

ISSUE 16 - 2023/24

BACKCHAT

Information, news and views from children and young people involved in Camden services planning and co-design

Inside:

Young Inspectors
**Children in Care Council
activities and events**

Invitation to Westminster

NEWS • BLOGS • FREE SPORTS • CHATS

**Shout
Out**



GET INVOLVED!



REAL TALK

Photo Gallery



The views of children, parents and carers are very important in making changes and improvements to our services.

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

www.backchatonline.org.uk

Projects and events young people have been involved in over the last year

MEET THE MEMBERS OF THE

cicc

Children in Care Council

Meet Hassan, the member of the CiCC and the Backchat guest editor of this issue.

Hi I am Hassan Mohamed, a care leaver participation and communication intern at Camden. I started work at Camden in September 2023. I support the Education, Employment and Training communication recommendations from our Young Inspectors annual report to the Corporate Parenting Board, which oversees delivery of our Corporate Parenting Strategy.

I am currently working to devise and develop external communications for dissemination of care leaver opportunities our services offer our young people. I am also using my own lived experience to advise the social care team to further develop and promote an app for care leavers within the borough.

I am really enjoying my roles at Camden as a care leaver intern, the roles all have a lot of variety and I feel that I am learning a lot of different skills. These include budgeting training and placement training.

My team is friendly, my manager is super helpful, and I like the environment that Camden offers me as a care leaver intern. Camden has offered me training during this programme. This includes website and app development, communications, and events experience. Every day I learn something new. I have also developed my skills in collaboration and budgeting, and built confidence in my project management skills.

I am also supporting our local charity Camden Giving. My roles include updating the funding structure for Salesforce and updating the location information for We Make Camden. Outside of work, I am obsessed with football, I am an Arsenal fan and I play football with my friends every week. I used to play professional football with the New River Club. I represented the United Kingdom in 2018 in Mexico City which was an amazing experience.



To find out more about Children in Care Council, please contact: elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk



The app is called Pocket PA and it is designed to support care leavers within Camden to access the resources and support that are available to them within the borough. I have also been responsible for promoting the app using my communications experience, including flyer distribution and attending a variety of events to speak in detail about the app. This role is exciting to me as it allows me to use my own experience better to improve access to services for care leavers within Camden.

The Children in Care Council is for young people who have experience of being in care. Young people meet once a month and it is an opportunity to:



Talk about their experience of support they get from services.



Make suggestions to make services better.



Get involved in making decisions and influencing changes and outcomes for care experienced children and young people.

Projects and events young people have been involved in over the last year



Corporate Parenting Board meetings

'When a child comes into care, the council becomes their corporate parent.'

'Camden's corporate parenting board brings together elected members, council staff and partner agencies to provide the best possible support and safeguarding to children in care. It provides a welcoming forum for our children, foster carers and care leavers to discuss and influence the full range of services available to them.'

(Camden Corporate Parenting strategy 2021-2024).

At the Corporate Parenting Board meetings, young people talk to councillors, the Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding, Executive Director of Children and Learning and senior managers about their experience of the services, what is working well and what needs improving.

Over the last year, presentations by young people and discussions have included the Young Inspectors' Report 2023 – *My meetings: children and families' experience of social care meetings*. Young Inspectors presented their work on the project, findings and service recommendations.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD MEETINGS PROVIDE AN IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO INFLUENCE DECISIONS ABOUT SERVICES.



Find out more, please contact: Email: elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk



Young People's Interview Panel

Young people continue being involved in selection and recruitment of candidates for posts in children services.

In collaboration with the NHS looked after children team, a care experienced young person has been supported to be involved in interviewing candidates for the post of Designated Looked After Children Nurse.

In January 2024 young people from the Children in Care Council and from the Youth Council have been invited to be involved in the recruitment process interviewing candidates for the senior post of the Director of Relational Practice.

Camden Virtual School Awards 2023

Camden Council's annual Virtual School Awards recognises the contributions and achievements (both educational and personal) of the borough's care experienced children and young people. It took place at the British Museum in October 2023.



