

The Londoners

Winter Edition | November 2024

GIRLGUIDING IMPACTING THE FUTURE OF YOUNG WOMEN

Evidence from Girlguiding's latest impact report shows the positivity the charity has on the lives of women.

ESCAPE THE CITY: A STAYCATION IN BOURNEMOUTH

A train journey from Waterloo to the south coast could see you off on your next adventure by the sea.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH REVIEW: CIBYL REPORT

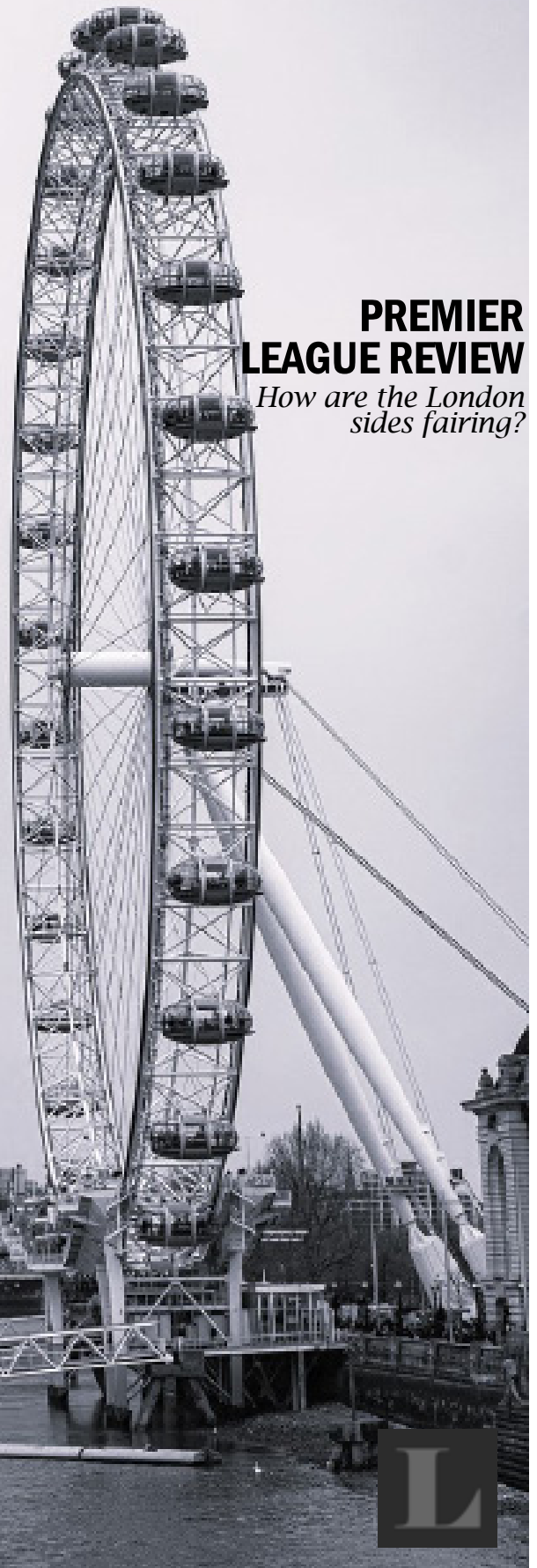
Two in five report that financial pressures have prevented them from engaging in mental health maintenance strategies.

CHRISTMAS SHOEBOX APPEAL

East London-based charity SMILE continues its fight against poverty and homelessness this Christmas.

PREMIER LEAGUE REVIEW

How are the London sides fairing?





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Girlguiding creating a strong future for women

By Chloe Chenery

Evidence from Girlguiding's latest impact report shows the positivity of Girlguiding on the lives of girls and young women across the UK.

Girlguiding is the UK's largest youth organisation dedicated completely to girls, with a vision for an equal world where all girls can make a positive difference, be happy, safe and fulfil their potential.

Girlguiding has a long history of empowering girls and young women, since being established over 100 years ago.

According to research released by the charity this year, Girlguiding volunteers report levels of happiness up to four times higher than those who volunteer at least once per month at other organisations in the UK.

Chief guide Tracy Foster, Girlguiding's most senior volunteer said: "It's no surprise to me that our volunteers report such high levels of happiness.

"Every week I have the pleasure of meeting different Girlguiding volunteers around the UK and they are experts at bringing fun and

friendship to everything they do.

"Like many of our volunteers, I've made lifelong friends at Girlguiding and I'm so grateful to be able to support and be supported by such incredible girls and women."

A report this year found Girlguiding volunteers are more satisfied with their lives than people who also volunteer regularly, and people who don't volunteer at all.

Volunteers surveyed by Girlguiding emphasised the personal benefits of joining, such as improvements to their health and wellbeing (91%).

Meanwhile 94% of volunteers said that Girlguiding helps them make new friends and 89% agreed volunteering helps them feel good about themselves.

Also 87% feel that volunteering has helped them learn new skills that can be used outside of Girlguiding and 64% have found that it

has improved their employment prospects.

Girlguiding CEO Angela Salt said: "Without our nearly 80,000 volunteers Girlguiding simply wouldn't happen.

"Our volunteers give of themselves and their time, week in and week out, leading 23,000 local groups.

"If you are looking for something fulfilling and rewarding to do, and if you would like to help give girls opportunities and together fight for an equal world, I would ask you to consider joining Girlguiding as a volunteer."

Research from the report shows that young girls are facing challenges and pressures every single day.

The report suggests that building good relationships with trusted adults helps girls do their best and feel

their best and shows us that Girlguiding isn't just about camping, trying new things and making new friends, it is also a safe space for girls to go where they are not judged regardless of their background

For more information about Girlguiding and the different flexible volunteering opportunities on offer, visit www.girlguiding.org.uk.



London renters face high rents as data shows rents across the city

By Olly Loveland-Jones



Data shows average rents cost thousands per month. Image Credit: Howard Lake, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/howardlake/4550761104>, CC BY-SA 2.0

London renters are facing sky high rents across the capital, according to statistics.

Data from the Office for National Statistics shows every London borough with average rents higher than £1,000 per month.

The statistics come at a time in which the newly elected Labour government has resisted calls for rent caps to be introduced on properties.

Rent caps are limits on how much landlords can charge tenants for rent.

Jae Vail, London Renters' Union spokesperson, said: "London rents are out of control.

"England is one of the few countries in Western Europe

without any limits on rent rises, and as a result, landlords have the power to hike rents well above wages and line their pockets.

"Skyrocketing rents are destroying our communities and they are punishing the people who keep our city running.

"Renting an affordable place to live on a care worker's salary in London has become impossible.

"Working-class people are being pushed out of the neighbourhoods they've called home for generations and into homelessness.

"The affordability crisis is a political choice.

"At a time when we desperately need a huge increase in social

homes, the government is more interested in clearing the way for big private developers to build expensive flats that ordinary people cannot afford.

"Landlords and developers cannot be trusted to regulate themselves.

"We need rent controls to bring rents back in line with incomes, and we need a major investment in social housing so that everyone has a secure home in their community."

The statistics show that in various boroughs, average rent is over £2,000 per month.

Greenwich and Sutton were among the biggest jumps in rent prices, rising 15% and 14.3% retrospectively.



Average costs of renting has reached over £1,000 per month in all London boroughs. Image Credit: Rob Oxley, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/robexley/4678791226/>, CC BY-NC 2.0

Brent had the highest increase, at 33.6%.

"At a time when we desperately need a huge increase in social homes, the government is more interested in clearing the way for big private developers to build expensive flats that ordinary people cannot afford."

While the new Labour government has resisted calls for rent caps to be introduced, London Mayor Sadiq Khan is a supporter of rent caps.

Earlier in November, Khan unveiled plans for new rent controlled homes to be built.

However, Westminster does not intend on giving him the power to implement rent caps on privately rented properties.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said: "We do not support rent caps and we have no plans whatsoever to devolve rent control powers.

"Lack of supply is fuelling the housing crisis, and we are taking action to boost housebuilding.

"We will work closely with the Mayor and boroughs so we can increase housing delivery in London."

According to the guidance, giving renters more rights and security is an issue the government wants to tackle.

However, they say there have

been no conversations with the Mayor about introducing rent controls.

In his 2024 re-election campaign, Sadiq Khan made rent controls a campaign pledge.

Some groups, such as Landlord Associations, oppose rent controls

Chris Norris, policy & campaigns director at the National Residential Landlords Association, said: "We strongly oppose the introduction of rent caps, which would only worsen the ongoing supply and demand crisis.

"The available evidence on this topic suggests that, wherever and whenever rent controls of any kind are put in place, the choice of available private rented accommodation for tenants narrows considerably.



Rent control exists in some European countries. Image Credit: Donnell Bailey, <https://lofti.co/buy-a-property/buy-to-let/offset/>, CC BY-SA 3.0

“The inflation in PRS rents across the UK is caused by a combination of the shortage of high quality private rented accommodation, as landlords continue to exit the market, and a significant increase in the cost of doing business.”

“Without bold, decisive policies which can help address these issues, this trend will only continue in future.”

“In order to improve outcomes for tenants and landlords, we need a private rented sector which is fair, inclusive and which works in the interests of both parties.”

“The Government can help make this happen by putting in place a clear, pro-growth strategy which encourages greater investment in the market.”

Supporters of rent controls point to their presence in various European countries.

