



HOUSE OF COMMONS



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# EMPOWERING FUTURES: BREAKING CYCLES OF VIOLENCE AND EXCLUSION

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Post Event Report



Supported By:



***This report is dedicated to the young people of London -empowering them to lead change, shape their future and build stronger communities.***



**The Youth Conference was hosted by Natasha Irons MP and Kim Leadbeater MP and delivered through the commitment and leadership of Cllr Dr Manju Shahul-Hameed, Founder of the Manju Shahul-Hameed Foundation for Mental Health. The event was generously supported by the People's Postcode Lottery, whose contribution helped make this conference possible.**

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## Event details

**Venue:** House of commons

**Date:** Thursday 26th June 2025

**Time:** 12:00 PM – 3:30 PM

The Manju Shahul-Hameed Foundation for Mental Health expresses its sincere gratitude to Natasha Irons MP and Kim Leadbeater MP for their support and collaboration in hosting this year's Youth Conference at the House of Commons. Their invaluable support helped set the tone for a day dedicated to empowering young people, amplifying youth voices and fostering collaboration across communities. The Foundation extends its appreciation to all speakers and roundtable facilitators for their insightful contributions and continued commitment to improving the lives and futures of young people across London.

## Context/Opening Remarks

The Conference started with welcoming remarks from co-hosts Uma Kukreja and Joshua Kingsley Eyakware followed by Natasha Irons MP, Kim Leadbeater MP, Toni Letts OBE and Councillor Dr. Manju Shahul-Hameed, immediately setting an energetic, inclusive and purposeful tone for the day. Collectively, they emphasised the importance of empowering young people, amplifying their voices in decision-making and working together across communities to create safe, supportive environments where all can thrive. Their messages highlighted shared priorities of opportunity, mentorship and resilience as key to breaking cycles of exclusion and disadvantage. The day was introduced as a platform for active participation rather than passive listening, with an agenda focused on exploring critical themes of entrepreneurship, mental health, community leadership and intergenerational collaboration. Attendees were recognised as essential partners in shaping these conversations, with roundtable discussions, workshops and networking sessions designed to provide new tools, insights and confidence to influence and build their own futures.

## Keynote Speech

The first keynote speech, delivered by Enterprise Nation on “How Entrepreneurship Can Help Young People Find Their Purpose, Take Ownership of Their Future and Develop Real-World Skills That Open Doors,” highlighted the transformative impact of entrepreneurship. Drawing on personal experiences with failed and successful startups, the speaker emphasised learning from failure, exploring purpose and passion and turning ideas into ventures. Practical advice on mentorship, market research and resilience was shared, illustrating how entrepreneurship builds confidence, problem-solving skills and opportunities for young people to create positive change.

Dr. Jacqueline Phillips-Owen from SLaM (South London and Maudsley NHS Trust) described the rising mental health challenges among children and young people, noting that 1 in 5 aged 8–16 and 1 in 4 aged 7–19 are likely to have a mental disorder. She described the Schools Resilience Project, which surveys students and parents to identify mental health challenges and their underlying causes, including social media pressures, limited parental understanding and unsafe communities. The project focuses on listening to young people, engaging the community and creating solutions beyond clinical treatment to strengthen resilience and tackle the root issues affecting schools and neighbourhoods.

Stephen Akinsanya, an experienced barrister and mentor, highlighted the importance of supporting young people, particularly those involved in serious crime, emphasising that “bad” children are often victims of systemic failures like poverty, neglect, and unsafe environments. Drawing on personal experience, he stressed early intervention, mentorship and creating opportunities to break cycles of violence. Akinsanya called on adults, teachers and policymakers to listen, believe in youth and provide supportive environments, with hope, trust, and opportunity as key foundations for empowerment and positive change.

## Youth Panel

The Youth Panel featured powerful testimonies from young leaders across London who shared their lived experiences of overcoming adversity through education, mentorship and community engagement. Their stories illustrated the importance of accessible mental health support, employability programmes and creative outlets in empowering young people to thrive. Discussions focused on building trust between youth and key institutions, particularly the police, with participants calling for greater empathy, communication and opportunities for co-designed solutions that reflect young people's realities.

## Discussion Topics

1. Overcoming Educational Barriers
2. Promoting Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being
3. Encouraging Alternatives to Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
4. Cultivating Supportive and Positive Peer Networks

## Positive Impact

- **Creative Engagement:** Arts and drama programmes provide safe spaces for youth, reducing anti-social behaviour and supporting skill development.
- **Community Participation:** Initiatives like boxing clubs foster belonging, purpose and social connections, particularly in areas with limited recreational facilities.
- **Mental Health Support:** Early intervention programmes normalise conversations about mental wellbeing and reduce stigma among youth and families.
- **Family and Mentorship:** Family-inclusive approaches and mentorship programmes break cycles of disadvantage, build resilience and strengthen family relationships.