Josh, our DJ and a member of the CiCC, created a playlist for the event and worked with the sound production team at the Museum to play the music in to both the auditorium and the foyer.

Councillor Patricia Callaghan, Acting Leader of the Council, gave a welcome speech before 57 young people, aged 4 to 19, received awards. Certificates were presented to the young people by Councillor Nazma Rahman, the Mayor of Camden, along with Councillors: Marcus Boyland, Jenny Mulholland and Jenny Headlam-Wells.

Projects and events young people have been involved in over the last year



Camden Council awards protected characteristic status to care leavers

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IN CARE LIVING IN THE BOROUGH HAVE BEEN AWARDED THE STATUS OF...

PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC

This means that those who are in care, who are care leavers, or who have had a past experience of care, will have the same protection from discrimination as other characteristics under the Equality Act after a motion to treat care experience as a locally protected characteristic was agreed at a Full Council meeting on 29 January 2024.

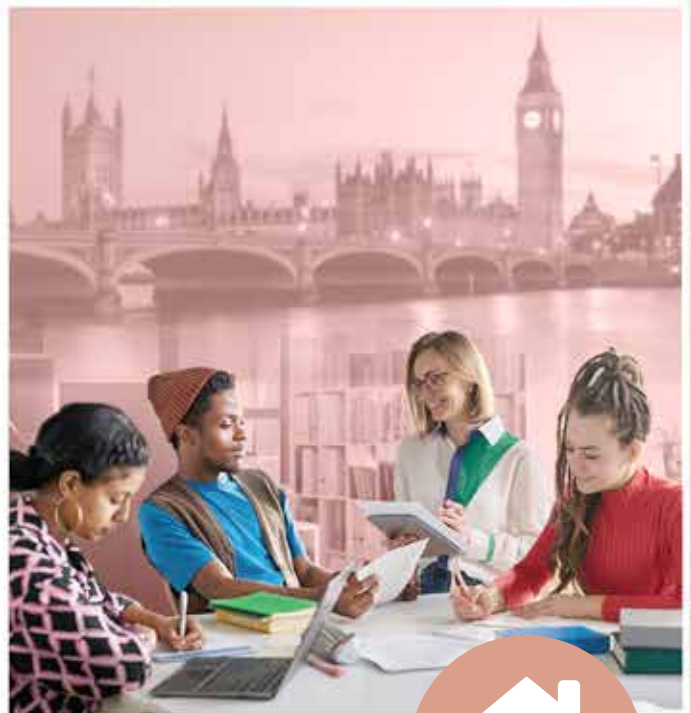
A moving debate

Ahead of the motion being agreed, a moving debate took place to raise awareness of the issues people have faced during and since leaving care and highlighted the incredible achievements of care experienced young people. During the debate, the Council heard from care leavers, national campaigners, staff from Barnardo's and Family Rights Group, and staff from the Care Experience service, whose job is to support Camden care leavers and were in favour of the motion to make care leavers a protected characteristic. Author and broadcaster Lemn Sissay OBE spoke to the Council about his experience of care and stated that the Council needs to "Implement policies that cater to care experienced young people, to ensure no one who has experienced care ever feels alone again." He ended his speech by declaring: "Let's use the word love in action in our corporate parenthood."

Campaigner Terry Galloway who runs the campaign to make care leavers a protected characteristic, also made a powerful speech in which he shared the statistic that "care-experienced people are 76% more likely to die prematurely". He spoke about his experiences of care and welcomed the announcements made in Full Council, stating: "Care experienced young people should have been included in the Equality Act from the beginning."



The Full Council agreed to give Free Wi-Fi for all care leavers (up till 25 years) in council housing, private rented accommodation or other accommodation.



National consultation on corporate parenting and an invitation to a launch of the report at Westminster

The Government have committed to extending corporate parenting responsibility for children in care to a range of other public bodies and organisations in England.

In September 2023, young people from Camden Children in Care Council took part in the national consultation which aimed to collect views on the plan and what the reforms should look like. The consultation was launched by All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Children and Care Experienced Young People.



Young people were invited to the launch of the report and findings to the Government's proposal which took place at Westminster in March 2024.



