

# BACKCHAT



Information, news and views from children and young people involved in Camden services

The Coronavirus Lockdown announced in March 2020 posed many challenges to children, young people and services. The past year has been very different. All activities were online and we have discovered new ways of keeping in touch, giving our views and being creative.

## Online opportunities TO DEVELOP SERVICES

**VIRTUAL**  
**Shout Out**

Welcome  
to the  
**LOCKDOWN**  
edition

**GET INVOLVED!**

### Make decisions

Find out what Young Inspectors say about their inspection of support for children and young people during lockdown

**CiC**  
Children in Care Council

Online conversations and documentary film:  
**100 DAYS IN LOCKDOWN**

Meet Abu, the guest editor and member of the Children in Care Council



Camden virtual  
**Takeover Challenge**

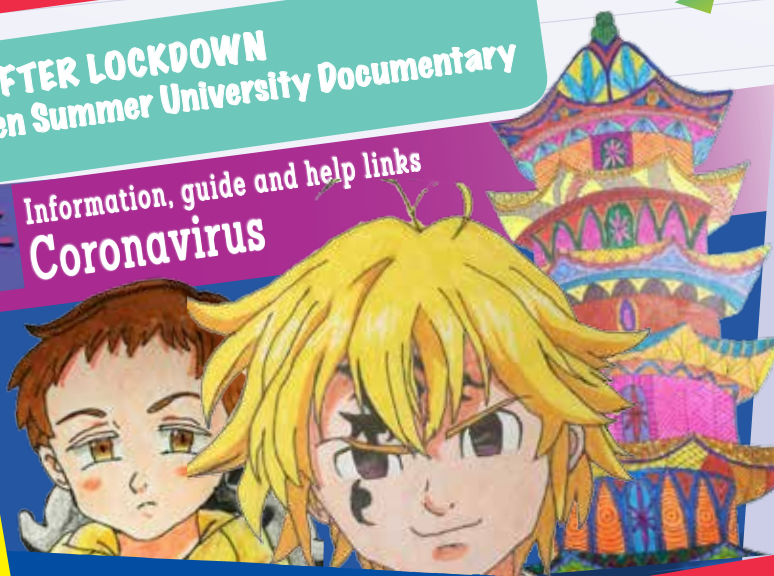


**LIFE AFTER LOCKDOWN**  
Camden Summer University Documentary

Information, guide and help links  
**Coronavirus**

Camden makes every effort to ensure children and families receive a high quality service. The views of children, parents and carers are very important in making changes and improvements to our services. During the coronavirus pandemic many opportunities to give views and to be involved in services were online on Zoom, Teams or by postal questionnaires.

If you would like to find out more, please contact: Elzbieta Chandrasena, Senior Development Officer for Participation, [elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk](mailto:elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk) tel 020 7974 1850 or talk to your social worker.



**LOCKDOWN**



**GALLERY**

[www.backchatonline.org.uk](http://www.backchatonline.org.uk)



What young people have been involved in since the last issue

## MEET THE MEMBERS OF THE

# CiCC

## Children in Care Council

**Hi** My name is Jenny, I am 22 years and I am your guest editor for this issue of Backchat. I am a care leaver and I have been studying photography for 4 years.

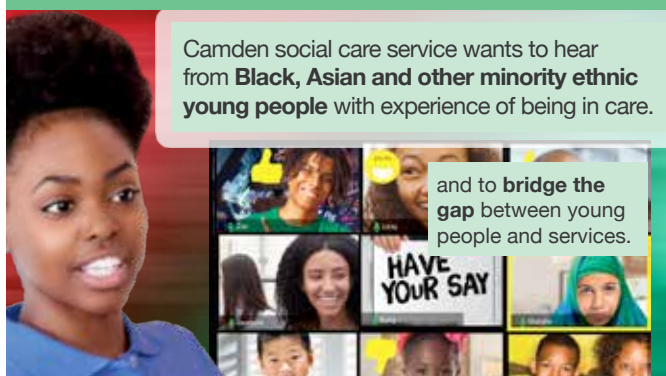
I hope to be Editorial Manager of a magazine or with a book publisher in the future. I have been involved in many projects with the Children in Care Council. In the Children in Care Council, we talk about issues important to young people in care, to care leavers and give our feedback to councillors and senior managers who make decisions about services.

