

Authoring Our Own Stories

A national youth voice initiative exploring civic identity and its impact on access to youth support

2024 Summary

Partnership for Young London

Photo-collage of Young Leaders from Partnership for Young London Yorks and Humber Youth Work Unit, Youth Focus North West, Youth Focus South West, Workers from across all four organisations and project participants in 2024.



Partnership for Young London



youth focus ^{NW}
Improving the lives of young people

**Youth
Focus**
SOUTH WEST

Authoring Our Own Stories: An Introduction to the Programme

Authoring Our Own Stories is a five-year, national programme that uses creative approaches to co-produce peer research projects. The initiative is funded by National Community Lottery Fund. The lifespan of the work is 2022 to 2026.

Authoring Our Own Stories explores the link between young people's civic identity and how it influences access to youth services. There is a specific focus on working with young people from marginalised communities. In 2024 these included, young people from Black and Asian communities (London), young, white working-class men from ex-mining communities (Yorkshire and Humber), young people from LGBTQI+ communities (Manchester) and young people who live in coastal areas and are also from racialised communities (Plymouth).

The initiative is led in partnership with four youth work units across England. They are Partnership for Young London, Yorks and Humber Youth Work Unit, Youth Focus North West and Youth Focus South West.

This document summarises the key findings and achievements from **Young Leaders in London** (also referred to as peer researchers). For more information about the other youth work units involved in Authoring Our Own Stories go to [Authoring Our Own Stories| PYL](#)

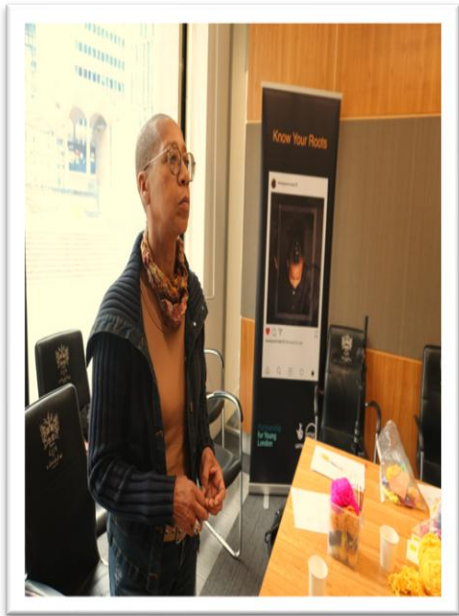


Young Leaders and Workers

L to R: Aaliyah, Olu, Sandra, Sian, Sharon, Yash, Anu, Ilaria, Marriam, Clara



Joshua and Caron



The Delivery of Authoring Our Own Stories Involves Several Key Stages

- Exploring Civic Identity and its influence on outcomes for young people from marginalised communities.
- Training young people to become peer researchers.
- Developing research projects that are co-produced with adults and peer researchers about an aspect of civic identity that everyone wants to focus on because it is perceived to be creating a barrier to accessing services (for example, the issue of racial stereotyping through adultification).

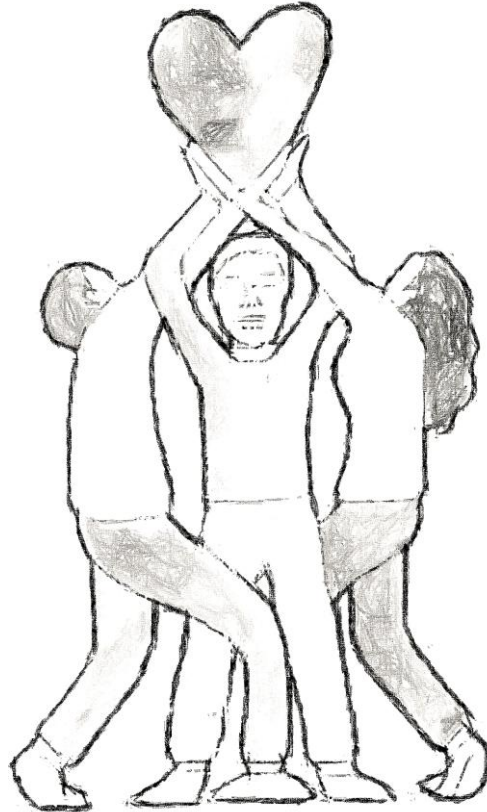
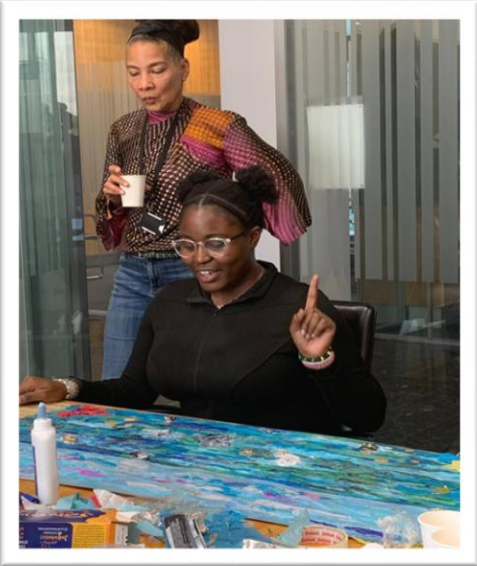
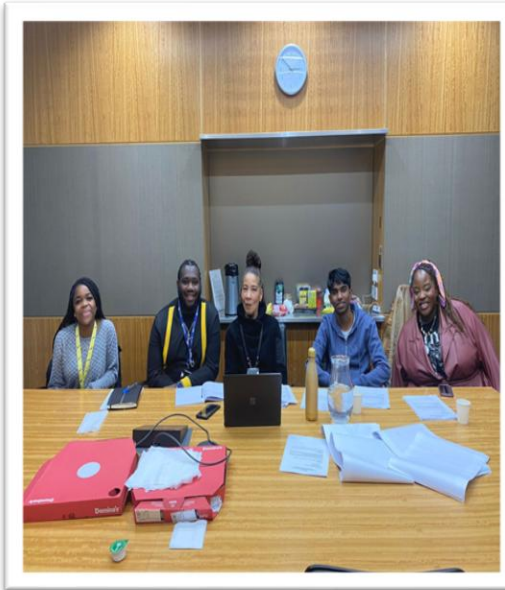


