



NEWHAM CITIZENS LISTENING REPORT & MANIFESTO 2022

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FOREWORD



Jerry During & Joanna Boldeau Co-Chairs, Newham Citizens

The Newham Citizens Manifesto Asks represent real solutions, created by real people in Newham.

Whether we are secondary school pupils; cleaners; faith leaders wanting a better life for our congregations: in our organisations and collectively, we have listened to one other, reflected on our own experiences, and developed solutions to the challenges we face together. In the process, our members have become leaders, taking action for a better, fairer community.

Newham Citizens brings together a diverse range of individuals and organisations, and many of our members hail from communities that are often under-represented in political participation. Through increasing co-production with our membership and Newham Council, we have an opportunity to grow local residents' involvement in decision-making and put people at the heart of democracy in Newham.

In doing so, we are taking the next steps on a journey of increasing co-production in Newham.

At our previous Assembly, in 2018, we made asks to the two leading candidates for Mayor. Both the conservative and the labour candidate. The candidate who won Rokhsana Fiaz OBE made a series of agreements at the Newham Citizens Public Assembly. We are delighted that in 2022, we can say that many of those agreements have been honoured.

In particular, those agreements included Newham Council becoming an accredited Living Wage employer. Their leadership was an encouragement to the 31+ other local employers who have accredited since 2018. Our organising on the Living Wage has meant around £14 million going back into the pockets of Newham's lowest paid workers over the last 5 years.

Our Manifesto in 2022 aims to build on this success, by encouraging more Newham employers to become Living Wage accredited.

As well as low pay, housing is another huge source of pressure for Newham residents. As our listening vividly shows, there is simply not enough affordable, quality housing that meets people's needs in our borough. Homelessness has soared, and young people are acutely affected.

We are delighted to be working in partnership with Newham Council to find a site for a new 'Social Housing Learning and Support Centre' (SHLSC). This project will provide young people with affordable housing while also preparing them for employment and independent living.

We have also entered discussions with the Council around community-led housing in the form of a 'Community Land Trust' (CLT) in Custom House. CLTs offer housing that is affordable to the local community long-term, as well as the amenities needed for community life.

We encourage those who make decisions in all sectors to listen to, and work closely with, communities. Our aspiration is to co-produce solutions to local challenges with not just Newham Council, but with employers, the NHS and TFL.

By encouraging a 'culturally competent' NHS service and peer-led support for people who face long wait times for mental health care, we want to ensure that people facing mental health challenges feel seen and heard within the NHS and their own communities.

Working with TFL represents an opportunity to keep our young people safer in Newham. We ask TFL to allow students to board the bus if they are in school uniform, even if they do not have their Zip card, for example. This will reduce the number of young people who have to walk home alone.

We were struck by the generosity with which people participated in our listening work. We were often discussing very difficult experiences: homelessness, mental health crisis, struggling to survive on less than the Living Wage. People persevere, and see their pain as part of a bigger picture that they want to change.

Our experiences are fuel to inspire and to change things for the better. We're so excited for the journey ahead.

Joanna Boldeau & Jerry During
Co-Chairs, Newham Citizens



Newham Citizens members, St Antony's Catholic Primary School



Young Newham Citizens members, Nov 2021

INTRODUCTION

Newham Citizens (Part of TELCO) are a local alliance who are part of Citizens UK and use Community Organising to develop local leaders, strengthen local organisations and find solutions to the challenges that our communities face.

Through the method of Community Organising we enable communities to develop their voice, build power and achieve change on the issues that matter to them. The method has a pragmatic, inclusive approach to influencing people who hold power in the political, private or public spheres.

The work of Citizens UK has led to some of the biggest campaign impacts in the UK, including the [Living Wage](#) which has

now put £1.3 billion back into the pockets of the country's lowest paid workers. This campaign began right here in Newham and east London in 2001, through local communities coming together, listening and organising for change.

We work with 23 civil society institutions in Newham, including local schools, community groups and charities, and religious organisations. We currently organise to make change around four Campaign Areas: Housing, Living Wage, Youth Safety and Health Inequalities.

If you are interested in being part of this powerful alliance of institutions contact: alistair.rooms@citizensuk.org.





Why Listening?

In Community Organising we believe that those closest to pain should be closest to power, and we encourage those who make decisions to listen to, and work closely with, communities.

Through our member institutions, in Sept 2021 - Jan 2022 we listened to the voices and experiences of people in Newham in relation to the four Campaign Areas. Local citizens are experts by experience in their local communities and the issues that affect their lives, and the solutions they have suggested form the basis of our Manifesto.

In advance of the Newham Mayoral Election in May 2022, we will present our Manifesto to the candidates for Mayor of Newham. We invite the future Mayor, local public sector leaders (TFL, NHS)

and businesses, to work together with us to make change for the better in Newham.

As noted by the Newham Democracy and Civic Participation Commission in their [Final Report](#)¹, increasing co-production between the Council and the local community represents an opportunity to increase local residents' involvement in decision-making, and to put people at the heart of democracy in the borough.

Our Report reflects strong relationships built by Newham Citizens across diverse groups in the borough, including with communities that are often under-represented in political participation and decision-making. Through Listening and Community Organising, we aim to go some way towards redressing this balance of power and strengthening local democracy.

We wish to thank everyone who has contributed to this report and carried out listening in their local communities.

In-depth listening conducted and report compiled by Suzy Kirby (Money A+E).

MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

- Applecourt Arts
- Caritas Anchor House
- Community Links - Canning Town
- Money A+E
- Newham Muslim Forum
- Newham Methodist Circuit
- Newham Sixth Form College (New Vic)
- Our Lady of Walsingham Parish
- Sarah Bonnell School
- School 21
- Shpresa Programme
- St Angela's Girls School
- St Antony's Catholic Primary (Forest Gate)
- St Margaret's Catholic Church
- Mind In Tower Hamlets and Newham
- St Antony's RC Church
- St Bonaventure's Catholic School
- St Martins CoE
- St Stephen's & St Nicholas' Parish
- The People's Empowerment Alliance for Custom House
- Trustees of St Francis RC Church
- University of East London
- Ursuline Convent

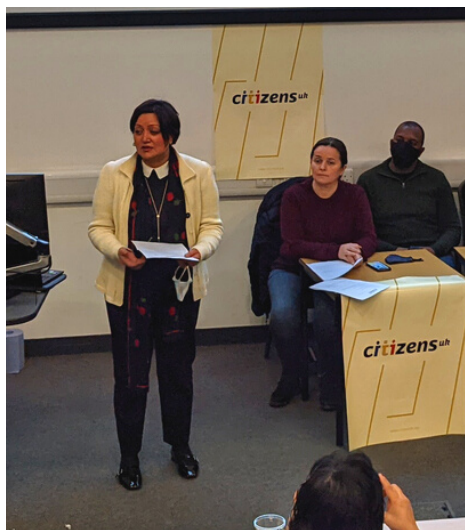
OUR TRACK RECORD

At Newham Citizens we have a proud legacy of working alongside local leaders to make change in our communities. We are a strictly non-partisan alliance and work with candidates who win elected office.

In April 2018, we hosted an 'Election Accountability Assembly' with the two leading candidates for Mayor of Newham at that year's election. Both the Labour and Conservative candidates attended, and the candidate who would go on to become Mayor, Rokhsana Fiaz OBE, made the following agreements (see top right) with our membership – all of which have been honoured.

We wish to recognise and celebrate the commitment and hard work of Newham Council and everyone involved in making these agreements a reality.

A huge amount besides has been achieved in the past four years, through our membership's tireless organising and the following changes (see bottom right) that have been implemented by the Council.



Current Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz addresses Newham Citizens Asks Workshop, University of East London, Dec 2021

The following of our 2018 Assembly agreements made with the winning Labour Candidate Rokhsana Fiaz OBE have been honoured:

- **Newham Council to become an accredited Living Wage employer.**
- **Newham Council to visit a Community Land Trust (CLT) in St Clements, Bow, and to explore creating a CLT in Newham.**
- **To work together to include Community Land Trusts as a viable model of housing in Newham.**
- **To convene a Living Wage breakfast during Living Wage Week in November 2018.**

Further successes in 2018-2022

- £12 million invested in the Real Living Wage by Newham Council, as they accredited as a Living Wage employer and raised the wages of 700 care workers.
- The Royal Docks Roundtable and the Living Wage Week Launch held, with Mayor Fiaz in attendance at both.
- Mayor Fiaz visited the CLT at St Clements, Bow, and the Council have worked with Newham Citizens, E16 CLT and PEACH to explore building the Newham's first CLT.

London-wide wins in 2018-2022

- Tate & Lyle and London City Airport accredited as Living Wage Employers and raised the wages of their staff. When our organising work started in 2018, there were 9 Living Wage employers in Newham. There are now 40+ employers, and 11,000 people have moved onto the Real Living Wage as a result – meaning that about £14 million has gone back into the pockets of low paid workers.
- Over £1 million has been invested by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, in community-led training for police officers.
- An overhaul by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime of community monitoring structures, to ensure that London's diverse communities are better represented. This will bring a diverse set of communities into the process to hold the Metropolitan Police to account.

During the same four-year period 2018-2022, Newham Citizens leaders also celebrated being involved with campaign wins (see left) in London.



Young Newham Citizens members, Nov 2021

PROCESS

Between September 2021 and January 2022, Newham Citizens engaged adults and young people in 22 schools, faith communities and charities to find out how the Campaign Areas of Housing, Living Wage & Low Pay, Youth Safety and Health Inequalities affected them and what could be done. This formed the basis of our listening campaign in member institutions in Newham.

The findings of the campaign have been used to produce this Listening Report, and as a basis for the Newham Citizens Manifesto or 'Asks'.

In advance of the Newham Mayoral Election in May 2022, we present our Manifesto to the candidates for Mayor of Newham, local public sector leaders (TFL, NHS) and businesses, and invite them to work with us in making change for the better in Newham.

Each member organisation undertook listening within their own organisations, around one of the four Campaign Areas. This took the form of discussion or focus groups, the results of which were fed back into an online Listening Survey.

Further focus groups and one-to-one interviews were also conducted by Newham Citizens, in person and online, in order to capture our community's experiences in more depth.

At an Asks Workshop at the University of East London in December 2021 attended by over 100 people, our members presented their evidence and stories, and discussed their proposed solutions to the issues raised therein. These

solutions form the basis of our Manifesto 'Asks'. These Asks are designed to be 'worthwhile' – ie. they will have a significant impact on improving an issue – and 'winnable' – ie. achievable.

This Listening Report brings together the results of all of the above. It also draws on a Living Wage and Low Pay Listening Survey by London Citizens, which recorded the results of listening in Citizens UK member organisations across London; and on the Newham Youth Safety Action Team's Listening Report 2021/2² which reached over 1,000 young people.

Over 1,500 people from Newham have engaged in the process of sharing their stories and in creating this Manifesto.

Our listening findings are multifaceted, both in terms of the range of institutions and walks of life that they cover, and the experiences that they reflect. While some statistical data has been included, we have prioritized the voices and stories from within our community.

On 3 February 2022 we will hold a Delegates Assembly, where we will ratify our campaign areas and formally agree the Asks which we have as an organisation.

On 26 April 2022 we will host a Newham Citizens Accountability Assembly, where we will propose our Manifesto Asks to the two leading candidates for Mayor of Newham.

Please mark these events in your diary!

OUR MANIFESTO

HOUSING

1. We ask Newham Council: Will you commit to having a senior staff member with the delivery of a Community Land Trust in their job description and allocated time for the project?
2. We ask Newham Council: Will you continue to work with Money A+E to provide a suitable site for the Social Housing Learning and Support Centre?
3. We ask Newham Council: Will you hire 'Lived Experience' Consultants (paid at least London Living Wage) to help shape Housing services, so that those with lived experience of the challenges of the housing system in Newham can ensure that services work for residents?

LIVING WAGE

1. Newham Council: Will you commit to creating a 'Lender Agency Vendor Accord' for the Royal Docks? This would ensure that companies on Newham Council land and companies coming into Royal Docks, their contractors and subcontractors, will pay the Living Wage.
2. We ask Jeremy Rees, Excel London CEO: Will you commit the Excel Centre to becoming a Living Wage employer, and to pay a Living Wage to all workers within one year of accrediting?
3. We ask Newham employers: Will you commit to meeting with our colleagues at the Living Wage Foundation, and learning more about accreditation as a Living Wage employer?

YOUTH SAFETY

1. We ask TFL: Will you work with our Youth Safety Action Team to improve the transport system in Newham, to ensure thousands of children across the borough can get home more quickly in the after-school period?

2. We ask TFL: Will you introduce a protocol in Newham, to allow students who forget their Zip cards to still travel if they are in school uniform or have their college card, so they can get home at this crucial time?

Our Commitment: Newham Citizens' Youth Safety Action Team will run workshops, led by young people and delivered across the Newham Citizens membership, that will support young people to use Newham Council's 'journey map'.

The workshops will explore the gendered nature of safety, and support young people to know how to prevent danger and what to do if they see or find themselves in a dangerous situation.

HEALTH INEQUALITIES

1. NHS Commissioners: Will the NHS work with voluntary sector organisations (VSO's) and the local community towards a wholly culturally competent service where people are offered care and support which encompasses their identity, needs and aspirations. Starting with Maternity (Maternal Mental Health) Care, before replicating this across the NHS in east London?

2. NHS and Local Authority Commissioners: Will you commit resourcing VSO's to support new peer support groups, with a particular focus around supporting those from under-represented communities with their mental health?

3. People are left alone and are at risk of going into crisis because of the long waiting lists for mental health support when they can access peer support services while they wait. East London Foundation Trust: Will you commit to working with us to ensure people are signposted to peer support, through a 'virtual waiting room' while they wait for mental health services?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: LISTENING

Housing

Action on housing without a doubt presents a huge opportunity to improve quality of life in Newham. The central theme emerging from our Listening has been affordability, and we note the gulf between private rents and average pay in Newham. Raising the income of those on low pay, through paying a real Living Wage, could make a real difference.

The lack of affordable options is keeping residents effectively trapped in housing that they described as being in a poor state of repair, unsanitary, overcrowded, far from their place work or unsuitable for a host of other reasons. This is weighing heavily on family life and children, who may without space to play.

We learned from our listening that providing the rent deposits and guarantors necessary to move home is placing a further barrier on those who want to move. Not only are deposits high, but our members described fierce competition for tenancies and a process that is marred by racism, ableism and discrimination against tenants who claim housing benefit.

