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# YOUTH CONFERENCE 2021



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The **US CHARITABLE TRUST** is a registered charity founded in 2012 (CN 1147089). We are based in Harlesden, London and work with 220 marginalised ‘at-risk’ 11-18 year olds a year. We run after-school and holiday programs designed to enrich our participants lives while at school, improve educational attainment and to make sure they are prepared and supported to leave school. Our activities focus on personal development, cultural experiences and introduction to employment/education possibilities and provide responsive tailored support to individuals.

## YOUTH CONFERENCE JUNE 2021

We wanted the chance to give our young people a voice, to create a space where they could share their thoughts with us; their hopes, fears and dreams.

We also wanted to find out how we could help. Where do they see themselves in five years’ time and what support do they need to get there? How do they want to be described? How has the pandemic affected them and their families?

The Conference was held at Newman Catholic College, Brent and ran over two days, divided by gender for discussion of some sensitive subjects. Our participants were aged 16-19. All of them use English as an Additional Language (“EAL”).

We explored the subjects in different sessions led by experienced practitioners. We took detailed notes of discussion, filmed sections with consent and also received a more detailed questionnaire from each student for data. This report summarises what we found out:



## IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

The term **BAME**, though widely used, has been called lazy and unspecific. But how does it make people feel? How would they prefer to be described?

Georgina Bednar (No Ordinary Experience) lead this session and began with exploring what the students felt described them, what made up their identity:

'sister' 'brother' 'Muslim' 'student' 'Hindu' 'Somalian' 'African' were some of the answers they offered.

We then looked at how they felt if some labels were taken away. They felt incomplete, not them, parts were missing...

We then looked at the term **BAME** and in small discussion groups explored which terms felt empowering and which felt negative.

Here are some responses to being described as 'minority ethnic', it makes me feel.....

'disrespected'

'invisible'

'weaker'

'not present'

"I hate the adjective 'disadvantaged', it makes me feel like there is something wrong with me. There isn't anything wrong, I just have a different story to some people. Doesn't mean people should call me disadvantaged, it's like pointing a finger straight at me".

"**BAME** reduces us to 4 letters. It strips us of our identity, it's like summarising human kind into only 4 categories. It does not allow us to be anything else".

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When asked which description of themselves they preferred the responses were CLEAR

'Indian  
Hindu,  
family name'

'Muslim  
Somalian,  
African'

'Italian,  
Moroccan,  
Muslim'

These terms made them feel proud, confident, **RESPECTED**, **HEARD**, **MULTICULTURAL** and **DIVERSE**.

Our students are from: India, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Romania, Italy, Somalia, Brazil, Poland, Indonesia, Portugal,

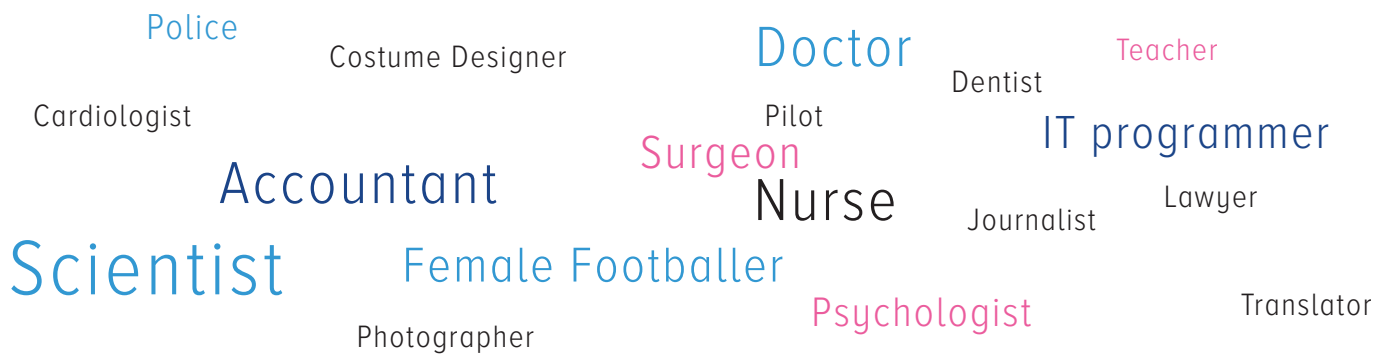
This has led us an organisation to consider how we use administrative labels. Sometimes in the constrained space of a funding application we can't use all the different words we would like, but we want to develop a clear message to carry on our website to explain who our students are, and we urge other organisations to do the same. We will seek to move away from an over simplified crude labelling of all that are 'non-white'.



## CAREERS AND ASPIRATIONS

Marlon Edwards and Anita Whittaker led the sessions on Careers and aspirations. We were blown away by the ambition and clear focus of our students. Despite many having experienced broken education and 100% have English as an Additional Language (EAL), they aim high.

They told us they want to be:



Though many knew what they wanted to do when they leave school, the route there was less clear.



25% said they were prepared and excited to leave school.

65% said they needed help with beginning a training or job search

10% said they were not confident at all about their prospects.

75% said they needed help with CV writing.

60% said they needed help with beginning a job search.

60% said they'd like to do practise interviews.

