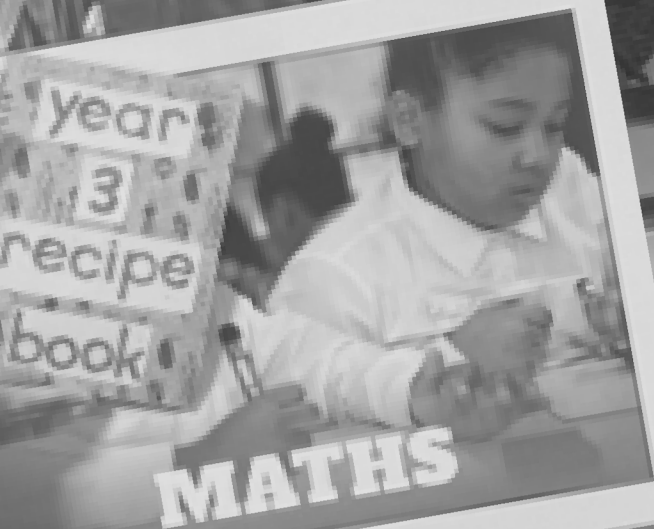


2023

WHY EVERY CHILD SHOULD BENEFIT

INSIGHTS FROM 8 LONDON SCHOOLS



St John's Angel Town
C of E Primary School

citizensuk

Foreword

The Migration Observatory estimates that 180,000 children in the UK live with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). This is a condition attached to many 'temporary' visas which denies families access to benefits and the social safety net, even when they are working and paying tax. However, for many families, living under a NRPF welfare ban is far from a temporary or brief episode: many parents will have NRPF for over 10 years – the majority of a childhood. This means that 180,000 children are growing up under a welfare ban, due to where their parents were born. Families do not even receive Child Benefit, which is £24 each week for the first child, and £15.90 for any subsequent children. This adds up to £1,248 per year for a family with one child, £2,074.80 for two children or £2,901.60 for three.

During a Cost-of-Living Crisis, where inflation in food prices has reached a 45 year high^[1], the devastating impact that this discrimination and loss of family income has on children's health, happiness, and future outcomes has never been more worrying. The case for extending Child Benefit to all children, no matter where their parents were born, has never been stronger.

Many excellent reports have been written on this deep inequality, and its negative impact on children, families, and society as a whole. While this report adds to this evidence base, it also offers something different, by tracing the efforts through which movements for change are born. Citizens UK uses broad-based organising to build ordinary people's power and bring together diverse civil society institutions to lead change for the common good. This report describes what the African American Civil Rights Organiser Ella Baker named as the 'spade work' of movement building: the small meetings and workshops which needs to take place in institutional settings to cultivate relationships, uncover stories and develop leaders who can sustain broad and powerful coalitions. This report evidences the power that undergraduate students can build when they step out of the university and use community organising methodologies to engage with a broad community base, from primary and secondary age pupils, to teachers, parents, community leaders and immigration lawyers.

As the report argues, speaking to 100s of children across the capital highlighted the urgency to extend eligibility for Child Benefit. Pupils growing up in families with NRPF openly shared their experiences of their families struggling to afford essential needs such as food and clothing in the Cost-of-Living Crisis. When asked how they would use the additional £24 per week if they were eligible, the majority of children said they would spend it not on toys or sweets, but on food and maintaining their households

It is time that #EveryChildShouldBenefit.

Albinia Stanley, Community Organiser

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Introduction

About This Report

This action report delves into the extensive effects of the Cost of Living Crisis on the daily lives of schools, families and children living in the UK. The aim of this report is to shed light on the importance of extending child benefits to families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). By amplifying the voices of students and families who are directly affected by the Cost of Living Crisis and the lack of access to public funds, the report aims to expose the harsh realities they face. It seeks to demonstrate the far-reaching impact of NRPF on students' well-being, educational opportunities, and overall family stability.

This action report serves as an urgent call to action, demanding immediate attention and action from policymakers. It emphasises that these vulnerable children and families would continue to suffer unjustly without adequate support. Central to this report is the advocacy for the provision of child benefits. By alleviating the financial burdens plaguing these families, child benefits can provide essential resources crucial for the well-being of their children. Furthermore, they can contribute to the cultivation of a society that is more equitable and compassionate.

Who We Are and What We Have Done

This action report has been underway since March 2023, driven by undergraduate students from the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society. In close collaboration with Citizens UK, a national group facilitating changes through community organising, this initiative actively engaged with seven primary and secondary schools,

along with sixth-form colleges across London. The aim has been to conduct an in-depth exploration of the consequences of the Cost of Living Crisis on students, staff members, parents and surrounding communities. By combining realms of education, research, and action, this action report adopts a multifaceted approach to address the pressing issue at hand.



Education forms a fundamental pillar of our methodology. We have developed interactive workshops tailored specifically to the needs of the schools involved. These workshops served as a platform for knowledge-sharing and empowerment, equipping students with the tools to name and understand the challenges posed by the Cost of Living Crisis.

Pivotal to our efforts is rigorous research, which enables us to amplify the stories and voices of the children, parents, and teachers directly affected by the crisis and NRPF. By listening to their experiences, we gained valuable insights that informed the comprehensive analysis presented in this action report.

Also, action is the defining feature of our approach. Collectively, we have harnessed the power of collaboration to develop and execute ideas aimed at combating the Cost of Living Crisis head-on. Our recommendations and proposed policies are directly intended to alleviate the burdens faced by students, staff members, parents, and communities.

No Recourse to Public Funds

This report investigates the impacts of no recourse to public funds. NRPF is a condition imposed on people subject to immigration control in the UK. It was put in place in 1971 and extended in 2012 as part of the Hostile Environment policy. Namely, those who are under immigration control are not allowed to access certain kinds of public benefits, including welfare support from the state government. NRPF usually applies to individuals on a temporary visa, but it can also apply to those with indefinite leave to remain if they are financially independent.

According to the UK Parliament, by the end of 2021, NRPF applied to 1.6 million individuals in the UK (McKinney et al., 2023).

Individuals with NRPF are unable to access various benefits that offer financial assistance. These benefits include income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income

Support, Child Tax Credit, Child Benefit, Housing Benefit, and other means-tested benefits (Benton et al., 2022). Typically, those affected by NRPF are immigrants from outside the European Economic Area (EEA), as the UK with its Hostile Environment policy aims to ensure that these households make a positive economic contribution and are not dependent on the government's support. People with NRPF include individuals on work visas, student visas, spousal visas, and others. Some of the children we worked with had NRPF, and many of those from economically disadvantaged families are disproportionately vulnerable to homelessness and face precarious living conditions in unsafe, overcrowded, or unsuitable housing.

According to the report by the Mayor of London, NRPF will increasingly have negative effects on households during the ongoing Cost of Living Crisis in the UK (Benton et al., 2022). Due to their inability to access the aforementioned mainstream benefits regardless of their need or financial crises, these households have been profoundly affected by the challenges arising from the Cost of Living Crisis. As highlighted in the Living with Dignity Manifesto, these consequences have impacted not only adults but also children who are subject to NRPF irrespective of their citizenship status; their parents' status is the determining factor (Praxis, 2022). In the UK, this applies to approximately 390 000 children living in families subject to NRPF (ibid). These children are unable to access mainstream support such as Child Benefits and Child Tax Credits, which significantly affects their living conditions in the Cost of Living Crisis.

As recent research highlights, the removal of NRPF would benefit these children particularly. According to the economic

modelling presented in the Mayor of London's report, eliminating the NRPF condition would have both short-term and long-term economic advantages, particularly because of the improved housing access and benefits for children (Benton et al., 2022). Research consistently demonstrates that children in low-income families have better long-term outcomes when provided with additional welfare benefits (ibid). These gains not only benefit individuals, their families, and communities but also society as a whole. Furthermore, the benefits of removing NRPF extend beyond economic considerations. As emphasized by the Living with Dignity Manifesto, eliminating NRPF enables households, especially children, to access mainstream welfare benefits, leading to enhanced living conditions and quality of life. This positively impacts every child affected by the ongoing Cost of Living Crisis.

fuel, and energy costs have been surging at the fastest rates (Hourston, 2022), the crisis has affected everyone. However, those facing the most formidable challenges are individuals with low incomes, people with disabilities, large families, older adults, those grappling with health issues, and most importantly for this report, non-citizens with NRPF (Roberts & Petchley, 2023). While the UK Government has introduced several support packages in response to the crisis, it has become evident, as discussed in the previous section on NRPF, that these measures fall short for many.

The consequences of the Cost of Living Crisis are devastating, particularly for families and children. The number of individuals living in poverty has surged by 350,000, leaving 4.2 million people – including children – trapped in dire



The Cost of Living Crisis in the UK

The Cost of Living Crisis refers to the fall in real disposable incomes, which the UK has experienced since late 2021 (Hourston, 2022). Inflation rates have soared continuously ever since the beginning of the crisis, with the annual inflation rate reaching 11.1% in October 2022 – an unprecedented high in four decades (Francis-Devine et al., 2023). As essential expenses such as food,

circumstances (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023). Many children are forced to endure living conditions characterized by dampness, mould, and an increased risk of homelessness (Shelter, 2023).

11.1%

42%

The Department for Work and Pensions' report further emphasizes the struggles faced by families with multiple children, revealing that 42% of children in households with three or more siblings live in poverty which shows an increase of 6% over the past decade (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023). As the cost of living skyrockets, families find themselves teetering on the brink, unable to cover basic necessities like food, heating, and electricity due to insufficient wages. Those, who are unable to access public funds, such as families with NRPF, are affected profoundly.

£5.83

In 2022, there was an increase in support for asylum seekers to £40.85 per week, up from £39.63. This payment has intended to cover various essential needs such as food, toiletries, non-prescription medication, clothing, and travel. It is expected to account for any unforeseen expenses as well. However, the daily allowance for asylum seekers is merely £5.83 per day.

Despite efforts by organisations like the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to advocate for higher payments, the Home Office dismissed these recommendations, arguing that travel and communication are not necessary and that asylum seekers only need to meet their "essential" needs without

attaining a "socially acceptable standard of living". Nonetheless asylum seekers communicate and travel to seek legal counsel and purchase necessities, making the existing level of assistance insufficient to meet the rising costs.

18%

It is challenging to imagine how anyone could maintain good health with such a meagre income, particularly individuals fleeing persecution who have been found to be more vulnerable to mental and physical health issues in various studies. According to a report by the Office for National Statistics, the average monthly cost of living for a single individual in the UK is £1,042, factoring in housing and energy expenses. In contrast, an asylum seeker currently receives only £190.40, which is approximately 18% of what they actually need.

Users of the Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support Service have reported struggling to cover living costs, especially those with children. A service user mentioned being unable to afford second-hand school uniforms for her daughter, potentially hindering the child's access to education (Edwards, 2022). Additionally, some parents stated that their children have been missing meals and relying on food banks, while others highlighted the significant distances their children have to walk (Bylines, 2022). The Cost of Living Crisis has a severe impact on asylum support recipients and there is an urgent need to increase the available support. Moreover, there is currently a backlog of families awaiting decisions on their cases (Milton, 2023), further exacerbating the suffering of children in these circumstances.

Throughout the report, key themes emerge:

- An emphasis on **the effect of the living crisis** on basic necessities; sustenance, suitable accommodation, and heating.
- The impact and potential that communities possess to the empowered and **demand change**.

The prevalence of **diverse backgrounds and their struggles** in particular in terms of exclusion and NRPF.