There is also a growing awareness that these pressures are weighing particularly heavily on young people, as they are just starting out in life.

Co-production and the concept of 'Housing Plus' were popular in our focus

group, especially in the latter's potential benefits for young people. Housing Plus involves developments that answer needs beyond just housing, such as training for employment and life skills support.

Living Wage

The issue of low pay is having a huge impact on the lives of Londoners. The most common theme of our listening was family. We heard that people are forced to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet, and the result is that they are spending little time with their children.

We heard that children's wellbeing is affected by seeing their parents less often, and by having less access to quality food.

Our members spoke of the sheer challenge and sometimes the impossibility of covering all bills – food, utilities, transport and rent – as the cost of living rises. Others expressed the desire to be able to save money at the end of the month, to give their children a better life.

Our listening shows that the challenges people face are compounded by precarious work and unpredictable shift patterns. They spoke of the stress of being unable to make plans, antisocial hours, and long commutes.

We were uplifted by stories of what moving onto a Living Wage had meant for employees, and the multiple benefits of accreditation for employers.

People reported increased wellbeing; having access to better food, more spacious housing, and less stress and worry about being able to pay the bills.

But perhaps most strikingly: more time with their families. The difference made in children's lives has been huge.

It is clear that for employers, paying the real Living Wage makes clear business sense. We heard that staff were more motivated and performed better at work. Our interviewees spoke of reduced sickness levels and the ability to build up trust between employer and employee.

Our survey suggests that there are significant opportunities for the cleaning and hospitality industries to improve employee engagement through offering a real Living Wage and more stable working patterns.

Youth Safety

The listening found that among our young people, there is a widespread fear of knife crime, harassment and 'unpredictable people', when on the streets and routes home from school.

These experiences are heightened in winter, and students described the problem being exacerbated by a lack of street lighting. Others spoke of having to wait a long time for buses, or of not knowing when their next bus would be coming, thus increasing the time spent

outside and feeling unsafe.

Improving the local transport system so that young people can get home quicker would make a huge impact.

At present students are not permitted entry to the bus if they have misplaced their Zip Oyster card. We believe it is essential that we work with TFL to change protocols, so that being in a Newham school uniform is sufficient to be allowed to board the bus.

The listening drew out many stories from students who had been witness to antisocial behaviour on buses, such as verbal abuse, fighting and theft. Although this is perpetrated by a minority of passengers, the result is young people feeling vulnerable on their way to and from school.

For the female students, media reports of violence and sexual assault against women and girls had a direct influence on their own experience when moving through public spaces.

They spoke of a sense of uncertainty about what could happen and men's intentions in public. Others described of what they saw as an intersection of sexism and racism in attitudes to violence against women and girls.

Our young people have committed to lead workshops that will support young people to use Newham Council's 'journey map'. The workshops will also explore the gendered nature of safety, and support young people to know how to prevent danger and what to do if they see or find themselves in a dangerous situation.

Health Inequalities

Time and again during our listening we heard about a need for stronger listening skills within the NHS. The most effective care had been that where people had felt truly 'heard', coupled with a more holistic view of the person and their treatment. These experiences were hugely valued.

However all too often we heard that people had felt 'treated like a number' by busy practitioners, and that care had not helped them as a result.

Our evidence suggests that people from racialized communities are receiving poorer outcomes in mental health care due to structural racism. Individuals may encounter stigma and services that do not accommodate for their voices and needs to be fully heard.

Several of our members described being treated differently because of their immigration status. They felt they had not being taken seriously by NHS staff once they had disclosed their immigration status.

It is clear that these experiences of not feeling fully seen and heard had added to existing mental health challenges.

We are encouraging the adoption of a 'culturally competent' model that could be adopted first in Maternity Services, and then replicated across the NHS in east London.

For many of our members, mental health support and treatment from community-led, lived experience organisations is proving highly effective. Shared experience, we heard, results in empathy and understanding any specific cultural barriers around mental health that may exist.

Expanding these peer support networks is all the more crucial in the face of waiting times for NHS mental health care that can be up to 2 years long. During this time we also want to ensure that people are signposted to the peer support available, so that recovery can begin sooner.



Community Organising training with Newham Muslim Forum and Sisters Forum

HOUSING



Members from our Housing Campaign Area present their Manifesto Asks at Newham Citizens Delegates Assembly, Feb 2022

In response to the question:

**If you were Mayor of Newham, what would be the first thing you would focus on?
The #1 answer was 'Housing'.**

(41% of respondents to Newham Citizens Listening survey)

Why do we need to act?

Affordability

'In a borough like Newham, where most of your tenants can't afford private rent, that's a broken model.'

– Greg, Money A+E

Action on housing without a doubt

presents a huge opportunity to improve quality of life in Newham. The central theme emerging from our Listening has been affordability, especially in the private rented sector.

'Whatever I pay for a 1- or 2-bedroom house, it's really, really dramatically high [to the point] that it's unaffordable.'

– Tanzila, Money A+E

The gulf between private rents and average incomes in Newham is already well documented. For example [Newham Council states](#)³ that average rents now represent 65% of average wages in the borough, compared to 30% across the UK.

Listening painted a vivid picture of people's lived experience of this intersection, located between rising housing prices and relatively low pay.

People repeatedly spoke of being trapped in housing that was unfit for themselves and their families, particularly in the private rented sector. Housing was described as being in a poor state of repair, overcrowded, far from their place of work or unsuitable for a raft of other reasons.

'I am unable to live in the borough that I work in because of the high house prices and high rent prices...[This] means that I commute daily to the borough in which I work and has an impact on my family, early mornings, late nights, tiredness of my child.'

– Caroline, teacher, St Antony's Catholic Primary School

These situations are often having a significant negative impact on family life, and even on people's ability to function day-to-day.

Our member organisations feel the burden of picking up the pieces of the housing crisis, whether that be schools for whom housing churn leads to 'pupil churn', or other organisations who are providing extra support for example in the form of money advice.

Question:

What action(s) do you think are needed to ensure that everyone in Newham has a safe, comfortable place to call home?

- More affordable housing
- Affordable rent
- The council to concentrate on affordable housing
- Provision of more social housing or affordable housing for first buyers
- More commitments to build truly affordable housing

(Selected answers, Newham Citizens Listening survey)

Housing is a Living Wage issue

'Employers play a part in this [Housing], with regard to the Living Wage'

– survey respondent

Responses to our Listening identify affordability as the issue on which so many others pivot. But house and rental prices, while undoubtedly out of reach for many Newham residents, cannot be considered in isolation.

'Due to low income [I] am challenged with council tax and property rent.'

– survey respondent

If housing costs are burning the candle of people's budgets at one end, low pay is undoubtedly doing the same at the other. Our members pointed to the rising cost of living, low wages and therefore the need for more quality, Living Wage jobs.

There is also a growing awareness – as expressed by our Housing focus group – that these pressures are weighing particularly heavily on young people, as they start out in life.

'I would like my own place': Omar*'s Story

Omar* is a resident at Caritas Anchor House homeless charity in Canning Town.

'I've been homeless since April 2021. I recently divorced, so I left the house. I was on the streets for three months. I spoke to Newham Council, and they told me they're going to be looking for somewhere, like temporary accommodation, for me. And 66 days elapsed, and then they said that they've no longer got a duty of care – which I found shocking.

Thankfully, Anchor House gave me a call, because I got referred to them. Anchor House is a homeless hostel in Canning Town. I've been staying there for a while. I got a job in the Excel Centre earning, I think it was £9.21 an hour.

If you're living at Anchor House, your housing benefit pays for the rent. But Anchor House has service charges. If you're unemployed you pay about £20 or £18/week. But if you do happen to be in employment, you do get a job, that can rise up to a maximum of £150/week – that works out [at] £600/month in service charges.

If I'm going to earn £9.21/hour, how am I going to pay £600/m in service charges? So I've had to leave work, so I can...pay £20/week instead.

I can't get a deposit to get my own place, I haven't got any money. Also when you are trying to get your own place, you're going to need guarantors. Where am I going to get a guarantor from? Everywhere I look it says, no, no, no: 'No housing benefits, no DSS'. Everywhere you look, you're sent into a corner. And eventually, you just become disheartened.

I can't work, because I can't find a job that's going to pay enough money for me to pay [the] service charge. So I'm just stuck, sitting in a room. I don't know when I'm going to be leaving. I'm a single man who's 33 years old.

I would like my own place...a room somewhere, but even that's become a fairytale. I could have been in a room a long time ago, and I could have earned [from] a job, I could have been paying [for] it myself.

I think there's deep-lying structural problems in the whole housing market, to be honest. I think it needs to change from the bottom up.'



Incumbent Mayor of Newham Rokhsana Fiaz OBE speaks at Newham Citizens Delegates Assembly, Feb 2022

Quantity and Quality

According to our members, poor quality and overcrowded housing is widespread in the private sector in Newham. We heard about homes that were marketed as one-bedroom properties but are in fact studio flats – and whole families living in the space.

People are also facing unsanitary conditions, lack of storage, and flats so poorly insulated that they never feel warm in winter. This is causing stress and anxiety for adults, and affecting the wellbeing of children, who may also be without the space to play.

‘The fridge is not cold enough, it’s not in good condition and there are cockroaches inside. I clean it all the time, but you know it’s not healthy. My

husband told the agency about it many times but they said, ‘you can buy used’.’

– Mrs P*, Money A+E, mother to a 2-year-old daughter, Newham

Our focus group in particular stressed the importance of housing quality as well as quantity. Many group members felt that conditions could be improved by more stringent regulation and enforcement in the private sector, such as stricter fines and revoking landlord licences.

However it was also seen as important that landlords be given the opportunity to improve conditions before enforcement takes place, in order to improve and not reduce the housing stock.



Newham Citizens Asks Workshop,
University of East London, Dec 2021

Question:

How would your/your family's life change if you could live comfortably in the place you call home?

- We would love more stress free it would lessen our anxiety
- Drastically
- Massively
- Security
- It would change drastically
- Peacefully
- It would make life easier to be able to work and have a home

(Selected answers, Newham Citizens Listening survey)

'My priority above everything is to move house': Mr & Mrs P*'s Story

Newham residents Mr & Mrs P* came to the Money A+E Advice service in 2021. Mrs P tells their story.

'My priority above everything is to move house. At the moment we have a 'one-bedroom' flat. But it isn't a one-bedroom flat – it's just one room, like a studio, that we use as a bedroom, as a dining room, for everything. And it's a very small room. I have a daughter of 2 years, she is growing and she wants to play, and this is a very small room for her.

I don't have any cupboards for my clothes. In winter, there are too many clothes – jackets for my baby, for my husband and me. Where can I put them? Where can I put everything?

The main problem for me though is the fridge. When I buy my milk, or something which I should be able to save for two or three days, no – it'll only last for one or two days.

The fridge is not cold enough, it's not in good condition and there are cockroaches inside. I clean it all the time, but you know it's not healthy. My husband told the agency about it many times but they said, 'you can buy used'.

We can't move house because we don't have a deposit. When I called the agencies everyone said that you need one or two months' rent in advance. I don't

have enough money, no savings to give them the advance. This is the problem.

Anna [Money A+E adviser] helped us with Universal Credit. After the rent, it was giving us just under £300 to buy everything for all three of us – for food, for clothing, everything. The council tax is £99.

Anna said that we're entitled to £750/month as a couple, and she's helping us to change the claim. She told us we could make an application and send it to the council [to reduce council tax] and she showed us how to make our other bills lower.

Now I feel good, a little bit. I feel lighter for having talked to you and told everything that is in my heart.

My husband has just been given a cleaning job, and soon they will contact him to tell him how many hours and what is the salary. I want it to be above 30 hours, so it might be sufficient for us to change the house and to live a better life.

A new house is still why I want to save money. Slowly, slowly, I want to save everything I can.'



A Shpresa Programme members shares a poem about her experience, Newham Citizens Delegates Assembly, February 2022

Barriers to access

Even if an individual or household can afford the monthly rent in Newham, our Listening told us that things are not always so simple.

We heard that the cost of the one- or two-month deposits required to rent a new property is putting moving is beyond many people's reach. It should be noted that Universal Credit covers monthly housing costs, but not deposits.

Finding the necessary guarantors can also pose challenges, as does the reticence of some landlords to return deposits at the end of a tenancy. These situations are leading directly to homelessness and to keeping people trapped in unsuitable accommodation.

'Landlords have the option to give you room if they want to, but you also need to have one month's deposit and a guarantor. And obviously [they want] no people on benefits. And so it ends

up: people being homeless.'

– Montse, Money A+E

Our members also spoke of a highly competitive market for private rented properties, that is marred by racism, ableism and discrimination against tenants who claim housing benefit.

When I became homeless in London, I went through employment[-style] interviews, when you have many candidates and you have to choose one. Because of my race, and because I was on benefits...I always end[ed] up without a place to live. So I became homeless.

– Montse, Money A+E

'Everywhere I look it says, no, no, no: 'No housing benefits, no DSS'. Everywhere you look, you're sent into a corner. And eventually, you just become disheartened.'

– Omar*, Caritas Anchor House

'Landlords didn't want to give me a house. And now it's even worse': Montse's Story

Montse Garcia is a debt, benefits and money adviser at Newham-based social enterprise Money A+E. She shares her own experience of homelessness, and that of her clients.

When I became homeless in London, I went through employment[-style] interviews, when you have many candidates and you have to choose one. Because of my race, and because I was on benefits because I could not get a proper job – because of ESOL – I always end[ed] up without a place to live. So I became homeless.

It was so difficult. It was a nightmare, really, because landlords didn't want to give me a room. And now it's even worse! Landlords have the option to give you a

room if they want to, but you also need to have one month's deposit and a guarantor. And obviously [they want] no people on benefits. And so it ends up: people being homeless.

I went through a period of depression. I had to approach the local authorities, and in the end, eventually, I got a place to live. I started to recover little by little, step by step. I started by volunteering with Citizens Advice to learn my rights, my obligations, and to help the community, especially to those from the Spanish community. I progressed, got a job with them...and now I'm here working for Money A+E.

So that's my experience. That's why I always say: I am a community worker in my heart, because I have the experience and knowledge of how to survive through difficult times. I share it with other people.

Landlords now are refusing to give back deposits, and you have to send them to court. That takes at least two months, when you have to move out to another property – where are you going to get the money for the [new] deposit? And you become homeless, of course, because you don't have the money.

I've got many clients in that situation, I've got clients who are homeless, I've got many clients [in the] benefits system. I [think there should be] proper legislation to fix this, to get proper housing, an adequate place to live.

