge coming out of lockdown to make continuous small changes and use social media as a platform to share and learn more frequently going forward. Some young people have also explained they want to move to a more question and narrational conversation with those outside of their inner circles and ‘echo chamber,’ and taking these important conversations regarding climate change to those who need to hear it, such as grandparents or family members who do not share the same views - the idea of using ‘dinner time’ style conversation to implement small changes.

Some young people expressed that although climate change became a hot talking topic, particularly on social media, this started to take a back seat when Covid-19 really hit home. One young person described this as a small ‘that’s great’ moment that people were quick to forget about when the next topic of conversation came up. Going forward, young Londoners have identified that there needs to be an accessible and open space for these conversations to continue to thrive in order for young people’s voices to be heard. Especially on these topics of climate change and the environment, and also a chance to meet like minded young people to build confidence and tools to put thoughts and ideas into action.

From these conversations, some young people have also expressed that they only feel that their voices are heard by other young people, and disregarded by the government and older generations. They feel that organisations should provide a ‘seat at the table’ for young people, where they are listened to and their ideas and feedback are actioned.

The common denominator from these conversations, was young people having great ideas to tackle and address issues and topics such as climate change, but have no platform or knowledge of where to go to put these ideas into motion. It was raised that the concept of turning a thought into an action can feel quite daunting for young people who aren’t aware of what different outlets and support are accessible to them. From these discussions, young Londoners are asking for the space and tools to build themselves and their creative outlets in order to get their voice across in the right way whilst using the right rhetoric. One young person said “support and resources to aid in this needs to be prioritised, whether it’s training on how to run a social action project, how to use social media to engage an audience or even simply providing a creative space for young people to come together and build.” The pandemic has given young people more focus, more drive for their passions and how to express themselves creatively, the next natural step is to provide more access and resources for them to do this on a wider level.



“Our age group has been the group that has struggled with work and educational opportunities due to gaps in learning and practical experience.”

Theme 5: Education

Every student that was interviewed, either at secondary school or university, commented that education was a key theme throughout 2020 in terms of how the impact of Covid-19 has affected their studies and prospects for the future. Across the board, the majority of these young people explained the struggle with online and self learning as well as how little support and direction they received, whether from different establishments or the government. One young person explained that studying for A levels during a pandemic was ‘resilience building’ and taught them how to be very self dependent in their studies, which was highlighted as a long term positive to prepare them for university. Although some young people explained that the effects on Covid-19 on their education and learning taught them a lot about themselves, the overall effects were detrimental to those who needed extra support from teachers, lecturers and schools. Some young people commented on the ‘lack of direction’ from the government when closing and re-opening schools, and the insecurities this posed to young people and their families, as young Londoners felt no one asked them how they actually felt about returning to school, with some of them explaining they did not feel safe. Young people feel their role in shaping their communities going forward is to redefine their own personal goals in a post Covid world, as well as introducing peer to peer support and study, with majority of young people also commenting on the want to educate and support the younger generations after them through the long lasting impacts of the pandemic.

A further concern to education was the worry of the job market to students who had just finished or will be graduating from university very soon. One student explained that “online learning does not fit with every degree, I had no access to a lab for my studies and I am now applying for jobs in a sector where I have no practical experience.” There has been a strain on students who have had to change their plans post-university very last minute due to losing job offers and not being able to find jobs to apply for to even experience an interview process, with some university graduates deciding to take on a further year of studying to avoid the job market altogether. Young people fear the long term impacts of this will have a devastating financial effect as well as a lack of practical skills and experience to bring to a new job. It was also mentioned that when it comes to education, young Londoners’ role in shaping their communities feels quite limited in terms of implementing change, but that they should have the confidence to address how these issues have affected them and ask for the right support to be implemented.

During these conversations, nearly half of these young people who are in education have identified that there needs to be more support coming from schools and universities when it comes to extra contact hours for those who struggle with online learning, mental health resources, and access to different opportunities for upskilling. This included more access to relevant volunteering opportunities and programmes to provide a range of different skills to fill the gaps they may have missed due to no experience of practical learning in 2020, while also allowing more community engagement and a sense of belonging.

One young person suggested that “in schools, there should be sessions with a support teacher who is available for young people to talk to about their mental health and how the school can better support students when they return” as well as education providers actually surveying young people on how they feel about returning to a physical learning environment and what support they need. This highlights the notion of organisations moving towards the idea of seeking and implementing change and structure alongside young people, as opposed to on behalf of them. One young Londoner also recommended that the government should implement some financial support for students attending University in London who have struggled during the pandemic due to not being able to keep part time jobs to afford rent and studies.