Oliver Goldsmith
PRIMARY SCHOOL



OUR WORK WITH LONDON SCHOOLS

THE RIGHT TO SAFE SPACES

GRINLING GIBBONS PRIMARY SCHOOL

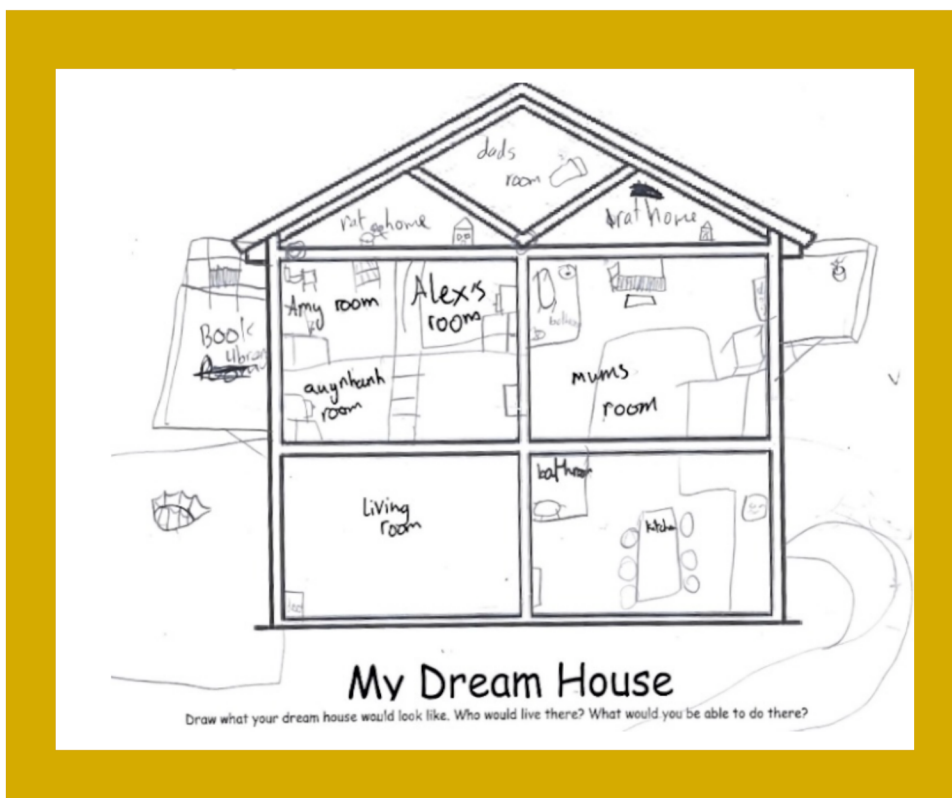
Grinling Gibbons Primary School is an educationally safe space for the young children of Deptford based in Lewisham. The school has placed emphasis on the importance of racial equality for all. This explains why a map which beautifully presents the diversity of children attending the school across the world is visible to all guests upon entrance. Their fight for equality has awarded the school a Race Charter Mark, which recognises their contributions to the surrounding community. We were given the privilege to work with 28 students of Year 5, where we focused on the right to safe and private spaces in students' home and community. Children spent further time deliberating on how conditions in their home and community can be improved, alongside the importance of ensuring their voices are heard through communicating to the leaders. Our workshops with the students have brought about the fascinating findings below:

The right to safe housing

Through discussions and children's illustrations of their current and envisioned future homes, we have gathered insights into the challenges they face amidst the ongoing housing crisis.

Struggles For Privacy in Shared Spaces

A primary concern was a lack of privacy in their current homes. Children recurrently expressed dissatisfaction with their living conditions often citing bathrooms as preferred spaces due to the tranquillity they offered. This longing for individual space was particularly depicted in their 'dream homes', where each family member tended to have separate private areas, showing a stark contrast to their existing crowded living conditions.

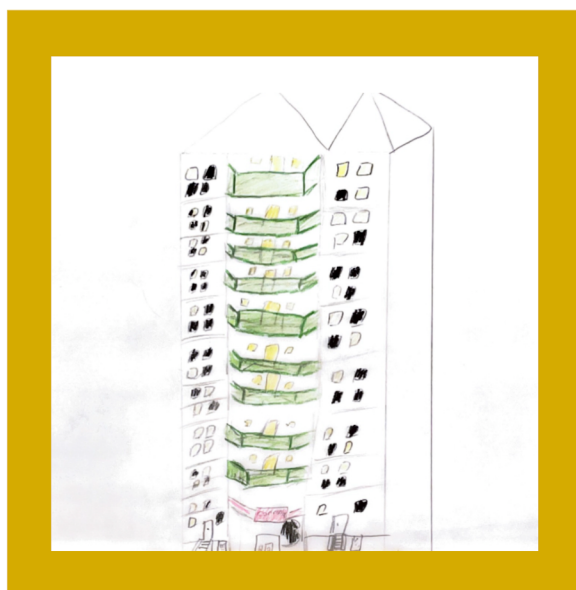


Material Challenges: Unsanitary Conditions and Scarce Basic Necessities

Parallel to privacy concerns, the children expressed significant worries about unsanitary conditions in their homes, specifically highlighting the presence of mould. They demonstrated an understanding of the health risks associated with mould exposure, with one child articulating that mould 'causes diseases, and if people inhale it, it's actually very bad for their health'. Furthermore, the children displayed concerns about access to basic necessities in their homes including heating, water and food, which reflects their awareness of the escalating prices amidst the crisis.

make the bills and gas less money) he can also
make houses less expensive also ~~the~~ should be
get should pay us more for our job

They should give free food, water, good sized
houses and heating to people who are
struggling!

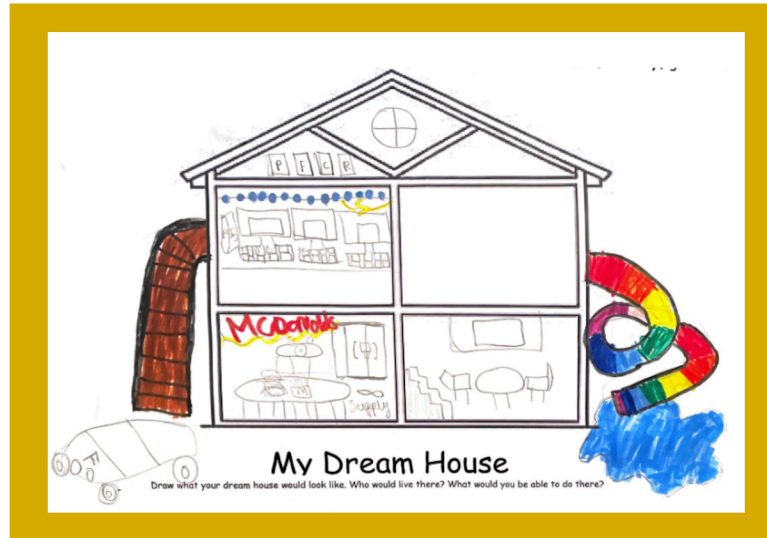


Safety Concerns and the Influence of the Broader Community

Expanding to the broader community, children's illustrations and discussions revealed an acute awareness of their neighbours within their building. Their drawings frequently represented the apartment complex with children distinctly identifying their own homes amongst others. They voiced concerns about the behaviour of their neighbours, characterising them as 'not very nice'. They reported instances of unhygienic practices in common areas, such as indoor smoking, urination in elevators, and improper waste disposal leading to rat infestations. Despite these challenging living conditions, children managed to find a sense of safety within their homes through the protective presence of their family. However, the fear of their neighbours presented a strong contrast, underscoring a complex interplay between physical living conditions, community relations, and perceived safety.

Aspiration for Safe Recreational Spaces

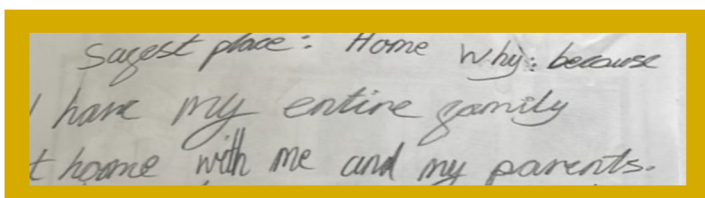
A notable insight from the children's dream home illustrations was the inclusion of entertainment-oriented spaces, like swimming pools, trampolines, and arcade rooms. This strongly contrasted with their mapping of their current living situations, lacking such recreational facilities, and highlighted a yearning for safe, accessible play spaces. This desire is particularly significant given their reported feelings of insecurity in their neighbourhoods, underscoring the need for secure neighbourhood spaces alongside improvements in their home environment.



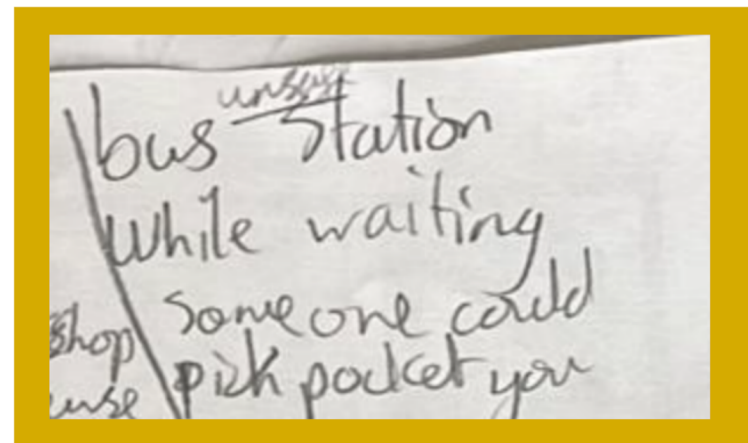
The right to safe neighbourhood

Alongside pointing out housing issues, children at Grinling Gibbons expressed their will to have a safer neighbourhood and community.

When asked what places in their neighbourhood they felt safe in, many children identified quiet places such as their home and the library, where they were able to 'do their own stuff', which resonates with their need for privacy. Other safe spaces such as churches and mosques, where they felt 'relieved and calm' demonstrated their need for protection, as children stressed on the accessibility of help. Comparatively, there seemed to be an alertness as well as unsettling perceptions towards most communal spaces in their neighbourhood.

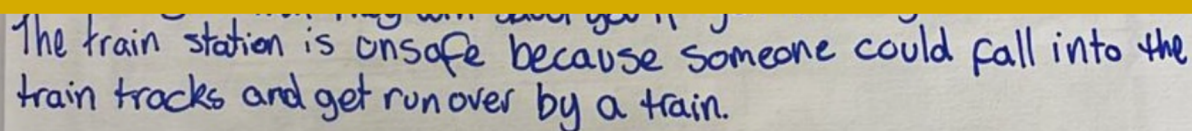


This might be rooted in the lack of quality infrastructure and fear towards strangers. One of the female students did not feel safe at a bookshop because she was afraid of the falling bookshelves, and some children classified the park as 'unsafe' because they 'might get kidnapped and approached by dangerous people'.



Such anxiety was generalised in many neighbourhood spaces including pubs ('people are all drunk there'), crossroads ('incoming cars might not stop'), bridges ('someone could push you down'), train stations

(‘someone could pick-pocket you’), gas stations (‘people could be selling illegal stuff there’). Though these places are not necessarily dangerous for them, it is clear from these reactions that the neighbourhood needs to be safer for the children. By improving the conditions of public facilities as well as better managing communal spaces, children’s perceptions of their neighbourhood area might be associated with more positive attitudes.

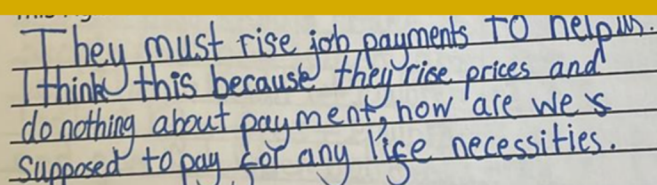


The train station is unsafe because someone could fall into the train tracks and get run over by a train.

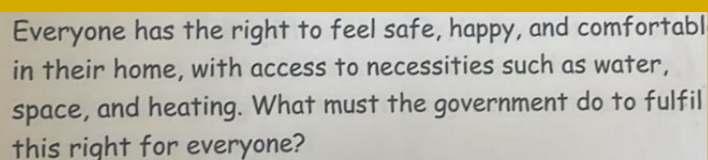
The children proposed ‘happiness and friendliness’ when we were brainstorming words around ‘neighbourhood’. A happy and friendly community cannot exist without a safe neighbourhood. It is the children’s wish to live in one, and we believe it is also their right to enjoy that.

The right to benefits- what do the children of Grinling Gibbons demand?

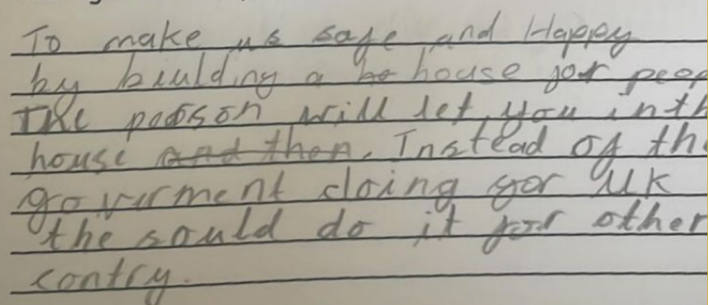
When participating in workshops, the students of Grinling Gibbons were able to translate their experience into a few key demands. Firstly, one of the most prominent demands lies in regard to money and the cost of living – where students expressed an awareness of the need for bills and everyday costs to be lower in order to fulfil their right to basic necessities such as food, clothing, space, clean air and heating. Across this, many shared the sentiment that there needs to be fairer pay and/or higher compensation which is proportional to rises in the cost of living for those who need it. Important to note, students identified that it is imperative for this to extend beyond those with UK citizenship through the phrase ‘for [those from] other countr[ies]’. In turn, this need can be partially met through recourse to public funds, specifically child benefits, for all families regardless of their citizenship.



They must rise job payments TO help us. I think this because they rise prices and do nothing about payment, how are we supposed to pay for any life necessities.



Everyone has the right to feel safe, happy, and comfortable in their home, with access to necessities such as water, space, and heating. What must the government do to fulfil this right for everyone?



