

Co-creating Employment, Education, and Psychological Wellbeing Workshops with Youths of Islington (EMPOWER-Islington)

Keri Ka-Yee Wong, Işıl Baştuğ, & Jasmine Lee



www.EmpowerIslington.com

The Empower Islington Study is a collaboration between University College London (UCL) and the Youth Employment team of Islington Council London from October 2022 to October 2023. Funded by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Research England, this collaborative research explores the impact of Covid-19 on 14-to-25-year-olds' social lives and health outcomes and aims to co-create mental health and life-skill support with young people for young people. Participants currently residing in Islington were invited to take part, most of whom are already in contact with social workers and support team from the council.

The Empower-Islington project aims to:

- **Aim 1:** Understand the barriers to mental health, employment, and education access that are worsening youth outcomes during the pandemic – as assessed by 1-on-1 interviews and consultative focus groups (What support do young people want and how can we empower them now?)
- **Aim 2:** Co-develop five bespoke expert-led workshops and experiential activities based on young people's voices in Aim 1.
- **Aim 3:** Assess activities in Aim 2 for short-/longer-term impact on young people (e.g., wellbeing/ ideas/behaviours change scores, skills/insights gained) and how project outcomes can have a sustained impact in Islington's policy, practice, and research.

Why Islington?

Every borough has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in differing ways. UCL's partnership with Islington is of particular importance and has informed the latest UCL-Islington Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in November 2023. Islington is amongst the nation's 20% most deprived neighbourhoods and top 10 most dangerous borough in London (15% more crime than other boroughs). Unemployment rate in 18–24-year-olds is high compared to the rest of Britain (57.3% v. 39.8%). With 52% of Islington residence identifying as from black, Asian minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, who we know have also been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of poverty, health disparity, racism, and health access, Islington's young people are in clear need of employment, education, and mental health support.

What took place?

Building on a previous UKRI Research England funded study, the CopeWell Study (CopeWellStudy.com) in collaboration with a West London Charity. The UCL research team engaged with young people through the co-creation process. Through focus groups and 1-on-1 interviews run between February to March 2023, conversations with young people informed five life-skill and mental health workshops that were run between July and August 2023. This report highlights young people's experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, things that went well as well as the challenges that they are still facing, and ways they would like to be supported on. This knowledge exchange partnership has enabled Islington Council, UCL academics, UCL student researchers, and young people to come together and to support each other during these challenging times and to co-create solutions that meet young peoples' needs. Importantly, we outline possible workshop templates that may be of interest to other academics and practitioners in improving

the career prospects and wellbeing of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds currently living with existing inequalities and have limited resources and support from their community to ‘reset’ their lifestyle – which we believe is a high priority population that deserves more attention than they are currently receiving.

Islington’s Youth Progression Team

“Like many young people across the UK, those in Islington were heavily impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic, but living in one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK and London meant that the negative impacts were felt more acutely.

Islington’s Youth Employment Team works with some of the borough’s most vulnerable young people; supporting them to access and sustain employment, education and training outcomes, and had (over time) increasingly identified social, emotional and mental health challenges as a barrier to young residents not just securing but also sustaining these outcomes. The Covid-19 pandemic further compounded these challenges around wellbeing and accelerated the need for a more holistic and trauma-informed approach to employability support.

To this end we were delighted to have the opportunity to work with UCL on the EMPOWER-Islington project - drawing on the skills and expertise of Dr Keri Wong and her team to help shape a series of workshops which could form part of our wider offer of support in assisting young residents to live healthy and fulfilling lives whilst accessing good jobs and careers.”

- **Siobhan Scantlebury**, Head of Youth Progression Team, Islington Council



Legacy of the Empower Islington Project

This report, together with the study website EmpowerIslington.com, documents what the Empower-Islington Study Team have learnt over the course of the 12-month project, the ways in which Covid-19 has impacted young people in this community, how the team has worked with young people as equal partners, and the initial impact of the co-created workshops in supporting young people’s mental health, career aspirations, motivation and sleep habits, the role of storytelling in understanding their experiences, and ways to develop new hobbies using creative arts. Whilst longer-term impact awaits to be measured, we have paid particular attention to design every workshop with the effort to emphasise its ‘legacy’ such that conversations started with young people can be continued in the absence of the UCL research team and mechanisms can be embedded into the existing ways of working in the Council.

We hope the knowledge shared here will help members of the public and the academic community in engaging with community-action partnerships between local authorities and academics, the co-production process and its usefulness, and inform current/future Covid-19 recovery education and public health policies.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keri Wong".

