

What does the Covid-19 pandemic mean for young people's mental and emotional wellbeing in Lambeth?



Innovation
Unit

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Contents Page

3

Executive summary

4

Introduction to the research

9

Insights

9

Insight 1 Many young people are experiencing high degrees of uncertainty as they transition to adulthood. This uncertainty has been increased by Covid-19.

11

Insight 2 For many young people home was a space of responsibility where they felt trapped or navigated complex relationships

14

Insight 3 Young people lost access to safe spaces where they can learn, connect and be held

17

Insight 4 The temporary shift to online education brought into focus huge inequalities and barriers to learning as well as a loss of the important social and ritual aspects of school

20

Insight 5 The Black Lives Matter protests affected the emotional wellbeing of many young Black people, and were a period of pain, reflection and empowerment

23

Insight 6 Some young people feel less safe and protected in the pandemic by public services and wider society. These disparities are often racialized and gendered.

27

Insight 7 Young people don't know about mental health services or think they are for them

29

Insight 8 Young people connected with their own creativity, self-expression and spirituality

34

Insight 9 In a context where the future of work is uncertain, some young people are embarking on their own entrepreneurial experiments and creative endeavours

36

Insight 10 Young people who were connected into strong and diverse social networks, had much better access to emotional support, mentorship, and safe spaces outside the home

42

Principles & opportunities

42

Methodology

53

Glossary of terms

Executive Summary

We have been collecting the experiences of young people living in Lambeth during the Covid-19 pandemic, to understand how these experiences impact their mental and emotional wellbeing, and find out what forms of help and support they want and need. We engaged young people through virtual methods over time, following a participant-led research process and synthesising our findings with a group of young researchers from Lambeth.

As young people in Lambeth transition to adulthood, many are experiencing high levels of uncertainty about education, work, income, their identity and home; all made worse by the Covid pandemic. Many are navigating precarious futures.

During lockdown, young people's mental and emotional wellbeing has been up and down. Many of the young people we spoke to felt trapped at home navigating formal and informal caring responsibilities, with not much time or space for themselves. Many felt unheard or left behind, without the adequate resources or guidance to learn and connect. This was particularly stark once the schools closed.

Lockdown was also affected by the Black Lives Matter protests: a period of pain as well as reflection, which brought into sharp focus the racist structures and practices that young people encounter every day.

Despite the challenges young people have been creative, entrepreneurial, and resourceful in finding new ways to cope. We witnessed that young people who were connected into strong and diverse social networks had much better access to relationships and resources that supported them.

Most young people are not seeking mental health services, but practical help and resources to manage complex lives; as well as sustained relationships with peers or mentors to help navigate their highs and lows.

We outline a set of recommendations to build an inclusive and protective ecosystem of support for the mental and emotional wellbeing of young people living in Lambeth. This includes:

1. safe spaces and groups
2. a networked peer offer
3. a networked mentoring offer
4. practical help for navigating changes and next steps
5. digital and infrastructural resources for young people who are being left behind

Who were the young people we spoke to?

Research participants:

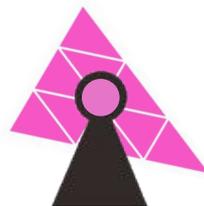


5 girls

2 boys



Aged 16-21



1 care leaver

2 formal young carers

4 young people who identify as LGBTQA

2 neurodiverse young people

1 young person not in education, employment or training

At least 5 young people were from a low income household



3 young people of Black Caribbean heritage

2 young people of Black African heritage

1 White British young person

1 bi-racial young person (Black African and White British)



2 young people had past diagnosis of depression and previous contact with mental health services

2 other young people described periods of depression and anxiety

Peer researchers:

We worked with 7 young researchers living in Lambeth, to help us ask the right questions and synthesise our findings.

I am **caring, young and Black**. My lockdown was **challenging, turbulent and uncertain**. I felt **depressed, anxious and unhappy**. **Friends, family and activities** help me to feel better. *Alex*

I am **creative, skilled, and talkative**. My lockdown was a **relaxing, fun, and loud**. I felt **rejuvenated, longing, and active**. **Sleeping, playing games and watching runway videos** helps me to feel better. *April*

I am the **eldest child of 5, a struggling extrovert, unheard**. My lockdown was **crowded, depressing, but also relieving**. I felt very **sensitive** during that time because there was **so much time to think**. **Meditating, sharing experiences and creating art** helps me to feel better. *Pipa*

Who were the young people we spoke to?*

An introduction from the research participants in their own words

I am a **confident, motivating, Black woman**. My lockdown was **challenging, life-changing, and an experience**. I felt **lost, confused and found**. My **faith, taking part in programmes, and being creative** helps me to feel better. *Rebecca*

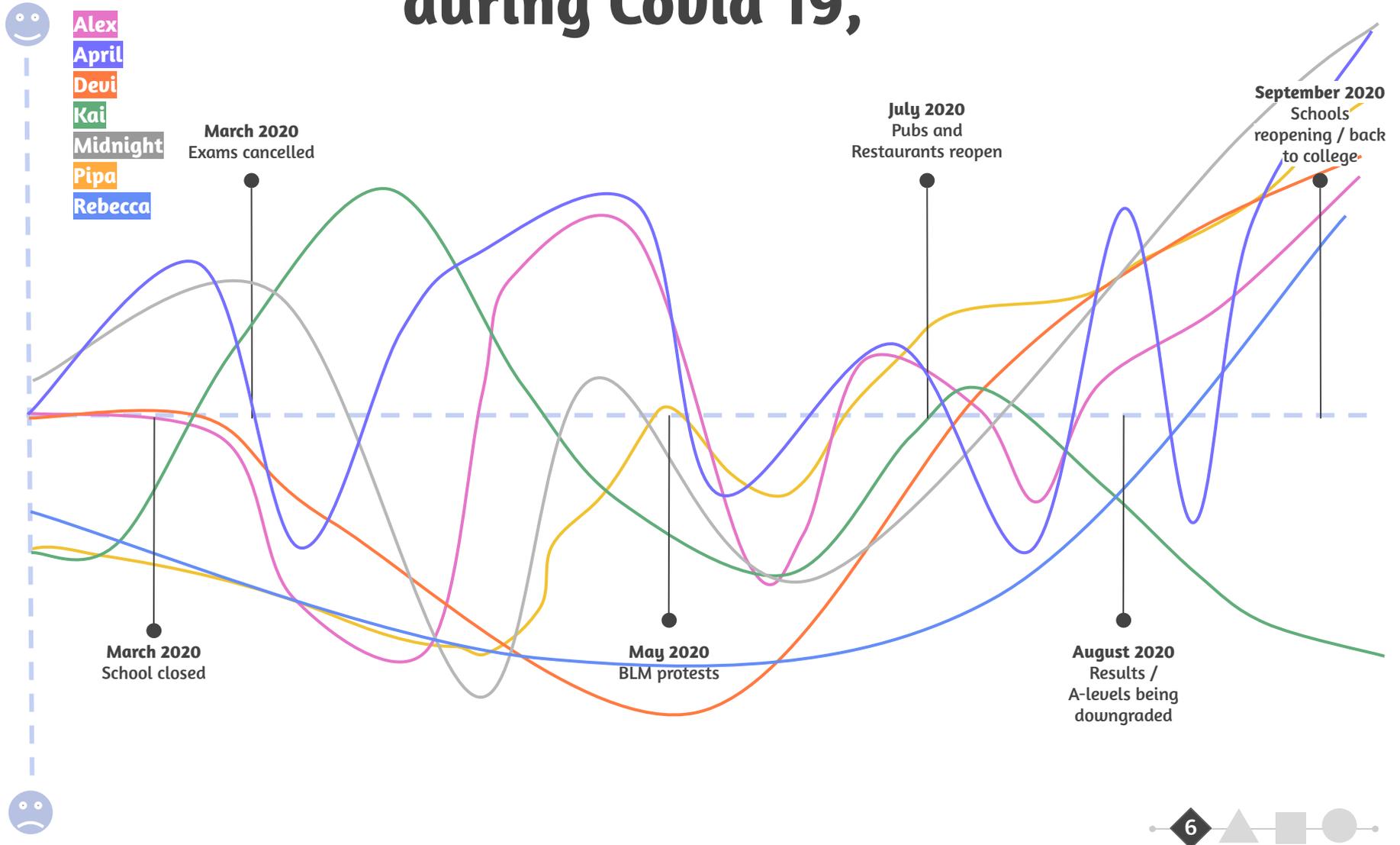
I am a **studying actor and writer extraordinaire**. My lockdown was **really hard at times**, but at the same time it did turn into **something good**. I **grew** from the experience. I went through a **metamorphosis in a way**. I felt **trapped isolated and alone**. **Voice acting** helped me to feel better. *Devi*

I am **sensitive, resilient, outgoing**. My lockdown was **challenging, relieving, confusing**. I felt **strong, alone, determined to overcome**. **Drama club, reading and unwinding with my friends** helps me to feel better. Young people in my area need more **inclusive facilities that cover more interests and personal circumstances**. *Midnight*

I am **autistic, LGBTQ+, ADHD, anxious, friendly**. My lockdown was a **relief from everyday stress, unproductive** which was **difficult**, and **stressful** in its own way, and **unprecedented**. I felt **lonely, isolated, stressed and determined**. I felt **hopeless** for a little bit. **Having hobbies and activities like crochet, being able to be with my friends, and being a part of a community like my school and youth theatre** helps me to feel better. *Kai*