To make us safe and happy by building a house for people. The person will let you into the house and then. Instead of the government doing for UK they could do it for other country.

Additionally, students also recognised a need for a safer and cleaner community. For them, this means tackling housing issues (like mould), disrepair (such as paint peeling, shelves falling) and unclean communal hallways and lifts, as well as creating safer community spaces (such as community gardens and adults accompanied by children-only parks).

Some students, concerning this, feel that more consistent and responsive maintenance and inspections should be done by landlords, whilst others feel that better financial support would mean that families can afford to resolve some of these issues when they arise. In this way, students see how fulfilling everyone's right to benefits, support and communal spaces can facilitate their right to a safer and more comfortable living both at home and in their neighbourhoods.



To conclude, the students at Grinling Gibbons wish to help decision makers and service providers better understand the needs of their community and others through their voices and demands. They believe this is how changes originate. Also, they look toward a vision of the future when '[things stop] being so harsh' and we 'make things easier for others' in an environment where everyone can access meaningful support and feel included both structurally and socially. They view this as part of their basic rights to safety and stability at home and in the wider community. This, for us, starts at the acknowledgment and reformation of the marked inequalities between families with citizenship and non-citizenship in receiving government aids such as child benefits.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY

Newman Catholic College

Introduction to the school

Newman Catholic College is an inclusive all-boys secondary school and sixth form. It is located in Harlesden, London, Borough of Brent, and serves a diverse and multicultural community. Committed to being a school of sanctuary, all staff extend a warm welcome to young people who may be fleeing war in their home countries, are facing trouble at home or just need a safe place. Newman Catholic College has a strong social justice ethos which aligns with their belief systems; this is seen through their UNICEF Gold award for being a rights-respecting school and their London Citizens club, championing issues that arise in their community.

This chapter delves into the profound impact of denying child benefits to families with no recourse to public funds, as revealed through workshops conducted with 6th-form students from Newman College. The students' perspectives shed a stark light on the far-reaching consequences of this policy, emphasising the urgent need for change. The report highlights the detrimental effects of the cost of living crisis, housing challenges, and the students' poignant insights on the vital role child benefits would play in alleviating their struggles and enhancing their well-being.

Students Demography

Newman Catholic College (NCC), is a boys Catholic institution located in the Brent area of London. Its students, aged between 11 and 19, are predominantly from working class backgrounds and of Irish, Caribbean and West African descent.

The number of students in the school is 714, with gender distribution of 90.6% boys and 9.4% girls. Although 55% of the students are Catholic, the school has been experiencing rapid growth in Muslim and Hindu students. Demographically, NCC represents between 16 and 17 different ethnic groups, reflecting the school's desire to be as inclusive as the community it serves.

Socio-economically, the community the school serves, Harlesden, is closely affected by poverty and an IDSR report (GOV.UK, 2023) in 2020 shows that the school is in the lowest quintile of all schools in the UK in terms of poverty index and in the lowest quintile in terms of pupil numbers. The NW10 area in which the school is located has a third of households classed as poor. Interestingly, half of Newman College's students are learners of English as a second language. Given the number of new immigrant students, a priority for NCC is to provide English as an additional language program not only for students but also for parents. As of May 5, 2022, 27.7% of students at NCC are eligible for free school meals, further reflecting the challenging socio-economic conditions faced by many in the school community.



The workshops

Through 7 hours of workshops and activities on how to locally educate and organise for social justice, the Sixth Formers embarked on a journey of introspection and delved into issues that necessitate collective attention in Brent. While listening to each others' heartfelt dilemmas and visions, the Sixth Formers were introduced to applied topics in policy and economics, namely 1) the cost of living crisis, 2) No Recourse to Public Funds, and 3) immigration and housing. During this process, the Sixth Formers also learnt how to demonstrate resilience through utilising mental frameworks of combating shame and stigma, and gained insights in how to ameliorate collective well-being through organic leadership. Beyond all, the Sixth Formers uncovered the importance of genuinely respecting diverse individual stances, demonstrating empathy instead of alienation when discussing issues with pertinent political discourses. The workshops culminated in the planning of a local action supporting the food bank (see "Food Bank"), where students will apply the skills and knowledge obtained to scale and innovate a local solution.

Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis

The students vividly expressed their concerns about the crippling cost of living crisis and its detrimental effects on their daily lives. They spoke of the financial constraints they face, struggling with insufficient funds to meet their basic needs. The resulting strain manifests in heightened stress levels, adversely affecting their mental health. Some students spoke about the need to take up part-time jobs during the school term to contribute to their household expenses and support their siblings. Additionally, the skyrocketing cost of heating homes during the winter emerged as a pressing issue, compromising their overall well-being.

Housing Challenges

Escalating housing prices have forced families to uproot and endure long commutes for children to attend school, disrupting their stability and adding to their burdens. The lack of investment in local areas further exacerbates the difficulties faced by vulnerable families, limiting their access to essential services and facilities. Often these families live in overcrowded neighbourhoods where pervasive noise pollution further hampers children's ability to study effectively and



reach their full potential. Moreover, the students highlighted the consequences of overcrowded living conditions. One student with a family of seven shared that they live in a two-bedroom flat. Such lack of access to vital space to grow, learn, relax and rejuvenate after a long day at school is detrimental to children's development.

Students' Perspectives on Child Benefits

In one workshop, Newman students were asked to calculate how much money their families would receive if they had access to child benefits and how they would spend the additional funds. Unsurprisingly, their responses revealed the need for financial support to address basic needs. Most students said they would spend the extra money on food shopping and maintaining their households. Adequate clothing, including school uniforms and supplies, also emerged as a priority. Some students said they would indulge in simple

pleasures such as going to the funfair and spending time with friends. Indeed, for many students from underprivileged families, outings are a luxury. Parents simply do not have the disposable income to pay for activities. Moreover, some children are burdened with significant childcare responsibilities that limit their time with friends. Lack of access to child benefits means that families who have significant financial burdens and struggle to afford basic needs cannot afford to pay for childcare. This not only affects younger children who are deprived of adequate pre-school education but also burdens the older children with responsibilities beyond their age that can severely affect their academic and social life.

The Food Bank

Unfortunately, more than 13 million people in the UK are living below the poverty line. Many families are unable to access public funds due to immigration status, suffer from unemployment, low income or debt. With a strong sense of serving the

Newman Catholic College



Friday Foodbank



Faith in Action



common good, the College recognises the difficulties many families face in accessing adequate food. In response, Newman Catholic College established a school-based initiative, the 'Food Bank' under the assistant headteacher Susan Grace's leadership and a dedicated team of teachers and students.

Every Friday, the food bank opens its doors staffed by student and staff volunteers and supported by a number of committed organisations. The campaign has partnered with Caritas Westminster and Wates Construction to create this work. Since the first blockade in March 2020, Caritas has been supporting Newman Catholic Academy through food donations and the food bank has grown steadily with the support of the local communities in Harlesden and Kensal Green. Wates Construction has generously provided the food bank hut, fridge and freezer. Kensal Green Mutual has established a vegetable garden on the school grounds to enable the food bank to provide seasonal fresh produce. Proudly, the campaign has now supported over 50 vulnerable families in the school community.

Despite the school's best efforts, shame and stigma play a significant role in deterring families from utilising the food bank. These emotions often arise from societal pressure and the fear of being judged for not being able to provide for their children adequately. However, child benefits serve as a crucial tool to empower these families and restore a sense of agency over their circumstances. By receiving child benefits, families can overcome the burden of shame and stigma, knowing that their children's

education and basic needs are being supported.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the workshops conducted with the 6th form students from Newman Catholic College shed light on the profound impact of denying child benefits to families with no recourse to public funds. The students' perspectives revealed the far-reaching consequences of this policy, highlighting the urgent need for change. The cost of living crisis and housing challenges emerged as significant issues affecting their daily lives and well-being. The students expressed the importance of child benefits in addressing their basic needs and enhancing their overall quality of life. Their reflections provided compelling evidence of the transformative impact child benefits would have on vulnerable families, enabling them to pursue education and experience a semblance of normalcy. Moreover, the establishment of the Food Bank at Newman Catholic College showcased the school's commitment to serving the common good and supporting vulnerable families. However, shame and stigma still deter some families from accessing the food bank, emphasising the importance of empowering families through child benefits to overcome these emotions. Urgent policy reforms are necessary to ensure social justice, uplift vulnerable families, and create a more equitable and compassionate society.

YOUNG CHILDREN CONCERNED

Oliver Goldsmith Primary School

Introduction

Oliver Goldsmith is a primary school for children aged 4 to 11 located in Peckham, a multicultural area with a predominantly African and Jamaican population. While it has been one of the most deprived areas in London, it has shown signs of improvement in recent years. Through our research, we discovered that nearly half of the students are eligible for free school meals, and a majority of the children's parents have migrated to the UK without citizenship.

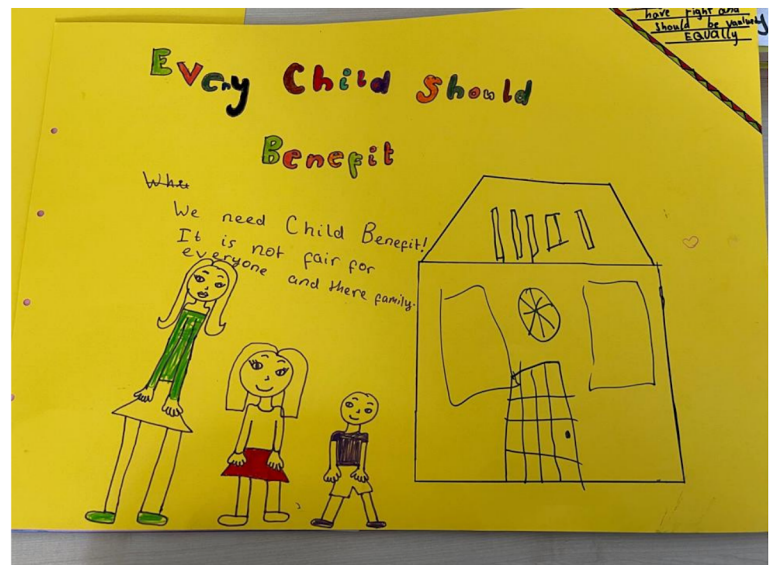
Our workshops involved 16 children who make up the school's council, ranging from year 3 to year 5. We conducted six workshops over the course of four weeks, with each team member responsible for planning and delivering one session.

Introduction to Citizenship

The first workshop consisted of introducing ourselves to the children and getting them to think about citizenship and rights. We started off by sharing a bit about ourselves, including where we are from and why we are going to be delivering these workshops to them.

When introducing ourselves, it was useful to reference where we were born and whether we were citizens or had arrived in the UK either as students or immigrants, as this helped to talk about citizenship later on.

We had an engaging activity called "friendship bingo" where the students had to write a name under each statement, with the first person completing all of them winning.



This was a great way to get the students to engage but also get to know us. The statements also gave insight into their lives as it asked questions such as "Find someone who went on holiday this year" or "Find someone who speaks another language." We then started with our utopian world activity in which we asked the children, "If you could change anything in the world, what would you change?" The responses were very positive, with the students mentioning topics such as climate change, discrimination, racism, poverty, world hunger, and violent crime.

We had the students write letters to Joel as a friend offering advice and support. The students demonstrated a great deal of empathy. In their letters, many of the students mentioned that they wished people helped Joel, and that if they could, they would help too. Some students mentioned that Joel should not worry as many children are going through this, including themselves.

Exploring these topics of what they could change and the overwhelming number of them who said poverty, inequality, and world hunger provided a nice segue into "Joel's story" – a video of a 10-year-old boy whose mother is not a citizen, meaning he does not receive meals at school, the family does not have a sufficient income, and also does not have a home. The story followed his journey of attempting to get support from various stakeholders but struggling and being put into unsafe social housing.

Citizenship

The topic of the second workshop was Citizenship, and the main objective was to introduce the children to the rights of British citizens versus non-British citizens. We began with an activity where we gave children IDs and asked them to go around and collect stickers from UCL students to paste in the boxes inside their ID cards. Half of the students had a British passport, and the other half had a BRP Card with the statement "NO Recourse to Public Funds." At the end of the activity, the students with NRPB IDs expressed disappointment about not being able to collect stickers for obtaining a job and were also unhappy about collecting a sticker for shared accommodation. Some students with British passports began exchanging and even offering their IDs to their classmates. However, we explained that this is not possible in the real world and provided them with more information about being non-British citizens.

After making the children aware of the situation, they became very passionate about participating in the next activity, which involved debating an issue they believed could help those with NRPB.

They all agreed and came to the conclusion that non-British citizens should either have the right to work or have the right to access public funds. They recognized that the weekly allowance some receive is insufficient to support them, particularly given the present cost of living crisis.