Dr Keri K. Wong

Principal Investigator, Associate Professor of Developmental Psychology
Department of Psychology and Human Development,
IOE, UCL’s Faculty of Education and Society



Project Resources

OSF Pre-registration:

Wong, K. K.-Y. (2022, Dec 16). Co-creating Employment, Education, and Psychological Wellbeing Workshops with Youths of Islington (EMPOWER-Islington). <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/82PGM>

Preprint:

Lee, J., & Wong, K. (2023, June 1). The mental health inequalities, challenges, and support needs during Covid-19: a qualitative study of 14-25-year-olds in London. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/vwe7p>

Report reference:

Wong Keri Ka-Yee, Bastug Isil, & Lee Jasmine (2023): Co-creating Employment, Education, and Psychological Wellbeing Workshops with Youths of Islington (EMPOWER-Islington) Study Report. University College London.

Presentation:

Lee, J., Bastug, I., Mulholland, E., Leung, J., & Wong, K. (2023, Sept 14). The Mental Health Inequalities, Challenges And Support Needs During Covid-19: A Qualitative Study Of 14-25-year-olds in London. British Psychological Society – Psychology and Education Section, Liverpool, UK. <https://osf.io/82pgm/>

Video Interview with The Independent Sage:

indie_SAGE. (2023, May 26). indie_SAGE 26.05.2023 [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9lhx7QJwg>

Timeline

December 2022

Ethics Approval

Ethics proposal submitted/approved on 16 Dec (REC 1735). Award letter for the project was received on the 9 Dec 2022 for a start date of 15 Dec 2022.

February

Recruitment & start of project

We began recruiting and interviewing young people living in Islington both in person and online.

April

Transcription & coding

All transcripts were transcribed verbatim and coded on NVivo. We held a calibration meeting to ensure intercoder reliability.

June

Workshop planning

Based on the challenges and support needs mentioned by young people, we brainstormed together ideas for 5 engaging, meaningful workshops.

August

Workshops 4-5

Our last two workshops were Empower Your Future (3/8) at UCL, and Empower Your HABits (24/8) at the Islington Youth Hub.

October

Final steps

We have finalised the end of project report and proposal with next steps for Islington Council.

February

Conference

We will present our findings at the UCL Qualitative Health Research Network Conference.

0

1

January 2023

Preparation & recruitment

We met with the Islington Council Youth Progression team to better understand their services and the young people they work with.

2

3

March

Interviews & focus groups

We continued interviews and focus groups, which we completed at the end of March.

4

5

May

Paper writing

We discussed findings from the interviews and focus groups in a paper titled 'The mental health inequalities, challenges, and support needs during COVID-19: a qualitative study of 14-25 year-olds in London'.

6

7

July

Workshops 1-3

We held three workshops: Empower Your Story (10/7), Empower Your Body (12/7), and Empower Your Mind (31/7). The first two were held at the Islington Youth Hub, and the latter at the Wallace Collection.

8

9

September

Conference & reflections

We presented study findings at the British Psychological Society Psychology of Education Section Conference at Liverpool John Moores University on 14/9. We also held a meeting with Islington Council partners to reflect on the project and discuss next steps.

10

11

November

UCL x Islington celebration

A special MOU event was held on 14/11 to celebrate the partnership between UCL and Islington Council.