With learning and studying taking place online for most of this educational year, young Londoners have found it increasingly difficult to interact with creativity like they did previously. Majority of students that were interviewed spoke about how their extracurricular activities were stripped from them when they had to stop going to school, the main concern being around sporting activities and events. Young people explained that one priority around this should be for schools and organisations to try and engage young people in virtual activities around these extracurriculars more as they have found themselves picking up various hobbies they hadn't tried before such as painting, baking and writing in their own time. Equal learning was also told to be prioritised by some of the young people that were interviewed to ensure learning is inclusive and as interactive as possible.



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LISTENING PROJECT 1: The Experience of young Londoners

Uplifting Conclusion and Call to Action

“Faced with increasing need and decreasing resources, organisations that provide services to young people must develop new strategies to adapt to the unprecedented circumstances in which they are operating.

Whilst much has been lost due to the events of 2020, young people showed us that much has been learned and there is still much to gain. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic for those of us fortunate enough to still be here is a new realisation of how we might choose to live our lives. When speaking with young people about arts, culture and creativity, 5/5 young people agreed with the statement above made by another young person in the group. Young Londoners have had to adapt, they have learnt to be more independent, and with the right support some felt they could even be “better for it” but only if that support is issued.

In every focus group and interview we held, young people shared that they are tired of being consulted and not being heard and ultimately not fed back to. With London being a young city with almost a third (2.7 million) of Londoners being under the age of 25, it simply must become a priority that there is the ability for their voice to be heard, that it is understood and that it contributes to decision making the first time around and not result in yet another U Turn.

“Over the past year, my opinion of young people and our generation has changed for the better. Looking at all the great information and stories being shared on Instagram which is inspirational and inspiring”. The effects of 2020 have shown us that young Londoners are becoming more creative, innovative and passionate about using their voice to change their communities.

The impact of 2020 has also shown us the effects of structural inequality and how pervasive inconsistencies in access or availability to public services can leave communities crippled. It is therefore left for the organisations which serve them to ensure all this potential is harnessed meaningfully, safeguarded appropriately, and leads to young Londoners development. The inequalities identified in 2020 simply cannot be the story told for young people in the future, there must be mentoring, therapy and quality local youth activities for all young Londoners and as the London Assembly has put it, “a new deal for young people” - one led by and created in partnerships with young people who truly represent the diversity of the capital.

Below we have highlighted calls to action for organisations that have come from young people through these discussions. After reflecting on what has been and what they believe is to come we asked young people what they would need from organisations, what they would like to see as a priority for young Londoners in the short to medium term and what they see their role as in shaping these changes.

“Growing up, I never had the chance to explore arts and creativity as it wasn’t included in the ‘expected’ academics which was always maths, science etc. There is now more opportunity to explore this and think about careers in this industry.”



1. Community: “We’re a community but we are also very separate”

Whilst there are a lot of differing narratives across London, there are shared and vested interests. Therefore more than ever there needs to be a concerted effort into creating opportunities for different peoples to come together. Social media has shown us the danger of only operating within our own echo chamber, we need to understand those around us better. Be it the gap between old and the young, rich and poor and the diverse ethnicities that live within the capital, more so than anywhere else in the country, we need to strengthen the perception of community outside of our defined groups.

Organisations should all be engaging in mentoring programmes for young people. There is a disconnect between different peoples and we have seen how relationships can bridge that, therefore in the fundamental institutions in which we all have to engage (school and work) there should be programmes and projects that enable connections to be built across our communities.

Young people also shared that they also understand the need for them to contribute to their communities, sharing that they would like to see programmes and projects created that allow them to appropriately mentor younger young people. One participant said “as an older young person I see my role in my community as also advocating for younger young people who don’t quite know how to articulate what they need yet,” highlighting young people’s desire to have a nurturing role to help younger generations who will also be impacted by the effects of 2020.

2. Creativity and Space: “Giving young people room to be creative, opportunities to demonstrate it and avenues and spaces to express ourselves”.

Young people identified the need for organisations to create a safe space for young people to go. The majority of young Londoners we spoke with expressed that they “don’t visibly see enough organisations and that this is the problem. Youth organisations come and go and there is no thought as to what will fill the void”. Whilst not all young people had direct experience of youth clubs and centres, all young people resonated with the fact that a physical space for young people to be themselves in the community should be the goal of all communities.

It is also incredibly important that organisations operating within the arts, culture and creativity sector ensure that they broaden their definition of these to include modern day practices of self expression over those more traditional practises. Organisations must harness the creativity that has been developed during this time. Young people expressed that there should be more opportunities and new initiatives and funding for self taught creatives and that it should be clear that this type of creativity is equally valued and actively sought after within the sector. Young people explained that the sector must allocate appropriate resources to these new creatives, be it short skit creators or TikTok videographers. We simply must redefine talent.

3. Listening to the voice of young people: “There needs to be more listening projects that are able to gather perspectives of young people in the places they already are in, to find out how they are doing, what support they still need, what support they are not getting and what the impact of the current support they are not getting is”.

Young Londoners explained that organisations should ensure there is a feedback loop when listening to the voices of young people. They expressed that they deserve to know what has come of the points they have made and what has not and why. They firmly identified a need for transparency and accountability of organisations when they are asking the opinion of young people.