The students believed that addressing this issue would have a positive impact on families who are suffering from the cost of living crisis and struggling to purchase basic necessities or living in inconvenient accommodations.

In their post-workshop reflections, several students expressed sadness for people without access to public funding while also voicing their desire to change things in the future and assist those in need. They demonstrated empathy and concern for those who are suffering.



Housing

In our third workshop, we focused on housing issues and how they may be related to citizenship. Students were organized into groups and were asked to draw their dream houses. They had a high level of autonomy to imagine and design their dream houses in any way they liked. Afterwards, they shared their drawings with the group to see if any similarities or differences emerged and discussed the reasons behind them.

They were encouraged to ask each other questions about why their houses looked a certain way. Some students also wanted to gain a better understanding of each other, so they shared whether their dream houses resembled their own houses. Most of them suggested that their dream houses were completely different from their actual housing situations. For example, many children drew big houses with gardens and playgrounds. These houses were depicted as beautiful, well-structured, and independent, without shared spaces.

One child drew separate bedrooms for themselves, their siblings, and parents, all with similar but spacious designs. They also divided rooms by function, such as a living room, kitchen, garage, and dining room, rather than cramming them together. This reflected the fact that their real housing conditions were not ideal. However, they believed that this could be improved with increased child benefits, which would make it more affordable for families to cover expenses.

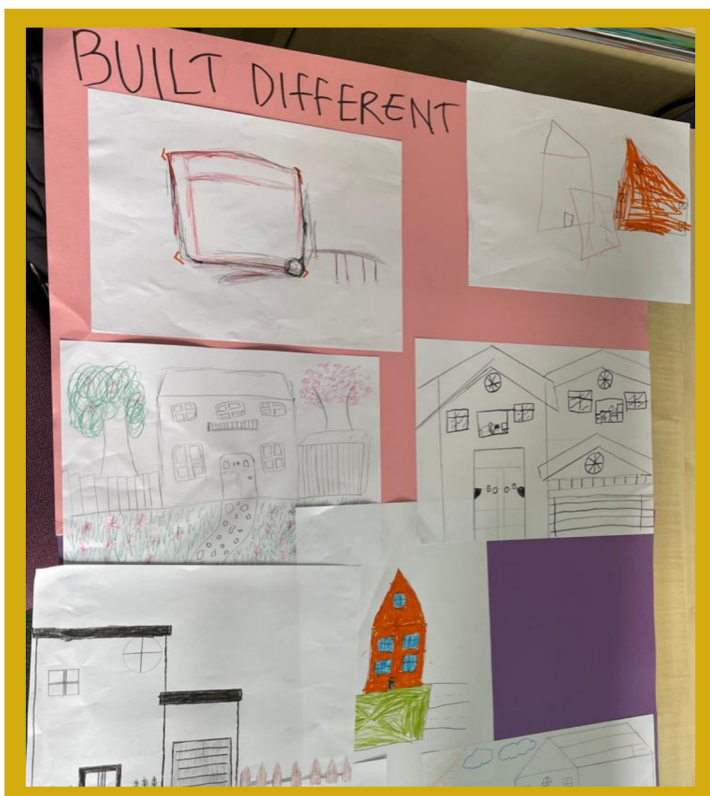


Two children drew windows in the shape of union flags and hearts. They explained that aside from decorative purposes, they wished for a more inclusive environment filled with love.

Later on, the students were asked to place their dream houses in dream towns and give them names. The students took the initiative to organize this task. One group named their dream town "Mulberry." They explained that not many people know this fruit, so it's cool. At the same time, the mulberry tree represents faith, growth, and nature, which they hoped their town with all its beautiful houses would embody. They expressed a desire for a peaceful living environment, demonstrating their willingness to improve their current housing conditions.

Housing Rights

This workshop aims to inform students about their housing rights and provide them with guidance on who to seek help from if they encounter housing issues that may violate those rights. The workshop consists of two activities. Firstly, students are introduced to their basic housing rights and then asked to apply this knowledge by identifying violations of housing rights in a fictional story about the Ahmeds family.



Secondly, students explore the Ahmed family's house built in Minecraft and engage in role-playing as teachers, social workers, housing authority members, and city council members to develop plans to assist the Ahmed family.

There was valuable feedback received during this workshop that is worth considering. When presenting a poorly conditioned house within Minecraft with a ceiling soaked from rainwater, one student casually mentioned that their actual kitchen also experienced occasional dripping. This seemingly ordinary response revealed that some students had become accustomed to living conditions that should not be considered normal or acceptable. It was a stark reminder of how easily we adapt to adverse circumstances, often overlooking the need for improvement

'said in a normal tone, 'our kitchen sometimes drips water too'

...

'our old house was also infested with rats'

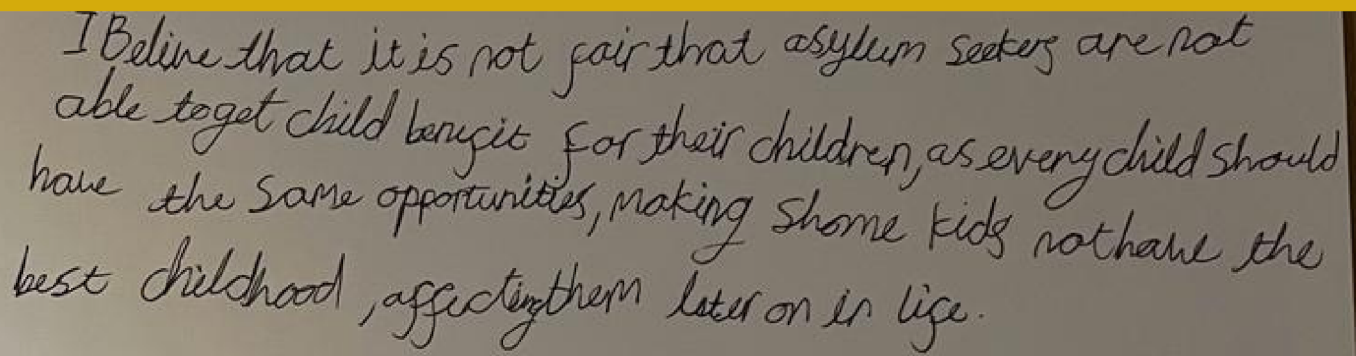
'I didn't know this basic information before'

Continuing with the Minecraft showcase, another student shared that their original house had been infested with rats. This revelation highlighted a concerning reality – the lack of attention given to unhealthy living environments in certain areas of the UK. The mention of rat infestation by the student served as a poignant reminder that many individuals, especially children, endure substandard housing conditions that pose risks to their health and well-being.

To enrich the educational experience, I conducted online research to gather information on how professionals from various fields could contribute to improving the living environment for children.

The collected information was then compiled into a concise "cheat sheet" that served as a reference for the students. Considering their age, some of the information provided was basic and general. However, the students found even this fundamental knowledge to be incredibly useful and valuable. The inclusion of the "cheat sheet" allowed the students to engage in role-playing as professionals, exploring different scenarios and brainstorming ways to address housing-related challenges.

Their enthusiasm and engagement in this activity were palpable. The fact that the students found even this basic information to be very useful highlights the current education system's oversight in providing relevant knowledge, such as understanding housing rights and accessing resources. The students' positive response underscores the need for more comprehensive and practical education in schools to empower them with the skills and awareness necessary to effectively navigate housing-related issues.



I Believe that it is not fair that asylum seekers are not able to get child benefit for their children, as every child should have the same opportunities, making some kids not have the best childhood, affecting them later on in life.

Child Benefits

The topics covered in the fifth workshop are about how to voice concerns and take action, as well as the issue of Child Benefit. The workshop had four objectives: (a) delve into the students' individual and group concerns and issues; (b) provide guidance on appropriate responses or actions; (c) teach them about Child Benefit and the disparities between UK citizens and non-UK citizens; and (d) gain insights into their thoughts and feelings to understand their perception of social justice. Two activities were designed for this workshop. First, students were asked about their feelings of unfairness, love, frustration, and happiness towards public spaces, school, and home. Second, they were asked to write letters to the parliament expressing their views on Child Benefits.

The first activity explored personal topics. When discussing perceived unfairness, students noted rising prices and bullying as issues. These responses illuminated injustices experienced from ages 6-11. Conversely, they expressed joy in simple things like football, family, and jokes.

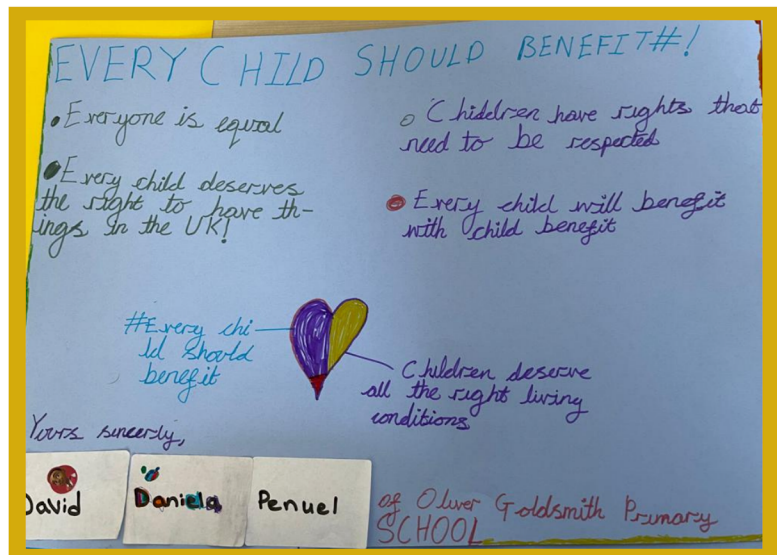
After completing the individual writing activity, we reconvened as a group to discuss their collective concerns and worries and guide them on suitable solutions.

Most of them agreed that bullying is a prevalent problem in school, and it was unanimously decided that if they witness or experience bullying, they will report it to one of their teachers or directly to the headmaster. They also raised concerns about not being listened to or taken seriously by adults because of their young age, feeling that their opinions and needs are sometimes disregarded due to assigned chores without extra time allotted. As a result, they proposed the idea of writing letters to make their voices heard and understood, potentially expressing their needs, such as requesting additional time after completing chores.

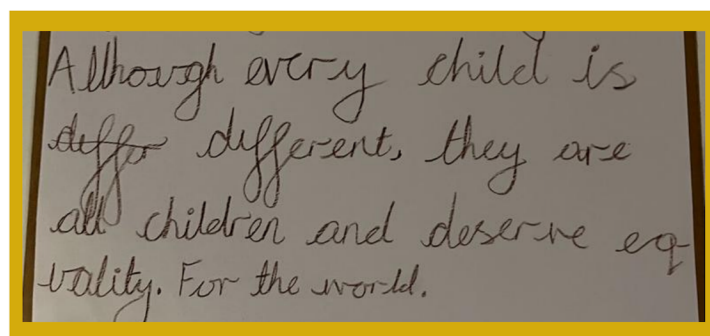
'they shouldn't have to live in such hardship because we are all the same - we are all children'

To practice letter writing, we first discussed Child Benefit. Child Benefit is a form of government support, amounting to £1,248 per year for the first or eldest child and an additional £827 per year for each additional child. However, not everyone residing in the UK has access to it, as it is primarily available to UK citizens.

However, not everyone residing in the UK has access to it, as it is primarily available to UK citizens. Therefore, individuals who have been living in the UK for years but do not meet the government's requirements (such as asylum seekers, refugees, and people with temporary working visas) may not have access to this benefit. Most of the students we worked with are UK citizens, and they found this situation unfair and saddening. The majority of their letters expressed sentiments such as "these children deserve the same opportunities as us," "it is not good for them to lack sufficient food and water," and "they shouldn't have to live in such hardship because we are all the same – we are all children." They strongly believed in equality and social justice, demonstrating their empathy and conviction that no one should be left behind.



Next, we explained the role of the students in our action and emphasized the importance of their participation. We encouraged them to think about why people choose to engage in collective action and how this can help make child benefits more accessible to everyone. To further involve them, we provided the students with banners and markers, asking them to create something we could hold during the collective action. The students made beautiful banners, with some of them writing about the unfairness of not everyone being able to receive child benefits.



NRPF/ Testimonies

This session focused on bringing together the students' feelings towards NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds) and transforming them into collective action. We began by providing a space for the children to share their stories and discuss how the topics we covered in our workshops may apply to their own lives. Many students mentioned issues related to housing or the challenges they face in obtaining citizenship. After they shared their stories, we identified a few students who could provide video testimonies to be used in our collective action.

While creating banners, our team explained child benefits to students, illuminating the expenses families face. They began understanding how such benefits alleviate familial stress.

In conclusion, the workshops provided a highly insightful experience. Through a variety of creative and engaging methods, we were able to encourage students to discuss sensitive topics such as citizenship, housing rights, and child benefits. The concept of limitations on public funds was met with confusion by the students, as they all believed that individuals who are struggling should receive help.

