

APART OR A PART

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SUPPORT
FOR NON-CITIZENS IN SCHOOLS
ACROSS LONDON



“It’s amazing that this title can be interpreted by everyone as different things!

It can describe the situation of international students like myself who are *apart* from major culture here but still find a way to make this journey a *part* of their lives.

It can also apply to those who live here without citizenship; although in paperwork they are not *a part* of this country, many of them still consider here to be their home and this country certainly takes an important *part* in their hearts.

Finally, although all of us are different and separate individuals, through collective faith and power, we can together make incredible things happen.”

- Yanbing Cui

“This report highlights that whilst society is divided and stands *apart* in numerous political affairs, many institutions are actively using democratic practices to play *a part* in uniting society and creating a utopia.”

- Nabihah Ahmed

“In this report, we present everything we've learned and achieved by working with schools across London. Therefore, the title encapsulates how, while these schools are physically *apart*, they are all valuable and vital to a larger fight for social justice; they are *a part* of something powerful.”

- Anjali Jayanty

“On one hand, this title echoes the urgency and power of choosing to fight for inclusion and social justice, and on the other hand, it directs us towards exemplary schools who have made a clear decision and are taking education beyond the classroom.”

- Dorottya Eszter Szij

“The essence of community organising and social justice work is recognising the power and joy that come from creating spaces where we can bring people together. From across institutions and from different backgrounds, we can collectively develop projects for social transformation in which every one of us has *a vital part* to play.”

- Dr Stuart Tannock

APART OR A PART

This action research report is a collective piece authored by 35 University College London (UCL) students as part of the module '*Educating and Organising for Social Justice*' led by **Dr Stuart Tannock** at the **Institute of Education (IOE)**.

The module, in collaboration with **six London schools** and the **Citizens UK alliance**, has acted as a **springboard** for the creation of a series of projects by IOE students with and for London school pupils. This report presents six chapters on our work with these schools, followed by our **recommendations** based on our reflections and research.

These projects began with in-school workshops covering a wide range of topics impacting non-citizen children as dictated by the interests and concerns of the pupils in the schools. Students discussed topics surrounding **citizenship** along with **community organising skills** and encouraged pupils to act on issues that impacted them, including **citizenship fees, poor housing conditions, discrimination, and language barriers**.

Each team of students has reflected on their time working with the pupils, teachers and schools, and the stories they have heard to begin forming an answer to the question:

How can schools effectively support the needs and interests of non-citizen children and their families?

Throughout the report, key themes emerge:

- the importance of **designating, funding and resourcing key people** to support the specific issues faced by non-citizen children
- the value of **partnerships across institutions**
- the value of **empowering young people** through community organising
- and the importance of **embracing broader visions** of what education is for and what counts as school success.

Ultimately, this report represents an **exemplification** of the **schools** undertaking additional responsibilities in **supporting non-citizen children**. We believe there is an important opportunity for schools to be **inspired** and **learn** from one another, as well as a **contribution to the ongoing action** to **improve provisions for non-citizen families and children**.

ISSUES FACED BY NON-CITIZEN CHILDREN IN THE UK

Through research across the module and direct work in schools, we encountered many issues faced by non-citizen children in the UK. Our understanding of these issues underpins our call for better in-school support and for the community to organise against the current treatment of non-citizen children in the UK.

The United Kingdom's immigration policy has created a **'hostile environment'**, which represents an explicit attempt to make life unbearably difficult in the UK for those who cannot show the right paperwork. This restricts those without proper documentation from receiving many public services which provide a safety net when things go wrong for citizens.

Citizens UK estimate the scale of the population impacted by such policies:

*"There are an estimated **1.2 million people** living in the UK without immigration documents, meaning that many of our neighbours **can't work, access benefits, report crimes to the police, marry their loved ones, or access basic services** including most of **the NHS**."*

For the children we met in schools, and their families, this created distinct problems. As seen across the report, children without citizenship are examples of children in poor housing conditions, parents with unstable incomes, separated families, and food poverty.

Whilst these problems are challenging in themselves, they also act as a barrier to children's learning who may have difficulty concentrating, accessing the language used in their lessons or with time physically spent away from the classroom managing illness or unable to re-enter the UK.

To address these issues, *Citizens UK* created their 'Children into Citizens' campaign. They recently **succeeded** in waiving the citizenship application fee both for **families that cannot afford it** and for **children in care!**

Still, *Citizens UK* are campaigning for the cost of citizenship applications for children to be **reduced to cost price** (£372), as it is currently £1,012.

Tap the code to learn more about the 'Children into Citizens' campaign:



Additionally, the UK immigration policy leaves many migrant families with **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**, restricting them from accessing much needed support from the government.

Hence, there is a fight for **widened access** to free school meals, **which has now been achieved for children from families with NRPF!**

Tap the code to learn more about this achievement:



We discussed these campaigns with pupils in the workshops, and we believe there is one key answer to the question of **‘How can schools effectively support the needs and interests of non-citizen children and their families?’**

This lies in **teaching and encouraging pupils** in schools **to get involved**, to **organise**, and to **share their voice**. Below is an executive summary of the chapters exploring the exciting work and field research we conducted.

p.6: HAVING A SAFE PLACE - Notre Dame Roman Catholic Secondary Girls' School

A discussion of how a partnership between *Citizens UK* and the career advisor at Notre Dame has created a safe space for students to voice their concerns about the community and local area.

p.9: HEARING THE UNHEARD - Surrey Square Primary School

An interview with a parent on the topic of citizenship and how the school has supported her and continues to support non-citizen children and families.

p.13: LOST IN TRANSLATION - St Gabriel's College CE Secondary School

An exploration of how language barriers prevent belonging, and create the need for representation and accessible translation of key information. An interview with the EAL director at St Gabriel's College on community issues, representation and her own community organising work.

p.19: AN ENVIRONMENT OF ALTRUISM - St John's Angell Town CE Primary School

A discussion of how involving more parents can establish greater collective power, and on the importance of free English lessons for families with unsettled statuses and unstable income.

p.23: FIREFIGHTING FOR FAMILIES - St Mary's Lewisham CE Primary School

A discussion of how employing a family support worker can strengthen the relationship between home and school life and can help transform the school into a community hub to assist vulnerable and marginalised families. A case study of a support worker in action.

p.27: A SANCTUARY OF WELCOME - Newman Catholic College

An exploration of how a School of Sanctuary is making effort to support the needs of migrant children, with some recommendations and examples for other schools to provide the same support.