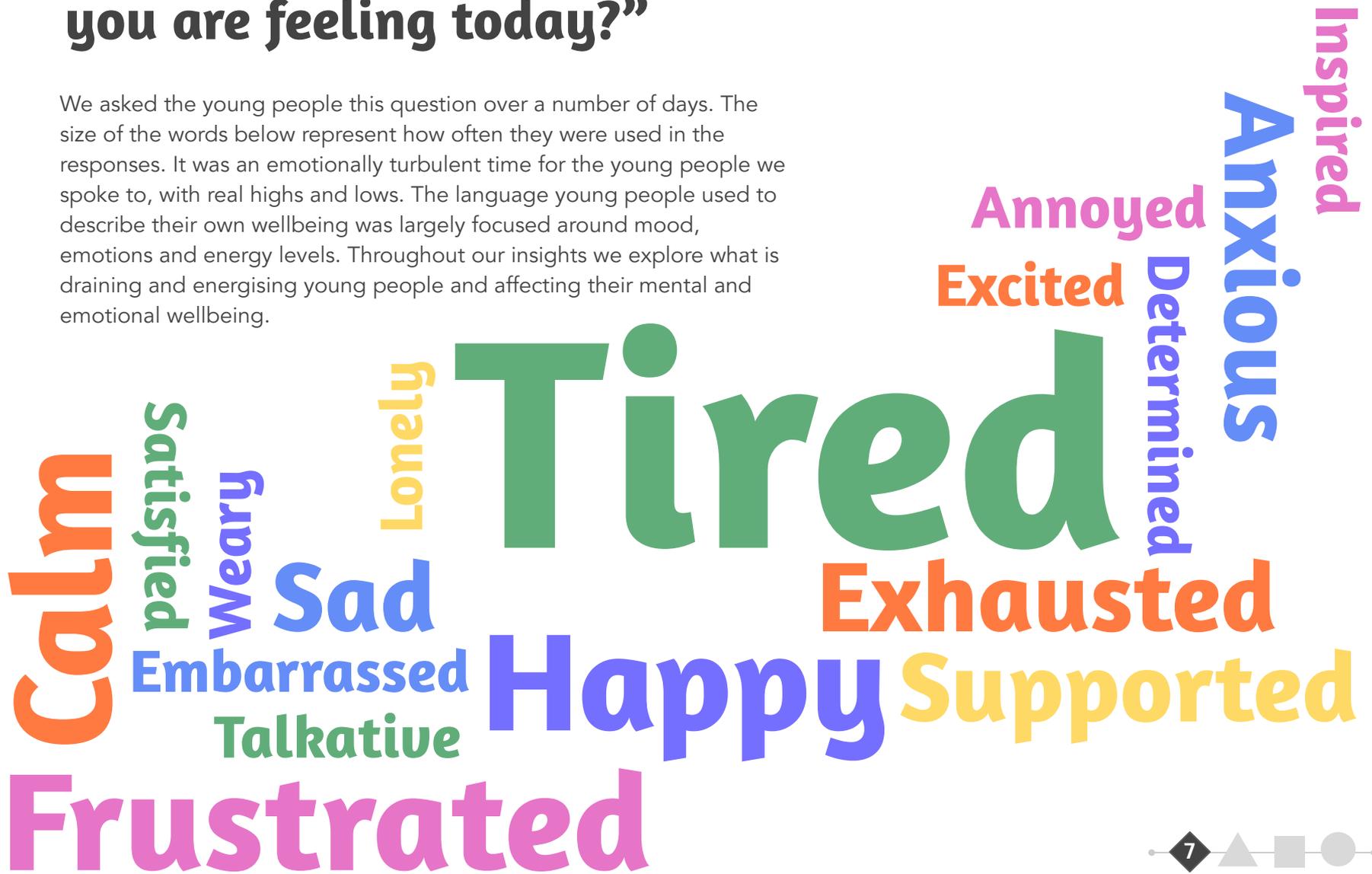
* The young people who participated in the research chose pretend names to protect their identity

“How were you feeling during Covid 19,”



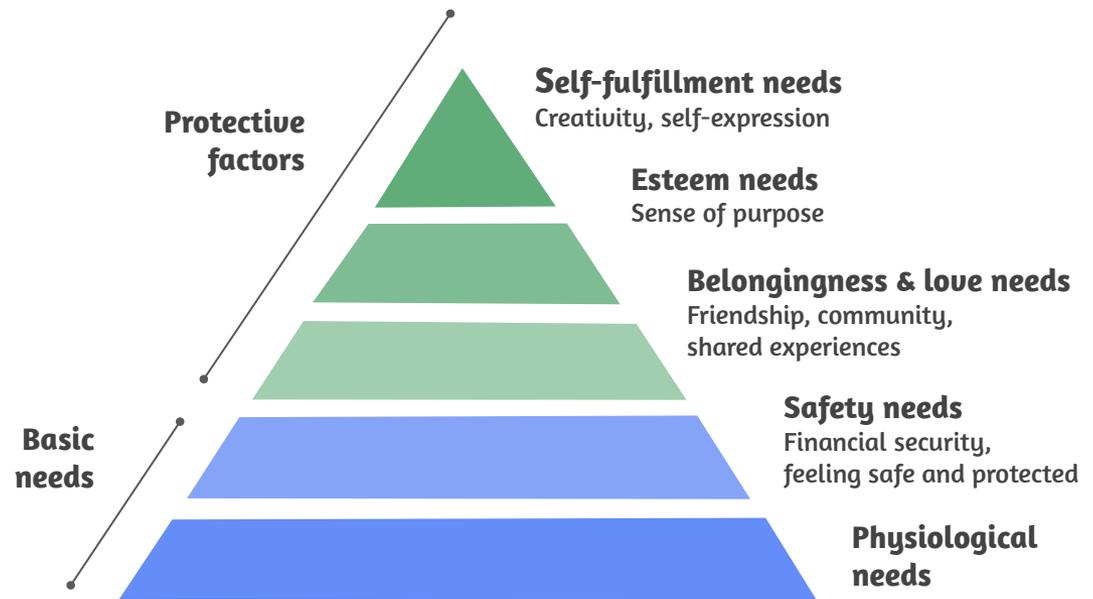
“What words describe how you are feeling today?”

We asked the young people this question over a number of days. The size of the words below represent how often they were used in the responses. It was an emotionally turbulent time for the young people we spoke to, with real highs and lows. The language young people used to describe their own wellbeing was largely focused around mood, emotions and energy levels. Throughout our insights we explore what is draining and energising young people and affecting their mental and emotional wellbeing.



How are young people's needs being met, challenged and protected?

For the young people we spoke to, some of their basic needs around safety are being challenged and this has been intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many young people are experiencing uncertainty around home, income, education and work. Some young people are witnessing increased public consciousness about the racism and institutional injustices they experience everyday. Young people are having their energy drained by not having their safety needs met. Opportunities for young people to connect with others and meet needs of belonging have been reduced by the closure of spaces and groups available to young people because of the lockdown. But the lockdown also created time and opportunity for creativity and self-expression, with many young people connecting to their sense of purpose. This has been really energising. How might we sustain these protective factors and create opportunities for young people to pursue creativity, purpose, belonging and connection?



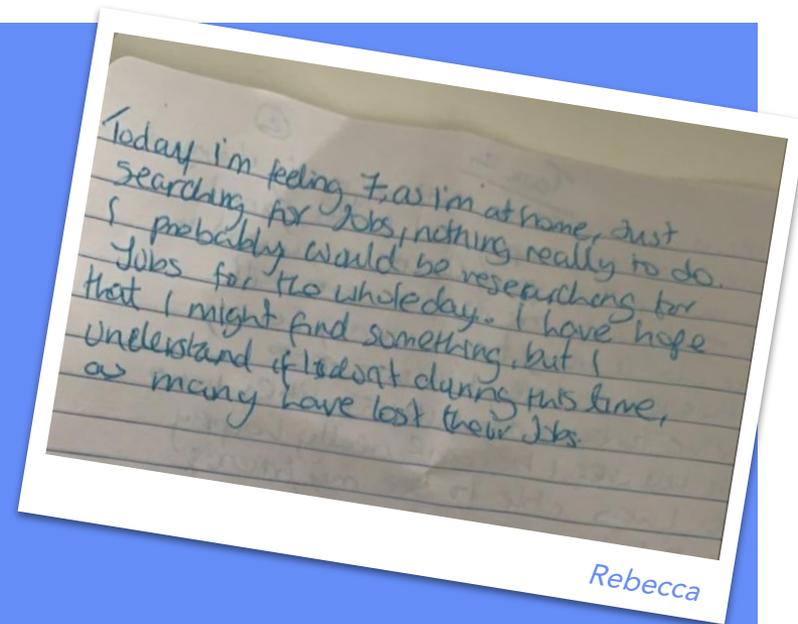
Adapted from Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Insight 1

Many young people are experiencing high degrees of uncertainty as they transition to adulthood. This uncertainty has been increased by Covid-19.

Young people are facing huge amounts of uncertainty where the pandemic has disrupted school and work opportunities, as well as hopes and dreams for the future. Securing qualifications, going to further and higher education, securing income and finding work, and finding somewhere to live are all complex transitions made more challenging by Covid-19.

Many young people are experiencing financial and institutional barriers to realising their next step. For some, a missed grade or the cost of a laptop left them stuck or navigating a precarious future.



These barriers are heavy: associated with feelings of uncertainty and being left behind.

The uncertainty and confusion around exam results in the summer was deeply unsettling for young people looking forward to the future. On top of the uncertainty, many felt a sense that the odds are being stacked against them. Some feel judged for where they come from, not what they offer and where they want to be.

1.1 Financial and institutional barriers

Devi is a care leaver living in supportive housing, and has been unable to move into his own independent flat because of Covid. Kai missed her grade for university and school is unwilling to let her retake. She is equally uncertain about finding a job because of the impacts of Covid. Kai is anxious she might become homeless if she becomes financially dependent on mum, who will not receive any support for Kai. For Rebecca, the cost of the laptop she needs for her apprenticeship is stopping her from moving on to the next step.

"I missed my university place by one grade - transferred to insurance choice which I applied for a gap year for. Mum tells me that we lose a lot of benefits if we aren't in education which means I would be homeless for a year, and my school isn't letting me retake a year and because of Covid 19 it is very difficult to find a job." **Kai**

"Right now I'm unable to afford the Macbook for my apprenticeship - it's had a huge impact on me because I'm unable to move onto the next step or pursue something I want to pursue because I'm unable to have that equipment. It really had a bad impact on me because I feel like I'm quite behind." **Rebecca**

"Currently it's like independent living, some inclusive care support. They are not really as supportive as the name implies. I'll be living here probably another couple of months, Covid has actually thrown out those plans, it was meant to be in January." **Devi**

"It was really stupid for government to even do that, and it just shows that there was a lot of classism within there. Like your exam results should be based on your academic potential, not where you live" **Alex**

"I went to visit my aunty in Coventry and I couldn't relax, I was freaking out. I have no backup plan. I want to do medicine and I have to do these A levels." **April**

1.2 Exam uncertainty

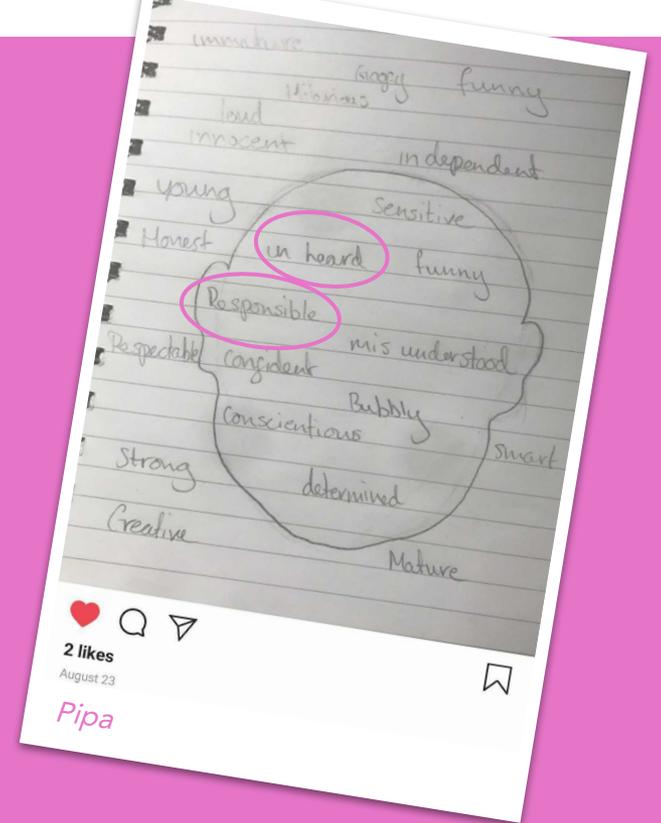
For April who was awaiting her GCSE results, the initial downgrading of A levels caused real distress. The classism embedded in the A level algorithms was upsetting for Alex, though he was not directly affected.