It's difficult but if I can get it, anyone can get it. I'm not special. I'm very committed to sort out my own problems – with help, you know, because I was supported by people at that time while I also fought hard to survive. So with the right help, and with commitment, you can [achieve] whatever you want.'

New Developments

'Slow down the developers and bring back affordable housing. With that comes a diverse community.'

– survey respondent

Our members felt that opportunities have been missed to provide housing that is truly affordable to Newham residents and meets their needs. There is a sense that private developers have – at least in the past – managed to negotiate with the Council to reduce the percentage of affordable or social

housing that they include within their developments.

We also heard that many housing developments in recent years are beyond the reach of most local people. These are understood to often sit empty, especially in the case of the Stratford developments that were built in connection with the 2012 London Olympics.

'We're inner-city boroughs, so we can't have conglomerates coming from outside and buying whole blocks up and

leaving them empty when we've got local people in need.'

– Esther, Money A+E

As well as affordability, the concept of 'Housing Plus' was popular in the focus group. This involves developments that answer needs beyond just housing: such as training, nursery spaces, schools, youth clubs and parking. Our members expressed how much they believe this would benefit local people.



Newham Citizens members, Money A+E

'If you've got ambition, we're here to nurture it': Esther's Story

Esther Iyobebe is a long-time East London resident, and recalls her involvement with the 'Housing Plus' model and foyer system.

'We've got to look at the picture that we're trying to paint, especially for the young ones. Life is getting so expensive for the young ones. And going into that picture: where have all the foyers gone? They should be coming back.

Back in the day, when you had young people, especially those who had come out of residential care like social services, or young people who'd migrated from the sticks like from Nottingham, Luton, wherever, and came down to live in London: there was a gap for single young homeless people. We did have the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCAs) or Young Women's Christian Association, but they were for an older set.

A foyer is a French word, and a French design. [It was] like a hostel that encompassed everything: training, housing, routes into employment, even catering – they would have a restaurant onsite – and some types of sports facilities. Frontline staff would support the young people, to keep them engaged, help them get a direction.

There was a time that England duplicated that. Haringey (I must confess, from my knowledge) was the best, because they had up to 5 or 6 different foyers dotted around the borough. These were renowned for getting young people into university, helping others into work. I think Newham had two that I can comfortably remember.

And then all of a sudden they disappeared, they closed them all down. And I'm not sure why, I don't understand.

But I think we have the know-all to say: 'where have all the foyers gone and why can't they come back again?' Because there's quite a lot of young people still going through those issues in terms of being homeless, needing links into employment, into training.

I know the generation after the foyers, are referred to as the NEET generation: Not in Employment, Education or Training. There's an assumption that every young person is living in a 'hotspot' area and getting involved in petty crime or maybe drug misuse. There's an assumption that every young person doesn't have ambition. And that's what foyers take away. It gives a young person a platform to say: if you've got ambition, we're here to nurture it.

We call it 'Housing Plus': it's not just about housing. We've got to see a 'Housing Plus' kind of a picture. There's a lot of things around housing that you have to put into the equation. And some of it might be with first language or mother tongue speakers; some of it might be with cultural differences; gender issues; religion, faith; or trauma [for those] who have come through the system, through refugee status or migration. There's a lot going on in our communities, more than just housing.

Fast forward to the here and now, basically, it's all about encouraging communities to harness opportunities. Keeping it real and keeping it moving. Knowing that the young shall grow.'

The Community Leading

There is a feeling among our members that at least some of the issues above are already familiar to the key actors in the housing industry such councils, landlords and developers.

Although there was a level of perhaps healthy scepticism about working with these groups, our focus group agreed that co-production would give the best results for Newham – that is, local people being actively involved in planning and delivering developments.

'Imagine if we found the spots [for developments] ourselves...we've got our own antennae in the community. Local people know the sites and what they need.'

– Esther, Money A+E

'It's no longer a matter of saying, this is the problem, because they know what the problem is.'

– member, Caritas Anchor House

Asks: Housing

1. Community Land Trust (CLT)

‘Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are non-profit organisations that develop and maintain affordable homes, community gardens, civic buildings, pubs, shops and other assets on behalf of a community, putting control of those assets into the hands of local people.’ - [London CLT](#)

Community Land Trusts are an ambitious solution to the housing crisis, providing housing that is genuinely and permanently affordable. The price of homes to buy within a CLT is tied to local average incomes now and in the future, and the homes remain under permanent community ownership.

Why is this important in Newham?

We believe that CLTs are a genuine solution to Newham’s housing crisis. They provide affordable, quality housing that is developed and owned by local people. A CLT in Custom House would put people at the heart of housing development in Newham, while building wealth within the borough.

We are working with [PEACH](#), E16 CLT, and the Community Led Housing Hub to secure and develop a site for Newham’s first Community Land Trust in Custom House. We aim to agree on a viable site by the time of the local elections in May 2022. Our Ask is for a senior Newham Council staff member to have the delivery of a Community Land Trust in their job description and allocated time for the project.

We ask Newham Council: Will you commit to having a senior staff member with the delivery of a Community Land Trust in their job description and allocated time for the project?

2. Social Housing Learning and Support Centre (SHLSC)

One of our members, [Money A+E](#), is developing a Social Housing Learning and Support Centre (SHLSC) that will provide 15-30 units of affordable accommodation for homeless young people and care leavers in Newham.

The SHLSC is planned to broadly follow the ‘Housing Plus’ model described above, in that it will also provide wraparound wellbeing support to its residents. Tenancies will be 12-24 months, and in that time young people will be prepared to ‘move on’ and sustain long-term tenancies in the private or social housing sector.

This preparation will include training in essential life skills such as money

management, and in skills for employment combined with connections to local employers and routes into Living Wage jobs.

Why is this important in Newham?

We believe that the SHLSC model is a genuine solution to Newham's housing crisis. By providing affordable, quality accommodation for young people and care leavers, the centre will meet the needs of two demographic groups within our borough who are heavily affected by the cost of living crisis and multiple social welfare challenges.

Their time spent living at the SHLSC will support them to access long-term, stable housing. It will also support them to find quality employment within Newham, building wealth in our borough.

Money A+E have worked closely with Newham Council to co-produce the SHLSC project. Once an unused or under-used site from the Council is proposed, we can launch this supported housing project.

We ask Newham Council: Will you continue to work with Money A+E to provide a suitable site for the Social Housing Learning and Support Centre?

3. Lived Experience Consultants to Council

We believe that those closest to pain should be closest to power, and encourage decision-makers to listen to, and work closely with, communities.

We ask Newham Council: Will you hire 'Lived Experience' Consultants (paid at least London Living Wage) to help shape Housing services, so that those with lived experience of the challenges of the housing system in Newham can ensure that services work for residents?

LIVING WAGE



Pupils prepare to perform their [Living Wage song](#), Living Wage celebrations, Royal Docks, Newham, Nov 2021

Living Wage listening

Our Living Wage listening draws on the results of a London-wide survey that has been completed by Citizens UK member organisations and represents the experiences of approximately 2,550 people.

We also heard testimony from those in Newham who have experienced low pay, including in one-to-one interviews and at our Issues Workshop event in December 2021.

Why do we need to act?

The issue of low pay is having a huge impact on the lives of Londoners.

The most common theme of our listening was family. When people are forced to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet, there is often hardly any time for family life.

'I have no time to be with my children, I'm exhausted.'

– survey respondent

£9.90/hr

UK Living wage

£11.05/hr

London Living Wage

'It affects the Muslim community greatly and has a knock-on effect in Muslim youth. Parents are tired and have little time to be with the kids, to learn English and to take part in our community'

- survey respondent

Our members spoke of the sheer challenge and sometimes impossibility of covering all bills – food, utilities, transport and rent – as the cost of living rises.

We heard that children's wellbeing is affected by seeing their parents less often, and by having less access to quality food.

'Can't support my family'

- survey respondent

'Rents are high...bills are rising; people are restricting their use of transport, and having to make difficult choices around food.'

- survey respondent

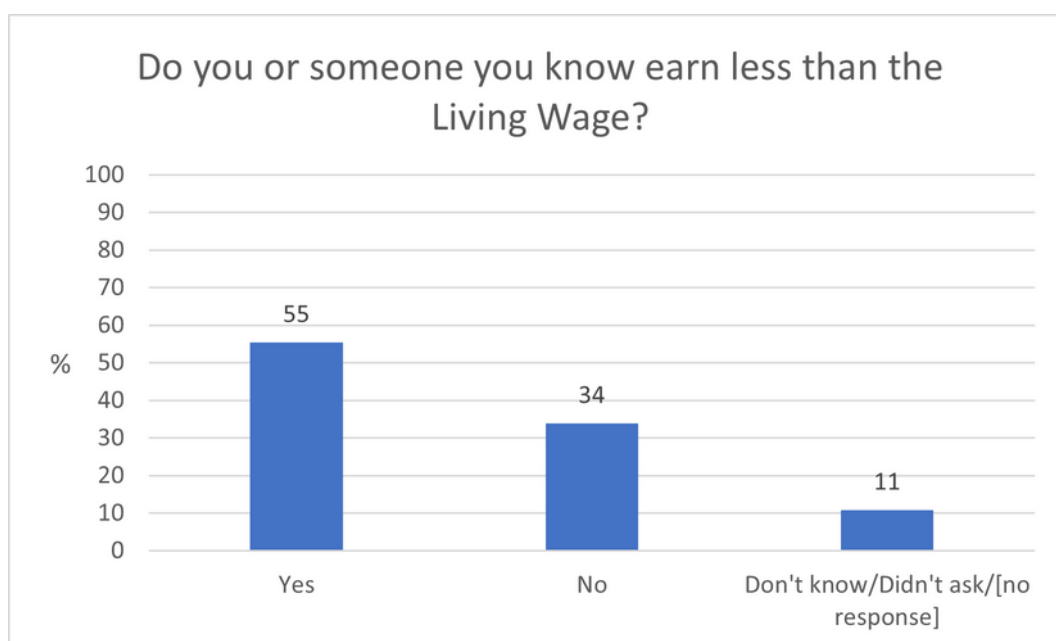
The cost of housing in particular is placing pressure on families when combined with low pay. We heard from families living in homes where the space is nowhere near big enough, and how this is negatively impacting their mental health and wellbeing through stress and lack of privacy.

'Rent is very expensive.'

- survey respondent

'My flat isn't big enough for the kids. The room just has space for the bunk beds... When I come back home I'm not very happy, it makes me feel down.'

- Maria*, cleaner



Results of London Citizens Living Wage survey

Within our survey, 55% of those responding said that they, those they listened to or others within their community earned less than the Living Wage (£11.05/hour in London).

Some members spoke of foregoing family holidays and celebrations due to lack of funds. Others expressed the desire to be able to save money at the

end of the month, to give their children a better life.

'Earning the Living Wage would make many differences in my life. I would invest that extra money in my sons' studies. I never do something like this, because every time there is not enough for saving.'

– Maria*, cleaner

'The Living Wage is really important': Maria*'s Story

Maria* is a cleaner in central London.

'I am a cleaner in accommodation for doctors, students and nurses in central London. I earn less than the Living Wage.

Before Covid I was working 6 hours [per day], then they cut it to 4 hours – but it is not enough, 20 hours [per week]. Last month I started to do 8 hours; my new job is difficult for me but I try it.

Because I study: I'm in ESOL [English as a Second Language], because I want to speak English. I'm happy because now I understand more English, and I don't want to leave the college.

But it is difficult because when I finish the college, I'm going to work in central London. Sometimes I come back home at 1am, because when the underground's closed I get the bus – it's a long [journey]. Then I wake up again at 6am. Look at my eyes, I've not had sleep, I'm tired!

I'm a single mum. Everything at home I need to do like cooking, clean the house, look after my sons. My older son is 19, my little one is 12 now. It's very difficult for me.

Earning the Living Wage would make many differences in my life. I would invest that extra money in my sons' studies. I never do something like this, because every time there is not enough for saving. I want to give something to my sons, but I can't.

And then I have my mum in Africa, I want to look after her. One day, maybe.

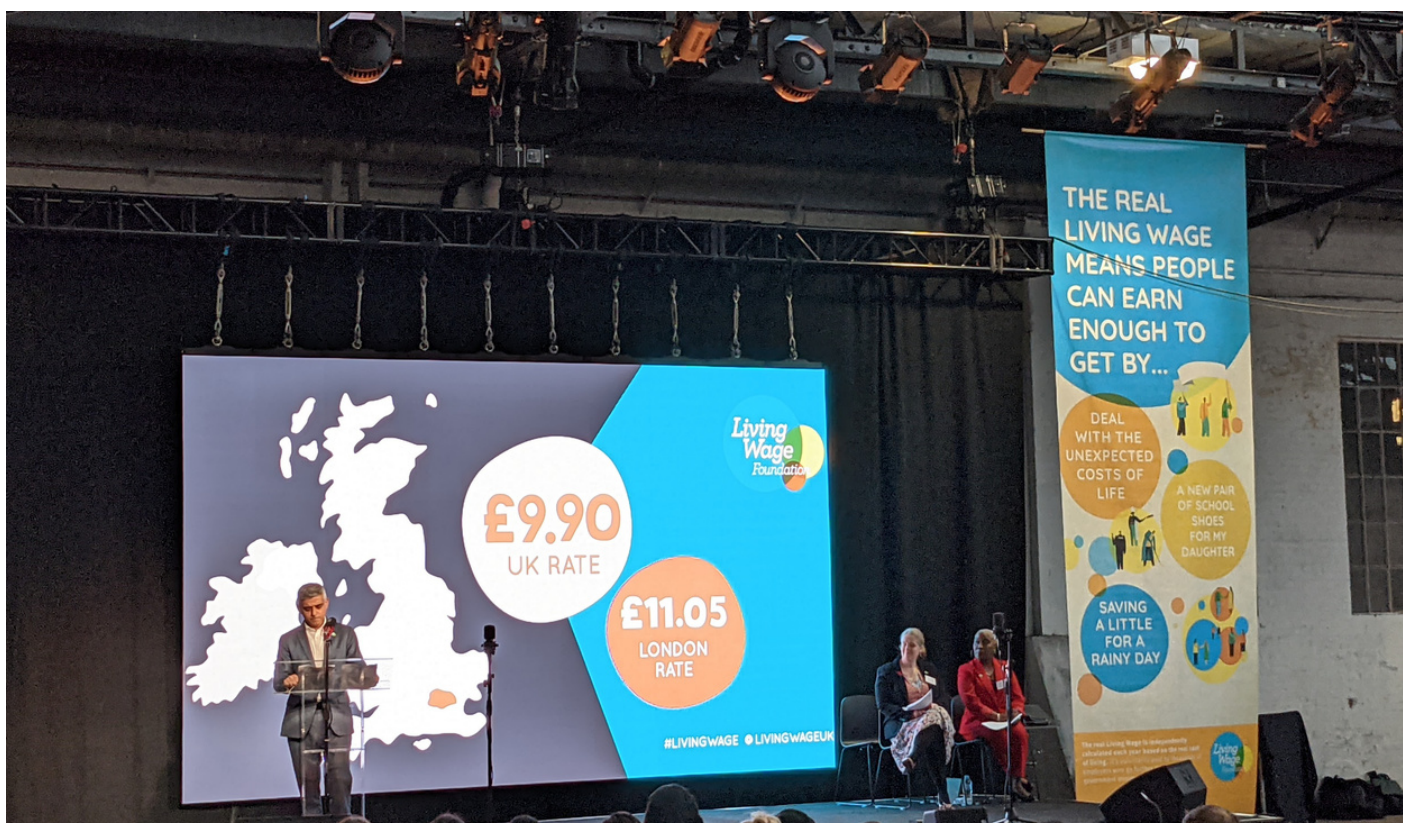
My flat isn't big enough for the kids. The room just has space for the bunk beds. Housing helped me, I have housing benefit. But when I come back home I'm not very happy, it makes me feel down, because a little noise makes my neighbour complain. But is not my fault, it's because the house is old.