In Germany, landlords are unable to charge more than 10% above the local annual rent.

In 2022, the Danish parliament introduced a temporary 4% cap on rent changes, in order to protect tenants from high inflation.

Vail added: “The UK’s private rental sector has ballooned in recent decades after the government sold off much of our public housing and increasingly relied on largely unaccountable landlords to meet the nation’s housing need.”

“Without bold, decisive policies which can help address these issues, this trend will only continue”

“Rent control is common in Europe and many countries’ housing systems show that improving protections for tenants does not significantly reduce the number of homes available to us.”

“Nonetheless, we need a shift away from relying on private landlords back towards a system with a greater number of public homes.”

“Rent control can make housing more affordable and secure for everyone in the meantime.”

“In the long-run, it can save

on public money currently spent subsidising the private sector that would be much better redirected into social and council homes.”

Council housing is another issue that has led to controversy and debate.

According to government data, the rate in the number of council homes starting construction decreased by 88% in the financial year of 2023-2024.

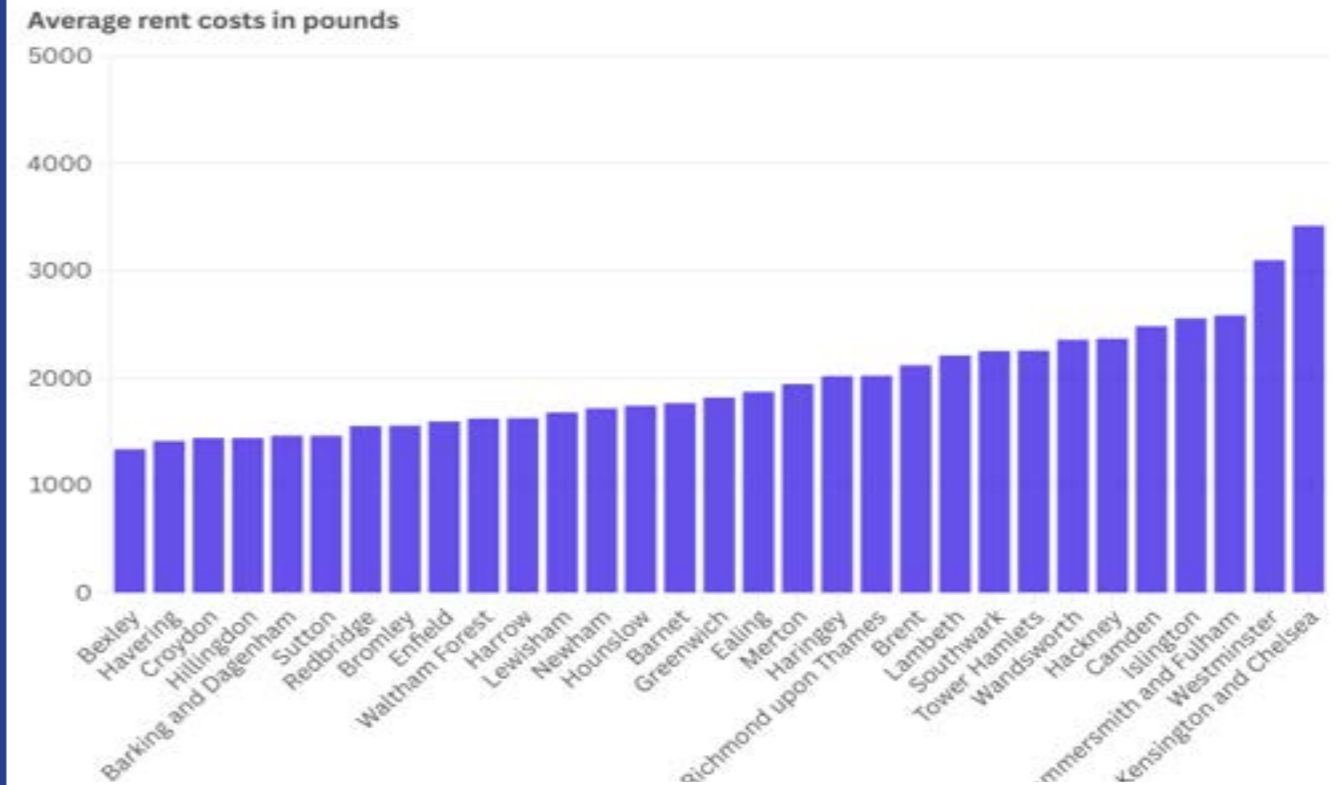
The current Labour government has argued that tackling the housing crisis is best done through planning reform and building a greater number of houses.

According to their 2024 manifesto, Labour pledge to build 1.5 million new homes within the current parliament.

It is hoped that this drive, which the government says it is committed too, will help reduce costs of housing and rent across the country.

The manifesto also includes information about the current approach to social housing.

According to the document, “Labour will prioritise the building



Average rents are above £1,000 per month in every London borough

of new social rented homes and better protect our existing stock by reviewing the increased right to buy discounts introduced in 2012 and increasing protections on newly-built social housing.”

Currently making its way through parliament is the Renters’ Rights Bill.

The bill’s stated aim is to increase the rights of renters through various means, though the bill stops short of introducing rent caps.

In a public statement, deputy prime minister Angela Rayner said: “Renters have been let down for too long and too many are stuck in disgraceful conditions, powerless to act because of the threat of a retaliatory eviction hanging over them.”

“Most landlords act in a responsible way but a small number of unscrupulous ones are tarnishing the reputation of the whole sector by making the most of the housing crisis and forcing tenants into bidding wars.”

“There can be no more dither

and delay.

“We must overhaul renting and rebalance the relationship between tenant and landlord.”

“This Bill will do just that and tenants can be reassured this Government will protect them.”

The bill aims to ban no-fault evictions, which is where landlords evict their tenants without having to provide a reason.

European countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland have already banned no-fault eviction.

Other measures include allowing tenants to appeal above-market rents designed to force them out, ending the practice of rental bidding and allowing tenants greater rights to keep pets in rented properties.

Rental bidding is the practice of landlords having tenants bid for higher rents than the advertised rent price.

The bill aims to end this practice by prohibiting landlords from asking for or accepting offers that are higher than the asking price.

Speaking about the bill, Vail said: “We have campaigned hard to abolish section 21 evictions because it’s unfair that renters can be thrown out of our homes for no reason at short notice.”

“Bringing an end to this cruel practice is long-overdue but it is only half the picture.”

“The bill isn’t doing anything to tackle the affordability crisis and tenants will still live in fear of the eye-watering rent hikes that have become the norm in our wild west renting system.”

“The government needs to tackle rising rents head on and introduce rent control so that we can all have a secure and affordable home in our community.”

Despite new measures making their way through parliament, the debate for greater rent controls is likely to endure, especially in the current economic climate.

Confirmation of HS2 Euston funding met with both praise and criticism

By Olly Loveland-Jones

The recent confirmation that funding for HS2 tunnels to be built between Euston and Old Oak Common will be provided has been met with both praise and criticism from councils and campaign groups.

In October last year, then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced a scaling back of HS2 funding.

He also announced that plans for HS2 to go to Manchester would be scrapped.

The announcement meant that while HS2 would continue to go to Euston, the funding for development of the line between Old Oak Common and Euston would be funded by private developers, instead of public money.

Major construction works near Euston station had initially been stopped due to doubts about funding.

However, after chancellor Rachel Reeves' announcement, the government is "committing

the funding required" for the tunnels to Euston.

The plan for HS2 to travel to Manchester, however, has not been reinstated

HS2 was first announced in 2009, under the previous Labour Government.

Since then, the plan has become largely contentious, sparking much debate and controversy on its various impacts, such as environmental and economic ones.

A spokesperson on HS2 for the campaign group Extinction Rebellion, said: "No cuts to HS2 have been reversed.

"Reeves stated that the Government would put up money for the Old Oak Common-Euston tunnel to stimulate private investors in the Euston Station complex.

"Without that investment there will be no tunnelling.

"This is exactly the same position Sunak took.

"Given none of the technical

difficulties of a new Euston have been overcome, this is unlikely to happen, and given Old Oak Common is going ahead as a new station, how can it be sensible now to spend tens of billions on a Euston that simply replicates a fraction of the connectivity that Old Oak offers and nothing more?

