

YOUTH VOICE

**A NEW
DIRECTION**

We create **opportunity**



Between November 2023 and January 2024 A New Direction invited 19 consultants, aged 18-30, to help us explore Youth Voice and co-produce an organisational approach to involving young people in the decision making of our work. All consultants were paid for their time.

They considered three questions:

- **What does effective Youth Voice look like?**
- **What model(s) of Youth Voice are suitable for our organisation?**
- **What good practice should we be aware of?**

They took part in sessions which included unpacking language; exploring our values & history; the current context of arts organisations & funding; and creative experimentation. The sessions were designed and facilitated by Django Pinter and assisted by Darcy Dixon as Listener in Residence, who created a report with best practice recommendations, thematic areas and suggested frameworks.

At the end of this process each young advisor created a response to the issue of Youth Voice and what they felt were their most important takeaways on the subject. This zine is a compilation of their unfiltered responses.

We hope you enjoy their contribution to this important topic.

Corinne Micallef
Senior Programme Manager, A New Direction

Open letter to shape your projects and workshops. Delivered as spoken word and given as a gift to all new participants in the hopes that the words seep into the fabric of AND.

Dear Creative Souls,

Welcome to this boundless space, **where every voice is not only acknowledged but celebrated.** This is an invitation to step into a realm where stories intertwine, and perspectives converge to shape a collective narrative.

In this shared sanctuary, we **cast aside the chains of oppressive thought**, creating an environment where new stories are sought and discovered. Here, each dialogue is an opportunity for growth, a chance to witness a cultural evolution where diversity is not just welcomed but allowed to flow freely.

Guided by the beacon of mutual respect, we embark on a journey of co-creation, deflecting prejudices and embracing a fresh landscape that is open and liberating. **This is a space where every voice matters**, where all perspectives are seen and acknowledged by the eyes of our creative community.

Here, we reject the notion of an echo chamber. This is not a closed gate but **an open field where ideas resonate, where stories are told without constraint.** Let this space be an unscripted canvas where the mosaic of diverse voices forms a bold and vibrant picture.

In a world marked by its constant ebb and flow, your voice is the unfiltered narrative that captures the essence of the diverse human experience. **Your stories, your struggles, and your triumphs contribute to a rich tapestry**, weaving together threads of authenticity that resonate with hearts and minds.

Your voice is not just an addition; it's an essential piece of the artistic puzzle. Every note, every word, every movement is a brushstroke that adds vibrancy to the canvas, challenging norms and inspiring change. **Your unique perspective possesses the transformative power to awaken minds and elevate emotions.**

As you navigate the creative landscape, embrace the authenticity of your voice. Be unafraid to explore the unconventional, the uncharted, and the untold. It is in those courageous moments that the true magic of creation unfolds.

So, dear creators, speak your truth. Let your voices be clear, and let creativity be your guide. **There is no need for conformity; let differences shine.** In this workshop, judgment has no place; only understanding prevails.

Let's embark on this journey together, side by side. This is an open invitation to co-create, to build a cultural landscape where all can find a home.

Guided by the ever-present beacon of mutual respect, we embark on a co-creative journey, deflecting the weight of prejudices, embracing a landscape open and liberating.

Within these walls, every voice is more than an echo; it's a distinct note in a harmonious composition. This is no closed gate; it's an open field where ideas resonate, stories are shared without constraints, and the mosaic of diverse voices forms a bold and vibrant masterpiece.

In those moments of uncertainty, I wish I could have whispered to you the echoes of the future — a future where your voice, raw and unpolished, would be the brushstroke that transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. **Your youth is not a hindrance but a beacon**, a vibrant hue in the palette of innovation that paints the narrative, the exuberant cadence of Youth Voice emerges as a melody that harmonizes with the rhythms of change. Picture a canvas splashed with vibrant hues, where the strokes of youthful expression paint a tapestry of innovation, resilience, and unbridled dreams.

