

Young adults'  
mental health and  
the good life in  
North Kensington

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# Introduction

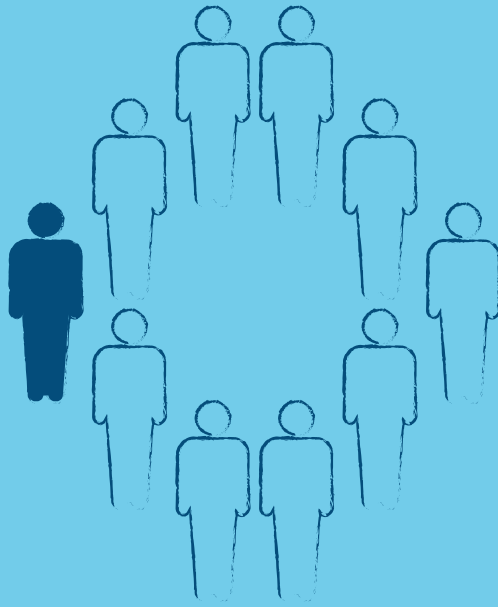
Being a young adult between the ages of 18 and 24 can be a challenging and confusing time and when confronted with unfamiliar and distinct difficulties, it can be easy to neglect one's mental health. Without the safety net of schools and teachers, the transition into adulthood can be overwhelming, especially when it comes to navigating the public mental health system.



*22.0% of young people in the UK aged 17 to 24 years had a probable mental disorder \*2022 NHS survey (MHCYP)*

My research aimed to explore the distinct challenges young adults encounter in accessing mental health resources in North Kensington. It seeks to understand how community support networks, social connections, and the availability and quality of services influence the mental well-being of young adults in this area.





2017



2022

*In young people aged 17 to 19 years rates of a probable mental disorder rose from 1 in 10 (10.1%) in 2017, to 1 in 4 (25.7%) in 2022*

# How I conducted the research

First, I did walking ethnographies in North Kensington, looking out for community centers/local mental health services in order to observe environment and consider factors like hospitality and accessibility. I then conducted interviews with young residents and with people who work for organisations providing mental health support in North Kensington. From these interviews, I wanted to find out what community members think and feel about available mental health services. In addition, I conducted online research, exploring local organizations/ governments websites to gather relevant documents, reports, or policies related to mental health and community support networks in North Kensington.



# Descriptions of the interviews



## Interviews with professionals

The first person I spoke with was one of the founders of a local youth organisation who has worked in the community for 25 years. During our discussion, he shed light on the numerous obstacles that young adults encounter when attempting to access mental health assistance in North Kensington. These challenges primarily include language barriers, cultural sensitivity, and the prevailing stigma surrounding mental health. Our conversation highlighted the importance of programs and initiatives that engage young adults through enjoyable activities and gradually introduce them to topics like mental health. He stressed that building trust and rapport is the key to successful engagement with young adults.

My next interview was with a local NHS therapist. She outlined many of the complex challenges she sees young adults face such as the lingering effects of The Grenfell Tower fire, struggles with high living costs, overcrowding at home and difficulties in education. Notably, she stressed that the most significant barriers are lack of awareness about available resources and the perceptions of long waiting times. She pointed out that there is a common misconception that seeking help is reserved for those dealing with severe mental health issues.

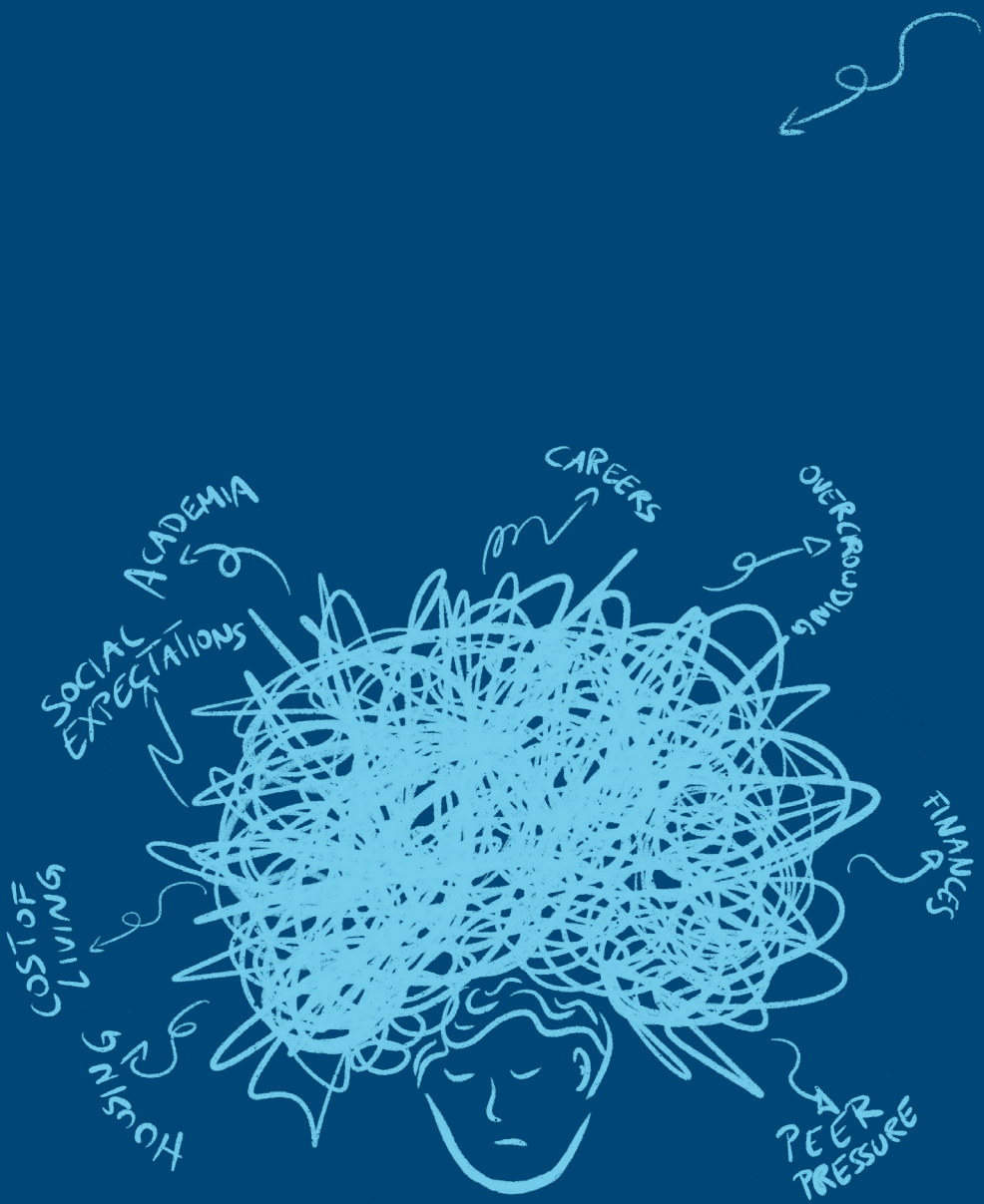
I was surprised to learn that, in contrast to this widely held belief, waiting times for assistance in this borough are almost non-existent.