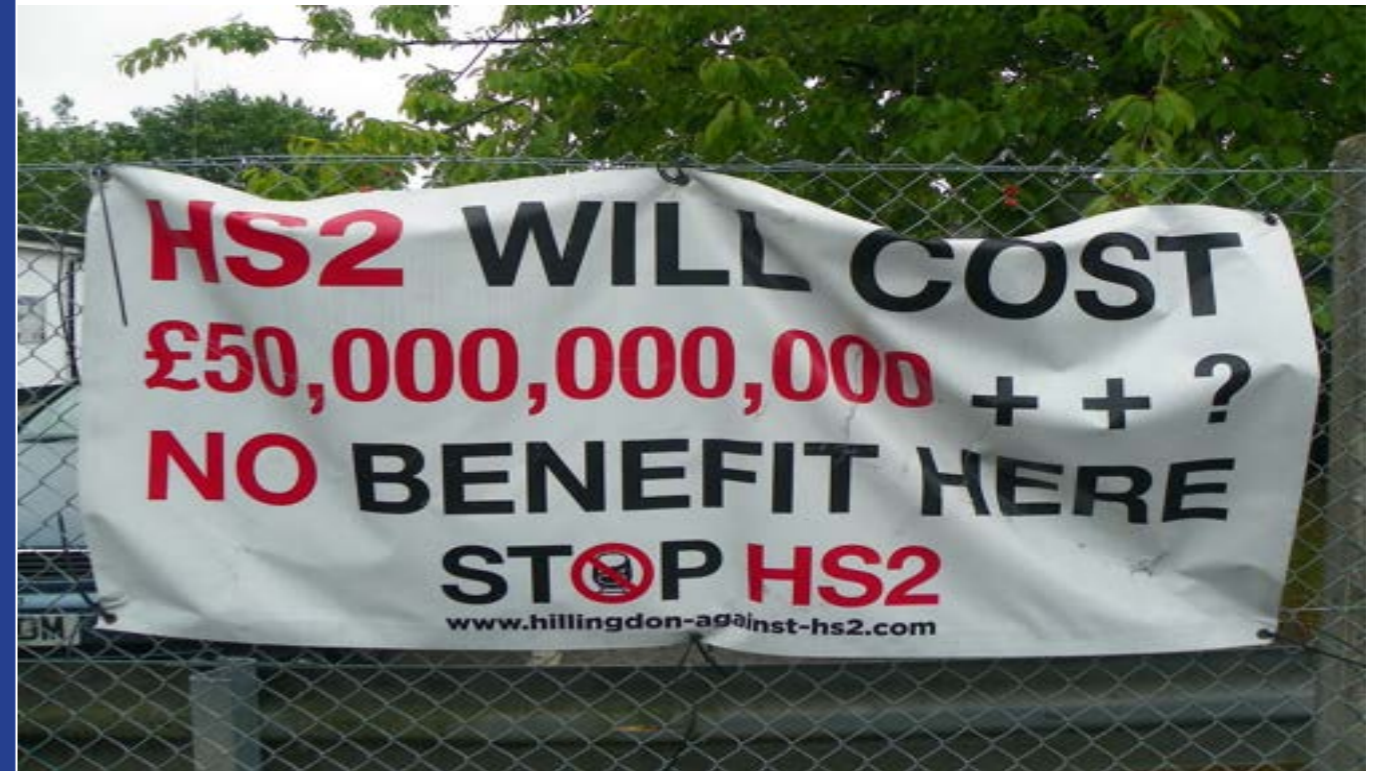
"This surely demonstrates the utter unplanned foolishness that HS2 always was.

"If HS2 was such a financially attractive project, businesses and financial institutions would have been lobbying hard to fund the whole of HS2 from the beginning, which is not the case."

Environmental impacts on HS2 have been a focus of controversy throughout the development of the train line.

Several environmental campaign groups oppose HS2 due to the perceived damage the project will cause to wildlife.

The Friends of the Earth



Some have questioned HS2's economic benefits. Image Credit: Peter O'Connor, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/anemoneprojectors/23451913891>, CC BY-SA 2.0

campaign group, for example, scribed HS2 in 2020 as a "costly and damaging mistake."

They argued it would "threaten wildlife, destroy ancient woodlands and do nothing to reduce climate-wrecking pollution."

"If HS2 was such a financially attractive project, businesses and financial institutions would have been lobbying hard to fund the whole of HS2 from the beginning, which is not the case."

Stephanie Creighton MCIPR, senior communications manager at HS2 Ltd said: "HS2 will be a railway that respects the natural environment by conserving, replacing or enhancing wildlife habitats along its route, creating a new green corridor along the route.

"More than 33 square kilometres of new and existing wildlife habitat, equating to an area the size of 4,600 football pitches, will be created.

"That's an increase of about 30% compared with what's there now.

"We are planting seven million new trees and shrubs, including more than 40 native species, specific to each location.

"Only 25 of over 52,000 ancient woodland sites in England will be affected by the route between London and the West Midlands, with over 88% of the total area of these ancient woodlands remaining untouched by HS2."

Camden Council welcomed the decision to confirm the decision for HS2 to run to Euston.

In a public statement, Camden Council leader Richard Olszewski said: "After years of uncertainty, this is an opportunity to start a new chapter for Euston and it means that we can begin to take the necessary

steps towards transforming Euston into a thriving place.

"Our residents and businesses have faced years of upheaval and lost homes and livelihoods to HS2.

"We owe it to them to deliver genuine change and a lasting legacy in Euston – and we know what the future can be;

thousands of new jobs, the restoration of lost green spaces, and the building of much needed affordable homes and community facilities – all delivered alongside a new station.

"Investment in Euston will reach far beyond our borough.

"Regeneration in Euston will support even faster growth in this sector and better connect economic hubs in London, Birmingham and beyond, helping deliver new growth and jobs across the country."

With the funding now confirmed, HS2 is certain to cause more debate into the near future, as supporters and critics debate its impacts.

Putney Bridge roadworks to finish in mid-December

By Olly Loveland-Jones

Roadworks on Putney Bridge, aimed at reducing the flow of traffic, are due to be finished later this year, in mid-December.

The works began in September and have since caused disruption to motorists and buses.

The works are aimed at improving the safety and accessibility on and around the bridge, and has resulted in some lane closures.

“I’m very pleased that more milestones have been met, and that the situation in Putney is now improving further.”

Putney Bridge is a vital route for commuters travelling between Putney and Fulham.

Councillor Jenny Yates, Cabinet Member for Transport, said: “We’ve been listening closely to everyone’s feedback and since mid-October have been able to implement some changes that have opened up space on the bridge, and really eased congestion.

“I’m very pleased that more milestones have been met, and that the situation in Putney is now improving further.

“The improvements to this junction were badly needed, and again I want to say how appreciative I am of the local community who are tolerating these essential works with patience.

“I know emergency roadworks such as those by UK Power Networks recently on the Upper Richmond Road, and Thames Water’s ongoing works on Wandsworth High Street have caused a really difficult situation for everyone, but please be assured that we are progressing our works on the Putney junction as quickly as possible.”

The roadworks are funded by private developers, which the council argues is beneficial due to people in the borough being able to save on council tax.

The project is part of a scheme called the Decade of Renewal, a £100 million investment on roads and pavements.

Councillor Yates said in October: “Work has progressed

well on site, and we remain slightly ahead of schedule.

“We’ve got the maximum number of workers on site that’s safe given the constrained working area and they’re doing 7am to 7pm on weekdays plus 8am to 6pm on Saturdays.

“Sunday working is more restricted due to permissible working hours but whenever it is beneficial to do so, it will take place.”

According to the council, most of the more disruptive works took place at night, in order to reduce disruption during peak travel times.



Putney Bridge works to finish in December. Image Credit: David Dixon, <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/5181947>, CC BY-SA 2.0

Arts Richmond Poetry Competition 2025

By Lucianne Bell

Arts Richmond’s poetry competition returns for the fourth time, with Changes as the theme for this year’s entries.

The competition is for original, unpublished poems, no more than 200 words and 40 lines long on the theme of Changes, which is open to the interpretation of the writers.

The deadline for entries is Friday 17th January at 12:30pm, and there is a £5 entry fee per poem, or £12 for three poems.

Entries must be entirely the writer’s own work and all entrants must be aged 16 or older.

Sue Pandit, chair of the literature committee at Arts Richmond, said: “We do promote this widely, in libraries and community centres with our posters.

“We are trying to approach all income groups for all our initiatives.

“We’ve got a huge number of schools locally, getting into those and the lower-income areas of the borough to get children writing is what we’re aiming to do.”

Pandit added that the competition is open to all and entries are being marked on the content they produce, not if all the commas are in the correct place.

Arts Richmond is anticipating



receiving 800 to 900 entries for the 2025 competition.

A panel appointed by Arts Richmond will select 40 poems to be judged by Roger McGough, a English poet, broadcaster, children’s author, and playwright.

The final 40 poems will be read by actors experienced in the performance of poetry, and an anthology will be published.

Pandit said: “It was Roger’s idea to launch a local poetry competition and that the competition has a theme.

“Roger is also a patron, and he is a wonderful supporter of local initiatives, he often pops into the local primary schools and chats with them.”

Some of McGough’s most famous work includes *The Mersey Sound*, a collection of poems he co-authored with Brian Patten

and Adrian Henri.

Outside of poetry, he has written plays such as *The Liver Birds* and *Grumpy Old Men*.

He also suggested that this year’s competition should go national, so people across the country can get involved, as well as choosing this year’s theme.

Prizes of £250, £150, and £75 are up for grabs at this year’s competition.

The awards ceremony will take place at The Exchange Twickenham on Sunday 1st June 2025 at 3pm.

Beginning back in 2019, the competition has run every two years since, with previous themes including: “About Time”, “Identity”, and “Turning Point”.

For further information or to enter head to <https://artsrichmond.org.uk/arts-richmond-events>.

Image credits to Arts Richmond & Nick Wright

Title image credit to Pixabay.



Roger McGough, also in image above with last year’s winner



THE ARTS RICHMOND POETRY PRIZE 2025



The wheels on the bus go round and loud

By Chloe Chenery

Imagine a live music venue on just a set of wheels. Well that's just what you get at Ludos - a classic red London double-decker with a lot of personality.

Artist and event manager Dan Sheed is the driving force behind the event with his promotion company Turtle Tempo giving upcoming artists a place to play.

