

AUTHORING OUR OWN STORIES ANNUAL REPORT 2025



Introduction

Welcome to the Annual Report for 2025.

Included in this document is an overview of work delivered from April to December of last year. It covers how we developed our research project for the year, what we learned, examples of how the data was interpreted and a call to action!

We are grateful to all the Young Leaders engaged in this youth voice project, to our Artist in Residence, Ilaria, Graphic Artist Drew and Caron, our volunteer. We are indebted to Sharon and colleagues at Partnership for Young London, to Suranne from Kings College, and the organisations who have partnered with us this year. Additionally, thanks go to all of the young people who have attended focus groups and our events and to our funder The National Lottery Community Fund.



Meet the Team

L. To T.

**Anu, Rachel, Drew, Ella, Ilaria, Maria, Caron, Rumaisa
Sandra and Emmanuela**



Thank you all!



What is Authoring Our Own Stories About? A Refresher

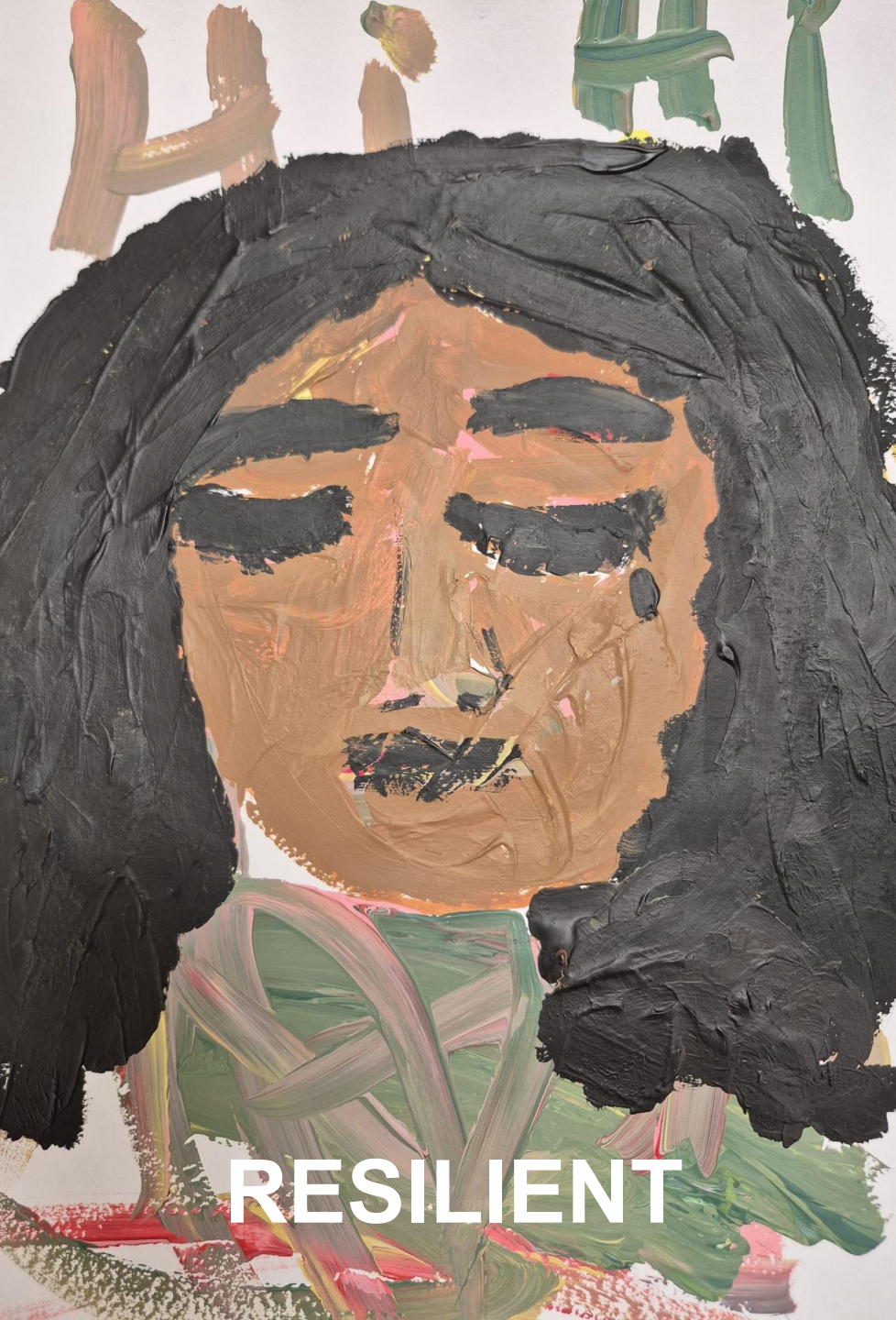
Authoring Our Own Stories (AOOS) is a five-year, national, youth voice programme that uses creative approaches to co-produce peer research projects. The initiative is funded by National Lottery Community Fund. The lifespan of the programme is 2022 to 2026.

This work is developed in collaboration with four youth work units across England. They are Partnership for Young London, Yorks and Humber Youth Work Unit, Youth Focus North West and Youth Focus South West.

AOOS explores the link between young people's civic identity and how this influences access to youth services. There is a specific focus on working with young people from marginalised communities. In 2025 these included, young women from Black and Asian communities (London), who explored the theme of resilience and what it means to be raised with the expectation to constantly be strong in the face of adversity, white working-class men from ex-mining communities (Yorkshire and Humber) who focused on education, training and employment, young people from Knowsley, in Merseyside, who explored the impact of living in an economically deprived area and young women from the coastal area of Plymouth, who explored issues of physical and emotional safety.

This document summarises the key findings and achievements from **Young Women Leaders in London** (also referred to as peer researchers). For more information about the other youth work units involved in AOOS, go to [Authoring Our Own Stories| PYL](#)





RESILIENT



**RESEARCH IN 2025
YOUNG BLACK AND BROWN
WOMEN: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO
BE STRONG?**



In 2025, six young women of African, African-European and Asian heritage co-produced the research project for that year alongside two workers and a volunteer. The theme of the research was resilience. Resilience was the selected topic, as the concept has been a recurring theme in our research projects since we first began delivering this work in 2022. We know from existing research that girls and young women of African, African-Caribbean and South East Asian heritage are often socialised to practice resilience in the face of adversity to a greater extent than their peers from other racial groups. The Strong Black Woman is based on a colonial ideology that suggests that Black and Brown women are more able to withstand pain and general hardship, than people from other racial groups. This constructed ideology has been used as ongoing justification for dehumanising people from the Global South for centuries and remains a current issue. Data still suggests -

