



MY PLACE FINSBURY PARK

Pioneers Project Report

proudly initiated & supported by

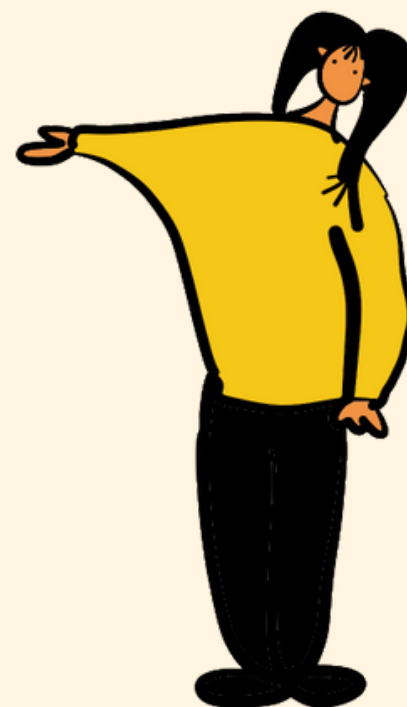
footwork

in partnership with



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Executive Summary
- 2 Meet the Pioneers
- 3 Training
- 4 Planning our Research
- 5 Our Research
- 6 Our Findings
- 7 Conclusions and Reflections



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"The My Place Pioneers are a group of young people who are passionate about creating positive change in their local community. These individuals have first hand experience of the challenges facing their community, and they are deeply committed to making a difference. They are from the Finsbury Park area and have a strong network of local connections, which allows them to bring a unique perspective and valuable insights to the table.

In addition to their passion and local knowledge, these young people are also dedicated, committed, respectful and persevering. They care deeply about their community and are willing to put in the hard work to bring about the changes they want to see. Moreover, this group of young people accurately represents the superdiversity in Finsbury Park.

Overall, we believe that this group of young people is uniquely qualified to lead the charge in creating meaningful and lasting change in their community. Their lived experience, local connections, and drive to make a difference make them an invaluable asset in the pursuit of a better future for all."



Rico Prince

My Place Junior Project Manager

MEET THE PIONEERS

Hello, we are the My Place Pioneers!

We are a group of 13-18 year olds from Finsbury Park who are passionate about speaking up for our community and being involved in decisions about the future of our local area.

Young people like us are constantly left out of decisions that affect us and our future; 89% of young people have never been asked about the future of their neighbourhood, despite 97% wanting to get involved [Grosvenor, 2019]

We are determined to change this - we demand a voice for ourselves and our community.

That's why we are the My Place Pioneers; we are the first group of people to deliver the My Place mission to give local people like us a real say in decisions affecting the place we live in and the opportunity to influence those in power to start thinking about the long term and building a better future for us, our community and future generations.

BUILDING OUR TEAM

On our first day as Pioneers we got to know each other through a series of team building exercises, including the creation of the My Place Pioneer Values. Each one of us contributed to these values, and the process of sharing and agreeing on these was an important step in building a collective bond - our values are a reflection of us as individuals and a group, what we value, and how we want to work together during this project. Our values are:

Respect . Communication . Courage . Resilience . Accountability

Before beginning our research training we were placed into two groups by Rico and Zimmie; group R and group Z. The groups were chosen based on Rico and Zimmie's knowledge of our personalities and skills, which were determined through our interviews and what we wrote in our applications.

The two groups were:

Group 'R'

Alesha, 13
Daniel, 14
David, 16
Hayden, 15
Julia, 16
Nuria, 15
Ushsean, 17

Group 'Z'

Channay, 17
Christopher, 15
Emily, 14
Hannah, 16
Jason E, 13
Jason O, 15
Shukri, 16



TRAINING

Week 1

London Development Trust
What is community development?

Footwork Trust
Introduction to research

Alvin Owusu
The value of lived experience

University of Westminster
What is research? methods & ethics

Quality of Life Foundation
Using research to measure quality of life

Commonplace
How to use Commonplace

For the first two weeks of the programme we received training from various organisations and individuals covering a range of topics including research design, research ethics, lived experience, and creative research methods.

These training sessions helped us understand our task and the different ways we could go about planning and conducting our research. We learned how to structure our research and how to utilise the range of local connections and knowledge we hold as a collective through our lived experience as members of the local community in which we were working.