OUR WORK WITH SCHOOLS ACROSS LONDON

HAVING A SAFE PLACE

Safe spaces and speaking up at Notre Dame Secondary School

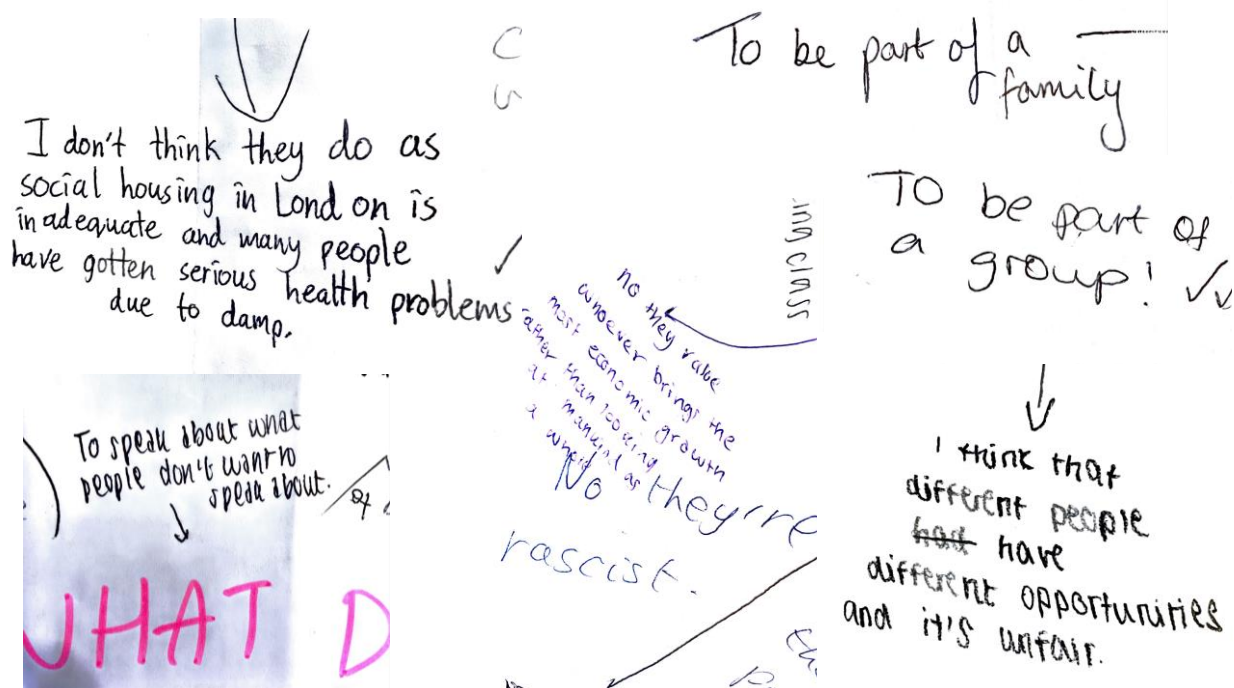
Notre Dame Roman Catholic Girls school is a comprehensive school situated in the London borough of Southwark. Home to over 314,000 people, Southwark comprises of several communities, including Peckham where many students reside, as well as Elephant and Castle where the school is located. Founded in 1855, it now caters to just over 600 girls, 25 of whom we had the pleasure of working with in partnership with *Citizens UK*, ranging from ages 11 to 16. Most of the girls are of Black ethnicity and come from a low socio-economic status background. The make-up of the school reflects that of its surroundings.

There are a number of ways in which Notre Dame Roman Catholic Girl's school aims to creatively address the needs of its students. **Teresa Crowley**, the **career advisor**, plays a tremendous role in creating **enriching**

experiences for the students at school. She realises that, as much as it is important to provide students with traditional extracurricular opportunities, so they can excel in school and later in life, it is also crucial to give those girls space to become **empowered citizens** who can advocate for themselves individually as well as collectively. *Citizens UK*, a people power alliance organisation, represents a great partner for the school in this joint effort of theirs.

"Why didn't I join Citizens sooner?"

Through the work of *Citizens UK* and Teresa, Notre Dame students have been provided a **safe space**. In this safe space, students are given the opportunity to voice their concerns about the community and local area.



The Safe Space

The group, which they refer to as '**Citizens**' has become a place for collective and independent empowerment. Students speak about their experiences of harassment, discrimination and being silenced, and they are listened to and supported. Unfortunately, it feels rare for a school to have designated time and space for students to directly engage with their community and each other away from the curriculum and outside of school required activities. Prevalent social issues such as **citizenship, institutional inequalities** and **power imbalances** are raised and discussed. Workshops serve to educate them on their powers and rights as the group develops their ideas into action.

Students are given practical experience of **community organising** as they develop useful skills they can apply inside and outside of their education. There are no expectations or requirements of the group, and this lack of pressure is a welcome break from academic competition. The number of students involved continues to grow as existing members of the group praise and recommend to their friends 'the voice' they feel like they have gained.

What does it mean for you to be a 'citizen'?

"To be part of a group"
"A person belonging to a community"
"To be part of a family"

The students at Notre Dame are also given the opportunity to speak up for their community. For example, the **listening campaign** offers a safe space

for students to share and learn from each other. In the campaign, students identify common problems that they encounter in daily life and collectively ask for improvement. They believe that the state fails to keep its citizens safe, while prioritising the safeguard towards richer people.

Many of the girls have also identified **youth safety concerns** such as being stalked and sexually harassed. In response to these concerns, many of the girls take on school-based leadership roles such as *prefect* or *committee leaders*, in which they attempt to solve these issues. The safe space cultivated by **Citizens** has given them an opportunity to band together and use their collective power for good. For instance, some students encourage the school to set up an anonymous report box.

What does it mean for you to be a 'citizen'?

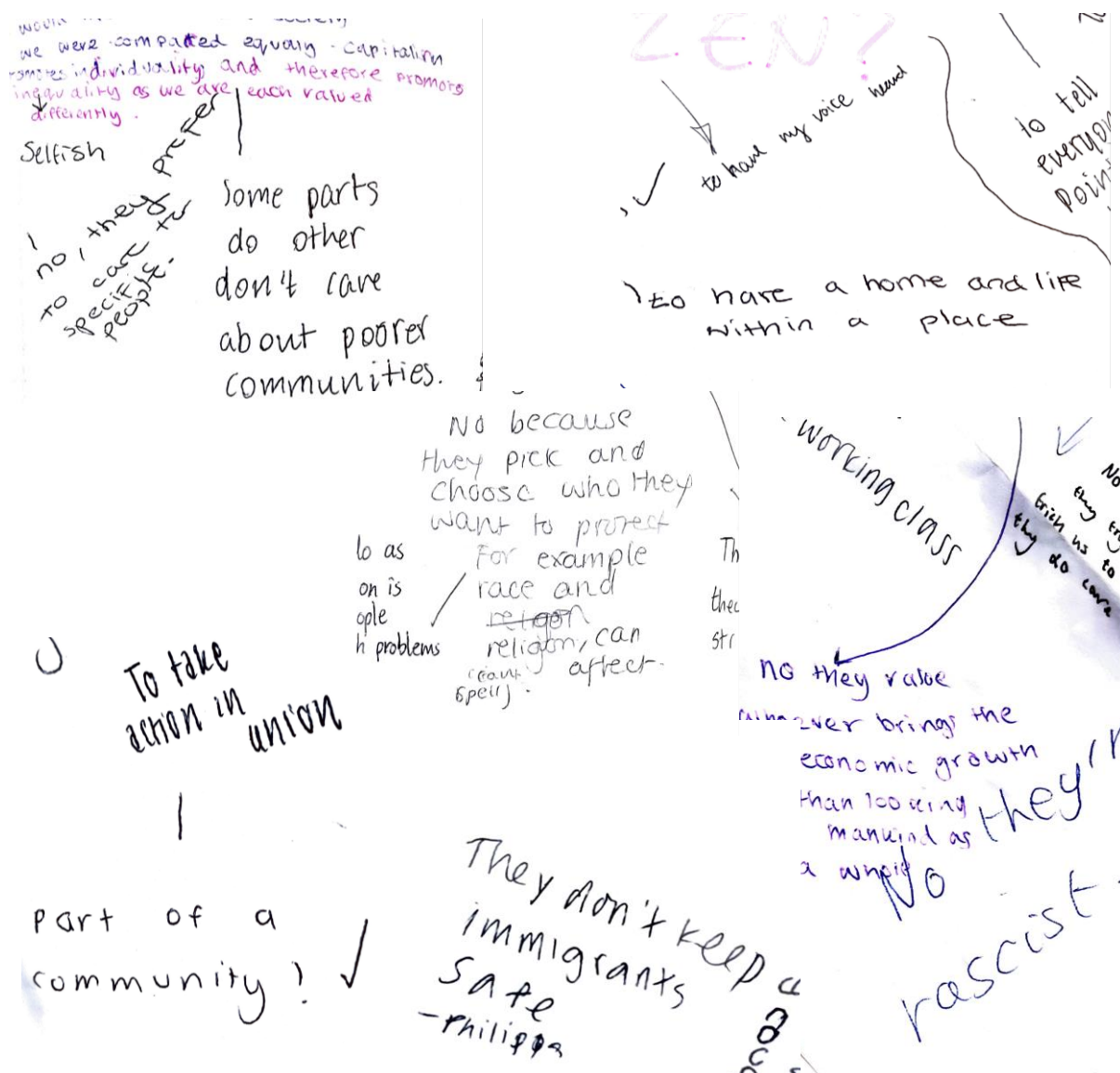
"To be able to share my views and still feel safe"
"To stand up to normalised bad behaviours"