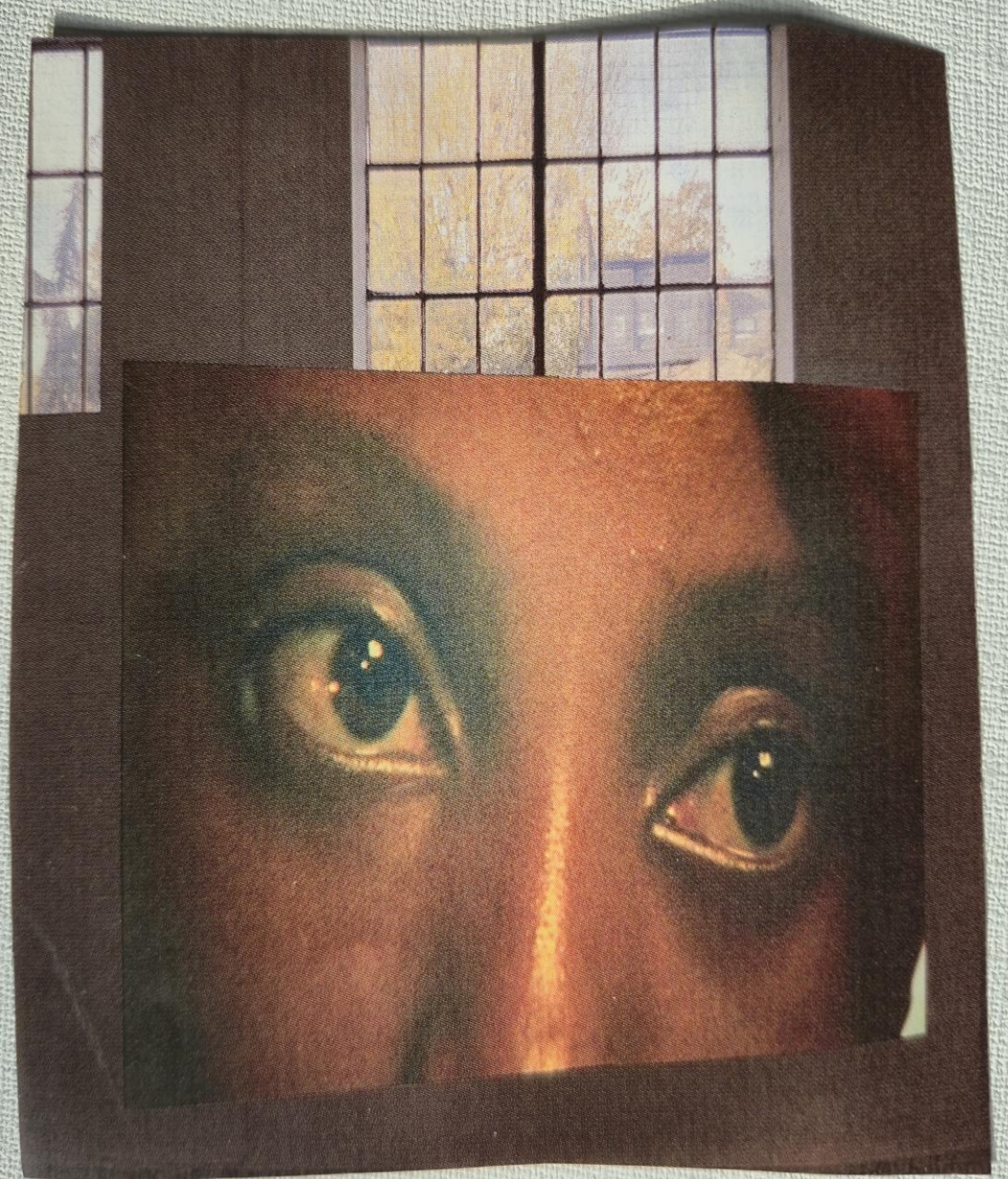
The 'Strong Black Woman' trope is harming our mental health (Cole, 2018)



Our methodology centred on the co-production of our research project. Choosing to use a creative approach enabled the process to be more open and accessible to greater numbers of young people who may not otherwise have engaged in this research. We believe our creative approach facilitates richer responses to ideas than simply giving verbal responses to the questions and concepts we explored. However, conventional methods of research, such as structured discussions, were integral to the process too.



The group were invited to read existing data, as part of a mini literature review, and to decide what aspect of resilience they wished to structure their research project on. The theme they chose to dive into in greater depth was **Adultification**. This formed the main area of interest that our research questions were formulated around.



STRUCTURING RESEARCH QUESTIONS



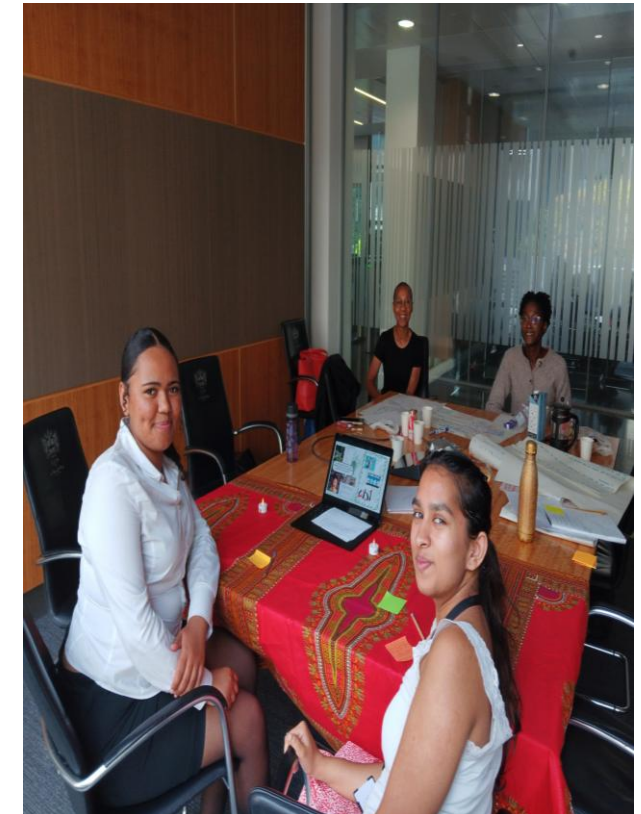
A key aspect of our training involved exploring what questions we wanted to ask focus group participants. We needed to identify what we wanted to learn from them about adultification.



We then had to decide as a group what the best method would be to present the research questions to gain the richest responses to our inquiry.



As with every year of this project, we knew whatever method we used would have a creative element to it, as creative approaches are key to our research methodology.





XBX

AUGUST
2025

EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE

SPECIAL FEATURE ON
ADULTIFICATION

Thush love

We used a multi-media approach to collect the data. This included the creation of the prototype for a magazine, some simple arts and craft activities to introduce key concepts and a podcast.

The magazine and podcast were branded **XBX**. This stands for **Experts by Experience**, recognising the skills and knowledge the focus group participants have already acquired through lived experience. The peer researchers hosted the XBX Podcast Show and put the focus group participants - the guests - in role as Experts by Experience

We delivered focus groups across London over the summer to just under 50 young people.