Illustration by Drew Sinclair

- Using creative approaches such as painting, collaging, handicrafts, poetry to develop the research projects.
- Delivering the projects to young people (also referred to as participants) in youth projects across the Capital.
- Analysing the data and pulling out the key findings.
- Creatively interpreting the data.
- Disseminating the findings and using the creative interpretations of the data as training tools that may also influence youth policy.



From L to R: Ling, Caron, Moshood, Sandra and Natasha



From L to R: Rachael, Joshua, Sandra, Yash, Sian, Camelia, Ilaria and Anu

What do we Mean by Civic Identity?

We don't have a definitive answer to this question! However, when we are talking about a person's civic identity, we are generally referring to a person's public or social identity (e.g. their age, ethnicity, class, religion etc).

Why is it Important to Know More about Civic Identity?

We began Authoring Our Own Stories in 2022. What we are learning, year on year, is that the way a young person's identity is perceived affects how they are treated, and, in some cases, what is available to them in terms of services and support

Each year, Young Leaders from London deliver focus groups to approximately 60 young people in the Capital. Our findings strongly suggest young people from minoritised communities are socialised to cope with social problems...to 'be strong'. Participants in our research make comments like 'it's character building', and 'it makes us stronger' when they successfully overcome problems. Although this is positive in some respects, it is also concerning that young Black and Asian people must be resilient as a routine aspect of their lives.



TRAINING in 2024

“In London we continued to focus on the experiences of young Black and Asian people, building on previous research of the project conducted in years one and two.

Our research in London focused on the experiences of young Black and Asian people who had notably different standout experiences accessing adequate services and support in the capital, due to their civic identities.

*Our delivery process involved analysing secondary data in this realm, building on previous research of the project conducted in years one and two and consequently **establishing our overarching theme of mental health** and finally conducting focus groups to collect data and inform the present recommendations...*

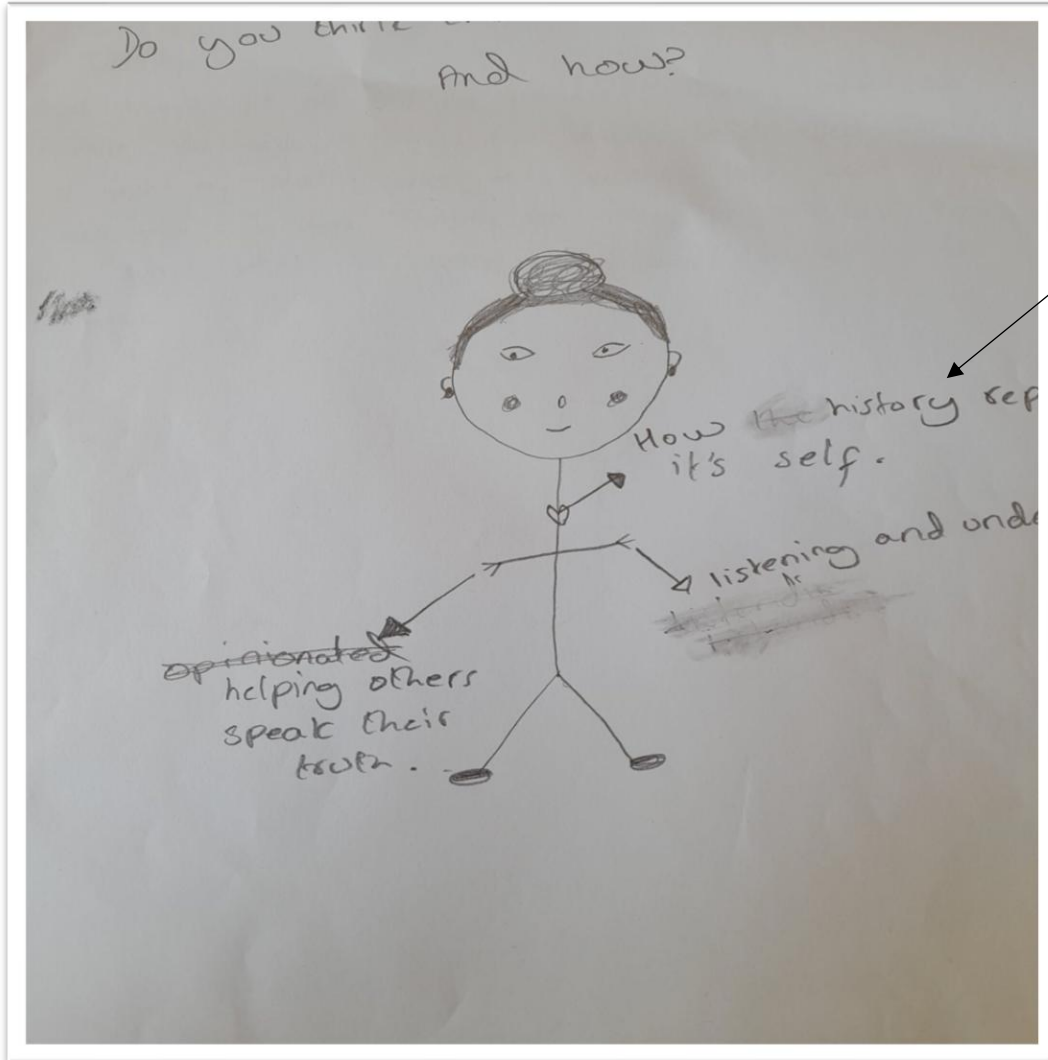
Present day events, like UK the race riots, reinforce the importance of such work and, more importantly, implementing meaningful measures to best support communities” (Clara, peer researcher, year three).