Week 2

Footwork Trust
Creative research methods

Tamanna Jahan
Using film as a research tool



Learning how to conduct research

Professor Andrew Smith and PhD students Ross and Didem taught us about research and how to do it. We learned what the different research stages are, different ways we could collect our data, and how to make our research safe and ethical. We then started to come up with ideas for what we wanted to research and how to collect the data we wanted.

Week 3

Changing Cities
Understanding Planning & regeneration



Connecting with our lived experience

Alvin from TAG Agency visited the group to help us build deeper connections with each other and understand our personal lived experience through the concept of block scholarship – knowledge that is gained through non traditional institutions such as a housing estate. We learned how this can help us connect to diverse people within our community and enhance our research.

Week 4

Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing
Involving communities in regeneration

Clarion Housing
How places are (re)built

University of Westminster
Pioneers present research to academics



Learning to scope our research

Researchers from the Quality of Life Foundation helped us to practice writing research questions and gave us advice about how to interview people. We learned about their work to measure people's quality of life in different areas and how research like ours can help create change by providing more knowledge and better understanding of issues that are affecting our communities.

TRAINING TRIPS

As part of our training we went on a series of 'inspiration days' – trips to organisations across London to learn more about regeneration and how (re)development happens. These trips allowed us to learn about different places in London and compare the similarities and differences with our experience in Finsbury Park, giving us a new perspective and helping to enhance our research.

We visited two housing associations in South London; Metropolitan Thames Valley and Clarion, who spoke to us about how they (re)build places, including how they work with local communities. We were also invited to University of Westminster's Architecture Faculty, where we learned about different careers within the built environment and presented our research plans to PhD students and Professors.



Spotlight: Research Trip to Clapham Park Estate

"Whilst conducting our research we went on a trip to Clapham Park Estate in south London, where Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing talked to us about how they have been working with the community during the regeneration, and we shared our experiences of regeneration in Finsbury Park and the research we were doing to understand more about this issue in our area.

We learned about different types of housing, including what affordable housing means, and we were given a tour of a new £6 million community centre. Personally, I found the trip enjoyable and I learned a lot. I also liked the regeneration plans and think they will be an improvement compared to the old buildings that were there before."



Alesha
My Place Pioneer

PLANNING OUR RESEARCH

We designed our research projects alongside doing our training, integrating what we were learning into our plans. First of all, we decided what we wanted to research based on what is important to us and our experience of living in the Finsbury Park area.

Everyone brought different ideas to the table including issues of gentrification, female safety, and homelessness but we ultimately decided on three topics that we felt were particularly important in Finsbury Park as the basis for our research; regeneration for group Z, and safety and leisure for group R.

Developing a research plan

After agreeing on a topic that we wanted to research and learn more about we then had to plan how we would go about collecting this information. With support from University of Westminster PhD students Didem and Ross, and the wider My Place team, both groups developed and refined research plans during the second week.

We developed a strategy for collecting our data, including where we would go to interview the public, what questions we would ask, what methods we would use to capture people's responses, and how to ensure our research was conducted in a safe and ethical way, both for ourselves and the public taking part.

Between the two groups we planned to cover areas including Finsbury Park, local youth hubs, businesses along Blackstock and Stroud Green Road, and Andover, Harvist and Woodberry Down estates. We chose these places based on our collective personal experiences in these places, and our knowledge that these are very popular areas in Finsbury Park and among a diverse group of people.

Before beginning our research we spent a lot of time writing questions and designing surveys that we would use to interview people. We did this in two main ways; through surveys hosted on Commonplace, an online community engagement platform, and questionnaires to use as a basis for face to face interviews with the public. We considered ethical implications for both our online and in person surveys, including what demographic data to collect from people and how to make sure our questions weren't leading or had the potential to cause offence.

Using our research topic as a guide, we developed a series of open and closed sub questions that would help us to answer our larger research questions. We were supported in this process by Didem, Ross, and the My Place team, who helped us refine our questions and structure our surveys.

DELIVERING OUR RESEARCH

After finalising our research plans we had a two week period to gather our research data. We used a combination of digital and paper surveys when conducting our research to allow people to complete them by hand or using a tablet. We also utilised handheld cameras and dictaphones to capture audio and video of our interviews where participants had given their consent.