BELOW ARE OUR FINAL FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

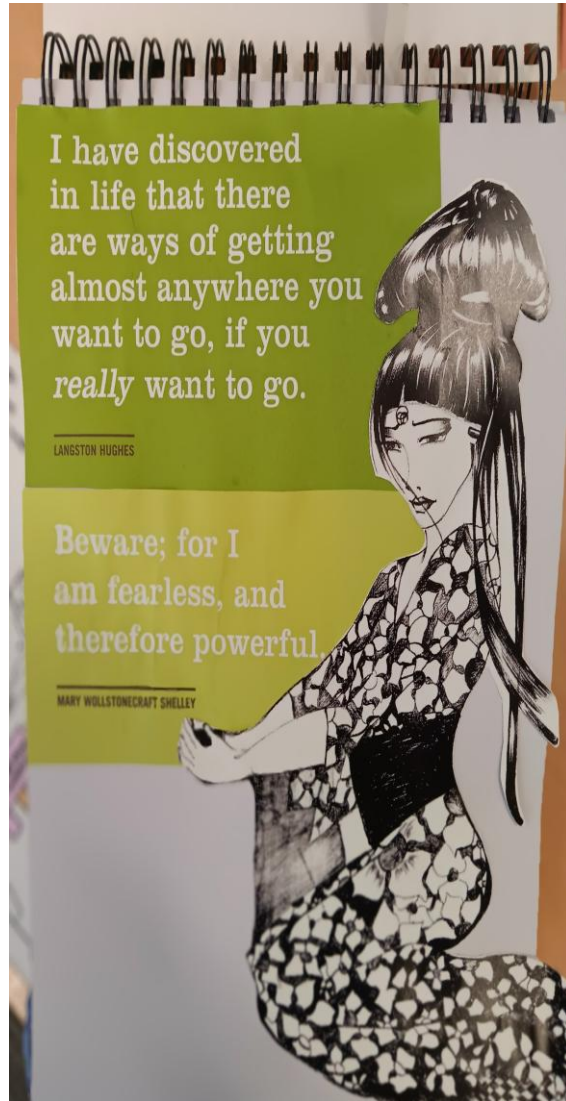
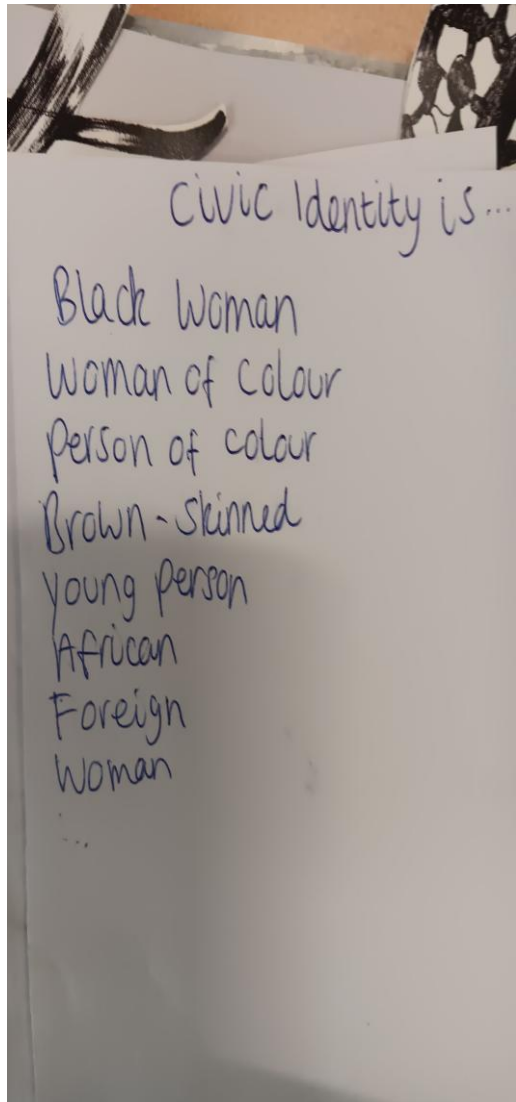
- *“Do expectations in Black and Brown Communities affect the mental health of adolescent girls?”*
- *“What roles and responsibilities do you have and how do they differ from your peers?”*
- *“What does a good mental health service look like to you?”*



**‘XBX PODCAST’
EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE
SEASON 5**

**FOLLOWING ARE
IMAGES FROM OUR
TRAINING, FOCUS
GROUPS AND EVENTS**





During training, we used creative writing, journal entries, drama role-play and collaging to explore different aspects of civic identity and what it means to be resilient as a young Black or Brown woman ...



A collection of props for a drama role-play session. The items are arranged on a brown and white checkered fabric. On the left is a red book with white text. In the center is a small, white, crocheted object. To the right are two blue gloves. Above the gloves is a small, brown, rectangular object with text. In the background, there are blue heart-shaped ornaments and a yellow object.

**PROPS FROM A DRAMA ROLE-PLAY
SESSION EXPLORING
INTERGENERATIONAL EXPECTATIONS
OF YOUNG PEOPLE OF ASIAN,
AFRICAN AND AFRICAN CARIBBEAN
COMMUNITIES**

THE POETRY
PARTICULAR



TRIED-AND-TRUE
PRESCRIPTIONS
FOR THE HEART,
MIND AND SOUL

WILLIAM
SIEGHART

PARTICULAR BOOKS

D96

20p

London
Catholic Truth Society

THE TEAM EXPLORING DIFFERENT TYPES OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS...



QUICK QUIZ:
WHAT TYPE OF QUESTION IS IT?

L. TO R. IMAGES OF FOCUS PARTICIPANTS AND YOUNG LEADERS



L. TO R. IMAGES OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS AND YOUNG LEADERS



As well as delivering focus groups, we delivered three bespoke workshops at The Zone youth club in Islington for young women with Special Educational Needs. The entry point for exploring gender, identity and resilience was anchored around the racialising of Black hair. The young women at The Zone wanted to explore how their hair shaped aspects of their identity as young Black and Brown women. We also discussed perceptions of Black hair and how Eurocentric beauty standards influence how young Black and Brown women present themselves in civic spaces.