Collage images from Ricardo and Nadia. Peer Researchers from year one



Another recurring theme in 2024 was based on a question posed in 2022 from Khamicah, a peer researcher. She wanted to examine...



‘How history repeats itself...’

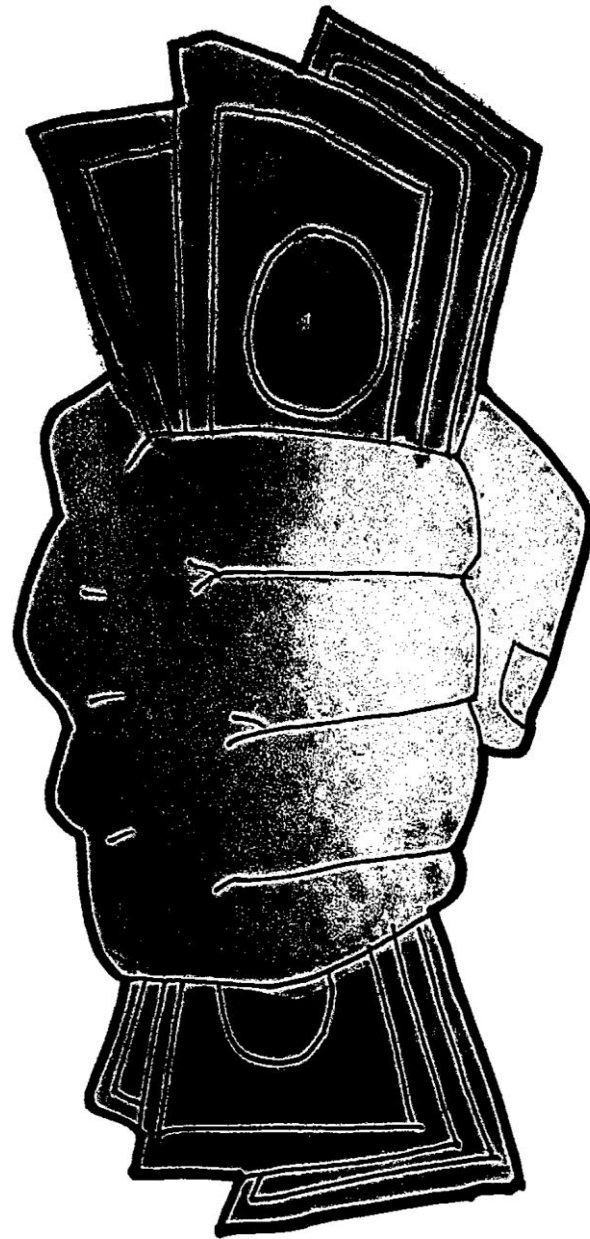
(Khamicah, Peer Researcher, year one)

*The race riots of 2024 illuminated 'how history repeats itself'. The racist incidents during the summer of that year reinforced, **again**, the vulnerability of young Black and Brown people through the influence of **racial stereotyping**.*

An Example of Secondary Data was the Recurring Theme from Years One and Two of Adultification

We found many of the young people we met have to take on adult responsibilities when they still need to be looked after themselves.

Often young Black and Asian people are treated more harshly than their white peers if they make mistakes. They are treated like adults.



'I've got 5 jobs'
(research participant)

'I think I hold a lot of responsibility'
(research participant)

'I need to get jobs'
(research participant)

'I need to help my mum'
(research participant)

'I can't be too vulnerable in front of my parents. I need to show them that I am powerful'
(research participant)



SIAN

HOW WE PUT OUR RESEARCH
PROJECT FOR 2024, ON
MENTAL HEALTH, TOGETHER



PUTTING OUR RESEARCH PROJECT ON MENTAL HEALTH TOGETHER

“We understood that mental health for Black and Asian young people brings up barriers at home, in their communities and more externally. So, to help find a solution to this we tested different creative methods such as podcasts, creative writing, storyboards and drawing in our training as peer researchers , to see what effective methods could be used to approach participants in the focus groups and understand their point of view. From there, we were able to decide as peer researchers what would work efficiently to collect the data when we delivered the focus groups in the summer.