This year has been different due to lockdown. All our meetings and events were online. During the first lockdown from March to June we had online conversations every week about experiences of the lockdown and what support everybody needed.

In the summer, we made a film "100 days in lockdown" and we presented it to all social workers and councillors. I was co-producer of the film together with other young people. It was a new experience for me and I am very proud of what we have achieved.

There is more information about the Children in Care Council projects and conversations in this issue.

I hope you enjoy reading and do not forget to see the Lockdown Art Gallery on the last page.



Camden social care service wants to hear from **Black, Asian and other minority ethnic young people** with experience of being in care.

and to **bridge the gap** between young people and services.

**HAVE YOUR SAY**



Find out more, please contact:  
Email: [elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk](mailto:elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk)



### 1. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) - virtual programme

#### Making decisions

Young people have been involved in making decisions on issues affecting children and young people in care and leaving care. These included:

- providing feedback on the new Corporate Parenting strategy
- creating safe space for Black and Asian children and young people to talk freely about their experience of the service following the Black Lives Matter events
- interviewing candidates for the post of Director of Camden Children's Safeguarding and Social Work
- producing a film '100 Days in Lockdown' reflecting experiences of children and young people during lockdown
- planning and co-hosting Camden's Virtual School celebration event in December 2020.

#### Speaking at Council meetings

Representatives of the CiCC attended Council meeting on 1 March 2020 and presented experiences of children in care during lockdown including showing of the 100 Days in lockdown film and main findings of the Young Inspectors research.

#### Attending Corporate Parenting Board

These are an important opportunity for young people to influence decisions about services. At these meetings, young people talk to councillors, the Director of Children's Safeguarding and Social Work, Executive Director of Supporting People and senior managers about their experience of the services, what is working well and what needs improving. Young people presented findings of the Young Inspectors' research and key recommendations for the support services during lockdown and transition to post lockdown support.

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### 2. Documentary film '100 Days in Lockdown'

The **100 Days in Lockdown** documentary film has been co-produced with children and young people from across all social care services during the first lockdown, following the announcement by the Government about the coronavirus pandemic on 24th March 2020.

The film documents children and young people's experiences of lockdown and the impact it had on their education, physical and emotional wellbeing and what support they needed during this time. It also looks into the future.

Children talk about their hopes for return to normality; meeting with friends, playing sports and going back to school.

### 3. Children in Care Council (CiCC) online conversations

#### Lockdown conversations

During lockdown CiCC hosted weekly conversation for children in care and care leavers to offer support and information on issues and challenges arising from the coronavirus lockdown and new rules.

What young people said about their experience of the lockdown.



MEET THE MEMBERS OF THE

# CiCC

Children in Care Council

#### Lockdown conversations

Top tips from young people how to stay positive and motivated during lockdown:

- **start the day:** get dressed, put your shoes on and talk to other people
- **have a plan for each day:** what you want to achieve. It can be a personal goal or school work
- **start a new hobby:** drawing, exercise, keeping a journal, dancing
- **keep in touch** with friends and family
- **join an online class**
- **make a plan for the future** what you want to achieve after lockdown: GCSEs, driving licence, joining a football club or a drama class.

#### Roots and identity conversations

In response to events surrounding Black Lives Matter movement, CiCC invited Black, Asian and young people of other minority backgrounds to join a programme of discussions.

Together with Partnership for Young London, CiCC held discussions to explore issues identified by children and young people from Black, Asian and minority background. Sessions provided space for children and young people to share their thoughts, personal experiences and helped to create an action plan for Camden social care.

Young people gave their feedback from those discussions to the Corporate Parenting Board in December 2020 and the feedback has been included in the Corporate Parenting strategy.

#### Race and Identity

Our children young people and care leavers will feel assured in who they are, have their voices heard and feel empowered to make a difference. We are committing to: "create safe spaces for young people to speak freely finding the right balance, without prejudice."

Junior CiCC - New to care drama activities

Junior CiCC worked with the creative team from London Bubble Theatre to explore children's experiences of coming into care. Children expressed their thoughts, wishes and feelings by creating a story of an imaginary child coming into care. They helped to record the story to make a training video for social workers. Children will show the video to social workers during their practice week in April 2021.