02

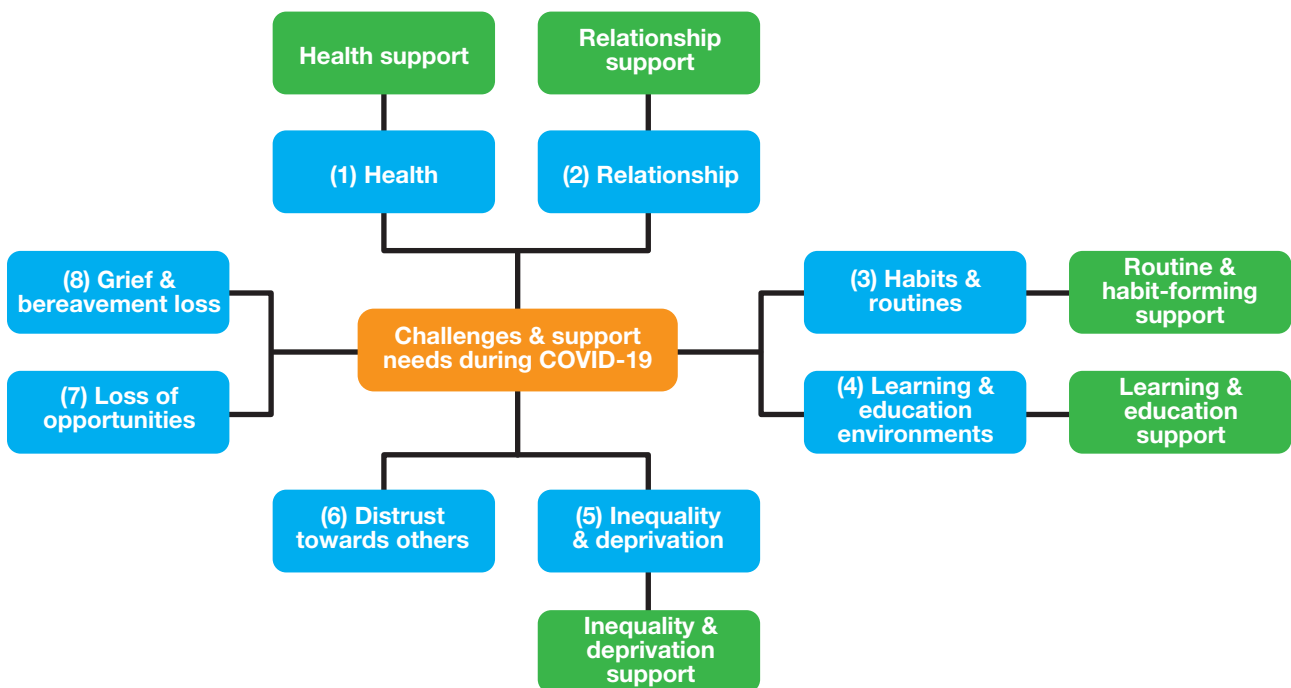
Interviews & Focus Groups

What we did

To explore how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted young people of Islington through a series of 1-on-1 interviews (N = 20, averaged 26 minutes) with young people (14-to-25-year-olds) referred to us by the Islington Youth Employment team. The interview schedule can be found on the [OSF page](#). The themes generated from the interviews and subsequent focus groups (N = 6, average group size = 2.83, average 22.6 minutes each) UCL researchers invited young people to share and elaborate on the shared themes in order to co-create potential workshops they would like to see being offered by the project in the coming weeks. All conversations were thematically analysed by the UCL research team (Lee & Wong, [preprint](#)).

Young people wanted

Challenges in 8 domains, of which 5 included support needs:



Participant demographics

20 number of participants

18.3

Mean age

60%

Female

60%

White

20 one-on-one interviews
M = 26min

6 focus groups
M = 22.5min

Difficulties

“I used to be quite confident... now it's like I had to re-learn all of that... after the pandemic”
(22 years, gender undisclosed)

education

“a big lack of motivation”
(15 years, female)

“I put on weight during Covid... now I am out of breath more”
(14 years, female)

health

“my biggest problem now is... having a routine”
(22 years, gender undisclosed)

habits

relationships

“both my parents lost their jobs due to Covid... I have to defend for myself now”
(22 years, gender undisclosed)

“covid was very useful in showing me who my true friends were”
(14 years, female)

inequality & deprivation

Support

“everything [for mental health] was such a backlog and long waiting list. It just wasn't something I could access.”
(22 years, female)

health

inequality & deprivation

“financially supporting students”
(22 years, gender undisclosed)

“they should have supported students... we didn't have access to the libraries, equipment...”
(22 years, gender undisclosed)

“providing a space to talk about this experience because we pretend like it's now in the past, even though it's still something actually very present”
(25 years, female)

education

habits

“getting into routine”,
“a set structure”
(23 years, male)

The results from the initial 'listening' phase of 1-on-1 interviews and focus groups informed the five mental health and life skill workshops which took place between July and August 2023.

Workshops

Workshop 1: EMPOWER Your Story (10/07/23 at the Islington West Library, 4 attendees)

Young people wanted

- To talk about their pandemic experience.
- To hear about others' pandemic experience.
- To feel that "they were not the only one".

What we did

- Our guest speakers
 - Dr Ahmed Hankir (Award-winning Psychiatrist at NHS and Author of "The Wounded Healer").
 - Amie Liebowitz (Award-winning Multimedia Broadcaster, Journalist and Producer featured in BBC and Guardian).
- Dr Hankir shared his own inspiring story with the messages of determination and empathy.
- Then, our research assistants Eoin and Ed used poetry prompts and prompt questions to encourage us to think about how we express our stories. We then composed a poem based on our unique stories. Listen to a young person reading their poem here: <https://tinyurl.com/3jrm5a2s>.
- Finally, we explored the practical stages of storytelling (i.e., Freytag's Pyramid) Amie Liebowitz and identified these stages in our own lives.

Quotes/Feedback

At the end of the workshop, young people told us that they had better understanding of the relationship between mental health/wellbeing and storytelling. They also felt empowered to share their stories and feelings with others.

"Sharing stories is important. Sharing stories is a good way of learning who I am." (Young people of Islington)

Take Home Messages

- Life doesn't always go the way you plan, and it is okay!
- Sharing your story is important for your wellbeing!

Legacy

Young people took poetry prompts and their own poems home with them.