Insight 2

For many young people home was a space of responsibility where they felt trapped or navigated complex relationships

Many of the young people we heard from felt trapped inside their home with very little time or space for themselves. Experiences of feeling trapped tended to interact with caring responsibilities and issues of overcrowding. Many young people we spoke to perceived home as a space for responsibilities where they were meeting the needs of others.

Some young people navigated shared spaces where they felt stuck or silenced by relationships in the home. This was true for one young person who had their gender identity undermined at home, and for a care leaver living in supported housing with strangers he did not know or trust. For one young person with a parent in prison, an end to visitations because of Covid meant being cut off from a vital relationship in her family network.



2.1 Overcrowding

Pipa and April both experience overcrowding at home which can make it difficult to find time for themselves.

“There wasn’t much time to myself or space, because we have like a two bedroom house, but we’ve converted the living room into a bedroom, so me and my two sisters share a room, and my 2 brothers share a room, and my mum has her own room...Usually if I want time to myself I’ve got to leave the house” Pipa

“My brother has his own bedroom and I share my bedroom with my two other sisters, so yeah I don’t really have that much space... I can’t do much on my zoom calls, so the only time I really have is night time, so sometimes I’d go to bed around 1.” April



2.2 Caring responsibilities

Alex is the primary carer for his mum, and has no one else at home. This left him really isolated during the lockdown. Though Pipa’s home is very crowded, informal caring responsibilities left her without space to express herself.

“In the first few weeks, I started to struggle a bit, because you couldn’t go see people or really leave your house at that time. And because it’s only me and mum, and then mum most of the time she’s either in bed or asleep, I felt really really lonely. Yeah I did feel like isolated, because obviously I could talk to my friends but I couldn’t go out and meet with them, or I couldn’t even go out or go to the shops or anything.” Alex

“Because there is so many of us at home, and there’s always so much to do, sometimes I don’t feel there’s time to talk about what I’m feeling” Pipa

2.3 Complex relationships at home

Kai's mum doesn't believe in the validity of trans identities, which was a source of stress for Kai who suppressed her own queer identity and feelings. For Devi, the space he was confined to didn't feel safe either. The risk of contracting Covid felt as heightened inside as it did in public. He lived with strangers who failed to acknowledge him. He didn't feel connected into any kind of family or community unit whilst at home.

Pipa's dad is in prison and the only way she can have in person contact with him is in a space outside the home, which she was shut out of abruptly. She describes the ending of visitations as doubly isolating. Pipa worried a lot for her younger siblings, who were cut off from forming a relationship with their father, which is something she feels she has missed out on.

"I kind of was cautious, and I live with 5 other people and didn't know whether they have it, so I was nervous about leaving my room to actually cook meals or anything. [The space] is very very small, so it's very hard to maintain social distancing. I didn't really want to risk anything just for a pot noodle or something..I felt like I was in prison, more than I do now. I only have one room to myself, I have pretty much everything I need here. My living room is in the same room as well as my office and they are less than a few centimetres apart, so that's when I felt more trapped. It hasn't been a safe place at all. I felt like a prisoner, my door was my cell and the only respite I had was to the toilet or to make myself food, that's about it." **Devi**

"Because we are already basically isolated from each other, it's not that different. But still there's always that catch up, I'll always have something to tell him, and I'd get a big hug.. I think more about my little siblings. Because when my dad went to prison, my baby sister was just born. So her relationship with him was all through the visitations, and now she doesn't get that anymore and she just gets that over the phone." **Pipa**



1 like

pipa_galauve 1. The court makes me stressed because that's where the future of my Fathers situation is discussed and decided but I never get to go in and listen so I sit in the waiting room in anticipation and creating all sorts of unsettling scenarios that I really shouldn't consider nor be concerned about.

Pipa

"Things got a bit tense with my mother...She said that she doesn't believe that trans identities count the same as cis identities. That was a bit stressful having to navigate that but I don't feel like her opinions are so strong that she would ever kick me out or do anything - it was difficult try to keep quiet about how I felt." **Kai**

Insight 3

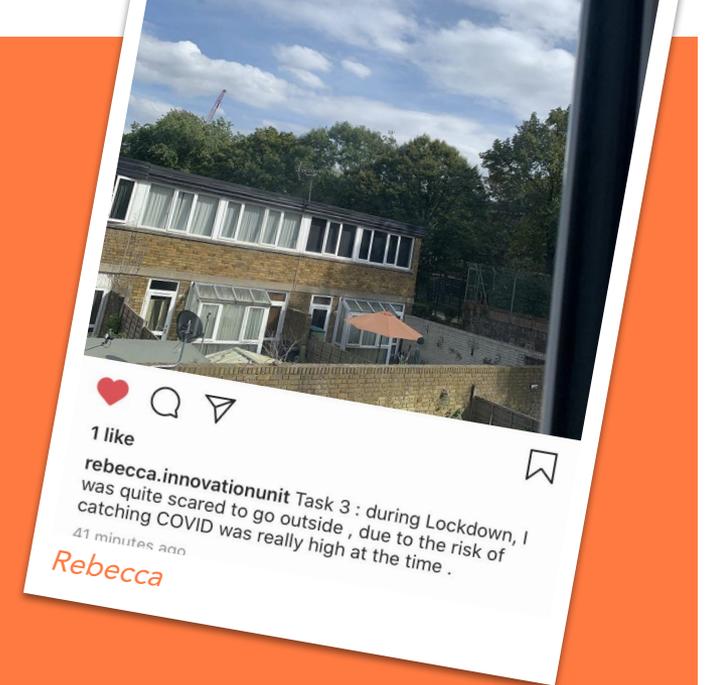
Young people lost access to safe spaces where they can learn, connect and be held

Young people often looked for spaces and relationships which would hold their own well-being outside of the home. Many craved spaces to let loose and people outside of their family network who could take care of their emotional needs.

At the same time, young people have lost access to physical spaces outside the home, in particular spaces they can just socialise and "just be".

Not all young people felt school was a safe space. But for those who found safety in school, the school closures were particularly challenging. For some this experience was emotionally painful, or cut them off from access to vital resources.

The impact of Covid restrictions have compounded with the effects of local urban regeneration and ideas about who has ownership of public space. This affects the places and spaces that young people feel they belong.



3.1 Finding relief outside the home

For Pipa, having a reason to leave the house is a huge relief and lets her be mentally and physically away from the complexity around her. Rebecca spoke about how her friends need to speak to people outside their home and family network in order to express themselves freely.

"It's usually just me at home doing stuff or helping to look after my siblings, and then eventually when I do find something to do it's like finally, yes, I get a chance to leave.. it's such a relief, like it's a weight off my shoulders, it gives me something else to think about, because in the house you know, everything is in your face, everything you have to do is all around me. So when I'm not around it I'm not thinking about it. It declutters my head a little bit." - Pipa

"Most of my friends feel like when they speak to their family they'll feel like they'll be judge.. But speaking to a friend allowed them to be more free to express themselves" - Rebecca

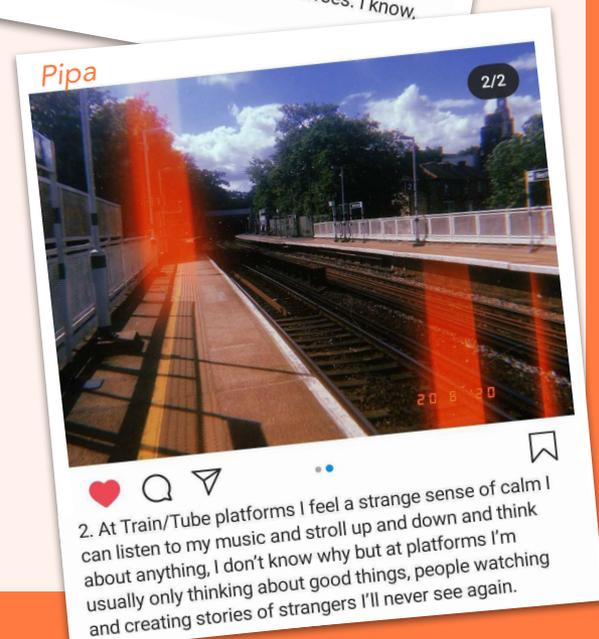
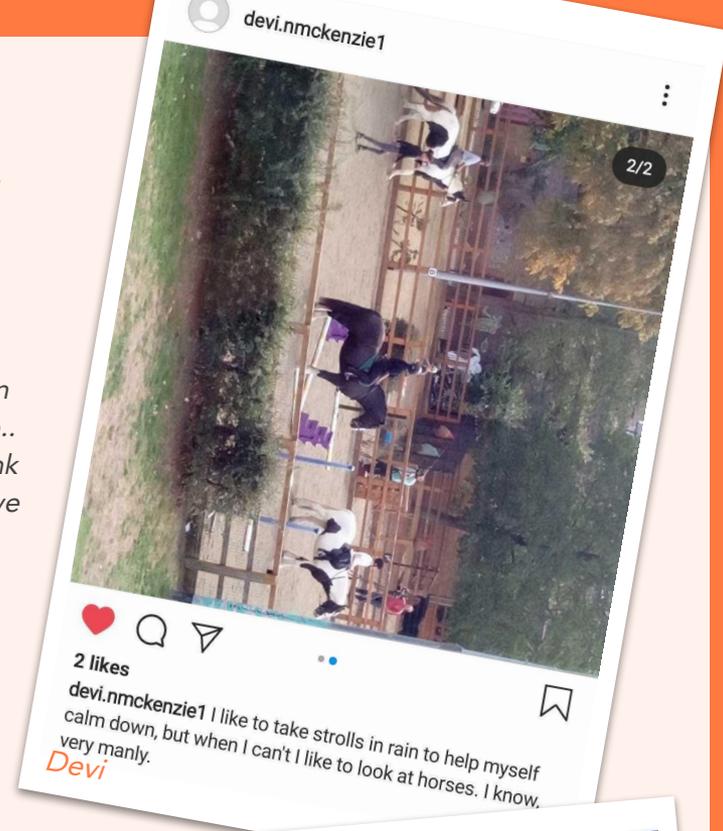
3.2 Losing safe spaces because of Covid

For many young people, spaces that they held as safe were shut during the lockdown, or were not made adequately safe for social distancing.

"You couldn't really go anywhere because everywhere was shut. There was nowhere for us to go. There was nowhere that was socially distanced for us to be in or socialise with anybody else" - Pipa

"I have quite a few safe spaces outside of home...I lost access to those spaces during lockdown" - April

"Sometimes I'd go to the (Brixton Youth Theatre building) and Max would let me sit there quietly and just set up in the office before anyone else came - those few moments of just being alone or doing something else, can't we just make things socially distanced and help people get back into their lives just a bit?" - Midnight



3.3 A loss of spaces young people feel they belong

April describes feelings of loss and exclusion in spaces that used to feel familiar and comfortable as a result of urban regeneration over time. Kai feels that young people are unwelcome in public spaces, where they often feel they don't belong.