Our Data Collection Tools

In the focus groups we used a scenario, by me (Sian!), called ‘Kelly’s Story’ as one of the activities. It involved creative freethinking and storylines to address barriers some young people of Black and Asian heritage face to discussing mental health with elders at home and in their communities. We also used a ‘Wellbeing Gallery’ created by Clara Akingbade and Ilaria Di Fiore. It is a self-reflective and calming activity, which lets young people create their own mini art galleries, helping them to identify what they do to support their mental health . Finally, we came up with a solution-based style podcast. Presenting the research questions in the informal setting of a podcast discussion helped young people understand what they could do to support their mental health” (Sian, peer researcher, year three).



L to R: Ilaria, Ling, Caron and Moshood

Our Data Collection Tools

Example One

Kelly's Story is a data collection tool created by Sian Campbell. The aim of this tool was to introduce a character, whose parents struggle to adequately support her with her mental health. The participants in the focus groups were encouraged to explore how Kelly could overcome the barriers that she encountered with her parents to identify the help she needed.

The exercise sought to have **transparent and respectful** conversations about difficulties that **some** young Black and Asian people face when seeking help to support their mental health within their communities.

Kelly's Story

based on an idea by
Sian Campbell

Kelly is going through depression and is looking to get help at school to deal with this. She has been advised that she should tell her family to make the process easier for her by her best friend Rachel



Create speech text between Kelly and Rachel

Kelly goes to her mum and grandma. They are migrants from West Africa and the Caribbean. They have a different attitude to mental health. They are extremely religious and feel that depression is not a 'real problem' and that Kelly needs to toughen up, like they have to.. She's spoken to other members of her family in the past and they tell her the same thing - 'be strong...'



Flash back of when Kelly decided to tell her mum and grandma about her depression
Create the dialogue between her and family.

Kelly's depression takes a turn for the worst. She decides to speak to her friend Rachel about what services she can use to help her.



What service can she use to help?
Create a speech between Kelly and Rachel

Kelly decides to speak to a service to explain the pressure she is under to remain strong when she is struggling and needs help.



Based on services picked, create a speech text about how Kelly shares her problem.

In the is section you have full creative power to come up with medium and longer term solutions you think the youth sector can take to support young Black and Brown women with their mental health and challenge the expectation of them to be strong...



Based on your discussions, list your ideas



Our Data Collection Tools

Example Two

The Wellbeing Gallery was created by Clara Akingbade, peer researcher, and Ilaria Di Fiore, who is an artist and a youth worker.

Each participant in our focus groups was given a copy of the Wellbeing Gallery and asked the following question:

'What do you do to support your mental health?'

They were then invited to fill in each of the picture frames with an example.



- The peer researchers and workers delivered focus groups to six groups in London. They were as follows:
- Peer researchers from the NHS Team Health Inequalities group at Guildhall
- Lewisham Young Mayor's Advisors
- Hoxton Hall
- National Citizen Service
- Spotlight (two sessions).
- The peer researchers learned how to analyse the completed Wellbeing Galleries, using a method called 'thematic analysis'. This involved looking for patterns in the responses of participant's responses, coding those responses and then categorising them into different themes. This enabled us to understand the most common strategies the participants used to support their mental wellbeing.

Following the Fieldwork in the Summer...



A completed Wellbeing Gallery from a focus group participant

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- Sian delivering our first 'try out' session in August with members from the NHS Health Inequalities research initiative