Young people received a UCL tote bag, notebook, and a pen that says 'Make your Mark'.

If you would like to read more about the EMPOWER Your Story workshop, here is the full blog summary: <https://empowerislington.com/2023/08/13/project-progress-report-3/>

Resources

- Poetry prompts.
- Prompt questions.



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Workshop 2: EMPOWER Your Body (12/07/23 at the Islington West Library, 3 attendees)

Young people wanted

- To build self-confidence, self-esteem and healthy body image.
- To support their physical health.
- To improve their sleep, exercise and eating habits.

What we did

- Our Guest Speakers
 - Dr Amy Harrison (Clinical Psychologist and Associate Professor at UCL).
 - Denise Sanderson (Body Confidence and Self-Esteem Coach, creator of Body Confidence Cards).
- Dr Harrison explained to us how negative thinking can lead to low self-esteem and body confidence and how we can challenge a negative cycle with more self-compassion.
- Denise Sanderson discussed how external pressures such as social media and body cosmetics can influence young people's self-esteem and body confidence. She also led an activity with her Body Confidence Cards.
- Our research assistants Martha and Hui created a body positivity wall that was decorated with positive affirmation cards. They also put together a jar of positive body affirmations, which included what young people would say to others struggling with body image issues.

Quotes/Feedback

“The art activity was so enjoyable, and being able to leave a legacy of sorts at the library feels really special. It was an activity that I think could be done in schools.” (Denise Sanderson)

“Really fun and engaging when people shared examples and we thought about interactions between how we think, feel, and behave. I really enjoyed making the piece of art that we put on the wall and adding some positive messages to the jar for others to find.” (Dr Amy Harrison)

Take Home Messages

- You can change your negative thoughts cycles!
- Be compassionate with yourself!

Legacy

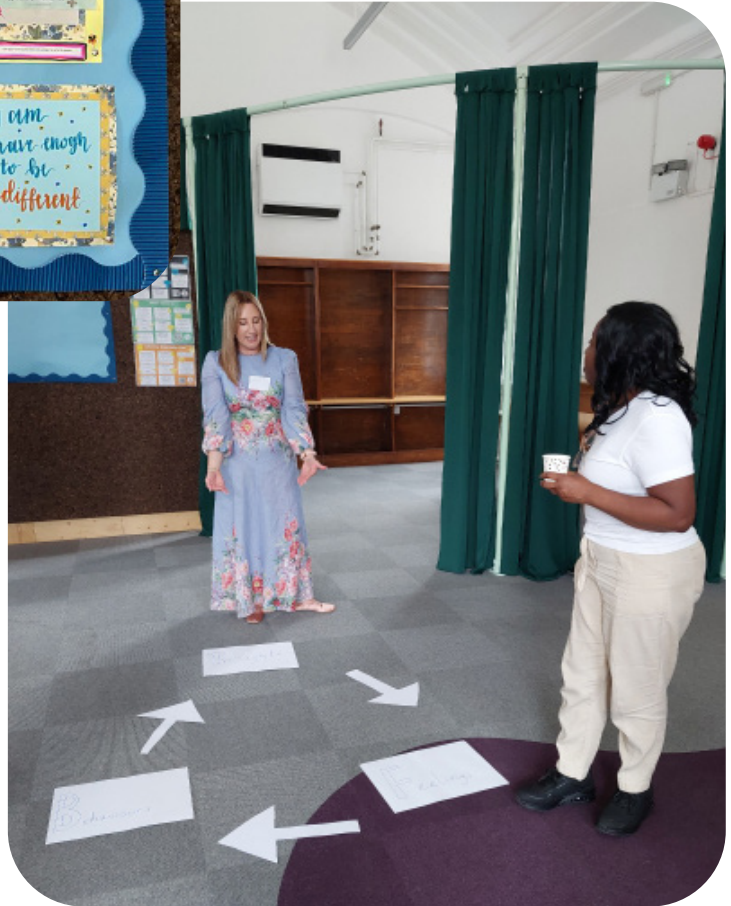
Body Confidence Cards are now a permanent part of the Islington Library Collection.

Body Positivity Wall and Jar of Positive Affirmations are now displayed in the first floor of the Islington West Library Youth Hub.

If you would like to read more about the EMPOWER Your Body workshop, here is the full blog summary: <https://empowerislington.com/2023/08/20/project-progress-report-4/>

Resources

- List of positive body affirmations.
- Body positivity cards (from Denise <https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/BodyConfidenceCards>)



Workshop 3: EMPOWER Your Mind (31/07/23 at the Wallace Collection, 5 attendees)

Young people wanted

- To explore alternative ways to cope with their emotions.
- To form new hobbies to improve their mental health and wellbeing.
- To improve their creative skills.