## Challenges and Barriers

- **Safety Perceptions:** Fear of crime, often disproportionate to actual risks, limits youth participation in community activities.
- **Cultural Stigma:** Fear of social care intervention and stigma around mental health prevent open discussions and help-seeking behaviour.
- **Limited Awareness:** Lack of targeted outreach reduces accessibility for marginalised or disengaged young people.

- **Resource & Coordination Constraints:** Insufficient funding and weak collaboration among organisations, schools and authorities reduce programme sustainability.

## **Actions and Key Outcomes**

- ✚ **Safe Spaces:** Create accessible, inclusive community and school-based environments for youth engagement.
- ✚ **Outreach & Visibility:** Promote programmes through schools, social media, local networks and public signage.
- ✚ **Community Safety Measures:** Enhance lighting, CCTV and the presence of trained adults; communicate accurate crime statistics to counter misconceptions.
- ✚ **Mental Health Support:** Integrate mental health education and first aid training across schools and community settings.
- ✚ **Trust & Relationship-Building:** Provide ongoing professional development for educators and youth workers in cultural competence and relational practice.
- ✚ **Family Engagement:** Implement family-focused interventions, counselling and mentorship programmes tailored to cultural and social contexts.

## Policy Influence

### **Youth Engagement:**

Policies should support creative and recreational programmes that provide safe, skill-building alternatives to anti-social behaviour while ensuring inclusivity and accessibility.

### **Community Safety:**

Policymakers should prioritise visible reassurance measures, infrastructure improvements and transparent communication of crime data to encourage youth participation.

### **Mental Health & Early Intervention:**

Policy frameworks must embed mental health education, first aid training and proactive support within schools and community settings, normalising wellbeing discussions.

### **Family & Cultural Inclusion:**

Policies should promote family-focused and culturally sensitive interventions to strengthen resilience, improve communication and break cycles of disadvantage.

## Delivery Plan

- ❖ Establish multi-use safe spaces with structured youth programmes.
- ❖ Partner with local authorities, youth organisations, and social services for coordinated implementation.
- ❖ Conduct targeted outreach using schools, digital platforms and community networks.
- ❖ Provide mental health first aid training and continuous professional development for staff.
- ❖ Implement mentorship and family-inclusive support programmes.
- ❖ Monitor outcomes and adapt programmes based on feedback, participation and community needs.
- ❖ Secure sustainable funding via local government, grants and partnerships.

Effective delivery will require a coordinated approach combining safe spaces, outreach,

professional development and family engagement. Ongoing monitoring, adaptation and sustainable funding are critical to ensure long-term impact. When implemented, these strategies will foster youth wellbeing, resilience and positive social participation, while strengthening community cohesion.

## First Youth Conference Report

Introduced by Alima Qureshi, Head of Communities and Young People at the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit, and Dawn Butler MP, the First Youth Conference Report was formally launched at the House of Commons on 26 June 2025. The report captures youth-led insights and actions from keynotes, panels and roundtables, setting out practical next steps for policy and practice. It also builds on the Foundation's November 2024 Youth Conference at the House of Lords, delivered under the National Youth Commission for Mental Health.

Co-authors shared their experiences and reflections from the event, highlighting key outcomes and insights from a youth perspective.

Speaking from a youth perspective, they reflected on their experiences during the event and shared key insights. The young co-author emphasised that we are ready to lead, but we need the right support, mentorship, and accessible resources to make a real difference. A major recommendation was the creation of a centralised directory where young people can easily find help with mental health, education, trauma and entrepreneurship.

The speech also highlighted the importance of building confidence in young entrepreneurs, expanding Mental Health First Aid programmes in schools, strengthening trust and dialogue with authorities and fostering early intervention and positive social networks. These reflections provide a practical blueprint for action, translating the ideas discussed at the conference into tangible steps to empower young people to thrive.

## Summary

The 2025 Youth Conference successfully brought together young people, community organisations and policymakers, creating a lively, participatory platform that put youth voices at the centre of discussions. Attendees actively shared experiences, learned from keynote speakers, and explored practical solutions across entrepreneurship, mental health, community safety and family engagement.