"When I was younger on a Saturday my dad and I quite a few times would go down to Brixton Market and get like a bunch of meats, vegetables, fishes and stuff. I went back there recently after lockdown with my mentor from church and, I know this sounds really really bad, but in a way I kind of felt very sad, I haven't been there for a long time. I know it is not a bad thing for places to change. I saw how it was sort of gentrified, if you know what I mean and I kind of felt sad seeing all the shops I grew up with gone, yeah ... We were at this pizza place in Brixton Market and they had like the QR codes to scan to get the menu and cuz both of us we didn't have the iPhones and we don't really have spaces on our phones to be having a QR code app and I kinda felt excluded from that. This is a place I grew up." - April

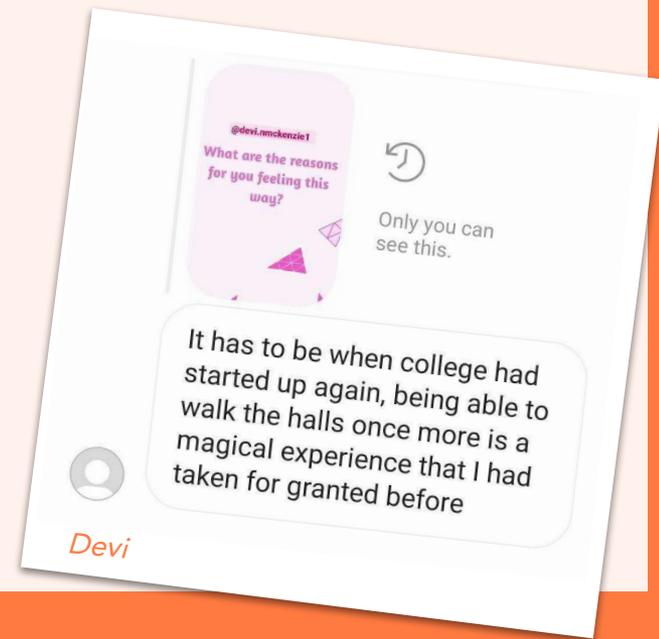
"I know that when I go out with my friends it feels like there aren't many spaces that we are welcome to go as they are all for children or adults. We feel like we are intruding, We have to be on our absolute best behaviour or we have to leave. It would be nice to feel confident that we are allowed to be in a park or a pub or a restaurant - without feeling threatened or threatening people." - Kai

3.4 When school is your safe space

Home doesn't feel like a home for Devi, but school does. When college closed, he felt cut off from opportunities to learn and connect. For others, school was a safe space to access the space and resources they needed to learn.

"[When college closed] I kind of felt lost, you know? The place I've actually considered home for the last I don't know how long was closing down and I would be unable to go there, to learn or meet those people which kind of hurt really" - Devi

"Another safe space is just staying behind after school. And even now I can't just stay behind and do work, and I find it really hard to concentrate at home, and yeah I would maybe do an hour studying at school, so that's another safe space I've lost" - April



Insight 4

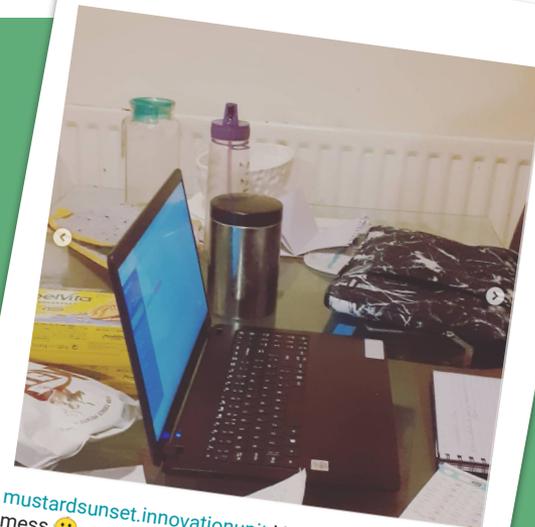
The temporary shift to online education brought into focus huge inequalities and barriers to learning as well as a loss of the important social and ritual aspects of school

Online learning and working from home brought new challenges for young people who didn't have sufficient resources or space to keep up with online school work. This was associated with feelings of stress, shame and being left behind.

Young people seemed to experience a one size fits all offering from school, despite having nuanced and specialist needs. This was especially true for students who are neurodiverse. There was no specialist provision or support for these young people through a disruptive transition to online learning.

Young people with complex needs were expected to fit into an entirely new way of working, rather than be provided with a learning experience that meets them where they are.

The time to independently explore hobbies and creativity was a positive thing for the young people we spoke to. But a break away from school also highlighted the importance of school based rituals and routine for some young people in managing their own wellbeing. For some, the stress of school was unsustainable, but so too was a total loss of routine and social interaction.



mustardsunset.innovationunit i know everywhere is a mess 😊 so the first 2 pictures is my dining room where i do all my homework and it makes me feel stressed especially since i can by there from early in the morning to 4 in the morning.

April

4.1 A lack of resources

April doesn't have a laptop, so had to use her brother's which he complained about. She also experienced conflict around space. This sometimes meant not having enough time to do her work, or doing her work very late at night. The space April associated with stress during lockdown was her dining table, where she does her school work. Devi, who also really struggled with online learning, described the experience of your whole world collapsing into one space when working from home. He felt ashamed that he could not keep up with his classmates who appeared to have all the right resources to engage with the transition to online learning.

*"I was quite ashamed, or not ashamed, nervous, about [asking for help] because everyone else seemed to be doing fine and I didn't want to be the only guy that seemed to be having problems. I didn't want them to think I was making an excuse or not doing work which is the opposite to what I do." **Devi***

*"People associate home without college, so their whole world is just right there." **Devi***

*"I had to stay up really late to do my work cos I wasn't able to concentrate during day time. There were quite a few arguments about the space as well." **April***

*"There weren't any alternatives that were offered, no extra support for people who find virtual learning difficult." **Kai***

*"I have to admit, I didn't do all the homework that my teachers set. It was so confusing... I got overwhelmed by the work. I really couldn't do it; I tried! I opened up "show my homework" app and there were just so many things to do here. So many things overdue. I closed the app. I know it sounds really bad but I just couldn't." **April***

4.2 A lack of provision for young people who are neurodiverse

Kai is autistic, and found it really difficult to learn at home without the guidance of her teachers or peers. When Kai reflected on what was most difficult about her experience of Covid, she highlighted the stress of remote working. April is a really motivated student who has slow processing and is seeking a diagnosis for dyslexia. For April, the most challenging thing during lockdown was getting her school work in on time.

Small changes sometimes made a lot of difference to young people struggling to navigate the rules and requirements of online learning. When April's teachers started sending her a timetable stating when each piece of work was due, she was much better able to organise her own learning.

4.3 A loss of routine and ritual

Kai's autism made learning the social rules of online spaces more difficult, which left her even more isolated.

Losing the structure of a school day for April meant throwing herself into her sewing, but this became obsessive and led to unsustainable patterns of productivity and burn out. Midnight felt uncomfortable with a loss of things to do.

A loss of routine around meal times for Kai also interacted with her ADHD and insecurity around food and body image, which negatively impacted her wellbeing.

"Because I am on free school meals I kind of have specific meals that I would eat - I would also take my medication which made me less hungry as well so while I was at home I wasn't taking my medication and there was food everywhere - and I found it very stressful trying to not just eat all of the time..."

A place in my home that made me feel stressed was my kitchen. During the quarantine I've been overeating more than before which is distressing as I'm already unhappy with my body" Kai

"When I do these things [sewing] I get really obsessive over them. I would take a few hours to sleep, get up the next day, sew all day, go back to sleep and repeat. And I would get immediately burned out and have to go rest for the next two weeks." April

"I was doing better because there was less pressure - but I let myself go completely, I wasn't doing anything. The way I was behaving was really detrimental to my long term mental health. I wasn't going outdoors to go on long dog walks, I wasn't socialising - really at all. It wasn't a good long term thing but the way I was before wasn't sustainable either.(Before lockdown)Going to school everyday meant I had to speak to my friends, I had to get up in the morning, then I walked the dogs and doing housework - without all of that routine I just didn't do anything..."the rules for talking over the phone and videos are different and I don't know them as well." Kai

"Being at home with my mum and the uncertainty of everything, we were just having a lot more tension, because she had pent up emotions from the months back when she felt I wasn't trying in school were coming up.....(Not having anything to do) really took me out of my comfort zone" Midnight

Insight 5

The Black Lives Matter protests affected the emotional wellbeing of many young Black people, and were a period of pain, reflection and empowerment

In the midst of lockdown, a number of Black Lives Matter protests took place in London as a response to state sanctioned violence and anti-Black racism. Protests did not only take place on the streets, but also online.

This period affected the wellbeing of the young Black people we spoke to in a number of complex ways. It was also a period where young people reflected on the racist structures and practices that exist within the institutions they attend every day.

5.1 Pain and empowerment

Alex found empowerment in the collective voice given to experiences and beliefs that have long been felt. But a growing racist backlash to the movement really negatively affected his mental health. For some, the collective reliving of the experiences of Black people felt overwhelming and depressing. Rebecca felt frustrated that Black people are still not being heard. Midnight has been proactively engaged with anti-racism for a long time but found herself needing to step back to protect her own wellbeing. Midnight described how the Black Lives Matter protests followed a movement of young people in London on Twitter sharing their experiences of sexual violence. She was shocked that this movement received so little media attention.

*“When the Black Lives Matter was popping off this Summer I felt like I needed to sit back - I’ve been stressed about this and passionate about this since I was little...Also there was a movement a little bit before BLM that died down when people were exposing their abusers and sexual assault” **Midnight***

*“What else does the Black community have to do to make their voices be heard? I was just in shock and baffled at the whole situation” **Rebecca***

*“I think there’s been a misunderstanding of what the movement is, and like that affected my mental health as well, because like obviously there was a lot of open racism about it. At the time the protests were happening, I was quite happy because the support was strong. But seeing all the negative comments and stuff, that made me quite upset, well it made me really upset actually” **Alex***

5.2 Engaging with institutional racism close to home

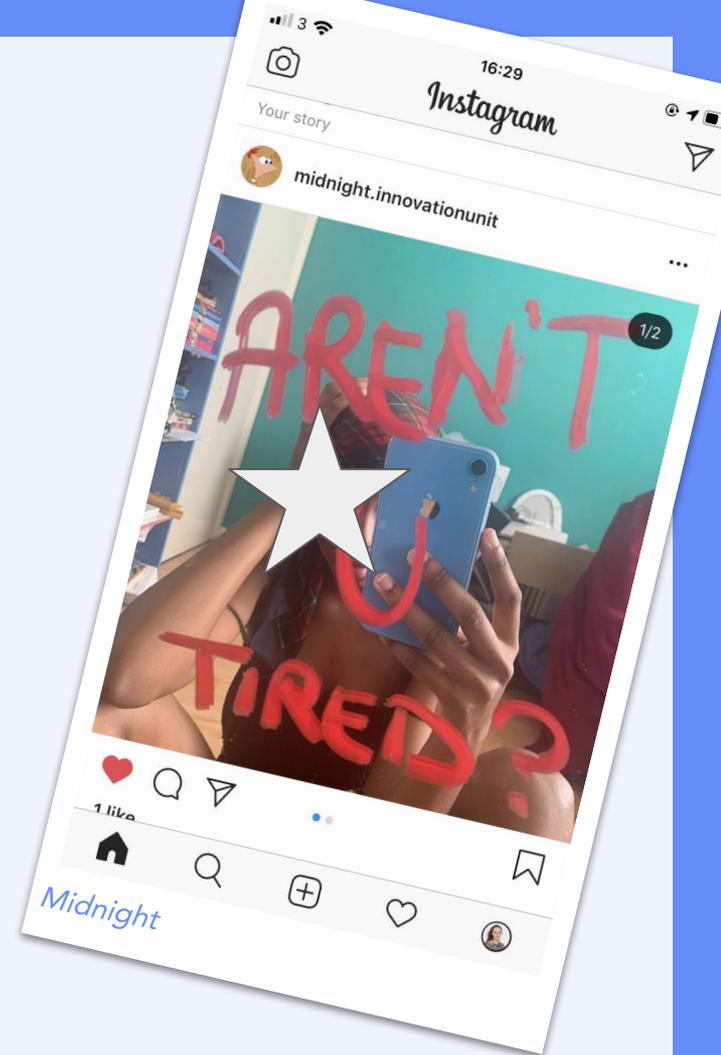
April's school pointed to the protests taking place in America without engaging with the everyday racism present within the school. This was racism that April has experienced first hand. Pipa was inspired to understand more about her own history, and pointed to the gaps in a school curriculum which ignored the experiences and agency of Black people throughout history. Rebecca felt her potential at university was limited by the way she was perceived as a Black woman.