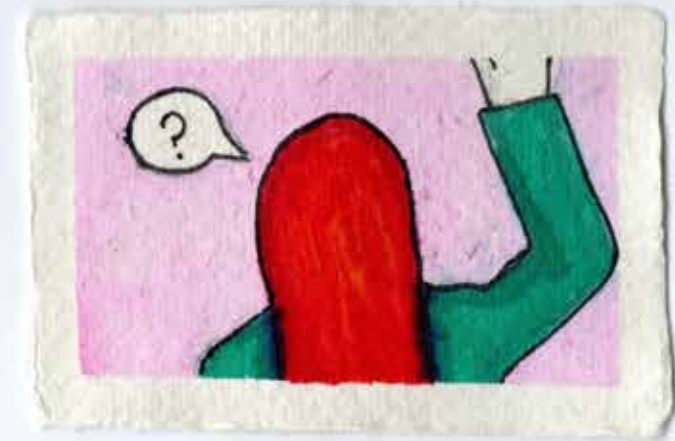
Embrace the naivety, for it is the catalyst that propels you into uncharted territories, where innovation thrives on the courage to tread where others fear to step. Remember, every idea, every doubt, and every moment of hesitancy contributes to the evolving symphony of your creative journey. The doubts you feel now will become the stepping stones, and the worries will transform into the wings that lift you higher.

Youth Voice is the rebellious whisper that dances through the corridors of convention, challenging the status quo with the audacity of hope.

With anticipation and excitement,

Barakat





youth voice



★ take aways →

Youth voice programmes are an effective way of furthering the future of businesses/models and their success.

The youth present freshness, new ideas and a vast outlook on the future as they find themselves at the start of theirs.



★ Youth voice models also present opportunities for young people where their often aren't any.

★ Why aren't there more youth voice programmes →

↳ Companies don't see the value in youth voices



↳ Lack of funding and accessibility often due to reason 1.

★ What makes a successful youth voice programme?

Engagement!



- transparency + openness between the company + youth on agendas and outcomes.
- Collaboration - always allowing youth to have a choice + opinion, working together on these.

★ What do we need?



↳ A **tool** so that youth voice can be heard + youth voice is both accessible to companies and companies accessible to youth.



A platform of mutual interest in learning + engaging.



★ **Common issues** young people face, why youth voice is necessary →

- Jobs often require experience or money, youth often defined by a **lack of**, so lots of voices with **fresh**

ideas go unheard.

- Lack of youth voice can lead to misrepresentation



★ What can you do?

! youth voice is a **human right!** think about what decisions you can make with + include young people in.

! give youth voice **value!**



As a young person what can you provide? / do?

- Resources → **A New Direction**
- information on funding, programmes, business models, etc.



Co-creating frameworks alongside young people shifts the balance of power and leads to more successful programmes.



Creating a safe space to share experiences and perspectives builds confidence.

Youth Voice involves consulting, listening, acting, empowering and encouraging participation.





CHLOE TAYALI

BABATUNDE ONABAJO



My artistic piece as a Young Advisor with A New Direction in 2023 aimed to encapsulate the creativity of all the young people who took part. It was a collation and featured the various photographs we took with a pinhole camera at the start of the programme, the various artwork at Whitechapel Gallery as well as our time at Battersea Arts Centre where we saw youngsters in the local area come up with amazing initiatives to improve their community. During my time speaking, there was a technical glitch with the audio but this did not prevent an otherwise engaging talk on the various parts of the programme that resonated with me. I really enjoyed the programme and speaking with other fellow young people.



GABRIELLE FULLAM

1 We are smart actually, smart enough to make decisions and consider implications, and wonder about what will happen next.

- a. Sure you say, experience is needed - but I've sat at board meetings with colleagues nearly three times my age and I've won votes and I've made presentations and done everything they've done. I've considered financial reports and ideological concepts and I've come out with an answer. Maybe it's one they don't like, but it's still an answer - isn't it?
- b. I've been interrupted and I've refused to turn off my microphone at the boardroom, I've left it on, I've repeated "Sir, I wasn't finished speaking, excuse me, I wasn't finished speaking, I haven't ceded the floor" again and again until I was allowed to continue.
- c. I had a guaranteed seat on that board. I was an elected representative.
- d. I was a trustee of the university. I was good at it.