Despite some practice runs, doing our first interviews was very daunting and took us out of our comfort zone. However, the majority of people we approached were happy to participate in our interviews, and whilst we can't be sure, we believe that the fact we are young people and local residents helped the public relate to us and to facilitate productive conversations.

Being local residents gave us a level of relatability and shared experience, which along with us being young people, maybe made people more willing to share than with someone who isn't from the same community or area.

During the process of conducting our research we overcame various challenges including bad weather, nervousness, and rejection from the public, which has helped us all develop our confidence and become more comfortable to try new things.

Conducting our surveys with the public also led us to reflect on some of our questions and how we might improve them in the future, such as in group R, who found that people's responses to questions on the topic of leisure were much less comprehensive and detailed.



Working on our research topics

ANALYSING OUR FINDINGS

After two weeks of conducting our research in August we had a two week break whilst people returned to school and college. Following this break we came back together two to three times a week after school to document and analyse our findings. To begin this process we transcribed all of our audio and video interviews and organised them alongside the written interviews we had collected. We also closed our Commonplace website and collected people's responses to add to our in person research.

Initially we found this process quite challenging, for a number of reasons; fitting our work around school was difficult and we all had slightly different schedules which meant it was hard to get all of our group members together at the same time and make collective decisions. In addition, we only had 1-2 hours every session to work together so our progress was less efficient.

However, we agreed on a plan for analysing our research data; first we transcribed all of our interviews, then we picked out key themes from each interview and tallied these across all of our interviews to understand what the most common issues were, such as a desire for more youth spaces or concerns about crimes such as drug dealing. Alongside this, some members of our team concentrated on analysing our

Commonplace responses, which would give us more quantitative data. The graphs and charts in Commonplace made it easy for us to quickly understand what the most common and important issues were, whether people felt positively or negatively about a given topic, and how these trends were affected by factors such as employment status, age, or connection to the area.

Spotlight: Andover interview

"One of my most memorable interviews was when Ushsean and I spoke to an elderly man in Andover estate, where we both live. He told us about the drug trafficking he has seen, how the estate doesn't feel right to be in, how horrible and messy it is, and how he feels people of different ages don't interact much as they come out at specific times of day. I found this interesting as it gave me a new perspective on my own area."



David

My Place Pioneer

KEY FINDINGS

Group Z: Regeneration

In group Z we learned that whilst many people have concerns about how regeneration is carried out and ensuring that existing communities are not displaced, overall the public were ambivalent or positive about regeneration in Finsbury Park as they wanted to see investment in the area and new facilities provided. However, people who had experienced regeneration directly were less positive and retaining the existing sense of community and regeneration benefitting local people were key issues for people. We also learned that improving safety is a more important issue for people on the whole, however regeneration is part of this.



Spotlight: Regeneration

“Before conducting our research we expected that most people would be against regeneration in their area, due to the gentrification and rising costs it can bring. However, we got mixed responses.

For example, we spoke to one resident who didn’t mind regeneration happening “as long as it’s not pushing out people who’ve lived in Finsbury Park for a long time, and that regeneration could be good or bad for the area, “depending on how it’s done”. These mixed responses indicate to us that people don’t feel as strongly about regeneration as other issues, and/or they are not aware of regeneration that has happened and is planned if it hasn’t affected them directly.”

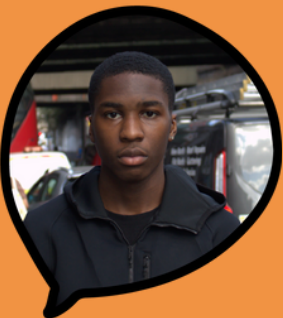


Shukri
My Place Pioneer

KEY FINDINGS

Group R: Safety and Leisure

In group R we found out that leisure is not a particularly significant issue for people; most people wanted to see improved facilities and better awareness of existing facilities, but overall people didn’t have strong feelings about this issue. However, safety was the top priority for people in Finsbury Park, with people concerned about a range of issues such as poor street lighting, female safety, and crime. Many respondents felt that drug dealing was a major issue and contributed to people feeling unsafe, particularly at night and around the park itself. We also learned that whilst a lot of people felt unsafe at night, this was a particular issue for women, and that the park itself was an area where people felt most unsafe due to a lack of lighting.