What we did

- Our guest speakers
 - Davina Shum (Musician and Journalist),
 - Holly Power (Community Learning Producer at Wallace Collection)
 - Lucy Ribeiro (Freelance artist and educator)
- Lucy guided a slow tour around the Wallace Collection, and we looked closely at four pieces of artwork. We practiced mindfulness, interpreted artwork and practiced drawing techniques.
- Inspired by the miniature wax sculptures exclusive to Wallace Collection, we made our own wax sculpture with Holly.
- We listened to the talented cellist Davina and shared which emotions the pieces evoked in us. Davina also shared how these pieces helped her cope with the pandemic, starting a discussion about our own coping mechanisms.

Quotes/Feedback

“I really enjoyed the workshop. It was really educational personally to me as it taught me how to express my emotions through arts and mental health.” (Young person of Islington)

“I think it was really encouraging and informative as well. Before I would think that art is sometimes gatekept. It is difficult to access. Now, that I’ve actually been to this workshop, I feel like I can actually go into art galleries and benefit from them. I don’t have to have degree in arts or have extensive knowledge about artworks to actually enjoy these galleries.” (Young person)

Take Home Messages

- Anyone can enjoy arts!
- It is important to find a way to express yourself! Creative arts can be one!

Legacy

Islington Council now has four Wallace Collection memberships that can be borrowed by young people of Islington and their families.

Young people got a UCL tote bag with art supplies and postcards from the Wallace Collection.

If you would like to read more about the EMPOWER Your Mind workshop, here is the full blog summary: <https://empowerislington.com/2023/09/07/project-progress-report-6/>

Resources

- Information about the [Wallace Collection](#) (free!)



Workshop 4: EMPOWER Your Future (31/08/23 at UCL Bloomsbury campus, 9 attendees)

Young people wanted

- A tour around UCL.
- To get a glimpse of university life.
- To talk about about career planning.
- To improve their study skills

What we did

- Our guest speakers
 - Dr Evi Katsapi (Head of Undergraduate Provision at UCL Education).
 - Glyn Jones (Careers Consultant at UCL Careers).
 - Current UCL students.
- Dr Katsapi kicked off the event by sharing her journey of changing careers, overcoming financial stressors, and pursuing academia – highlighting the importance of resilience and persistence.
- Glyn Jones then shared his unconventional career journey (from barista to genetics student to career consultant), alternative career paths and career resources.
- With an unplanned fire alarm, we kicked off the UCL campus tour with current students.
- After pizza lunch, we did a career quiz with participants and filled in a career exploration sheet together to learn more about their interested careers.

Quotes/Feedback

Young people enjoyed the tour around UCL, hearing different career paths and getting careers advice from various people.

“I learnt a lot about how to think about my career! I also really enjoyed talking to the professionals and volunteers who were very familiar with the industry.”
(Young person)

Take Home Messages

- Career journey is not always straight forward! Everyone has their own path!

Legacy

We put a suggestion box in Islington West Library Youth Hub for young people to share their suggestions and ideas with Islington Council for workshops, speakers and career advice and more.

Young people also got a UCL totebag with pamphlets by UCL Careers, pens and notebooks.

If you would like to read more about the EMPOWER Your Future workshop, here is the full blog summary: <https://empowerislington.com/2023/09/19/project-progress-report-6-2/>

Resources

- Question prompts.
- The suggestion box poster.
- UCL Campus tour map.
- [Skills assessment](#)
- [UCL Self-guided Bloomsbury Campus Tour](#)



Workshop 5: EMPOWER Your Habits (24/08/23 at Islington West Library, 6 attendees)

Young people wanted

- To build healthier routines and habits, especially regarding sleep.
- To improve their physical health

What we did

- Our guest speakers
 - Dr Elizabeth Halstead (Sleep Psychologist and Lecturer at UCL)
- Dr Halstead presented us with the key facts about sleep.
- After, we played a sleep trivia game. We moved left or right of line in response to whether ‘myths or facts’ read out by Dr Halstead were true or false (e.g., “If I can’t sleep, I should stay in bed and keep trying to sleep.” True or False? [False!])
- We shared anonymously our struggles with sleeping and voted for the challenges that most resonated with us. Dr Halstead then provided helpful tips for each difficulty.
- Finally, Dr Halstead introduced the sleep goodie bags and answered our questions.

Quotes/Feedback

“I really just wanna get my sleep back on track, because I’m going into Year 11 and it’s a vital year, and I can’t be sleeping at 6am no matter what. It’s been like a thing since Covid, you know, I’ve been at home, so I’ve been able to sleep at 6am without having anything to stop me from doing it. So I just wanted something to give me a clear path back into the right way...”
(Young person)

[Interviewer: What are some lessons that you’re going to incorporate into your sleep schedule?]