A CALL FOR INCLUSION

ST GABRIELS COLLEGE

Introduction

Saint Gabriel's College is a secondary school located in the London Borough of Lambeth. The school strives to make a community of committed and enthusiastic students. The amazing teachers and students at St Gabriel's work hard to embed culture and diversity into their school system through an inclusive nature.

Many students at St Gabriel's come from Hispanic Latin-American backgrounds and families with lots of students immigrating to the UK. Highlighting the importance of continuing to create an inclusive environment in the borough of Lambeth as a whole – so these communities can be celebrated.

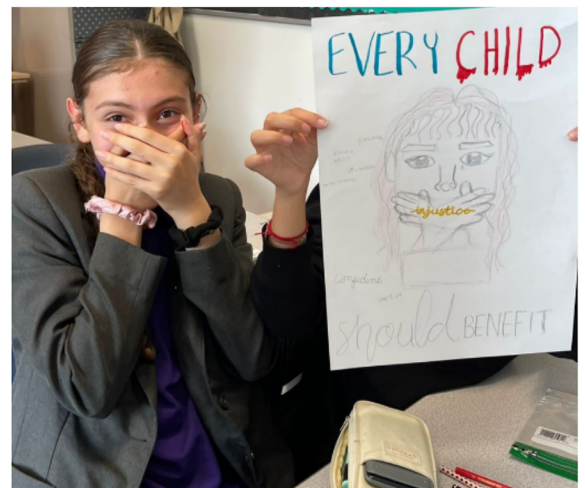
At St Gabriel's, they have students who study English as Another Language (EAL). For the students who predominantly speak Spanish as their first language they are able to learn English as an additional language in the school. Our workshops were planned and dedicated to EAL students in year 7 aged 11-12. Almost all the students we worked with had only lived in the UK for a few years and had grown up in a Latin America country. Which made it prevalent to us that the idea of representation of culture and language, immigration and citizenship were big concerns for these students. So, we made it our aim to embed the social inequalities that were relevant and aligned with the issues they too faced in their own families and communities.

Following the action theme of the Cost of Living crisis we worked to create a set of workshops that looked at how this can impact housing, living conditions and the effect this can all have on families and children. We showed how individuals can work together through community organising to make changes to these inequalities that members of society are facing. Sparking an interest in the students who felt frustration over the inequalities that society unfortunately faces.

Our workshops were an eye-opening experience that allowed us to teach and view the perspective of our future generations in their ability to face and overcome the social injustices in society. This report will further explain our findings and share the experiences of the students from Saint Gabriel's College.

Voices Deserved to be Heard

At the start of the workshop series, we introduced the concept of community organising to the students and practised some elements of the cycle of community organising. Despite not having prior knowledge about community organising, students were engaged in sharing different social injustices that they encountered in the community and the world, which facilitates the first step of community organising-istening.



one of the recurring themes include racism, which echoes with the findings of Lambeth Citizens' Listening Campaign in 2018. As most of the students are immigrants in the UK, many had personal experiences with this issue and were passionate about making a change towards this phenomenon. However, they were unsure about how to make changes about these situations as they have lived with them their whole lives. Then, we attempted to demonstrate the spirit of community organising and present it as a way to take action on certain social injustices.



Once again, students were fascinated about being part of the force in terms of change-making as children's voices were not often heard or even dismissed by the public. Through introducing previous actions involving children's work and involvement, students were more hopeful and willing in terms of contributing to the community. This is impressive considering most students have not been UK citizens, including their families. The enthusiasm and energy that they hold is what we believe to be different from adults.

Besides, it is also shocking to see their awareness towards the conditions that they have been living in and develop a critical lens and their individual voices towards certain topics. At the last session, they also took the initiative to decide whatever ways they wished to support the public action. Students have made posters and written letters to representatives of the government to make their voices heard. Their creativity, organisation a

awareness of the surroundings make them truly beautiful and unique beings regardless of their different identities.

Housing

Highlighting the UK's housing crisis, we helped the kids understand that many can't afford a decent home. We showed via community organising that unity and collective action can overcome issues as such. Our "Dream House" drawing exercise allowed the pupils to visualise their ideal living arrangements and assess their present housing problems to fix any issues. We had interactive talks in smaller groups to let people express their concerns and experiences.

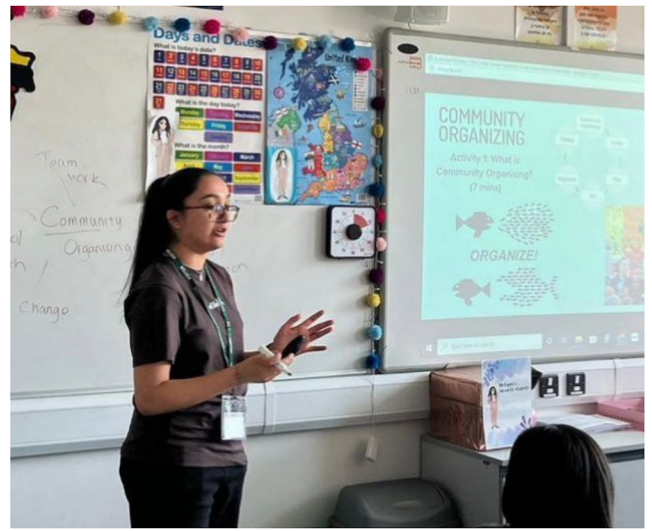
Throughout the discussion process, two major themes related to their housing conditions showed up. First, several immigrant students appealed their nostalgia about their houses back home, which is likely due to a more spacious environment. The little things, such as the greenery and fresh air, also matter to them. Secondly, they have also shown dissatisfaction



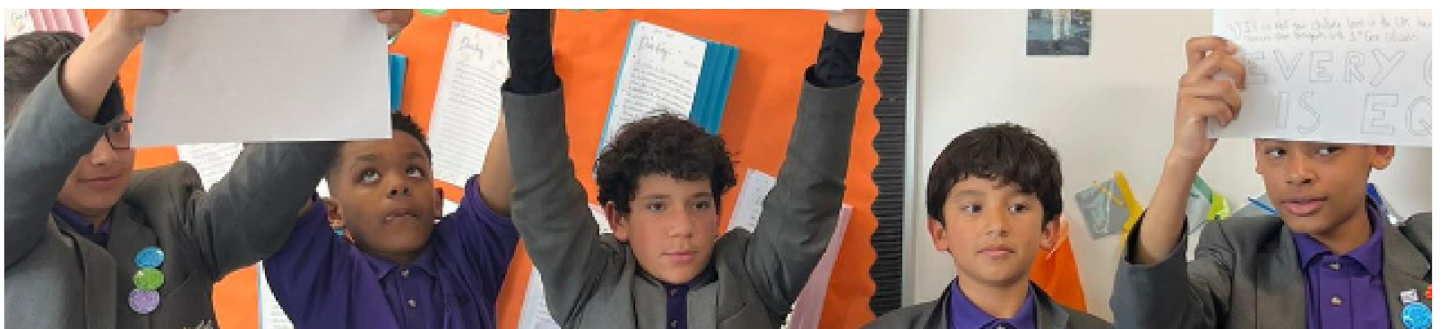
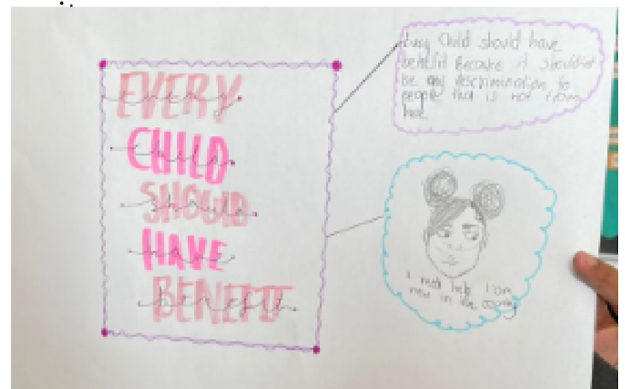
towards the infrastructure at their current houses. they have also shown dissatisfaction towards the infrastructure at their current houses. Without adequate lights and sound-proof floors, students have reported feelings of annoyance and insecurity. Even with English as an additional language, their heartfelt expressions of their experiences with social inequality tugged at our heartstrings. It was a stark reminder that their needs weren't restricted to housing but encompassed basic safety measures, a sturdy home infrastructure, and the comforting ambience of a 'family home'. Cultural sensitivity and respect for their immigrant backgrounds were underlined as we listened to many children nostalgically refer to their homes back in their countries during the lesson.

Privilege

In our third workshop, we explored the concept of privilege using pictures and an interactive 'privilege race' activity. The students interpreted images to understand 'privilege', with some associating it with luck or advantage. To further clarify, we used a role-playing activity involving four made-up characters: Johnny, Meriam, Khadeejah, and Charlotte, each with a unique background. The class, divided into four groups, assessed their character's privilege based on various prompts like 'English as their first language'. The character accumulating the most points, which was Johnny, illustrated the dynamics of privilege. After our activity, we had a discussion with the students on what they think the meaning of privilege is and how this might be unfair to the marginalised. After our activity, we had a discussion



with the students on what they think the meaning of privilege is and how this might be unfair to the marginalised groups. Some students have created a hand gesture, by bringing their wrists together as if they were jailed, to express how unfair the game was and why some characters were receiving points, and some were not. Despite not being familiar with the concept of privilege in the first place, they appeared to have strong feelings and experiences in social injustices. They were aware of the different treatments that people of different statuses and social backgrounds received, and felt the need to take action



Finally, drawing on the 'privilege race' activity, we explained to the pupils how things like immigration status and citizenship can influence what resources different people in the UK can benefit from, leading us to present the #EveryChildShouldBenefit campaign. We were surprised by the motivation the pupils displayed, many showing interest in participating in the campaign. Since this unfortunately clashed with their school timetables, we found another way to involve them, by having them make posters for the action and write letters appealing to MPs to make change. The children were able to express their voices in artistic and creative ways, working together to provide us with materials to sustain the campaign.

Conclusion

Our experience working at St Gabriel's College proved to be a convincing testament to each child's resilience and intelligence, especially these children from immigrant backgrounds. We were able to appreciate the cultural diversity within the school, with EAL teacher Claudia Lopez-Prieto doing an admirable job at creating a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. We note the obstacles they face: the language barrier that distances them from their peers and educators, the alienation caused by language and cultural differences, and the need for an inclusive and compassionate support system that nurtures their values and strengths, not just from their peers, teachers and families, but from the country they live in.



While the word 'justice' may seem complex and daunting to these children because of their age, their intuitive grasp of its essence – through their experience of injustice – is profound. Despite their tender age, their perception of fairness is astonishing, perhaps more advanced than that of many adults. Witnessing their struggles, we realised that social justice is not just about power or hierarchy but about creating a world where every child feels safe, loved and appreciated regardless of their origins.

Addressing the inequalities faced by these children is an urgent requirement. It was interesting working with a demographic of children/ families who mainly come from immigrant backgrounds. While talking to them about the concepts of privilege and exclusion, many expressed a slight feeling of social opportunity. These challenges show their great spirit and the immense courage it takes to navigate a world that does not always understand or acknowledge their struggles. Their experience should be a rallying cry for us all, prompting us to provide these young people with an environment that fosters their sense of belonging. This endeavour requires empathy, resilience and a relentless commitment to justice. Let us work to ensure that every child at St Gabriel's, and indeed every child across the globe, benefits from our collective compassion and commitment to their bright future.

THE RIGHT TO EAT

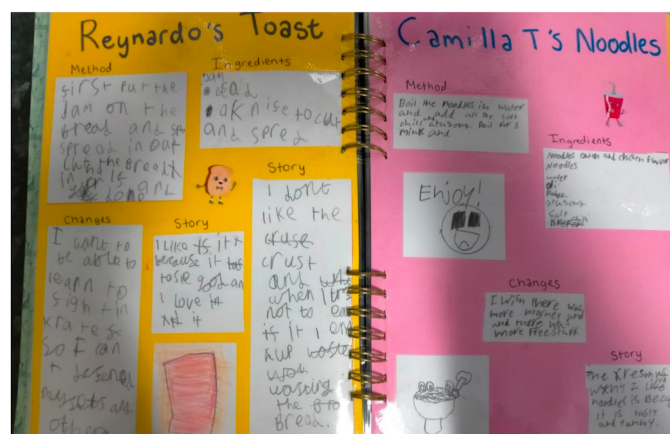
St. John's Angell Town Primary School

Background to School, Area, and Community

St John's Angell Town Primary School is a Christian School based in the heart of Brixton. It helps support its students to be confident and independent young people, who are motivated to learn and challenge themselves. With a large body of immigrant students, St Johns is acutely aware of how The Cost of Living Crisis has affected people. Despite the best efforts from the staff to protect the children from these issues whilst they are in school (for example, everyone is given lunch no matter who they are or what their status is), the children were still very aware and sensitive to issues of inequality and struggle. Even at the young age of 8, they gave meaningful insights and reflections on complex topics, including food inequality, political systems and the value of citizenship. As a team, we learned as much from them as they did from us and we would like to share those findings here.