## Interviews with young adults

The young adults I spoke with candidly discussed the challenges they and their peers encounter, encompassing decisions about education, achieving independence, financial management, and self-discovery. A notable revelation was the general lack of awareness amongst them regarding available mental health services, as they all struggled to name any specific resources.

Recently, there has been a growing availability of mental health services, partially fuelled by significant events like Grenfell and the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the young adults I interviewed voiced a clear desire for more specialised assistance. They expressed a need for customised mental health support initiatives, workshops, and activities explicitly created for their demographic in the community, emphasising inclusivity, regularity, and flexibility to suit their preferences.





# Findings from my research

## Availability verse awareness

**“In Kensington and Chelsea we’re really fortunate, but people aren’t necessarily aware that there are services available for them”**



In North Kensington there is an abundance of mental health resources but the primary challenge is that many individuals are not fully aware of the range of support services that are accessible to them. My research found that the most valuable thing would be directing efforts towards increasing awareness and combating the stigma surrounding reaching out for mental health support. By fostering open conversations and education about mental well-being, the community can ensure that the ample resources are more widely known and utilised to support those who need them.





## Community

# “Making sure that you have a way to stay connected with other people who are good for you”

All my interviewees expressed positive sentiments about the community and highlighted its diversity and sense of belonging. The strong sense of community and availability of social connections serves as a pillar of support and comfort, especially during challenging times like the aftermath of the Grenfell tragedy. This is crucial to the mental well-being of young adults here as it reduces feelings of loneliness and offers reassurance.

I visited several community spaces which offered mental health support for residents of North Kensington. I visited spaces such as Al-Hasaniya, St Charles Hospital, Al Manar Mosque and Midaye centre. I was met with very friendly and welcoming environments and the overall atmosphere were easy and comfortable.

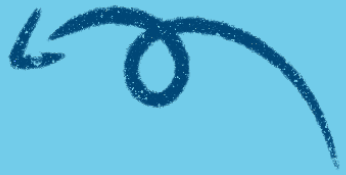
## Improvements

**“I’d rather go to events exclusively for young adults”**



**“[I would want] something that’s flexible for everyone to get into”**

**“[I would want] talks at colleges/unis [to raise awareness]”**



My final question to all my participants asked them for their ideas for enhancing young adults' mental health support and this led to discussions on a range of initiatives and programmes. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 often find themselves overlooked, as they no longer fall within the children's category, and navigating adult spaces and resources can be a daunting experience. This borough stands out for its abundance of resources and funding but I believe stakeholders should listen to the voices of young adults and adopt these proposals, including the creation of more specialised and exclusive resources tailored to their unique needs. Funding also needs to be allocated to spreading awareness through methods such as speaking at colleges and schools, promoting resources on social media and creating informative leaflets or brochures.



The **Good Life in North Kensington** brings together a team of residents to explore what a 'good life' means for people in North Kensington, London, and what some of the barriers are to achieving it. In 2023, seven local residents became 'citizen social scientists' and carried out their own research projects, investigating issues which matter to them and their communities.

They have been trained and supported by UCL's Citizen Science Academy, based at the Institute for Global Prosperity, in collaboration with the University of Manchester and the Westway Trust. They have since been awarded the Citizen Science Certificate by the UCL Office for Open Science and are now working with local organisations to help ensure citizen voices are part of decision-making processes.

The Good Life North Kensington is part of a larger project on rethinking neighbourhood change and urban futures in the aftermath of housing tragedies. The project is led by Dr Constance Smith (University of Manchester) as part of a UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship. For more information see [www.highriselandscapes.org](http://www.highriselandscapes.org)



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