“Counting from 100 in 3s, just forcing yourself to go to sleep in general... you know like the circadian rhythm, you have to force yourself up and you can’t set a drastic time back, you have to go one hour each week so your body can get used to it and you can get up and go to sleep at a reasonable time.”
(Workshop participant)

Take Home Messages?

- Create a 30 minute sleep routine before bed time!
- If you can’t sleep, get out of the bed and do something relaxing until you get tired.
- Breathing exercise to help relieve anxiety before bed: Breathe in for four... hold for seven... out for six...

Legacy

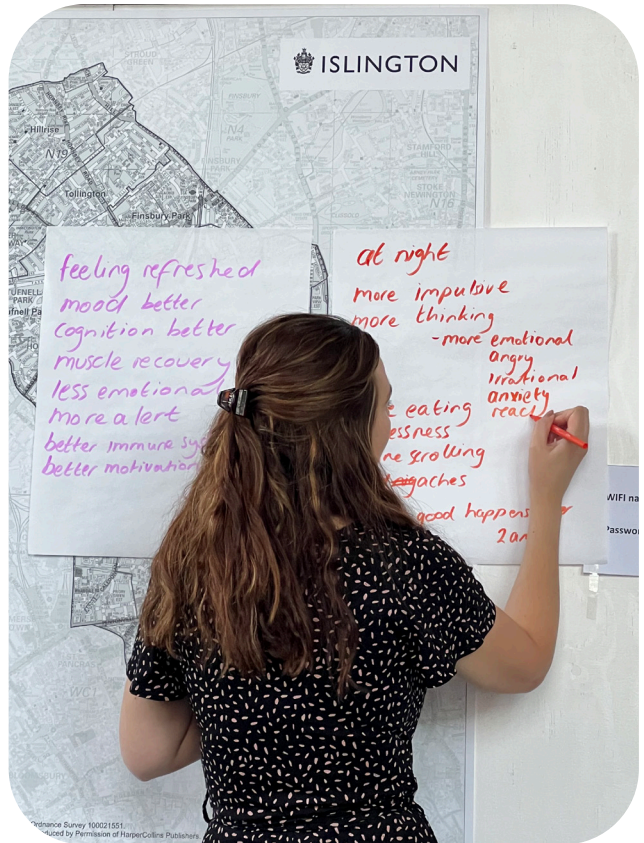
Young people got a goodie bag with a sleep mist/roll-on, sleep tea, a sleep bookmark that included helpful sleep tip (e.g., create a 30min sleep routine). They also got a UCL merchandise.

We stuck up posters with sleep FAQs and sleep tips in Islington West Library Youth Hub for future users of the venue.

If you would like to read more about the EMPOWER Your Career workshop, here is the full blog summary: <https://empowerislington.com/2023/10/03/project-progress-report-7/>

Resources

- Sleeping kit: <https://www.thisworks.com/products/choose-sleep-kit>
- Trivia about sleep with answers.
- FAQs about sleep & Tips on improving sleep
- Bookmarks (template)



TIPS ON MAKING CHANGES TO YOUR SLEEP HABITS



.. by Sleep Psychologist Dr Liz Halstead

Changing your daily routine and improving your sleep will take time.

1. Start small
2. Be patient and stick with it
3. Be kind to yourself
4. Work with a partner
5. Consult your doctor



FAQs ABOUT SLEEP!



.. by Sleep Psychologist Dr Liz Halstead

Q. What is lucid dreaming?

A. Lucid dreams are when you know that you're dreaming while you're asleep. Frequent lucid dreams might decrease sleep quality or affect one's mental health.

Q. Is smoking ok before bed?

A. Nicotine is a stimulant. Smoking near bedtime has been associated with more difficulty falling asleep, unwanted awakenings, and reduced amounts of restorative sleep.

Q. How does alcohol affect sleep?

A. As it is being processed by the body, alcohol disrupts the normal structure of sleep. This can cause sleep fragmentation and lower-quality sleep.

Q. I can't sleep, should I go for a run?

A. No! Vigorous exercise tells your body it needs to be awake! Relaxing exercise before bed is better.

Q. I snore, is that bad?

A. If snoring is loud and sounds as if a person is choking, snorting, or gasping, you should tell your GP.

Q. Should I take magnesium?

A. Some individuals find magnesium supplements to promote sleep, and a few studies have demonstrated a sleep benefit.



Recommendations

Below are proposed recommendations for each of our project stakeholders.