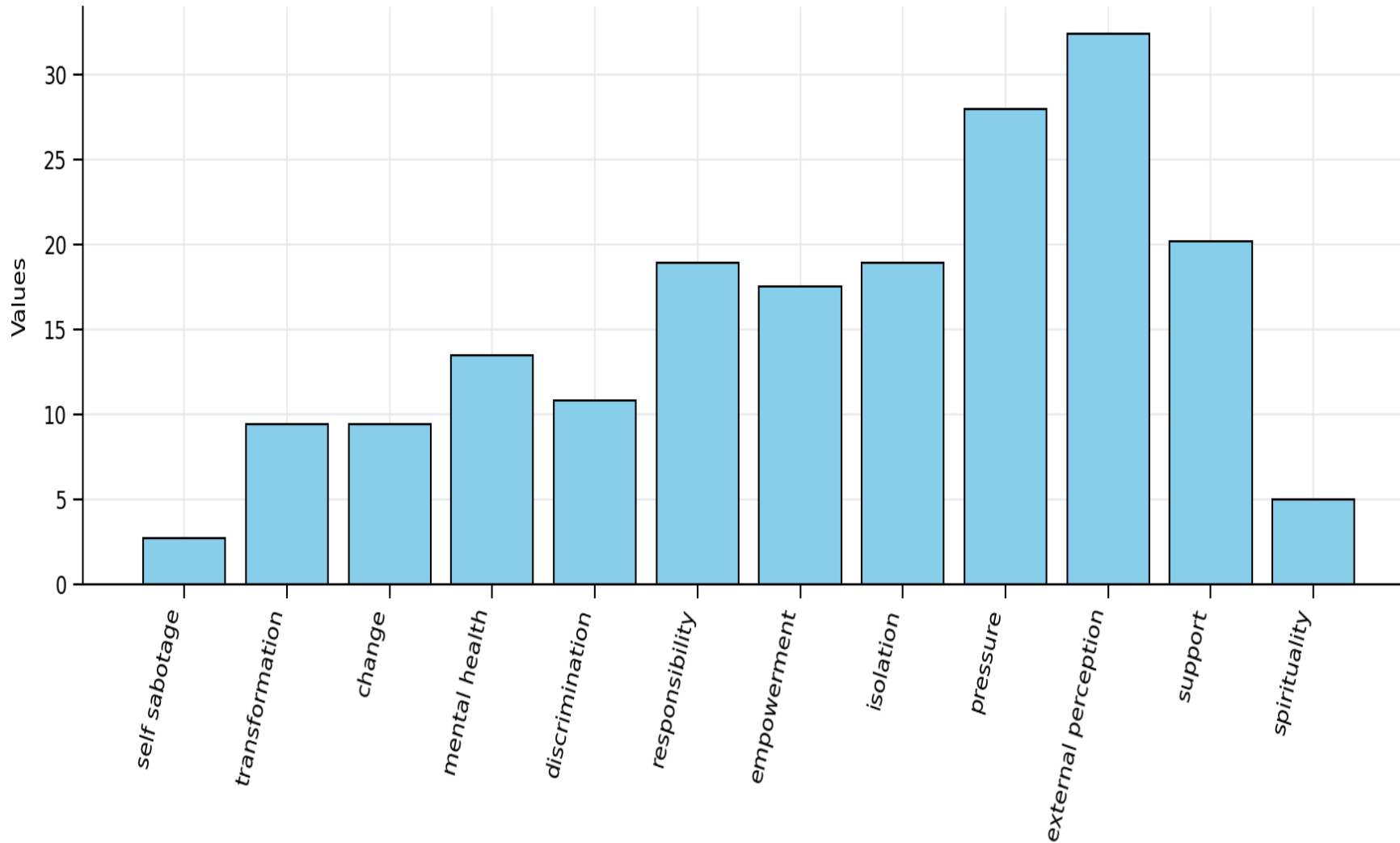


How did we analyse the data?

Once the focus groups were delivered, we used a process called Thematic Analysis to analyse the data.

This involved examining the responses from participants to each research question, identifying patterns and then creating codes for those patterns. We then grouped similar codes together and gave each group a theme.

Bar Chart of Research Themes



We created 135 codes for our data sets. Similar codes were grouped together. Each group was given a theme that connected the codes. 12 thematic groups were made in total. The numbers of codes per thematic group were translated into statistics, which provided the results in this bar chart.

EMERGING THEMES: PRESSURE, EXPECTATIONS, SILENCING AND PERFECTION

“Living up to the expectations of our parents. Doing the things that they were not able to do. This affects young people especially young Black and Brown women because they have got to bear the brunt of the idea that ‘we’ve come here...we’ve sacrificed so much for you...’. You have to bear the weight of that, not that it’s your fault but it kind of feels like it is your fault. ...and that’s like the fastest way to go downhill mentally” (focus group participant, 2025).

Often within the Black community, I would say amongst girls as well, when there is a physical disability or, or a learning difficulty or a mental health illness that they might have it kind of gets swept under the rug and you’re told ‘you need to get off your phone’, or ‘read your bible’. But I feel that, that can really affect the Black and Brown community because people don’t get the help that they need. Often it just gets swept under the rug and you’re told ‘you just need to go outside’, or something like that” (focus group participant, 2025).

“...I code switch a lot and at times I know I shouldn’t. I should be myself, I should be authentic...I know it’s sad because I do not want to be that person in the room but there’s almost like, we know there’s pressure to, because when you are leaning more towards perfect people are almost surprised by your intelligence they also listen to you more as opposed to if I was myself, I know that I wouldn’t be taken as seriously” (focus group participant, 2025).

HEALTH INEQUALITY

- ***'...you shouldn't have to cope with some experiences better..'***
(Care experienced young woman, 2025)
-



A woman with her hair in braids, wearing a dark patterned sweater and a headband, is seated at a long wooden table. She is looking towards the right with a thoughtful expression, her hand near her chin. The table is covered with various items including papers, pens, a purple marker, a white cup with a star pattern, and a small purple packet. A colorful, patterned fabric runner is laid out on the table. In the background, other people are seated at similar tables, and a person is standing near a doorway. The setting appears to be a large, well-lit room, likely a community center or a meeting space.

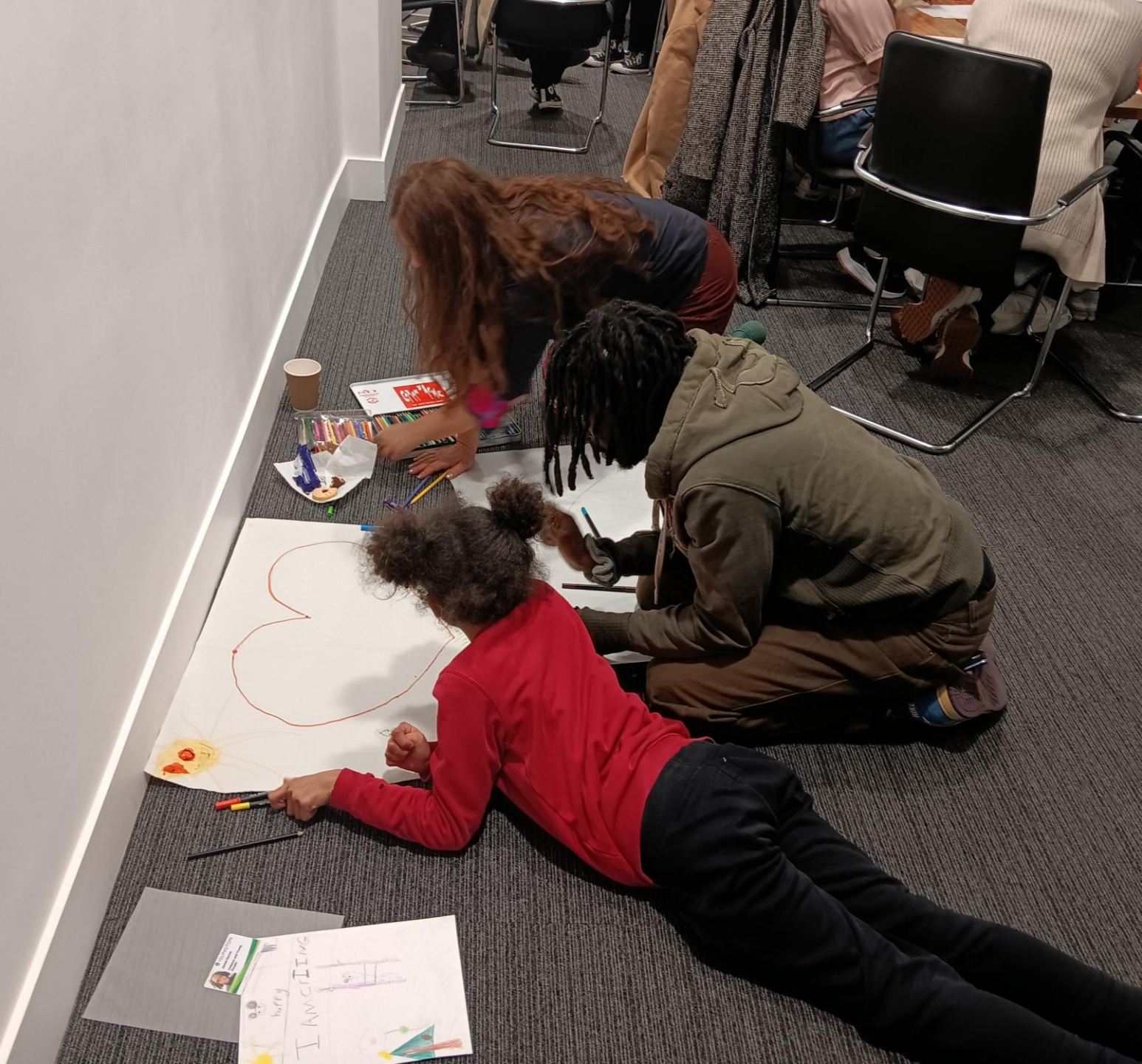
**WE PRESENTED OUR FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS AT A STAKEHOLDER EVENT IN
NOVEMBER 2025, AT THE GULDHALL IN LONDON. IT WAS
AN INTERGENERATIONAL EVENT, WITH PROFESSIONALS
AND FAMILY MEMBERS CALLED
'BRING YOUR AUNTY!'**