It was also consistently felt that organisations should work to target specific groups of young people that they do not regularly interact with. Young people explained that it is no longer acceptable to give “a blanket service, organisations need to be versatile and able to fulfil the needs of different young people or signpost these young people to organisations who can support them best”.

4. Mental health: “Everyone has a mental health and it affects everyone no matter what circumstances you are in regardless of status, background or upbringing. Conversation and support for young people’s mental health needs to be normalised and prioritised”

Every young person that participated in this Listening Project identified that mental health was a stand out theme for them in 2020. Young people expressed that the limited access and visibility to mental health services, combined with the overwhelming demand for this throughout the pandemic, was a massive barrier in seeking mental health aid in the form of conversations, counselling and therapy. The overall consensus from young Londoners was that there needs to be more funding put into mental health, whether it’s for more support staff on the ground or mental health roles to be introduced into different organisations and places of work, or for the creation of more local support services to access.

Young people also said that half of the problem was not knowing what options were available to them for mental health support, especially on a local level. This generated the idea of having a centralised platform for all young Londoners to access which lets them know every type of support available to them, whether it’s national services and the NHS, or more local and communal support. This goes hand in hand with wanting a similar centralised platform for all the different creative opportunities young people can engage with within their local areas to enable self expression and improvement in mental health. There is a need for providing open and free spaces for young people when services such as counselling and therapy are not feasible options.

For students, it was common agreement that both schools and universities need to have more funding in order to better support mental health, as well as putting in work to implement change and encourage open conversations, rather than performative action. Young people still feel like there is a bridge between themselves and education providers as well as older generations in the understanding of the importance of mental health and the stigma attached to it, and there needs to be more done to understand and empathise with young people’s mental health struggles. “Healthcare professionals and community leaders need to better understand what triggers can look like for young people in a post-Covid world, such as what anxiety looks like for someone who hasn’t been to school in 7 months or what poor mental health looks like for a post-grad student who is struggling to find a job”.

Closing Remarks

In summary, having spoken at length with young people about community, culture and creativity it was overwhelmingly apparent that young people want to be part of the solution but need to be shown the way and given the tools to do so. There was a want for space and better access to services but also a clearer understanding of what is really available for young people. Our own personal reflections are that this generation of young people will be more resilient, if they aren't already, than any other we have seen in a long time as a direct result of the year 2020, and it is therefore for us to help empower them. The calls to action above are themed around building trust, transparency and accountability, giving young people the tools they need to contribute to the conversations in a meaningful way and giving them the chance to advocate on their own behalf. One young person said "If we use our voices correctly and in an educated manner, and come with the power of knowledge to say something, it is easier to make change come about. It all starts in the small changes with one person, to then cause the domino effect to pass down generations." Put simply, we need to normalise the idea that young people should have their say in the affairs that concern them as part of the decision making process.



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The Way Forward

LISTENING PROJECT 1: The Experience of young Londoners

CASE STUDY - PARTICIPANT 4

I am a young person who lived through the pandemic in 2020. I believe that regaining a sense of normality, and re-building social support that young people require to thrive will be imperative over the next few years in producing more young leaders, and young people excelling.

I believe that having a social network, an embracing community and a mentor are things all young people need. During 2020 these are all systems that have been deconstructed and destroyed based on the nature of events. I think with careful planning and consideration this can be rebuilt.

Moving past the impact of 2020 will depend on the government and the leading bodies of this world. I believe that Covid-19 has and did affect everybody! However, I do believe that some people were more significantly impacted than others were. I belong to the group of people who were fortunately not as affected by Covid-19. I say this because I work for the NHS so my work routine remained the same, the main impact came when the government enforced restrictions. Not being able to see my friends and family did initially make me feel hopeless, however I was able to save, focus on my exercise and health, and bond better with my colleagues and family.

Regaining a social community seems like a tall order as social distancing has become a new way of living. I feel that organisations who have the resources, and the passion to create safe places for young people to receive personalised advice on how to prosper financially, educationally and emotionally will be imperative over the next few years. A lot of young people want a space where their voice is heard, and matters. They also want a space where they are truly and authentically cared for.

I believe that this can be created through a mentorship scheme across multi generations. I do think that young people can relate to older people and vice versa.

I personally desire that in 3 years' time I will be married, financially comfortable, and trying to plan for my first child. I also imagine that I would be progressing well within my career, and I would have hopefully forgotten all about Covid-19!

The things that I as a young person need to achieve that aspiration is as follows:

- Knowledge of current financial market
- Knowledge on saving during and after a pandemic
- Knowledge of financial tools
- Support with property investment and home owning
- Knowledge on wedding planning

Google is a great tool to finding the answers to all the things listed above, however I think the personal touch of lived experience will be of use to any young person who is willing to learn from someone who has walked the path before.

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