Normally when you're working, a priori you can pay your bill[s], because you're working hard. For me, I don't need any benefit if my house is not expensive. I can work for paying my rent, but housing is expensive.

I know maybe 12 or more people in the same situation [as me]. They are cleaners. Many mums, they don't have time to go to school, because [they are] just working, working, working for supporting the family. The first thing is: support your family, not school. I want to speak English, but the first thing is: I want to look after my sons. My future, I put on the back burner.

[One lady I know] was a nurse in Portugal. But she doesn't speak English, she doesn't write English; now she is working in a restaurant washing dishes.

The Living Wage is really important, because many many people are receiving less.'



Incumbant Mayor of London Sadiq Khan speaks at the Living Wage celebrations, Royal Docks, Newham, Nov 2021

Precarious hours

‘Over working is exhausting. There’s no dignity.’

– survey respondent

More than half of survey respondents also told us that they, those they listened to or others within their communities were experiencing zero hour contracts or precarious work.

Precarious work may involve workers receiving their shift pattern less than a week before they have to work, or being obliged to follow an otherwise unpredictable work schedule.

Our members’ experiences suggest that these unpredictable shift patterns are compounding issues of low pay, and presenting multiple additional challenges. First is the difficulty in budgeting month to month that a fluctuating income creates.

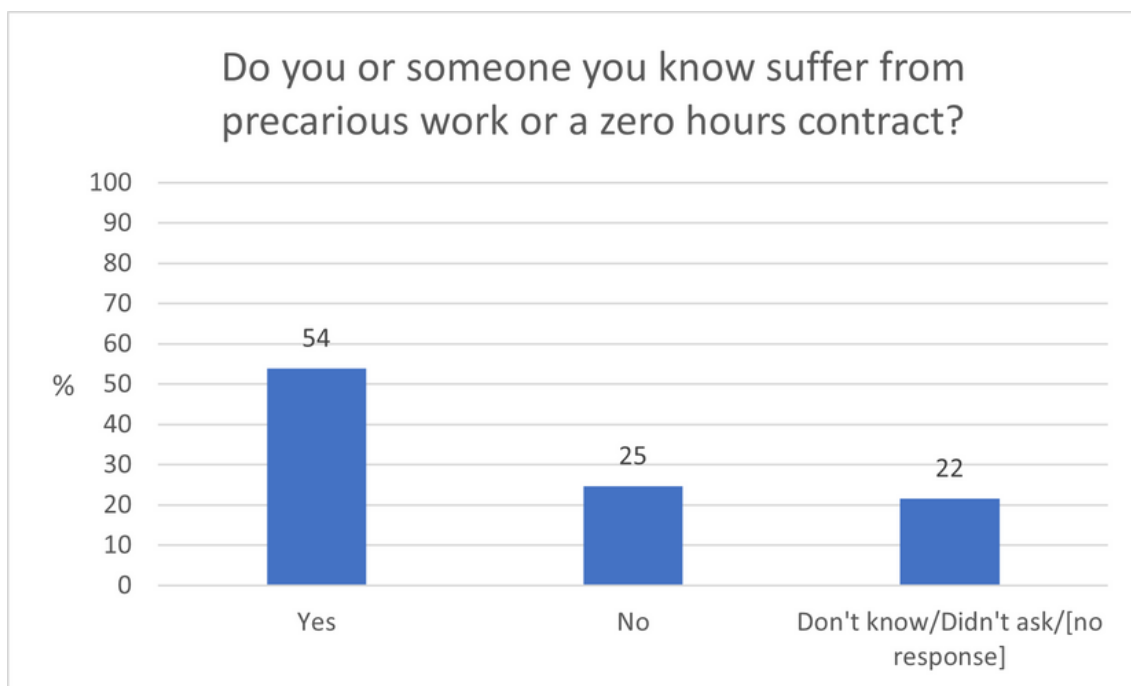
‘Having a stable working pattern would be the best thing that could happen to me. Because I don’t have a stable job, I can’t really save at the end of the month. I struggle to pay the rent, also to pay for my transport.’

– Sara*, cleaner

We also learned that frequent changes – sometimes made at short notice – to working patterns are affecting Londoners’ mental health.

People spoke to us of the stress of being unable to make plans; antisocial hours; and long commutes. It was clear from our listening that precarious work is making Londoners exhausted, anxious and disconnected from their families.

‘It can be stressful...they could tell you that that job’s secure for at least four weeks, then maybe two weeks into it



Results of London Citizens Living Wage survey

they'll tell you, 'no, you've got to go somewhere else'.

'And it's the distance what you've got to travel as well. Because they're not local [jobs], not local at all.'

– Angela, cleaner

Right: The University of East London celebrates 10 years as a Living Wage Employer



'Having a stable working pattern would be the best thing that could happen to me. ': Sara*'s Story

Sara* is a cleaner living in east London.

'Sometimes I have work, sometimes I don't. I've been getting £10/hr cleaning houses. I'm cleaning offices, but they were paying £8/hr. Sometimes they would pay me, sometimes they wouldn't.

I sometimes live off charity; I found some people in the street who helped me with buying groceries. Many times also I go to the charity shops to get clothes.

Having a stable working pattern would be the best thing that could happen to me. Because I don't have a stable job, I can't really save at the end of the month. I struggle to pay the rent, also to pay for my transport.

I live with another lady in a very small room where the walls are damp, there is just a very small kitchen. And one day, we were just one day late with our rent, and we were threatened with being kicked out.

I still live there, because if I go somewhere else, they will ask me...for the deposit, and I don't have that.

If I earned the Living Wage, I would have what I would need. I wouldn't have to worry about the rent, the food. My intention is not to claim benefits, but my intention is to work...if I work I can support myself, I can even save some money or send it back home to my daughter.

I'm in conversation with many others and we share our stories – similar things are

occurring to them. Please share all of what [we] go through. I would like everything to be known through you.

More than anything I would like...that no-one may take our integrity.'

Benefits of paying a Living Wage

'We heard a testimony from a Year 11 student at Newman Catholic College who spoke about the difference that him, his mum and family are experiencing now that his mum has moved onto a Living Wage job after being paid the minimum wage for many years as a cleaner.'

'She takes more pride in her work and can afford to buy essentials such as more food and a desk for her kids at home. The student spoke about how he is now able to spend more quality time with his mum as she doesn't have to work as many hours as before, and how his school work has improved now that he has a desk at home to do his homework and revision.'

– survey respondent, Brent

During our listening we heard stories of what moving onto a Living Wage had meant for employees, and the multiple benefits of accreditation for employers.

People reported increased wellbeing; having access to better food; more spacious housing; and less stress and worry about being able to pay the bills.

But perhaps most strikingly, because people did not have to work as many hours as before, they were able to spend more time with their families. The difference made in children's lives that our members described, was huge.

We also heard stories from employers about the business benefits of paying the real Living Wage. We were told that staff were more motivated and committed, and performed better because they were simply healthier. Our interviewees spoke of reduced sickness levels and the ability to build up trust between employer and employee.

'It is not just the right thing to do, it makes absolute business sense. It ensures that we attract and retain the best and most motivated people...We want good people and the Living Wage is an excellent way of getting and keeping them.'

– Matt Sparkes, Global Head of Corporate Responsibility, Linklaters ([Living Wage Foundation website](#))⁴



Living Wage celebrations,
Royal Docks, Newham, Nov 2021

'You'll see the difference in your workers': Angela's Story

Angela Fields lives in Custom House and is the founder of Custom House Cleaning Co-op, a Living Wage cleaning company.

'I guess it started back in 2008. I was made redundant, couldn't find no work. I was getting offered zero hour contracts, which was no good to me as a single parent in temporary accommodation, [with] the high cost of rent. So roll on a few years to 2014: I accidentally came across an organisation called PEACH, which is People's Empowerment Alliance for Custom House. They was looking to set up a workers' co-op, so I decided, 'yeah, that's what I want to try and do'.

I'd never run a business before, didn't know how to. I spent over 200 hours unpaid: researching, business plan, everything like that. That was in 2014, then 2015 we got our first contract, and it's just gone from there really. I'm quite surprised, I must admit. Most small businesses fail in the first two years, and we're still here seven years down the line.

We have contracts in churches, we have a contract with a printing firm, and we clean PEACH's office too.

I've always been a Living Wage employer, from the start. But being involved in the campaign, I'd only say [I've done that] in the last 2 years or so. I'm part of the Royal Docks Living Wage Campaign now. I think it's really good, that everybody needs to know about the Living Wage.

As a cleaner a long time ago, I was on [about] £6/hour in the City of London. It was in the 1990s, but still very low pay even then. Most of the time, then, the rate of pay was £7, £8/hour. Most of [the jobs] were all through agencies, so the agencies profit.

All these big business, they would go and fight for a big contract, [then] they would subcontract it to get a profit. And that's what most of these big cleaning companies do. Then that's most of the time when you end up with the agency staff.

And they're not reliable, because you won't always get the same cleaner coming in. It's unsettling for the organisation, because it's good to have a familiar face doing the daily job. That's where that trust builds up as well.

It can be stressful [as a staff member]. Because if you're under the agency, they could tell you that that job's secure for at least four weeks, then maybe two weeks into it they'll tell you, 'no, you've got to go somewhere else'.

And it's the distance what you've got to travel as well. Because they're not local [jobs], not local at all.

It can be degrading sometimes, because the [supervisor] may say that you've made a mistake somewhere, but you haven't. They tell you to do it again because it doesn't look clean, but you know you've done it properly, there's no dust there, no mark, no nothing.

The cleaners are willing to do the work. Cleaners are always needed. No matter what industry it is, they always need cleaners.

And with your own cleaning company, you go above and beyond if you know what I mean. So for instance, once a month I will give the kitchens a good [extra] cleanout. And that's just to show our appreciation, that we are who we say we are, we're not just there to earn a wage, we're passionate about what we do. I think that's the big difference.

One of my clients – it's in Stratford in a church – after being with them for 18 months on a cleaning contract, they trusted me and knew me that well, that they asked me to be a caretaker for them. It was going there at 6pm, opening up the church, letting the people in, and then I lock up after them.

I've been with them a long time and they are really nice people. And through Covid they kept contacting me, asking me do I need any food, am I ok. Having that kind of relationship with the client is really good. It works both ways, we trust each other.

I just want to try to get some more people off benefits. It's local work for local people. One of my staff was on Universal Credit beforehand and caring for her brother. When I took her onboard as a cleaner, she's still able to care for her brother, and she doesn't have the job centre on her case about looking for work. That's helped her stress levels.

It is hard work, it is physically demanding. I'd say that sometimes people will look down at you when you say you're a cleaner, but I think...I'm happy with my job, I'm getting a decent wage.

[To employers considering becoming Living Wage accredited] It'll be the best thing you'll ever do. You'll see the difference in your workers. It'd just be great if you could join us.'

Angela can be contacted at angela.fields@customclean.london.

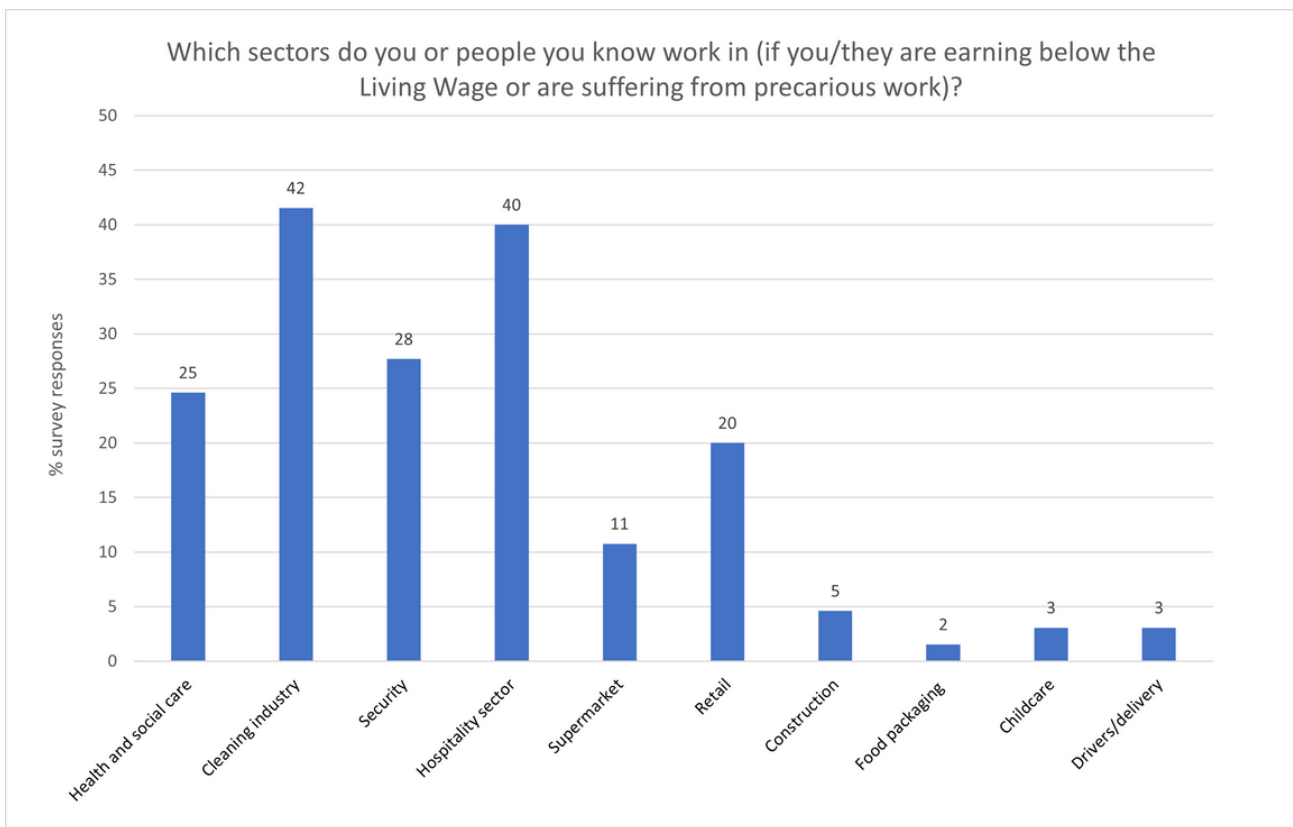


Which industries could benefit from becoming Living Wage accredited?