With his passion for working with newer artists, Dan reached out to Ludo's bus in North London.

When talking to Dan, he said: "It's basically just like a cosy sort of atmosphere.

"A place where artists can share their music to an environment that's welcoming and everyone's listening.

"It's just a lovely vibe really for everyone involved."

Every night, a handful of artists are featured with the lineup being curated by Dan to allow for different music to be represented.

Since the age of 17, Dan has been obsessed with discovering new music that no one had heard of and watching them grow.

Viola Beach was one of Dan's Favourite bands and when they tragically passed in a fatal car accident in 2016 - it really struck a chord that turned into a burning desire to start up a music blog.

But, not only does

Dan have a passion for allowing the growth of artists, he also aspires to keep music affordable by making all of his events pay what you wish.

When talking about this, he



said: "You've got things in the news lately about ticket pricing, like surges and stuff like that.

"I think with these shows all being pay what you want, it means that anyone can come

along and no one is left in the lurch of things being too unaffordable"

Bands such as Achilles Heel, a group of friends from South West London, have played on Ludo's bus.

Keyboardist Harry said when bandmate Caitlin told him about the bus: "I didn't know what's going to happen.

"Are we going to be on, like, a moving bus?"

"I didn't know what was going to be going on and we turned up and it was super cool.

"You know, I've not done any gigs for 3000 people or anything yet, but with intimate ones, you can gauge the audience a bit better, and you feel a bit more of a connection as well."

The top deck of the vintage bus accommodates up to 38 guests, while downstairs seats just six, with a small amount of standing room at the bar.

The bus is parked in a courtyard with additional seating outside and space for up to 100 guests.

To find out more information and find upcoming gigs look at <https://turtletempo.co.uk/>



Picture credit: Dan Sheed

Squid Games comes to life via speed dating

By Libby Jennings

How did you meet your significant other? At a Squid Games singles event, perhaps? It certainly may be the case for 50 singles who survived the DateinaDash Squid Games night. Don't worry, nobody actually died!

For those unfamiliar with the show, it's a game show-esque narrative where contestants deep in debt compete through rounds of Korean children's games for a massive cash prize, with fatal consequences. While the dating version features the same Korean kids' games, the consequences are much less severe!

The night was filled with familiar challenges: marbles, honeycomb, and a special twist on red light, green light. In marbles, participants had to strategise to keep their marbles while attempting to win those of their opponent. Honeycomb challenged players to carve out a shape from a delicate honeycomb without breaking it. And in red light, green light, players had to cross the finish line without moving whenever "red light" was called out, or risk elimination. With only one person ultimately pocketing the £100 prize, the stakes were high, and it was all to play for.

The concept of the night certainly is a conversation starter, but it does raise questions about how a show about greed, death and betrayal would translate into the dating sphere.

When this event first launched in 2022, eliminations were part of every round, and about 40 participants cut within the first 10 minutes, which received some negative feedback.

Attendees felt they didn't have enough time to connect with others before being cut. In response, the organisers adjusted the setup: now, participants stay in the game for most of the night, moving through rounds with different activities and only facing elimination in the final round. This change gives everyone a chance to meet more people, enjoy the themed games, and engage without the pressure of being eliminated early on.

Rob, also known as Mr. Cupid, founder of DateinaDash, said: "Any activities that involve team building or games lend themselves well to dating events – dating is much more fun when you're doing something."

"There's also a £100 cash prize to keep things exciting and competitive, which adds a bit of friendly banter."

According to Rob, "It's one of the only events we run where no one leaves at half-time."

While online dating can be time-consuming and costly, Rob believes in-person events bring a refreshing change. "If you attend a paid dating event, you know most people are serious about meeting someone for more than a fling," he said. "In-person events are good fun and should be treated like a night out with friends. They're random, and you can meet a lot of people quickly, though attending a few events helps to get the most out of it."

DateinaDash said speed dating events are its 'bread and butter,' which they aim to mix up continuously with unique experiences to keep things exciting for newcomers and regulars.

Squid Games-themed dating might not be everyone's cup of tea, especially if you haven't watched the show or prefer a more traditional setup.

Other upcoming events include a big New Year's Eve party at Nordic Bar on December 31st, which is expected to draw over 200 people. You can check out more honeycomb-less DateinaDash events on Eventbrite.



Former Greek serviceman holds solo art exhibition in Wimbledon

By Olly Loveland-Jones

An art exhibition hosted by a former serviceman in the Greek army took place in Wimbledon earlier this year.

The exhibition, named Carnyx, was hosted by Theo Papandreopoulos and curated by Mehroz Shiakh, featuring several pieces of art, all with their unique meaning.

The event took place at the PAUSE/FRAME building, owned by the Koppel Project, situated near New Wimbledon Theatre.

The works include Exhaust Horn, a large horn that can be blown into to make a loud and haunting noise, Goliath, Attila, and Maedate.

Papandreopoulos used materials such as car parts, beetle horns, industrial steel, and medieval Japanese armour crest as part of the artworks.

The sound works in the exhibition were intended by Papandreopoulos to add an

aural extension, in order to portray what sound sculptures may make.

When blowing into Exhaust Horn, the sound creates a booming noise.

Blown into like a trumpet, it creates a loud noise intended to add onto the visible sights of a sculpture and explore the sounds grand sculptures may make.

The horn was made in collaboration with jazz musician Fin Bradley.

Another work includes Goliath, a mechanical structure built around the horns of a beetle.

The aim of Goliath is to convey a tendency towards dystopianism and brutality.

A third work includes the Attila sculpture, which is named after the warrior Attila the Hun.

The work intends to use its dark and aggressive colour to exert a sense of power and

dominance onto the viewer.

Papandreopoulos also served in the military, and grew up near a military base in Greece, influencing his work, particularly on the focus on masculinity and discipline within the military.

Papandreopoulos has contributed to various other art exhibitions across the UK, however the exhibition hosted in Wimbledon was his first solo exhibition to take place in London.

The exhibition was open to the public from October 14th to November 2nd.



An image of Attila, named after the warrior Attila the Hun. At the top: Goliath



Why are creative outlets so important in 2024?

By Lucianne Bell

For many, co-curricular activities are a distant childhood memory.

What with trying to pay the bills, raise a family, have a job, AND attempt to have a social life; hobbies funnily enough aren't at the top of everyone's ever growing to do lists.

But should they be?

Since the boom of hobbies during the pandemic, many have continued to participate in classes, workshops, and sports.

I'm not just talking about baking endless amounts of banana bread, getting your daily steps in, or joining a run club.

Creative outlets specifically, offer a safe space to craft and socialise, with fewer accessibility limitations in comparison to other hobbies.

Handmade Workshops is a south west London creative

workshop business, founded by Catherine Dolan and Ann Brown.

Motivated by their love of crafting and view that there was a distinct lack of creative workshops on offer in the area, Handmade Workshops was born in 2018.

Since then their small business has grown significantly.

Catherine said: "It's really evolved, because we set up being just a creative workshop business, and now we work with charities, corporate events, and parties. Things we never intended to do."

Over the years, they've worked with a variety of organisations in the local area including United Response, Anstee Bridge, and Richmond Carers Centre.

Recently they did a workshop

with young people who aren't in education for various reasons and with a lot going on in their lives.

When discussing the impact of the workshops for people with disabilities or mental health struggles, Catherine mentioned that workshops are often a vehicle for a dialogue to begin.

She said: "Some people love crafting while others don't, so one of the parts about it is to make it approachable to everybody."

Catherine's background in teaching gives her a good understanding of how to develop the workshops and make them adaptable to all ages and abilities.

These crafting workshops offer an escape from daily life for people perhaps not into sport or music and other such activities.

Catherine said: "The big thing about crafting is that you've got something to do, you can join in as much or as little as you want. You don't have to say a word."

So, crafting may be your social outlet, a mindful escape from the stresses of daily life, or perhaps both. But regardless the benefits shouldn't go unnoticed.

Attendee of the Mosaic Crochet class, Cathy, first joined Handmade Workshops back in 2022 following retirement.

Cathy, pictured on the right below, said: "Craft has become my obsession since I retired and coming to Ann's beginners knitting was sort of revolutionary, it set me on a journey.



"Through Catherine I've also attended other knitting groups, so I've made a lot of new friends as well."

During the pandemic, Cathy worked for the NHS, at the local community healthcare trust in Teddington.

Initially, she worked from home doing administrative work, she mentioned it was 'all hands on deck' at the time.

However, once the vaccine became available Cathy asked to be re-deployed to work with the nurses giving out the vaccinations.

Cathy said: "I think it would be nice for the NHS to provide

sessions like this, as part of their counselling arrangements, it's just a kindness."

She mentioned how important outlets like these ones are, not only to develop a new skill but also as a place where people can open up about their lives.

It appears that craft offers so much more than a new skill, it provides an outlet to those seeking friendship, support, and just a bit of fun.

Cathy said: "My advice for people wishing to get involved, is to just give it a go, you'll definitely find your tribe.

"I think Handmade Workshops are really relaxed and friendly, they're not intimidating in any way.

"That's really important with craft, to find people who will be willing to help you whatever your level, and handmade workshops do that brilliantly, absolutely brilliantly.

"They've got a really good formula, and it's difficult to put your finger on anything absolutely specific but it's just really really friendly."