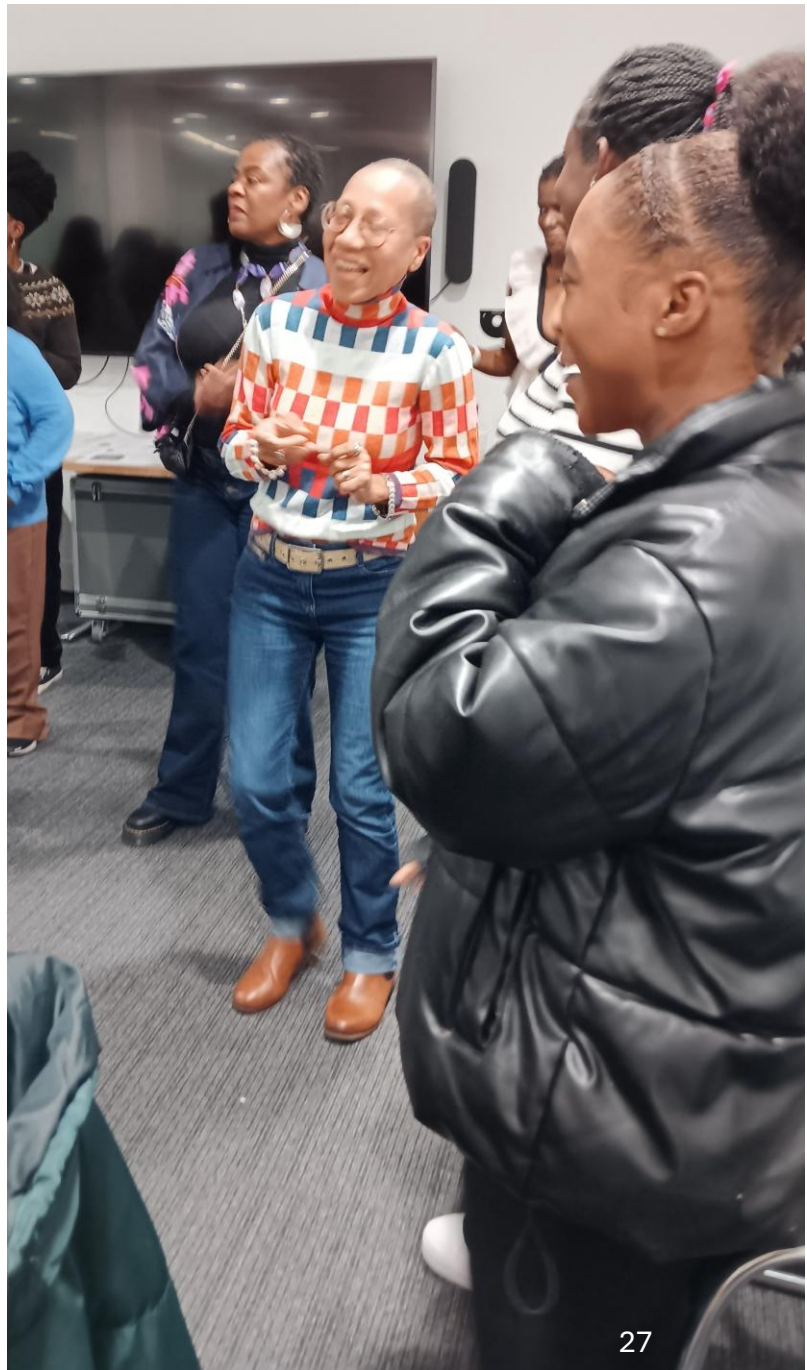
BRING YOUR AUNTY 25TH NOVEMBER 2025, LONDON

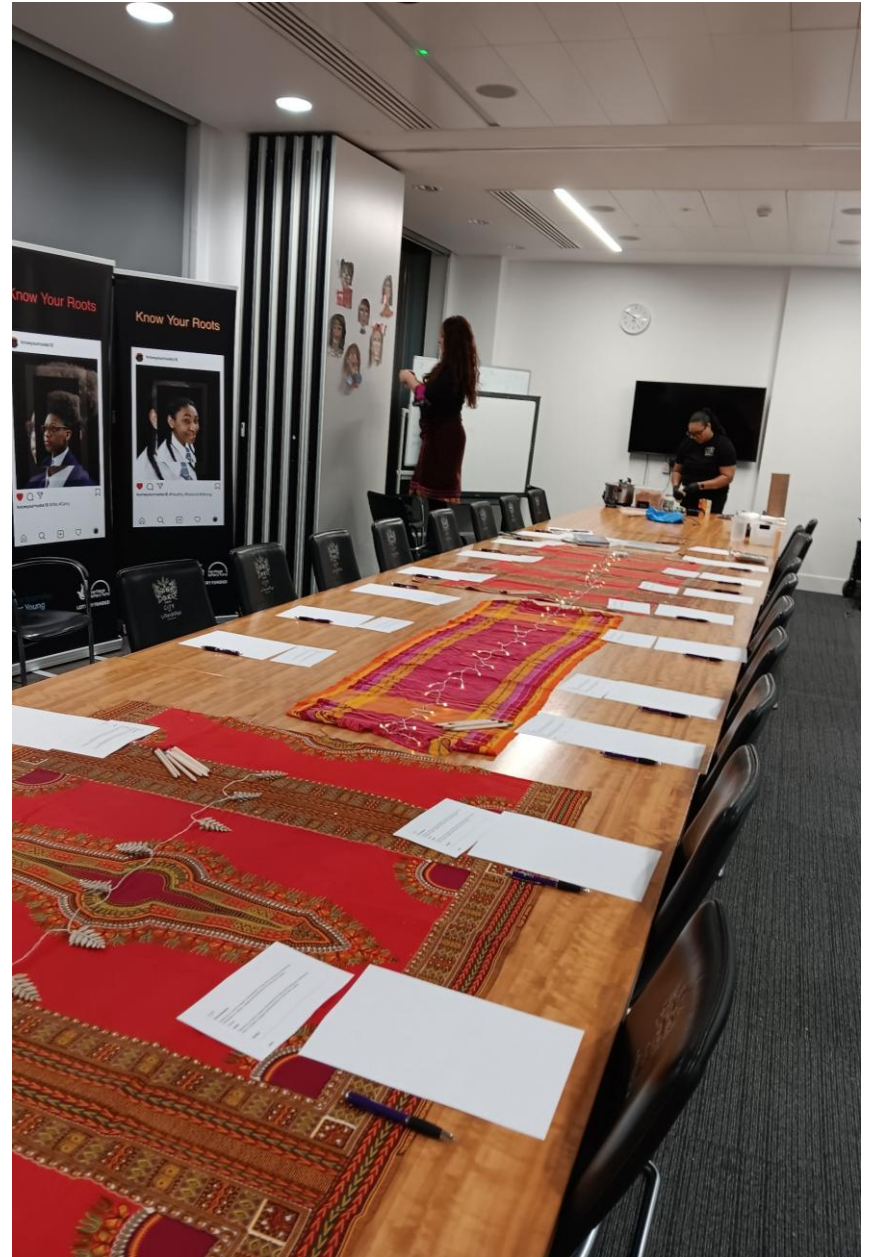
We asked young women to bring along someone who represented their aunty to this event so we could share our recommendations across generations. One of the key findings from our research was that it is important to create more opportunities for dialogue between younger and older members of Black and Asian communities when discussing matters related to mental health and emotional well being. This is in part due to the different perspectives and attitudes that generations have. The dissonance can, at times, be an obstacle to younger generations receiving the resources and support they need and may lead to older and younger generations feeling misunderstood.