Using the views of care experienced young people APPG shared the feedback with the Government to inform changes to the corporate parenting.



For more information, please see Report: APPG for CECYP. <https://becomecharity.org.uk/report-the-appg/>

Projects and events young people have been involved in over the last year

November 2023

'Step into Our Shoes' Camden young people help to launch new report on adolescent health

Camden Council launched its annual health report on **adolescent health** at an event organised by local young people aimed at raising awareness of the issues they are facing.

Each year, every Director of Public Health publishes an **independent annual report** focusing on a particular health and wellbeing issue affecting local communities. This year, their report focuses on **adolescent health** and the issues that young people are facing in the borough.

The report was officially launched on 28 November 2023 at 'Step into Our Shoes', an event at LABS in Bloomsbury which was curated by 'Camden Youth: Tell Them', a group of local young people aged 16 to 21 to explore young people's health across the borough and beyond.

Camden Youth: Tell Them co-produced 'Step into Our Shoes' as their response to this year's annual public health report (www.camden.gov.uk/adolescent-health-2023). At this event they launched a graphic novel they created to illustrate key findings from the report and invited local decision-makers and health partners to take a walk-in young people's shoes and to commit to working together to improve adolescent health in Camden.

Activities at the event

Activities at the event included **sports, affirmation writing, a word search challenge and audio recordings** of young people's experiences of living in Camden as part of the safety and violence zone. At the long-term conditions zone, young people challenged guests to test their lung capacity as part of an experiment on asthma to map lung capacity in Camden by postcode. Guests were also asked to vote for which is the most pressing issue for young people's health in the borough – physical activity, food and healthy weight was voted first, with mental health and safety and violence tied in second place.

Camden Youth: Tell Them also held the Council and partners to account in a lively panel discussion, asking questions including: "What's the first thing you're going to do after this event to address the findings of the annual public health report?" Other discussions explored ways to improve health and wellbeing for young people in Camden. Panel members included Kirsten Watters, Camden's Director for Health and Wellbeing, Councillor Sabrina Francis, Camden's Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture, Nigel Robinson, the Head of Sports and Physical Activity at the Council, and Chaima Hale, Start Well Clinical Lead for Camden.



Adolescent health issues

Camden Youth: Tell Them said: "We're glad that the Council are shining a light on these issues that are so important for us and other people our age. While some of the findings were expected, reading the report showed some of the harsh realities for young people in Camden and the need for urgent change. Through working on Step into Our Shoes we found out more about the services for adolescents in Camden and hope that more young people can find out about them and get the help they need when they need it."

The creation of the graphic novel and co-production of the 'Step into Our Shoes' event by Camden Youth: Tell Them was part of a paid training programme established by the Council in response to findings in the annual public health report, which highlights the importance of quality training and employment for young people's health. Key themes that were discussed at the event included young people's safety, mental health and wellbeing, healthy eating, the cost-of-living crisis, body image and inequalities facing young people.



Projects and events young people have been involved in over the last year

Shout Out May 2023

Young people get their shout

Young people, youth workers, other professionals and local politicians joined Camden Youth Council's annual Shout Out event to hear the views of local young people.

Topics at this free youth-led event, held at the Crowndale Centre in Camden in May 2023, included the environment, mental health, jobs and careers and youth safety.

More than 80 young people joined workshops on their chosen topics, with feedback being shared at the end with everyone, as well as the announcement that youth groups are invited to apply for 'skills for life' grants from Camden Youth Council.



Watch a short film about the **Shout Out event** on Camden Council's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSYKLSRO398&t=12s>

Shout Out



To find out more about Camden Youth Council and how to get involved in youth democracy and your community visit: www.camdenrise.co.uk/get-involved



YOUTH MP ELECTION

April 2024

Camden Youth MP Election 2024

Young people across Camden will go to the polls in April to elect a new Camden Youth MP and two Deputy Youth MPs. Camden's Youth MP and two Deputy Youth MPs have a two-year term and are the voice for Camden young people, putting forward their views at a local level but also at a regional and national level through the UK Youth Parliament.

