

# THRIVE & VIBE IMPACT REPORT

*Reflecting on our journey,  
Crafting our future.*

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# Programme Overview

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## Context

Black Thrive's Young Researchers programme, funded by Children in Need, is a co-produced wellbeing initiative designed to support the mental health of young Black and mixed heritage children in Lambeth. The programme, launched in 2022, involved 11 community researchers aged 8 to 13 who explored factors impacting the mental health and wellbeing of Black and mixed heritage children in the area.

The study employed the Tree of Life approach, a strengths-based tool rooted in narrative therapy, to explore key themes including identity, poverty, bullying, and feelings of safety. Key findings from the research revealed that poverty, homelessness, and racialised bullying in schools were the most significant factors affecting children's wellbeing.

Despite these challenges, the study also highlighted the importance of resilience, self-awareness, and bravery as powerful support mechanisms for protecting mental wellbeing, especially in cases where institutional support may be lacking. Using this information, our young researchers collaborated with us to co-produce a wellbeing programme that addressed the study's findings and their experiences gained throughout the programme.



This process involved assigning researchers to various departments within event and programme production, including finance, marketing, and curating.

The Thrive and Vibe Wellbeing Programme consisted of four impactful events: Glow Up, Level Up, The Actors Toolkit, and Rhythm & Rhymes. These events aimed to enhance mental health, personal growth, and community connection through fun, creative and educational activities for young people aged 8 – 18 years old. We aimed for all activities to be based in Lambeth, working closely with community organisations and businesses to bring them to life.

Our young researchers met weekly at Brixton Tate Library to discuss the workings of the programme, including the name, workshop themes, suggested facilitators, spaces, collaborators, and gift bag design.



# The Glow Up

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Black Thrive worked in collaboration with Black Girl Fest (BGF), a Black-led agency focusing on social exchanges, to produce Glow Up. A one-off event focused on encouraging young girls to talk about skin, hair and wellbeing whilst also building their self-worth.

Our young researchers have consistently highlighted the need for spaces where young people can learn about their hair, skin, and self, which would not only improve their confidence but also build their skill set. Our young researchers discussed internalised racism and how that seeps into our self-esteem, especially when discussing black hair, and natural styles such as 4C hair, locs and afros. This discussion led to conversations around the policing of hair in institutions such as schools, where young people regularly experience hair-based discrimination. One of our young researchers, who suffers from eczema, explained that young black children have little representation when it comes to skin disorders, but also highlighted 'eczema being most common in black children'. These conversations served as the foundation and catalyst for the Glow Up workshop, which directly challenged these detrimental narratives.



**Objective:** The workshop focused on self-care and worth, mindfulness, and personal empowerment.

**Activities:** A panel talk featuring SimplySayo, a comedian and poetry queen on social media, was facilitated by Zahara, one of Black Thrives Young's researchers. Sayo discussed her career and journey to becoming confident in herself amidst adversity. She emphasised how she used her community and beliefs to overcome the barriers. The participants asked questions about her journey and confidence when putting herself into the 'outside world' and took pictures with her.

Participants had the opportunity to learn how to care for their hair with an emphasis on afro hair textures courtesy of MCR Braiding, a teaching hair salon. This session was followed by a tutorial on braiding, giving the young people a chance to practice. The workshops were creative, and included activities such as making vision boards, affirmation cards and crocheting.

**Impact:** 45 young black and mixed heritage women in attendance between the ages of 8 and 16 years old. Over 75% of the young people in attendance came from Lambeth or neighbouring boroughs in Southwark. A parent explained, 'I wish we had this when I was growing up', when picking her daughter, which emphasised how impactful and needed tailored spaces are to the community. Young girls discussed leaving with a better understanding of how to care for their hair and the confidence to continue learning. And they had similar reflections about other activities, such as crochet making.

Watching the young girls create vision boards and discuss with each other what they wanted their boards to say was an eye-opener. Some shared their goals, whilst others used phrases and words of affirmation, giving us an insight into how they perceive themselves. Our participants were gifted goody bags containing hair products from Mielle Hair Care and OsoCurly – both Black-owned hair care brands. We also supplied combs, face masks, emery boards and other nail care products. We were able to provide them with mindful colouring sheets and affirmation stickers to leave with. The goody bags were a great way to ensure that the community we engaged left with tangible ways to encourage them to engage in self-care at home or in a personal space.