Our survey suggests that there are huge opportunities for the cleaning and hospitality industries to improve employee engagement, through offering a Living Wage and/or more stable working patterns.

Security and health and social care were also industries where this boost would benefit many key workers.

Left: Living Wage 'Pledges', Royal Docks, Living Wage Week, Nov 2021



Results of London Citizens Living Wage survey

ESOL

‘Single-parent households, earning only one income. Non-English speakers working antisocial hours. Being able to provide for their children. A lot of work and nothing else...Not speaking English is a great barrier to accessing better jobs.’

– survey respondent

An emerging issue from the listening was the role of improving English for many migrant workers.

This was reported as a barrier to accessing better paid, higher quality employment. The sheer hours and hard work required to get by on low pay, our members told us, leave little time or energy for learning.

We heard from Maria*, a cleaner who is managing to fit in ESOL training. This is coming at a great cost to her own wellbeing: combined with her cleaning work, a long commute, and caring for home and children as a single parent, she admits that she is left exhausted.

‘It is difficult because when I finish the [ESOL] college, I’m going to work in central London. Sometimes I come back home at 1am, because when the underground’s closed I get the bus – it’s a long [journey]. Then I wake up again at 6am. Look at my eyes, I’ve not had sleep, I’m tired!’

– Maria*, cleaner

Story of the Living Wage

The Living Wage movement began in East London in 2001; since then nearly 9,000 employers across all sectors have come on board. They include half of the FTSE 100, the Houses of Parliament, Nationwide,

Oxfam, ITV, Chelsea Football Club and Getir.

These employers have found that paying a real Living Wage, as well as being the right thing to do, has had real business benefits. They have talked of lower staff turnover, higher employee engagement and a better bottom line. Staff feel valued so they go the extra mile.

Back in 2001, the national minimum wage was just £3.70/hour. The east London chapter of Citizens UK conducted listening within their communities and heard stories of people struggling to pay for the basics like food, rent and heating. They were barely seeing their children because they were working two, sometimes three low paid jobs. It was clear that something had to be done.

The campaign employed many effective and creative tactics, such as rallies, marches, gigs and shareholder action. Citizens UK called on employers to also pay their outsourced cleaners, caterers and security staff a real Living Wage. Big banks and City firms, east London hospitals and schools were among the first institutions to come on board and feel the benefits of Living Wage accreditation.

We are delighted that in 2021 Newham Council became a Living Wage employer under the leadership of Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz. We celebrate too the Council’s initiatives supporting local employers to become Living Wage accredited, under its Community Wealth Building Agenda.

In November 2021, London Mayor Sadiq Khan launched the London Living Wage Campaign from Newham’s Royal Docks,

ahead of his own administrative move to the borough. This Campaign will see London become a 'Living Wage City' and will put £635 million into the pockets of its lowest paid workers.

More than 4.8 million people in the UK are still paid less than a real Living Wage, and as our listening shows, many in

Newham and London are still struggling to cover the cost of living. There is still so much work to be done and every employer who joins the movement, makes a real difference to people's lives.

Learn more about accreditation from the [Living Wage Foundation](#).⁵



Pupils perform their [Living Wage song](#), Living Wage celebrations, Royal Docks, Newham, Nov 2021

'They are making a tangible difference in people's lives': David's Story

David A-Mensah was one of the earliest campaigners for a real Living Wage. He reflects on the journey and the difference that paying the Living Wage makes for employers.

'We began the journey some 20 plus years [ago], when we encountered families who were basically struggling to live in London. If I may just give you one example. It was a family: the lady was a single parent, had two children, was doing three

jobs. She hardly saw the kids. She saw them after school and left, and hardly spent any time at home.

Now there were three challenges in that. Because she hardly saw the children, therefore what the children were actually doing, she never knew. And this was a lady who could cook, but could not afford to cook. She did not have the time either. The only thing that helped during this period was that they could have school meals, but breakfast they didn't have, it was not the norm for them.

The effect that it had on her was [on] her health, which went down quite considerably, as well as [that of] the children. They were all crammed in a one-bedroom place, with skyrocketing rents. And putting food on the table was a challenge, making sure they didn't go behind on their rent was another challenge.

So, this plight began our journey. Through a listening campaign, we started tapping into those who were in east London, particularly in Newham, to work out: how many people are in the same situation? And it turned out, there was quite a considerable amount of people who were literally 'work-home-work-home'. They didn't have a life, and couldn't have a life. So something needed to be done.

We gathered faith leaders, including myself, and Jewish leaders, mosques, Sikhs. We gathered together and we marched from east London all the way to Whitehall, just to let people know that this is happening, in the midst of the richest place in London, which is Canary Wharf. We just could not understand that. People were blinded by what was around [them].

We began to seek credibility by commissioning Queen Mary University of London, to find out what the Living Wage should be. And then we had to petition first the banks – the big banks.

And how we did that is by buying shares into HSBC. It meant that we could attend their AGM. It was fantastic.

We brought shares on behalf of the lady I mentioned so she could attend one of the meetings, and we allowed her to speak to all the shareholders. And everybody was ashamed that day. And we did it on purpose, because sometimes when you share information second-hand, it doesn't have the gravitas that it does first-hand. So having given this lady the opportunity to speak up, the entire floor began to applaud.

And the other thing that we brought to them is that those who were keeping those offices clean and sanitized, were the exact sort of people that they were paying so little. HSBC were the first to get on board. And of course it snowballed...

KPMG, Barclays, they all began to get on board.

We had a lot of opposition in the beginning. We were told it was something that businesses couldn't afford. But we proved to them that if they paid these workers a Living Wage, the likelihood of them working three jobs was minimal.

It also meant that they'd be more healthy, that the likelihood of them having sickness is less. The moment they began to pay them a Living Wage, their sickness went down, and people began to be more committed to the jobs they were doing. And it meant that they could have a better living standard for themselves and their families. So it was a win-win all round.

Once again I'm going to use the lady I mentioned before as an example. Once she began earning a Living Wage, the health of the children improved. It did on two fronts: one, they could afford to live in a two-bedroom flat instead of a one-bedroom. That meant that the two boys could have their own rooms. It also meant that the lady also had privacy.

But fundamentally they could afford to buy good food. The effect on the kids in terms of their health was just absolutely profound. Their concentration was much better the moment they started having good food. Their wellbeing, how they actually looked physically, was improved.

So, the effect that it has on families: it's profound.

My hope is that the Living Wage will continue to expand. That there'll be more and more companies who'll see the benefit. Not just for the companies, but it's better for the staff, and it's better for society as a whole. They are making a tangible difference in people's lives.'

Asks: Living Wage

Why are these important in Newham?

Our Asks below all aim to increase the number of Newham residents who receive the Living Wage, and as a result are able to access a decent standard of living.

They also aim to increase the benefits of accreditation for employers in Newham. We want Newham businesses to draw upon a workforce that is healthier and more engaged, because that is better for their bottom line and for the local economy.

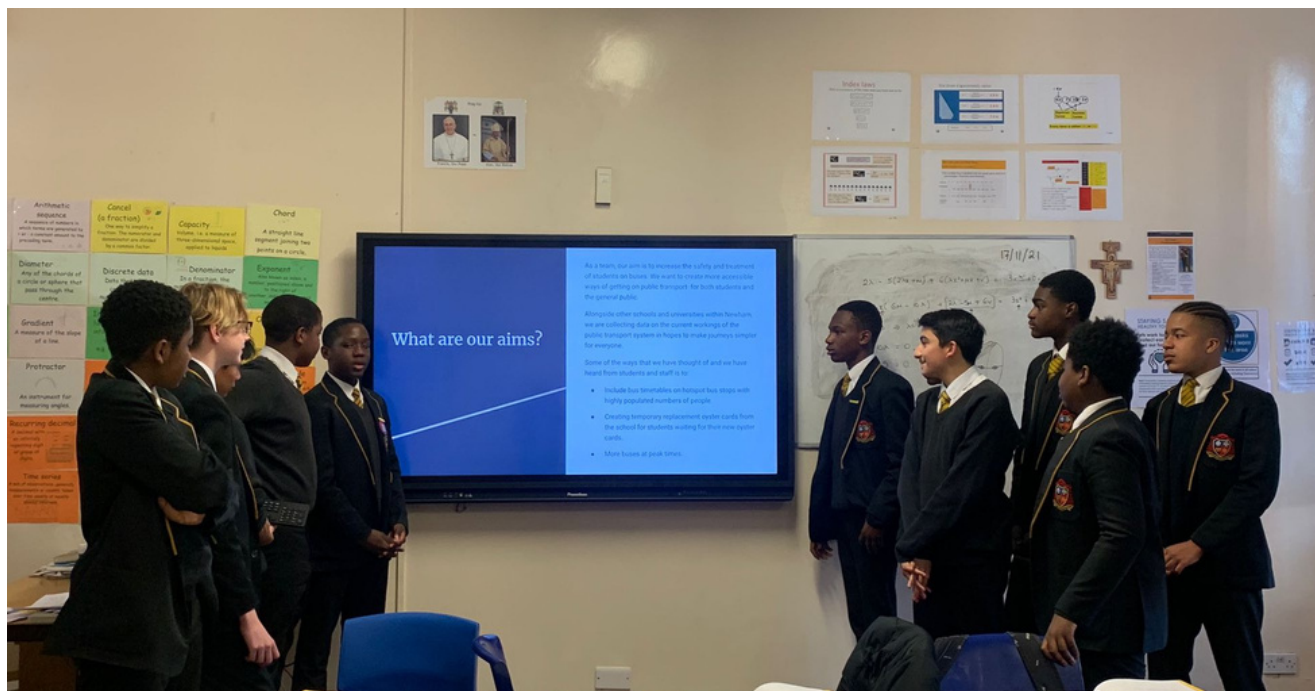
1. We ask Newham Council: Will you commit to creating a 'Lender Agency Vendor Accord' for the Royal Docks? This would ensure that companies on Newham Council land and companies coming into Royal Docks, their contractors and subcontractors, will pay the Living Wage.

2. We ask Jeremy Rees, Excel London CEO: Will you commit the Excel Centre to becoming a Living Wage employer, and to pay a Living Wage to all workers within one year of accrediting?

The Excel Centre is an exhibition and international convention centre in Royal Docks, Newham, one of the biggest of its kind in the UK. The Excel supports over 37,000 jobs, and [nearly 40% of its employees live in East London](#).

3. We ask Newham employers: Will you commit to meeting with our colleagues at the Living Wage Foundation, and learning more about accreditation as a Living Wage employer?

YOUTH SAFETY



St Bonaventure's School students present on their Listening at Sarah Bonnell School

Youth Safety and our listening

The risks to youth safety in Newham are [well-documented](#)⁶, and felt by many of its residents.

In recent years our borough has seen rising levels of knife and gang-related violence, with sometimes tragic consequences for our young people, some of whom have attended our member organisations. We know that all too often they feel unsafe in the areas in which they live, study and socialize.

The purpose of our listening was to hear the direct experience of our young members: about what makes them feel unsafe in public, and how we can work together with organisations such as Transport for London, Newham Council and local businesses, to take meaningful action.

Our listening comprises the results of the Newham Citizens Listening Survey, and focus groups discussions conducted at St Bonaventure's School and Sarah Bonnell School in Dec 2021 and Jan 2022. Students from these two schools and New Vic College also contributed the findings of their own listening work at our public Asks Workshop in Dec 2021.

We also drew on the Listening Report (Dec 2021-Jan 2022) of the Newham Youth Safety Action Team (NYSAT).⁷ We want to recognise the teachers, UEL researchers and students for all their time and energy, and for their permission and contribution to the report. The NYSAT report drew on a survey of 1,037 students from Sarah Bonnell School, St Bonaventure's School and New Vic College in Newham.

Why do we need to act?

Dangers on the route home

‘Most young people have got harassed at least once in their life which is far too common.’

– Sabra, student, New Vic College

The listening found a widespread fear of knife crime, harassment and ‘unpredictable people’ when on the streets and routes home from school.

The young people described a sense of never knowing for sure how others around them might behave, and being vulnerable to harassment or attacks.

‘Gang violence [makes people feel unsafe]. Especially people who have to walk home alone. They don’t feel they’re safe walking down paths that they normally do, because they see lots of people who they think might end up hurting them.’

– Chizaram, student, St Bonaventure’s School

‘You could be walking home from school... it could be dark and you feel unsafe in your area, because there’s a man walking by you, or someone on the other side of the road who you think is following you. It just makes you feel uncomfortable.’

– Student, Sarah Bonnell School

These experiences are heightened in winter, when students may need to walk home on streets that are dark, or to spend time waiting at bus stops that they describe as being poorly lit. Students see more street lighting as key, especially in areas such as bus stops, parks and side roads.

‘In the winter, not knowing what could happen to you – that’s what makes people

feel unsafe. You have no idea what could happen to you.

‘And there are ways that we can fix it, but it’s just about bringing those ways up. It’s just adding street lights.’

– Gabriel, student, St Bonaventure’s School

Others spoke of having to wait a long time for buses, or of not knowing when their next bus would be coming, thus increasing the time spent outside and feeling unsafe.

We would like to work with Transport For London (TFL) to ensure that young people in the borough can get home safely and more quickly in the after-school period.