The newly-elected Youth MP and Deputy Youth MPs will lead Camden Youth Council (www.camdenrise.co.uk/web/camden-rise/camden-youth-council), as well as attending regional and national events, including the UKYP national meeting and House of Commons debate to decide on future campaigns. They will meet senior Council officers, councillors and other local decision-makers, oversee the progress of the issues outlined by young people at the Camden Shout Out and represent the views of local young people at a range of council and community meetings.

The Camden Youth MP Election 2024 will be held in schools and youth centres borough-wide from **15 to 26 April**.

Samir Qurashi, current Camden Youth MP (2022-24), said: "My time as Youth MP for Camden has unquestionably been one of the best experiences I've ever had. The opportunity to impact policies, bring about tangible changes, and advocate for the perspectives of young people across local, regional and national levels has been truly remarkable. I wholeheartedly encourage others to embrace this opportunity."

Aya Elgool, current Camden Youth MP (2022-24), said: "Being a Youth MP is one of the most rewarding things. I've improved my public speaking and had the chance to communicate and network with people that I wouldn't have come across before. It makes me very proud to be able to represent young people's voices."



The election is organised by Camden's Integrated Youth Support Service and local young people. For more information, visit: www.camdenrise.co.uk

Projects and events young people have been involved in over the last year

Takeover Challenge

November 2023

Takeover Challenge

School meals, mental health, social media, the cost-of-living crisis and Camden's diverse communities were among the topics debated at our last annual Takeover Challenge for local schoolchildren.

A week of school-based workshops culminated in local pupils giving presentations at the Crowndale Centre on Friday 24 November 2023 to a panel of senior officers and councillors. The event, which was opened by Tim Aldridge, Executive Director of Children and Learning, offered a safe space for young people to express their opinions, challenge preconceptions on topics that matter to them and help shape the council's policies.

The impact of social media

Discussions focused on questions such as the impact of social media on young people's lives, online safety issues and how adults can support children and young people online. Children and young people challenged the room by asking: "If adults find it hard to switch off and stop using their phones, imagine what it is like for children."

Children and young people also discussed why diversity is important and how the borough can 'unite people and speak up for diversity'. The children were asked what they enjoyed most about growing up in an area as diverse as Camden. To which the children answered: "Without diversity, Camden would be dull, bleak and lifeless."

Further topics included the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on mental health. Children and young people also notified senior officers and councillors that "almost half of children worry about the cost-of-living crisis" and the conversation centred on how the borough can further create safe spaces and support for families during this time.

Final debates included how can more young people get support and sustainable food provided at schools.

The Mayor, Councillor Nazma Rahman, suggested children and young people help design the school menu. Councillor Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, thanked everyone in his closing speech and promised that the Council would act on the children's ideas and feedback.

The event took place in November 2023, offering the opportunity for children and young people from five primary schools and two secondary schools to present their ideas on a range of topical issues directly to local politicians and senior officers from the Council.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S REAL TALK

November 2023

Young people debate social media, mental health and racism at real talk event.

More than 30 young people discussed their views on the use of social media, mental health and racism during a debate for 16 to 21-year-olds in Camden on 9 November.

The free Real Talk event at the Crowndale Centre, Camden, offered a safe space for young people to express their opinions and challenge preconceptions on topics that matter to them.

Discussions focused on questions such as whether we can be our real selves on social media, if social media has made us more aware of racism in society and whether it affects our mental wellbeing, as well as broader online safety and other health and wellbeing issues, including vaping.

Young people attending came from The Hive Camden, Fitzrovia Youth in Action, Reactive Forum, FWD and Somers Town Youth Centre.

The debate was led by Shape Up, a collective of artists and facilitators, and the event was organised by Camden Council's Children's Integrated Commissioning Team, part of the Council's Health and Wellbeing Department.

Real Talk, which is an annual event, also offers the chance for young people to have a say in the way local services, such as youth services, education, health, benefits, training and employment, housing and environmental services are delivered or designed.



For more information and support on mental health and wellbeing, visit: www.camdenrise.co.uk/emotional-wellbeing

Projects and events young people have been involved in over the last year



Get active with reactive

Reactive Forum is an activity-based forum for disabled young people aged 13 to 18.