Islington Council

- Goal: to sustain the impact of this project
- Partnerships
 - With the Wallace Collection – e.g. membership passes for Islington young people and adults; to embed within their wider cultural offering if possible
 - With UCL – career service connections, workshops from academics...
- Exploring opportunities for greater communication across youth offerings (e.g. summer activities organised by the Council and other youth hubs)

Future researchers/projects and practitioners

- Working with young people
 - Youth Councillors were really passionate and helpful throughout the project. They could be involved earlier on in the project, which could improve the co-production element.
- Recruitment
 - Recruitment could be challenging. More direct contact with young people (e.g., dropping into their regular sessions) could support establishing rapport between young people and researchers/practitioners.
 - Collaborating with the day-to-day social workers/case workers who already have rapport with young people could attract more young people. Potentially, social workers/case workers could carry out the interviews.
 - It could be better to learn the workings of the partner institutions in order to identify the divisions/parts/sections that work directly/specifically on the aim of the project.
 - Recruitment could benefit from more regular signposting from the partner institution in their channels.
 - Working with youth clubs
- Working with practitioners in education and mental health
 - Young people need and want a space to talk about their own pandemic experience; therefore, creating opportunities or safe spaces to talk about their experiences is crucial.
 - Workshops could be hosted for not just young people, but also for those caring and working for young people.

Young people

- UCL student co-researchers & research assistants
 - Keeping a clear record of the workshop with a decided outline/formate could facilitate the production of an end-of project report.
 - It may help to designate a student-researcher to oversee a part of all ongoing workshops such as preparation, execution and evaluation process (e.g., assigning someone to check the uploading of all the feedback forms to the designated space). It could facilitate the

Key Learning Outcomes

Strengths

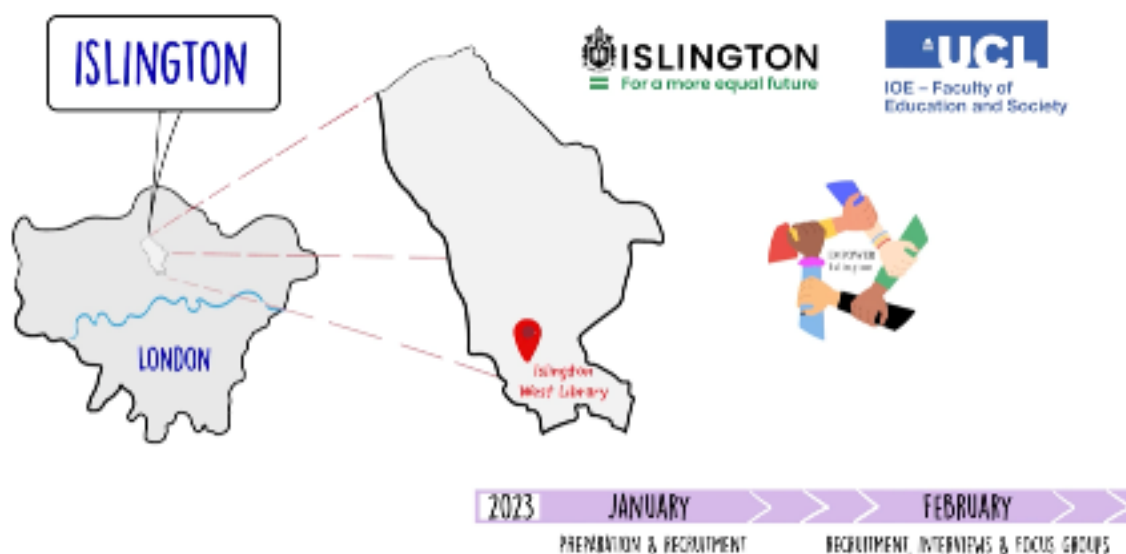
- **Desire to speak up:** Young people desire a space to open up and process their experiences with other people. Simply hearing that other young people have gone through the same experiences as them helps them feel more understood and heard.
- **Co-production:** collaborating with young people, listening to their challenges and discussing with them sources of support they desire is a crucial way of creating resources that do meet their needs. This also creates a stronger sense of ownership over the study (e.g. keen participants who attended more than one workshop).
- **Student research assistants:** RAs conducting interviews and focus groups are young people themselves, which minimises the hierarchy between researchers and participants.

Limitations

- **Baseline deprivation not measured** but assumed: as we relied on referrals from the Islington Council, we did not explicitly measure the baseline deprivation and inequalities faced by young people
- **Wide age range:** participants ranged from 14-25 years old, which spans a wide range of challenges and support needs. Future research is needed to target specific age groups.
- **Recruitment for workshops:** the turnout for workshops was often different from the turnout for interviews (reimbursed with a voucher). It seemed that only the most motivated young people turned up to the workshops, hence those we most wanted to target, e.g. those not in education, employment or training (NEET), were unable to benefit from the workshops.
- **Timeline for workshops:** the workshops coincided with summer holidays, which meant that young people may have been less motivated to attend – workshops may be more suitable for term time, though the current project timeline was limited by funding deadlines.