‘[There have been] occasions where I have waited over 30 minutes for a bus, not knowing when it would come because the stop doesn’t have a timetable, turning what could have been a 15-minute walk into an hour-long journey. [Our] Ask [is] to add timetables to bus stops.’

– Chizaram, student, St Bonaventure’s School

Ask

We ask TFL: Will you work with our Youth Safety Action Team to improve the transport system in Newham, to ensure thousands of children across the borough can get home more quickly in the after-school period?



Above: 'Safety Support' Map created by students as part of Youth Safety Action work, 2021

Boarding the bus

Question:

Please explain what makes you or young people you know feel unsafe when using public transport?

'Drivers not letting youths on if they didn't have the means to pay.'

(Survey respondent, Newham Citizens Listening survey)

Most of the young people we spoke to had a story of themselves, or someone they knew, being refused entry to the bus when they had misplaced their Zip card (a form of Oyster card that allows 11-15-year-olds free travel on London buses). This results in longer walks home, sometimes while in the dark and feeling unsafe as described above.

It is therefore vital that wearing school uniform is enough to allow students on the bus, if they have lost or forgotten their Zip cards.

One student pointed to an experience when he had seen a schoolboy refused entry for not having his Zip card, but the same driver allowed an adult to board when her credit card did not work on the reader.

The young people wanted to help drivers to understand the impact of refusing them entry to the bus, as well as their experiences around public transport in general.

'It's a case of making drivers aware that there are situations that can make children and students feel unsafe, and letting them understand and help them in those situations.'

– Gabriel, student, St Bonaventure's School

'The driver sometimes doesn't let me on': Joshua's Story

Joshua is a student at St Bonaventure's School in Forest Gate, Newham.

'Sometimes after a football match, I have to walk home from school at about 5 o'clock. At this time, it gets very dark especially in winter so I prefer taking the bus to avoid the darkness and cold. At times I don't have my Zip card as I left it in my other school bag. And the driver sometimes doesn't let me on.

For example, yesterday I had a match at Wanstead Flats [local green space] that ended at 4pm and I had [to] make my own way to UEL [University of East London, for Newham Citizens workshop] by 5:30pm. I didn't have my Zip card as it was in my other bag at home but I tried to get on the bus anyway.

The bus driver saw me and asked for my bus pass, and he didn't let me on even after he saw my uniform. I had to walk to UEL by myself in the cold and dark and only barely made it on time.'

Alongside our listening findings sits evidence from [the Greater London Authority](#),⁷ that shows that the hours of 3pm to 10pm on a school day are a 'lost opportunity' in terms of deterring young people from being exposed to criminal exploitation.

Ask

We ask TFL: Will you introduce a protocol in Newham, to allow students who forget their Zip cards to still travel if they are in school uniform or have their college card, so they can get home at this crucial time?



Above: St Bonaventure's students recording their experiences as part of listening work, Dec 2021

Bus safety and antisocial behaviour

The listening drew out many stories from students who had been witness to antisocial behaviour on buses. Although this is perpetrated by a minority of passengers, the result is young people feeling vulnerable on their way to and from school.

Experiences included verbal abuse, fighting, sexualised harassment of women and girls, and stealing from other passengers. Sometimes these incidents involved large groups acting in an intimidating manner, or people who were visibly drunk.

‘There was this thief that took a woman’s item then came on the bus, put everyone in danger and tried to steal this woman’s phone. I had to step in.’

- Ifeanyi, student, St Bonaventure’s School

Young people feel most at risk on buses that are otherwise empty or mostly empty. The top deck is another hotspot, and there is also a sense that drivers are not always aware of antisocial behaviour occurring.

During the listening it was recognised that drivers cannot simultaneously drive the bus and be 100% aware of everything that is going on inside it. The idea of an additional ‘warden’, who would circulate on buses or at bus stops to ensure safety, was popular among the students.

‘When someone enters [the] bus and it is empty you’re most likely vulnerable to getting kidnapped or attacked.’

- Preetham, student, New Vic College

‘On nights on the bus I’ve felt unsafe many times’: Elijah's Story

Elijah is a student at St Bonaventure’s School in Forest Gate, Newham.

‘On nights on the bus I’ve felt unsafe many times, because of other people. There was this one time I was on the bus, I was all by myself, and a large crowd of people [got on], they were a bit older than me, let’s say 16-18. And they were swearing a lot, they were verbally abusive, they were chatting about other people on the bus – mocking them about how they looked, how they spoke.

I felt really uncomfortable and unsafe in that situation, because these guys...the bus driver is not really aware of what happens on the bus, and these guys can really do something to you, and you wouldn’t be able to say.

Bus drivers should be more aware, or there should be someone to be on that bus, maybe the top level – that’s where more [often] the youth are – to watch over, see what happens. Because a lot happens there but the bus driver doesn’t know.’

Time and again young people expressed the view that current levels of CCTV on buses are insufficient, and that as a result people feel 'safer' to commit crimes on crowded buses.

'Most of the time, you can't really see what's happening. Like if someone could be getting harassed at the back of the bus, you wouldn't be able to see it and report it.'

– Student, Sarah Bonnell School

The listening found that the students would like more education on what to do in the event of witnessing or being victim to a crime.

Students told us that, were an incident to take place, they were unsure how and where to report it or of what to do 'in the moment'. They had only recently learned that bus drivers have access to a panic button, for example, and would like such knowledge to become widespread.

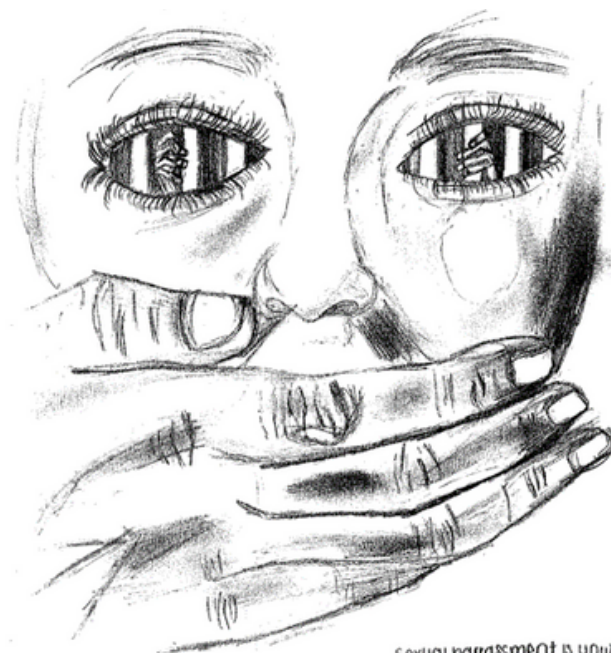
'We don't know what to do in that situation [crime/harassment on the bus]. If we are ever facing that situation, everyone just freezes, we don't know what to do – who to ask, where to go. So I think we should be educated on what to do in that situation.'

– Student, Sarah Bonnell School

Safety for young women

For the female students at Sarah Bonnell School, media reports of violence and sexual assault against women and girls had a direct influence on their own experience when moving through public spaces.

Some girls spoke of feeling inherently uncomfortable around men and boys.



Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of sexual nature which, violates your dignity, makes you feel intimidated, degraded and humiliated, creates a hostile or offensive environment. Victims of sexual harassment can suffer significant psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, headaches, sleep disorders, weight loss or gain.

Above: artwork by a Sarah Bonnell School student

Others mentioned a sense of uncertainty about what could happen.

'[It] makes you more hyperaware of your surroundings, about the fact that if you do see a man, you don't really know his intentions...that can be quite frightening.'

'90% of women have been sexually assaulted, mostly by men.'

'Boys in a group...they're scary.'

- Students, Sarah Bonnell School

The group linked this experience to what they saw as systemic issues, around attitudes towards women and media framing of stories about violence against women and girls (VAWG). For them, 'victim-blaming' reports and attitudes had already had a direct impact, and reduced the likelihood of them reporting crimes.

'The media tends to blame women...they focus on: the woman could have done this, should have done this, shouldn't have stayed out late at night...It should change I think.'

'Many young people like us, we don't report crimes. I think they think...people might not believe us because we're young, we're a woman, and women are too emotional or something like that.'

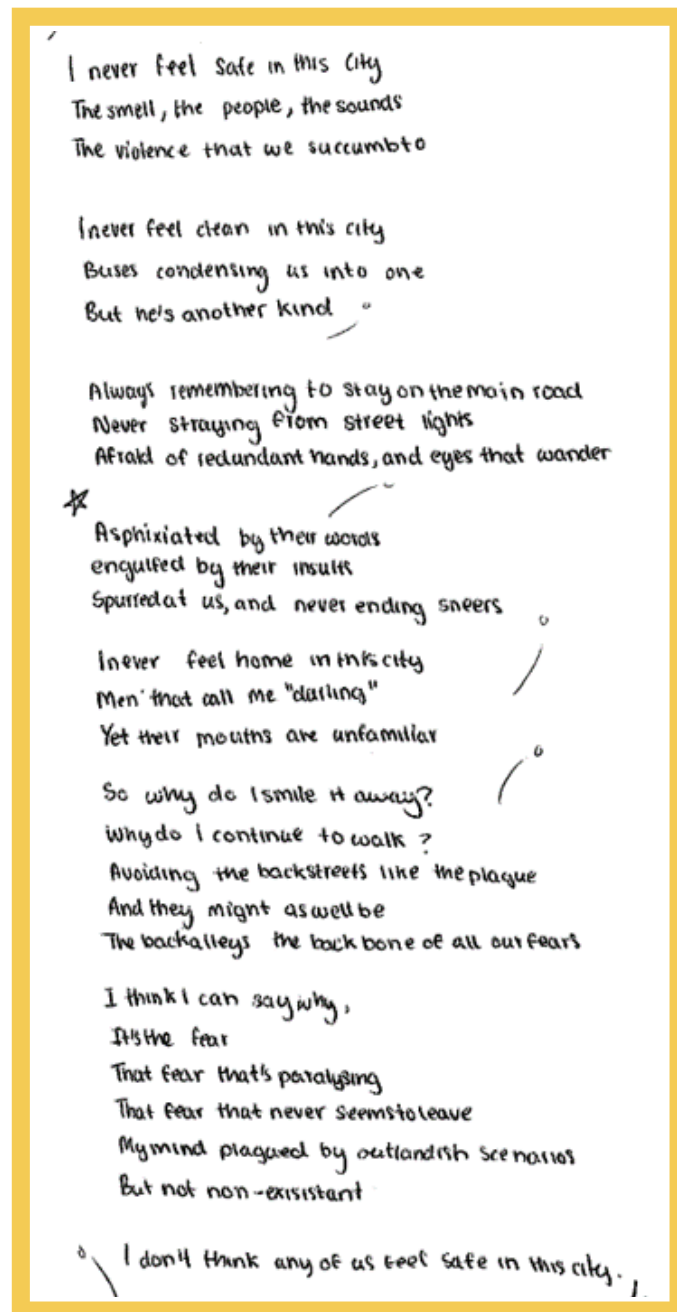
'Stereotypes...about genders, races, social classes, things like that can change people's look on stories. People might say, no-one would ever do that to you, you look like this.'

- Students, Sarah Bonnell School

Other girls in the focus group spoke of what they see as an intersection of sexism and racism in attitudes to VAWG, and the media's relative under-reporting of violence against women of colour.

The girls felt that effective action would include more education for all young people around consent and what constitutes harassment. Ideally this would be delivered to those who have 'lived experience' of the issue in order to be most impactful.

For the girls, sharing experiences was crucial, and they spoke positively of their recent work talking to boys at St Bonaventure's School about youth safety. While this had taken some of the girls out of their comfort zones, they saw huge value in the exercise in terms of raising awareness and changing attitudes.



Above: poem by a Sarah Bonnell School student

'It was really useful. We were coming out of our comfort zones. We're also talking to people who may not understand our issues specifically as women...I feel like it was really useful...to explain, to share ideas.'

- Student, Sarah Bonnell School

'It's about changing mindsets': A Sarah Bonnell Student's Story

'As women of colour, we see it always from that perspective and other people may not... Race for me, and probably for everyone here, race always links back to everything.

Sarah Everard, for example, that was a big one. That was a wake-up call for me. I realised, there's never been that big of a storyline...it led to other thoughts about race and women of ethnic minorities, how come I don't hear as much about them going missing or them being sexually assaulted.

If we're brought out of our comfort zone and so are boys, we can sit down and have a conversation about stuff, how they feel, how we feel...I know it seems a lot about feelings, but you're actually getting somewhere, because you're not just talking about it with a group of girls who all understand. It's about changing mindsets.'

Our Commitment

Newham Citizens' Youth Safety Action Team will run workshops, led by young people and delivered across the Newham Citizens membership, that will support young people to use Newham Council's 'journey map'.

The workshops will explore the gendered nature of safety, and support young people to know how to prevent danger and what to do if they see or find themselves in a dangerous situation.

A safe place to grow up, work, and thrive

Our evidence suggests that young people in Newham would also benefit from the provision of continued and expanding job, apprenticeship and work experience placements. Students at all three schools surveyed by the NYSAT team mentioned routes into employment, when asked what matters most in terms of keeping them safe and for brighter futures.

'Employment for youth, increasing the minimum wage to London Living Wage... offering more work experiences and apprenticeships for youths, offering youth clubs.'

– survey respondent, student, New Vic

We want all young people to flourish, and action has never been more important as

Question:

How could we all ensure we continue to make Newham a safe place free from harassment to grow up, work, live and thrive in?