The conference highlighted the transformative potential of mentorship, creative engagement and accessible opportunities in helping young people overcome barriers, build confidence and take ownership of their futures. Mental health emerged as a major concern for young people, with calls for early intervention, resilience-building and the wider promotion of the Mental Health First Aid Programme to strengthen support for young people across London.

Roundtable discussions reinforced the importance of safe spaces, positive peer networks and culturally sensitive family engagement in preventing anti-social behaviour and fostering belonging. The event concluded with a shared commitment among all participants to translate dialogue into action, implement sustainable programmes and address systemic barriers.

This year's conference marks a significant step forward in fostering lasting partnerships, empowering young people and ensuring ongoing advocacy and support for youth wellbeing across London, setting the foundation for continued progress in breaking cycles of disadvantage.

## Appendices

### Agenda

11:15 AM - Arrival and Security

12:30 PM – 12:50 PM: Opening Remarks

12:00 PM – 12:30 PM: Lunch and Networking

Hosts, Natasha Irons MP, Kim Leadbeater MP, Toni Letts OBE and Cllr Dr Manju Shahul-Hameed

12:50 PM – 1:05 PM: Keynote Speech & Q&A: The Power of Entrepreneurship for Young People - Polly Dhaliwal, Enterprise Nation

1:05 PM – 1:15 PM: Talk from Stephen Akinsanya, Barrister

1:15 PM – 1:45 PM: Round Table: Exploring Personal Experiences and Breaking Barriers – All Participants including

Barclays, Chamber of Commerce, Natwest and Wates Group.

Discussion Topics:

1.Overcoming Educational Barriers   2. Promoting Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being  
3.Encouraging Alternatives to Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour   4.Cultivating Supportive and Positive Peer Networks.

1:45 PM – 2:05 PM: Feedback from the Round Table Discussion.

2:05 PM – 2:20 PM: Break & Group Photo

2:20 PM – 2:25 PM: Report Launch,1st Conference: Alima Qureshi, Head of Communities and Young People, Mayor of London's VRU; Dawn Butler MP.

2:25 PM – 2:35 PM: Dr. Jacqueline Phillips-Owen, SLaM (South London and Maudsley)

2:35 PM – 3:05 PM: Youth Panel: Voices of Lived Experience & Q&A

3:05 PM – 3:10 PM: First Youth Conference Report: Dr. Magna Aidoo & Guruom Pathak

3:10 PM – 3:30 PM: Closing Remarks and Reflection: Participants

### Attendees

◆ **Youth Development & Empowerment**

- **Prince's Trust** – Youth entrepreneurship and skills development
- **Managers Foundation** – Support for young leaders and future opportunities
- **Empower From Within** - Workshops, Music and Wellbeing for young creatives
- **Young Futures Hubs** initiative – Youth focused community support network
- **Future First** – Skills, employability, and education pathways
- **Streets of Growth** – Youth intervention, employability and skills development.

◆ **Mental Health & Wellbeing**

- **King's Maudsley Partnership** – Child and adolescent mental health services
- **Royals Charity** – Funding for the Schools Resilience Project
- **Elevated Minds CIC** – Mental health, identity, and leadership for young people
- **Champions for Change Well Being** – Mental health and wellbeing programmes for youth
- **South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust** – Mental health and substance misuse services provider

◆ **Community Engagement & Inclusion**

- **Second Wave** – Creative arts and youth engagement tackling social issues
- **Peabody** – Housing, community regeneration, and support services
- **South East London Chamber of Commerce** – Business-community partnerships
- **Greenwich – Metropolitan Police:** Community engagement, safety initiatives, and youth outreach programs
- **Tower Hamlets – Metropolitan Police:** Community engagement, safety initiatives, and youth outreach programs
- **Lewisham – Metropolitan Police:** Community engagement, safety initiatives, and youth outreach programs
- **Lambeth Council** – Community services, youth engagement and volunteering programs.
- **Tower Hamlets Council** – Community services, youth engagement and volunteering programs.
- **NatWest** – Community engagement, financial education, and volunteering initiatives

- **Barclays** – Community engagement, financial education, and volunteering initiatives
- **Chamber of Commerce** – Supporting local businesses, community initiatives, and networking opportunities

#### ◆ Education & Skills

- **Goldsmiths, University of London**– Higher education and research partnership
- **London Violence Reduction Unit** – Early intervention and school inclusion programmes
- **Enterprise Nation** – Helps entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses to grow
- **Wates Group** – Education, skills and community development through construction training, apprenticeships, and social value programmes.
- **CEO CIC** – Supporting the educational and skills development of vulnerable young people and adults (KS4, NEET, YOT, Ex-offenders)

## Discussion Topics Diagrams