NOV 2025 - LONDON

Introducing the next generation of Women leaders

**NOV
25**

**PEER
RESEARCH**

*FEATURING POEMS,
ARTICLES &
RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE YOUTH VOICE
PROJECT AUTHORIZING
OUR OWN STORIES'*



XBX

EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE
SPECIAL EDITION

The group chose to use the magazine concept presented in the focus groups, as the method to creatively interpret data from 2025. The content of the magazine includes articles, poems and paintings that reflect the key themes from our findings.

We created a physical copy of the magazine, and we are currently working with graphic artist, Drew Sinclair, to translate the content into a digitised version. This will be used as a resource in our training programme to professionals in 2026.

The Team

YOUNG LEADERS

*Rachel Adjekukor - Maria Ayaka. - Anuoluwapo Fadairo -
Emmanuela Kumi. - Emmanuella Mamah. - Rumaisa Mulji*



Caron Vacciana

ARTIST - IN - RESIDENCE AND YOUTH WORKER



Ilaria di Fiore



NATIONAL LEAD FOR AUTHORING OUR OWN STORIES

Sandra Vacciana

CONTENTS IN THIS MONTH'S XBX

SPECIAL exposé *ON 'MENTAL HEALTH'*

1. POEMS
2. ARTICLES
3. RECOMMENDATIONS
4. LINKS TO
RESOURCES
5. AND MUCH MORE!

Articles

[Can We Have a Word with You? Why it's Time to DITCH the Term 'MENTAL HEALTH'](#) - Words by Rachel Adjekukor

[Fitting In and Perfection as Young Black and Brown Women](#) - Words by Emmanuella Mamah

[Breaking The Glass Ceiling: When Empowerment Comes with Scars](#) - Words by Emmanuela Kumi

[We Won't 'Cool it Down'](#) Words by Rumaisa Mulji

[Warrior](#) Words by Anuoluwapo Fadairo

[The Pressure of Perfection](#) by Anuoluwapo Fadairo

[We Carry](#) by Anuoluwapo Fadairo

PRESSURE

PRESSURE

PRESSURE

BE

BE.