"It has prompted me to look into a lot more of our history.. The curriculum at school needs to change.It doesn't teach you that Africa has so much gold and diamonds and things, it just teaches you that we were shipped from one place to another.You're not taught about what we were before and what we could have been"- Pipa

"During quarantine, when these protests were going on, ... I was thinking maybe the school is going to send something addressing how they can deal with racism in their own school. ... They send us this powerpoint of this other organisation talking if protest is good and what's going on in America.

I sent them a long email with my friend, saying this is absolutely ridiculous. Why on earth are you talking about America when this is happening in your own school? I sent it to senior leadership management." April

"I was treated as a stereotypical Black woman, I wasn't getting as much of an opportunity as other colleagues would"-Rebecca



Insight 6

Some young people feel less safe and protected in the pandemic by public services and wider society. These disparities are often racialized and gendered.

Some young people don't feel protected in the pandemic by public services and wider society because of structural racism and the risk of gender-based violence. Being unable to socialise in groups left young women feeling vulnerable in public. Many young Black people felt that they were treated as a risk or a threat to protect society from, not as people who also need protecting. For some this was intensified by the pandemic.

Reports of the disproportionate effect of the virus on Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities led some parts of society to locate risk and blame in those communities, which was felt by some of the young people we spoke to.

Some felt fear for Black family members working in the NHS who faced increased exposure to the virus, often without the provision of adequate protection.

Not feeling protected by the police was a common experience which was exacerbated by community history, gender and colorism, and increased police presence was noticed by young people during the lockdown.

6.1 Not feeling protected by the police

Pipa felt a responsibility to teach her brothers to police themselves in order to protect them from hostile encounters with the police and wider society. Increased police presence was notable during the lockdown, and Alex appreciated the increased freedom and reduced risk of contact with the police when lockdown eased. After police were charged with the murder of George Floyd in America, Rebecca's parents became more fearful for her safety in public, because of interactions she might have with the police.

"I think that's a whole like generation and community thing. So obviously I live in Brixton and they've got a sort of infamous reputation for like not trusting the police" **Alex**

"With BLM my parents were cautious of the things that we wear, they're very cautious - if my friend comes to pick me up with a car, they make sure the car is okay - that everything is okay in case my friend gets stopped" **Rebecca**

"I guess it's the freedoms, where you're not at risk of getting in trouble with the police or something for being on public transport for example" **Alex**

"I have younger brothers and they are Black. I'm lighter skinned but my little brother is dark skinned and I think he is viewed differently. I think the police can protect us, but it really does depend what stage you're at in life. My little brothers, I feel like once they get older, the way society views young black men is so hostile. I think sometimes they are overlooked on the protection front. I think sometimes people feel like they should be protected from young Black men, not protecting the young Black men. My brothers know how to behave but I always give them like an extra warning" **Pipa**

6.2 Blame placed on people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities with a lack of adequate protection

Midnight witnessed people avoiding her in public, as well as conversations online about limiting the freedoms of Black and Asian people because of a perceived risk to safety. Midnight also felt fear for Black family members working in the NHS who she felt weren't being adequately protected. For Alex, the explicit blame placed by an MP on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities for the spike in coronavirus cases was a deep injustice, but did not disrupt what he expected from people who hold political power.

"Also I felt really annoyed because when that report was put out everyone was like 'oh BAME ethnicities and whatnot they're like being disproportionately affected that means they're more likely to have it. And you're starting to see really ignorant comments like 'oh black people shouldn't be allowed...or asian people shouldn't be.... Because they're gonna have it'. And even if you're standing somewhere and you're going to the supermarket you see people standing - instead of 2 metres away they're like a good mile down the queue from you! That was wild!" Midnight

"I know so many Black people working in the NHS...my mum was coming home complaining she didn't have enough PPE....At points I just wanted my mum to stay at home and be safe" Midnight

"There was something in the news I saw, where I think it was someone in government, they said something along the lines of people from this particular background are more likely to like, to either get covid or not to social distance than others, or something along those lines. It was basically just blaming others, which didn't sit right with me, at all. To be honest, it's not surprising.. It doesn't really surprise me, because it's something I would expect them to say. It's like you're disappointed but not surprised" Alex

6.3 Increased risk of gender-based violence and harassment

Precautions to keep people safe from the virus asked us to physically distance from each other. But for Midnight and other young women around her, physical distancing in public was associated with feelings of fear and increased vulnerability to sexual harassment and violence. Being unable to go outside in large groups was scary for young women who felt more exposed.

“A lot of people I know especially girls they’re very aware that sexual assault is something that happens, or sexual harassment - they’ve openly said it’s happened to them. So with lockdown some people didn’t feel as safe. Because I guess when there wasn’t a lockdown you had more control over who you could be with, where you could go and who you could travel with.” **Midnight**

“I remember one time I had my mask on, I was wearing a jumper, a long maxi dress...even had a headscarf on my head. And as I walked out the shop a van going passed beeped at me, and I knew this was a very older person but I thought ‘I’m just a bit like a grandma maybe they think I’m somebody else that I don’t know’. But 5 minutes later the same van did a U-Turn, came back around and the man got out the car, and I was waiting at the bus stop, and he came and sat really close next to me. And I got up and said ‘Excuse me you’re supposed to be social distancing’ and he said ‘oh you don’t have to with me I just want to get to know you’. I was so scared I got up and just called my mum and walked away.” **Midnight**

Insight 7

Young people don't know about mental health services or think they are for them

Young people that spoke about mental health support offerings often didn't feel comfortable or deserving of accessing services. It was more often the case that young people just did not know about available mental health services.

More fundamentally, young people overall were not seeking mental health services, but holistic support and resources to manage the complexity and uncertainty in their lives. Accessing that support was about having really good relationships in spaces that felt safe.

7.1 Mental health services aren't reaching people

Some young people feel that mental health services are not connecting with young people or meeting them where they are. Some young people feel they need to be connected into support by existing relationships, where they feel comfortable enough to reach out. April expressed the importance of forming better connections with people you trust, in places that feel safe.

"Right now I don't think the NHS is doing that great of a job connecting with young people. It is way too formal. It is just a list of surveys about how you feel and it is really intimidating... Going to a GP is quite scary, you know what I mean. I wouldn't want to talk to a GP about myself cos that's scary." April

"I've never really had the opportunity to tell somebody what's going on or you know, have an ear. And nobody ever really thinks oh I can reach out to this service and tell them what's going on. Usually somebody has to prompt you" Pipa

"What you don't want is youth centres with a bunch of posters and hotlines on the wall... instead just have a nice place with great role models who give good advice." April

"I think some people don't know what support is available or who to reach out to" Alex

If you have a problem come to us remember" it starts to get old. These suicidal hotlines .. it's like OK I can call you but then what from there...? In an ideal world, it'd be about being able to form better connections with adults, so then we can reach out." April

7.2 Some young people feel undeserving of accessing mental health support

For Kai, mental health support was not understood as something that was for her. Mental health services were perceived as existing only for people already at crisis point.

"I didn't feel like I was able to access a lot of the mental health support available - as I thought they were for those who were suicidal, I wasn't bad enough so something like this would have really helped." Kai

