

**GLOBAL  
LEARNING  
LONDON**




**Creative Communities – Active Citizenship  
Resource for Parents and Carers**

*Date Published: July 2021*

*Last Updated: October 2021*



*"Anatomix graffiti, Tower Hamlets Cemetery" by duncan is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0*



Have you ever seen something that bothers you but you weren't too sure how you could change it? Have you ever wanted to volunteer at your kid's school or at your local faith centre, but weren't too sure where to start? Or have you felt that you want to connect with people and learn new skills, but haven't found the time or the opportunities?

This resource will help you to understand how to be an active citizen. It will explore what this means and help you to help others in your local community. You will find ways to identify lots of opportunities to support and connect with local organisations, people and initiatives.

Three themes are addressed in detail - Climate Change, Consumer Choices and Community Connections - all at a personal level, locally and through global interconnections.



## What is Active Citizenship?

When you hear the term 'active citizen', what comes to mind? Jot down two or three words.

There has been a lot of research around what it means to be an active citizen, but for the purposes of this resource, we will define it broadly as:

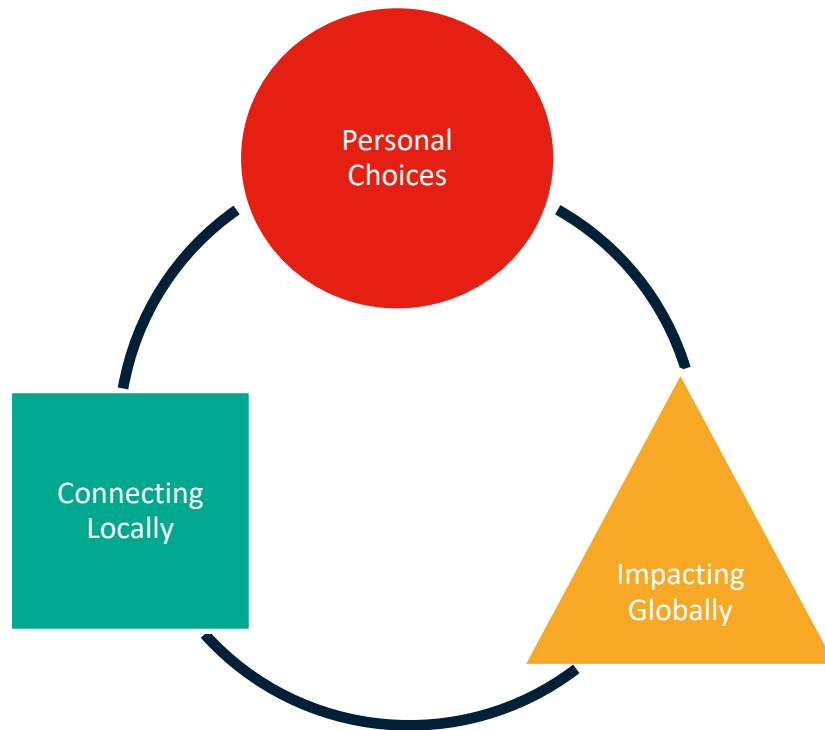
*A person who seeks to create positive change  
in the world around them.*

Anyone can be an active citizen, you don't need any specific skills, experience or knowledge- only a willingness to create positive change in your community. Active citizenship can range from being a good neighbour to initiating a community clean-up at your local park. Active citizenship could be speaking to a friend about a local issue that is important to you or writing to your local MP about it. There is a whole spectrum of activities, new things to learn and different levels of commitment to consider when you choose to be an active citizen.



Image: [Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets](#) and [Crisis UK](#)

We live in an interconnected world and that is why as an active citizen, every informed and intentional choice you make will lead to a positive impact for yourself, your local community and the global community too.



## Personal Responsibility

It is important to recognise the impact we make through our personal choices. This could be voting for your school governor or at your local elections, learning about a cause or issue that is important to you or making more informed choices when buying.

## Local Connections

By connecting with our local communities - through school, local council or faith centre - we are able to work collectively with others to bring about positive social change locally. You can find out more about local organisations and how to get involved through your [local council website](#), your [local library](#) and your school newsletter.



## Global Justice

As an active citizen, we should think about what is happening in different parts of the world and how our actions can have a direct effect on those thousands of miles away.



*Image: Taken in Commercial Road, Tower Hamlets*





## Why Should I Be An Active Citizen?

Everyone will have their own rationale and reasoning for being an active citizen, but here are a few reasons that may help you understand why it's important for all of us to recognise the duty we have to make this world a better place.

### Stewardship

This world provides us with the most important things we need for our survival. In turn, we as citizens of this world have a duty to do what we can to look after it, nurture it, protect it and work towards creating balance.

### Connected community

Active citizenship gives us an opportunity to meet and connect with like-minded people in our local communities and work together to make it better.

### Skills development

There are so many ways that you can be an active citizen and this gives you a chance to develop your skills and learn new skills too. It might be gardening or cycling, or even organising an event, creating posters, project management, fundraising, learning effective ways to use social media, and the list goes on.



## How Can I Be An Active Citizen?

Becoming an active citizen pushes us to empower ourselves and to empower others. As an active citizen you can give as much or as little time to a cause that is important to you.

In this section, we will be looking at 5 steps that you can take to begin your journey as an active citizen - through this you may realise that you have been an active citizen for a long time!

### 5 Steps to be Active Citizens

#### 1. **Think about your everyday choices.**

Set a timer for 1 minute, close your eyes and think about all the choices you have made today. The clothes that you wear, the shop you bought your groceries from, how you took your children to school, the people you connect with...etc.

You made a lot of choices today, didn't you? Imagine if our daily choices were made with the intention to make our community and world better.

- ▲ Who made my clothes and how much were they paid?
- ▲ Is it right for me to eat caged hen eggs?
- ▲ Could I walk the kids to school a few days a week?
- ▲ Am I connecting with people from my community? How can I make a difference?

#### 2. **Brainstorm what is important to you.**

When you start thinking about all the choices you have to make on a daily basis, you might feel like you don't know where to start. In these moments, think about what is important to you and your family. What are you already doing? What are you passionate about? What concerns you? What do you want to be able to change or impact?

Begin with choosing 1 or 2 points to focus on and think about the different ways you could impact or change that as a family. It might be that you choose to stop doing something or that you actively start something new.

#### 3. **Learn more about the impact you can make.**

The more we learn about the choices we make on a daily basis- the better choices we will be able to make. But we have to do the research and there are so many organisations working to bring us up-to-date and important information to help us make these informed



choices. You can check out the [Ethical Consumer](#) for advice on choices we make as consumers.

Please bear in mind that when making informed choices, it is really important that we are accessing information from trusted sources. Here is a video on [how to spot fake news](#).

**4. Stepping out of your comfort zone.**

Being an active citizen may mean that you have to take some steps out of your comfort zone. This will look different for each person, it could be speaking to a friend about what you've learnt, visiting your local community centre, joining a local group or [even writing to your local MP](#). Or you might be like Rahima who would often see a group of mums speaking outside the school, one day she decided that she would walk up to them and ask them if they wanted to continue their chat while walking in the park. This has turned into a regular morning walk for mums after school drop-offs. Rahima had to take a big step out of her comfort zone, but the impact of that one step has been significant. There are lots of [walking groups in Tower Hamlets](#) that you can join, or maybe you could set up your own one.

**5. Finding the right people/organisations**

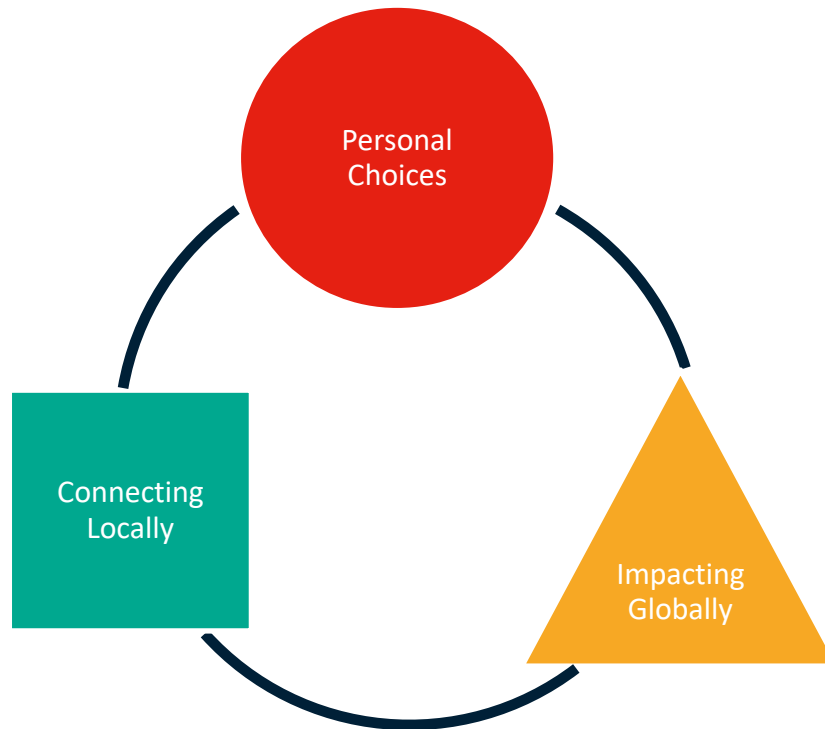
Always remember that you are not alone in wanting to make the world a better place. There are local organisations and people who might be a few steps ahead of you in the journey - and connecting with them, even if it is for a chat, can really help you to realise the importance of your role as an active citizen. You can contact your [local volunteering centre](#) or check out your [local council website](#) to see what is going on in the area.

Through these 5 steps you may find new interests, make new friends or start a new hobby - but remember that being an active citizen is about creating positive change in the world around you. What positive actions have you taken by following these steps? Share some of the new things that you learn and do on your social media or with your friends and family.

We would love to hear about what you are doing too, so do tag us on your posts!  
We are @GLLSpace on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).



## What Can I Do As An Active Citizen?



We mentioned at the beginning of this resource that everything in our lives and around us, is interconnected. This is why it is so important to be more intentional with our choices and decisions.

In this section, we will focus on becoming an active citizen within 3 very broad and connected areas and what we can do to make changes in our home, in our localities and globally too. The 3 areas we will focus on, are:

1. **Climate Change**
2. **Consumer Choices**
3. **Community Connections**

There is so much that we can do within each of the above areas, and we are sure that you are already doing what you can. There are many reason *why* these 3 areas are important, here are some reasons why, and maybe you can think of more:

- ▲ The United Nations introduced the Global Goals in 2015 which made it an obligation on all countries to enable their citizens to take action on climate change and become more informed consumers. You can learn more about the Global Goals through this [link](#).

- ▲ Building connected, stronger and more resilient communities is vital for knowledge sharing and creating innovative solutions.
- ▲ Both local and national governments have ensured that there are schemes, laws and opportunities for citizens, organisations and businesses to make a positive impact in all 3 areas. For example, reducing use of supermarket plastic bags, recycling schemes, Fairtrade labelling, and food waste projects, to name but a few.



Next, we will be looking at how we can impact each area; within our homes, locally and globally. We will also be sharing ideas and stories from Tower Hamlets of how parents, schools and activists have started to create positive change collectively.

# Climate Change

## Personal Choices

Within our households we can make simple changes to help combat climate change. When we think about what we can do at home - the first thing that may come to mind is **recycling**. If you are recycling as much as you can, that's brilliant. You may have also seen posters or labels which mention Reuse and Reduce too. We're sure that you have had one of your little one's searching through your recycling pile to find the perfect cardboard box for their next invention! Reusing and repurposing jam jars, shoe boxes or wrapping paper is just one of the ways we could be reducing our carbon footprint<sup>1</sup>. This [BBC website](#) has lots of ideas for kids to reuse recyclable items at home. Or your child may wish to work towards a [Green Blue Peter Badge](#).

The choices we make within our homes play a key role in our fight against climate change and some of the choices or changes we make might even feel minimal, but the impact is significant. Here are just some of the areas within which we can be making an impact on climate change at home - and questions that we can ask ourselves when reflecting on what we do, what we can do and how we can positively impact others too.



<sup>1</sup> The amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere because of the activities of an individual, organisation, or community.

You can find lots of ideas on what you can do at home by completing this carbon footprint calculator questionnaire on the [WWF Footprint website](#) and you could make a pledge on what you will change at home with the [Climate Coalition](#).

## Connecting Locally



Image: [Oitij-Jo](#)

One of the key elements of active citizenship is to connect with local communities and create positive change in our localities. Refer back to the *5 Steps to be Active Citizens*, do you remember what you wrote about what is important to you? This list will help you better understand where you may like to start connecting locally. You can also think about what you are doing at home and reflect on how this can extend further. For example, using social media to share upcycling projects that you and your children have been doing together.

When you feel ready to step out of your comfort zone and find the right organisations and people, there are many different types of groups and communities that have grown in Tower Hamlets, through support from the council and from the grassroots.

When connecting locally find out what is already happening in your area. [Friends of the Earth](#) have great tips and advice on how to become active for climate change and also provide details of climate change groups in your locality. If you are already connected with local community organisations or centres - why not find ways to use that space to raise awareness about climate change.



Image: [Cycle Sisters UK](#), Waltham Forest Council

One of the key issues facing the UK, in particular major cities, is air pollution, which is both a climate change and health issue. It has been found that in London alone, we surpass the legal safe limits set by the EU within the first few days of the New Year<sup>2</sup>. Tower Hamlets has the most traffic in the country<sup>3</sup> and has therefore been running an anti-idling campaign for a number of years now. Many parents leave the car engine running during school drop-offs and pick-ups, this

---

<sup>2</sup> [Green Peace – Air Pollution](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Tower Hamlets – Air Pollution and Idling](#)



is a source of air pollution. You can sign the [Tower Hamlets Breathe Clean Pledge](#) to commit to improving air quality in Tower Hamlets.

In order to make the biggest impact on air pollution in our communities, we have to reduce how much we use our cars. Walking and cycling groups are a brilliant way to connect locally, find routes with reduced air pollution and positively impact climate change. You can find a number of different [local Tower Hamlets cycling clubs](#), or with the organisation [Cycle Sisters](#) you can borrow and ride a bike in local parks in Tower Hamlets - an initiative that connects Muslim women through cycling. As mentioned earlier, there are lots of [walking groups in Tower Hamlets](#) that you can join too.

## Impacting Globally

We live in a deeply interconnected world and this became very apparent during the pandemic. Suddenly, we were in a global lockdown; families were unable to see each other for months, everyone had to start adapting and we were all going through it together. It's not that different when it comes to climate change, in that everyone *has* to adapt and we are all going through it together (although it affects some more than others).

Extreme changes in weather is one of the main effects of climate change and we have seen this in the UK with heat waves and storms. Across the globe there has been an increase in hurricanes, cyclones, floods and droughts, all of which have destroyed homes or livelihoods.

Active citizenship is about stewardship and understanding our role in making this world better and helping those around us, those we share this planet with - all people, creatures and plants. Sometimes, the task may feel overwhelming, which is why it is so important to act collectively. There are international charities and organisations that you can connect with to learn more about the impact of climate change and how countries in the Global South are adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change. From clean energy to ethical farming and much, much more.

**“UK’s Climate Leaders are regular people who are helping tackle climate change by making greener choices every day.”**

[Together for our Planet](#)

The question always arises about what more could we potentially do to help those who are facing the effects of climate change in life-changing ways? In order to push for change on the bigger issues we have to engage politically as active citizens. Here are three ways that you can do that:

1. Write to your local MP about climate change. The Climate Coalition has a great [template](#) that you can use to do this.
2. Sign a petition that urges the government to take action on climate change. This [petition](#) was created by Friends of the Earth for the UK government.
3. Speak to your children about the [UN Climate Change Conference](#) taking place in November 2021 using this BBC Newsround resource.



Image: National Grid UK's [Voices for a Green Future](#)

All the changes that we make in our personal lives and through our communities to reduce climate change, will have an impact globally.



## Consumer Choices

### Personal Choices

We make consumer choices every single day; the supermarket we walk into, the 3 for 2 offers that lure us in every time, the website we make our online purchases from, the distracted clicks we make when an advert pops up, the films and programmes we watch, the books and newspapers we read and the list goes on.

How do we, as active citizens, ensure that our consumer choices are more informed and intentional? Do we make our purchases based on what we need or what we want? And how do we distinguish between the two? People are becoming more aware of how social media, supermarkets and seller websites are designed to ensure maximum sales. This may be one of the reasons for overspending, landfills full of clothes that have been barely worn, and excessive food waste. This section will focus on the personal consumer choices we make when it comes to the clothes and food we buy, and how we repurpose our purchases before disposing of them.

In the UK, households waste 4.5 tonnes of food every year<sup>4</sup> and 10,000 items of clothing are sent to landfills every 5 minutes<sup>5</sup>. As active citizens there are a number of very simple things that we can do at home to reduce our food waste and make the most from the clothes we have. By reducing our food waste, we can be saving up to £700 per year on food. Below are a few ideas and you may already practice a number of these. You will have ideas of your own, please do share your ideas with us.

1. **Buy less** - always check what you have at home before buying.
2. **Repurpose** - you could make a [leftover vegetable soup](#) or a [tote bag out of an old t-shirt](#).
3. **Plan ahead and avoid impulse buys** - in order to be a conscious consumer, we have to make conscious and informed choices.
4. **Freeze** - sometimes we cook more than we need, or family and friends drop off food, or we may have a lot more vegetables than we need. [Here are some tips](#).
5. **Wash to last** - there are certain clothes that you can wash at a lower temperature and use the shortest cycle, to ensure they last longer.

---

<sup>4</sup> [The Guardian - UK households waste 4.5m tonnes of food each year](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Keep Britain Tidy - Waste Less, Live More: The slow-down on fast fashion](#)

## Connecting Locally

When it comes to the consumer choices we make in our local area, we have to reflect on the locally-owned services being provided. In 2018, small businesses accounted for 99.3% of the private sector businesses in the UK<sup>6</sup>. Tower Hamlets is home to many local small businesses, the majority of which have less than 10 employees<sup>7</sup>. There are also community organisations created to support local communities, these can be found on the Tower Hamlets [website](#), there are [community gardening initiatives](#) which help people grow their own fruit and vegetables and gives an opportunity to meet new people. Also, East London Mosque has been home to a number of [beehives](#) since 2011 and they are producing local honey.




Image: [Wen \(Women's Environmental Network\)](#)

Despite Tower Hamlets being one of the most deprived boroughs in the UK, there is a wealth of local talent, creativity, diversity, and most importantly, commitment to help the local community thrive. From Whitechapel market to Bengali-owned restaurants on Brick Lane, from your local butchers and bookshops to your local tailors and artists, the list goes on. In order to bring about

---

<sup>6</sup> [House of Commons Report - Small businesses and productivity](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Tower Hamlets Growth and Economic Development Plan](#)



positive social change in an area, as active citizens we need to recognise the role that locally-owned businesses play in building connected, thriving and strong communities.

Here are a few reasons why it's important to connect locally when making consumer choices:

1. **Strengthening our local economy:** By supporting a locally-owned business, we are putting money into our local economy. If the business thrives, they invest back in the community because they usually shop locally too.
2. **Creating jobs for local people:** Job creation has become especially important since the pandemic. The more a locally-owned business can thrive, the more jobs they will be able to create and they are more likely to hire locally too.
3. **Building a local community:** There are stories, histories and heritage, passion and commitment behind many locally-owned businesses. They are often at the heart of local relationships too, between residents and businesses. They are created and run by people from the local community, who want to see their locality thrive.

## Impacting Globally

As important as it is to support local businesses, the world we live in has become much more interconnected and we play a key part in this - both as individuals and as a country. In the UK, 47.3% of vegetables and 84% of fruits are imported<sup>8</sup>. However, during the lockdown last year, there was a significant rise in the number of people growing their own vegetables<sup>9</sup>. Despite this, we are heavily reliant on fruit and vegetable imports, as well as fashion and clothing imports. The UK spends billions of pounds every year on clothing and accessories.

As consumers, what impact can we have globally? Where, if at all, can we make that impact? Do we have any power at all to create change? Can we compete with multinational, multi-million pound companies?

Collectively, both human rights and climate change organisations and activists are raising awareness of the issues caused by supermarkets and clothing stores. Unfortunately, at times, it takes a disaster for people to take real action. In 2013, over 1,000 garment workers were killed in the Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in Bangladesh, due to unsafe working conditions. This factory was making clothes for stores in Europe and America. After the accident global trade

---

<sup>8</sup> [Food Foundation - Monitoring imports of fruit and veg into the UK](#)

<sup>9</sup> [The Guardian - 'It satisfies a nurturing instinct': how lockdown has created a veg-growing revolution](#)

unions and brands came together to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. This ensures independent inspections, safety training and a complaints process for workers and accountability by brands and suppliers. You can learn more about what happened and what you can do on the [Clean Clothes Campaign website](#).



*Juliamh123, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons*

Think back to when you brainstormed what was important to you and where you would like to make an impact. There is no doubt that in our everyday consumer choices there is a global element that you can influence through your actions. As consumers, our choices and demands can impact how companies behave. There are two overarching issues which we can focus on:

1. **Human Rights:** this focuses on workers' rights, for example the conditions within which they work and their pay. A simple way to do this is to buy [Fairtrade](#) when possible, you might just start with one household product that you ensure is always Fairtrade. For example, Fairtrade bananas, which are available at all supermarkets.
2. **Climate Change:** this would include how products are produced and how far they have to travel. Meat and dairy production causes 14.5% of climate change gases; watch this [video](#) to learn more about the impact of the meat industry on climate change.

## Community Connections




*Festival of Communities hosted by QMU, Summer 2019 at Stepney Gardens*

### Personal Choices

As we slowly ease out of lockdown, think about how you would like to reconnect with your communities or further develop your relationships with your new lockdown communities.

- ▲ Make a quick list of all the communities you belong to. This could include your child's school, an online community, a neighbourhood or parenting group.
- ▲ Now jot down communities you would like to belong to. This could include a local climate action group, cycling group or a gardening community.



How can we connect the different communities we engage with? Is it possible to take our skills and knowledge from one space to another? What impact do our stories and heritage have on the creative communities we are a part of? What is missing in our activities or our skill set?

As active citizens we have to appreciate the connectedness of our communities and our world, as this helps us to realise the potential ripples and waves created from all positive social action. And this is why, as individuals - our stories, our heritage, our experiences and our skills are vital in ensuring a more diverse, interconnected, creative approach to the challenges we face in our communities.

## Connecting Locally

Tower Hamlets schools have worked on incredible community projects which connect our children with the local council, [care homes](#) and [homeless shelters](#). You can speak to your child about their school community and find ways to better connect with their school. You could volunteer to support a school project or fundraising event, or think about becoming a [school governor](#) and work collaboratively with your child's school. You can also engage with other important causes or receive training in Tower Hamlets by connecting with [Citizens UK](#) who help to tackle injustices in local areas.

Tower Hamlets provides a forum for parents and carers to come together through the [Parent and Carer Council \(PCC\)](#). The PCC also supports Parent Champion volunteer programmes for parents and carers to join, with a focus on a range of topics including increasing awareness on the important of mental health. You can also benefit your local community by influencing decision making in your local borough by sharing your views to shape council proposals through [Let's Talk Tower Hamlets](#).

## Impacting Globally

Oxfam describes a global citizen as “someone who is aware of and understands the wider world – and their place in it. They take an active role in their community and work with others to make our planet more peaceful, sustainable and fairer.”<sup>10</sup> In essence, by being an active citizen in your locality with the intention of making the world better - you are automatically impacting the world in a positive way.

---

<sup>10</sup> [Oxfam – What is Global Citizenship](#)

## Conclusion

This resource was created to support parents in starting or continuing their role as active citizens during a pandemic. In this time, we have seen the resilience and connectedness of our communities. From community-led food distributions, to socially distanced visits to care homes, or online book clubs to winter walking groups. Although, at times, it may feel overwhelming, when we watch the news or hear of a tragedy that has struck a family - when communities come together - we see the much needed impact of social action.



*Image: Arnhem Wharf School*

Also, as parents, we are committed to raising our children in a balanced, happy and encouraging environment. By finding creative ways to be a more conscious active citizen, we are inspiring our children to do the same. We are inspiring them to imagine a better world, helping them understand their responsibility and duty towards it and empowering them to realise that they have the ability to make it better- in whatever small or big way they choose.

We encourage you to share your stories with us through social media, especially as it may inspire others to create their own active citizen communities too.

This resource was produced by the [Global Learning London](#) Team, led by Faaria Ahmad, with contributions from Triny Diaz, Linda Barker and Fatema Zehra and commissioned by Tower Hamlets Council's Strategy, Policy and Performance Team. Thank you to Dr Mahera Ruby from Blooming Parenting and Sarah Javaid from Cycle Sisters for all their help.

Our organisation was incubated in the [Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service](#) (THSLS), of which we remain an integral part.

We are part of the [Consortium of Development Education Centres](#), which brings together independent, not-for-profit organisations that support and deliver global learning in schools and communities across England.



*Additional images included are from [creativecommons.org](#) [pexels.com](#) and [pixabay.com](#). All, free to use under license [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)*

This resource is licensed under the Creative Commons licence, 2021. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, and display portions or the full version of text and images, provided you give explicit credits to Global Learning London and the organisations mentioned in the resource.



**However, if you intend to distribute a modified version of our material, you must ask us for permission first and distribute the resulting work only under the author's consent. Please contact us [hello@globallearninglondon.org](mailto:hello@globallearninglondon.org)**