mastering the art of perfection

TO

PERFECT

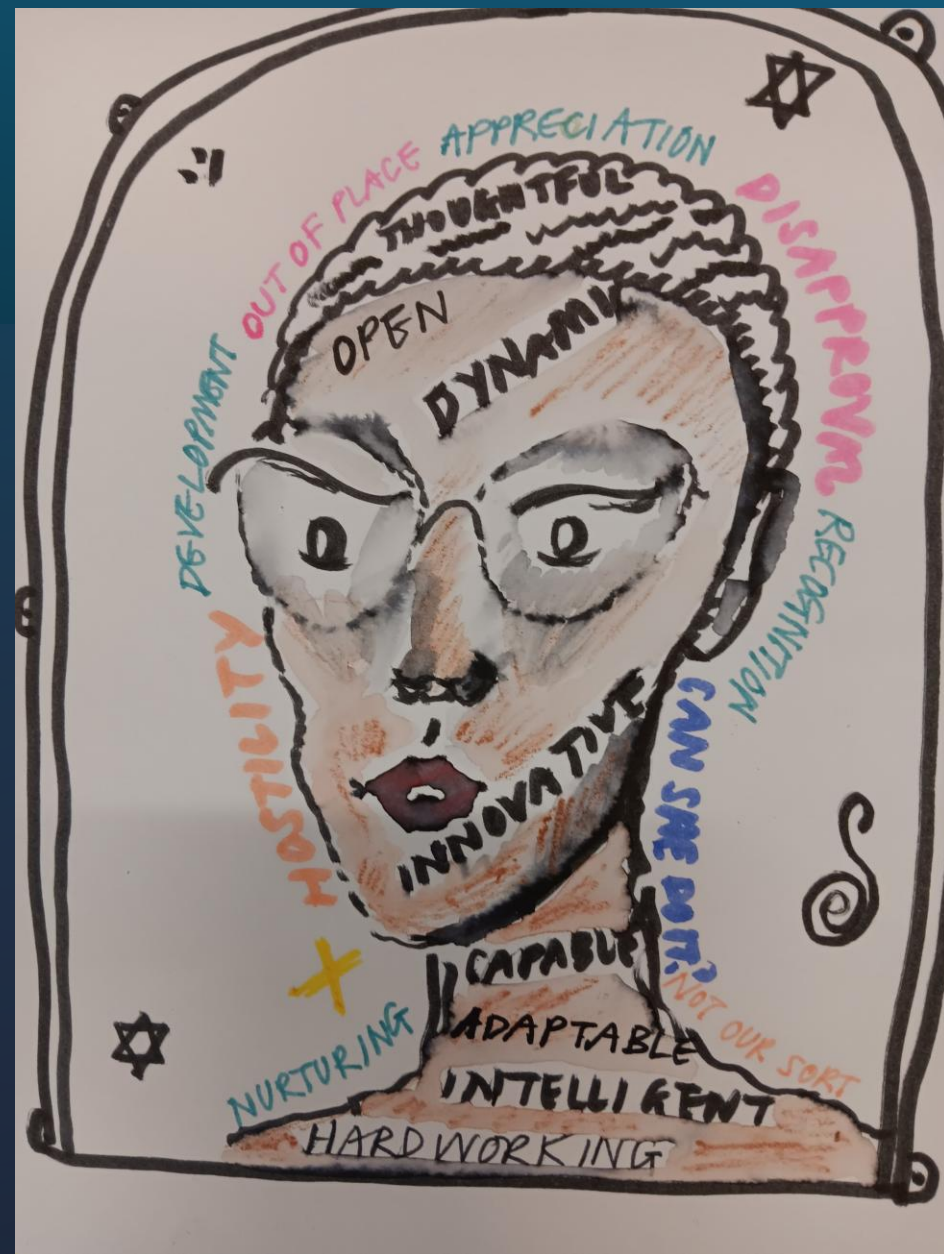




SAFE
MY OWN SKIN



SAFETY







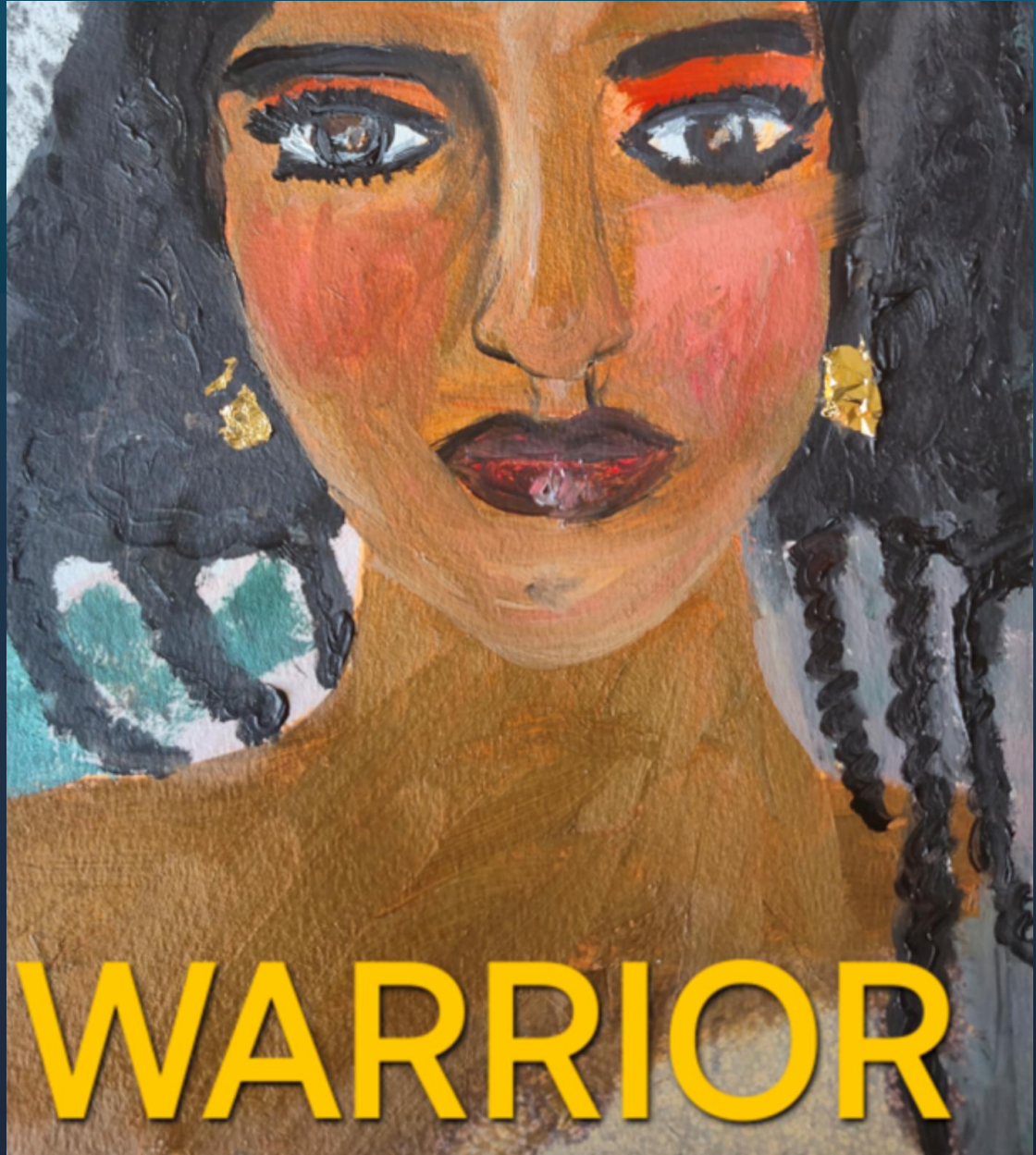
SAFETY
TO IS

CONNECT
WITH
MY

STORY

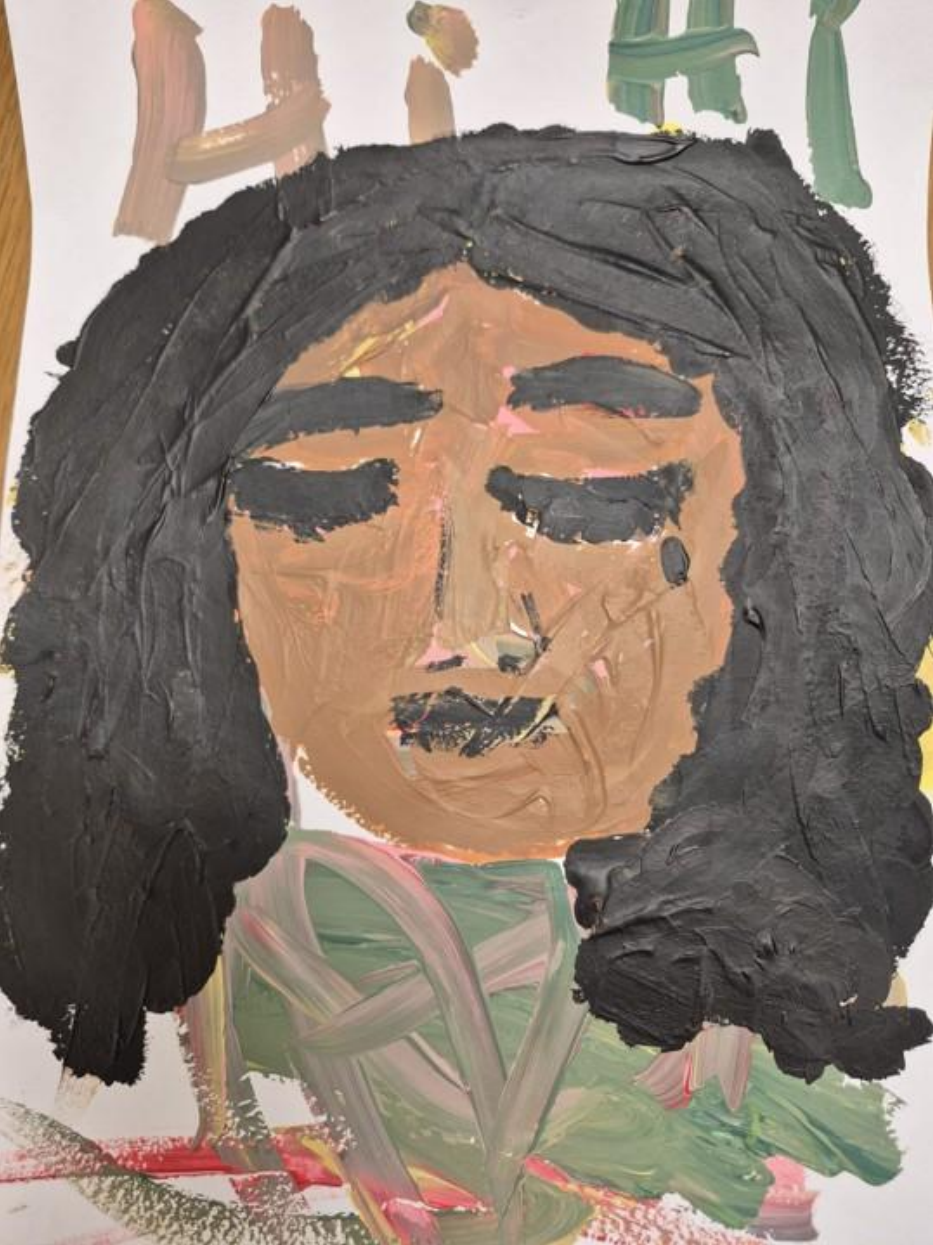
MY

FAMILY

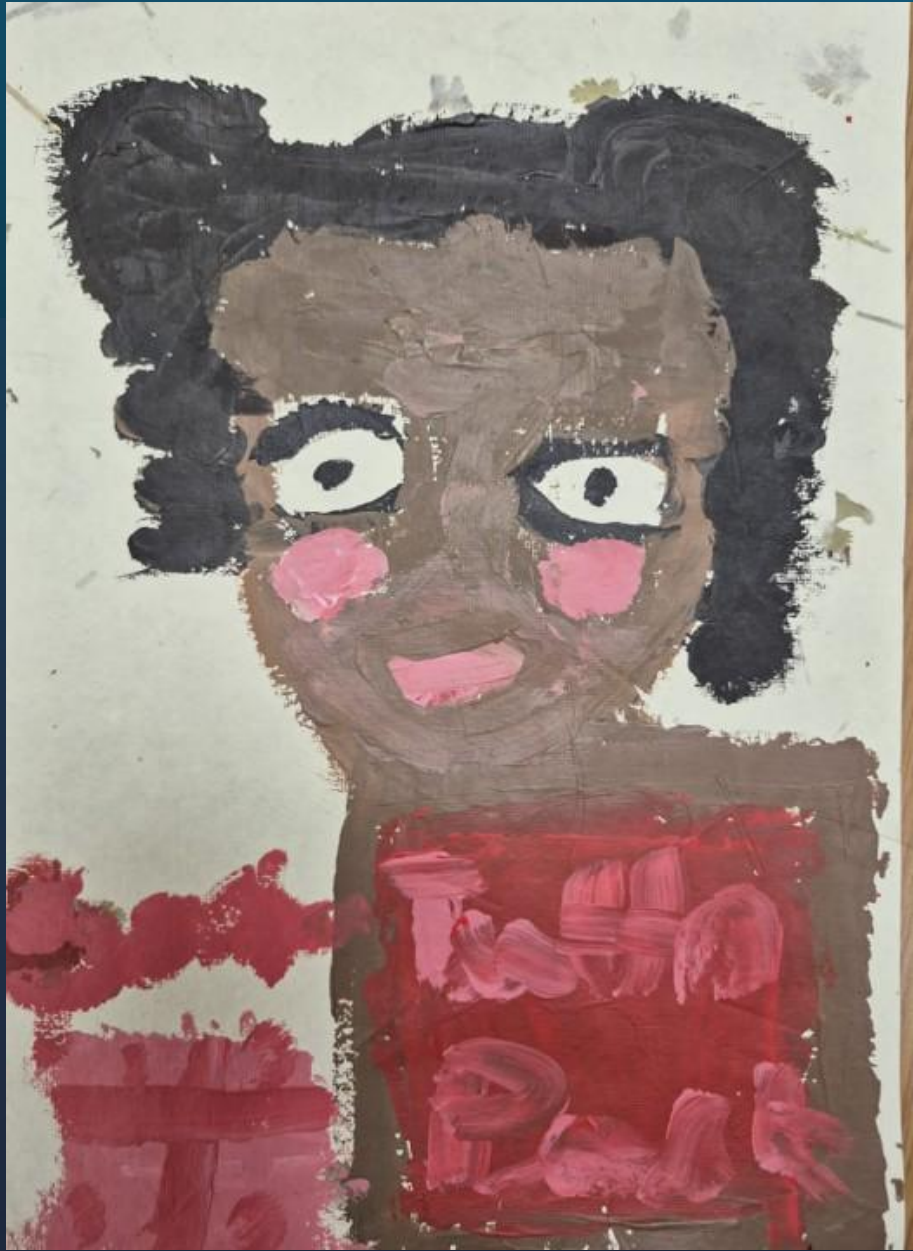
















SUMMARY

Research from 2025 reflects how the pressure to meet social expectations compels many young women from different racial groups to present themselves within a system of Western, Middle-Class 'norms'. **This pressure is heightened further for young women of Asian, African and African-Caribbean heritage, due to the intersection of sexism, racism and cultural expectations.** Findings from *Authoring Our Own Stories in 2025*, strongly recommend those working in the youth sector and similar fields continue to deepen their understandings about how these expectations create barriers to young Black and Brown women engaging in civic life, whilst also feeling able to be their authentic selves. ***What more can we do within our respective roles to create environments that encourage young Black and Brown women to feel safer and exercise self-agency?***

Our call to action includes using learning from Authoring Our Own Stories to understand more about how young Black and Brown women's personal, and civic identities keep them confined to the margins of society.



