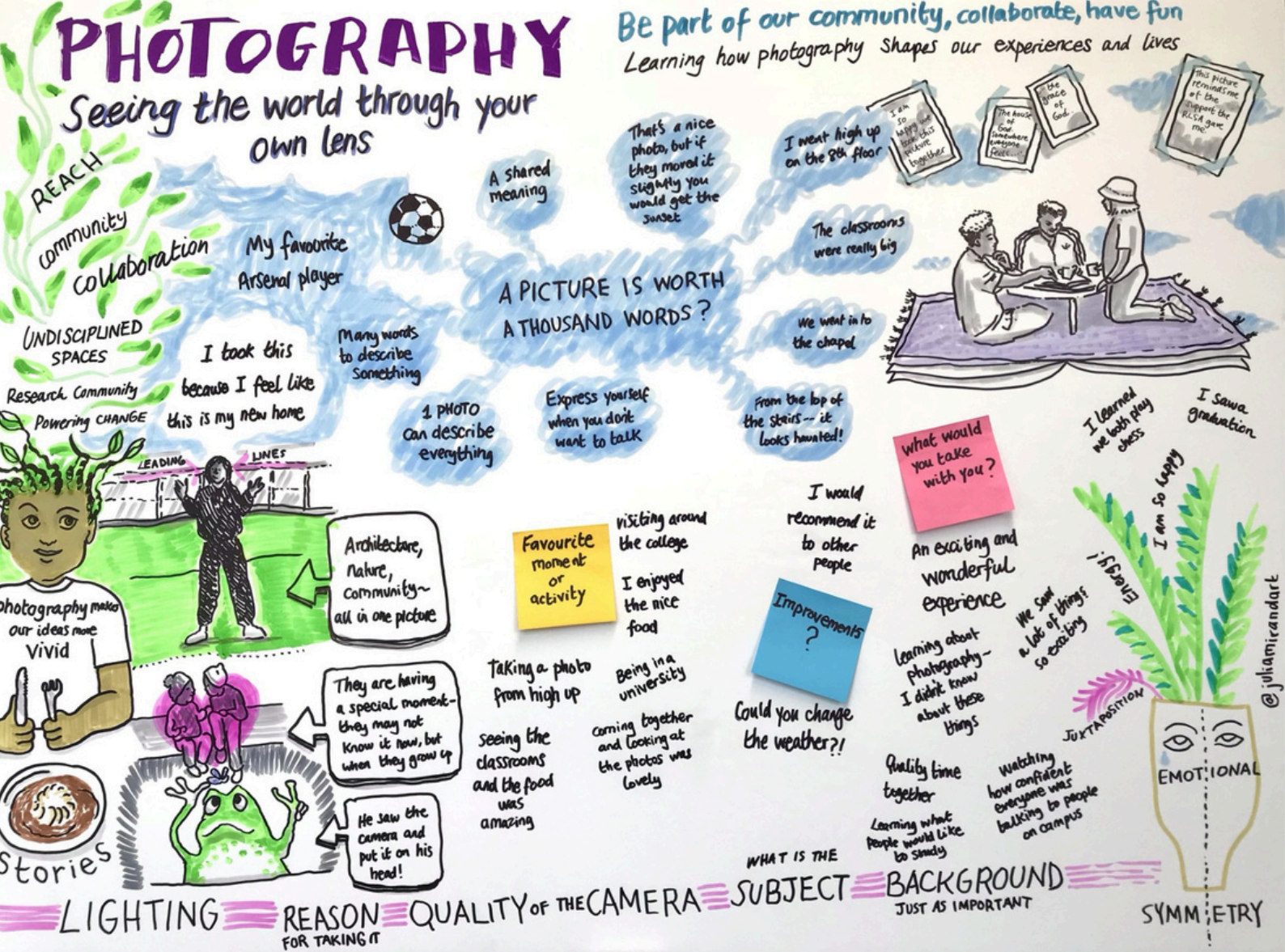

Building Connections Photography Workshop

in collaboration with the Da'aro Youth Project,
the South London Refugee Association, and the
Young Foundation



August 2024



Project Summary

Our project was a collaboration with the Da'aro Youth Project (DYP) and the South London Refugee Association (SLRA). The DYP is a community-led organisation that provides support services to young refugees and asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa. The SLRA is a frontline organisation which provides advice and support to refugees and other migrants in south London. The DYP and SLRA run regular programming for young people (16-25-year-olds) in their communities.

