

## **HeadStart Newham – Youth Voice**

HeadStart Newham incorporates the voice of young people throughout its programmes, providing the platforms and resources required to elevate their voices and empower them to make the changes they want to see in their local communities.

HeadStart Newham describes co-production as the 'golden thread' that runs throughout its services, and influences and links in with what is happening in the wider Newham community. This includes participation in the [Next Generation Forum](#), advising senior decision makers on priorities for young people to steer their strategies and budgets over the next year, and Newham-wide strategy '[Year of the Young Person](#)', which aims to shine a light on children and young people's achievements, champion their rights and demonstrate how they contribute to Newham's success and vibrancy. HeadStart Newham's Youth Panel ensures that young people's ideas and opinions are included in decisions that impact upon their lives and wellbeing.

### **Youth Panel**

The [Youth Panel](#) began in 2016, and since then has been led by growing numbers of young people who have created a range of projects and resources that inform and engage other young people across the borough, such as a support [booklet](#) on transitions and the [Kids Time](#) project for young people and parents, where a parent has a mental illness. Many members of the Youth Panel have previously engaged with HeadStart services, such as [Bounce Back](#) or Your Time, but young people are welcome and encouraged to join regardless of whether they have received any prior support.

The Panel is embedded in local strategic decision-making processes and structures, with young people sitting alongside senior councillors, teachers and strategic partners within the Local Authority and CCG. Day-to-day, the Panel acts as a scrutiny group. They are both consulted on and propose strategic decision making, and are given as much control and autonomy over their engagement as possible. For example, the youth panel representatives that sit on the HeadStart board co-designed the Terms of Reference to be young person-friendly with the inclusion of a jargon buster section. They have established clear processes which guide decisions on how consultations from adults are accepted and how the Youth Panel are involved. They have published a set of

[guidelines](#) for professionals to follow when working with the Youth Panel or co-producing projects with children and young people.

## Recruitment

The Youth Panel play a key role in the recruitment of staff to HeadStart Newham services. All adults applying to work with HeadStart and on HeadStart programmes, such as Youth Practitioners on the Bounce Back programme are interviewed by the Youth Panel. Young members take part in interview panels, are paid an hourly London Living Wage and develop their own sets of questions, which are given equal weighting to the questions asked by adults on the panel during assessment. HeadStart also consult with the young people separately to identify key qualities and criteria for staff, so that this perspective can inform shortlisting and recruiting processes.

## Podcasts

In 2021, the Youth Panel began a series of themed [podcasts](#). The first was on Back to School, where young people discussed their experiences of returning to school in September 2020, post Covid-19. They wanted to share what it was like for young people to return to school during the pandemic and how it affected their mental health and wellbeing. You can listen to the podcast here:



The second podcast discussed Culture and Equality and featured the Director for Brighter Futures and Newham's Children's Commissioner. Young people asked guests questions about their experiences of being people of colour in Newham, as well as sharing their own feelings and experiences. They also spoke about the broader political context surrounding racial inequality, and linked their discussions in with worldwide movements such as Black Lives Matter. You can listen to the podcast here:



The third podcast<sup>1</sup>, on difficult conversations surrounding mental health, looks at conversations about mental health and wellbeing, why young people and adults might find them difficult, what the barriers are and what can be done to make these conversations easier to have, so that young people don't reach a point of crisis with their mental health.

### Newsletter

The Youth Panel also began publishing a monthly [newsletter](#) from May 2021, which all contain a range of resources and information, including:

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<sup>1</sup> This podcast is currently awaiting publication on YouTube and the HeadStart Newham websites.

- Tips and advice on common situations that many young people find emotionally challenging, such as transitions
- Signposting to fun community activities and projects
- Information about how to engage with HeadStart and participate in the Youth Panel
- Inspiring real-life stories about young people's mental health journeys.

### **Courageously Superior Three**

Three young people involved with HeadStart Newham directed a short film to convey the message that it's okay to ask for help with your mental health. The film was structured around a poem written by one of the young people featuring in it, and has since been sent out across the council, communities, schools and published online.

***'I get it, as young people we feel like our voices cannot be heard***

***That our age is determining factor between support and rejection***

***I get it, that as young people the fear creeps up when you have to make the choice to say, "I'm not okay"***

***But you are brave***

***Stronger than you think***

***Asking for help is a courageous thing***

***I did it. I said three words, "I'm not okay",***

***And I thought they would say***

***"No, I'm not helping you"***

***But it worked out. Teachers listened. Support entered.***

***Voice heard. Life got much easier'*** – excerpt from a poem by Laiba Waseem – Youth Panel member

You can view the film here:



### **Peer mental health support**

The Youth Panel delivered drop-in mental health support groups for young people in Newham during lockdown, and created resources with top tips and advice for looking after their mental health. They worked with parent facilitators on the [Being a Parent](#) course to create resources for parents on their mental health, which were circulated to schools and young people online, and they are currently developing an animation to support young people with transitions, such as from primary to secondary schools.

### **Young Researchers**

Young Researchers have worked with the [Boing Boing Community](#) on a research project on exam stress, creating a booklet entitled 'Conquering Exam Stress', which provides young people with a guide and a framework to recognise their individual motivations for passing their exams, taking active steps towards managing stress, learning about the effects of stress on the body and how they can help prevent it from interfering with

their mental and physical health. The Young Researchers interviewed 14 pupils in Newham, and found that when young people, schools and the family link together and communicate well with each other, this stress can be reduced.<sup>2</sup> The finished product contains a number of creative tips and pieces of advice on how to manage stress, such as through a 3-minute pre-sleep meditation, simple grounding exercises and creating a revision timetable. Feedback from the young people and professionals involved in the research project has been positive.

***'The young researchers' project appealed to me as I thought it would help me understand exam stress from the perspective of other young people. I found that students experience stress differently, and there are different ways that they handle it. Also, I felt like partaking in this project would allow me to develop certain skills that would look good on my personal statement for college.'*** – Young Researcher

***'We have learnt lots about young people's activism throughout this project. I think it is fair to say that we have learnt a lot about what makes a good and helpful co-research working alliance: to be open, honest and as curious as possible; to each own the work and to consult on everything about it; to be comfortable asking questions and unafraid of the answers; to have as much fun as is possible.'*** – Adult HeadStart co-researcher

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<sup>2</sup> A PowerPoint summarising the findings can be found [here](#).