Aims and Focuses

Given the diversity of the Lambeth/Brixton area in which the primary school is located, the aims of our workshop were equally diverse. Our aims started wide, with a general focus on inequality, cost of living, and social justice, and narrowed throughout the planning process as we began to learn about the children, their families, and their backgrounds. The teachers informed us of the fact that a large majority of the school was on Pupil Premium, the first spark to our idea to focus on the topic of food. Given the rapidly changing prices of food in the living crisis, the topic was a good fit for the overarching goals of Citizens UK. No matter the society we live in, food unites us, and gaining a deeper insight into food allows us to gain rich information about the communities we aim to explore. Being a common theme amongst all cultures, it is easy to compare and contrast the way that privilege, citizenship, benefits and financial circumstances affect access to food.



Something to keep in mind was the focus of the children and their ability to grasp the difficult concepts we were communicating to them. Food presented the perfect package to convey these ideas. This simple yet effective topic resonated with all children and simultaneously sparked the curious sense of creativity with which children typically approach cooking, food, and the kitchen. In the same thread, our workshops aimed to capitalise on this creativity, planning hands-on activities that allowed us to gain insight into the children's views about food given the living crisis, as well as effectively educate them on the underlying issues surrounding this expansive topic.

Strong Sense of Equality

Among the students at St John's Angell Town School, a strong sense of equality permeated the workshops. While engaging in various activities centred around individual food preferences and desires, when the students were asked about the changes they would like to see in the world, the narrative swiftly shifted to collective aspirations for a better world, emphasising the well-being and equality of all. Several students, for example, expressed their belief that *"Everyone should have the same amount of food."* Inequality was evident not only in the lack of food for some individuals but also in the literal, societal inequalities in food access. One student, for example, articulated their vision for a better world by stating, *"I want everyone, including greedy people, to have the same amount of food. Everyone on Earth is here on a mission to make the world a better place. So we need to be healthy. I want everyone to be healthy."* The testimonies of other students further reinforced the notion that unequal access to food posed a substantial threat to human dignity and well-being and that access to food is seen as a human right. When the children were later in the workshops introduced to the concept of citizenship and No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), their initial reaction was disbelief and a lack of comprehension regarding why such circumstances would exist in the United Kingdom. Although they were unable to share whether they are personally affected by NRPF due to their limited information at a young age, the idea of an inequality mechanism within the context of the cost of living crisis was incomprehensible to their understanding of the world.



Everyone Should be able to Afford Healthy Food and Sustain a Healthy Living

In the diverse and vibrant community of Brixton, London, children from all walks of life come together to learn and grow. However, disparities in access to healthy, nourishing food persist, with immigrant students often bearing the brunt of this issue. One student shared her experience of being affected by The Cost of Living Crisis - *'I used to have donuts every Friday, but now I can't.'* As we progressed through our activities at St. Johns Angell Town School, more and more students expressed their concern of poor access to affordable healthy food as well as a wish to bridge this nutritional divide. Although not absolutely correct, this quotation aptly demonstrates the sentiments felt by students - *'Pizza is healthy. Everyone should have a pizza once a week to be happy.'* As students engaged in workshops about nutrition, budgeting, inequality, and basic political awareness, they gradually realised the need to change the current situation. This change in mindset empowered these young learners, many of whom are navigating the challenges of a new cultural environment. Following the workshops, several students voiced their desires for change. *'I want everyone to eat one cheese toasty a day and give it to someone homeless. Everyone be healthy and strong. Be happy. Have Chips. Have full meals. Be smart. To God.'*

Everyone Should Have Food Every Day

In the class at St John's Angell Town School, we learned that the community of Brixton is still facing many social challenges, one of which is a food gap. Access to regular, nutritious food is a basic human right and should be ensured for everyone, regardless of external circumstances. It is crucial to recognise that the provision of food should not rely solely on government temporary measures, nor should it be limited to specific settings such as schools. Rather, it should be an ongoing effort to ensure that everyone has access to meals on a daily basis. During the workshops, many of the children expressed their strong desire for everyone to have food to eat every day. One of them shared her insight - *'If I were the Prime Minister for one day, I would make sure that everyone has food to eat, especially those who are homeless, they deserve to have food too.'* When the children were asked why regular food was important to people, they responded that they felt access to regular food was important in supporting a person's health and well-being. Access to adequate food enables individuals to lead meaningful lives and contribute to their communities and societies - *'I want everyone to have food to eat every day and I think it's important to be well fed so that you can have the energy to do other things.'*



"The workshop has been a great experience and the children were able to gain a wealth of knowledge. Thank you very much to all of the UCL students involved" - Ms Bonsu

"It has been a great pleasure working with the UCL students. They have shown great initiative with clear ideas which are current to our children's needs. They have worked collaboratively and through the workshops the children have gained a breadth of knowledge" - Ms Campbell.

Total cost:		
Item	Proportion weight	price
Pizza	1	£5.10
Burger	1	£4.00
Fruit smoothie	24	£6.00

Conclusion

As can be seen from this report, the children at St Johns Angell Town are not only affected by the consequences of The Cost of Living Crisis, but they are also keenly aware of them. Throughout our sessions, the students showed a high level of sensitivity to the wider issues within society, such as a lack of proper and nutritious food for everybody. In addition to this they also expressed a strong willingness for change and improvement in the country and its systems. We firmly believe that by working collectively, we can create a more just, equal opportunity and inclusive Brixton, ensuring that all children are able to enjoy equal opportunities in life, regardless of their socio-economic background and cultural differences. We hope that through this report, we have been able to amplify these students' voices and concerns and that they will be heard respectfully and their issues acted upon.

DEMANDING SANCTUARY FOR ALL

St. Mary's Lewisham CE Primary School

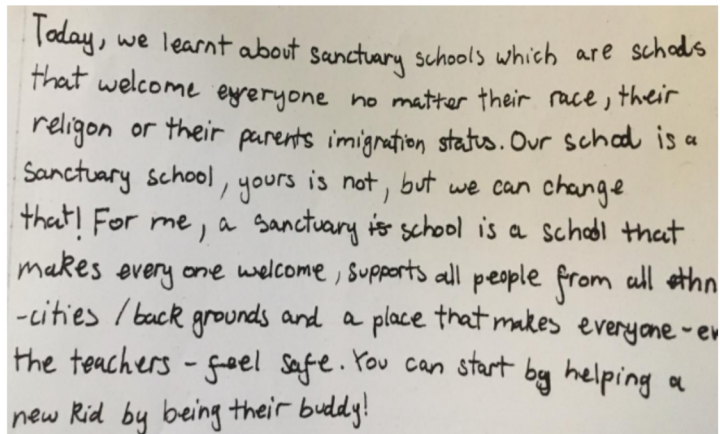
St Mary's is a Church of England primary school located in the centre of Lewisham: a vibrant and diverse borough with a long history of community resistance and activism. Lewisham was the first borough to be named a Borough of Sanctuary, and the school itself became registered as a School of Sanctuary in June 2021 - joining a network of over 300 other schools in a commitment to create a safe and welcoming culture for refugees and asylum seekers. St Mary's has worked tirelessly since, both within and outside of the school walls, to ensure a culture of openness that opposes discrimination and works collectively with community organisations like Citizens UK to support families struggling under an environment that is hostile not only to immigrants and refugees, but also to many that have called this country home since birth yet whose status remains insecure for complex reasons - much of which has to do with Britain's own colonial and racist history and changing citizenship policies (Webber, 2022)

Importantly, the school provides free meals for all that need them to ensure that every child is well-fed, and has been taking local action alongside Citizens UK to campaign with families at St Mary's on housing issues. We have spent the last month conducting workshops with year 5 pupils, and whilst the majority of pupils that we worked with are not subject to the NRPF condition (and many were unaware of their own citizenship status), their own livelihoods remain precarious and often unsafe. Their families face a multitude of intersecting problems relating to structural and interpersonal racism, unsafe and insecure housing, underfunded community resources, and an increasingly worsening cost of living crisis. Marta Tildelsley, the school's family support worker, estimates that around 70% of the school's pupils live in temporary accommodation, of whom over the past few years several have had traumatic experiences and even faced homelessness.



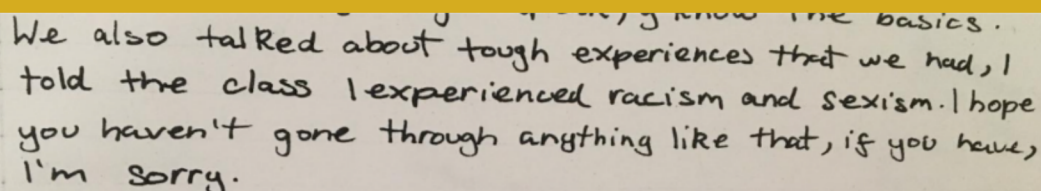
to make sure the school felt welcome for any new pupils. Inside of the welcome pack that they prepared together for new students, the children included greetings in various languages, daily schedules and a map of the school, and assured newcomers that they would be their friends.

The children wanted this feeling of safety to be extended beyond the school. In their letters to their pen-pals at Grinling Gibbons, another local school within the borough, they even mentioned their enthusiasm to help other schools become a School of Sanctuary. This evidenced a real pride in diversity, and in being a sanctuary school - reflecting the essence of the school as a whole.



Today, we learnt about sanctuary schools which are schools that welcome everyone no matter their race, their religion or their parents immigration status. Our school is a Sanctuary school, yours is not, but we can change that! For me, a sanctuary school is a school that makes everyone welcome, supports all people from all ethnicities / backgrounds and a place that makes everyone - even the teachers - feel safe. You can start by helping a new kid by being their buddy!

Unfortunately, however, the outcomes of our workshops did not make it possible to say that the pupils always felt welcome or safe in their own borough. Some students mentioned that they were unable to change many things because of discrimination due to their appearance and race. For example, one student mentioned that despite the efforts of their parents, they were not able to get the same salary as their colleagues, while another spoke of witnessing their parents being racially harassed on public transport.



We also talked about tough experiences that we had, I told the class I experienced racism and sexism. I hope you haven't gone through anything like that, if you have, I'm sorry.

I can't wait to receive your letter and I'm excited to write back (I love writing, remember?).

Your penpal,

A Strong Sense of Justice: What is Fair, and What is Not?

To draw upon these experiences and tie them in with the notion of citizenship, in our second workshop, we played an adapted version of the 'privilege race': a game that uses statements indicative of family background, race, ethnicity, and economic status, in order to demonstrate the unequal disparities between participants, and facilitate reflections on the nature of privilege. In this game, our students lined up in a straight line to race against each other and were asked to step backwards or forwards if they felt the statements applied to them. In the end, instead of starting from the same point, the students started the race from a variety of positions, reflecting the various privileges and/or barriers they face in everyday life. For example, one statement read: "If both of your parents' first language is English, take two steps forward". Additionally, we also introduced different coloured cards, which represented various levels of citizenship status:

including full citizenship, leave to remain, or status with the NRP condition. Each card had different numbers of steps for forwards or backwards associated with them (e.g., "If you have a blue card, take three steps forward.").



During the race, the significance in the disparities became evident. Some students were able to step forward with every statement, while others remained at the starting point until the end, or had to take multiple steps backwards without ever stepping forward. This represented clearly the hierarchies of citizenship, created at least in part by the narrowing of rights that occurred throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, in which former colonial 'British subjects' with equal rights became alienated from the notion of Britishness - a process which has continued throughout the early 2000s (Webber, 2022). The Institute for Race Relations report on this outlines an ongoing process of 'stripping ethnic minority citizens of residents rights and devaluing their citizenship', with the vast majority deprived being British muslims (ibid, p11). Many of the children's own families of origin are from former colonial nations, making issues of citizenship and belonging feel pertinent to them. Reflecting these complexities, one pupil's written letter described himself proudly - but in his words, 'confusingly' - as 'Muslim and Bangladeshi', but 'Lewisham-bred'!