30% said they don't know how to write an application letter

They said

'I don't have the vocabulary for interviews'      'I'm no good at writing CVs'  
'I have no idea about CVs'      'I don't have one (CV) but really need one'  
I'm no good at it' (interviews).

## MENTAL HEALTH

Endy Mackay and Angelina Elliot led our sessions on Mental Health and encouraged the students to explore a subject which is often difficult to talk about. After an introduction in the large group, we split up in to break-out groups, each with an experienced staff member to explore certain aspects further.

Most of the students said they would speak to friends before adults if they had a problem or were feeling down. Many cited not wanting to cause their parents stress or worry by sharing their problems, some cited not wanting to get in trouble.

Just under 50% said they didn't know where to access mental health support, many more said they didn't know you could receive anonymous support.

**60%** described their mental health as 'generally good'.

**36%** said they 'have bad days'.

**4%** said they were unhappy all the time.

**75%** of the young people said the pandemic had made their mental health worse with anxiety and loneliness the most common areas of concern. They also said that they worried about the virus and loved ones getting ill or dying. They found learning online very hard and stressful, particularly as they have English as an Additional Language.

**20%** said they knew friends who had self-harmed recently.

Many of the young people described the move to the UK as stressful and that it affected their mental health. They described the shock of culture, either losing or gaining freedom on arriving in the UK. Some girls told us of the loss of freedom from moving from an Indian village, where they could wander relatively freely, to the confines of a big city. They stressed that their coping strategies were different in the UK and they were still adjusting.

"I feel vulnerable when I think about my life back in Morocco. Morocco was my home, I miss it every day"

"I felt vulnerable when my best friend's dad passed away, I did not know how to help".

How do you feel?

"Angry, I did not sleep well last night and it's making me angry at myself and everyone else".

"Calm, nothing is bothering me today".

"Down, I don't know how to get back up sometimes, especially when I wake up in the mornings".

"Overwhelmed, I have been feeling this way since I came to the UK".

We run workshops in small groups with trained professionals to deal with mental health, develop coping strategies and provide support for specific situations. We work with schools, youth services and referrals to support our young people and improve well-being.

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## RELATIONSHIPS AND CONSENT

These sessions, which were divided by gender, were led by Anita Whittaker and Marlon James-Edwards, who had worked with many of the students before and created a safe and private space to discuss personal issues.

Anita focused on empowering the girls to have positive relationships in their lives, be that with a friend, partner, husband or family. Marlon talked with the boys about porn and sexual expectations.

We discussed communication being key to relationships and consent, and how sometimes you need to listen, sometimes to talk. We explore the difference between talking 'at' and 'with'.

Consent was not a word many of them immediately identified, possibly due to language barriers, but 100% of the girls reported after the session that they understood consent and would discuss it with their friends. The boys agreed it was important to be aware of the serious implications of consent in many different situations.

Anita encouraged the young women to speak out if anything happens to them, for their own safety and to encourage others. They practised saying 'NO' and 'STOP' in loud voices.

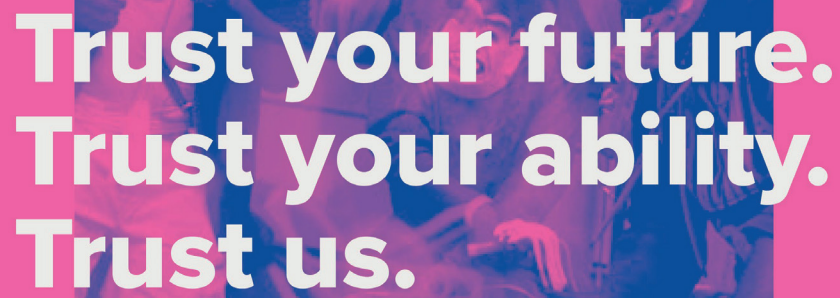
This area is new to the [US CHARITABLE TRUST](#), but the demand for workshops and information to support young people has come from our students. We are currently working with professional groups and organisations to design responsive support and information.



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**Trust your future.  
Trust your ability.  
Trust us.**

## STAFF STATEMENTS

“For some of the group this discussion was entirely new and it felt like we were just opening up the lid. For others, they were more engaged with their thoughts on their identity in relation to their position as a young person and how this interacted with their identity from a different culture being in the UK... I think at times the conversations were opening students up to being vulnerable and hearing similar ideas shared by their peers gave them confidence to speak up about experiences of racism and space to consider the most important aspects of themselves. overall it was a rich workshop on both days and it really felt like we turned on some metaphorical light bulbs!” Georgina Bednar – (No Ordinary Experience)

“I thought the event being separated by gender was a great help when addressing the topics. I think it allowed them to be more vocal and openly contribute to the session - (in the boys session, which I attended.) Some of the topics really need more time to really drive the objective but I think it was a great start.”

Angelina Elliot

“There was an intimate and informal feel to the day which I think was helped by the lunch arrangements, which allowed participants, guest speakers and organisers to serve, sit and eat together. This created a sense of egalitarianism and an environment that differs greatly from school. It broke down barriers and any perceived hierarchy, and allowed us all to enjoy healthy food and healthy conversation together.”

Endy Mckay