Ushsean
My Place Pioneer

Spotlight: Safety

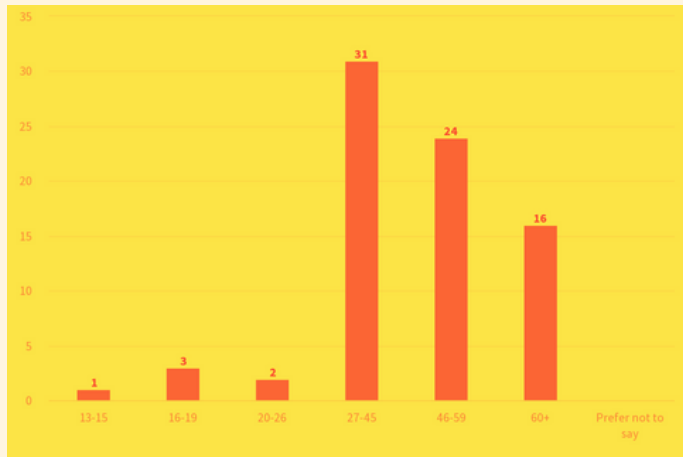
“We spoke to a woman who had been living in the area for her whole life who told us about how much the area has changed from when she was a young girl to now. She told us how the area used to have a strong community but that these days people in the area have no relationship with each other. She feels that increased drug trafficking in the area attracts people who hang around and causes residents to feel more unsafe and be wary of coming out of their houses, particularly children and the elderly. This leads to people interacting with each other less, which negatively impacts community connection and increases isolation.”

COMMONPLACE RESULTS

Alongside interpreting our interviews we also analysed the findings from our Commonplace website, where people could complete surveys about safety, leisure and regeneration, as well as identifying areas on a map of Finsbury Park where these issues are prevalent.

Summary

Overall, the data from Commonplace reflected what we found when speaking to the public but there were also some key differences. Our Commonplace responses were disproportionately from those aged 27–59, and those in full time employment, which affects how the data can be interpreted. Issues like pollution, more cycle lanes and traffic were also much higher among our Commonplace responses than our in person investigations.

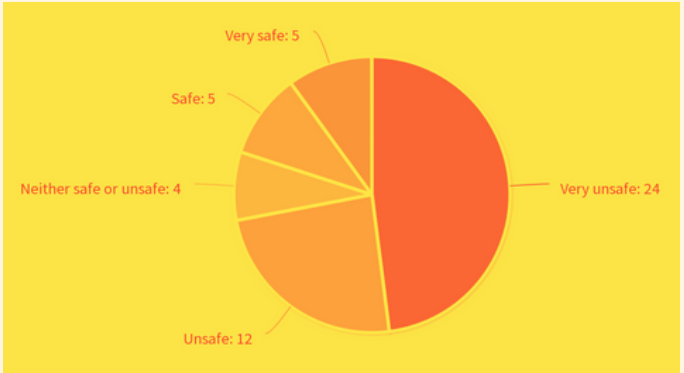


40% of respondents were aged 27–45, with less than 10% aged 26 or under

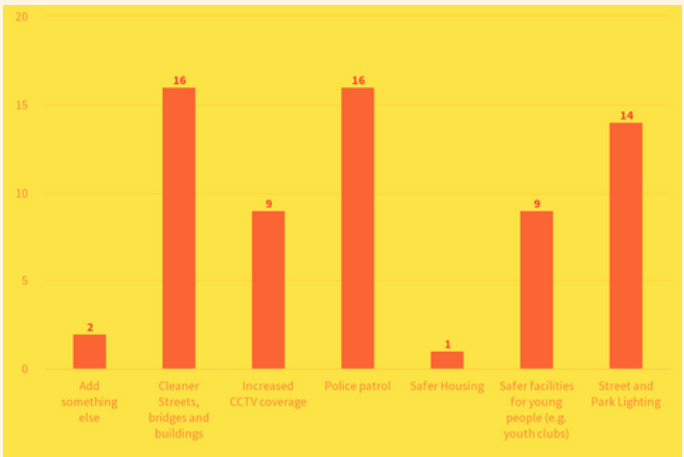
Safety

Over 60% of respondents had negative feelings about safety in Finsbury Park, with almost three quarters of people feeling either unsafe or very unsafe.

Police patrols, cleaner streets, and street lighting are the elements of safety that people feel most need improving, with Finsbury Park station, Blackstock Road and the park itself being areas that people feel most need addressing in terms of safety.