3 Maybe it's the union background, but I am a materialist about the whole thing. If you don't have actual decision-making power then what is the point?

- a. If we can be selected and withdrawn by the institution, then we exist simply to
- b. reaffirm the institution.

2 We inherited a framework from those that came before, but we are capable of uprooting it.

4 But who is the 'we' involved, how do we become meaningfully representative? Is that not our point?

5 If that's not the point, then what is?

6 Our point cannot be just to reaffirm the institution. It must be to question it.

7 There are real stakes.

8 We aren't there just to be 'upskilled'. We are there to be there.

9 We aren't there to be unpaid

11 If true participation cannot preclude the right

- a. to not participate at all (it reminds me of mandatory voting).
- b. Where is our protest vote? What does our protest vote mean to you?

10 Symbols, labour, union, structure.

HENNY SHAW

At the core. Listen to young people. Always pay young people for their time. Give everyone thinking and sharing time.

The apple seeds. Where are you planting them? Where is this learning about youth voice going? How are you using it? What grows next from the apple tree? Where is the space for young people to cultivate their thoughts and opinions afterwards? Are you embedding your learning about youth voice into the soil of your organisation?

What about the orchard? What is the climate you are working in? Are you working with or against that? What are your limitations as an organisation? How does youth voice situate itself within your project? Is your work about young people, for young people, or neither? To what extent is that impacting your model of youth voice? Why?

A slice of the apple. Has the model of youth voice been cut to fit the needs and expressions of the young people you are listening to?

Apples come in different colours. Is this youth voice representative of our diverse population? Have you heard from those with special educational needs, have you heard from queer young people, young people of colour, trans young people, young people from different religions? Bring the people with the most significant barriers to engagement to arts and culture to the front.

Where is the apple? How can you foster an environment that supports and empowers the voices of children and young people? Where do young people speak most freely? Is this the same place you are listening to them? Why or why not? Is there trust between you as an organisation and the young people you are working with?

Crunch! What happens when you accidentally bite your tongue? Are you taking the time to

learn from your mistakes?

Are you repairing them properly? Can the young people hear the sound of change? Do the young people have agency to move too?

Are the young people engaged? Are they also enjoying the apple?

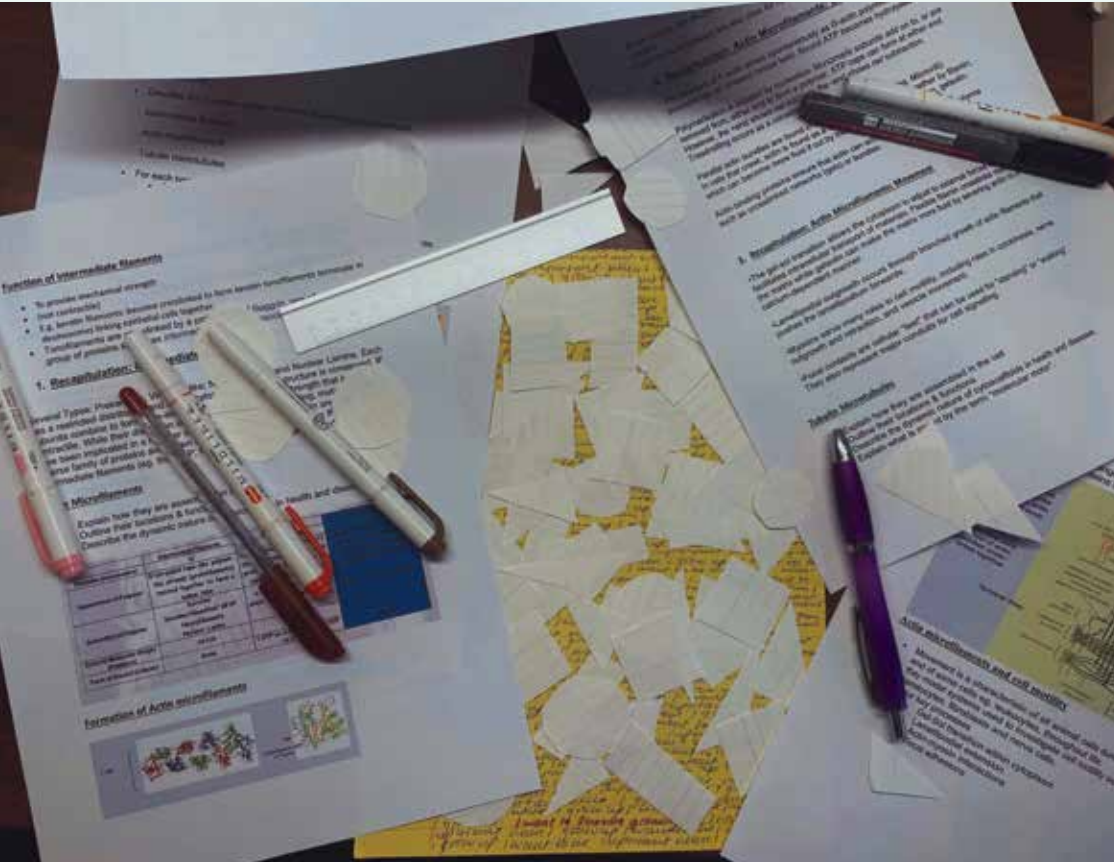
Drink the apple

juice! Are you listening and responding to what is shared? Where are you concentrating the voices of young people?

Are you letting it spill over your work as an organisation or are you keeping it in a bottle? Why?



JUSTYNA LEWANDOWSKA



I have decided to go down a photography route for my creative response because of the nature photography insinuates - that of capturing a moment.

That's exactly what I believe Youth Voice to be; a moment. A moment we as a society strive to make last in a similar way, you'd try to fall back asleep when you've woken up from a really good dream.

The photo itself is of a variety of university notes (ironically my own) and stationary all rammed around the photos perimeter and covering the vast majority of the media space. So much so that if you do not sit and look you may miss the main trajectory.

Amongst the chaos of the stationery and paperwork that tends to notoriously plague the daily adult life, you can only just glimpse a yellow paper completely covered in tiny writing, manically drawn all over the page implicating the person writing it had clearly hyperfixated on the writing.

The whole page is covered by the sentence "want to be important when I grow up" which quite self-explicably reflects the stress young people go through subconsciously aiming to fit the mould of society's office job selection which tends to rear away from the creative sector.

The shapes scattered over this page show the way the creative young voices are usually silenced by the form-fitting academic minds. The sentences are written skewed and in cursive imitating the need to be in a rush - almost implying the lack of importance of creativity and Youth Voice in the bigger picture of society.

The main aim of the piece is however, the shapes scattered over the yellow paper; symbolising as though Youth Voice (even whilst silenced by so many) can be brought out with a mere sweep or breeze pushing away the distractions. Youth Voice is the basis of many themes and foundations of many schemes in society - covered by much paperwork, stress and the mundanity of the day to day. Working with A New Direction has made me realise as a primary takeaway that even individuals who seemed to have succumbed to the societal norms and expectations of academics are still part of Youth Voice and serve a new direction of Youth Voice.

Youth Voice is angled

Youth Voice is mouldable

Youth Voice is a perspective

KYE PERRY

My suggestion for a Youth Voice model for AND would unsurprisingly revolve around a youth-led consultation group in the form of a youth council/ youth board. A group of young people under the wing of AND to form an independent unit to advise and offer their experience to help progress and propel AND's youth programmes directly and tangibly. A framework this could take shape as would be a series of regular meetings (monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly etc) to discuss and debate current initiatives taken by AND and also report and assess ongoing and previous projects and courses.

From previous experiences in youth-led groups, I think keeping the number of such a group would be best realised with a small group of between 3-6 people to allow for each member to make significant input and to allow the group to work closely with one another as a unified unit. Any bigger size could lead to the group splitting or a case of simply put "too many cooks".

This would be a paid position as I think the benefit of their input to AND or similar charity would warrant a fee for their work. So taking elements of a board of trustees but removing the voluntary aspect of it to reimburse participants for their efforts - much like our time as young advisors. A record of each meeting would be kept for subsequent reflection and analysis, this could be done via minute-taking (rotating through each council member) or via a recording of the meeting itself. I am unsure if these meetings would be chaired by an external member of AND's staff or independently chaired by the council itself. I would lean more to the side of self-chaired meetings to fully allow the group to express and discuss ideas in detail before having separate shorter meetings with a member of staff to transfer ideas.

TAAJ IBRAHIM

Youth Voice is that you, is that me
Youth Voice can't be the two or three
Youth Voice is 6 wings and chips after school with my G
Talking about how can Miss give me a C

See I could be like you and you can be like me
He could be like she and she could be like he
All of us unique in the way that speak and
breath but the special thing is that we are
all unique in the way we want to be seen

And If we're seen we can talk a bit more, share a bit
more, care a bit more
things I said in my head, are all on the table now
Because safe space is real
Now I'm more present that ever before

To get the frame work, we gotta be know picture we
wanna paint
You don't pick out your frame before you have picture
for it
You already have a framework that triggered all the
thoughts that I picture for it
So you should carry on

Because there's someone like me or someone like she
who's gonna spark thoughts for this work And it's
important that it carries on
Because this is Youth Voice



OLAOLU FAYOKUN

Audience

The metaphor:

A group of 15-year-olds can all be so different, just like a group of 30-year-olds can. Let's say 3 15-year-olds are the milk, eggs, and flour in a cake recipe; all so different but create an excellent dish. 3 30-year-olds could be the ingredients to a fantastic lasagne; also scrumptious but can overpower the cake with its stronger scents and flavours & should be had beforehand, not at the same time. If not, then a stomach ache could be imminent...

Content

The metaphor:

When you've been given £1 million to build & get a ship from A to B you want to have some kind of input even if you don't know how to build it yourself. You need everyone's ideas. It doesn't have to be a dictatorship, but you need basic ground rules or else this boat is gonna sink, not because we as a group don't know how to build one, but due to confusion and comrades talking over each other.

LOUIE PARKER

Fundamental to Youth Voice for me is its function of breaking down hierarchy and power relations - often based on age but not limited to. For me an organisation has to demonstrate a willingness to accept what my conception of 'true* Youth Voice is going to be - one which is currently unorthodox in relation to current dominant organisational structures which lends itself to being potentially considered too idealistic/transormative (Pick your adjective).

True Youth Voice for me must be present amongst the entirety of an organisation.

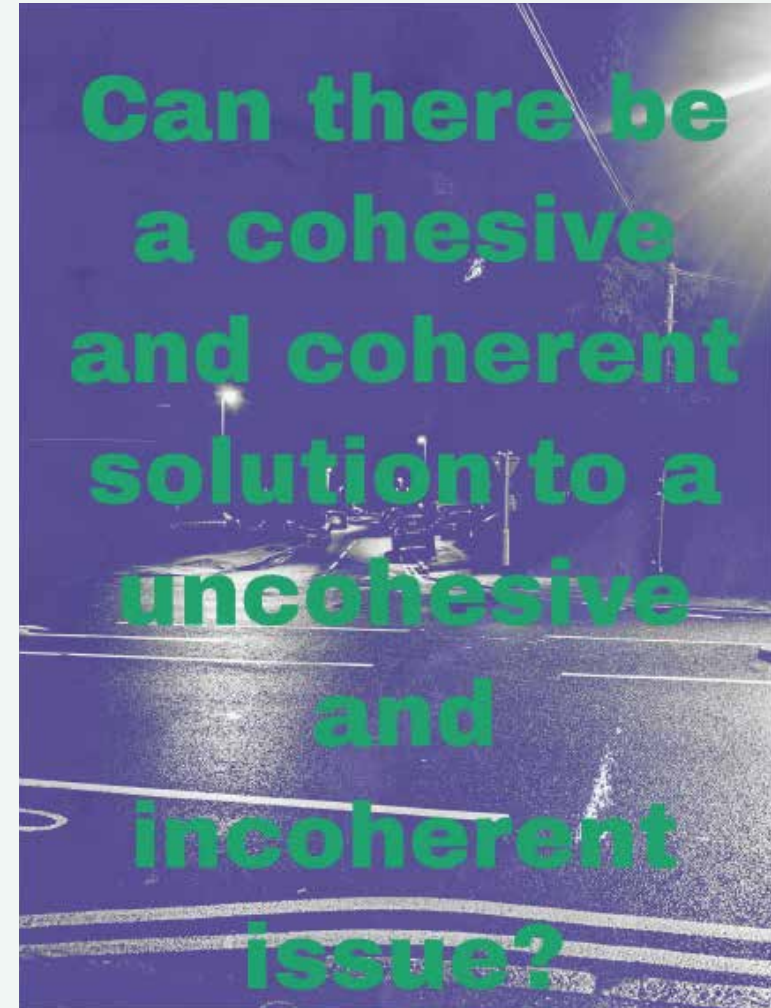
I stress the entirety of the organisation as opposed to select aspects for a number of reasons. For one having youth among all hierarchical layers demonstrates to youth and those youth below them that positions of power should not be and are not unobtainable. The risk of an organisation having youth only for selective hierarchical levels to me predicates an unconscious, most likely unintended tokenism, in which youth are 'heard' and 'involved*' via methods which are convenient for the existing hierarchical structure and operation of an organisation. I therefore believe that Youth Voice by virtue is tokenistic to a level if not implemented throughout the whole structure of an organisation.

Youth voice



Across youth voice programmes, there tends to be a coherent idea about who is considered a young person. Some think 15-18. Some think 18-25. Some think 18-30. Some include or exclude school aged children.

Institutions and organisations need youth voice — they need young people to breathe new air into the space, to challenge them and to aid or even lead efforts to modernise, such as decolonisation.



“Can there be a cohesive and coherent solution to an uncohesive and incoherent issue?” is written over a photograph of a nighttime street scene.

JORDANNE CASE

Tokenism Ban

It is easy to have youth participation in programmes and consider this as giving youth a platform. The issue with this is that these opportunities may not be what the youth want, if they were given a choice. The best way to make decisions on Youth Voice is to ask what the youth would like, and then find ways to implement this.

In instances where Youth Voice has been an addition to programmes rather than the focus, there may be a need to disassemble the programmes, and reassemble them with Youth Voice at the centre of it. If Youth Voice is not built into programmes, then tokenism can occur by losing this element over time.



TAMZIN MILLER

From the outset, the programme broadened my perspective on what Youth Voice is, highlighting the need for more inclusivity across a more extensive age range than I initially thought. Proposing a nuanced approach, I think A New Direction should develop a youth board programme with three distinct youth groups, each offering valuable advice every three months. This setup aims to consistently infuse diverse youth perspectives into all current and future programmes.

Let's break down the proposed structure.