Catherine went on to add: "It's important to us to be small and to be local, we really want to be the heart of the community.

"That's why we work with other charities and events, to build relationships and to try and connect other people as well."

Niamh, 24, from St Albans, pictured in top left, a newcomer to Handmade Workshops, attended the Japanese Stitching class at Stepping On Out in Teddington.

She explained the good balance between teaching and socialising at the workshop, and how creative outlets are great to help take your mind off things and are very therapeutic.

Niamh said: "As an adult there's not so many outlets to socialise anymore, especially if you work alone, so it's quite important to have those outlets.

"It gives you a hobby, a social space, and that's really important."

She mentioned that coming out of covid people had lost some of their social skills, and how that can make attending workshops such as these quite daunting.

With more Gen Z and Millennials getting involved in health, fitness, and other hobbies, Niamh added that she felt a big shift away from drinking culture post-covid.



Attendees of Japanese Stitching Workshop in image.

Niamh, explained: "Attending a workshop such as this one gives you an event, without drinking, where you're learning something new.

"A lot of the things people are scared at from the social aspect, is not knowing what to expect.

"You're there for the craft, you can come and not say a word if you wanted, so it's quite low pressure like that."

She suggested for those who may be apprehensive about joining a class to call up ahead of time and getting in contact with the workshop organiser so you know what to expect.

So, perhaps unlike run clubs and team sports, crafting provides outlets which gives people an easy way to socialise and to try something new.

Niamh said: "I'd encourage anyone to get involved in it, even if it's something you're not

sure if you really want to do or a craft you'd really carry on.

"You don't really know what you like until you try it, so I'd just say go out there try it out and see what you think."

Creative workshops are clearly a hit within the local area, however how can creative outlets help support adults who are in need?

United Response is a care provider for adults with learning disabilities, autistic people, and those with mental health needs.

It works with those people to achieve their personal goals, by providing residential support, supported living services, and community outreach work.

At its area office, The Enterprise, it provides up to 25 hours of activities per week, ranging from creative arts, keep fit sessions, pottery classes, and karate sessions.

Matthew Campbell, service manager at United Response, said: "We've had people come to some of our sessions who haven't left the house in a couple of years, especially after the pandemic."

"After a couple of sessions they get involved with the group, talking and expressing themselves."



Co-founder of Handmade Workshops, Ann Brown



Image credit: United Response

"Whereas when they first come to our sessions they are quite closed off and nervous around other people, their confidence just grows after a couple of weeks."

Pottery is one of United Response's most successful workshops, especially with improving fine motor skills.

Matthew added: "Even if they're not participating in the art directly, just being around a table with their peers and having a focus on creating some sort of art work really helps them to express themselves."

Naturally covid limited the resources available to those supported by United Response, Matthew explained more about the effect it had.

He said: "The pandemic had a real big effect on people with learning disabilities, because although we still had our support workers, they didn't get to see their families, or go to any of their social groups or classes."

"And a lot of the people we support are very ridged with their routines, so when the pandemic happened, it had a really bad impact on their mental health."

With the help of Handmade Workshops, The Enterprise moved the 25 hours of activities online, so that people

across the country, not just in Richmond, could get access to them.

Catherine and Ann made crafting boxes which were delivered to those supported by United Response, so they could continue participating in their crafting workshops online.

Matthew mentioned how valuable these creative sessions are for the people they support, especially people who are non-verbal, as it gives them a way to express themselves.

He said: "You can see the frustration on their face when they are trying to explain something but they can't."

"Being able to put all their feelings down and express themselves really helps them without having to say anything."

He added: "I think that's what the handmade ladies do so well, is being able to include everyone."

"If some of the people who come to our sessions are more physically disabled and they're not able to use their hands properly, the handmade ladies will adapt it to fit anybody."

"Being able to adjust those sessions and make them available to everybody, really benefits their mental health."

Those who may need support from United Response can get referrals from local authorities,

family referrals, or you can self-refer yourself.

Six years on, Handmade Workshops is going strong and having an impact in all parts of the community.

Catherine concluded: "Ultimately we love doing it, and it's the people that we meet, and the interactions we have with people that keep us going."

They have a variety of upcoming festive workshops including Rolled Beeswax Candles, Festive Wreath Making, and Embroidered Christmas Decorations to name a few.

It goes without saying that the benefits of creative outlets are clear and evident, not only for the average person but especially for those most in need.

They create a safe space for people to develop a new skill, socialise, and become part of the local community.

If covid taught us anything, it's that life is too short and hobbies should be at the top of your to do list, they don't stop after education, not if you don't want them to.

So, slow down, fill your cup doing things you enjoy, and have an open-mind – who knows you could be the next Picasso!

Image credits to Lucianne Bell.

Images on right display different items made at previous festive Handmade Workshops



Co-founder of Handmade Workshops, Catherine Dolan

Escape the city

Your Bournemouth coastal adventure awaits

Words & images by Cymbeline Young

For families, couples, friends, or those who just prefer to go it solo, a scenic one-hour and 46-minute train journey from Waterloo to the south coast could see you off on your next adventure by the sea.

With picturesque forest walks just a stone's throw from Bournemouth's expansive sandy beaches and lively nightlife, this vibrant yet historic town offers a diverse range of activities and sights to suit every type of traveller.

After a long week of work, we know the last thing you want to be doing is scouring Tik-Tok for recommendations, so we've done the legwork for you. All you have to do is pack the bag!



Sight-see: Russell-Cotes Museum & Gallery

What's the best birthday gift you've ever been given?

For Annie Russell-Cotes, in 1901, it wasn't just a gift.

Her husband, Sir Merton Russell-Cotes, gifted her a bespoke seaside home perched on the cliffs of Bournemouth, which still stands as a museum today after they gifted it to the town in 1907.

Now known as the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, this grand home is a time capsule

from the Victorian era, offering a glimpse into the lives of the affluent Russell-Cotes couple.

For lovers of history and romance, the story behind this historic home is one you won't forget. The carefully crafted mansion, filled with exquisite works of art from across the globe and in-depth history of the area, can be seen by visitors for £9.50 per adult and £5.00.



Walk: Hengistbury Head

Get your walking boots on and head out to the stunning UNESCO World Heritage site of Hengistbury Head. Famous for its scenic ocean beauty and diverse nature reserve, this headland dates back to the Stone Age.

As a famous hiking spot, pick the perfect trail to take you through the beaches, heathland, woodland, and a viewpoint — all in a day's work.

With free parking and, a hot chocolate waiting for you at the Hiker Café after your long walk, what's stopping you?



Fun when there's no sun: BH2 Leisure Complex

If your flying visit happens to fall on a rainy day, don't worry! Bournemouth's BH2 Complex has you covered.

Located in the heart of town, this bustling hub offers a wide variety of indoor activities for you to choose from. Foodies can take their pick of worldwide delicacies. After you've indulged in your favourite food and drink, why not challenge your friends to a game at Boom Battle Bar.

If all that action sounds a bit much after a hearty meal, why not wind down with a film at the Odeon? Get comfy, grab some popcorn, and let the big screen take over to cap off your day

Gabriel Almeida, a Bournemouth local, originally from London, said: "Careful when visiting Bournemouth, you might never leave!

"I came to the south on a camping trip with my family in 2007 and we loved it so much here we decided to move from our home in Camberwell.

"We love it."

Escape the hustle of London and explore the beauty of the coast.

Enjoy your trip!

Re-imagined Treasure Island set to arrive at the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond

By Daniel Mulhern



Treasure Island is arriving at Richmond's Orange Tree Theatre in December, but with a couple of changes to Robert Louis Stevenson's classic.

The reworked classic is directed by Natasha Rickman and written by Hannah Khalil.

In the original story, the young Jim Hawkins finds a map to treasure and with the help of some friends and a crew hand-picked by 'trusty cook' Long John Silver, they set off on the Hispaniola.

Hannah noticed there were no female pirates in Stevenson's story, so she decided to make some changes.

She said: "I had read about Ann Bonny and Mary Read, these two real-life female pirates. I was looking for a way to write about them.

"To be able to create the world and portray these brave female pirates is really exciting."

In the rework, Long John Silver (Japhia Papa Marfo/Angus Alderson) runs his pub in Bristol with Ann Bonny (India Rissik/Kaci Kerwick) and Mary Read (Katie Rough/ Ferah Jennela).

The three of them will join cabin-boy Jim Hawkins (Apple Rozas-Lipman/Kit Riou), Dr Livesey (Bronte Sherborne/Avani Zarine) and his squire Trelawny (Michael Neckham/Joshua Lendon) on the Hispaniola in an adventure filled with pirates, sea shanties and cheese.

The space at the Orange Tree allows for the audience to be really close to the action in what will be a unique experience.

Hannah said: "We have such a big company that there's two different versions of the cast so if they like it they can come back and see another group of people do it.

"Our director Natasha has a real flair and we have a lot of

young actors which I think is really special.

"It should feel fun, exciting, compelling and when it finishes, you'll think you could watch it again."

Hannah said she has been inspired by the young cast and believes they will go on to do great things.

"There's so much talent on show and audiences will be seeing people on stage who I have no doubt will be in bigger casts, bigger stages and probably on screen in the future.

"If you want to see the stars of the future, come and see Treasure Island."

Treasure Island runs at the Orange Tree Theatre from December 18th to December 22nd.