Reactive Forum meets at Somers Town Youth Centre once a month on a Friday during school term times from 11am – 2pm.

Young people talk about things that affect you as residents living in Camden and how best to tell the Council your views. The Council asks Reactive about things like getting a job, having a place to live and services for young people and their families.

There's lots going on at Reactive Forum. You can:

- meet new people
- gain new skills for your future
- use computers, play pool and table tennis
- meet decision-makers and guest speakers.

If you want to get involved, your school support worker can contact:
Catherine Andrews, Senior Disability Youth Worker on **07827 859417**
Catherine.Andrews@camden.gov.uk

Dates of our next 4 meetings:

Friday 8th March 2024
Friday 10th May 2024
Friday 7th June 2024
Friday 12th July 2024

TOTAL RESPECT

2023

Training for social workers and foster carers

Total Respect

Total Respect is a national, award-winning training resource developed by the Children's Rights Alliance for England. In Camden, the training programme is co-designed and delivered together with care experienced young people.

The training programme offers sessions for social workers, foster carers and partner agencies. It is designed to energise and motivate participants to reflect on:

- delivery of child centred services
- own practice of involving children in care planning and what can be changed
- assumptions about children and young people experiences of being in care and receiving support from social care service.

The perspective of young people on effective listening to children and young people is an integral part of the training programme.

Young people involved in co-facilitating training sessions are supported to develop confidence, communication skill and presentation skills.

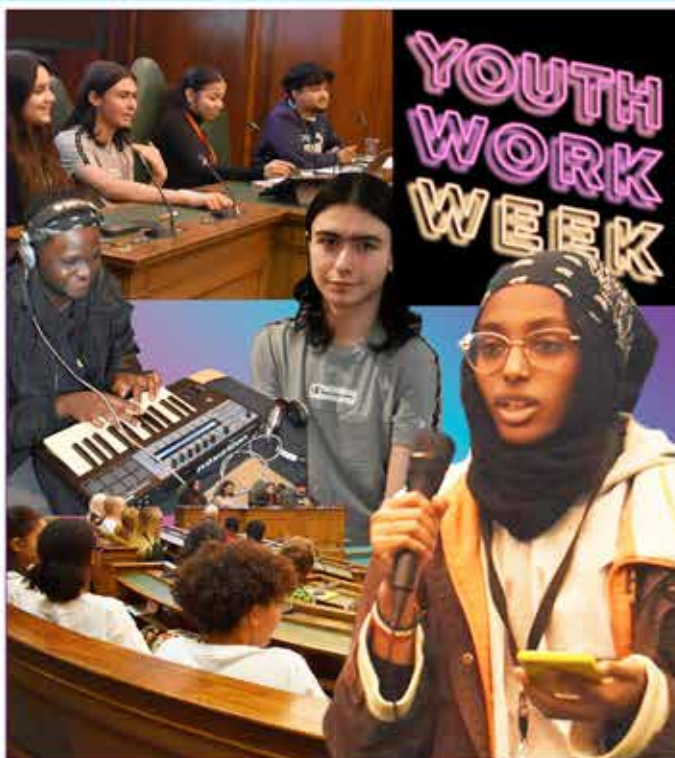


Training delivered together with care experienced young people



For more information, please email:
elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk

Projects and events young people have been involved in over the last year



November 2023

Camden celebrates Youth Work Week

Young people, youth workers and organisations who support young people came together at Camden Town Hall on 7 November 2023 to celebrate Youth Work Week 2023.

Stalls showcasing the amazing variety of youth organisations and youth work in Camden were set up on the civic floor of the Town Hall before an event in the Council Chamber, chaired by local young people, which comprised a quiz, speeches, films, spoken word and poetry, singing and music.

The youth conference was organised by Camden's Integrated Youth Support Service and was attended by the Council's own youth centres, community youth and play projects, the Young Camden Foundation, the Roundhouse and local politicians, including the Mayor of Camden.

Guests were shown a new film, which highlights the huge range of activities and opportunities available for young people in Camden, and also heard about some of the fantastic work going on in our local youth centres, including a recent international volunteering programme led by Somers Town Youth Centre.