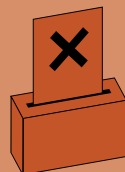


Find out more:  
Email: [elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk](mailto:elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk)



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## VIRTUAL Shout Out



THE EVENTS FOCUSED ON HOW YOUNG PEOPLE WERE FINDING LOCKDOWN, WHAT THEY HOPED/THOUGHT LIFE WOULD BE LIKE AFTER LOCKDOWN AND CONCERNS AROUND EDUCATION.

Young people had a chance to talk about their experiences and challenges around home schooling and exams.

### Speaking at council meetings

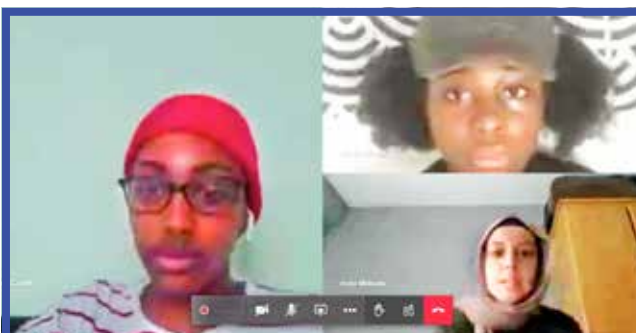
In May and June 2020, the Camden Youth Council and YOS Peer Advocates hosted three virtual Shout Out events for young people in Camden. The aim of the events was to give young Camden residents the chance to speak openly about their experiences of lockdown in a youth led forum.

The event also included a question and answer session with key professionals in education including: Councillor Angela Mason (Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life), Jon Abbey (Head of Camden Learning) Gary Moore (Head teacher at Regent High School), Ruby Nasser (Head teacher at Edith Neville Primary School) and Carlo Metcalfe (Lead Personal Advisor from Camden Careers and Connexions Service).



### Training for social workers and foster carers online

This year total respect training was online and was delivered to social workers, foster carers, managers and partner agencies. Looked after children and care leavers continued to be involved in the planning and delivery of Total Respect training. The training focuses on key aspects of communicating with children and young people. Good communication is essential to developing a trusting relationship that is vital for safeguarding children. Delivering training helps young people to develop new skills and confidence.



### Young Activists

The Camden Youth Council hosted a Young Activist Shout Out event in August 2020 in response to the Black Lives Matter movement.

This event included youth activists answering questions and giving advice to those wanting to become more involved in social justice.

The event had some great and varied speakers including: Athian Akec Youth activist campaigning on knife crime, inequality and climate change.

Saba Asif a former Deputy Youth MP for Camden who campaigns on issues such as cuts to youth services, youth violence and working class issues,

David Adeogun, the President elect of the African-Caribbean Society at the University of Nottingham

Emmanuel Onapa – youth leader from Hackney who conducts research and campaigns on issues like school exclusion.

The speakers gave their advice and guidance to young people just starting out on their activism journey and were a great source of inspiration.

Find out more: [www.camdenrise.co.uk/camden-youth-council](http://www.camdenrise.co.uk/camden-youth-council)

## LIFE AFTER LOCKDOWN

What will change for the better?



Young people investigate what we can be hopeful about with the help of a diverse set of experts in this uplifting documentary. Produced in a week long online film workshop at Camden Summer University featuring punk biologist Lucy Eckersley, climate change activist Shana Tufail, historian James Simpson and Keith Morgan from Young Camden Foundation.



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## Takeover Challenge

### Takeover Challenge November 2019

Takeover Challenge was originally set up by the Children's Commissioner for England to give children and young people opportunities to learn how professional organisations work including local councils and national government.

Camden young people have been taking part in the Takeover Challenge activities since 2012.

### Feedback from young people



This year, pupils from Camden primary and secondary schools presented their findings and ideas around key topics to a panel of senior Camden Council representatives. Members of Camden Youth Council and Camden Children in Care Council chaired the event.

### The children put forward their views on:

Mental health, food poverty, cyber bullying, online safety and racial equality, as well as sharing their experiences and lessons learned during lockdown and the pandemic.

They also made recommendations for action by the Council to help improve the lives of children and young people in Camden. The annual event was held online using Zoom this year, with the help of technical support from Camden City Learning Centre and Camden Learning.