Book tickets at Orangetreetheatre.co.uk.

All images courtesy of Steve Gregson.



Bill set to bring ‘Chaos Theatre’ to the Omnibus Theatre in Clapham

By Daniel Mulhern

Red Fox Theatre’s show about the life of American conspiracy theorist Bill Cooper is coming to Clapham this December at the Omnibus Theatre.

Bill’s writer and director is Megan Jenkins, who created the show alongside the other members of Red Fox Theatre.

Fellow creator Callum McGuire described Bill as being unique and very different to what audience members will have seen before.

He said: “We brand ourselves as chaos theatre and we use any kind of medium within our means to tell the story best.”

Bill Cooper was a conspiracy theorist and radio show host that Bill Clinton once referred to as the most dangerous person on radio.

The creation of the play is just as chaotic as the play itself.

Callum said: “We’re quite unique in how we create.

“We find a story and work around the story we want to tell, we will improvise and then Megan will write everything we do.

“She then sifts through everything to find the gold and sets the scene.”

In the play everything is constantly moving, everyone has roughly 12 different parts.

Callum said: “Our characters never leave the stage and are always there, almost being entities of Bill himself.

“All the way through Bill controls the show itself, because he is hosting these radio shows and we’re sort of his puppets.

“There’s plenty of roles throughout, we aren’t just one

character. We’ll go from a British admiral, to an alien, to a cowboy.”

Red Fox Theatre was created in 2018 by Callum, Jonty Weston, Megan, Ben Simon, and Anna McCormick.

Bill is only Red Fox’s second show as the theatre spent years touring with their hit first show *Catch of the Day*.

The theatre started when Callum heard the story behind *Catch of the Day* on the radio.

Catch of the Day is a story about Anglo-Irish relations in the 60s, built on the testimonies of those who experienced it.

Callum couldn’t believe it wasn’t a story already and they started working on it.

“I told a few of my friends about the story, they loved it. Then we decided on kind of a whim to book a run in Edinburgh.

“That’s how Red Fox was born and we have been creating ever since.”

Throughout the production of *Catch of the Day* they were travelling over and back from Ireland and interviewing people, asking them about their lives and stories.

Both shows use what Megan calls ‘Secret Lasagne’, as she compared teaching people about divisive issues to sneaking your

child’s vegetables into a lasagne.

He said: “It has been the same for Bill, we have hours and hours of recordings from Bill’s radio shows.

“In some parts you don’t know if what’s happening is true or false, but it’s really lovely to have those verbatim bits come back to knit it all together and make you realise these are true stories, these are things that were actually said.”

Bill is to open at the Omnibus on December 3 and will wrap up on December 22.

You can book tickets for Bill at www.omnibus-clapham.org.



The cast preparing for Bill. Image Credit: Red Fox Theatre



Is Ozempic really the magic bullet for healthy weight loss?

By Chloe Chenery



Credit: Chemist4U on Flickr

Some hail it as a miracle solution, but evidence and concerns show it may not live up to the hype.

Ozempic has skyrocketed in popularity in the most recent years as a treatment for type 2 diabetes but also as a weight loss aid for those with a high body mass index (BMI).

It belongs to a class of drugs called GLP-1 receptor agonists, which mimic a hormone that helps to regulate appetite and blood sugar levels leading to weight loss and improved glycaemic control.

When talking about the attention Ozempic has had lately, Abbas Kanani superintendent pharmacist at Chemist Click said:

“Demand has led to

off-label prescribing and the use of Ozempic for weight loss.

“This has caused global shortages which is concerning for diabetic patients who rely on Ozempic.

“Current guidance in the UK states that Ozempic should only be prescribed for treating type 2 diabetes to protect supply for diabetes patients.

“It should not be prescribed solely for weight loss.”

Abbas also supports The Department for Health and Social Care and NHS England advice against prescribing GLP-1s off-label, as this can worsen shortages.

On the surface, the benefits of this drug seem straightforward however there are

consequences.

According to the Ozempic website, the drug can cause serious side effects such as inflammation of your pancreas, low blood sugar, kidney problems, severe allergic reactions and gallbladder issues.

The most common also include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pain and constipation.

So do the benefits of Ozempic outweigh the potential harm it could cause?

The latest figures show that in 2021-2022 63.8% of adults aged 18 years and over in England were estimated to be overweight or living with obesity, with people 45 and 84 years old being the most overweight.

Reports suggest that obesity

is expected to rise from 14% of the global population in 2023 up to 24% of the global population by 2035 meaning that 2 billion people globally are expected to be obese by 2035.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities states that “obesity is a global and complex public health concern.

“It is associated with reduced life expectancy and is a risk factor for a range of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, at least 12 kinds of cancer, liver, and respiratory disease, and can also impact on mental health”.

Announced in October, the UK government is partnering with Eli Lilly to test the weight-loss drug Mounjaro in a five-year trial in Greater Manchester to find out if the drug can help people with obesity get back to work and prevent obesity-related diseases.

The trial which has had a £279 million investment, will include up to 3000 patients including those who are obese and unemployed.

NHS Chief Executive Amanda Pritchard said: “Obesity is one of the biggest public health issues we face, and we know weight loss drugs will be a game-changer, alongside earlier prevention strategies, in supporting many more people to lose weight and reduce their risk of killer conditions like diabetes, heart attack and stroke.”

With obesity costing the UK health service more than £11 billion each year, action to tackle the condition is urgently needed.



Credit:
Me on Flickr
PickPic
antefixus21 on Flickr
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The double-edged mental health crisis beyond the food bank

By Libby Jennings

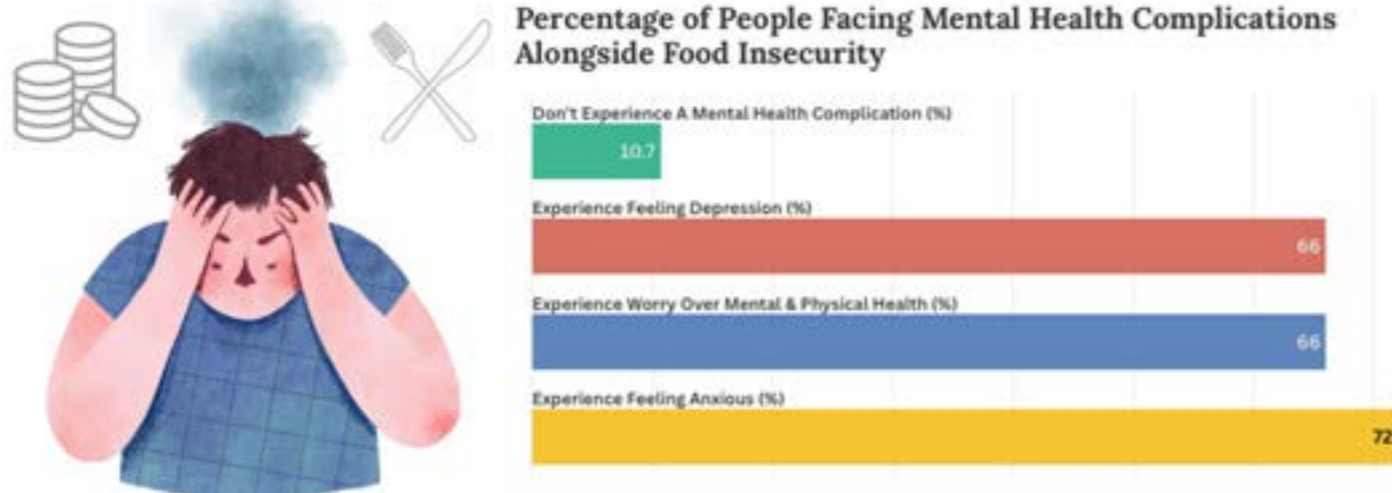
“Mental illness is valid, I need more support. My mental health issues are from the death of my daughter. It’s so difficult to control that sometimes I can’t go on. Lack of money to live makes things a thousand times worse,” shared a Trussell Trust food bank user.

This personal struggle highlights a growing problem in the UK, where food insecurity and mental health issues are inextricably linked.

According to a 2023 Food Foundation report, individuals who experience food insecurity are twice as likely to develop mental health problems compared to those who are food secure.

The data also highlights that 56% of people referred to food banks report having a mental health condition, compared to only 15% of the general population.

As the winter months unravel, food bank usage increases, with a notable seasonal spike. According to Trussell Trust data, food bank referrals increase by 40% in December and January, with families facing not only the winter chill but also anxiety of whether they can afford food, heating, and basic necessities.



Data from the Food Foundation empathised the impact of food insecurity on mental health is staggering; 72% of households facing food insecurity in the past six months report feeling anxious, and 66% report experiencing depression. This contrasts with just 11% of individuals not facing food insecurity who report these issues. In addition, more than 66% of food-insecure households worry about the long-term effects of their situation on both their mental and physical health.

Sarah Noles, local engagement officer at Oasis Hub Waterloo, explained:

“There’s a strong relationship between experiencing mental health conditions and financial hardship; the two factors reinforce each other.”

A major driver of food insecurity is the financial burden placed on vulnerable individuals. According to 2023 Trussell Trust data, nearly one in five food bank clients were referred due to benefit delays, sanctions, or cuts. This reflects the growing financial strain as benefit cuts and delays in Universal Credit payments have forced many families into crisis.