YASH

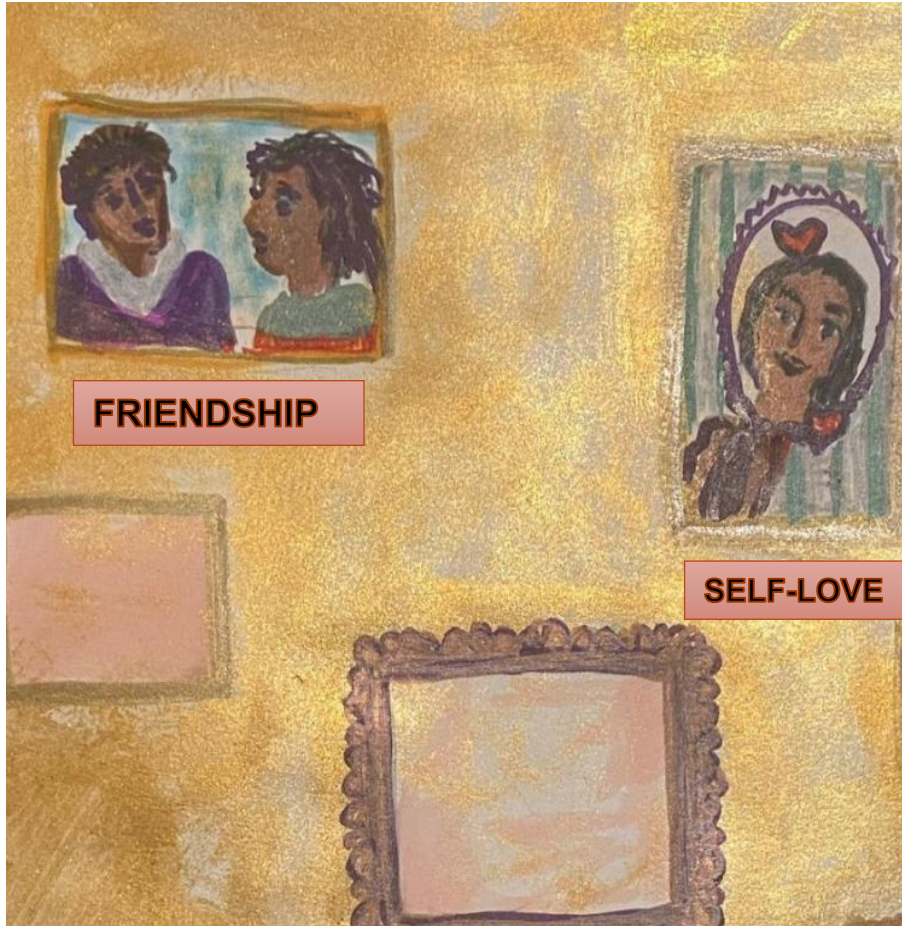
WHAT WE LEARNED



Key Findings that we learned from the Participants in our Focus Groups

- *“Mental health is a very common theme amongst young people.*
- *Young people didn’t know too much about civic identity before we met them.*
- *They knew about identity but ‘civic’ threw them off.*
- *Young people were more engaged in the creative side. So, ‘Kelly’s Story’ and the ‘Wellbeing Gallery’ worked most effectively.*
- *It’s good to have a wide range of ideas/methods when running a focus group to cater to the different needs and learning styles of the participants in the focus groups.*
- *Community, and that feeling of belonging, is important to all young people (but not all young people experience it).*
- *Recording helped us see all the responses from the podcast. Using these, and analysis from ‘Kelly’s Story’ and the ‘Wellbeing Gallery’, we created links between our learning and the learning from other groups, from the national projects.*
- *Communication and clarity are important parts of focus groups as it sets the tone and should be valued. So are the morals of the researchers.*
- *We needed understanding of how to approach young people and speak to them to make them feel engaged.*
- *Young people feel the burdens of having to be heroically resilient to support their mental health” (Yash, peer researcher, year three).*

22% of young people from our focus groups rely on their own self-care resources to support their mental wellbeing



19% of the young people from our focus groups use creative activities to support their mental wellbeing





L to R: Sian and Joshua leading 'Kelly's Story' and the Podcast with the Youth Empowerment Board and Spotlight, in Tower Hamlets



As well as finding common themes across the data that we gathered in London, the peer researchers were also tasked with finding common themes across the data from the work delivered by the peer researchers in Yorkshire and Humber, Manchester and Plymouth too. This helped us develop a national picture of what barriers young people from different marginalised communities face when trying to gain effective youth support.