This year's panel, who listened to the presentations and put follow-up questions to the pupils, included:

The Mayor of Camden, Cllr Maryam Eslamdoust; the Leader of the Council, Cllr Georgia Gould; the Council's Cabinet Member for Young People, Equalities and Cohesion, Cllr Abdul Hai; the Council's Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director (Supporting People), Martin Pratt; Managing Director of Camden Learning, Jon Abbey; Director of Children's Safeguarding and Social Work, Anne Turner, and Director of Equalities and Disproportionality, Hanad Mohamed.



### Camden Virtual Youth MP Election

On 18 February 2021, 30 past and current members of Camden Youth Council came together for our first virtual Youth MP election.

### The 2021 virtual Youth MP Election results were:

- Camden Youth MP, 2021-22: Anes Bouzouina
- Camden Deputy Youth MPs 2021-22: Andrea Giró-Adeleye and Anya Nedungadi

Find out more: [www.camdenrise.co.uk/get-involved](http://www.camdenrise.co.uk/get-involved)



### 2020 and 2021

### Camden Youth Awards

Nominations have now closed for the Camden Youth Awards 2021, which will be held 'virtually' online this year.

### The 2021 virtual Youth MP Election results were:

These awards (watch our film announcing the 2020 winners here) celebrate the achievements and progression of our local young people and services throughout this most extraordinary and challenging year.

The 2021 Awards will be a chance for the Camden community to recognise and celebrate the amazing work carried out by young people, youth work practitioners and youth services to keep young people active, engaged and supported during a time where there was much uncertainty and instability due to the pandemic.

The categories have been changed this year to reflect the changes in how we engage and support each other during a year of lockdowns and social distancing.

Find out more about the 2021 awards: [kathleen.blake-pink@camden.gov.uk](mailto:kathleen.blake-pink@camden.gov.uk)



# Young Inspectors 2020



## SUPPORT SERVICES DURING LOCKDOWN

Every year, a team of Young Inspectors undertake research into the views of other service users and professionals about the services provided by partner agencies responsible for safeguarding children.

The Young Inspectors are young people aged 16 to 25. They are selected by interview and are involved in designing and conducting each inspection. The strength of the Young Inspectors is that they can apply their own experiences and knowledge of the service to the inspection.

This year, the focus of the Young Inspection was on:

- Children, young people, care leavers and parents / carers experience of direct work and support from services during lockdown
- Experience of child protection and LAC review meetings during lockdown
- Social workers and personal advisors experience of providing support to children, care leavers and families during lockdown
- Re-thinking aspects of direct work and safeguarding practice to support families after the lockdown, including retaining some of the new and innovative ways of working developed during lockdown.

## INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION OF THE INSPECTION BY YOUNG INSPECTORS

*Jenny*



Working as a team is always fun, joking and supporting each other through the project makes it a lot more enjoyable.

Working on the project mostly online had its challenges. It was a new experience and I learnt new skills.

Every time, in the most positive way, I am really happy about the care and work that social services has put in to help young people.

I have always wanted to work and help others and bring awareness to important issues. This project allows me to work on current issues for children and young people.

The most valuable thing for me was highlighting issues for young people in care who are easily pushed under the radar and putting it in the report for people to read/ understand and learn.

Young Inspectors team co - leader

*Rosie*



I enjoyed meeting the team and working together. It was interesting interviewing professionals and learning how they had to adapt to working differently during the Covid-19 lockdown.

I found it challenging working from home as I get easily distracted.

One of the most valuable things about the project was hearing from young people and children who felt that they were well supported during lockdown. It was great to hear that!

Young Inspectors team co - leader

*Levon*

The things I found most enjoyable about doing the project focused on being part of a group to accomplish a singular goal. Finding out essential and informative information and learning new facts, never even considered before, makes being part of the Young Inspectors team exciting. It also compelled me to think about the way we view our social services team and children in need in a different light. The most valuable thing about the project is that this report will be used to make a change and make improvements within the social care system.

Young Inspector



*Tasmin*

Young Inspector

I enjoyed working with the other team members, because the communication between all of us was really good and flowed easily. It was challenging to keep working online, taking notes and doing interviews with managers and social workers through video conferences. The reduced physical contact we have had within our group was also something new and I needed to adjust to. Covid-19 and lockdown has resulted in service finding different ways of working and of supporting children and families. It has also brought to light issues such as digital poverty. What I found most valuable about this project is the knowledge that I have learnt from the past two weeks and the opportunity to be a part of something that could help not just young people and children, but staff as well.