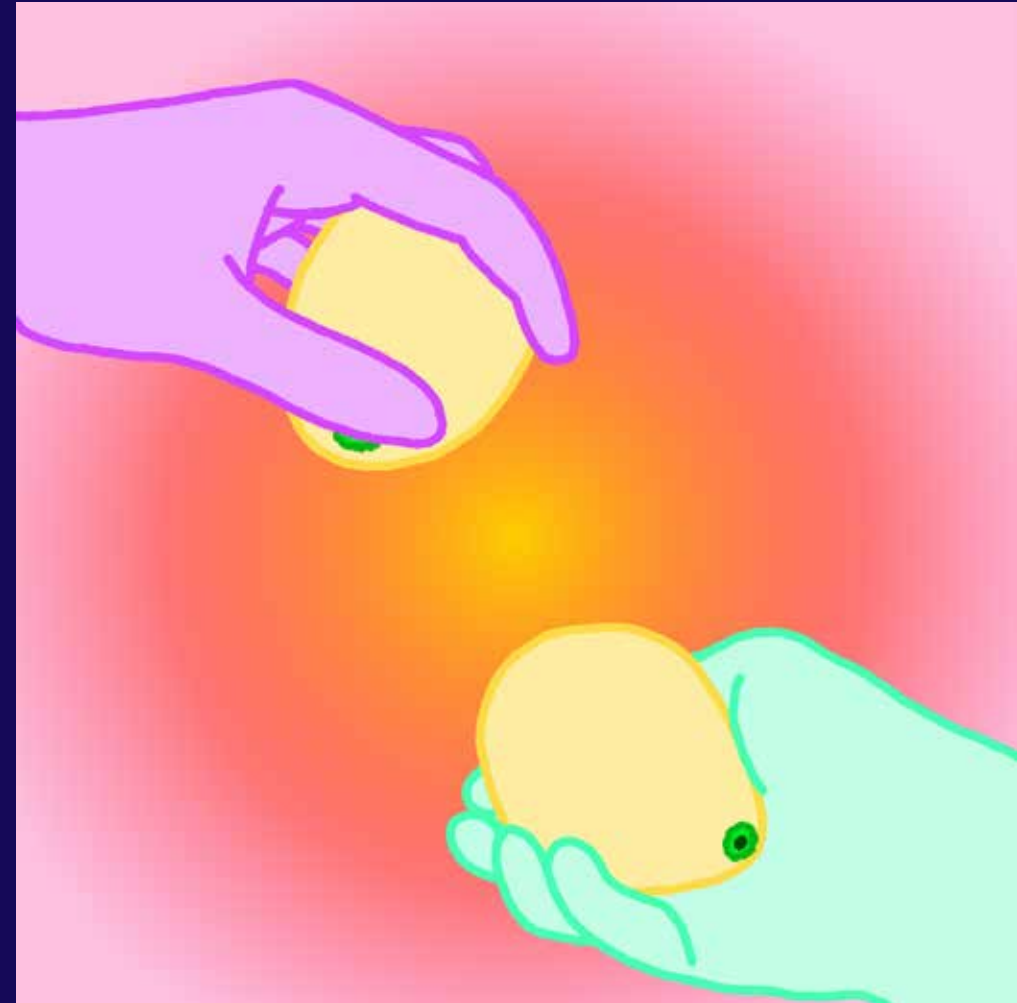
- **Group One**, consisting of Primary School Children (3-11), will tap into the innocence which should offer unfiltered perspectives of the youngest members of our community. Their unique viewpoint can offer insights untainted by societal norms, providing a refreshing take on their potential issues. However, I recognise the potential challenges in recruiting young children from primary schools, and the programme must prioritise their safety and well-being.
 - **Group Two**, comprising Secondary School and Sixth Form students (11-18), standing at the crossroads of adolescence. Their experiences and challenges are distinct, reflecting the transitional phase from childhood to adulthood.
 - **Group Three**, the Young Adults (18-30), represents individuals who have navigated through the educational system and are forging paths in adulthood. Their insights can shed light on how our programmes align with the aspirations and work-based challenges faced by young adults today.
- Whilst I acknowledge the significance of all age groups, I strongly advocate for tailoring contributions based on their unique experiences. A primary school child's insight will never align with the needs of a young adult going into work, and vice versa. Despite the potential challenges, such as feasibility and safeguarding concerns, the consistent involvement of these groups I feel could provide invaluable advice for A New Direction.

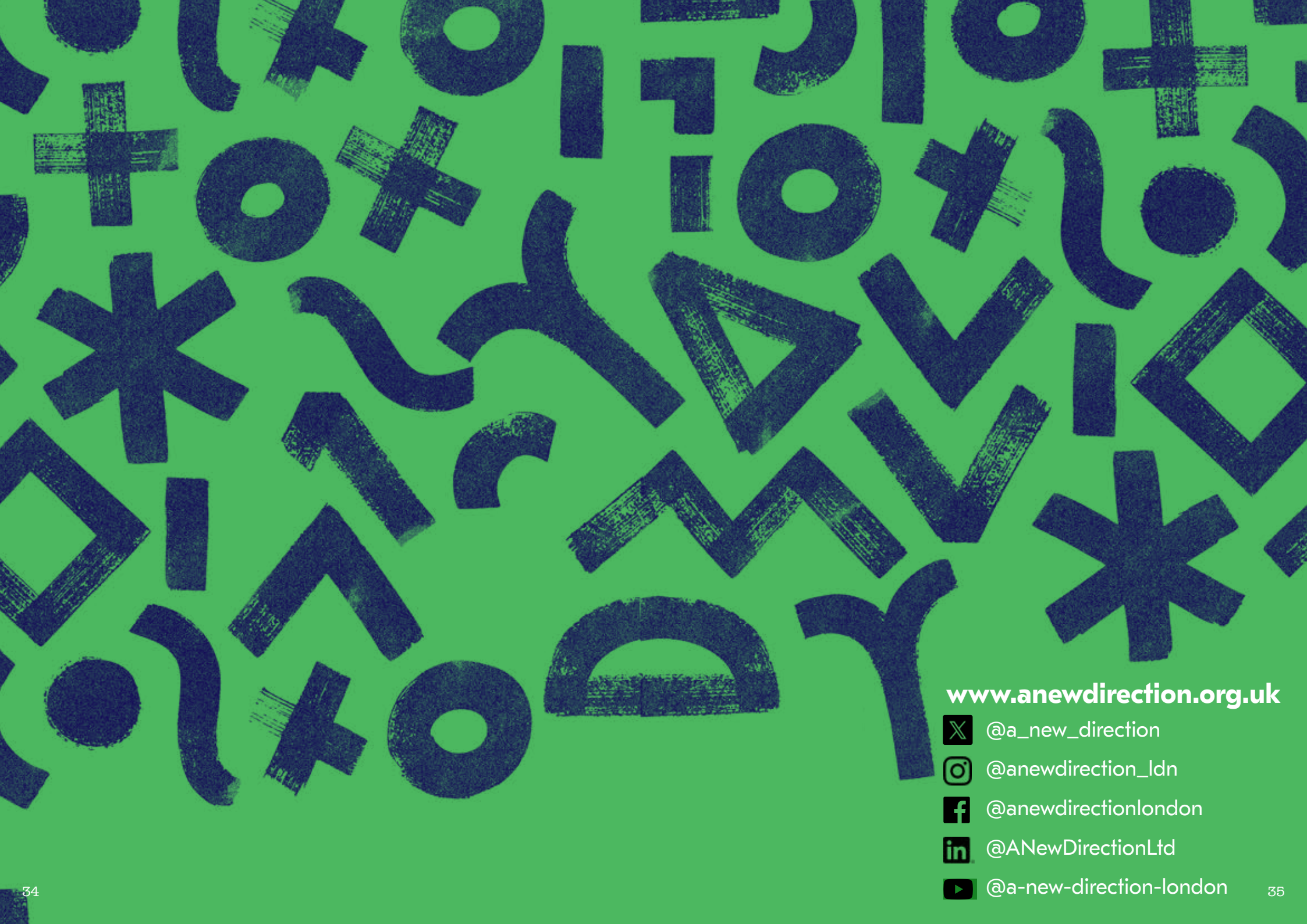


EVIE ANDERSON

After participating in the Youth Advisor programme with A New Direction, I thought about how to represent and interpret Youth Voice. One thing I took away from this programme and my interactions with other young people is that having optimism when we are under difficult circumstances is exactly what Youth Voice offers. My interpretation of Youth Voice is that it is something that gives people who feel inexperienced and underrepresented freedom of expression and positivity. It can encourage change, bring a sense of community and help deal with issues young people collectively suffer from. It can also be a form of therapy for many like myself who before being exposed to what Youth Voice is, felt isolated and ashamed to be struggling to get into the creative industry. It can allow those who feel powerless to be heard. There is potential for Youth Voice to be an essential tool for collective action that could help problem-solve injustices. It can also just be something as small as a group discussion that helps every person feel welcomed, not alone with their problems and that they can contribute with confidence their perspective into a conversation.

‘When life gives you lemons,
make lemonade’





www.anewdirection.org.uk

 @a_new_direction

 @anewdirection_ldn

 @anewdirectionlondon

 @ANewDirectionLtd

 @a-new-direction-london



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

**A NEW
DIRECTION**

We create **opportunity**

A New Direction is an award-winning charity (1126216) working to enhance the capacity and agency of children and young people in London to own their creativity, shape culture, and achieve their creative potential.