Nearly 40% of food bank users report having cut back on heating or other essential services to afford food, contributing to worsening mental health symptoms, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The financial gap in support is highlighted by an anonymous food bank user who shared:

“Sickness made me not fit to work despite the fact that I’ve been working since 15 years old and paying taxes. £166 per month is disrespectful & very stressful. This does not help my mental health condition.”

Noles argues the current support system often fails to account for the trauma many food bank users have faced. “The system is not designed with trauma in mind,” she explains, noting that around 55% of food bank clients have experienced significant life events, such as the loss of a loved one, which contributed to their need for emergency aid, according to Cambridge University Press.



Credit: Oasis Hub Waterloo

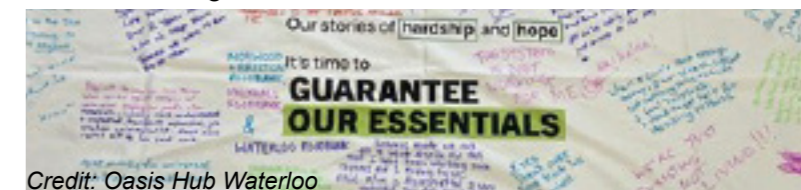
As Noles points out, a more trauma-informed approach, would reduce the retraumatization many face while seeking support.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, nearly half of people seeking food bank support report unmet mental health needs.

This is supported by the 2023 NHS survey highlighting that 44% of individuals with mental health conditions report being unable to access the treatment they need due to long waiting lists and underfunded services.

To address the crisis at hand, many experts advocate for substantial changes in the UK’s social security system. A key proposal is ring-fenced funding for mental health services, particularly those delivered by community organisations.

These services could provide trauma-informed care and support to individuals facing both food insecurity and mental health challenges.



Credit: Oasis Hub Waterloo

Furthermore, campaigns like the Trussell Trust’s ‘Guarantee Our Essentials’ initiative are urging for urgent increases to Universal Credit to meet the rising cost of living. According to a 2023 report by Citizens Advice, 55% of people receiving Universal Credit have reported that it does not cover their basic living costs, with many reporting having to make tough choices between food, heating, and essential medical treatments.

Experts agree that addressing food insecurity and mental health requires a systemic overhaul that tackles the root causes, including inadequate social support. As winter approaches, demand for food banks is expected to rise, underscoring the urgent need for a holistic approach.

For real change, the UK government must prioritise long-term solutions, fostering collaboration between local charities, community organisations, and government bodies to create a sustainable framework that addresses both food insecurity and mental health needs.

As Noles emphasised:

“We are doing everything we can to empathise the link between mental health and food bank needs. There is hope, but only if MPs and the government listen to the people most affected by these issues and take meaningful action.”

Lambeth Council didn’t respond when contacted for comment.



Is women's health being prioritised?

By Chloe Chenery

Announced in 2022, the Women's Health Strategy was a turning point for change, in the hope of amplifying the voices of many women and allowing better access to healthcare.

According to the Government, while women in the UK on average live longer than men, women spend a significantly greater proportion of their lives in ill health and disability when compared with men.

Historically the health and care system has been designed by men

for men, although women make up 51% of the population.

However, when reflecting on this plan, health journalist Sarah Graham said: "We're two years into a 10-year plan, but it doesn't feel like we are 20% in."

"It doesn't feel like we're 20% of the way to what the strategy says we're going to achieve."

"So how do we take it to that next level and make sure that these things are a realistic possibility?"

So what exactly did the strategy aim to improve?

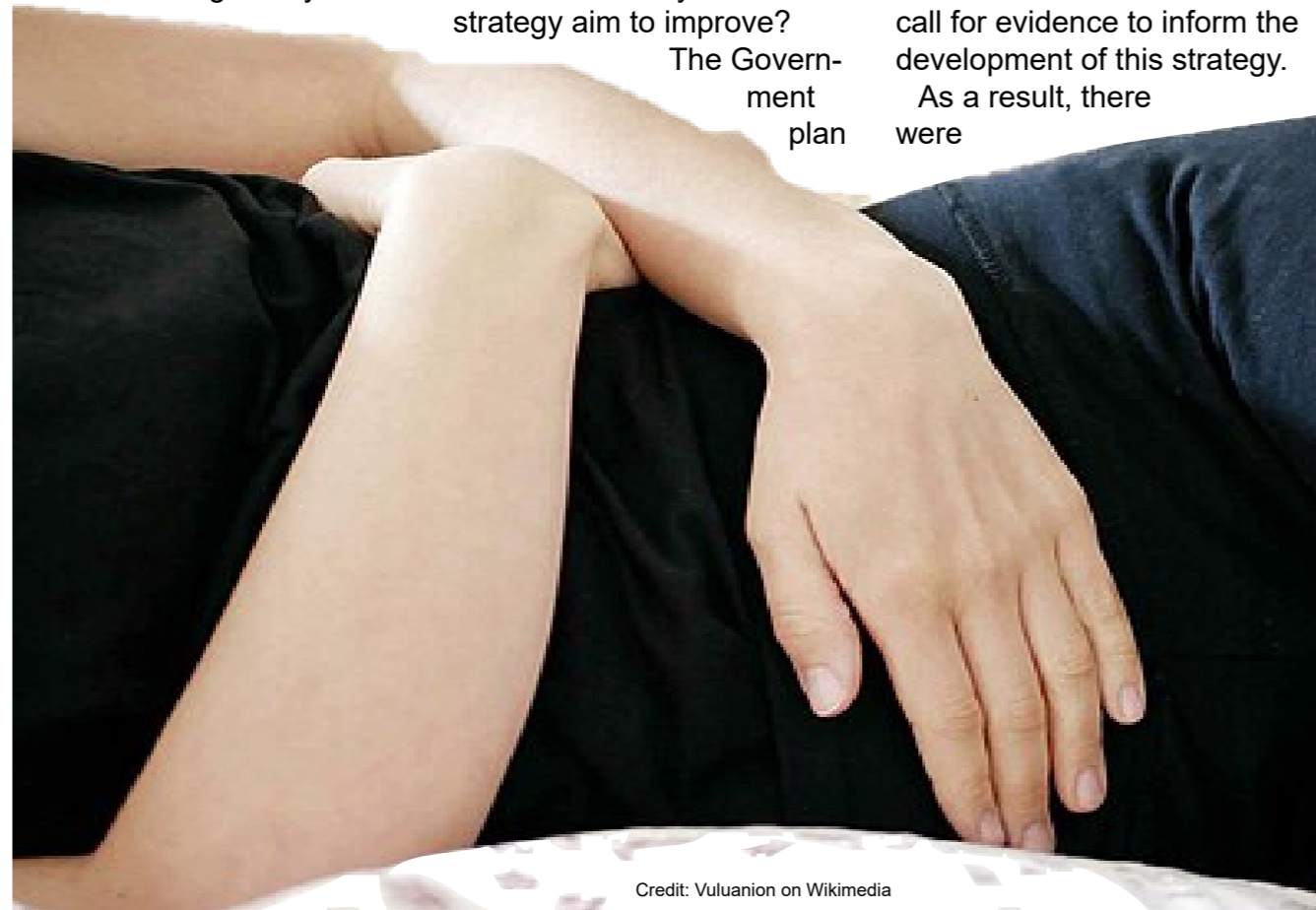
The Government plan

that the strategy will have boosted health outcomes for all women and girls and radically improved the way in which the health and care system engages and listens to all women and girls.

They aim to achieve this by taking a life course approach, embedding hybrid and wrap around services as best practice, boosting representation of women's voices and experiences in policy making as well as focusing on women's health policy and services.

On 8 March 2021, the government launched a 14-week call for evidence to inform the development of this strategy.

As a result, there were



Credit: Vuluanion on Wikimedia

110,123 responses of which 97,307 were from individuals who told them that they lived in England and wanted to share their own experiences, the experiences of a female family member, friend or partner, or their reflections as a health or care professional.

Women highlighted issues such as not being listened to at appointments, waiting years for diagnoses for conditions such as endometriosis and health issues that restrict them from fulfilling their everyday lives.

Gynaecological issues were the top topic for those who responded to the public survey, with 63% of respondents as well as 47% choosing menstrual health.

Women not feeling listened to is a big problem, with many saying it has taken speaking to doctors on multiple occasions over months or years before receiving a diagnosis for

things such as endometriosis.

When discussing this with Sarah, she told me: "I think very often when we talk about women's health, we think of gynaecology, you know, menstrual health, menopause, pregnancy, childbirth."

"And I think one of the areas that I find very frustratingly not talked about is a lot of particularly kind of chronic health conditions that disproportionately affect women, so things like ME, a lot of autoimmune diseases, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, long COVID, all those sorts of conditions."