# The Level Up

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Providing a space for young people to be genuinely themselves, relax, and have fun was always a key highlight of the study and was essential to our young researchers. Safety in our community was a complex topic that arose, not just in physical spaces, but also in digital spaces. We recognised the importance of acknowledging and safeguarding these areas, as they often allow for discrimination and bullying to go unchecked. The Young Researchers also highlighted that gaming can be a tool that helps them better understand themselves and their mental health.

Young Black gamers frequently encounter racial slurs, microaggressions, and targeted harassment in online multiplayer games. These experiences can lead to feelings of isolation, shame, and a diminished sense of self-worth. The normalisation of racism in online spaces can exacerbate mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Some young gamers choose to mask their identities or avoid social interactions altogether to escape harassment.

The young researchers expressed that most adults think gaming is silly and take away consoles as a punishment, but reiterated that gaming, when cultivated in a safe space, can be a tool to improve mental health and wellbeing. Video games can serve as a source of relaxation and emotional resilience, helping players cope with anxiety or depression through immersive storytelling and gameplay mechanics. Gaming communities can foster friendships and connections that promote social belonging.

To address this, Black Thrive partnered with Esports Youth Club (EYC), a community organisation based in the heart of Brixton, which aims to provide young people with fun and engaging gaming sessions. EYC provided eight gaming sessions across Lambeth youth clubs, focusing on mental health and wellbeing.



**Objective:** Providing a space for young black and mixed heritage children to learn how gaming can be a safe, inclusive and fun space to find community whilst protecting themselves from harm.

**Activities:** Young people were given access to the latest gaming consoles, technology and insights into the gaming industry. In each workshop, participants had the chance to try out games primarily focused on promoting healthy wellbeing, while also being invited to participate in a gaming tournament that encourages positivity and healthy competition. Esports provided a mental health support resource to all participants. They facilitated focused discussions on how to engage in a safe and meaningful way, with signposting to external youth services for further help.

**Impact:** Esports have engaged 40 young people across Lambeth youth clubs, providing a comprehensive gaming session focused primarily on the theme of young people's mental health and wellbeing through video game play.

**BigKid Foundation:** BigKid, a youth and community organisation dedicated to ending youth violence, collaborated with Esports to host a mini-tournament using VR, where young people competed to claim the high score on Beatsaber, a music and rhythm-based game. The young people loved the session and particularly enjoyed the VR.

**CHIPS:** CHIPS, a community peace service in Angell Town, Brixton, provided a space for young people to discuss their relationships with gaming and mental health. The young people there all loved football, so they hosted an EAFC tournament as part of this and gave away prizes to two worthy winners, with everyone having a great time.

**Baytree Centre:** The Baytree Centre, an educational and social inclusion charity for women, hosted a girls-only session with 15 young girls. "The girls really enjoyed last week's session, and Caprice did a wonderful job engaging them", came from the youth workers and staff at The Baytree Centre.

Alongside all of this, Esports will continue to host three upcoming sessions within the community, targeting more obscure community spaces, such as places of faith and alternative education centres, to engage an additional 40 young people.





Access to acting and drama lessons can have a profound impact on young Black children, fostering creativity, emotional wellbeing, and social development.

Drama provides a safe space for self-expression, allowing young Black children to explore their emotions, identities, and cultural heritage. This is particularly important for marginalised groups who may feel overlooked in mainstream narratives. Through storytelling and character development, they can share their unique perspectives and celebrate their culture, fostering a sense of pride and self-worth. Acting classes expose children to stories that reflect their experiences while also challenging stereotypes. This representation helps them see themselves in a positive light, affirming their value and potential in a world where they might otherwise feel invisible or undervalued, which promotes self-empowerment and a stronger sense of identity.