**THEMES FOR LONDON
AND COMMON THEMES
ACROSS THE PROJECT
NATIONALLY**

**National Common
Themes**

Mental health

Stereotyping

Toxic masculinity

Adultification

**Intergenerational
friction**

Safe spaces

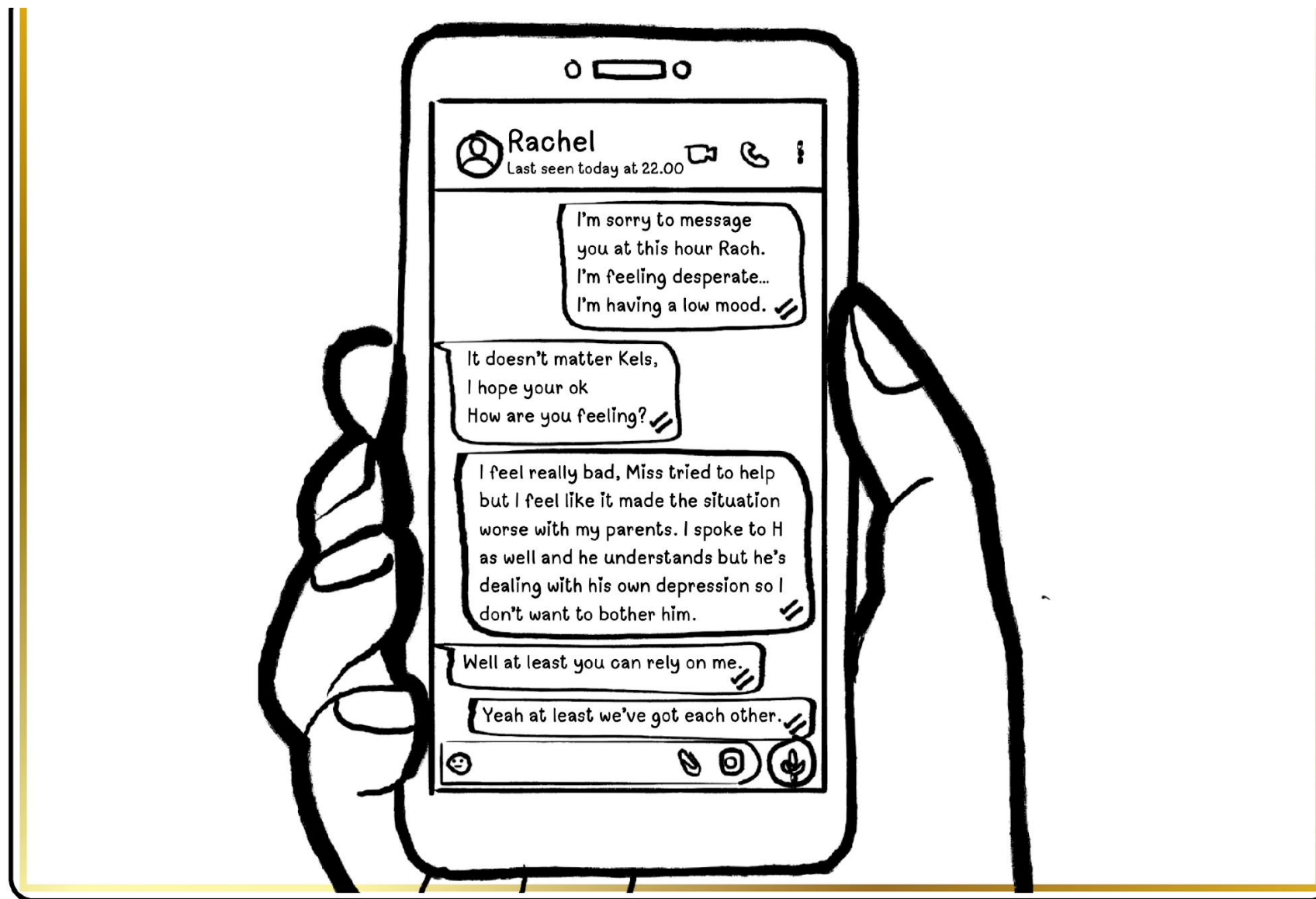
Belonging




*“Our data taught us that although young Black and Asian people can be self-reliant in looking after their mental health, **there is too much pressure on them to find their own solutions for support.** They often turn to their friends for advice. This can create, what some young people described as, ‘toxic bonding’.*

Stereotyping was another theme from our analysis and other groups in terms of gender, race and through ableism. Toxic masculinity was a theme in London and Yorkshire and so were adultification and intergenerational friction.

*Finally, **safety and belonging were themes for all the groups.** For example, some young people in London and in Manchester said there are limited spaces for young people of Black and Asian heritage from the LGBTQI+ community to feel secure to express their civic identities” (Olu, peer researcher, year three)”.*



Initial Illustrations for 'Kelly's Story' by Drew Sinclair



I don't know
what you want
us to do.

Dad I'm not
you.



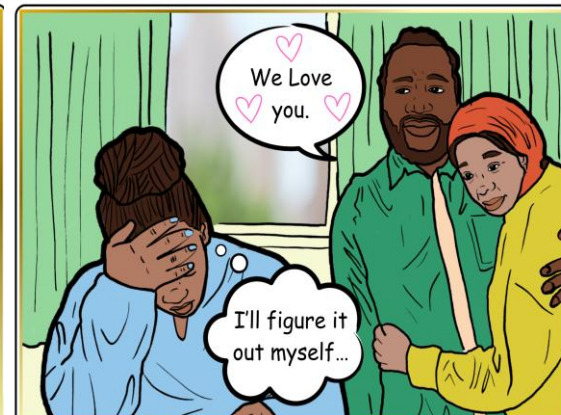
Initial Illustrations for 'Kelly's Story' by Drew Sinclair





RESOURCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

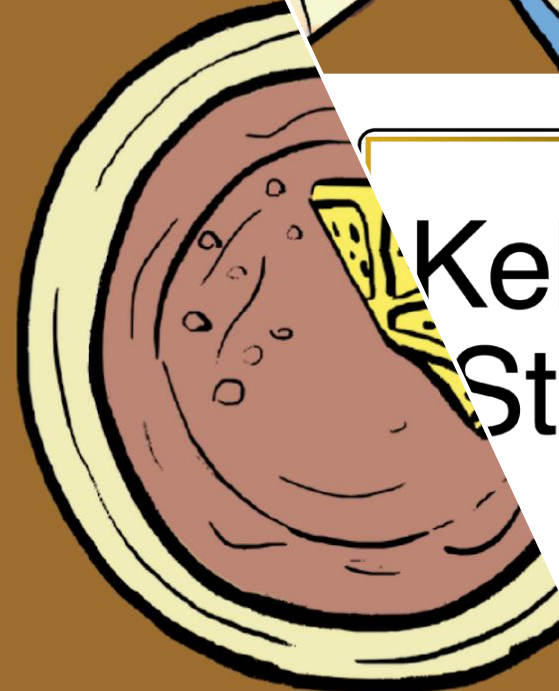
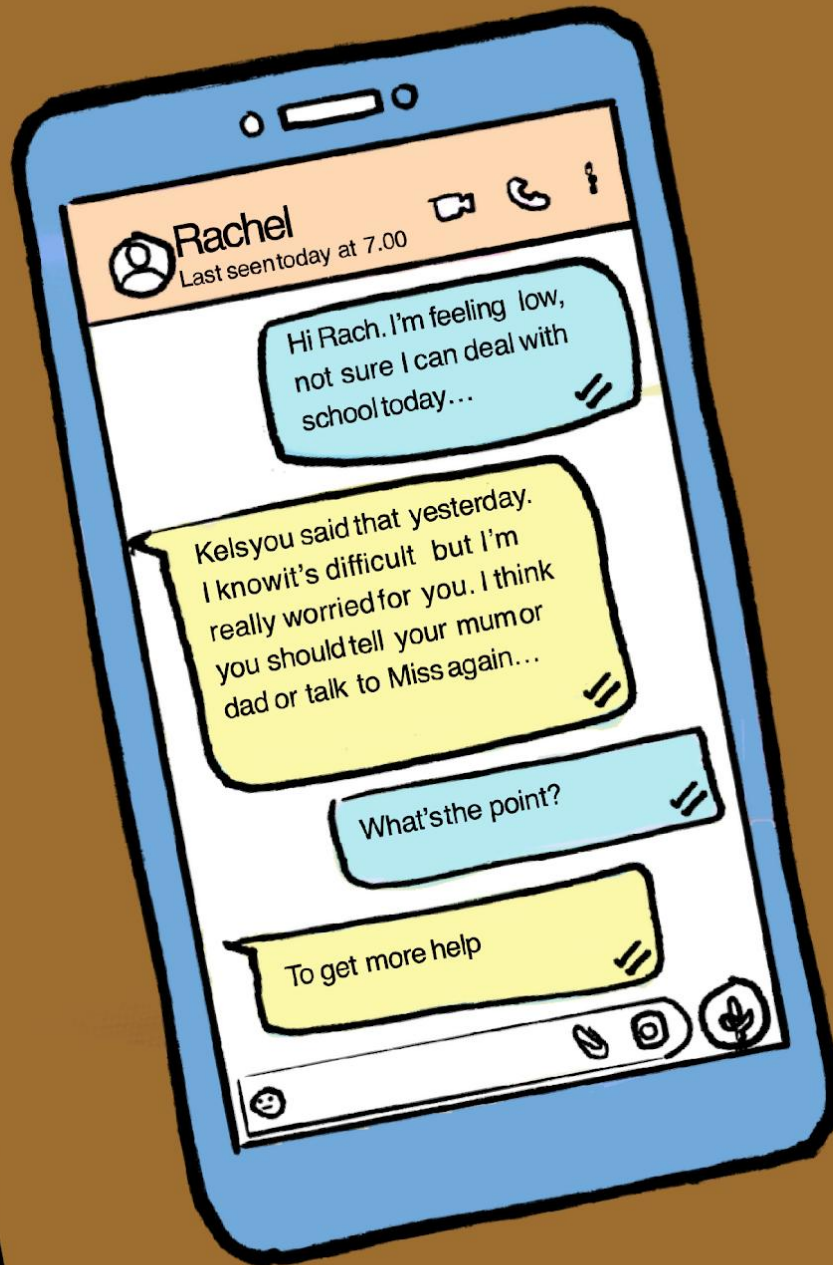
We have used the feedback from young people in our focus groups on 'Kelly's Story' to develop a resource. It is illustrated by Drew Sinclair, a graphic artist. The aim of 'Kelly's Story' is for professionals to work with young people to explore how we can have sensitive conversations with adults, when there is a disconnection in perceptions and attitudes about mental health.



Recommendations from London

“So as a result of our work we recommend that practitioners invite professionals who are seen as successful in Black and Asian communities into youth spaces to discuss their mental health journeys and invite parents and guardians to these events to help shed light on the different views of different generations on mental health and educate them on its importance.