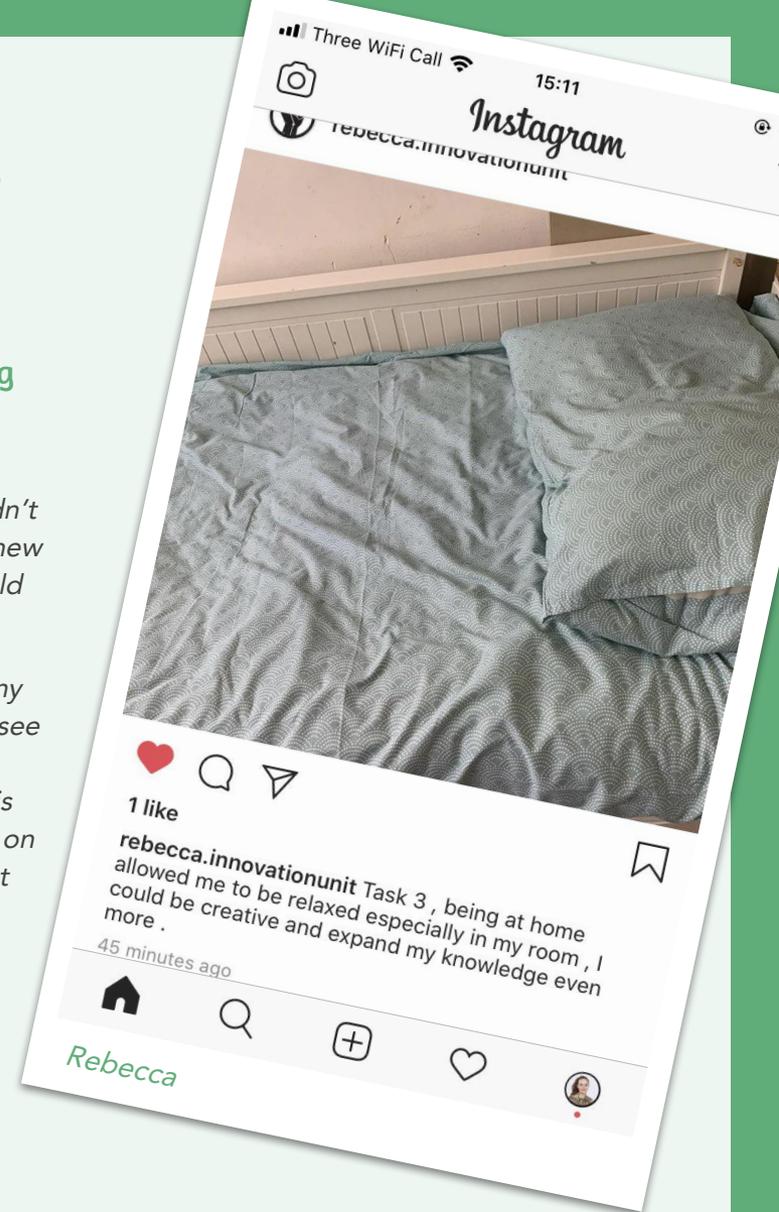
8.1 Spirituality and mindset

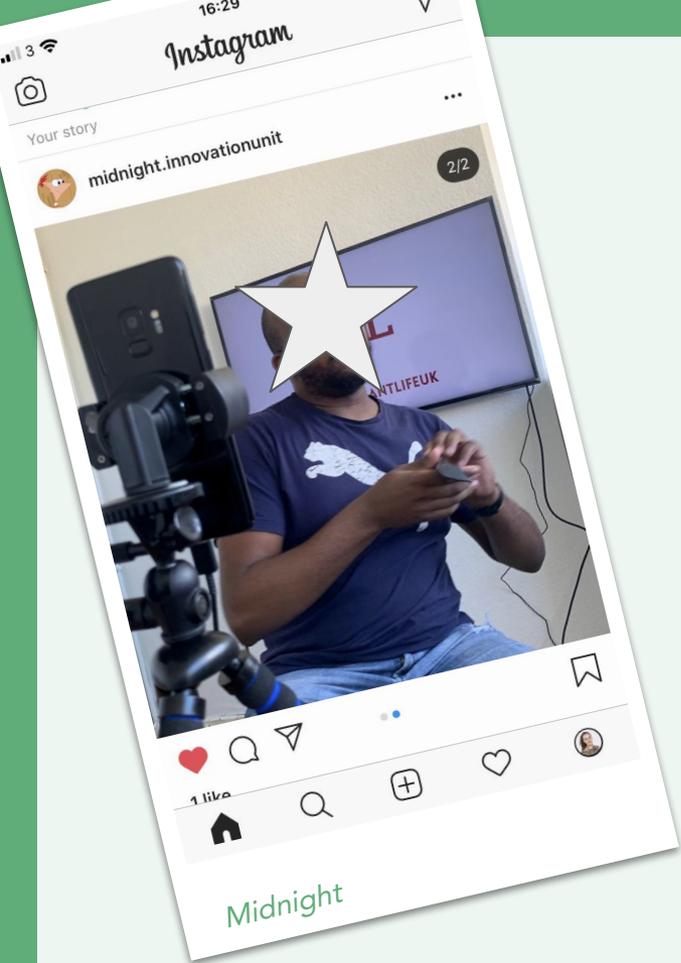
Spirituality allows Pipa to be besides the emotions and complexity she holds at home. She also relies on spiritual guidance to avoid the preconceptions others might hold about her life. When Rebecca felt depressed, she decided to rely on herself because she felt other people might not understand. For Devi, mindset is really important for shifting his own perceptions of his situation.

"I meditate for a lot of things but especially like things that are close to me and in my face. I do try and use meditation to get away from those things even though I'm still around them. And I start reading up more on how I can be besides all of the feelings that I'm feeling and be able to visualise my situation....I have tried like reading oracle cards, because it makes me feel like someone is there, like my spirit guide or what not, instead of having to go to someone physical who might hold bias to my situation" Pipa

"My depression came back but I didn't tell anyone at my house hold, as I knew I could fight myself and no one would understand me" Rebecca

"I don't really know how [I change my mindset] but I know why. The way I see it things are as bad or good as you want them to be. If something bad is happening you can choose to focus on the bad, or you can try and see what you can learn from it." Devi





8.2 Connecting to a sense of purpose

For Devi, lockdown was intensely isolating, but it was also a moment that allowed him to find what he feels is his purpose in life. Away from his physical theatre group, Devi got into voice acting as a way to continue his passion. Acting for Devi is therapeutic, a way to connect with difficult or complex emotional memories.

*"I really truly found that I couldn't live without acting. You know when you feel you've found your purpose in life? I feel I've found it in acting. It's all about mindset. If you want to do something you'll find a way. You have to climb through the thorns to get to the rose"-
Devi*

"I would recommend drama to anyone, because I find it has a lot of therapeutic effects. Like to really be able to go deep inside yourself and use it, use that energy, and it can really jog loose some feelings you weren't even aware of or hid away. And the beauty about acting is you don't even have to say it's true or real, you can just say it's a character. We don't need to know why, or where it came from, just congratulate you." Devi

"As bad as it was the Covid pandemic actually helped me push more towards what I want. You know the saying you don't know what you have until it's gone? I truly didn't know what I had and the opportunities I had until I couldn't take them anymore. So it's now made me more motivated than ever to continue on this path." Devi



8.3 Utilising resources online

Pipa learnt and engaged with spirituality using resources she found online. Others like April found they were using online spaces in new ways over lockdown, to engage with creativity and self-expression.

“I recently found this man called Moogi on YouTube, and he speaks about this thing called the Invitation, and it is about being just consciousness, and being aware of your surroundings rather than letting them just take control of you, like your emotions, instead of being sad, think about why things make you sad.” **Pipa**

“If lockdown hadn’t happened, I would have used Instagram differently. I wouldn’t be as creative. I’d be following a bunch of YouTubers first and classic instagram influencers. And I don’t think that would be good for my self esteem because I am naturally quite insecure...Now fashion is much more in my face every single day and actually that really inspired me to be designing a lot. [...] I became a lot more creative with my designs and I really have that zeal to sew.” **April**

8.4 Accessing resources to connect with themselves and others

Rebecca and Midnight describe the experiences of the people around them, who were shut out from exploring new hobbies or staying in touch with friends because of space, electricity and data and Wi-Fi poverty.

"I knew there were people from lower income families who didn't always have the ability to be able to come on line with us during our video calls because either they were sharing their laptop or ipad with somebody else in their family"

Midnight

"So when we were told to do exercise indoors, most of the people I know were unable to do that due to lack of space, were unable to be motivated and watch things on TV or YouTube because of lack of money - money wasn't coming through from their parents because most of their parents lost their jobs. It was hard for them to even find ways to be able to entertain themselves. If I watch this, how much is the electricity?...My friend bakes and was thinking what if I turn this on and there's not enough electricity for next week, so she had to stop that for a minute because she had to look at the importance of having electricity at home." **Rebecca**

Young people found time to engage with creativity and self-expression when school's closed. But addressing digital exclusion and the resource divide is essential in supporting young people to engage in activities that promote positive mental and emotional wellbeing.

Insight 9

In a context where the future of work is uncertain, some young people are embarking on their own entrepreneurial experiments and creative endeavours

Amidst the uncertainty, some young people are engaging with more creative pursuits and exploring alternative paths to traditional employment. They are using a diverse set of social media platforms to explore and create opportunities for themselves.

Some young people used the time they found in lockdown to build or strengthen their own businesses.

These young people have been supported to do so through training and mentorship opportunities.

Carving your own path is not without its own complexity and uncertainty. It sometimes sits at odds with familial or cultural expectations about success and failure.

9.1 Online opportunities

Some young people are using the spaces available to them online to seek new work opportunities. Midnight explained that the people around her are exploring social media influencing and online trading schemes as a career option. Devi used the social media platform Reddit to find voice acting jobs, which was really validating.

"I joined something called Reddit, it's like social media, a different kind of community, I joined it for acting stuff. I came across an ad and they were having a casting call. I had a weird thing where I thought I wasn't right for it, but I emailed him and I got the part" Devi

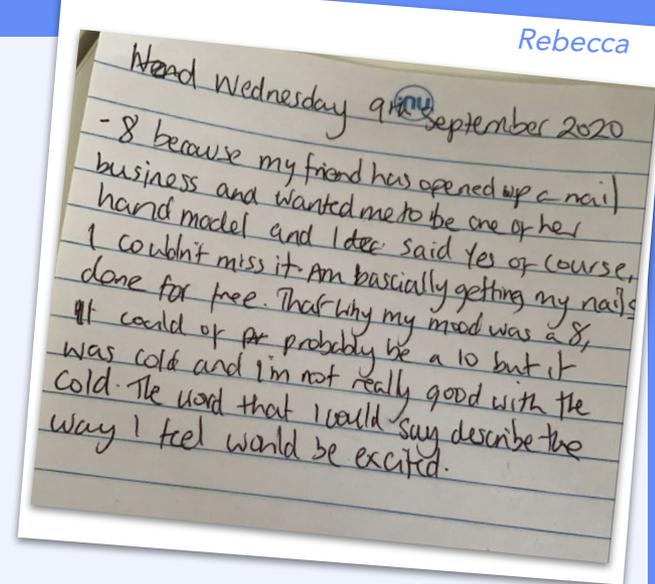
"A lot of people my age are getting into trading schemes or social media influencing, and for people who aren't into that, creative programmes have always been like a good outlet, because you still feel like you're doing something." Midnight

9.2 Entrepreneurship

Rebecca spent time in lockdown developing her false lashes business, supported with workshops facilitated by the Young Carers service. April started her own sewing business last year, after learning sewing from a Nigerian tailor in Coventry when she was 11. She uses her sewing to express the coming together of English and Nigerian culture.

"I also joined a workshop that Young Carers organised, it really helped me develop more skills and also it brought my vision of having a business to life, I became more creative towards my business" Rebecca

"So yes I'm Nigerian I love being part of it. That is really what influences my sewing. My whole purpose is to combine Nigerian style with English techniques." April



9.3 The challenge of forging your own path

In lockdown Rebecca decided to quit her university course and pursue an alternative direction. She felt this decision was made particularly challenging by the expectations placed on her as the eldest daughter of a Congolese family.

"I feel like with every African family they really are heavy with the education system.... It's very like A 'must' to do ...if your child doesn't do it, that means they like, they're not going to be seen as the 'head' or as the best child of the family" Rebecca

Insight 10

Young people who were connected into strong and diverse social networks, had much better access to emotional support, mentorship, and safe spaces outside the home

We found that some young people were very connected to networks and support systems outside of home. These connections served as protective factors for young people with complex lives. We heard how drama groups, creative writing groups, skating groups, photography groups, church groups and other youth groups allowed young people to explore a shared interest or experience and offered a break from the responsibilities they often held at home. For many of the young people we spoke to these groups were a lifeline.

Strong mentors helped young people access new opportunities and navigate difficult situations. Young people with mentors found it much easier to reach out to someone when feeling a bit wobbly before things spiraled out of control. As April put it "In an ideal world, it would be about being able to form better connections with adults, so then we can reach out."

We witnessed really effective mental health support that was embedded in the existing relationships and social networks in young people's lives. The young people we spoke to were more likely to reach out to adults they already trusted and had a connection to when they needed help rather than contacting an unknown mental health service.

We noticed a multiplier effect. Once a young person was connected to one or two groups, they were often aware of and accessing numerous and diverse opportunities. One young person had a mentor through church, was part of a Renaissance Foundation programme, was in a peer mentoring scheme, and got involved with an online STEM programme as well as with the Youth Advisory Programme at St Thomas among other commitments.

10.1 Youth groups

Alex and Rebecca found mentorship and a community of people with shared experience through the Young Carers service. April is connected into safe and supportive relationships with adults through her involvement with the Renaissance Foundation. For Devi, the physical space of Brixton Youth Theatre as well as the virtual community through WhatsApp has been a lifeline.