'Education after leaving school for youths with better pay.' – survey respondent

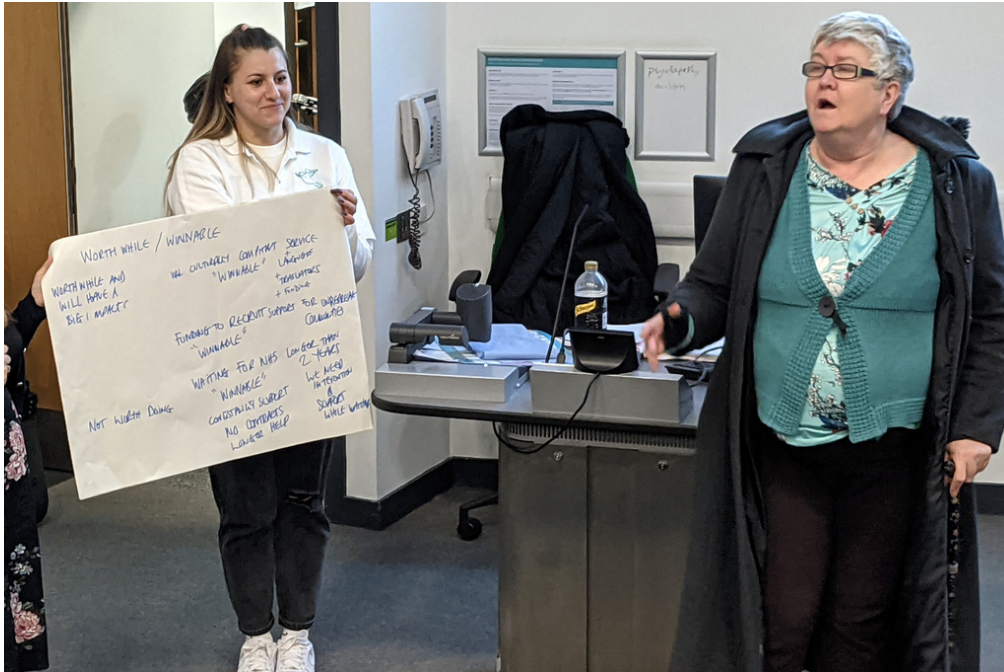
(Survey respondent, Newham Citizens Listening survey)

we live through the youth unemployment crisis [currently affecting young Londoners](#).⁹ It is essential that we continue to work together with businesses, to expand paid work experience placements and sustainable routes into employment for young East Londoners.



Above: Listening with Sarah Bonnell School, St Bonaventure's School and New Vic College students

HEALTH INEQUALITIES



Members from our Health Inequalities Campaign Area
at Newham Citizens Asks Workshop, Dec 2021

Why do we need to act?

The importance of being ‘heard’ and mental health stigma

‘You need care and love as well [as medicine].’

– Mind member

The results of the Health Inequalities listening highlighted just how far a positive relationship with practitioners is essential for mental health recovery and treatment.

Our evidence suggests a mixed picture in terms of our members’ experiences.

Time and again we heard about a need for stronger listening skills within the NHS. The most effective care had been that where people had felt truly ‘heard’,

coupled with a more holistic view of the person and their treatment needs. These experiences were hugely valued by participants in our focus group.

‘This particular psychiatrist made me feel really at home. We used to not just talk about my issues, we’d also talk about games, books and all that, so it made me feel really safe.’

This doctor made me feel really, really strong about my mental health, and he showed me really good methods to cope with mental health in a funny and realistic way.’

– Ryan, Mind member

However, all too often we heard that people had felt 'treated like a number' by busy practitioners, and that care had been less effective as a result.

The listening also brought out stories of multiple changes of therapist, or of therapy being cut short before the person being treated felt they were ready.

'They don't treat you like a human, they're thinking: who are you going to complain [to]? Who will listen to you? Because you have a mental health issue.'

– Samina, Mind member

Members mentioned the challenge of explaining their situation fully within 5-10 minute appointment slots, or of having to recount their mental health history from the beginning each time they encountered a new practitioner.

'Some people may know what it is they're going through, and actually know what stages they're at, and need deeper investigation...but they go back to the beginning, and they keep on going back to the beginning.'

– Laura*, Mind member

Our evidence also suggests that people from racialized communities are receiving poorer outcomes in mental health care as a result of structural racism.

Individuals may encounter stigma, and services that do not accommodate for their voices and needs to be fully heard.

'There's over-medication of Black men. And I think [that] the voice of Asian women, Muslim women specifically is muted. The way that they're treated in the healthcare system doesn't encourage their voice to be heard.'

– Joanna Boldeau, Mind in Tower Hamlets & Newham

There was also a sense of generalised discrimination against mental health within the NHS.

'Everyone needs more training. The NHS needs more training...If [you] go to hospital with a physical problem, and they see you've got mental health on your records, they look at you completely differently.'

– Pamela, Mind member

'I've always self-diagnosed': Laura's* Story

Laura* is a Mind in Tower Hamlets & Newham Peer Support group member. She shares her story.

'I noticed there was something going on with me at the age of 19/20 – there was quite a lot of anxiety. I had a traumatic experience when I was much younger. From time to time I have flashbacks and so forth, and [I've] expressed it to the doctors. I'm now 50-something, I've been going to the doctors for 30, 40 years, and it is [only] now that someone says, 'oh, I think you're suffering from complex PTSD.'

I've been going to therapy for many years, and I've always self-diagnosed. I've had to wait sometimes 6 months, sometimes longer than that, just to get something like 12 weeks of therapy. I'm yet to get counselling for the PTSD, or even get [officially] diagnosed for it.

I've had talking therapies...it's kind of patronizing, [as if] you just don't know what you're talking about. I have an understanding of what it is, I've had to live with it. So now that I'm telling [them], I want [them] to take that on board and hear what I'm actually saying.

I went to a counselling place, [back when] I didn't understand what was going on with me. I said to [the counsellor], 'I think I'm suffering from anxiety, I don't have any confidence.' The lady, she looks at the next person, [and] she says, 'Ah, she's got enough confidence.'

So that put me off, and set me back quite a long time. I didn't understand why she behaved the way she behaved.

I've had this idea in my brain for the longest time...it was really just training people to listen. Training people with basic counselling skills. Just to be able to reflect, to bounce back, because people just want to be listened to when they're going through crisis.

And of course, with listening skills, you have to have someone that's non-judgemental, because we've got [such a] diverse range of people. And people are very judgemental based on what they may pick up off the news, or their personal opinions. Just to have that understanding of: don't bring whatever it is that's outside into the listening arena.

What has been good is when I've had someone who doesn't really think about the medical model. Who can give you complementary therapies and advice other than: 'take a tablet'. I'm speaking about a doctor I had...[who was] listening to what I needed and giving me other alternatives. That's a good thing.'

Mental Health support for under-represented communities

The listening heard that for many of our members, mental health support and treatment from community-led, lived experience organisations is proving highly effective.

Members spoke of the value of receiving support from their own community and in their first language. Shared experience, we heard, results in empathy and an of understanding any specific cultural barriers that may exist around mental health.

Individuals also spoke of becoming more reliant on these services due to negative experiences within NHS mental health care and long waiting times.

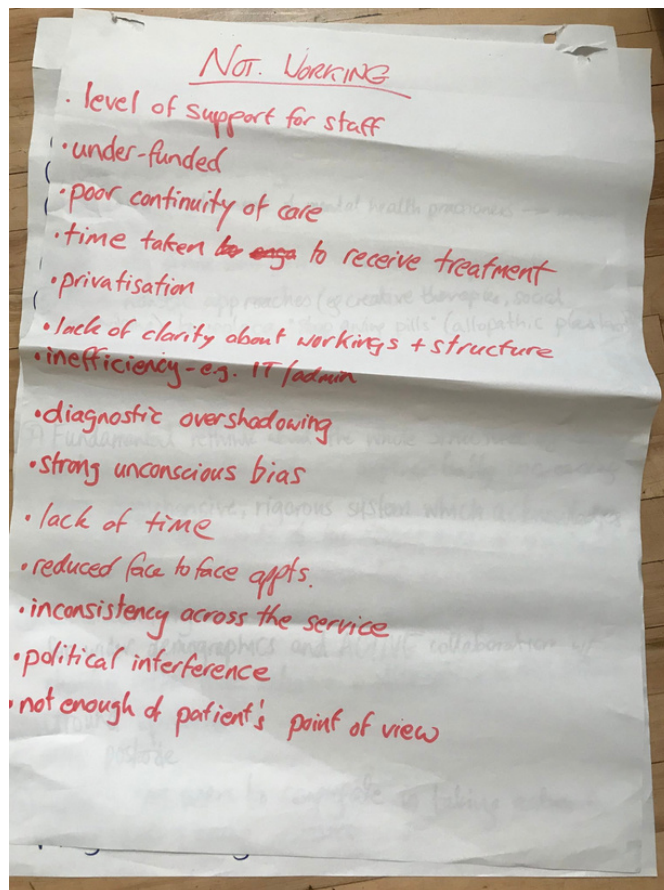
The [Shpresa Programme](#), for example, is supporting women from the Albanian Speaking Community (ASC) in Newham with their mental health, through group sessions led by an Albanian-speaking psychotherapist. The service is heavily over-subscribed at present.

[Mind in Tower Hamlets and Newham](#) runs a Peer Support programme, that trains those who experience mental health challenges to become leaders and support others. Members have spoken about the positive impact of this programme for their mental health.

'Coming to Mind is really helping me.'

– Resna*, Mind member

We propose that there is a huge value in growing the impact of these services, and that doing so could potentially result in cost-savings and social return on investment.



Listening session notes

We ask the NHS to commit resources to new peer support groups, with a particular focus around supporting those from under-represented communities with their mental health.

'Community organisations to give the first help in our community': Ledi's Story

Ledi Lala is a community worker who supports women at the Shpresa Programme in Newham.

'We work with the Albanian community at Shpresa. And we try to offer support in regards to mental health. We know how wide this topic is and how the help is very little for our community, in part due to the barriers that there are: language, [and] stigmatisation of our community for the mental health.'

In our community it's very stigmatised, and people find it so hard to talk about mental health because they will be prejudiced [against]...It's a [source of] shame.

So for our community, it's really hard for the person to initially accept that he needs help. And getting help is another big problem. What I would say [is needed] is more funding, for NHS to work with community organisations. For the community organisations to give the first help in our community.

Our women receive mental health treatment and support in their own language, [but] it's so hard for them to get it in the same way in English...or with translation, but it is very difficult to get translation. Even with translation, it would not be the same.

At Shpresa, we offer some mental health support with an Albanian psychotherapist. But we have a very long waiting list, as people find it easier to talk in Albanian...rather than wait for months on an NHS waiting list.

It's 6 weeks [of] sessions, in group, but the ladies need much more than that. They need one-to-ones, they need longer sessions. If there is more funding, it would probably work best.'



The focus group also saw great value in training community and faith leaders, so that they can deliver support effectively in community spaces and places of worship.

Left: Listening session at Mind in Tower Hamlets & Newham

'People trust the imam, they trust the priest': Resna*'s Story #1

Resna* is a Peer Supporter at Mind in Tower Hamlets & Newham.

'I think because of cultural and religious barriers, communication-wise, I think [we] should have something in place where [people] can go into mosques and talk to the imam about certain things about their mental health. And the imam can refer them [to support services].

When people go to pray, the first person they turn to is the imam. People trust the imam, they trust the priest and they go to that person, because of their religious belief.

Some people are afraid to talk about their mental health. [They feel that] they're either going against their family or their religion. If there's someone in place to reassure them, that might help them to speak up openly.

I'm talking about my and my family's experience. I feel like they've not been able to openly talk about [mental health]. If people are more educated, if they go to people that they trust, then they'll openly talk about the kind of help that they need, and then they can get the full help.'

Immigration status and NHS mental health care

Several of our members described being treated differently within the NHS because of their immigration status.

They told stories of not being taken seriously by staff once they had disclosed their immigration status, and of not feeling 'believed'.

For some individuals, this experience of not feeling heard had added to existing mental health challenges. Others had disengaged from NHS services, and were instead relying on their local community organisations for support.

'People throw you like a football – here, there – because of your status... So this is making a very big impact on people's mind and mental health.'

– Samina, Mind member

It is therefore essential that we work with NHS leadership to ensure staff are trained to better understand immigration statuses and processes.

Members of our focus group believed that this could avoid a repetition of their experience – that is, a sense that some practitioners believe that they 'came here just for immigration' (Shpresa member).

The listening also revealed some cases where asylum seekers had struggled to register for a GP because they were sofa surfing or living with friends, and did not have the bills in their name required for registration. This had resulted in them not receiving treatment for (mental) health issues.

'I am an asylum seeker before - now I have my status. And I live with my friends, but I have just the card from the Home Office...nothing in my name. The bills, or the contract of the home - nothing...

And I have a lot of problems in [the] GP to register, because they ask me [for] bills...if you don't have bills, they don't register you in GP.'

- Member, Shpresa Programme

Our members expressed a desire for the NHS and Home Office to work together to verify people without a need for physical proof, so that they could register for a GP.

'He has severe problems with mental health, but he has never seen a doctor. Just because he doesn't have a Home Office ID, he doesn't have a proof of address... He doesn't have accommodation but that doesn't mean that he shouldn't have the right to get NHS treatment regarding his mental health.'

- Ledi Lala, Shpresa programme, on her client who is an asylum seeker and is sofa surfing.

' When you talk about your [immigration] status, they don't take you seriously anymore': A Shpresa Member's Story

The Shpresa Programme is based in Newham and supports the Albanian Speaking Community in the UK. One of its members shares her experience.

'I've been here in London about seven years, and I did three times with a talking therapist. The first one was after I had my son...I didn't know how to talk, and they bring me [to] a talking therapist, [with] a translator. When you say...I have this problem, and when you talk about your [immigration] status, they don't take you seriously anymore.

In eight sessions, they change me three times the talking therapist...And when I go and talk with the doctor, all the time he said just, 'You need to take the depression pill, depression pill.' When I take them I feel sleepy all the time...I see my son but I don't have energy to do anything. I stopped taking the depression pill, and I stopped asking the doctor to have the talking therapy. I don't want to go anymore.

To be honest...I have more stress than before when I go to talk with them. When I look at them, they look like they don't believe [me].

I'm feeling more comfortable to speak with my association...because my people can understand me very well. Because people say to me, oh you are from Albania, you have all this one story – but it is not one story.

Everyone's story's different... We came here because we have this problem, that's why we are here. So usually when we say [it is] that problem, we have really that problem.

I have my story. For that reason I come here with my son, to have my rights, to protect my rights.'

Accessibility and 'medical passports'

Members suggested that NHS services could be made more accessible, through providing the NHS website and printed communications in different languages including sign language, and in Easy Read; and by adding a 'read aloud' function to NHS webpages.

Listening also brought out the idea of a 'medical passport' for mental health.

This would be a type of digital record, subject to different levels of access as appropriate to protect confidentiality, that would include all of an individual's mental health history.

The medical passport could be designed to avoid the necessity of recounting the latter at appointments or during crisis, and could also be useful for those facing language barriers.



Newham Citizens Asks Workshop, University of East London, Dec 2021

'A lack of access to [health] services because of structural racism': Joanna's Story

Joanna Boldeau is Operations Director for Mental Health Services, Mind in Tower Hamlets & Newham. MITHN has been working to become an anti-racist organisation. She shares her experience.