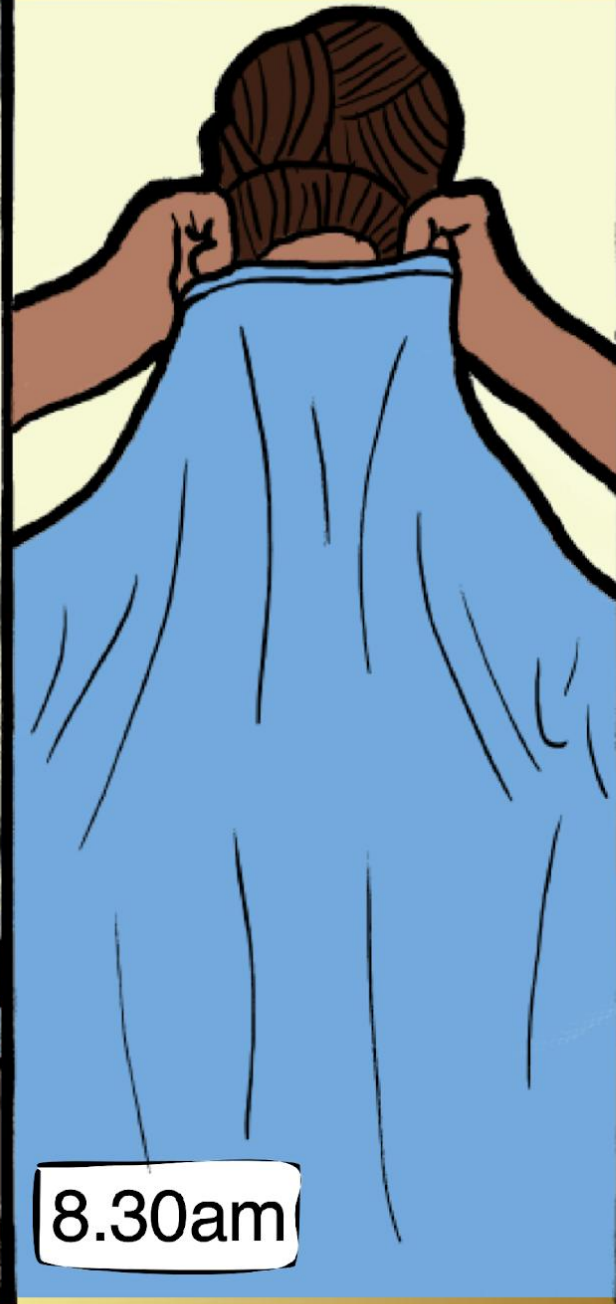
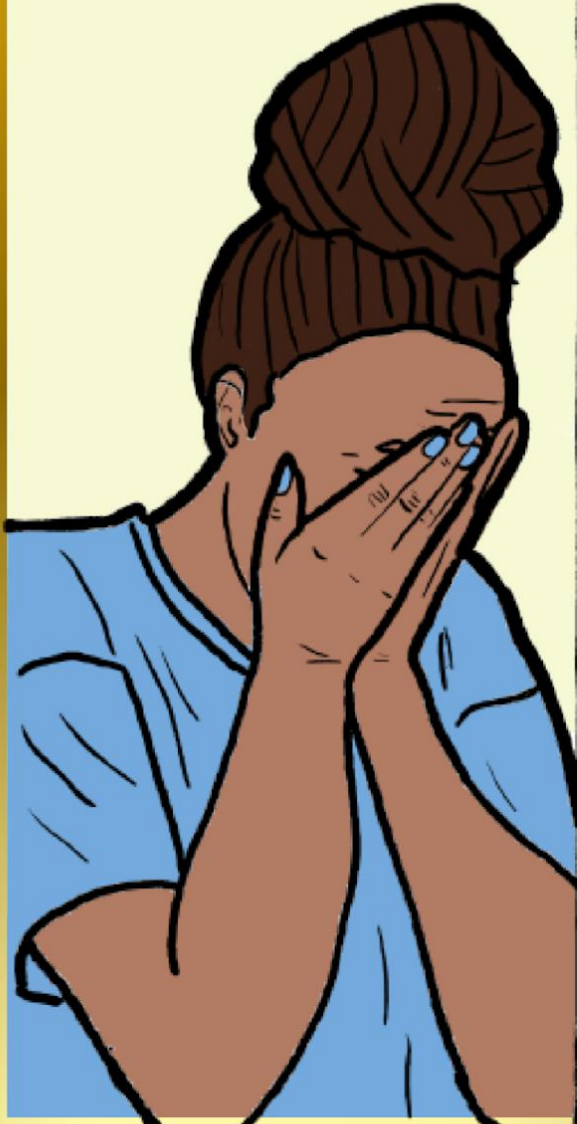
We would also like the National Youth Agency to include civic identity as a theme in the National Youth Work Curriculum, to help continue our work on educating young people about civic identity and creating safe spaces for Black and Asian young people across London and England as a whole” (Anu, peer researcher, year three).



Kelly's Story



8am



8.30am

10am



A comic book illustration featuring two Black women in a library setting. The woman on the left, with her hair in a bun and wearing an orange shirt, is holding a blue folder and looking towards the other woman. The woman on the right, also with her hair in a bun and wearing a brown jacket over a blue top, has a somber expression. In the background, there are bookshelves filled with books of various colors. The entire scene is framed by a yellow border.

Hey Kelly.
how are you
doing?

Not very
well miss..

Over the forthcoming months we will be launching a further two resources exploring how professionals can go beyond the surface to create more opportunities to support young people in their sense of belonging. Resources by Natasha Lyons, Ling Yan Zheng and Moshood Danmola





Young Leaders interviewing senior leaders from National Citizenship Service and delivering sessions at London Southbank University in autumn, 2024.

Our Partners

- Last year we ran 5 sessions to share findings with the following stakeholders:
- London Youth
- London Southbank University
- National Youth Agency
- Spotlight Youth Club
- NCS
- We also delivered an online training session to voluntary sector organisations about our work

Finally, we are working alongside artist Ilaria Di Fiore to create a physical Wellbeing Gallery. It will be an 'exhibition' of the key findings of Authoring Our Own Stories over its five-year life-span and launched at the end of the entire project in 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2024 FROM LONDON

1. Use the resources created by young leaders in your work.
2. Invite professionals who are seen in as successful in Black and Asian communities, to your youth spaces to share their mental health journeys. Invite parents and guardians to attend these events to discuss what they can learn with young people.
3. National Youth Agency, include civic identity as a theme on the National Youth Work Curriculum.



**A MASSIVE SHOUT OUT TO ALL THE YOUNG PEOPLE,
PROFESSIONALS, VOLUNTEERS, ORGANISATIONS AND
NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND WHO HAVE AND
CONTINUE TO SUPPORT AUTHORIZING OUR OWN STORIES. WE
SIMPLY COULD NOT DO IT WITHOUT YOU!**



Illustration by Drew Sinclair