"It's because we're all going through the same sort of stuff, so it's like we're all in it together, and when we do go there it's like we're one big family so that does feel like nice" Alex

"The physical location of Brixton Youth Theatre, I feel really at home there. I'm able to be me in a way, without shame"- Devi

"It's a children's charity like, we have Zoom calls once a week ..they bring speakers to speak to us and then we ask them questions, it's on Spotify I think!. We can always just turn to them and speak. Especially one of the people, Zoe, I just always text her. In lockdown as well, we did the Jack Petchey music contest, so over zoom everyday, it's just really fun, and great like having people to turn to at the organisation" April

"I also joined a workshop that Young Carer's organised, it really helped me develop more skills and also it brought my vision of having a business to life, I became more creative towards my business...I'm really happy I found Young Carers at this time." - Rebecca

"The youth drama group WhatsApp group during lockdown, it's been a lifesaver to be honest, just to have it there. If it wasn't for the WhatsApp group of Brixton Youth Theatre I feel I may have gone insane."- Devi

10.2 Church

We heard about the many ways in which church plays a supportive role in the lives of many young people. Church for April is all about community, whereas Rebecca spoke much more about her personal relationship to prayer which helped her overcome a really dark time.

Church basically occupies my whole weekend. On Friday we have the youth service and hangouts and then on Saturday I have acting classes that is in my church and on the Sunday I get to church by 8.30am and I am a stage manager. I haven't done it for a while and kinda miss it. I've been doing that since I was 13. -

April

"The way I overcame my depression was joining a church service my friend introduced me in, that really changed me, I became happy" Rebecca

"In terms of like community and stuff, other than young carers I don't really have that sort of connection so to put it, it's like I live there and I know what's there and who's there, but I don't really have like a sort of close connection" Alex

"The best thing about my community well especially on my road is just how nice the neighbours are. My neighbours they are Muslim and Christians and we just get along so well no matter what religion." April

10.3 Communities of place

April felt more connected into her community, and valued the diversity and kindness of her neighbours. Alex felt a disconnect with the place they lived. As Olamide, one of the young researchers put it "you can live in the community but might not experience it".



10.4 Mentorship

Mentorship was a huge asset in the lives of young people, connecting them into support and resources to grow and move onto their next step. April found mentorship through church, Devi from his teacher and Pipa through photography workshops facilitated by a local university.

They have like a youth programme [at church], so you're assigned to like a youth mentor, a youth leader, so each person is assigned to a certain adult... So we Zoom call twice a week and that's as a group, cos there's a few of us that share the same mentor, and then I just text her any time if I want to, and then she just checks up on me every few days.. Sometimes we talk about things I don't want to talk to my friends about, and she has really good advice. April

They're more mentors really. They kind of guide me towards what I need to get out of life. I told my teachers what I want from life and what I need to get there and they seemed very happy to kind of help me out." Devi

I did a photography workshop and I've stayed in touch with one of the mentors. He facilitates me with film and cameras for different projects. He's getting me training to become a facilitator so I can get a job. It's nice to have support" Pipa

10.5 Multiplier effect

Young people already connected into social networks were better able to access other opportunities and support.

Everyone I knew who wasn't already a part of something they'd really drawn the short straw, it [lockdown] was a really dark time for them." Midnight

There's not always much broadcasting of what's going on in Lambeth - if you're not part of a group already you're not going to hear about others." Midnight

10.6 Isolation

However, those young people with few connections felt cut off and unaware of things going on that might be a source of growth and support. It seemed like young people were either in and connected or largely left in the dark about available opportunities. This became more stark as many things were shut down over lockdown. Midnight speaks about the importance of being interconnected so that no young person is left to process their struggles alone.

“[When there’s a lack of opportunities to do something new] that’s affecting communities like friendship groups, classes, that destructs how people interact with each other also, and just seeing it as each child dealing with their own issue in lockdown by themselves that’s really narrow minded because we’re all...all of our relationships are destructed we didn’t know how to be with each other.” **Midnight**

“Before I could probably deal with it, the lack of communication here because of college, and then BYT, but then you take both of them at the same time, phew, that was not any easy time there...I actually felt more alone than I have in my entire life..” **Devi**

10.7 Online connections

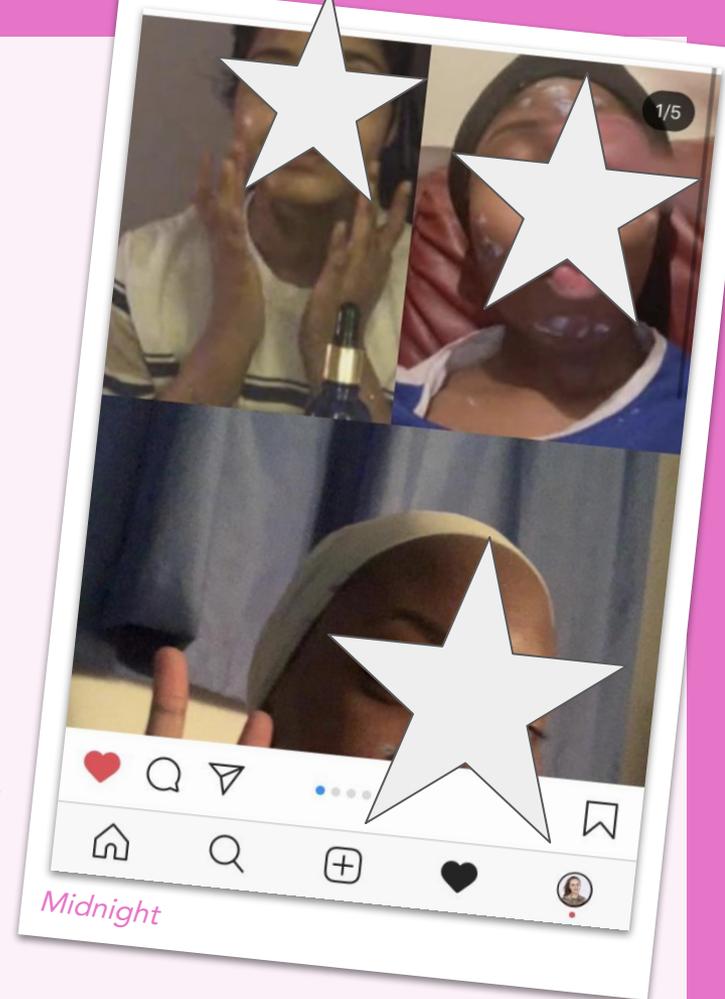
During lockdown, many young people accessed support online. We heard about youth groups moving their meetings to zoom and about apps that young people found particularly useful for their wellbeing. Some of the young people we spoke to tended to find the online support helpful but all reflected that it cannot fully replace connection in real life. What young people needed from online spaces varied, with some seeking more private interactions. Social media didn't always feel like a space that actually connected people to their friends.

"One app that I think is absolutely amazing is the MeeTwo app, I think it is run by the NHS. You just post like how are you are feeling and then other young people will be answering these questions; it is all anonymous. It is SO GOOD! It is just normalising having these kinds of talks" "I use it basically all the time. If there is something you've experienced that you can use to help other people, it is just a good feeling and if I'm feeling a certain way, I can just post something and it's totally anonymous and then people answer me who are my age." April

"There was a whatsapp group but it was very public, there was no way to speak in smaller groups so anything you put on the whatsapp group everyone could see." Kai

"Personally I don't like online activities in the sense that it's not the same as going to something physical. If it's online as well, there's more of a reluctance to go, it's like I can't be bothered. Or maybe some people don't even have good enough internet access so if you have it in a centre that's easily accessible to people, they've got somewhere to go." Alex

"I spent a lot of time on instagram and snapchat but not really posting anything as I didn't have to keep up appearances of being a social person. Watching other people virtually connecting with their friends was a bit isolating but I still had people I could connect with if I really wanted to." Kai



Principles and Opportunities

We heard how Covid has exacerbated the uncertainty and complexity in young people's lives, and generated new anxieties. But we also heard about real strengths and opportunities that can be built upon to support young people's wellbeing. Young people overall were not seeking mental health services. They valued or sought mentorship, connection into community, the opportunity to connect with their own creativity and purpose, as well as the infrastructural resources to study, connect and create.

Mental and emotional wellbeing support needs to be embedded in the places young people feel safe and with people they trust. Ideally mental health wouldn't be something that gets addressed 'over there' for people who are really ill, but addressed as part of everyday life: in existing relationships, with mentors or peers, and as part of existing activities, such as youth clubs and drama groups.

We recommend a set of opportunities for local funders and providers, to build a supportive and protective ecosystem for the mental and emotional wellbeing of young people in Lambeth. This includes:

1. safe spaces and groups
2. a networked peer offer
3. a networked mentoring offer
4. practical help for navigating changes and next steps
5. digital and infrastructural resources for young people who are being left behind

We have also devised a set of principles to guide the work ahead, based on our engagement with the young people we spoke to and worked with as part of this project.

Principles

Find opportunities to make the most of the strengths and expertise of young people. Be careful not to underestimate young people. Their experience puts them in the best place to know what they need.

It's never one size fits all. Young people's needs don't fit into neat boxes. What will work for each young person will look different. Don't be intimidated, rather, respect individuals needs and preferences and aspire to meet them where they are.

Assume that a lot of young people won't have adequate access to physical and digital resources. There are many young people in Lambeth with complex lives. Design for them, so no one gets left behind.

Show young people in Lambeth that you know and care that institutional racism exists. Young people in Lambeth have experienced institutional racism first hand. Be proactive in addressing the structural and institutional racism that affects their lives and future.

Make young people feel like you care about their mental and emotional wellbeing before they reach a crisis. Young people need to know that there are spaces, relationships and resources available to support their mental and emotional wellbeing, before they hit crisis point.

Opportunity 1

Safe spaces and groups

A network of local safe spaces across Lambeth, either in tailored locations, or hosted by local organisations, to ensure all young people have quick and easy access to a positive space for their mental and emotional wellbeing.

There are different spaces which attend to different needs. Spaces are organised around hanging out and socialising; taking space and quiet time; hobbies and creative outlets; and connecting to others with shared experiences.

Each safe space is supported by an online space- where young people can access information, positive mental and emotional wellbeing resources and connect with other young people.

“Maybe setting up a physical centre where young people can come. Obviously making sure it’s like covid safe and what not. And maybe provide activities and just something simple where people don’t have to feel alone, and they’ve got somewhere to go to if they feel like they just need a break away from home” Alex

“People who are LGBTQ will be stuck with people who don’t know or who are against it so there should be like a safety thing - almost like a hostel or something you can just go to if you are in danger. A community space where you can go for the day if things are getting really tough. Socially distanced, out the house, and you don’t have to spend money to be there. This would help deal with the tension of being stuck with the same people every day.” Kai

Opportunity 2

A networked peer offer

A network of peer support offers providing a range of ways that young people can volunteer to support other young people in safe and supported roles and groups.

There are different peer offers to meet the different life experiences of young people living in Lambeth. This includes LGBTQ+ and neurodiversity peer support groups, as well as a peer offer for young people experiencing racism.

The monthly [Peer Support Group](#) facilitated by the Young Carers service is one example of a peer offer within a network of other peer support opportunities for young people across the borough.

Support and guidance is available for young people supporting others if they need it. This includes training & education on inclusion.

“Where you’ve got young people that are there to support each other. So if someone says that they’re not doing so well you’ve got other people that can help them and stuff, and maybe through that you can do like activities, and it will just bring you into community, because we’re all going through the same stuff” Alex

“Some people feel more comfortable around people that like have a certain way of speaking, like if they speak slang just like them, or if they’re the same colour as them” Pipa

Opportunity 3

A networked mentoring offer

A network of mentors of different ages and backgrounds, to listen and guide young people through good days and bad days.