How safe do you feel in Finsbury Park?

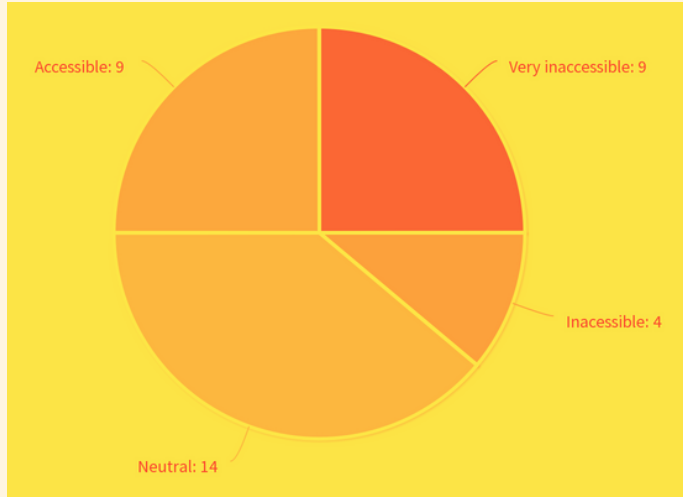


People want to see more Police patrols, cleaner streets and better street lighting

COMMONPLACE RESULTS

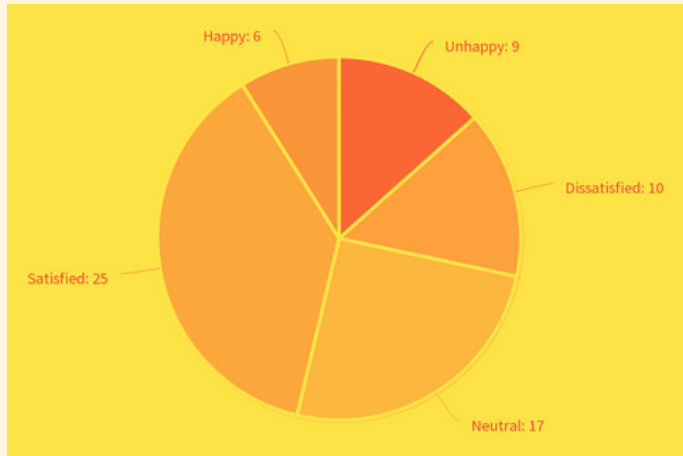
Leisure

Only 36% of our Commonplace respondents felt leisure facilities in the area are inaccessible, and almost 8 in 10 people felt they are at least somewhat affordable. This suggests that people are reasonably satisfied with the current leisure provision in the area.

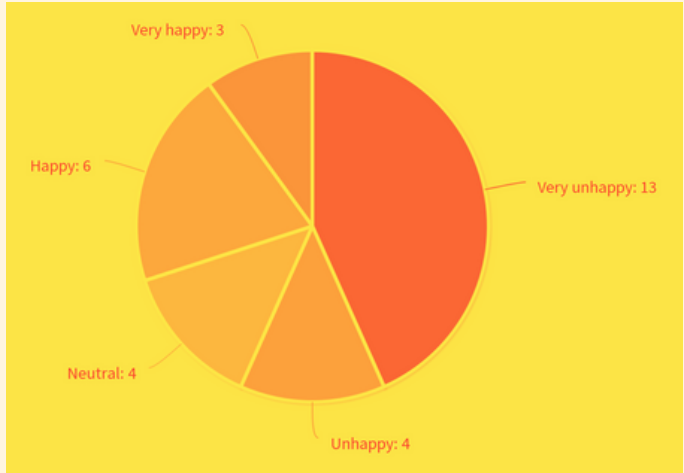


Regeneration & Change

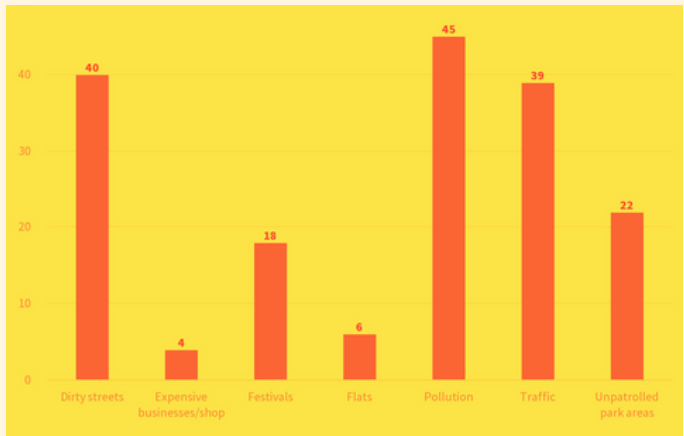
Overall, people like Finsbury Park; 46% of people feel positively about the area, compared with 28% who feel negatively, as shown in the chart below.