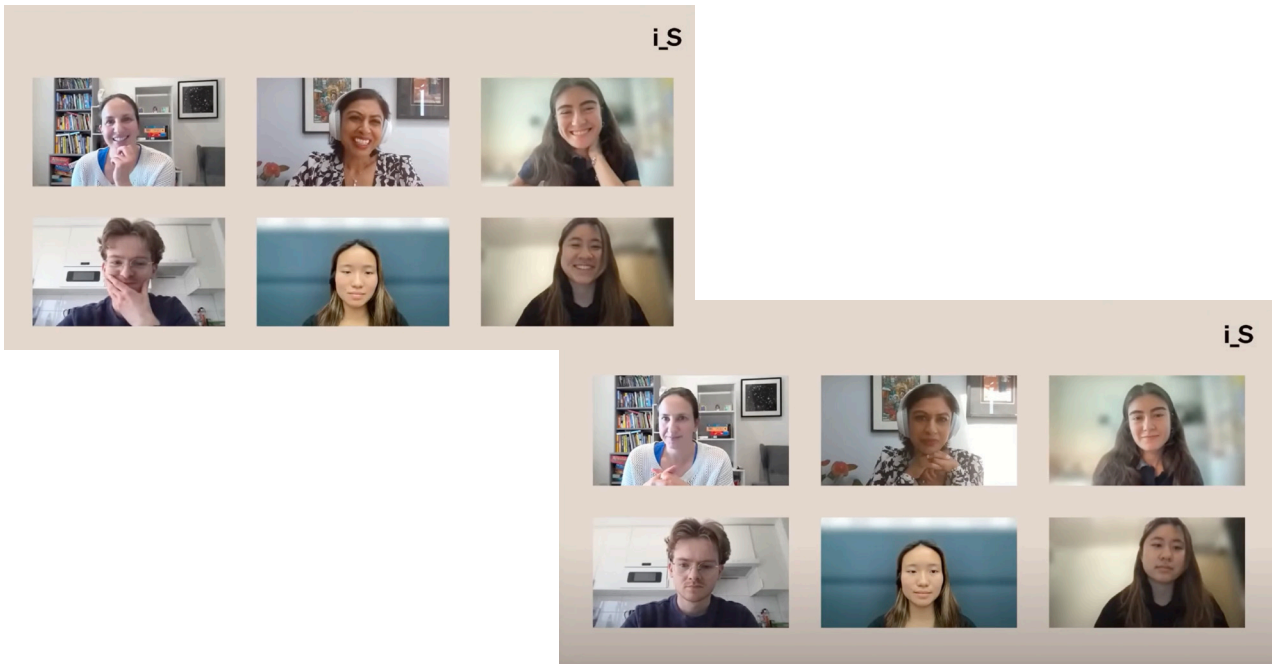
Project Animation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_KDX5r9uUc



Video Interview with the Independent Sage

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9lhx7QJwg>



Presentation at UCL x Islington Council MoU Event

On 14th November 2023 (Tuesday), UCL and Islington Council came together for the [signing of a Memorandum of Understanding](#). Our Principal Investigator Dr Keri Wong, Head of Youth Progression Team at Islington Siobhan Scantlebury, and research assistants Işil Baştuğ and Jasmine Lee delivered a short presentation about the EMPOWER-Islington Project.

Acknowledgements

The EMPOWER-Islington Project was made possible thanks to funding from **UK Research and Innovation** for University College London's (UCL) HEIF Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund 2022-2023 to Dr Keri Wong. We would also like to thank the **Youth Employment Team at Islington Council** for actively referring young people to take part in the study interviews and workshops, and **Mary's Youth Club** for kindly advertising our workshops. Special thanks to all our participants and families for sharing their experiences and ideas with us on this important topic, especially the **Islington Youth Councillors** (Areeb, Ameera, Tyra, Libby) for their keen support.

None of this would have been possible without the tireless effort of every member of the EMPOWER-Islington research team (**Işil Baştuğ, Jasmine Lee, Eoin Mulholland, Jaimie Leung, Martha Oakes, Hui Hai, Nadia Yeo, Yao Yuan, and Edouard De Bray**) in conducting interviews and focus-groups with such professionalism, organising and advertising the workshops throughout the summer.

We would also like to thank all our amazing guest speakers for making our workshops fun, informative and engaging: **Dr Ahmed Hankir** (NHS), **Amie Liebowitz** (BBC), **Dr Amy Harrison** (UCL), **Denise Sanderson** (bodyconfidencecards.com), **Davina Shum, Holly Power** (Wallace Collection), **Lucy Ribeiro, Evi Katsapi** (UCL), **Glyn Jones** (UCL), and **Dr Elizabeth Halstead** (UCL).



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