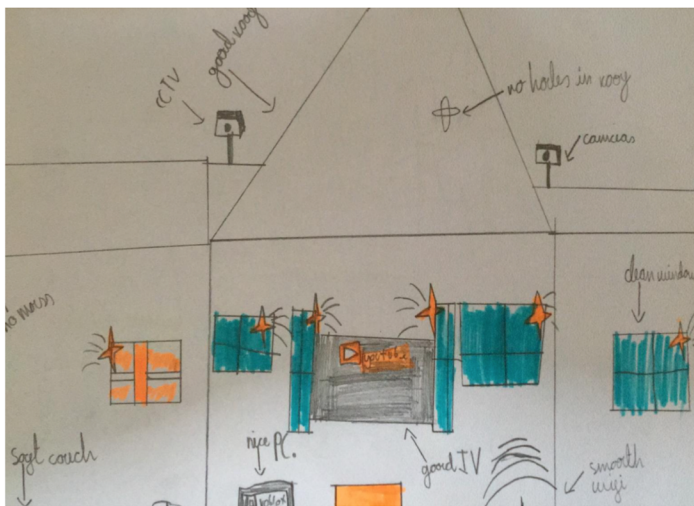
This sense of unfairness provoked frustration, which was reflected both verbally and in their behaviours during the race, especially in the beginning of the game. Arguably to protest this, they attempted to cheat – for example by taking big or even multiple steps forward at once. On the contrary, towards the end of the race, those with the red card which represented having no citizenship or who were left behind became less expressive, which might be an indication of how desperate and demoralised they felt. The frustration and the disappointment among students were obvious in our small-group discussions after the game. For the students who stayed at the starting line until the end of the race, the whole activity caused a sense of separation from other peers. Unfortunately, they also felt hopeless as they believed there wasn't much they could do to change this situation. Similarly, one of the students expressed that it was unfair that even if some of them put in extra effort, they still could not win. At the end of the statements, the students were encouraged to look back at where their peers were, and to reflect on how it felt to see them in such positions. Most, if not all of them, revealed feelings of confusion and compassion, but also unease when thinking about why they may be more privileged. Regardless of whether they were at the front during the race, all students concluded unanimously that the whole experience was far removed from the ideal of being a sanctuary, as multiple students described in their own words: "not like a sanctuary at all". During an in-depth discussion on citizenship and NRPF afterwards, all agreed that if the decision was in their hands, they would change the rules of the game, further reinforcing the strong sense of fairness and justice amongst them.

"NOT LIKE A SANCTUARY AT ALL!"

Social Housing as a Public Fund: Demanding Sanctuary for all

In our final workshop, given that we had been made aware that around 90% of the class had experienced housing problems, we facilitated a space for the children to elaborate on these issues in particular. Whilst initially hesitant to speak out, by the end of the workshop, the majority of students had raised their hands to speak about their experiences. Some of the students mentioned that their sinks had taken weeks to be fixed and spoke of having to use buckets to collect leaking water, while another child reported having to share a single room with four other people. One told us that he had to move to four different houses while waiting for social housing, and several spoke of traumatic experiences of upheaval in being moved suddenly without notice. Additionally, at least half of the class had experienced problems with mould. We were also made aware of one child that had been forced to sleep in a car for 5 days after being made homeless.





These experiences of lacking a sense of security and safety exposed that the aim for Lewisham to be a sanctuary for even its own residents, let alone asylum seekers and refugees, has yet to be realised. The children spoke articulately about their views that safety and access to housing and benefits should be basic rights for everyone – regardless of where they or their parents were from and regardless of their citizenship status.

Still, regardless of the type or duration, all of these housing issues had a significant impact on the students' lives and interrupted their schooling. The children further noted that these problems went beyond their own housing and extended to underfunded community resources that also had problems with disrepair and mould – such as local leisure facilities. One spoke of problems with rubbish not being collected on time, and another even wrote in their letter to the council about their fathers unemployment and its impact on their stressful home life and mother's health. The idea that someone in a similar situation might not have access to benefits felt deeply wrong to them.

After our discussion, the children drew pictures of their ideal houses, and we found that many children had written notes about the demand to feel protected; several drew elaborate security systems, alarms and padlocks on their houses. This reflected their need to feel safe and not be disturbed by outsiders. One pupil even wrote that their dream house would have an 'impenetrable invisible shield' protecting them. Their dream houses arguably represented the antithesis of their real-life circumstances, in which some even reported landlords entering their homes unannounced.





#Everychildshouldbenefit

Fundamentally, despite the work already done by St Mary's and Citizens UK already, our workshops highlighted that significant numbers of children continue to live in circumstances that leave them feeling unsafe. They are keenly aware of existing gulfs in the levels of privilege between themselves and others, and that these are unjustified – especially those relating to their family backgrounds. Do we really expect children living in one of the wealthiest countries in the world to have to suffer living in such bad conditions, and to be worried about basic necessities? Whilst the children shared a strong sense of fairness, this was often accompanied by a sense of hopelessness about their incapacity to change the conditions they faced due to existing imbalances of power. Throughout our workshops, they were keen on the idea of building power by connecting with others and supporting them in their struggles for access to public funds. Whilst more local changes are necessary for the children we met at St Mary's to feel secure, urgently, a change in child benefits to enable access to all would provide essential support for the families that are under pressure – and be significant in reducing the limitations imposed by wider policy on the staff at St Mary's working to support such families. Most importantly, both we and the children see this as a vital part of a broader and necessary struggle to enable all children to feel safe and secure, and ultimately, to be able to flourish.



SOUTHWARK: SCHOOLS OF SANCTUARY

Surrey Square & Notre Dame

The London Borough of Southwark is a vibrant, diverse, and culturally rich area. In Southwark, Surrey Square Primary School and Notre Dame Roman Catholic Girls' School offer a supportive and value-driven education.

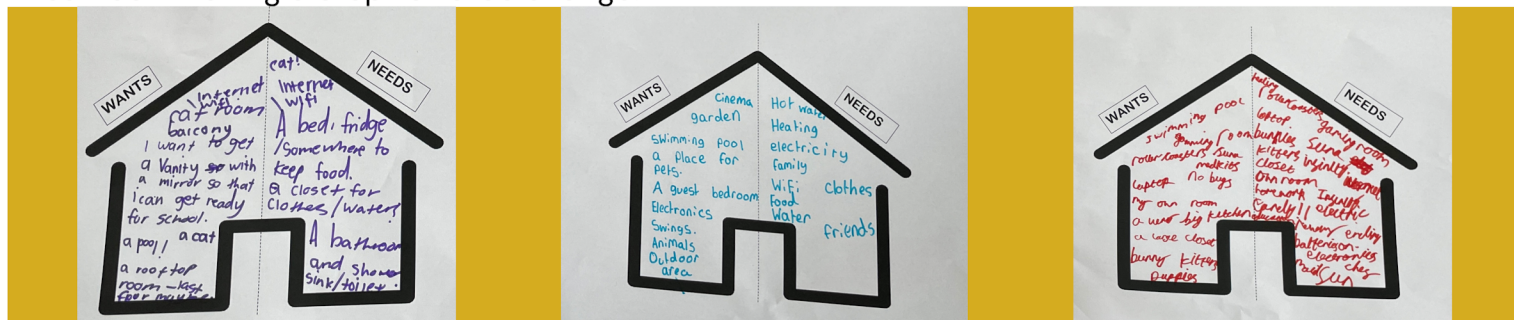
Surrey Square Primary School emphasises personal excellence by teaching and modelling six core values – Responsibility, Respect, Enjoyment, Community, Perseverance, and Compassion. Notre Dame RC Secondary School is dedicated to developing confident Christian women who understand equality and justice and can actively participate in a multicultural society, by providing strong pastoral support and promoting independence and responsibility.

In conducting workshops on No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), citizenship and housing issues, we aim to empower students, promote social justice and build stronger communities. Exploring citizenship helps students appreciate its associated privileges while understanding housing issues equips them with essential knowledge that informs their future decisions. By discussing these topics openly, we fostered empathy, which is particularly relevant in a space with diverse opinions and experiences. Beyond the classroom, we hope that the conversations extend beyond school to the wider community and the Southwark area, with the key goal to shape a more informed, empathetic, and proactive generation that can drive positive change.

Surrey Square Primary School

At Surrey Square primary school in the heart of Southwark, teachers and students are experienced in social justice organising. Surrey Square has won the School of Sanctuary award for its outstanding efforts to empower students and their families to initiate change and support them through the process. The sense of social justice and support for all families is vital within the school: coffee mornings, events, schemes, and suggestions to help families and children's educational experiences are being offered constantly.

We worked with a small but agile group of five students from Year 5, who were community ambassadors and had been previously introduced to local issues (e.g. NRPF) before. We emphasised the importance of the diversity and validity of all opinions, and were inspired to see young students' deep awareness and insight into complex political discussions. The opportunity to connect to others as part of a collective struggle was eye-opening for all individuals alike, and it once again reminded us how powerful conversation and active listening can be in taking a step towards change.



Housing

Our first session with Surrey Square primary school was an introduction to the cost-of-living crisis and housing. All the children had observed increased items in shops and items of play (e.g. footballs, video games) that are crucial for socio-emotional development.

When asked to write about dream items in a house, students mentioned key items such as heating, food, water and electricity, among other items such as gardens and entertainment items, which highlights that basic needs are constantly on their minds. Students affirmed that housing is becoming unaffordable due to the cost-of-living crisis. Unfortunately, individuals without citizenship do not have the luxury of applying for council houses and funding.

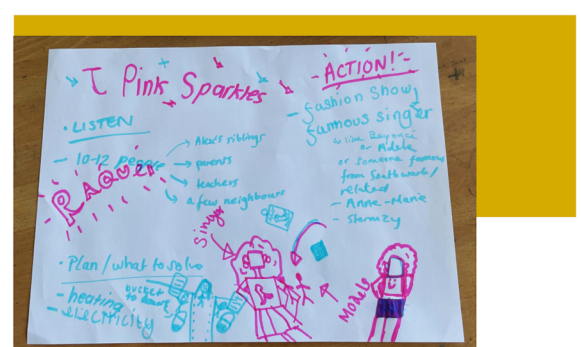
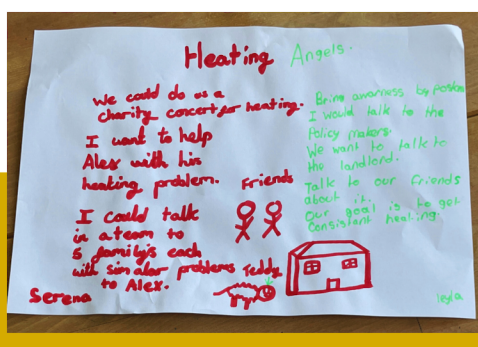
Students further understood the difficulties of buying basic necessities from an activity where they had to allocate a realistic budget to everyday items. In most cases, students underestimated the price of grocery and clothing shopping; one child stated it would be £20 but was shocked when my colleague suggested putting aside around £60 - £70 for food shopping. There is a clear disconnect between student versus parent perceptions of prices, which does not contribute to the cost-of-living crisis as this can cause communication issues within families and communities.

No Recourse to Public Funds

The second session was focused on the importance of citizenship and its link to NRPF. The main objective of this workshop was to raise awareness, which aimed to increase understanding and awareness of the concept of "no recourse to public funds" and its impact on vulnerable populations. Many children found the different tiers of citizenship rights unfair as it all lead to a life in Britain, and together we explored the challenges individuals and families face with limited or no access to public welfare benefits. Students produced lovely posters to explain which NRPF sub-issue they would like to focus on and how they will achieve this.

The workshop on No Recourse to Public Funds provided a valuable platform for discussion and collaboration, shedding light on the challenges faced by individuals and families with limited access to public welfare benefits. The event facilitated meaningful discussions, generated policy recommendations, and fostered collaborations among various stakeholders. By addressing the concerns and exploring potential solutions, we helped students think of ways to contribute to a more inclusive and supportive society.

Students decided that a charity concert and fashion show are feasible in ameliorating the issue, demonstrating compassion and empathy by choosing to wholeheartedly brainstorm an issue that is complex and wicked. It is incredibly touching to witness primary school children taking the initiative to plan such a realistic action to raise awareness of NRPF.



Notre Dame Roman Catholic Girls' School

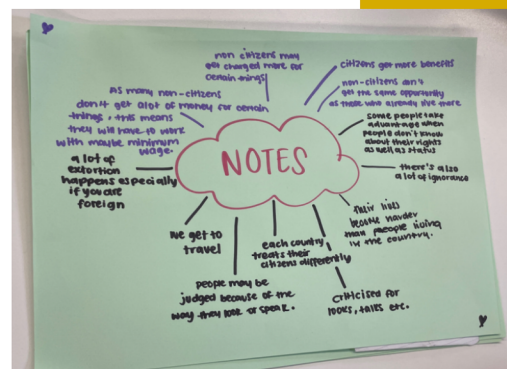
Notre Dame Roman Catholic Girls' School (1855– present) is a secondary state school for young women aged 11–16. In addition to its outstanding academic results, the curriculum is characterised by justice and equality. As a team, we delivered two workshops to some of the school's remarkable students in Years 9, 10 & 11. Each student displayed a wealth of knowledge, empathy, and a sense of indignance at the inequalities faced by those experiencing the NRPF condition. Additionally, the school provides a safe place for students to engage with these critical topics because they were comfortable sharing their opinions and stories with us and the school's Careers Leader, *Teresa Crowley*. In this section of our report, we highlight the importance of actively listening to the experiences and suggestions of young people concerning such issues in society.