However, people felt negatively about how the area has changed; over half of people felt it had changed, and less than one in three felt positively about this change, as this pie chart demonstrates.



Contrary to our hypothesis, and results from our in person interviews, signs of gentrification such as new, expensive retail were not a major concern for people, instead they were more concerned about reducing traffic and pollution, as shown below. We believe that demographic differences may be a major reason for this difference between our in person and online results.



CONCLUSIONS

Overall, our research was a huge success; in just four weeks we were able to plan and deliver two social research projects to better understand how people in Finsbury Park feel about significant issues in their local area. Using our lived experience as members of the communities that we were interviewing, we were able to access a diverse range of people and have meaningful conversations about important issues.

The combination of this with the broad reach of our online engagement through Commonplace has given us a strong body of research that shows both general feeling about regeneration, safety and leisure, whilst also capturing more nuanced and in depth reflections from the diverse communities in Finsbury Park, especially those traditionally underrepresented in conversations about the development of their neighbourhood.

We have learned that safety is a critical issue for many people in Finsbury Park, with issues like drug dealing and street lighting particular areas of concern. We also discovered that whilst many people are concerned about potential loss of community and unaffordability as a result of poorly executed regeneration, there are also lots of people in Finsbury Park who would welcome investment in the area and are open to regeneration as long as it reflects what the community wants and doesn't lead to displacement of existing residents.

Furthermore, many people expressed to us what they love about Finsbury Park and would like to see retained and celebrated, including its diversity, sense of community, and green spaces.



REFLECTIONS

We feel our research could have been improved even further by having more time to plan and ensure our questions were more focused to ensure as many relevant responses as possible.

More time to ensure we gathered data from a truly representative sample of the population would have benefitted the research too, as one of our main challenges was ensuring that our data wasn't skewed towards certain demographics. For example, 40% of our Commonplace responses were from people aged 27-45, with only 1.3% from people 15 and under. For context, 0-15 year olds make up 16.9% of the local population according to data collected by Islington Council in 2021 (1). In addition, 56% of respondents were in full time employment, compared to 40% of the working age population in Finsbury Park (2).

These demographic disparities may have skewed our Commonplace data somewhat. For example, we had a high proportion of responses from people working full time, who were more likely to feel positively about changes that have happened in Finsbury Park (33%, compared to 17% for self employed people and 0% for those working part time, unemployed or retired). Similarly, people were less likely to feel negative about the Finsbury Park area the older they were (20% of 60+ year olds, 27% of 46-59 year olds, 24% of 27-45 year olds, 40% of 13-19 year olds).

Whilst we were able to access more diverse voices through our in person engagement, particularly young people, we didn't collect demographic data in the same way we did through Commonplace, so this diversity isn't reflected in the data.




THANK YOU

This report was written by the the My Place Pioneers with support from My Place Project Coordinators Rico Prince and Zimmie Sutcliffe.

The My Place Pioneers are:

 www.myplace.community

 [@myplace.community](https://www.instagram.com/myplace.community)

 [@myplacecomm](https://twitter.com/myplacecomm)

 [/myplacecommunity](https://www.linkedin.com/company/myplacecommunity)



Alesha Lecco



Channay Buttler-Revell



David Alungwa



Emily Sipiano



Hannah Bourne



Hayden Dease



Jason Edwin



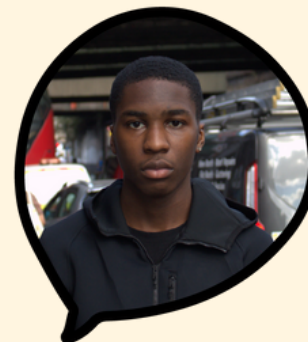
Julia Szumilas



Nuria Costa



Shukri Abdi



Ushsean Plummer



proudly initiated & supported by
footwork

in partnership with
 London
Development
Trust