A mentor has attributes that are relatable to the young person they are supporting. They might have shared experiences of culture, race, religion, community, gender or sexuality. They are someone a young person feels comfortable reaching out to, and who regularly checks in and asks the young person about what's going on for them.

Mentors draw on local resources & assets to support young people, and refer them and support access to more specialist support if they need it.

“Having adults there who can relate to young people is important. They are often young, in their late 20s. They understood what was really going on with like instagram and snapchat” April

“I have struggled a little bit. And in secondary school I had to ask for help rather than being seen, and even then I wasn't really acknowledged, like my situation, nobody really tried to help get me counselling, nobody ever spoke to me as much. In college they think you're grown so they don't really ask you if you have issues at home...I've never really had the opportunity to tell somebody what's going on or you know, have an ear.” Pipa

“For autism there needs to be advice on communicating with the new methods, I know that a lot of people with autism hate change in routine. There was no thought about how autistic people would be dealing with this - there was no targeted support. Even if there was a counsellor type person to get advice, to help work through strategies to try and make things as normal as possible. Just some resources around communicating not face to face would be good” Kai

“Motivational and business programmes that helps people with marketing and sales to start own businesses- [during lockdown] lots of people are tapping into their creative sides and thought deeply about what they want their life to be “ Rebecca

Opportunity 4

Practical help for navigating changes and next steps

Practical help is available to support young people as they experience transition or look to the next step. This includes more support for changes in young people’s lives that relate to the pandemic.

Teachers and mentors are trained and supported to provide specialist guidance for young people who are neurodiverse, to help them navigate changes to learning and social life.

For young people looking ahead, skills workshops are on offer to grow young people's confidence in themselves and support them in their next step, whatever that might be.

Opportunity 5

Digital and infrastructural resources for young people who are being left behind

Enhancing community provision of resources to help overcome digital exclusion and the resources divide.

This includes the provision of laptops, wifi plans and spaces offering the internet for young people without adequate space or resources to learn and connect.

High Trees Centre's '[Connecting Tulse Hill](#)' is a great example of a local project that helped support families and individuals access devices and WiFi during lockdown. They have been looking to provide a community WiFi set up for local estates where 50% of residents are digitally excluded.

“Laptops provided to kids to help with education and creativity” **Rebecca**

“So I was thinking we could actually have designated buildings for studying outside of college for students who like me have very limited supplies or resources and don’t have the best environment to work in... because the way I see it students are the ones who will change the world.” **Devi**

Methodology

When designing our methodology we thought critically about our research practice. We wanted to acknowledge the power dynamics and risks that arise when researchers from outside of a community try to make sense of what is going on within one.

The Black Lives Matter protests were taking place during our research design phase. This motivated us to better understand how social inequalities such as race and class influence research approaches and outcomes. We also had to think innovatively about engaging meaningfully and safely in a virtual Covid-19 world.

The following principles guided our approach to this research.

We are committed to building a participant-led research process which allows young people to express themselves in a way that feels safe and empowering.

We used Instagram as one way to communicate with the young people. This was a platform they already used in their day to day. We encouraged the young people to use photo, video or voice note functions, to help them to express themselves in a way that felt comfortable for them.

We respect the young person as the expert in their own life.

We worked with participants to check and reshape their own story.

We are driven by community outcomes.

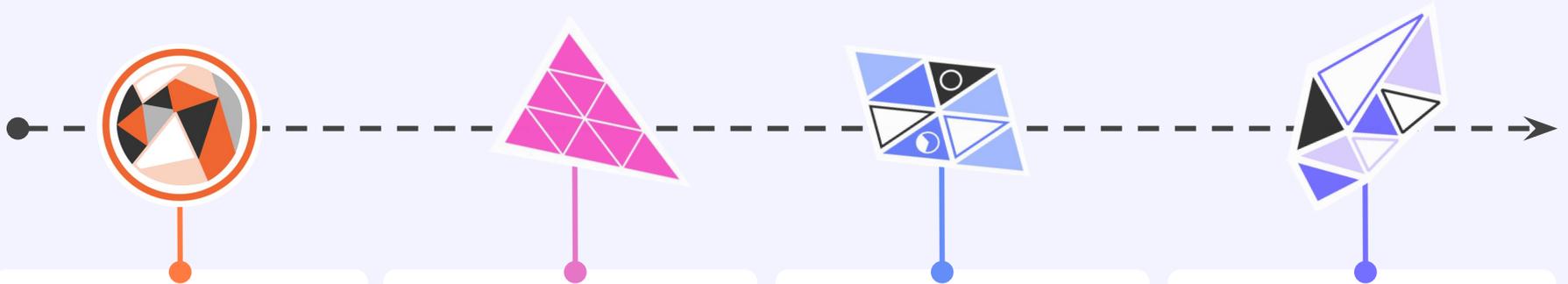
Insights and recommendations are fed back to local funders, decision makers, partners and participants.

We ensure young people are compensated for their time, and have access to appropriate support if they need it.

We are humble and inquisitive, acknowledging our own bias and shortcomings.

This meant working with Hana Riazuddin, a PhD researcher at King's College London, researching how gentrification impacts the mental health of young people in Lambeth and Southwark, using a participatory research approach. Hana connected us to a group of peer researchers from Lambeth who helped us ask the right questions and synthesise our findings, bringing in their own lived experiences to strengthen the insights.

Our Process



Methodology design

- Designing a safe and successful virtual methodology
- Testing the methodology with young people
- Hiring a local consultant and young person to get feedback

Recruitment and set up

- Reaching out to partner organisations
- Creating a support plan for each young person
- Using a "Getting to know you questionnaire" to tailor the research process to individual strengths, skills and preferences

3 week research engagement with participants

- Instagram engagement (mood tracker and warm up activities)
- 1 x 1 hour research interview focussing on the young person's experiences of Covid
- 1 x 1 hour design session focussing on their needs and ideas

Sense making

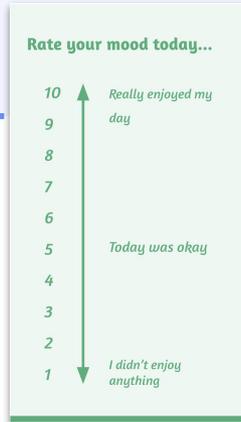
- Internal synthesis session
- Synthesis session with 7 peer researchers
- Checking data with participants to make sure they are happy with the story we are telling

Participant Journey

2

Instagram

Mood tracking and warm up reflective tasks for interviews



4

Interview Two

Focusing on young people's wellbeing needs, the barriers they face and coming up with solutions for them and other young people in Lambeth

3 weeks

1

Set up

Getting to know them, creating a support plan and logistics

Hey _____ !

Thank you SO MUCH for agreeing to take part in our research. We hope that our research helps local funders and people in power to understand how young people have been affected by recent events (Covid-19 and BLM). These findings will help to inform future forms of preventions, care and support for other young people.

Who are we?
We are Innovation Unit, a not-for-profit organisation that works to design new solutions in mental health, children's social care, education, and health. Find out more about us on our website. <https://www.innovationunit.org/>

Who am I?
Each participant gets an assigned researcher. You're mine (Sophia). I'm an Associate with Innovation Unit, currently based in Peckham. I really hope you'll enjoy being involved in the research and look forward to learning about your experiences and opinions!

What will this be like for you?
This engagement will be spread across three weeks. Overall it will take up 4 hours of your time. We'll be asking you about your experiences, feelings and coping mechanisms. See the next page to better understand what the process will look like.

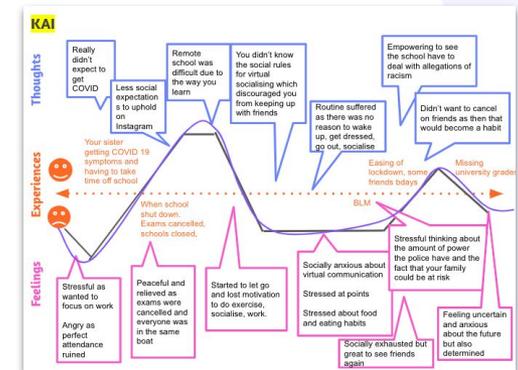
As well as you getting a £50 voucher we hope this is a positive experience for you. It's an opportunity for you to reflect on your wellbeing and be heard by local decision makers and funders. Your story will help build new forms of care and support for other young people. So thank you.

Innovation Unit

3

Interview One

Delving into the young person's experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and how they have been feeling



Feedback from the young people

We sent out anonymised surveys to the **participants** and **peer researchers**, and were really pleased to see that the process had been enjoyable and empowering. We believe this is a reflection of the principles that guided this work.

Transparency that my assigned researcher was white and her willingness to listen offered my story as a person of colour dignity

I'm just thankful that I was able to take part in this life changing experience

Being able to talk to someone and express things I haven't told anyone and finally getting things off my chest.

Feeling like my voice and experiences mattered and were heard.

I enjoyed the experience so much and glad I got to take part in order to have people like me heard

I was very comfortable when contributing . I had a lot to say.

I could relate to some of their experiences

I like the way we were able to contribute to our own opinions, ideas and experience and show what we think in different perspectives.

I found the session very beneficial as it really helped me to enhance my research skills and it gave me an insight on how COVID treated others.

I found it comfortable speaking about race, I left free as I was able to speak about my experience and what's going on in the world in terms of BLM

Glossary of terms

Institutional racism: occurs through policies and practices that, intentionally or not, put a racial group at a disadvantage. These discriminatory treatments or biased policies don't always mention any racial group but their effect is to create advantages for white people and disadvantage for people classified as non-white.

Structural racism: a system where public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to maintain and produce racial inequality. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it is a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist.

Source: 11 Terms You Should Know to Better Understand Structural Racism. The Aspen Institute. August 29, 2017.
<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/structural-racism-definition/>

LGBTQ+: stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning) and others.

Source: Rachel Rosen. LGBTQ+ glossary for parents. Parent Info. May 2018.
<https://parentinfo.org/article/lgbtq-glossary-for-parents>

Mental and emotional wellbeing: a term to talk about how a person feels, how well they are coping with daily life or what feels possible at the moment. Good mental and emotional wellbeing doesn't mean a person is always happy or unaffected by their experiences. But poor mental and emotional wellbeing can make it more difficult to cope with daily life.

Source: How to Improve Your Mental Wellbeing. Mind. 2020,
<https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/6152/mental-wellbeing-2020.pdf>

Synthesise: synthesising research means integrating existing knowledge with your research findings to be able to better apply your findings and create new knowledge.

Source: Carina Wyborn et al. Understanding the Impacts of Research Synthesis. Environmental Science & Policy. Volume 86, August 2018, Pages 72-84
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1462901117311048>

Neurodiverse: applies to a community of people who are neurodivergent. This includes the conditions of ADHD, Autism, Dyspraxia, and Dyslexia.

Source: Neurodiversity Definitions and Different Types. Exceptional Individuals.
<https://exceptionalindividuals.com/neurodiversity/>

A very special thank you to Hana Riazuddin, Olamide Bamigboye, Shahani Richards, Elizabeth Kuyoro, Frances Conteh, Amina Sesay, Shamso Ali and Afnan Bouh for helping us to shape and understand our findings. And to Alex, April, Devi, Kai, Midnight, Pipa and Rebecca for sharing your stories.