Some of our young researchers discussed the importance of being able to express themselves freely. Spending most of their time at home or within an educational setting can be restrictive at times, limiting different ways of learning and character building. Therefore, the ability to have creative freedom is cathartic for young people, highlighting the importance of play and remaining childlike in the way we view the world. This is especially true for young black kids, who adults frequently adultify, and for those who, due to personal struggles, are forced to mature from an early age as a means of survival.

The Actor's Toolkit was facilitated by professional actors, Tom Moutchi and Demmy Ladipo. Tom and Demz are Black actors who used social media to share comedic skits about relatable and culturally appropriate scenarios in their households, which has now led them to be professional actors engaging in contemporary theatre and screen projects. The importance of learning being shared by young, successful black men was crucial for the acting workshop, as they serve as leading examples of the possibilities that come from engaging with acting and drama.





The young people all shared their insights in the space. Those who were nervous or anxious later became comfortable challenging themselves in front of their peers.

**Objective:** To use drama as a tool to improve the wellbeing of children in Lambeth, fostering self-expression, confidence, and emotional awareness.

**Activities:** The facilitators used icebreakers to help participants feel comfortable in the space, before employing a series of game-style activities to build emotional and self-awareness. Examples include 'being still', in the space and playing a salesperson to encourage belief, acceptance and confidence in self. Each participant received feedback from the group after each activity, and the session ended with a Q&A session with the actors about their journey, advice and plans.

**Impact:** 14 young people participated in this session, spanning an age range of 12–19 years old. There was a mix of young people from Lambeth and outside, including neighbouring boroughs such as Southwark and Greenwich.



The participants spent time collaborating and improvising, which helped build confidence and improve communication skills. Performing in front of others can reduce self-consciousness and increase self-esteem, equipping them with tools to navigate social interactions effectively. Initially, some were nervous because putting themselves in the spotlight can be uncomfortable, but being supported by the facilitators and their peers in the space allowed them to persevere through the challenge.

Throughout the day, it was amazing to see the participants come out of their shells, share their joy and laughter with the rest of the room and be vulnerable in ways they hadn't before.

***'I really enjoyed today's session, I feel like I learnt so much' - Black boy aged 13***

***'I don't know what I was expecting, outside of normal drama games but the activities were really good' - Black boy, aged, 18***

***'Normally you have to pay to attend these things, and paying for me and my sister can be a lot so I'm glad it was free and I did it with her' - Black girl aged 14***

All participants said they would come regularly to sessions and would love to hear more about them.



# Rhythm & Rhymes

When building the programme, we thought deeply with the young researchers on how to encourage emotional expression in a positive and thought-provoking way. Lyrics have always been a part of the young researchers, whether responding to a question with song lyrics or entering a session singing. It has been a staple in providing a relatable and safe space for them to work in.

Journaling and poetry were the two main ideas that came from these discussions. Poetry provides a safe space for children to process trauma, articulate their emotions, and heal from experiences of systemic racism or personal struggles. It enables them to explore their identities and confront societal injustices constructively.

Writing poetry can help children cope with feelings of fear, anger, or sadness, serving as a therapeutic outlet that promotes emotional growth. Black children can reclaim their narratives and challenge the stereotypes associated with them. Through creative expression, they can affirm their identities and celebrate their culture, promoting self-confidence and pride. Engaging with poetry can improve mental health by reducing stress, enhancing creativity, and encouraging reflection. It offers a form of escapism while also fostering empathy through shared stories.

We were particularly keen to work on these sessions with a facilitator or host organisation that reflect the young people they would be engaging. It's vital that young black children feel free to express themselves in their 'own language', and are led in these spaces by people they can trust or at least relate to.

Poetic Unity CIC are a black-led charity that supports creative expression through the joys of poetry, focusing on improving mental health and wellbeing. Creativity is at the heart of the work we do, so working with Poetic Unity was an exciting opportunity. Young people spend a significant amount of their time in school, so we recognised it would be essential to deliver an activity within the school setting. We partnered with them to do exactly that.

**Objective:** Empower young participants through creative expression using poetry. Participants understand the tools they can use to discuss more vulnerable topics and provide a comfortable space to share their thoughts on these topics.

**Activities:** Games and Icebreakers that make young people feel comfortable expressing themselves in front of their peers. Followed by collaborative and insightful discussions on mental health and wellbeing, identity and purpose and a guided writing session to write their poems.



I know who I am  
 But do you?  
 I know I can do maths  
 I know I'm good at science  
 So what about me makes you question if it's true?  
 Is it where my parents are from  
 The way I talk or my gender  
 I prove again and again that I can do things  
 But to you I'm never a contender  
 I'm used to it now  
 I was born under the pressure  
 2 siblings forever successful  
 But I was taught to fight, always be better  
~~You have to work 10x harder~~  
 100% never enough  
 Cuz that makes means the best would have enough  
 And I should've asked for harder stuff  
 You see expectation followed me my whole life  
 So silly boys are no bother  
 But I can't be asked with these feelings  
 Cuz I know who I am  
 Why don't you?

Solitary  
 I can vibe alone,  
 I have outgrown  
 Solitude is my power  
 Life's my greatest desire  
 Sometimes being alone is my best company  
 That feeling of going somewhere  
 Unaccompanied  
 You can't achieve don't let no one  
 Decide  
 Being alone, this is comfort for me

They say be yourself  
 But what does being yourself mean.  
 When you want to express yourself  
 but hide behind a smile  
 when you need to cry and let it  
 all out, but you can't so bottle it  
 up and keep it deep inside.  
 When you want to give your opinion  
 but scared of rejection,  
 I want to release it all but the  
 opinions around me make it hard  
 make it scary make it uncomfortable  
 to be myself.

## Poems from a Year 8 Class session



### Impact:

Poetic Unity visited local schools and educational centres in Lambeth, including The Norwood High School and Phoenix Place. Through this initiative, they were able to support a total of 65 students.

The Norwood School is a co-education community school based in West Norwood, Lambeth, for young people aged 11-18 years old, with a majority of black and mixed heritage backgrounds.

Phoenix Place is a Not-for-Profit specialist school for girls with social, emotional, mental health needs, SEN, attachment difficulties and/or additional complex needs. Most young people have EHCPs (Educational Health Care Plans) and have been out of mainstream education for a sustained period, which can lead to a negative outlook on education and severely impact their self-esteem and confidence in everyday life.

Poetic Unity facilitators were able to create a safe space for sharing personal thoughts and ideas on their wellbeing. In each session, over 90% of young people said they've experienced anxiety or depression, and facilitators identified those who would need further support. The writing sessions produced in-depth and deeply personal work that truly resonated with the mental state of some of the young people. Some of the young people chose to perform their poetry at the end of the workshop for their peers and teachers.

# Success Stories

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The Thrive and Vibe Wellbeing Programme, co-produced by Black Thrive's Young Researchers, has demonstrated a significant positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young Black and mixed-heritage children in Lambeth. Through a series of four impactful events—Glow Up, Level Up, The Actors Toolkit, and Rhythm & Rhymes—the programme addressed critical issues such as identity, self-esteem, and community safety.

The programme's effectiveness is evident in the increased confidence, self-expression, and emotional awareness observed among participants. The events provided safe and inclusive spaces for young people to explore their identities, share their experiences, and develop coping mechanisms for challenges like racialised bullying and discrimination. The positive feedback from participants and parents underscores the need for tailored programmes that cater to the unique needs of Black youth in Lambeth.



## Future Plans

To build on the success of the Thrive and Vibe programme, plans should focus on:

**Expanding Reach:** Extending the program to more community spaces, such as places of faith and alternative education centres, to engage a wider audience.

**Sustaining Impact:** Implementing follow-up sessions and resources to ensure the long-term impact of the program on participants' mental health and wellbeing.

**Enhancing Partnerships:** Strengthening collaborations with community organisations and businesses to provide diverse opportunities and support for young people.

**Continued Co-production:** Maintaining the co-production approach, involving young researchers in the planning and implementation of future initiatives to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

By continuing to prioritise the voices and experiences of young Black and mixed-heritage children, the Thrive and Vibe program can continue to promote positive mental health outcomes and foster a sense of belonging and empowerment within the community.



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