NEXT STEPS

In 2026, Young Leaders from year 5 will be co-designing and co-facilitating a series of three training workshops, they will be delivered from June 2026 onwards. Members of the group will also be participating in the annual summer conference at **London Southbank University on 1st and 2nd of July**. Here they will showcase how tools from this research can be used in a diverse range of professional and community settings, to address some of the key themes raised in this report.



DIGITAL EDITION OF 'XBX' COMING SOON!

THANKS TO YOUNG LEADERS, STAFF AND INTERNS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE RESEARCH IN 2025

- JESSICA ABHVANI
- RACHEL ADJEKUKOR
- CLARA AKINGBADE
- MARRIAM ANDERSON
- EMILIA DUNSIN ADEYEMO
- MARIA AYAKA
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- KATY BROWN
- JULIA DANTAS
- ASPEN ELIASOV
- ANUOLUWAPO FADAIRO
- ILARIA DI FIORE
- CHELSY JACKSON
- EMMANUELA KUMI
- SHARON LONG
- NATASHA LYONS
- EMMANUELLA MAMAH (AKA ELLA)
- PROFESSOR NICOLA MARTIN
- SONIA MCCOLLIN
- RUMAISA MULJI
- ZOE NATION
- SURANNE PERERA
- CHRIESE PUSEY
- TANYA RAHMAN
- YASHNEIL RAMLALL
- DREW SINCLAIR
- ANGEL SINGH
- CARON VACCIANA
- SANDRA VACCIANA
- RIANNE WILLIAMS
- TANISHA ZAMAN

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