CAMDEN RISE

2023

Camden Rise

Activities, support and opportunities for young people

Camden Rise website is the place for young people to find activities, support and opportunities, as well as ways to get involved in their community.

Visit camdenrise.co.uk to find the latest information about out-of-school and holiday activities - including youth, play, arts and sports, education, training and jobs, mental health and wellbeing support, advice and support to stay safe, volunteering, work placements and opportunities to get involved in local decision-making. There's a news and blogs section, competitions you can enter and videos made by local young people.

camdenrise.co.uk

OPPORTUNITIES

ACTIVITIES

AND SUPPORT



Young Inspectors REPORT

My meetings: children and families' experience of social care meetings

2023

My Meetings

Introduction

Every year, a team of Young Inspectors undertakes research into the views of children, young people, parents and professionals about the services provided by partner agencies responsible for safeguarding children.

The Young Inspectors are young people aged 17 to 25. The team is involved in designing and conducting each inspection. The strength of the Young Inspectors is that young people can apply their own experiences and knowledge of the service.

This year the aim of the young inspection was:

1. To find out about experiences of participation by children, young people, parents / carers in children looked after review meetings and child protection conference meetings.
2. To identify main themes based on the feedback from focus group discussions with young people and parents and responses to questionnaires.
3. To develop standards to help ensure that young people and parents are more involved in the meetings and are supported in shared decision-making.
4. To develop recommendations for the service based on the responses from young people, parents and professionals.
 - obtain feedback from young people, parents, kinship carers and social workers on the recommendations made in chapter 4 of the report (Kinship care)
 - identify main themes based on the feedback obtained from the focus group discussions, from interviewing managers of the service and from questionnaires.

The Young Inspectors team have made eight recommendations for services which emerged from the analysis of responses to questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews with service managers.

It helps us feel more in control and make better decisions about our next steps knowing what our options are.

8%

12%

As a very introverted person, I became more confident and soon found myself more comfortable asking questions to senior members of staff.



Reflections & Evaluations

of the project by young inspectors

JENNY

Young Inspectors' team leader

Meeting the new team and getting to know each other was one of the highlights of the project. Working as a team and learning about our experiences really consolidated the relationships and experience. Being a part of this project has reaffirmed my passion to work in Camden.

KACEY

Young Inspector

I found interviewing senior members of staff quite challenging as a very introverted person. However, gradually, I became more confident and soon found myself to be comfortable asking questions to senior members of staff.

HUSSAIN

Young Inspector

I enjoyed doing focus group discussions with young people and with parents.