Most notably, the girls spoke at the **Southwark and Peckham Citizens Assembly** demanding for improved youth safety. Drawing from the listening campaign, it was apparent that **youth safety** was a common problem outside of school premises. Supported by Teresa and the *Citizens UK* team, three of the Notre Dame girls spoke in front of a full house of community representatives and

potential Parliament candidates to demand for improved youth safety through increased number and brightness of street lighting. Both candidates **agreed** to the demands of the young people.

On a concluding note, the girls have developed towards being critical thinkers both **independently** but also **collectively**. Rather than learning to utilize the support and 'tools' given by the school, the girls were seen taking a step further by questioning existing school systems and re-evaluating internal structures. Throughout the workshops, '**listening**' (in a safe space)

was a key skill which was emphasised in conjunction with the '**power of collectivity**' in order to create change. The skills the Notre Dame students garnered can translate further than their school-life into each of their wider communities. Our partnership with *Citizens UK* was a great method to put into practice programmes to educate social justice to students. The importance of educating and organising for social justice should be recognised and implemented throughout schools to ensure more young people benefit and develop as citizens of a democratic country.



HEARING THE UNHEARD

Citizenship struggles and family support at Surrey Square Primary School

Like other schools later in this report, Surrey Square's children have been impacted by the government's policy on citizenship. Many of its students are going through or have gone through the **citizenship process**, having to raise over £1000 in order to get citizenship in the UK. This school in particular is surrounded by the Aylesbury estate, which many news articles describe as a 'concrete prison' for those with low socio-economic status, being forgotten by the government and local council. Surrey Square has therefore employed a **family support worker**, who engages with families going through the process of obtaining citizenship, referring them to the right support and acting as a support network for the families.

Interview with a parent

Kemi, a parent of a previous pupil at Surrey Square, took part in an interview with the UCL student team to explain the hardship that she and her children had endured due to inability to acquire British Citizenship. Kemi described her struggles with finding suitable accommodation and access to food for herself and her children. Kemi's inability to provide paperwork to landlords and the extortionate rent prices made it extremely difficult for the family to find a safe space to live. After arriving in the UK in 2017 with the hopes for a better quality of life, the family found a shared apartment to live in. However, they had soon run into problems when the apartment building they were living in had to be taken down to be reconstructed. Kemi and her family were heartbroken as they

were forced to move out. Kemi turned to the school for help as her monthly wage was not enough to cover the rent for another property.

In the interview, Kemi expressed her gratitude towards the staff at Surrey Square Primary school who were able to help her and her family in their time of need. The school provided **food, vouchers, and clothes** for the family and were able to find a place in the school to keep their personal belongings until they were allocated another place to live. The family support worker at Surrey Square directed Kemi to the local council who would be able to find accommodation for the family. After pleading with the council and filling out countless forms, they were finally offered a one-bedroom property to live in. The parent recalled being assisted by the family support worker and other staff at the Primary school to move her belongings and settle her family into their new home.

One of the hardest moments for Kemi throughout this entire process was when her son, who has a passion for football, was **refused registration** to participate in his football team as he did not have a British passport at the time. Kemi described the guilt she felt when the coach refused to take her son to the sporting activities, she felt saddened that she could not give her son the opportunity to follow his passion for football. She expressed her worries, saying that if her son was not able to obtain citizenship and follow his passion, that he would get himself in **trouble**, potentially committing

illegal activities. Luckily, Kemi expressed that her son did not have time for this due to being occupied by football and because he began to enjoy himself at school. Still, she felt that this is why the government should give these children citizenship; it could greatly harm children's education if they resort to illegal activities to escape their troubles at school. For example, children who do not obtain citizenship may not be able to go into education post GCSEs or A-Levels. Without the help from Surrey Square and citizenship, her son would not have been able to go on and play for Millwall Football Club.

This situation is highly stressful for Kemi, with her recommending to friends and family to not come to the UK, as without proper papers and citizenship, it is not a good place to reside. Thankfully, Kemi was able to obtain citizenship. However, this process was still not stress free for her, with the council originally allocating her with **No Recourse to Public Funds**, leaving her struggling. She states that without the support of staff at Surrey Square, she would not have been able to obtain these funds, with the family support worker demanding the council allow her to access public funds. In the interview, Kemi adds that the school was, and still is, a "second family" during these hard times. For example, the school provides children with breakfast in the mornings to support poor families and those with no access to public funds. Kemi adds that Surrey Square is a "**community for everybody**."

Kemi emphasised that other schools, both public and private, ought to emulate what Surrey Square have

achieved over the years. This is because, as Kemi notes, school can have a tremendous impact on family life in direct ways. For instance, Kemi participates in **parental training** at the school, learning from the teachers how to best assist their children. Such parental training has allowed Kemi to have more open and honest conversations with her children. She also says they have helped support all parents in many different ways. Kemi says that Surrey Square has taken up the role of a second home for many parents as she is in consistent contact with them. Kemi is constantly reassured that if she is having any problems she can always come and see the social worker. This gives Kemi and many parents alike the confidence, safety and support they need.

Kemi stressed that the most important thing schools can be doing is **providing school meals**. This is because many children do not have access to healthy well-rounded meals at home. However, since Surrey Square provides breakfast, Kemi felt confident that her son could start the day with a good meal that would contribute to his health and allow him to focus on his studies.

When asked what Kemi thinks of the government, she states that she **does not understand** why they will not give the children citizenship, adding that children who are not as lucky as her son will end up in gangs or highly distressed in hostile environments. In the interview, she also added that this place is the children's home, and that they cannot go anywhere as they belong and have a right to reside in the UK. She and her family worry that others who are not as lucky to have

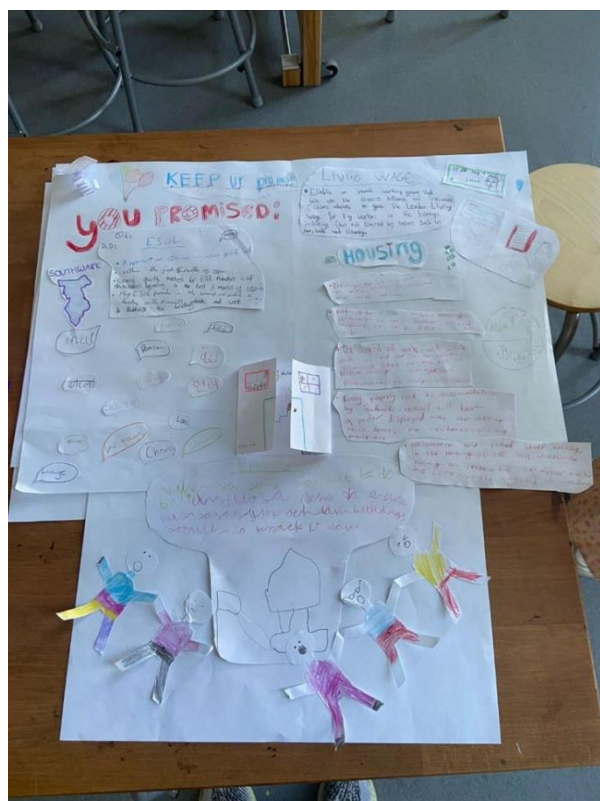
such a supportive school will struggle to gain peace and residency in this country. It is clear that children, not just from Surrey Square, are being **forgotten** and **neglected** by those who are supposed to help them.