Our collaboration culminated in a photography workshop on 1st August, 2024 in the REACH Space at King's College London (KCL).

Ten young people from the DYP and SLRA communities participated in a photography workshop centred around connection on 1st August, 2024. The workshop included dialogues on connection, joy, and hope, photography demos, opportunities for youth participants to explore KCL campus with cameras, young people sharing their photos, and the creation of a community scrapbook.

“I enjoyed coming to university for the first time, seeing the classrooms, and the food was amazing” -youth participant

The project had four primary aims:

1. Foster connection among youth participants by providing them with an opportunity to reflect on sources of connection, joy, and hope in their life.
2. Equip participants with storytelling and photography skills.
3. Introduce participants to King's College London.
4. Create a community scrapbook showcasing photos taken by participants. The scrapbook will serve as a source of guidance, hope, and inspiration for other young people navigating similar journeys.

Road to the Project

The idea for a storytelling-centred workshop first emerged as part of KCL's Undisciplined Spaces programme. This project was inspired by a discussion our group had early on in the program about the power of oral and visual storytelling as a force for connection.

Through subsequent dialogue, we realised that a common thread throughout our individual work was its focus on youth empowerment and from this realisation came the idea for a youth storytelling event.

Our team first reached out to the SLRA in March 2024. After meeting with staff members, we were connected with the youth department at the SLRA as well as the DYP. While our team was committed to developing an event around storytelling and young people, we wanted to ensure there was enough openness in our plans so as to create opportunities for co-creation with our community partners. During discussions with our community partners, a clear vision for the event began to emerge. We decided to co-create a photography workshop focused on the theme of connection to be held on the KCL campus. Such an event would align with our community partner's goal of fostering a sense of support within their communities and would present the young people with an opportunity to explore a part of London they might not otherwise be introduced to.

“I enjoyed seeing how encouraged the young people were about life in university and capturing the moments through the camera” -staff member from community partner

Our community partners brought the idea to their youth clubs to see whether or not there was interest. Sure enough, the young people seemed very excited about photography and the opportunity to explore KCL.

Once we established a shared vision and chose the date of 1st August for the event, meetings were held to discuss logistics and safeguarding procedures. By the time 1st August arrived, our team was well-prepared to welcome the young people and staff members onto the KCL campus.

What happened?

The event began with an introduction of our project and ourselves to the young people. This was followed by a round of introductions by participants and questions from them. The session properly started with an icebreaker on favourite dishes. Young people were asked to pair up with peers they did not know well, find out about each other's favourite dish, and then share a photo of that dish with the rest of the group.

This icebreaker was chosen to provide an accessible way for the young people who were unfamiliar with each other to feel more at ease interacting, find common ground, and start building connections. As participants shared their favourite dishes, Fufu emerged as a shared favourite, sparking a lively conversation on the similarities and variations in how it is prepared and served across participants' cultures and home regions.



Image of the Miro Board our team used for brainstorming, taking notes, and assigning responsibilities.

We then asked the young people to share photos they had taken or found on the internet that responded to prompts around the theme of connection, joy, and hope. Many shared photos of London and trips around the United Kingdom, showcasing their growing connection to their new home. The youth club organised by our community partners' and religious symbols featured in many photos. These photos represented spaces where the young people felt safe, supported, and connected – both to their culture and identity and to others in their community.

Engaging in or watching sports and other physical activities emerged as a prominent source of joy for the young people, as reflected in the images they shared. Their hope and excitement for the future were expressed through photos related to college and educational pursuits, and pictures of places they wished to visit.



photography workshop ~ food chat 01-08-24
Undisciplined Spaces at REACH, KCL

Julia Miranda

We then broke for lunch on the KCL campus. While the young people had lunch, we printed out the photos they shared.

After a brief conversation about the photos and their reasons for sharing them, our team gave a presentation about photography composition and demonstrated how to use the cameras. Participants then had an opportunity to apply their new photography knowledge and explore the KCL campus in small groups. Guided by facilitators, the young people explored Bush House, the Strand building, and Somerset House with instant cameras provided by our team.

This was certainly the highlight of the day. The young people were excited to use the cameras and explore the university campus. Serendipitously, there was a graduation event occurring on the day of our workshop

The young people were keen on taking photos of the graduates and each other.