'Anti-racism work has always been part of Mind in Tower Hamlets and Newham. 70% of our clients are from diverse backgrounds and racialized communities. This is about how we became intentional about it as an organisation; as an organisation saying: we are going to stand up for people who face marginalisation, and we will influence for change.

It was due to the pandemic, and also because of the murder of George Floyd. The frustration, the sadness that internally, [our staff] were experiencing. We did a listening campaign with staff around racial injustice. It was about [creating] a safe space for staff who've experienced racial injustice, to share their own personal experiences if they wanted to. And for colleagues to support and to listen.

It was a powerful experience. Some of it included health, some of it included employment, some of it included childhood trauma from racial discrimination. I think listening is the biggest place to start. Across the board, but even more so for racialized communities who don't feel heard.

In terms of race and identity, people who are from Black or brown communities will face even more stigma and lack of access to [health] services because of structural racism.

Unfortunately, the experience that we find that clients have is that it's dependent on who they see. So there are good staff, there may be a good psychiatrist, but there are many that don't listen to them and that's a common thing.

I used to do support work, and I have the experience of going to a meeting with a client who would like to have their medication reviewed or would like to have access to some alternative therapy. They go into the meeting and this [other] person holds the power. When you understand marginalised communities, [you know that] if you are the person that holds the power, they will automatically discount themselves from access to you.

The data shows that mental health is more likely to be criminalised for Black people. They are twice as likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act. And

voices of BAME women can be muted, the way that they're treated in the healthcare system doesn't encourage their voice to be heard.

We've developed a specific project to reach into communities who are seldom heard, and work with them to develop their own unique ways to access support and to engage with their mental health and wellbeing. We've been doing a lot around spirituality and mental health, through our work with the Newham Muslim Forum and local mosques in Newham; faith is also a help in someone's recovery.

One of our clients wanted to share their story about being Black and trans, and their experience...when they were sectioned and on a mental health ward, the impact of the staff not calling them by their preferred name. The lack of understanding about the care that, as a Black person, they needed for their hair for example, or the lack of acknowledgement of how racism impacted on their mental health, hindered them from recovering quickly.

We talk about culturally competent staff. I think when we look at competencies... we need to review the way that we value skill sets.

If you've gone to a prestigious university, that's almost like the top of the hierarchy when it comes to employment and [recruitment]. But actually, people with life experiences...bring skills of equal value to a role, alongside somebody who has only gone through the education system here and has a first-class degree. I think that's something across the NHS that they haven't yet factored in.

We almost expect staff to step forward for senior positions, but actually, how do we mentor them? How do we encourage leadership in them? How do we raise their voice so they see themselves in a role? Because sometimes they won't see themselves in that role, they write themselves off.

You see so many staff in healthcare and social care, where black and brown staff are the frontline and they're not represented at a senior level, where decisions are made. And I think if you encourage leadership within your teams, you'll encourage leadership within your clients. It has that ripple effect.

If your staff team are well taken care of, they're supported, they're valued: you have a high functioning service. People that walk through the door feel valued and supported, and they see themselves in that service.'

'I was alone in my thoughts and decisions': Resna's* Story #2

Resna* is a Mind in Tower Hamlets & Newham Peer Support group member. She shares her story.

In 2001 I was placed in a temporary accommodation in Newham. I reported emotional distress to my GP and she prescribed me with anti-depressants. After three weeks I was about to be taken to Bangladesh; I informed my GP. She prescribed me with 3 months of anti-depressants, even though she knew I was feeling suicidal. The medicine was not given a follow up-plan or a review.

I was jetted off to Bangladesh with my three months of anti-depressants. I took more than the recommended doses because I was so unhappy. I felt that I lost the battle with my family and gave in to marrying someone they chose. I was mostly unconscious because of the medicine I was taking too often.

I came back to the UK, and every visit to my GP was always for 10 minutes and occasionally 20 minutes, which made it hard to explain exactly what was going on with my situation and to be able to trust and speak openly.

I was rehoused in permanent accommodation in Tower Hamlets. My husband joined me from Bangladesh and later we had a child.

Social services decided that it would be a good idea for me to take a respite [break], and they took my daughter away from me and put her into care. I did not want to consent to this, but they threatened to go to court and have her removed.

It was such a hard time, my mental health was constantly scrutinised, I was constantly scrutinised. There was no support, just judgements after judgements. I was alone in my thoughts and decisions.

I tried to tell my GP everything but I feel like they let me down. I wasn't happy with how my daughter was being treated in foster care, I separated from my husband and my family did not support me. In fact I felt like they turned against me, and used my mental health to undermine my capabilities as a mother.

In a nutshell, I felt like no-one at the time wanted to take my case seriously, because it seemed a typical Asian honour-based story. It felt like they didn't want to get involved, I was taking up too much of their time.

Eventually, I stood up to everyone after I became so overwhelmed with the

criticism. I calmly yet firmly told each and every person who tried to bring me down, not to judge my capabilities as a mother, a woman, a Muslim Bengali.

I've found Mind and coming [here] is really helping me. Now I look back and I think: I was not just speaking for me, I was speaking for everyone in my situation. I want things to change, I want everyone to be listened to and taken seriously.

Waiting times

'If we had funding we could offer support to people while they wait on waiting lists.'

– Ledi Lala, Shpresa Programme

Our evidence suggests that it is common for people to be waiting 6 months, 18 months or even up to 2 years for mental health treatment in Newham and east London. This is without a doubt exacerbating the mental health challenges that they face.

'I remember...I went to the doctors and said, if you don't help me, I'm going to go and commit suicide. And waited 6 months for help.'

And that's why the suicide rate is so high. The suicide rate is through the roof because of the waiting times...

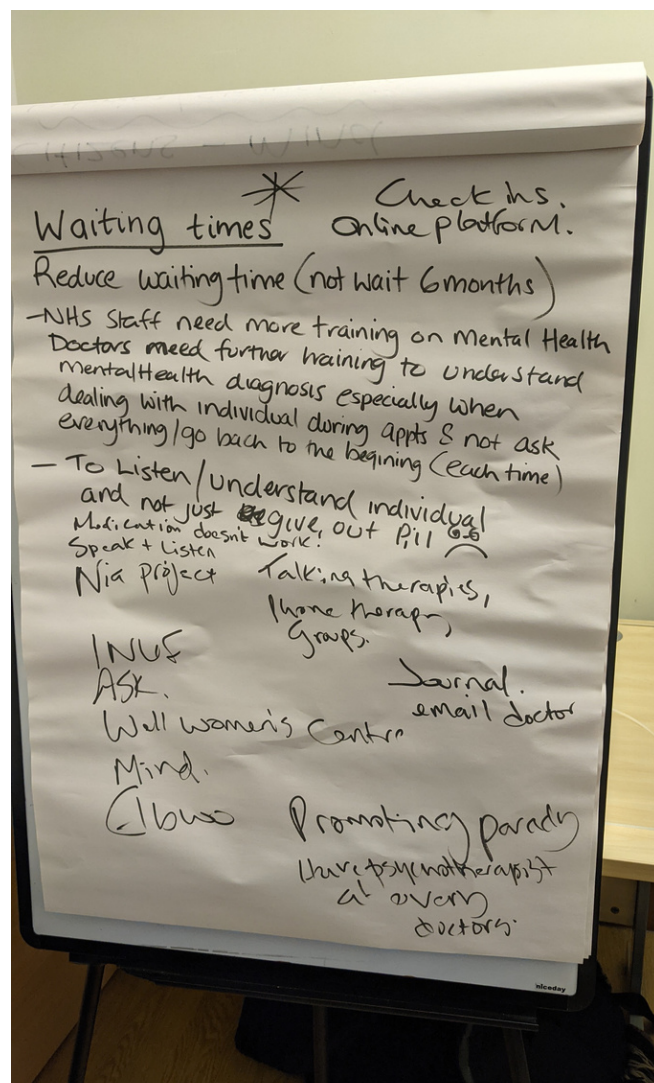
What you have to understand about any form of therapy is that, it only deals with one layer at a time. It's like peeling an onion, you have to keep just peeling the layers off. But each time you want to go back for help, it's an 18 month - 2 year wait now.'

– Pamela, Mind member

In some cases, people are self-diagnosing or relying on their own research into treatment and self-care.

'I go to the library to search for books... what is good for mental health? What is wrong? And to understand myself: what do I have to do? This is more quick [than waiting for NHS support].'

– Mind member



Listening session notes

Long wait times make lived experience and community-led services, such as those described above, all the more essential. They are already being heavily used, and relied upon to provide interim support, therapy and community.

'For an [NHS] OCD appointment, there's about a year waiting list. I thought to myself: I need to take [things] into my own hands, so I go to [peer-led] OCD meetings.'

– Ryan, Mind member

It is clear that there is huge potential for the NHS to connect with services such as Mind and other local providers, in order to ensure that people are routinely offered these forms of support during waiting times. The benefits of doing so are clear.

We see huge potential in local peer support services coming together with GPs or other NHS practitioners, for example through inviting the latter to attend support group sessions. This would provide mutual awareness and information that GPs could provide to patients who face long waits.

'In my last GP, she told me about Mind. Because of them I'm alive.'

The GP...gave to me the Mind number, and she provided me with some acupuncture. This kind of thing is very good for mental health.'

– Samina, Mind member

'The best experience is the one that you've lived': Ryan's Story

Ryan is 22 and has recently completed Peer Leadership training with Mind in Tower Hamlets & Newham. He is also involved with the football and mental health charity Kick It Out.

'About a couple of years ago now, it was really difficult, I was going through a really bad time with my mental health. I think I had something like five suicidal attempts within the space of two months of each other.

My OCD became really, really bad. I didn't see any way out, I didn't see any way forward. And I thought, I just can't do this, and I got admitted to hospital because I'd done an overdose.

In the end I got admitted to NHS psychiatrist appointments. It was really helpful. I met someone who was able to understand what I was going through, and I liked the psychiatrists that talked to you on a human level.

And this particular psychiatrist made me feel really at home. We used to not just

talk about my issues, we'd also talk about games, books and all that, so it made me feel really safe. This doctor made me feel really, really strong about my mental health, and he showed me really good methods to cope with mental health in a funny and realistic way.

For example with my OCD, he would always joke about with it – [but] not in a bad way. Like for example when I used to say to him, 'I've got something else', he'd say, 'Oh not again, Ryan! I'm sick and tired of it!' In a jokey way, and I'd see [it] in a jokey way. And it was really lovely.

[Then] the NHS just seemed to cut me off. At the time I got a text. Almost as if they assumed that because the course was going ok, they assumed that I was well enough when I wasn't. It was really hurtful...it just feels like: I've just built up a good momentum, and now all of a sudden I've been tossed aside like yesterday's garbage.

It just makes you feel more suicidal, because it feels like – if the NHS ain't helping you, who is going to help you? I actually went back into a psychosis and mental breakdown, because of the NHS.

Now I go to NA meetings, which is Narcotics Anonymous. I feel safe there. It's run by the people that go there themselves. It's just great – I'm able to open up and express myself. You feel at home in a sense, because you're around people that have gone through it themselves. I've spoken to lovely people at NA who say, you're like family to us.

For an [NHS] OCD appointment, there's about a year waiting list. I thought to myself: I need to take [things] into my own hands, so I go to [peer-led] OCD meetings. It's brilliant, because the service is right there right now, there's no waiting list. I don't have to wait for the NHS, I can just get on with my life and go to these meetings.

Since Covid, teenagers, young adults – their mental health has skyrocketed through the roof, and there's not that many services for mental health through the NHS. I think it'd be good thing to tell people about things like NA and the OCD group while they're waiting for treatment.

As ironic as it sounds, when I talk about mental health I feel really passionately about it, because I feel as if what I'm saying can help people in the future. With mental health, if you understand it because you've gone through certain situations, you can help others.

The best experience is the one that you've lived.'

Asks: Health Inequalities

NHS Maudsley in South London have worked with the South London chapter of Citizens UK, to listen to thousands of Londoners and [introduce the following](#):

- Extra resources for peer-led recovery mechanisms, to reduce waiting times before someone receives support.
- A 'virtual waiting room' to support children and young people waiting for mental health treatment
- Work towards developing a culturally competent workforce.

Our Health Inequalities Team in East London are making the following policy proposals, with a focus on improving Mental Health and Maternity Care in east London.

1. NHS Commissioners: Will the NHS work with voluntary sector organisations (VSO's) and the local community towards a wholly culturally competent service where people are offered care and support which encompasses their identity, needs and aspirations. Starting with Maternity (Maternal Mental Health) Care, before replicating this across the NHS in east London?
2. NHS and Local Authority Commissioners: Will you commit resourcing VSO's to support new peer support groups, with a particular focus around supporting those from under-represented communities with their mental health?
3. People are left alone and are at risk of going into crisis because of the long waiting lists for mental health support when they can access peer support services while they wait. East London Foundation Trust: Will you commit to working with us to ensure people are signposted to peer support, through a 'virtual waiting room' while they wait for mental health services?

IN MEMORY OF JOSEPHINE MUKANJIRA

+ ALL THOSE LOST DURING COVID-19



Covid-19 has brought huge challenges to our communities in Newham, we have seen some of the highest mortality rates in the UK. Many of our member organisations have lost key members of their community. We share the story of just one person who lost their life in Newham, Josephine Mukanjira. We wanted to recognise Josephine and all the others who were sadly lost to Covid-19 during the global pandemic.

Josephine worked for Citizens UK as a staff member for 12 years, making her one of the longest-standing members of the staff team. She was also a leader in Newham Citizens and TELCO for over a decade, as a Churchwarden of St Martin's Church, Plaistow (the above photo was taken at the Newham Citizens election assembly in 2018). Josephine was such a committed person, joining her church to live and breathe the values of Citizens UK.

She will be deeply missed.

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Notes

*Name has been changed.

Citizens UK works with civil society institutions in Newham and across the UK, including schools, community groups and charities, and religious organisations.

If you are interested in being part of this powerful alliance of institutions contact: alistair.rooms@citizensuk.org.

www.citizensuk.org
www.citizensuk.org/chapters/east-london/



Notes

*Name has been changed.

Citizens UK works with civil society institutions in Newham and across the UK, including schools, community groups and charities, and religious organisations.

We are a strictly non-partisan organisation having worked with politicians across all parties. We will seek to work with incumbent politicians in order to achieve change and will invite the two leading candidates to our Accountability Assembly. These events are what is referred to by the Electoral Commission as 'non-selective hustings'.

This means that the event isn't viewed as supporting a candidates or candidates or prejudicing the electoral prospects of other candidates. Each candidate will be given equal time on the night and be asked to commit to the agenda of the local alliance.

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