Our action

It is extremely important to hold those who have power accountable for their promises. This is why the UCL student team's workshop group wanted to create a reminder of the demands that the newly elected council leader promised to achieve during his time.

The community ambassadors from Surrey Square attended the election assembly on the 27th of April, in which they witnessed Kieron Williams be re-elected as Southwark's council leader.

The task set was to create a poster, in which the children can have the opportunity to send or hand in a poster that Kieron can hang up on the wall. This poster included the demands he promised in the citizens assembly regarding **housing**, **ESOL** and **living wage**.





LOST IN TRANSLATION

EAL students' fight for justice for Spanish-speakers at St Gabriel's College

Upon entering Saint Gabriel's College, located in the Borough of Lambeth, one is enchanted by a cascade of posters, colours and creative works calling for **social justice**. Actively celebrating Black History Month, LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and cultural diversity, the school engages in a **life-long learning process** uniting teachers and students in campaigning for a just world.

St Gabriel's social justice struggle comes from the need to represent its **diverse student population**. In particular, the school and the wider Lambeth community is home to many **Latin-American families** whose lives do not go without obstacles. A heartfelt discussion with EAL students, for whom English is an additional language, reveals that many of their wants, needs and rights seem to get **lost in translation**. It is a daily struggle to navigate life between Spanish and English.

The students we worked with came from various Latin American countries and have lived in London for different periods of time, some almost their entire lives. Yet, they are united in their difficulty in gaining access to full cultural and social identifications in London, as their language, and often immigrant background **sets them apart** from other students.

Figure 1
Students with Latin-American flags



Not being able to speak English as a native speaker causes multiple **difficulties** for these children. At school, they must fight and bravely overcome a **communication barrier** to master their education in English. At home, parents struggle to fulfil their responsibilities when they do not speak the language of the hospital, community and corner store and are always **dependent** on the translation of others.

"I have to miss school to translate for my mum at the GP"

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) lessons provide a gateway for these families to successfully integrate into the London community. It is the responsibility of the Lambeth council to provide **accessible, affordable, and attainable** ESOL classes for adults who require it. However, councils seem to fall short of caring for their EAL citizens, as many ESOL classes are underfunded, and their accessibility is hindered by confusing, disorganised, English-only information. Many ESOL lessons are provided during daytime, leaving parents with the **impossible choice** between providing financially and learning English for long-term security.

"I know that the absence of your parents leaves you alone and angry, but you must always remember that they work late to create better living conditions for you."

- St Gabriel's EAL director Ms. Claudia Lopez, speaking to her students

Figure 2
EAL students campaign video filming process



In collaboration with the UCL student team, St Gabriel's **younger EAL students** explored these difficulties and their often-suppressed emotions through a role-card activity illustrating how a lack of **citizenship** can emphasise the othering of EAL individuals. They reflected on their own experiences, and used their voices to engaged with their dream of gaining recognition and representation for Latin-Americans. The students came together to harness their emotions, knowledge, and creativity to make a short film titled:

***'Latin Dreams Y Esperanza'
(Latin Dreams and Hopes)***

In the film, they shared their cultural background and feelings of discrimination and loneliness through a short and powerful script narrated in

Spanish and English. They asked for understanding, empathy, and representation to relieve themselves and their families of the language barrier and difficult immigration experience.

'We want to belong! We want to be heard! We want to be represented!'

This film and its conveyed message aim to consolidate the demands and promises of the **2022 Lambeth Citizens Accountability Assembly**, organised by Lambeth Citizens, the Lambeth branch of *Citizens UK*. Alongside demands on social mobility and housing, the Lambeth community asked for improved immigration advice and ESOL information under the theme of **'welcome'**. Three 'welcome' demands were made.

Ask 1 - Invest in improving access to the provision of local, free, independent and regulated immigration advice so that families and adults can get the advice they need **before** they find themselves in crisis and in need of support from Lambeth.

People with lived experience of the immigration or asylum system and local community organisations that represent them should be involved in shaping these advice services.

Ask 2 – Work in partnership with Lambeth Citizens to invest in an Early Intervention Scheme that identifies children and young people with insecure status and connects them with quality immigration advice to be supported towards achieving permanent status **as soon as** they are known to Lambeth Social Services.

Ask 3 - Appoint an ESOL coordinator with sufficient paid time to create and maintain a webpage on the council website with up to date information about local provision – and to work in partnership with EFA (Education Finance Agency) and the wider Lambeth ESOL community to bring us together for quarterly coordination meetings.

The finished campaign video, which will be presented to Lambeth Council, will illustrate the importance of these developments in supporting EAL students across Lambeth. The experiences of these EAL students and their **impressive courage** and motivation to campaign for a better world should serve as an example for all of us to fight for the justice every Latin-American person in London deserves. The students showed that that change can be achieved **together** by **speaking up!**



Advocating through Educating

An interview with Ms. Lopez on EAL support and representation

The UCL student team at St Gabriel's had the wonderful opportunity to speak with Ms. Claudia Lopez about her work as a **teacher, organiser and campaigner** for social justice as part of the Latin-American community.

Ms. Lopez has been a member of staff at St Gabriel's College for 6 years and fills many positions at the school. Alongside being the school's **EAL teacher** and **coordinator**, she also works as a **'Raising Achievement' co-ordinator** for EAL students and for Year 7s. This involves overseeing and supporting students' journey through St Gabriel's, from their enrolment to their graduation.

Preferring an immersive style of teaching to taking students out of class, Ms. Lopez teaches English to all students who require support. She is central to the support St Gabriel's College gives to EAL students, who make up 56% of the student population at the schools.

As a Church of England school, St Gabriel's College is fully inclusive of all students regardless of race, religion, gender, and sexuality. Hence, the school's senior leadership are supportive of Ms. Lopez's proposals on ways to improve diversity and inclusion at the school. Being immersed in the Latin-American community, Ms. Lopez is understanding of students' experiences of inequalities and struggles they face due to language

barriers. Such barriers prevent the parents of EAL students from having easy access to information about their

children's learning and wellbeing at school, creating the need for a **supportive figure in schools**, like Ms. Lopez, who can help parents of EAL students become more familiar and comfortable with a better understanding of their children's education.

Ms. Lopez became more involved with *Citizens UK* during the pandemic, motivated by her passion for social justice and her strength in being able to give a voice to the members of the Latin-American community. A key example of her drive for justice is her campaign for **COVID advice** to be officially **translated** into Spanish by the Lambeth Council.

*"As a member of **Lambeth Citizens**, I've had the platform to raise how **vital** it is to have local guidance **translated to Spanish**."*

- Ms. Lopez in her report of the campaign.¹

Ms. Lopez describes how it was difficult for Spanish-speaking groups to be heard, but with the support of Lambeth Citizens, the change was made in just **24 hours**. Still, while the support of Lambeth Citizens was instrumental, the official translation of advice would not have been made possible without the **persistence** and **mobilisation** of the Latin-American community in Lambeth. This campaign is another source of social justice inspiration, and Ms. Lopez hopes for such change to be achieved for Latin-Americans across London.

¹www.citizensuk.org/chapters/south-london/south-london-news/information-can-save-lives-organising-for-advice-and-guidance-in-spanish/

Figure 3
Ms. Claudia Lopez in her classroom



Though, the fight for justice is not easy for the Latin-American community in Lambeth when dealing with the council.

*“They make it very hard for people to get help, creating a block between **the council** and those who are **paying council tax.**”*

Ms. Lopez explains the **ambiguity** and **inconsistency** in translation support offered by the council; while they should provide an interpreter, they ask individuals with limited English proficiency to bring someone to translate to meetings, making it increasingly **difficult** for non-English speakers to have easy access to necessary help and resources. Ms. Lopez calls for **better support for EAL individuals** as she often experiences parents asking for her help with accessing necessary services; arguably, this should not be her responsibility, but is yet another role she and many bilinguals have to take on due to the council’s negligence.

*“**We don’t exist.**”*

Ms. Lopez uses this statement to describe the council’s and government’s perception, or lack thereof, of Latin-Americans in London. While the council’s support for the Latin-American community and for non-English speakers in Lambeth is improving thanks to the support of Lambeth Citizens, Ms. Lopez describes how other London boroughs have done very little to support Latin-American individuals, of whom there are over 1,000,000 across London.

Nonetheless, as Ms. Lopez recalls, many campaigns have reaped success in improving representation and recognition of the Latin-American community in London. An example is the youth-led **‘LatinXcluded’ campaign**, which called for the inclusion of ‘Latin-American’ as an option to be chosen by individuals on official forms, increasing **recognition** of the community. The campaign was successful, and Lambeth council **now collect LatinX data on all forms!**

Ms. Lopez also recognises that, compared to adults such as herself who have become **primed** and accustomed to having to combat **prejudice** in their daily conversations, young EAL students at St. Gabriel’s College are able to **brush off** stereotyping and discrimination easily, pointing to the need to discuss and dismantle everyday discrimination against Latin-Americans and EAL individuals. Hence, she is hopeful for further **recognition** and **inclusion** of **Latin-American individuals** in Lambeth and across London. As the community continues to grow exponentially, so does the number of people facing a language barrier every day. Hence, Ms. Lopez reminds us to:

*“**Don’t stay quiet.** Speak up, especially for those who can’t but who want **to be heard.**”*



An Environment of Altruism

Cultivating community organising at St John's Angell Town Primary School

Introduction

Upon first impression, St John's Angell Town (SJAT) primary school was **a safe place** for children, an environment where they are encouraged to think individually and honestly throughout their daily learning. Nonetheless, after our team of UCL students collaborated with Year 5 pupils on community organising, the pupils' feedback throughout and after the workshops indicated that they appreciated how we invited them to consider their own power and how we asked for their opinion on more abstract or "adult" things that they may usually be **excluded** from. At all three stages of the whole-day workshop, students showed us unanimous engagement, answering questions even when they were unsure about the correct answer, and most importantly, being very excited at the prospect of helping others by using their power as children. By the end of the workshop and action, the children showed impressive understanding and embodiment of their power to speak up for injustice through **listening, effective storytelling, and leadership**.

The issues we discussed during the workshop were all linked to **immigration** and **citizenship**; concepts which the children had already had a grasp on. We specifically focused on the issues raised at the Lambeth Citizens Assembly held in the Spring, to make sure that our workshop is relevant to the actual issues currently present in the local

community. These included housing and provision of English language lessons for families with unstable incomes and unsettled statuses who are the most vulnerable yet have the least amount of support and access to public funds. The following report combines our knowledge and experience with SJAT since the schools' collaboration with *Citizens UK*.

Working with those 'without' citizenship

SJAT has a long history of developing the culture of helping others. In the past, the school has cooperated with the **food bank** in **Brixton**, collaborating on the church's charitable events and **fundraising**. Many of the school's efforts went into supporting children without citizenship. In 2017, the school held a **fundraising campaign for Syrian refugees** where the SJAT students participated in raising the much-needed resources and donating welcome packages to 11 families. This campaign followed the 2016 **SJAT and Citizens UK march** supporting refugee children as a part of Black History month, where they campaigned for the UK government to welcome more refugees. SJAT has worked with *Citizens UK* for a long time not only on external campaigns but also within the school.

The community organising workshops and events for SJAT students run by UCL students with the support of

organising being naive, children quickly learned that they couldn't just use their **imagination** to convey messages to politicians, and instead needed to build **real power** to hold politicians accountable. The workshop was indeed a good gateway for children to rewrite the rules of their understanding of community organising into a more **concrete** and **practical concept**.

Taking Action: Community Organising Comes True

The after-school booths organised by the children were an important component of our workshop. This initiative aimed to involve more parents to establish a **greater collective power** as community organising has become embedded into the school activities. The pupils prepared role plays, leaflet copies and posters beforehand, and they were responsible for delivering what they had learned about community organizing from the workshops to parents.

Figure 3
Images of pupil's work



Students held optimistic expectations of making a change to better the community, and they also actively and smoothly led their own booths. The creative poster had a pocket which contained all their wishes for equal rights for people who do not possess citizenship in the UK. They then made a **presentation** to parents at the booths (Figure 4) saying that all people should have **equal access** to housing, food, and free English lessons in order to find a job, regardless of their immigration status. As well as this, children also spontaneously shouted slogans to **call for change**.

**“Power equals change”
“Don’t give up”**

Figure 4
Pupil’s presentation to parents



The kids were very receptive to the idea of community organising and effectively passed it onto their parents on the booths. Through this, we observed first-hand how much children are **underestimated**, and how their power and capabilities reach far beyond expectations.

Overall, working with the young people from SJAT was not only **empowering** for them but the UCL students involved. Be it through the effective **storytelling**, listening and leadership skills they adopted and showed; through the **wishes** they voiced after becoming aware and learning more of the issues in the local community; or through the **chants** they shouted to emphasise the importance of change, the young people of SJAT know: **“Don’t. Give. Up.”**

The young people of SJAT were appreciative of having their voices and opinions heard, and we thank them for being **incredible** participants of the workshops conducted by UCL students; and hope that this is only the **beginning of great change!**

FIREFIGHTING FOR FAMILIES

The role of a family support worker at St Mary's CE Primary School

St Mary's CE Primary School in Lewisham is a school serving 238 students, 96% of which are of black or ethnic minorities. While 41% of students are considered disadvantaged or qualify for Free School Meals (FSM), **5%** of the students are from families with **No Recourse to Public Funds**.

Coping with an increase in families requiring assistance, and no one designated to support them, the leadership team had to manage and juggle issues with **housing, citizenship, and welfare benefits**. Furthermore, much of the school's staff came from a teaching background, and therefore did not possess expert knowledge on the most effective approaches or organisations to aid marginalised families.

After five years of immense leadership and commitment from the school's leadership team, St Mary's were able to employ **Marta Tildesley** (Figure 1) as a **family support worker**. Currently, her role involves looking after pupils, parents, and families to break down the barriers to students' learning and progress.

In collaboration with Marta and *Citizens UK*, students from UCL planned and executed **three social justice workshops** surrounding issues of housing and citizenship with the Year 5s. This culminated into both St Mary's and UCL students' participation in the local **Citizens' assembly** where they demanded change and accountability from Lewisham's mayoral candidates. After witnessing the democratic work being done at the school, the UCL students interviewed Marta about her role and the experiences that have come with it.