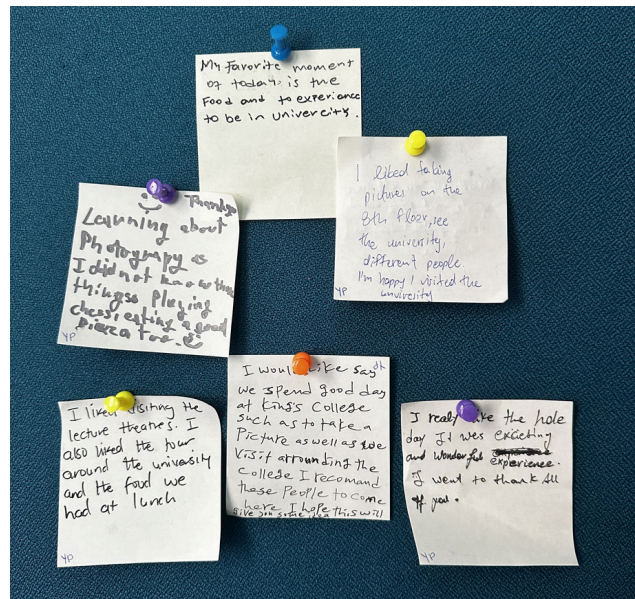
Our group came back together to share the photos and reflect on the day. As a final activity, the young people were given the chance to add whichever photos they wanted to the community scrapbook. All of the young people chose to keep a few of their photos—especially the photos of each other—and add others to the community scrapbook. Captions and illustrations were also added to the scrapbook. At the end of the workshop, staff members from the DYP and SLRA took the scrapbook with them to use as a resource for future youth club events. Ultimately, the workshop was a day of new experiences, connections, learning, and fun.

Impact

The youth participants were asked to write down what their favourite part of the day was as part of the evaluation our team conducted. Several participants specifically mentioned that being at a university, exploring classrooms, seeing the graduates, and eating on campus was a particularly memorable experience for them. For many of the young people, the workshop was the first time they had ever been to a university campus.

In addition to providing an opportunity to introduce the young people to university, the workshop proved to be a way to get them more comfortable taking photos. Some young people noted that they learned a lot about photography and best practices in their evaluation responses. When exploring KCL, there were moments when the young people demonstrated courage and imagination—whether it was by going up to strangers to ask if they could take their picture or by taking unique images (i.e. flights of stairs from above, drink glasses left on a terrace ledge, ceiling paintings in KCL chapel, etc.).

The workshop's theme of connection also resonated strongly, as evidenced by feedback from both young people and staff. Several young people highlighted how much they enjoyed spending time together and learning more about each other, sharing lighthearted moments, and meeting new people at King's. This connection was captured in the numerous photographs they took of and with each other, as well as with staff members and facilitators.



Post-it notes from participants detailing their favourite part of the day

Staff members shared that they appreciated having the opportunity to spend quality time with the young people, and valued learning more about them through their remarks about their future aspirations throughout the workshop. A heartening example of connection within the workshop was that of a young person who started off seeming disengaged and reluctant to join the photo-taking activity. However, with their small group's encouragement, they quickly became one of the most enthusiastic photographers, eagerly capturing joyful moments with everyone in their group, and stating how happy they were to have made new friends.

Making an impact beyond the six hours we spent with the young people was incredibly important to our team. The events of the day were captured by a live illustrator and these visuals were shared with community partners. The community scrapbook created at the end of the workshop will serve as a way to share the event with other young people at SLRA and DYP's youth club, and potentially spark their curiosity.



"A picture is worth a thousand words."



Slides from our team's presentation on photography

At the end of the event, we gave staff a Kodak instant camera and printer so that they could do subsequent photography activities during their regular youth club meetings. The hope is that the youth club will continue adding to the community scrapbook.

What We Learned

The workshop was an incredible learning opportunity for our team. We were particularly humbled by how openly and honestly our community partners shared feedback with us before, during, and after the event. At one point during the workshop, a staff member from our community partner asked our team if we could move more quickly into the portion of the day where the young people had the opportunity to take photos.

"I liked visiting the lecture theatres. I also liked the tour around the university"- youth participant

The dialogue and discussion portions of the workshop proved to be challenging as a result of language barriers. Following the guidance of our community partners, we decided to skip a dialogue activity to create more time for photo-taking. This proved to be a pivotal decision in making the day a success. From this experience, our team learned the importance of leveraging the expertise of community partners and adapting to the needs of participants. Our team intends on taking these lessons with us as we continue to develop community-oriented events.

"Coming together and seeing the photos was lovely"- staff member from community partner