You can see the full report on Backchat Online – Young Inspectors Reports



# Young Inspectors 2020

## KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Emerging Themes

The Coronavirus Lockdown posed many challenges for the social work service and children and their families. In spite of the difficult circumstances, services responded promptly to the challenge to ensure that the safeguarding of children and the meeting of their needs remained at the centre of the response. All staff interviewed by the Young Inspectors team spoke highly of the level of commitment of colleagues across the entire service, including the Virtual school and the LAC CAMHS team. Partnership working was perceived to have continued with a high level of engagement. The Young Inspectors team identified the following emerging themes:

1. Feedback received from children, young people and care leavers tells us that they felt supported by their social workers and personal advisors during lockdown and that they received either more or the same level of contact from them as usual.
2. Feedback from parents and foster carers highlights appreciation of the type and level of support they have received during this difficult and challenging time and
3. There is a good case to consider holding meetings via video link as an option for child protection, looked after children and child in need reviews. This is based on the feedback received from children, families and staff on use of the wide-ranging devices used in communication with children, young people and families during lockdown.
4. The preferences of children and young people with regard to communication with social workers depended on the age group of children. Younger children seemed to prefer face to face contact, whilst teenagers found telephone/ video contact satisfactory.

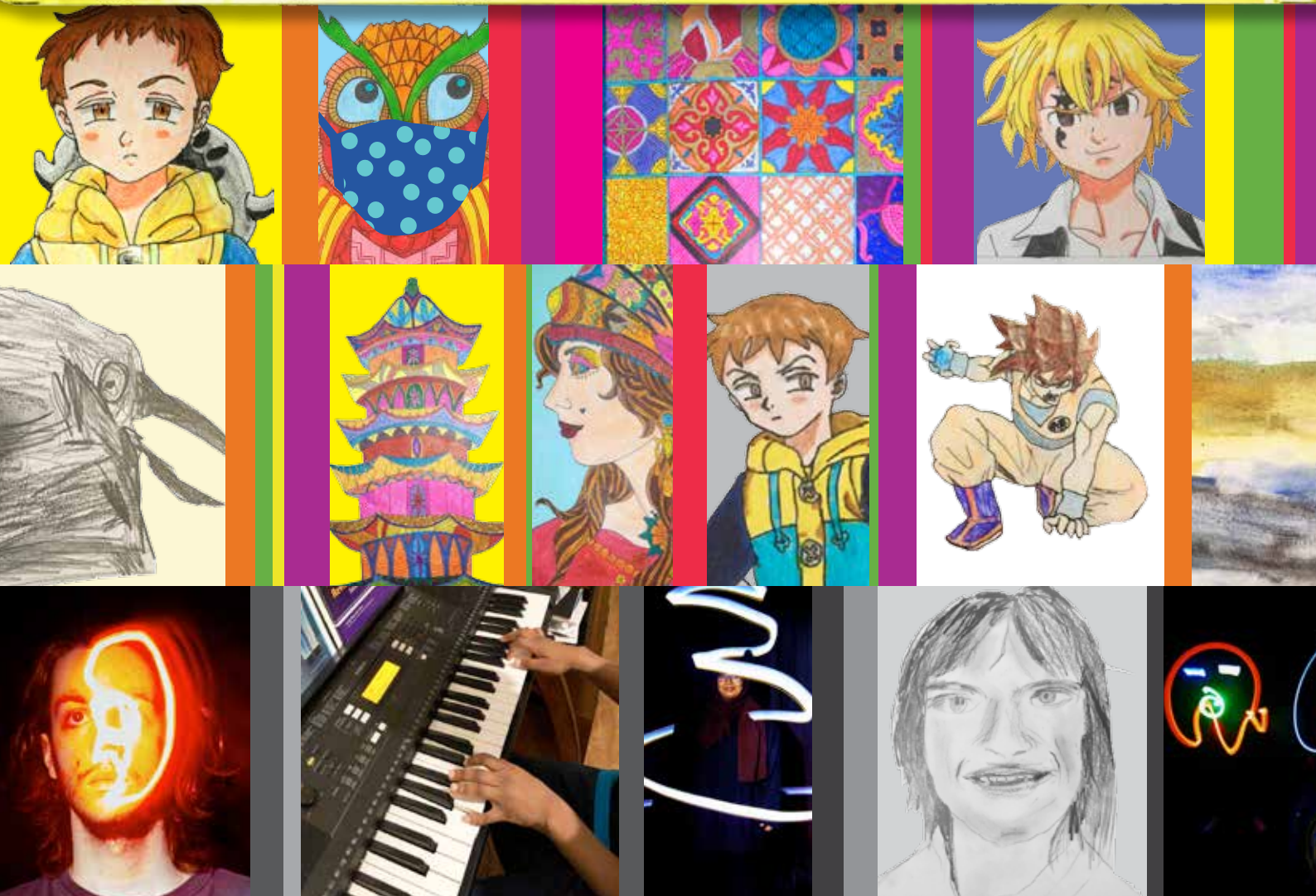
5. Feedback from care leavers highlighted the following areas they needed most support with: financial assistance, mental health, motivation to do things and coping with isolation.
6. Responses to questionnaires, feedback from young people and national research suggests that younger children experienced an increase in emotional difficulties while teenagers showed reduction in their emotional difficulties but increase in restlessness/attention behaviour and low self-esteem. The increase of restlessness and behaviour difficulties has also been observed in children with learning needs by parents and social workers.
7. Unaccompanied children appear to have found lockdown particularly difficult due to the isolation they felt as a consequence of not having contact with their family and community support groups. Also, for many UASC it triggered memories of traumatic experiences.
8. The CAMHS LAC mental health team provided increased support to foster carers and key workers in Pathways due to the need to address issues of heightened anxiety levels during lockdown.
9. Online video meetings and one-to one contacts with children and parents raised new challenges for social workers in terms of managing confidentiality and the need to be aware of who else might be in the room with the child or the parent they were talking to.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORT SERVICES POST LOCKDOWN ARISING FROM THIS INSPECTION ARE:

- 1 To provide an option of using video / online links with children and young people where appropriate where it a choice of the child and family.
- 2 To consider conducting some meetings with professionals online such as: panel meetings, strategy meetings and core groups and to consider hybrid review meetings with some participants online and others in the room.
- 3 To consider how children and young people can be encouraged to participate in child protection meetings including a video call option to hear their voice in decision-making.
- 4 To provide tools and resources for social workers to help build their own emotional resilience.
- 5 To support care leavers to re-connect with their activities and commitments including getting back to education, training, employment.
- 6 To review the support provided by Pathways and Pathways key workers.
- 7 To raise awareness of the impact of lockdown on the mental health of children, young people and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- 8 To provide accessible information for young people on relaxation techniques and mindfulness.
- 9 To provide more training for social workers on using technology for creative tools in direct work with children.



# LOCKDOWN GALLERY



See these photos and many more on **Backchat Online** [backchatonline.org.uk/photo\\_galleries](https://backchatonline.org.uk/photo_galleries)

## GET INVOLVED!

Contact Elzbieta Chandrasena, senior development officer for participation:  
[elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk](mailto:elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk) tel 020 7974 1850 or talk to your social worker or a youth worker.

## CORONAVIRUS GUIDE, INFORMATION AND HELP

Coronavirus is an illness that can be spread from person to person by coughing or touching surfaces or skin that has been contaminated by the virus.

If you are worried, below are some of the organisations you can contact:

**Childline.org.uk** tel 0800 111

**Kooth:** an online mental health support for young people [www.kooth.com](https://www.kooth.com)

### MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

[childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/coronavirus](https://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/coronavirus)

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/childrens-guide-to-coronavirus/>

#### Translation of the information:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/193qQN9l04Dvf0N9L5zeWTiXK\\_DRbrAyg](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/193qQN9l04Dvf0N9L5zeWTiXK_DRbrAyg)

**Anna Freud:** Self-Care and Coping Strategies [www.annafreud.org/selfcare/](https://www.annafreud.org/selfcare/)

**BBC:** How to protect your mental health [www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799)

**CBBC:** Video and Questions [www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51861089](https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51861089)

**Young Minds:** Feeling Anxious about Coronavirus <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus>