



London Child Poverty Summit 2022

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Purpose of the Summit

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

The Childhood Trust's fourth annual London Child Poverty Summit was held on the 20th of October 2022, in partnership with the London Child Poverty Alliance. The summit offered an opportunity for open and analytical conversations around child poverty in London and held during London Challenge Poverty Week. Gathered within Salvation Army's Regent's Hall was a multitude of talented and passionate people, many of whom represented organisations working on the frontline of the fight against child poverty. Conversations across the summit focused on the need to address the very urgent impact of child poverty right now, and the possibility of eradicating poverty in the future.

With the cost-of-living crisis and the unstable political atmosphere, the issue of child poverty has never felt more crucial. The attendees and speakers at the summit responded to these circumstances with passion, energy, and creativity throughout the day. While the issues discussed were complex and difficult to solve, the enthusiasm within the summit for seeing real change was both motivating and inspiring.

A consistent motif throughout the day and the theme set by The Childhood Trust's Chief Executive Laurence Guinness, who opened the summit sharing the desire for this to be the last London Child Poverty Summit. The themes discussed throughout the day targeted a wide range of aspects, including legal barriers, political-institutional biases, poverty cycles, and intersectionality, all of which must be addressed if child poverty is to be eradicated.

Experts and people with lived experience of these issues spoke on panels about the work they do, and how others in the room could get involved. The summit highlighted how important youth workers, activists, charity workers, volunteers and community projects are in fighting poverty and acknowledged the valuable contribution they make to the lives of the young people of London.

As the attendees filtered out into Oxford Circus at the end of the day, having made new contacts and discussed ideas, a real sense of community was present. It is clear that a huge number of hard-working and talented people are committed to supporting disadvantaged children and to helping solve child poverty. The summit was the perfect way to recognise this shared goal.

"Poverty is not inevitable. It is driven by incredibly poor and often heartless decision making."

**Debbie Weekes-Bernard
Deputy Mayor of London**

Guest Speakers

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

Child Poverty in London - A Humanitarian Crisis

- Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor of London, Communities and Social Justice
- ### Cut Short - Why we're failing our youth & how to fix it
- Ciaran Thapar, Author of 'Cut Short', Youth Worker and Education Consultant
-

Deputy Mayor, Debbie Weekes-Bernard's opening speech identified the crisis of child poverty as a senseless humanitarian tragedy. Child poverty *'did not start with the cost-of-living crisis'*, it has only further exacerbated existing levels of hardship. A statement evidenced by staggering statistics; 42% of families with three or more children are now food insecure, unable to provide the nutrition children need to function, learn and play.

The Deputy Mayor called for the end of policies like NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds) and the two-child benefit cap that cause children unnecessary suffering. A point she drove home by quoting recent research from the London School of Economics that found the removal of NRPF visa conditions could save £872M over 10 years.



Debbie Weekes - Bernard
Deputy Mayor of London



Keynote speaker Ciaran Thapar

Keynote speaker Ciaran Thapar, outlined the correlation between SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) cuts, rising permanent exclusions for children with behavioural difficulties and the simultaneous rise in sentences for first-time knife carriers.

Insight from his experience working in secondary schools, youth services and prisons revealed how the closure of hundreds of youth centres and cuts to support for young people since 2011 has further impacted youth violence.

His stories of the young people he has worked with brought the statistics presented to life while clearly defining the need for more supportive and less punitive measures. His powerful speech concluded with the stark truth that young people will take greater risks if they don't perceive their lives to be of value:

"The less society communicates to children that they matter, the more they begin to believe they don't."

Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

Chair: Monica Lakhanpaul, Professor of Integrated Community Child Health at UCL

- Ed Davie, Policy and Public Affairs Lead at the Centre for Mental Health
- Sophyat Jimoh and Alaa Jalal Maki Alnazir from Brighter Futures, Charity Supporting Young Migrants
- Lauren Roberts-Turner, Researcher at Leaders Unlocked



Children need food, guidance, safety, security, space, friendships and routine to develop healthy brains during their formative years. It is the sobering reality that poverty, and the exacerbating influence of the pandemic, have increased the already unacceptable level of children suffering poor mental health.

The panel described the comprehensive damage that poverty inflicts on wellbeing from different viewpoints, prescribing solutions to fix the failing system. The session commenced with Professor Monica Lakhanpaul's presentation on children's mental wellbeing.

The pandemic saw an approximate 134% increase in child mental health problems. The impact of the pandemic was particularly severe for children already in or falling into poverty. The successive lockdowns forced confinement to cramped or inadequate housing alongside stressed parents with an absence of peer support in many cases due to school closures.

134%
increase in
child mental
health
problems as a
result of the
pandemic.

Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing

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Extreme stress causes a vicious cycle of underdevelopment and social isolation. Children experiencing, for example, damp-smelling housing, or shouting in the night are likely to suffer negative impacts on brain development and will withdraw further socially as a defence mechanism.

The CHAMPIONS project, of which Professor Lakhanpaul played an instrumental part, focused specifically on children aged under 5 living in temporary accommodation during the lockdown. They found children exhibited signs of frustration, mood swings, social withdrawal, separation anxiety and attachment problems due to constant confinement and a lack of routine. Whilst the lockdowns were temporary, evidence presented by Professor Lakhanpaul outlines the long-term economic and interlinked psychological damage they caused.

The decrepit system has failed so many children who suffer the conditions of poverty, and recent developments indicate a deepening of this trend.



Experience of
multiple ACEs
increases the risk
of suicide by
1,220%.

Ed Davie discussed studies that showed the links between financial deprivation and mental illness, showing financial wellbeing to be the biggest single factor in explaining mental health inequalities. He identified a causal chain, with the quantity of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) five times higher for the most deprived fifth of children. Experience of multiple ACEs increases the risk of suicide by a staggering 1,220% and depression by 460%.

This impact is disproportionately felt in non-white communities. Professor Lakhanpaul also commented on this racial disparity in the findings of the Co-POWeR study, which found a link between social isolation in the lockdowns and self-harming behaviour in children living in minority-ethnic communities.

Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing

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Lauren Roberts-Turner

The panel agreed that increasing income was key to alleviating the child mental health crisis. A rise in the minimum wage and scrapping the Two-Child Limit for child benefits were two unanimously agreed on solutions. These suggestions were also raised later in the day by politicians during the Politics Q&A.

Lauren Roberts-Turner's talk was specifically about the poverty-inducing structure of society. Lauren passionately described a dire need for extra welfare support because poverty is '*not a choice*'.

A statement confirmed by the lived realities shared by Sophyat Jimoh and Alaa Jalal Maki Alnazir who spoke on behalf of Brighter Futures, a project giving young people facing immigration issues a voice. Ed Davies explained that a fundamental barrier to extra financial subsidies for those in poverty is the misperception of poverty as a consequence of irresponsible spending and life choices, rather than systematic and structural constraints.

For example, a common misperception is that increasing child benefits will increase the quantity of money that parents spend 'unwisely' on impulse purchases like alcohol and cigarettes. Ed's presentation provided a study that challenged this damaging misperception: increasing child tax credit actually leads to large declines in parents' alcohol and tobacco consumption because the extra money reduces the need for stress-related coping mechanisms like alcohol consumption. Changing the narrative and the way the wider public perceives those in poverty is a vital stepping stone to achieving meaningful progress.

Clearly, there is much work to be done– even more given the damage caused by the pandemic. The grave reality is that poverty is not just a problem of economic deprivation, but psychological too: a psychological deprivation that can leave deep, lifelong scarring.

The consensus across the panel was that more money must be put into struggling people's pockets and into mental health care. With austerity looming and inflation rising, action must be taken to avoid worsening the child mental health epidemic.



Sophyat Jimoh and Alaa Jalal Maki Alnazir

Children with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

Chair: Adeola Oladapo, Campaigner at the NRPF Action Group Panellists:

- Helen Flynn, Head of Policy, Research and Campaigns at Just Fair Yasna Khan, Campaigner at Together in Unity
 - Abi Brunswick, Director of Project 17
 - Nneka Favour, Campaigner at the NRPF Action Group
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No Recourse to Public Funds, or NRPF, is a policy introduced in 1999 under New Labour as part of the Immigration and Asylum Act. It stipulates that those who are subject to immigration control have “no recourse to public funds”, including welfare benefits and public housing. In 2012, Theresa May’s Home Office extended the definition to impact more individuals, now including migrants who have the right to live and work in the UK, despite the fact that they are subject to the same tax laws as UK citizens.

The impact of this policy is pushing many low-income migrant families into poverty, and allowing a large number of children to fall into destitution. A large number of charities dedicate time to campaign for the abolition of this policy. On top of this, there is political support for the end of NRPF, with a 2020 motion for its suspension receiving 37 signatures. The consensus within political activist groups is that the policy is racist, causes damage to migrant communities, and contributes to the UK’s childhood poverty issue.

Children with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

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The panel hosted at the summit covered those with lived experience of dealing with NRPF, as well as charity leaders at the forefront of the fight to abolish the legislation. The panel was chaired by Adeola Oladapo, whose personal experience with NRPF has motivated her to campaign for the needs of marginalised women. Her aim to be the “voice of the voiceless” has led her to raise her voice against the injustice experienced by her and many others. Adeola opened by explaining the connection between NRPF and child poverty. With so many children affected by the poverty caused by a lack of government support, Adeola spoke on childhood hunger, with a plea for its eradication.



Adeola Oladapo

Adeola then handed over to Nneka Favour, a member of the Praxis NRPF Action Group. A mother of four from Nigeria, she has personal experience with living with NRPF, and spends her time campaigning to end NRPF. Praxis NRPF Action Group meets weekly to discuss campaigning strategy, with creche, transport, and food provided to allow busy members to attend. Praxis have been able to secure free school meals for undocumented children through campaigning, something the group were incredibly proud of. Their current project is a petition to change current regulation to secure rights after 5 years of residency rather than ten, allowing migrants much faster access to the infrastructure they deserve.



Nneka Favour

Nneka's work is even more inspiring when you consider the continuing challenges she faces under the regulations she is fighting. While being a mother of four, she still does not have access to welfare benefits, universal credit and housing allowance. While she tries to fight the legal system, she and her children are still impacted by that same system. The fight to combat child poverty currently relies on similar sacrifices, an issue which must be addressed to achieve the end of childhood poverty.

Children with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

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After Nneka's statement, we heard from Abi Brunswick, the Director of Project 17. Project 17 works in support of migrant children, and fights to avoid them falling into destitution. They focus on improving access to support from local authorities, providing valuable advice and advocacy for migrant families. Project 17 works extensively to make sure the duties imposed by Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 are fulfilled by local authorities.



Abi spent her time on the panel explaining how Project 17 empowers local councils to provide support to families with children in need. Beyond this, she explained how the explicit racism within the system is impacting the material lives of children. Finally, she called for the abolition of NRPF, a sentiment mirrored by all of the panelists. This, she explained, was the only way to fully address the impact of the issue of child poverty within migrant communities.



Abi then handed over to Yasna S. Khan, a community organiser with Together in Unity. They are a community group made up of immigrants with lived experience of the UK immigration system, as well as being impacted by the NRPF policy. Yasna also volunteers with The Unity Project, a charity that provides support to those impacted by NRPF, as well as lobbying and research towards ending the policy altogether.

Yasna went on to explain Together in Unity, how it operated and whom it prioritised. The organisation is self organised and focuses its efforts towards migrant parents and children. Yasna also broke down how all consuming poverty is for children: how it impacts their self esteem, sleep, anxiety and chronic stress, and takes away from their sense of home and belonging. For migrant children, Yasna described, it is not an exaggeration to say that the impacts of poverty are felt 100 fold.

Children with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

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Finally, we heard from Helen Flynn, the Head of Policy, Research, and Campaigns at Just Fair. She provides support to the All-Parliamentary Group on No Recourse to Public Funds and has co-written reports with Project 17 on the impacts of NRPF, as well as how this policy violates economic, social, and cultural rights specified in UN charters. In addition, Helen is an experienced researcher and campaigner, having worked with a wide variety of community groups and NGOs.

Helen's statement revolved around explaining how NRPF is violating United Nations treaties on human rights, 7 out of 9 of which the UK have signed (and is therefore legally obligated to protect). The human rights obligations are reviewed every five years, with the next review on the 10th of November this year. Just Fair are also campaigning to allow individuals to take the government to court over violations of UN treaties. Helen's unique insight moved beyond the government's moral obligation to revoke NRPF and explained how there is a legal obligation for the government to do so.

The breadth of knowledge and the depth of care demonstrated by the panel helped to shed valuable light on an issue that is not discussed as often as it could be, and hopefully inspired a fresh wave of pushback against the policy.



Helen Flynn

Displacement & Gentrification: Young peoples views from the frontline

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

Films produced by The Octavia Foundation and The Childhood Trust's Young People

Introduced by Marjorie Parker, President and CEO of Jobs First NYC

Screening followed by panel discussion with young people with lived experience



Where to?

15-year-olds Menisha and Amari have known each other since birth and have been inseparable since. However, when Menisha's struggling mum has a move enforced on them to a bordering town hours away, it suddenly makes Menisha and Amari have to reflect on the future of their friendship, going on one last adventure before Menisha leaves.

One of two films about displacement shown by the Octavia Foundation at the summit, Menisha and Amari's story encapsulates the impact of gentrification on children's mental health and relationships and the anxiety caused by having to move far away from family and friends.

Displacement & Gentrification

Young peoples views from the frontline

London Child Poverty Summit 2022



The screening was followed by a panel discussion from young people with lived experience of the impact of gentrification. Their stories further illustrating how gentrification has led to the displacement of working-class and Black and ethnic minority residents in London. How children can feel like they no longer belong in the neighbourhoods that they grew up in; intensifying feelings of isolation, hopelessness and anxiety commonly experienced by children growing up in poverty. Statistics reveal the problem is only getting worse with just a third of almost 300,000 new homes built in London since 2010 classified as 'affordable'.

Distance is the Journey

The second film, told the story of 18-year-old childhood sweethearts, Ria and Kayaan, who discover they are going to have a baby. Their excitement turns to desperation as they realise their only option for housing is far from the support of their own parents. The anxiety of raising their child away from their family leads to Kayaan taking drastic measures to try and fix the problem.

Due to a lack of affordable housing, London raised parents are increasingly forced to move out of the city away from their network of support. This isolation can have harmful consequences for children living in poverty. Effectively depriving them from the community that can help to alleviate the pressures they face with childcare, advice and love.

Social Exclusion within Education

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

Chair: Baroness Ruth Lister of the House of Lords

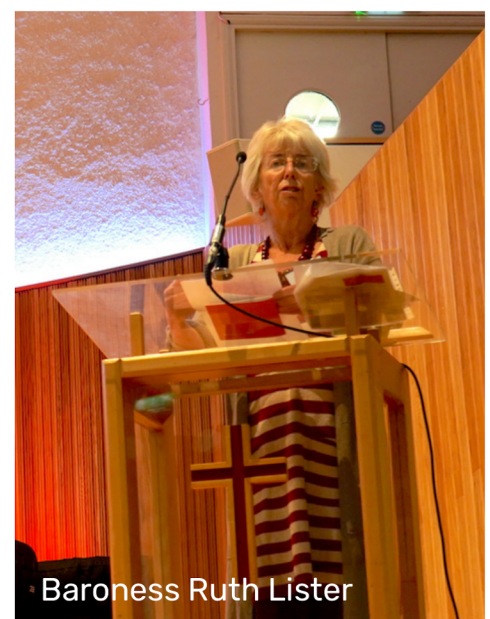
- Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) Youth Panel
 - Dr Claudia Sumner and Fabienne Crocket, Practitioners on CPAG's Cost of the School Day Project
 - Omar Mohamed, Activist & Person with Lived Experience of Poverty
 - Galiema Amien-Cloete, Executive Headteacher at Rotherhithe Primary School
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An insightful and diverse panel discussion regarding Social Exclusion within Education took place in the afternoon, chaired by Baroness Ruth Lister of the House of Lords. This panel explored the effects of social exclusion on different dimensions of the quality of school life for pupils living in London.

Firstly, twelve student representatives from the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) Youth Panel shared their perspectives through an online meeting, which was recorded to share with participants of the summit.

A point was raised that some pupils felt unable to take part in trips or clubs organised by the school due to the extra costs required. In the case of participating in clubs, the pupil may need to purchase specialised equipment. However, pupils facing this dilemma were also less likely to ask their parents to fund these extracurricular activities.



Baroness Ruth Lister

Social Exclusion within Education

London Child Poverty Summit 2022



This contributes to social exclusion as students would be missing out on experiences shared by other classmates. Furthermore, it becomes more difficult to join in on conversations that have occurred during these activities outside of school. Therefore, the pupils called on schools to recognise these concerns, and be more inclusive when designing activities that may require extra costs. These measures can be taken by schools subsidising partial costs for pupils that lie within certain criteria.

Next, Dr Claudia Sumner from the Cost of the School Day Project, of the Child Poverty Action Group, delivered a presentation on ways the project is working to address social exclusion in education. Dr Sumner has held positions in policy, research and practice, in the field of education. Together with pupils, parents, carers and school staff, she sheds light on the impact of school-related costs for low-income families in London.

Dr Sumner highlights the responses from pupils when discussing this impact. Some perspectives are shown below:

“There’s nothing for free. If you can’t pay for special occasions, you can’t go”

“You’d know if someone didn’t have money. Everyone stands up and the teacher goes round for money and they sit down”

“I don’t want to make my mum feel bad cos she can’t buy loads of stuff, so I don’t ask her”

The Cost of the School Day Project proposes three steps to relieve the social and economic burden on pupils and their families. This includes:

- 01 — Identifying barriers**
- 02 — Considering potential impacts**
- 03 — Recommending strategies**

Social Exclusion within Education

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Finally, Dr Sumner proposes open discussions regarding the cost-of-living crisis, including removing the barriers that children face by talking about things that cost money, for the stigma surrounding money to be reduced.

The panel discussion also heard from Galiema Amien-Cloete, an Executive Headteacher at south London's Rotherhithe Primary School. Galiema has vast and extensive experience working in the education sector, having trained and taught as a teacher in her home country of South Africa, before moving to London.



Galiema Cloete

Galiema highlights the diversity of her school community, with 45 different languages spoken in school. She states that 1 in 3 children are affected by experiences such as poverty, displacement, and death, as well as the effects of the pandemic.

To help pupils in the area, the school community has devised many strategies including a revised uniform policy, free school meals, breakfast offerings, grant applications and subsidising extracurricular activities. For example, as part of the revised uniform policy, the school has negotiated lower rates with suppliers and is giving students the option to purchase branded or non-branded uniforms. This has allowed students to save between three pounds per item.

However, Galiema also highlights the challenges with reform. As a result of the reduction in funds for the education sector, the school had to cut back on extracurricular clubs from 30 in 2019 to 15 clubs in 2022. Therefore, emphasis is placed on lack of funding as a threat to these initiatives becoming less effective at alleviating the economic costs for pupils and their families. Nonetheless, these strategies are a great example of initiatives schools can take to improve the quality of school life for children.

Social Exclusion within Education

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Omar Mohamed also greatly contributed to the conversation with his own experience of poverty and how it has influenced his work now in activism. Omar Mohamed has experienced both relative and absolute poverty. His experiences inform his work as a social worker in South-East London training other social workers.

The presentation was personal and intimate, with a description of growing up in a garage, his 14th house in London. Due to the noise from trains living in the garage, and limited space, it was very difficult to fall asleep. This caused a 14% school attendance rate, leading to a feeling of isolation and permanent exclusion.

After transferring to a different school, Omar noted that on his journey he would walk past Harrow boarding school, showing images of the stark contrast between the two schools. He recalls how the lack of funding at the school also contributed to a lack of space and lack of resources for students to enjoy.

Nonetheless, after completing his high school certificate, Omar graduated from university with a First class degree, and is now speaking and taking action on improving social workers' engagement with poverty. In concluding remarks, Omar reminds the audience that the blame should not be put on individuals, instead, the system should be revised to ensure that students are able to live with a higher standard of living and to fully realise their potential.



Political Debate

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

Chair: Kathy Evans, Chief Executive of Children England

- Munira Wilson, Liberal Democrat MP for Twickenham
 - Emma Best, Conservative AM, London-wide
 - Anne Clarke, Labour Party AM for Barnet and Camden
 - Zoë Garbett, Green Party Cllr for Dalston Ward
-



The day's discussion concluded with a four-way debate between the key political parties. Representing the Conservative Party was Emma Best, a Councillor in Waltham Forest and an elected member of the London-wide Assembly. Representing the Labour Party was Anne Clarke, a councillor for Cricklewood and also an elected member of the London-wide Assembly. Representing the Liberal Democrats was Munira Wilson, who is the Member of Parliament for Twickenham. Finally, representing the Green Party was Zoe Garbett, the Mayor of Hackney.

The debate centred around the issue of solving child poverty from positions within political institutions. Due to their differing political standings, each member of the panel brought different viewpoints on the issue. However, all of the panellists seemed committed and passionate about the issue of childhood deprivation and fighting it within their respective constituencies.

Political Debate

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

Anne Clarke of Labour explained that she felt that momentum will be generated by those who are working with deprived children, rather than those in power. She shared that she works alongside teaching assistants at a food bank, showing that those in positions working with children are passionate about ending poverty. Anne was very critical of the culture within UK policing and said it required complete reform. In terms of getting into politics, she recommended getting involved by helping out and therefore feeling connected to the work within politics.



Munira Wilson brought a unique perspective as the only member of parliament of the group. She talked about school budget cuts, and how they will impact children in poverty. Munira had asked the new Chancellor about this the day before, due to her concerns about how the fiscal policy would impact children. She also commented on how children are seen as a cost and not as an asset, which doesn't reflect our desire for happy and healthy citizens in the future.



She also talked about how young people are already getting involved in politics in a significant way. She referred to the place they hold in conversations around climate change, housing and social issues. Munira was one of 37 MPs to sign a motion in the House of Commons to suspend No Recourse to Public Funds over the pandemic and expressed her desire for the policy to be overturned.

Political Debate

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

Zoe Garbett discussed how listening to normal people's voices and lived experiences is the best way to capture the essence of the political situation. She also talked about how the policing system is deeply flawed and that certain policies, namely stop and search and strip searching, need to be readdressed. She also expressed the opinion that No Recourse to Public funds should be abolished.



Zoë Garbett



Emma Best

Emma Best's ideas focused on removing difficult choices from the lives of deprived families, recounting how she had to decide between her basic necessities as a child. Emma explained policies that promoted affordable housing, as well as providing parking for NHS and council services. Emma also focused on early prevention, and its economic advantages in fighting poverty in the long term.

She also promoted young people getting into politics, citing it as the best job in the world to help people, emphasising the wide range of opportunities available within politics. In terms of the issue of bigotry within the police force, she was glad it had been acknowledged and welcomed more young people to be involved in conversations with police services.

Overall, despite their differing methodologies, it was clear that all of the politicians truly cared about child poverty, and were using their power to make real change when they could. The fact that all of the key parties were represented (in terms of English politics) shows that there is a general political appetite for resolving the issue of child poverty, and it is possible to fight the issue through political institutions. We thank all of the political representatives and wish them the best on their projects in their respective areas.

Acknowledgements

London Child Poverty Summit 2022

The London Child Poverty Summit is a collaborative effort that wouldn't be possible without an incredible network of people and organisations working together to end child poverty.

Thank you to our volunteers, organisers and summit partners:

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Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Ciaran Thapar, Professor Monica Lakhanpaul, Edward Davie, Lauren Roberts-Turner, Brighter Futures, Adeola Oladapo, Helen Flynn, Abi Brunswick, Yasna Khan, Nneka Favour, Marjorie Parker, Octavia Foundation, Baroness Ruth Lister, Claudia Sumner, Galiema Cloete, Omar Mohamed, Kathy Evans, Munira Wilson, Emma Best, Anne Clarke, Zoë Garbett

And to all who came and shared their questions and insight.

Thank you!