KYRAH

Young Inspector

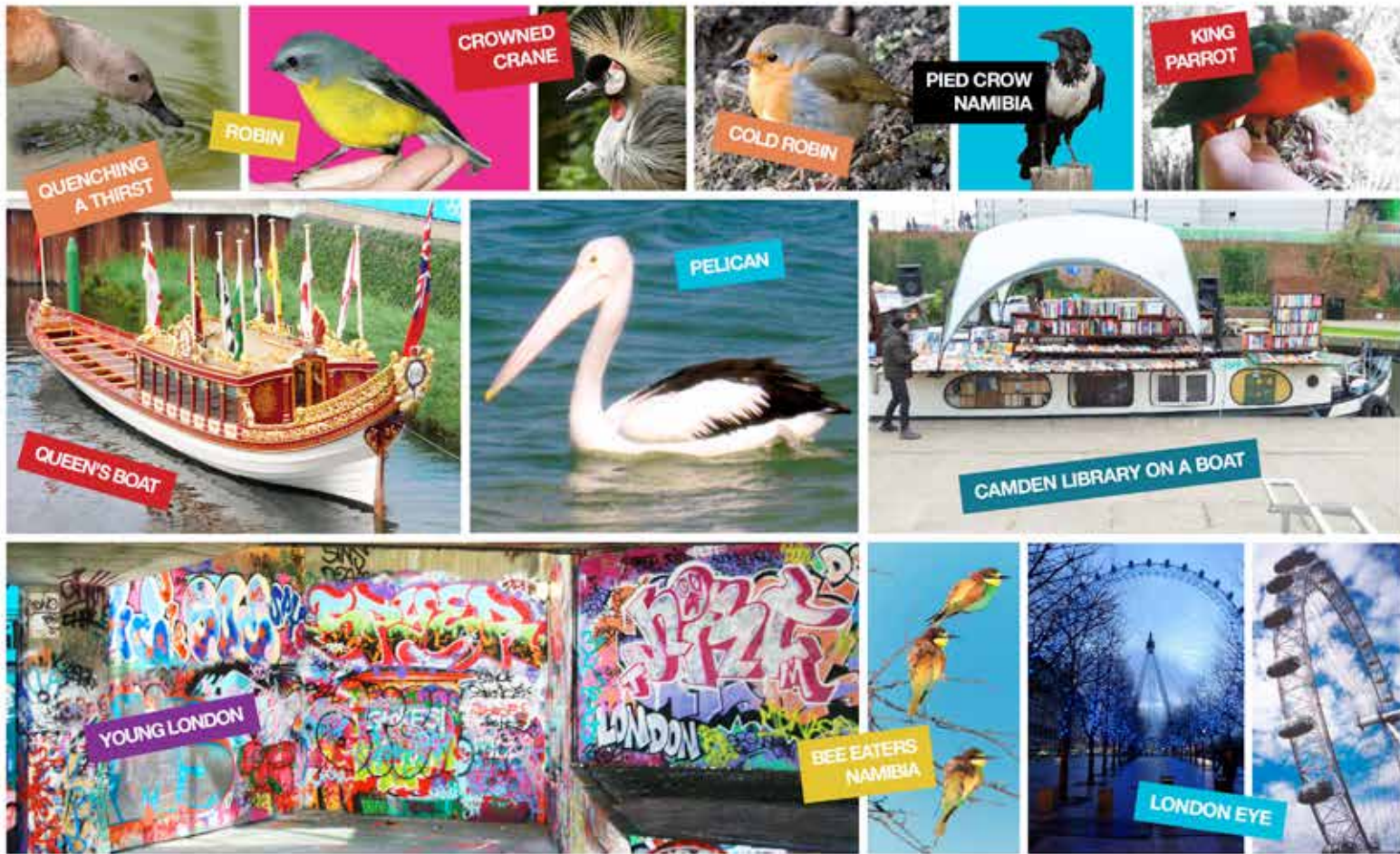
The most challenging aspect for me was interviewing parents face-to-face, as parents often have much more to say. The project sparked my passion and showed me that I can do much more than I expected of myself. It also gave me a taste of the office environment, which is a rare opportunity for young people to experience.

FYORI

Young Inspector

I enjoyed the teamwork, sharing ideas and working together. The project has helped me to get more confidence to speak English and share my ideas in the group. I have learnt about social care services and different areas of social work.

Backchat Online photo gallery



See these photos and many more on **Backchat Online** backchatonline.org.uk/photo_galleries

USEFUL INFORMATION AND HELPFUL LINKS

Information and help links to find activities and opportunities to get involved:

If you are feeling down, anxious or worried you can access:

- Camden Summer University CSU website (www.cmdn.co.uk)
- Free and low-cost activities – online guide (www.camdenrise.co.uk/things-to-do)
- 'Camden Young Women and Girls Football
- camdenrise.co.uk

If you are feeling down, anxious or worried you can:

- Talk to your GP
- Call Childline.org.uk tel 0800 111
- Visit Kooth, www.kooth.com - an online mental health support for young people

Mental health and wellbeing video link:

www.youtube.com/user/tavistockandportman/playlists

These are available to watch in English, Oromo, Tigrinya, Dari and Arabic.

1 www.camden.gov.uk/documents/d/guest/online-guide-to-free-and-low-cost-sport-and-physical-activity-in-camden-march-2024

GET INVOLVED!

If you would like more information about projects featured in this issue and to get involved, please contact Elzbieta Chandrasena, senior development officer for participation:

elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk
tel 020 7974 1850 or talk to your social worker or a youth worker.