Figure 1

St Mary's Family Support Worker, Marta Tildesley



As recognised by Marta, family life is complex and often **challenging**. However, through enacting her vision of transforming St Mary's into a **community hub** that can signpost families to essential services, she has been able to ease the difficulties faced by local families and the school. For instance, schools often have heavy caseloads; however, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) at St Mary's highlighted that the addition of a family support worker to the team reduced the pressure. Marta's role as a family support worker with a background in law and consultancy has enabled her to **confidently** advocate on behalf of many marginalised families and liaise with various external services offered by charities, solicitors, and the council. The SENCO further noted that Marta is a "**wealth of knowledge**" that the school did not previously have; Marta has "helped so many people with housing and no recourse" because she "knows the systems, knows who to approach to ask for funding and grants". This is evident in students'

illustrations of Marta (Figure 2, Figure 3).

Figure 2
A Student's Illustration of the Support Received from Marta



Unlike other school staff, Marta works off timetable; she dedicates her time to strengthening St Mary's **long-term relationships** with families. From touching base at the school gates or over the phone to meeting in parks, cafes and homes, Marta has been available to listen and advise families facing homelessness, immigration problems, language barriers and mental health issues. This has actively cultivated St Mary's as a place of **welcome**; families trust that the school cares about their wellbeing and progress. Ranging from accompanying families in challenging situations, providing children with clean uniforms to assisting guardians in completing welfare benefit forms, the pragmatic support has established the school as a **compassionate** community hub.

Marta's work has not only assisted families in overcoming their struggles

but has also positively impacted the school's **network system**. Through connecting St Mary's with *Citizens UK*, Marta has facilitated community projects that have inspired staff, guardians, and students to collectively act against the injustices they face. For example, after listening to the communities' concerns, St Mary's campaigned against the Lewisham housing crisis, extortionate British Citizenship fees for children, NHS migrant charging and **No Recourse to Public Funds**. This community organising and Marta's work supporting families with settling their immigration status created inclusivity for migrants and refugees, gaining St Mary's the **School of Sanctuary** award in 2021. This award is granted to schools who consistently foster a welcoming and culturally diverse environment. Bringing in innovative ideas and access to new resources, this award has connected the St Mary's community with other Schools of Sanctuary who share the same social justice goals.

This immensely valuable work comes with a great sense of **responsibility**, something that emerged as impacting Marta's **wellbeing**. Whilst Marta reassured the UCL students that being a family support worker was the "most fulfilling job" she has had in her career; the emotionally demanding nature of the role was also evident. Marta described how difficult it is to get away from her work at weekends and in the evenings, reflecting on a particularly challenging time when a pupil was stuck abroad and it felt impossible to leave her job behind and carry on with her life. She also discussed the increasing pressure caused by charitable funds ending, and how difficult it can feel when there is nothing she can do to help but wait with the families while their cases pass through the **tangles of bureaucracy**. The responsibility of funding Marta's role also falls onto the school leadership team who, in the current

climate, could easily eradicate her role and divert funding elsewhere. Here, it can be seen that this fire-fighting responsibility can be **draining** as well as **rewarding**. It is important to continuously reflect on who is putting out the fires, whether there are others with a greater pool of resources to more effectively do so and, most importantly, why the fires are spreading.

Recommendations

From the perspective of a family support worker, Marta had recommendations for schools and governing bodies across the UK. First, she recommended that schools **hire family support workers** like her. Schools should have a holistic outlook on the development of pupils, not only their academic progress, but also other aspects of their everyday life. Since social and council services are often slow and overwhelmed, many family issues such as housing and immigration problems and food poverty go **unresolved**. Therefore, it is necessary for schools to have a staff member that sits out of the classroom who is open to being approached, either in-person or over the phone. Family support workers in schools could give flexibility around relationships with families; they aim to tackle deeper barriers that often go unmissed by time-restricted services. The combination of a **courageous** change in both leadership style and budget makes room for hiring family support workers. As a school's lack of budget may result in **inadequate funding** for a family support worker, the financial responsibility to fund this support should fall on the government. Marta hopes that schools will be better equipped to take this **financial leap of faith**, as it is important to nurture the whole family unit as well as individual students. For this reason, she believes all schools should be **funded** to employ family support workers, even if they only work once a week. She noted that *"you'd be amazed, how much you can*

get done in a day", as it is the practical things that we tend to exclude from our day-to-day thinking, therefore underestimating what a family support worker could achieve.

Secondly, Marta suggested that **governing bodies** should give more support to disadvantaged students. Whilst Pupil Premium exists, Marta mentioned that the government could **establish a fund** for schools dedicated to supporting marginalised families. According to her experience, a specialised fund is very essential because it can be used for a wide range of purposes and benefit families in many ways; the fund could provide families with small-scale but **practical** material support. For instance, for purchasing refrigerators, washing machines, or even new school uniform. Additionally, the funds could be used to pay for school trips and experiences that allow marginalised children to develop the same **cultural capital** as other students, breaking the traditional patterns of **social reproduction**. Moreover, the funds could help families access professional legal services, which are especially helpful when they are dealing with issues of immigration and citizenship. Last but not least, the fund could be utilised to develop the school into a community hub which contains all essential services that can be easily accessed by families.

The brilliance of this job is that family support workers become central to schools, merging relationships between not only children, but staff and families. The connections and **trust** built by family support workers are crucial in making schools a community hub. Some families may feel **disconnected** with the community; hence Marta's role is more than just forming relationships. It is about supporting families to strengthen their sense of **identity and belonging**. She mentioned "sometimes we forget that parents are parents,

rather than someone's mum". She advised that schools should truly get to know parents as **individuals**, as opposed to someone who just brings their child to school every day.

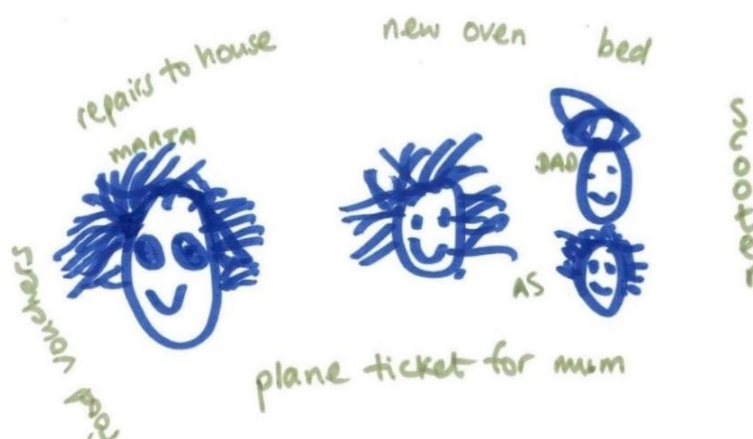
Indeed, beyond children's school life, **family environments** are of paramount importance. As a family support worker, Marta has dedicated time and energy to her role at St Mary's. Within the school, she has fulfilled her job by establishing relationships with both students and parents and providing them with in-depth support. Moreover, she has facilitated the school's networks with the wider society by actively approaching relevant organisations. Marta emphasised that she felt that working as a family support worker is "the best job in the world".

Although Marta's enthusiasm has allowed her to advocate for marginalised families' rights, she also expressed that her job is often restricted by bureaucracy. She further emphasised that whilst helping a family through housing or immigration issues can improve their dynamics, smaller **practical** support such as free uniforms can also be beneficial. It is never too late to implement change within schools or the family unit. The success of family support work is not measured by the amount of support given, but rather by the **joyous** family reactions that follow. Marta and the students from UCL hope that more schools and institutions can learn from St Mary's. By employing family support workers, the collaboration and sense of community between schools, families and wider society can be strengthened.

Case Study: Student AS

Joining his father in the UK and St Mary's Reception class mid academic year, AS (whose name will remain anonymous) arrived from Guinea Bissau. AS' mother, who had previously been his primary carer, could not fly out due to illness. Alongside AS speaking no English and experiencing significant distress for leaving behind his mother, his father was under great financial pressure. Hence, Marta mobilised St Mary's into the family's support system. For example, to ensure that AS had the best quality of learning, a free breakfast club space, uniform and food vouchers for free school meals were provided. The school also gifted AS presents at Christmas. Furthermore, Marta assisted the family through several housing and immigration issues. After liaising with Lewisham Housing, an eviction was prevented, and various delayed property repairs were secured. Following Marta's application for external funding, the family were supplied with a new cooker, bed and bedding. In terms of immigration status, Marta helped AS' father to apply for settled status via the EU Settlement Scheme and oversaw visa applications for his wife who had been restricted by a Home Office mistake. Marta noted that the immigration process has been incredibly difficult for the family and continues to impact AS's learning and wellbeing, as he still comes and says, "When is my mummy coming, is she still alive?". Whilst St Mary's have fundraised for the plane tickets, the family are still awaiting their reunion after four years.

Figure 3
Illustration by Student AS



A SANCTUARY OF WELCOME

The inclusion of non-citizen students at Newman College



A reimagination of the Newman Logo, as sketched by a student from our workshop group

Newman Catholic College (Newman) is an exemplary school that has nurtured a supportive, safe, and welcoming environment for all students, irrespective of their background. In June 2019, Newman was recognised as a **School of Sanctuary**, in addition to already being a Refugee Welcome School, a deserved recognition of their commitment to providing **safety and security to all**.

The student body at Newman is greatly diverse, with a large population of immigrant and refugee students; 77% of students come from EAL backgrounds and, across the school, there are over 60 languages spoken.

With such a diverse community and commitment to sanctuary, Newman is dedicated to **inclusivity**. The school's approach to welcoming all students, regardless of their citizenship status, should be used as an example and as inspiration for other schools, to

develop their own practices to show a similar level of inclusivity for all.

Equality, Equity and Respect

"Everyone Counts, Everyone Contributes, Everyone Succeeds".

This is the motto that adorns the walls during assemblies - a quick walk through the hallways and you can see this ethos in action. Newman holds UNICEF Gold Rights accreditation, highlighting their core principles of **equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination, and participation**. While the international cohort have their own unique stories, there is a great sense of unity within the classrooms. Within our own group, we had students from Brazil all the way to Syria. Like in many other classes, the students were encouraged to use English as one way to create connections with people from other countries. We were taken aback by the comradery shown amongst the students, from the witty banter upon

entering the classroom, to the support and kindness shown during group activities. Perhaps it is the wise words from Sir Ian McKellan that echo throughout the school since his visit in 2017 - *“the only label you need is your name”*. At Newman Catholic College, equality is for everyone, and this community is **eternal**.

This equality is extended into Newman’s practices that acknowledge the individual needs of each student. The school offers an alternative curriculum for students who arrive from overseas. This involves **tailoring** the education these students receive to account for the upheaval and distress they have experienced as it is likely to hinder their ability to complete education at traditional ages. This alternative curriculum centralises developing students’ competence and confidence in English language skills so they can transition to GCSE and A-Level classes with the ability to effectively engage with the national curriculum. In the UK, English has been made to underpin human connection outside of educational settings. This development of English language skills therefore not only enables students to move to the next level of academia but crucially helps prepare them for life in the UK as active and productive citizens.

This equitable support for students in Newman extends beyond the duration of the term. During the summer break, the school hosts a program called the Syria Summer Camp. This camp provides a holistic education to refugee, asylum-seeking, and unaccompanied students aged 4-17, to prepare these individuals for life in the UK. This preparation centres around

developing their English language skills and addressing their psychological and social needs. One student who we worked closely with in our time at Newman started off attending the camp, and is now graduating in the following months, and taking on a teaching role at the camp this summer. He speaks incredibly fondly of the Syria Summer Camp as well as the support he has received from Newman, *Citizens UK*, and other external organisations that support non-citizens’ access to rights. This fondness is exemplified by his desire to return to the camp after his graduation, so that he can stay connected with the school and give back to a community that has always supported him.

These practices of equity underpinning the Newman community and the tailoring of students’ education to their specific needs are central to the school being a **sanctuary of welcome** for all. These principles should lay as a foundation for all schools in the UK to ensure the inclusion of refugee, asylum-seeking, and non-citizen students across the country.

Refugee Project Leader

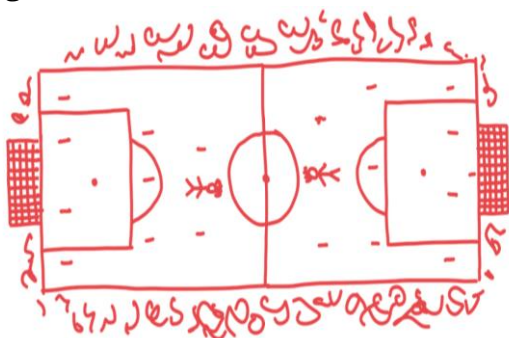
If you were to walk up to any student at Newman and ask them about their experience of support at the school, almost always, their immediate response includes the words, **“Ms. Anjali”**.

Ms Anjali Saran started working with Newman on a project as a member of an external organisation, and within two years took on her own role at the school. She is now the **refugee project leader** and at Newman. Not only has Ms. Saran been a key asset in directing

and running the Syria Summer Camp, but she is also a rock to the asylum-seeking and refugee students at the school.

When asked why she chose to work at Newman specifically, Ms. Saran recalled her experiences in other institutions, and describes how unique it was that everyone at Newman was immediately **helpful and supportive** towards her. We see here that this immediate acceptance and unity goes beyond teacher-student relationships but is **embedded** within every relationship in the community of the school as a whole.

In conversation with Ms. Saran, she mentioned that nearly every week, Newman sees to the enrolment of one new refugee or asylum-seeking student, with an estimated count of 110 non-citizens already currently enrolled at the school. Ms. Saran notes that roughly 70% of the students at Newman speak English as a second language, but in our experience, language proficiency does not in any way influence the students' ability to **connect** with one another at Newman. In one of our workshops, we asked some students to sketch out a representation of '**where they feel at home**', and two students worked together to hand this in:



A football pitch, "home", as sketched by two students from our workshop group.

Seeing how the students find ways to build friendships even when challenged by societal-structural barriers is merely a reflection of the efforts Newman exerts to create a sanctuary for its people.

Newman provides additional support for over **50 vulnerable families** from the school community through services such as a Friday food bank with the support of external sponsors. The **richness** of Newman's cultural capital is truly an indication of the efforts made by the staff to approach and connect with others to be able to provide for and benefit the students and their families as best as they can.

To better understand how a school can nurture a similar environment and ensure a smooth transition for new and vulnerable students, we asked Ms. Saran to share a few words of **advice**. From her experience, Ms. Saran has observed that there are two fundamental structures that can make all the difference; creating opportunities for socialisation and assigning a staff member as their point of reference.

On the next page, we have included some examples of what this entails.

1. Creating opportunity for socialisation with other students
 - a. Social activities that may include but are not limited to;
 - i. After school clubs
 - ii. Extracurricular activities
 - b. Encouraging teachers to pair the student up with supportive peers in classroom activities
2. Assigning one staff member as a reference point/guide for the students

Some examples of those responsibilities include but are not limited to;

 - a. Helping them build an independent sense of stability
 - b. Assisting in both, minor and major adaptation struggles;
 - i. Ensure their wellbeing is supported through practices such as therapy/counselling and/or pastoral support
 - ii. Communicate with other staff members when the student is experiencing difficulties
 - iii. Ensure that the student receives extra educational support until meeting the group average
 - iv. Run sessions for all staff to raise awareness on the struggles these students face in adapting both educationally and socially
 - v. Consistently observing their progress

As mentioned by Ms. Saran, some of these students are dealing with the **unimaginable** weight of upheaval and this may sometimes reflect negatively in their behaviour. While conflict is unavoidable, the teachers at Newman truly exhibit an **unwavering patience**; and while they may deal with misbehaviour sternly at times, they are always compassionate and understanding of the greater picture.

Ms. Saran, as well as the entire staff at Newman, have set a prime example for supporting these students. All schools in the UK are urged to **employ a member of staff**, such as a refugee project leader or EAL pastoral support manager, to offer **direct support** to migrant, refugee, or asylum-seeking children; this will allow us to ensure that not only are they granted the right to education but are able to study *effectively* in the UK.

Citizens UK

“Citizenship is about more than what nationality documents you hold, it is ultimately about whether you are equipped and are willing to play an active role in your community.” - Daphne Giachero, Associate Organiser for Citizens UK.

Beyond centering inclusive practices within the school, Newman coordinates with **external organisations**, particularly with *Citizens UK*, to support its non-citizen students and foster a welcoming community within the school.

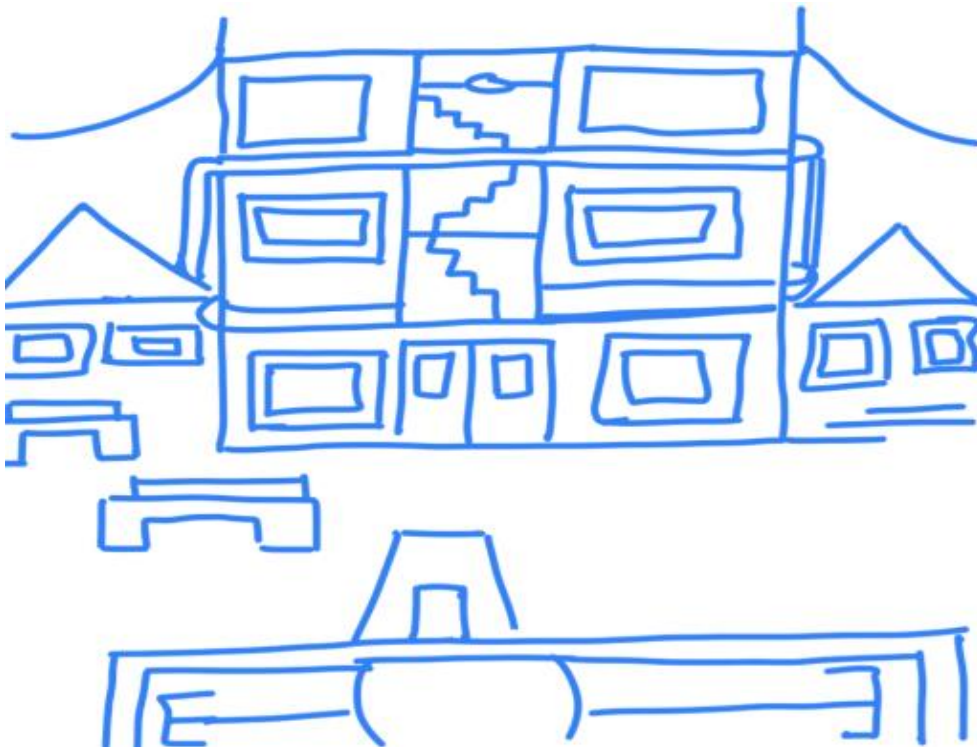
Through the method of Community Organising, the after-school *Citizens UK* club teaches students how to listen to their community, raise issues affecting them and their peers, and take collective action to address these problems. For example, as part of the

clubs engagement with a campaign for the **London Living Wage**, students were given the opportunity to directly engage with **community organising**. They listened to the experiences of individuals in their local community and liaised with local employers to take action for the common good. Evidently, this club develops students' **potential** to become leaders within their communities. While these students often are non-UK or EU nationals, they nonetheless embody what it means to be a citizen by playing **active roles** to benefit others.

In conversation with them, some of the non-citizen members of the club have expressed their appreciation for the manner in which it has encouraged their **individual development**. Mostly, they reported that part-taking in the sessions has encouraged them to better their confidence towards public speaking. But many students also communicated that this experience

has allowed them to feel **empowered** for the first time; to be able to trust in their ability to make a change.

Our work with preparing students for the **Brent Accountability Assembly** in April highlighted to us how Newman's ties to *Citizens UK* helps create an invaluable space for students to develop a powerful sense of connection to their community, as well as a belief in the value of their unique stories and their capacity to connect their personal experiences to broader struggles within their communities. For example, this is especially true for the work students have done on the London Living Wage Campaign. Students weaved together insights from the listening and advocacy work they conducted with local businesses in Brent with personal testimonies, which they then **presented** at the Accountability Assembly to politicians and other decision-makers.



A sketch of Newman, by a student from our workshop group

Concluding Points

There are many valuable takeaways from Newman's approach to creating a sanctuary for refugee and asylum-seeking young people. Schools that are interested in creating room for non-citizen students can look into implementing some of Newman's tried and tested strategies and structures within their own institutions.

First, it appears essential for schools to **designate a member of staff**, who can cater to the needs of non-citizen students and continue to support them throughout their academic careers, in the same manner Ms. Saran does at Newman.

Secondly, schools should be **committed** to fostering a community that is **equal, inclusive**, and **welcoming** to all students. This involves supporting students inside and outside of the classroom and both during and after the duration of the term.

The **sanctuary** within Newman is a space like no other, and the overwhelmingly positive feedback from current & past students, staff and external organisations is a testament to an ingrained culture of **care** and **inclusivity**. Thus, it is important for schools across the United Kingdom to consider implementing these eight rules to ensure all students, regardless of citizenship status have access to effective education:

- Designate a refugee project leader
- Educate the entire staff on the needs of non-citizen students
- Reach out and collaborate with organisations, such as Citizens UK
- Do not limit students' learning opportunities based on their age or the time period within the academic year they join the school
- Provide pastoral support to aid students' transition into the UK
- Offer EAL and additional language support to prepare students to integrate into the national curriculum
- Provide extracurricular opportunities for socialising and working with the broader community

Illustrations by Year 5 pupils at St Mary's CE Primary School



‘How can schools effectively support the needs and interests of non-citizen children and their families?’

To answer this question, we have presented past and ongoing **examples of social justice** in schools across London:

While **Notre Dame** are helping students to speak up about **youth safety**, schools such as **Surrey Square** and **St Mary’s** are supporting families and children without **citizenship**.

St Gabriel’s and **Newman** are striving to welcome **EAL students** and combat the **discrimination** they face every day, while **St John’s Angell Town** are cultivating the power of **community organising**.

Upon our reflections and research, we wish to make recommendations for educators, organisers, policymakers and campaigners going forward:

Designate, fund and resource a staff member at all schools to support children and families with **settling their statuses**

Cultivate a place of welcome by **embracing** and acting upon **all students’ voices** regardless of their citizenship statuses and backgrounds

Introduce more students to community organising as a means of **empowering them** to collectively make positive change

Alongside fostering opportunities for students to build **transformative relationships** with each other, these six schools actively nurtured networks beyond the classroom. Whilst these schools face different citizenship challenges, they have all chosen to **mobilise their communities** to address injustices. From connecting with families, to forming alliances with different institutions, these schools highlight that **the gap between our current society** and a **fairer world** begins to close once **communities consciously** and **collectively** play **a part** in organising for social justice.

We hope that the **inspiration** gained from reading about these schools’ achievements and ongoing campaigns **can propel others to participate in collective action for the common good**.

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