Citizenship & Child Benefits

In our first session at Notre Dame, we focused on exploring the topics of citizenship, no recourse public funds (NRPFs) and its impact on child benefits with a remarkable group of Year 9 students.

During the icebreaker, the students found Life in the UK test "tricky" and "random" and were shocked to learn that these questions were required for the citizenship application. Students also realised that the number of rights and benefits differed based on status when showed differing social rights between citizens versus non-citizens (see below figure). They expressed empathy and shock at the lack of support for non-citizens families, where they collectively rallied that access to Free School Meals (FSMs) should be eligible to all as a first step.

The students also recognised that generally, citizens get more benefits (e.g. visa-free travel). In addition, they recounted personal experiences as a citizen or non-citizen, such as being mistreated on holiday in other countries due to being 'foreign' (see below figure); therefore, they could relate to how non-citizens may feel in the UK.



The students showed incredible maturity in making nuanced arguments with personal experiences as supporting evidence. They ended the task by summarising that "each country treats their citizens differently", but people should *not* have a 'harder' life because of their country of birth.

After further discussion, students agreed that NRPF was ultimately "unfair" to families needing support, especially when they are disadvantaged in more than one way (e.g. language barriers, racism as immigrants). To further explore their opinions, students viewed case studies of non-citizens in the UK (see figure on the right).

Students were shocked by this and suggested how they would change her predicament, including allowing her to access UK student fees and 'opportunities for Joy's brother to 'attend a special school' or receive 'support for his special educational needs' (see figures below). They wanted those like Joy to receive 'funds' to access support, including Free School Meals and other benefits for development.

Students further understood the reality from several angles, as mental health concerns were also raised due to the financial and social pressure associated with being a non-citizen. They recommended various solutions, including 'having a better support system' including multilingual civil servants across UK services.

It is key to mention that at this point, students understand the importance of equity over equality when obtaining basic living necessities are difficult in this day and age. For example, students were outraged that someone like Joy could not access child benefits because of their parent's unsettled legal status, though the benefit should be for the child.

- Joy was born in the London and is now 17 years old. Her mother moved from Zambia to the UK around 20 years ago. Joy is currently in Year 12 and is about to apply for university through UCAS.
- Joy also have a little brother called George, who is autistic and is currently studying in Year 3.

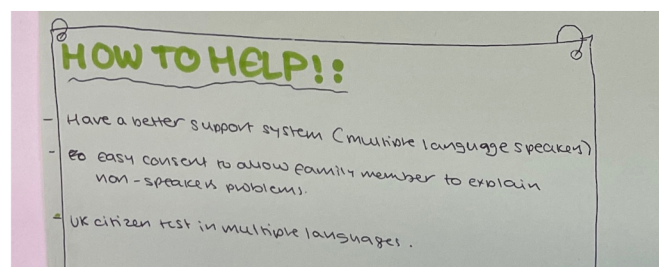
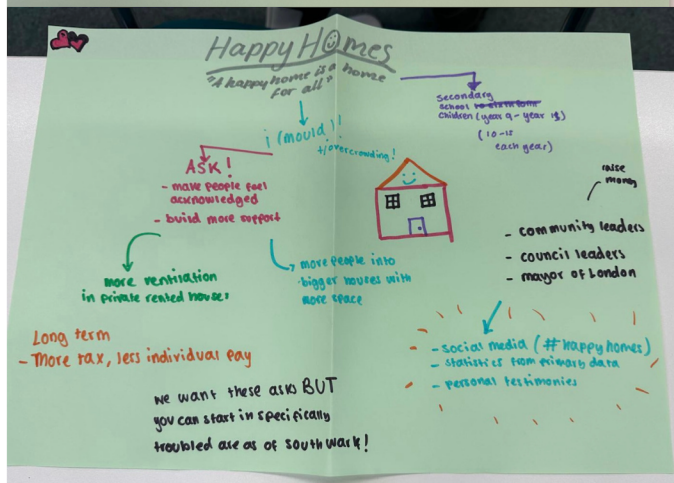
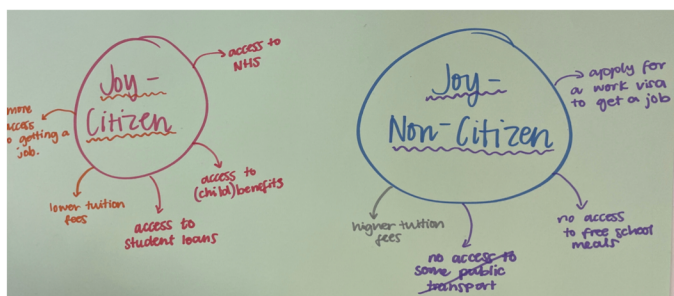
In summary, the students were highly motivated to engage with the topic. It was a remarkable experience to hear their suggestions and that *every child should benefit*, whether deemed as 'foreign' or a 'UK citizen'.

Housing & NRPFs

In our second session, we engaged in various activities on housing issues and raised awareness about the challenges faced by families in accessing affordable housing.

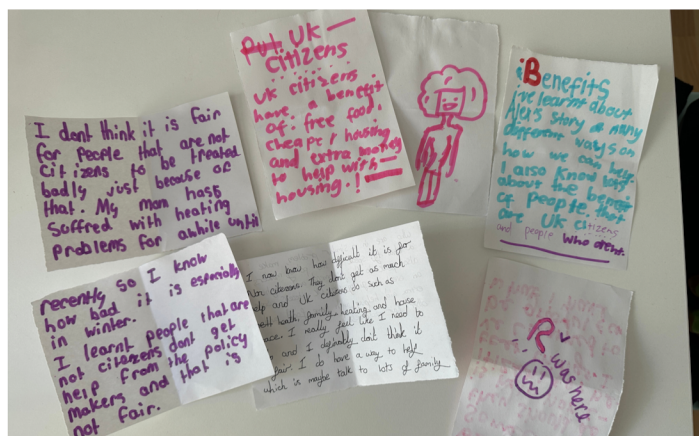
Delving deeper into housing benefits and citizen status, the students pondered again on whether it is reasonable for individuals with certain citizenship statuses to have access to more rights and benefits than others. They all believed that it is not fair for housing benefit eligibility to be closely tied to one's citizenship status, questioning the fairness of this arrangement.

After explaining NRPF and how it contributes to housing with a case study, the students empathised and expressed anger over overcrowding and adverse living conditions that could be avoided if NRPF was not in place. The students were encouraged to reflect on whether Alex and his family would and should be eligible to apply for social housing.



To act upon this issue, students displayed remarkable enthusiasm and creativity in learning about the action cycle, forming teams named "Happy Homes" and "Affordable Housing Association". They developed step-by-step plans and even designed posters to raise awareness and promote change. During our discussions on specific housing issues, such as Wi-Fi connectivity and heating, the students shared personal experiences, expressing empathy for those facing such challenges. Some students mentioned how their parents had struggled with similar issues. It was inspiring to observe the maturity and compassion displayed by the students, exceeding our expectations.

We then shared personal testimonies to further emphasise the importance of narratives in driving social change. Students were deeply moved by this and demonstrated passion in joining the professionally organised, collective action during June 2023. Seeing their genuine desire to make a positive difference in the inequalities brought forth by No Recourse to Public Funds was heartening.



Spotlight on young people's perspectives

Fostering a culture of listening is paramount. This includes hearing student narratives and experiences, tuning into the voices of others, and becoming receptive to diverse perspectives. During the workshop on citizenship, students actively shared their insights and experiences about unfair situations linked to citizenship and No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Stories from their local communities about challenges, such as accessing free school meals, were shared and listened to, creating an atmosphere of empathy and understanding.

But the listening didn't stop at real-life stories and experiences. The workshops also served as a platform for students to voice their opinions on potential actions to address these issues. This active engagement in problem-solving facilitated the sharing of innovative ideas and allowed students to feel heard and valued. Practising the action cycle enabled students to demonstrate their capacity for community organising. As they moved through the stages of the cycle, their ideas were listened to, acknowledged, and considered. The focus on listening empowers students to become more engaged and proactive citizens, equipping them with the tools and confidence to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Ultimately, students wrote down their thoughts and opinions in an anonymous box. This activity gave students a safe and confidential space to express their perspectives. Students noted how the workshop allowed them to confront and reflect deeply on specific issues, such as citizenship and housing, which one student described as a "great addition". This reflection increased understanding and empathy towards those unfairly treated because of their identity.

In essence, beyond imparting knowledge on citizenship, NRPF, and housing issues, students nurtured a culture of active listening and valuing student voices. Students' perspectives highlight the profound impact of the workshops, illuminating the transformative power of education and engaging young people in social justice.

Conclusion

This action report documents the collaborative efforts of listening to children's experiences across London's primary and secondary schools. Through active listening, we've gained insights to children's concerns and demands, especially under the impact of the cost of living crisis.

Overall, the main problems identified across the different schools were those of 1) embracing diversity by improving access and inclusion for families excluded from popular notions of 'Britishness', whether that be due to their citizenship status, race, cultural background, and/or language barriers; 2) the significance of housing struggles for families without citizenship, particularly those with NRPF and those living in temporary accommodation; 3) the lack of community resources and the urgent necessity for improvement through structural interventions in funding and provision; and 4) the need to address food poverty and the inability of many families to meet basic needs. For these families, feelings of shame and stigma were significant and detrimental to their well being - evidencing a clear call for adequate funding access so as to enable them to meet their own needs autonomously, without relying on food banks and other local community initiatives already being supported by the schools. The fact that many older pupils reported having to take on part-time jobs in order to support their own parents to provide for their younger siblings highlights the extent to which families are being overwhelmed by current financial strains, and exposes directly the vital need for these families to have access to funds to relieve part of their economic

burden. Still, even younger children were not shielded from the stressors their parents face in struggling to overcome such barriers to living fulfilling lives.

Housing was a particularly prominent theme throughout, with many children reporting inadequate, unsafe, overcrowded, and unsanitary housing conditions - often with issues of disrepair being repeatedly ignored by housing providers. Children spoke of landlords not respecting their rights and of being forced to move under traumatic circumstances, and even being made homeless. Undoubtedly, significant improvements in housing rights and their enforcements are necessary, especially for those living in temporary accommodation. The urgent need for all families to be given access to secure, safe, and affordable housing, regardless of their citizenship status, is a prominent one. Arguably, such experiences reflect more systemic issues in the housing sector faced by many in this country, for which reasons and resolutions cannot be underlined or proposed here. Still, our report provides clear evidence that the need for continued work on these issues by both Citizens UK in collaboration with other actor's (both local and national) is felt not only by parents, but children too. Ongoing work by Citizens UK on housing campaigns thus presents a vital addition to their demands for an end to NRPF - to which universal access to child benefits would make another significant contribution. Neither solution will be sufficient alone to improve the lives of the children we worked with.



It is our hope that the findings and recommendations outlined in this report will ignite meaningful dialogue, inspire change, and drive the necessary actions needed to **extend the provision of Child Benefits to families with No Recourse to Public Funds.**



Every child should benefit, and it's time to act.

All of these problems produced significant difficulties for children, particularly in impacting their mental health and schooling experiences. But out of them emerged a vision for a better future, and a sense of empowerment that might come from organising collectively with others facing similar barriers in society. Working with these schools for the past several months was an eye opening experience to their everyday struggles, things we could not fathom experiencing but are the realities for thousands of children and families living in the UK, and we urge for change to be made.



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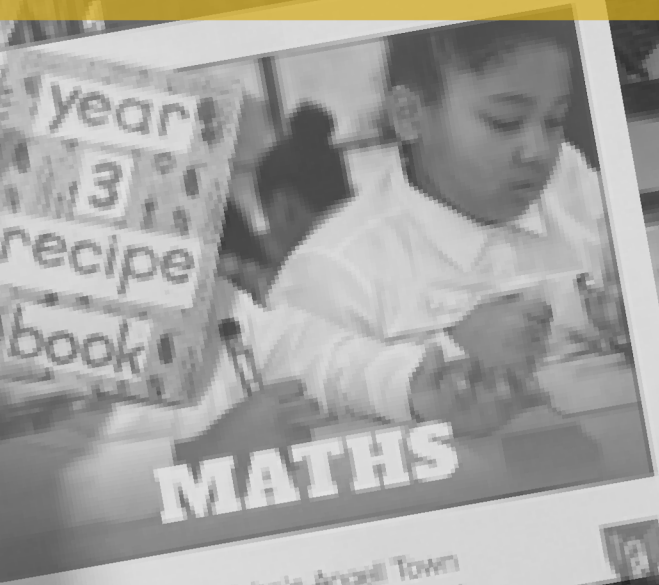
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#EVERY CHILD SHOULD BENEFIT



St John's Angell Town
C Of E Primary School