"Thyroid disease is another one where we don't necessarily think of it as a women's health issue, but actually

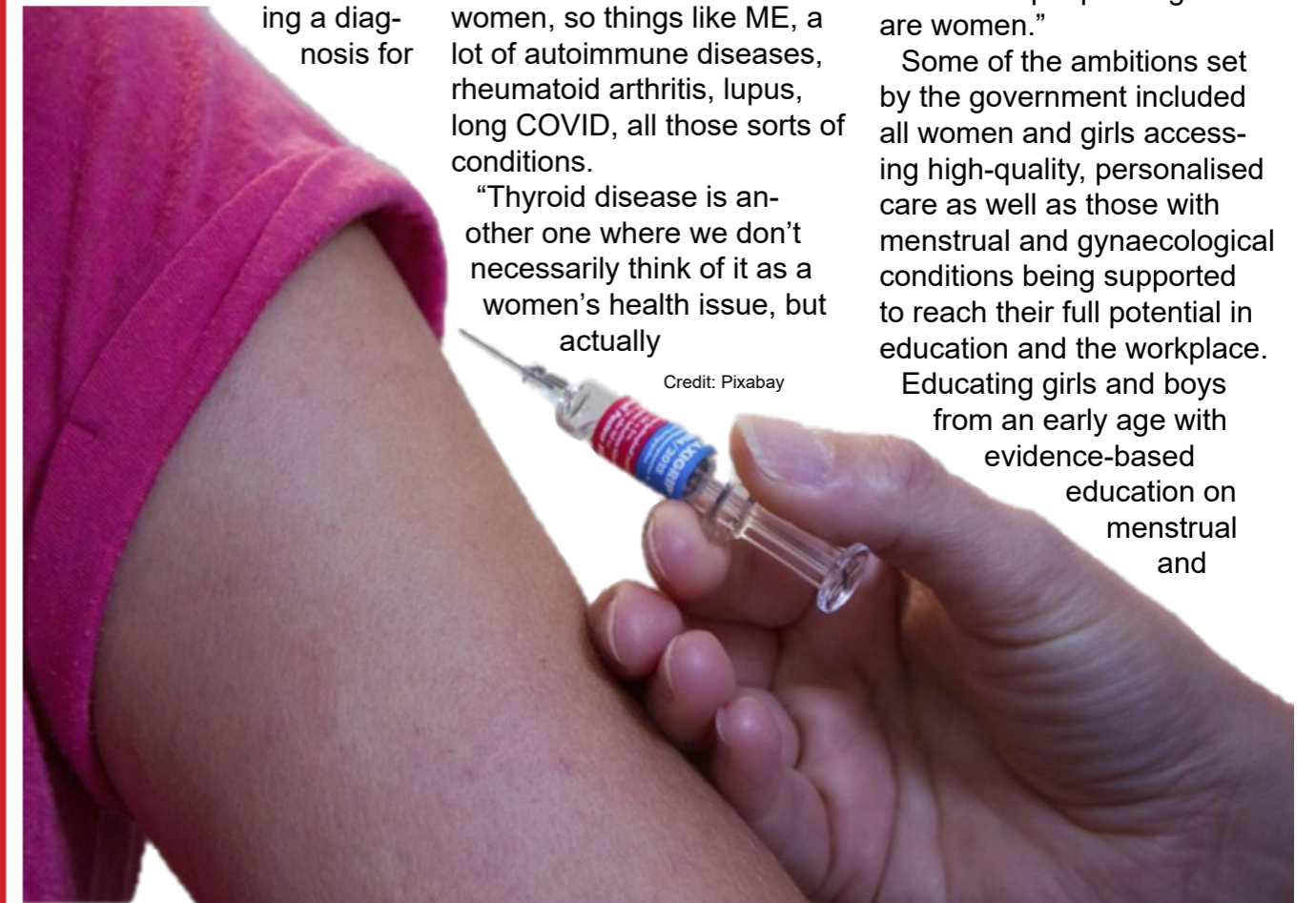
in some cases, 70, 80, even 90% of the people diagnosed are women."

Some of the ambitions set by the government included all women and girls accessing high-quality, personalised care as well as those with menstrual and gynaecological conditions being supported to reach their full potential in education and the workplace.

Educating girls and boys from an early age with evidence-based education on menstrual and



Credit: Rawpixel



Credit: Pixabay

gynaecological health will also reduce taboo and increase awareness of the issues that can occur.

Many women fear the infamous smear letter through the door as many find it embarrassing - but it really is a life saver.

Sarah highlighted a new self sampling pilot to overcome this: "I think cervical screening is a really interesting one because the public health messaging on it has not been

the clinic for further investigations.

Another focus, which they have highlighted as one of the main things this year to tackle is expanding women's health hubs.

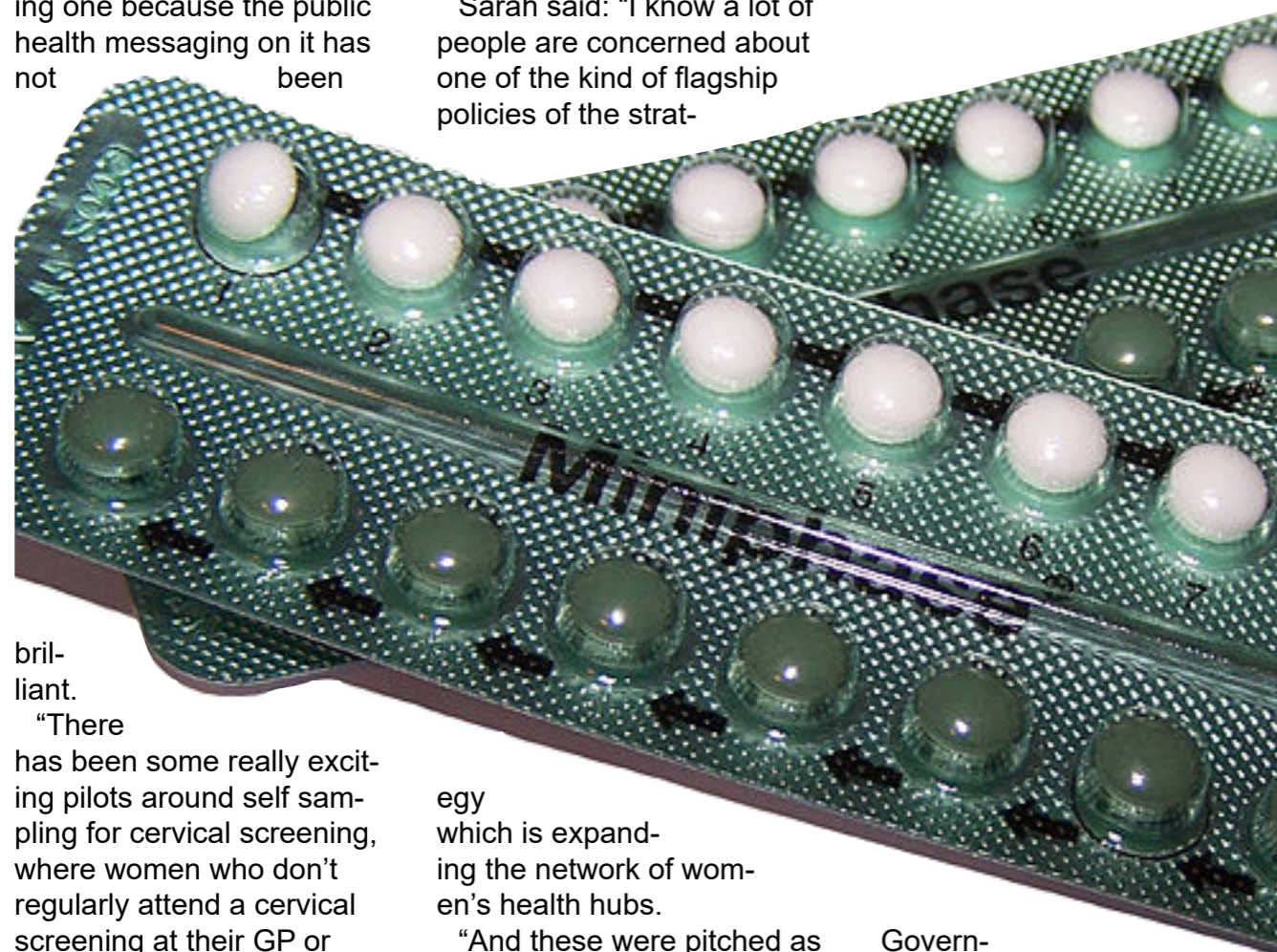
These health hubs aim to improve access to and experiences of care, improve health outcomes for women, and reduce health inequalities.

Sarah said: "I know a lot of people are concerned about one of the kind of flagship policies of the strat-

existence in places such as Liverpool, Manchester and Hackney.

By the end of December 2024, integrated care boards (ICBs) are expected to have established and developed at least one women's health hub in every ICB to improve access and quality of care.

But what have the



brilliant.

"There has been some really exciting pilots around self sampling for cervical screening, where women who don't regularly attend a cervical screening at their GP or sexual health clinic can be sent a kit in the post, and essentially it's a vaginal swab which is tested for high risk HPV.

"It's something you can do at home in the comfort and privacy of your own bathroom.

"You send it off to a lab for testing and then if anything comes back then you're referred into the hospital or

egy which is expanding the network of women's health hubs.

"And these were pitched as a kind of, you know, one-stop shop where you could get your cervical smear, have a pill check, or get your HRT.

"You could kind of do everything you needed to do in one place at one appointment, so you're not being sent all over the place to different clinics."

At the time the strategy was announced, some health hubs were already in

Government actually achieved over the past year to make the lives of women just that little bit easier?

NHS England announced its ambition to eliminate cervical cancer by 2040 by making it as easy as possible for women to get the lifesaving human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination and increasing cervical screening uptake.

Credit: Ceridwen on Wikimedia Commons

The NHS England Pharmacy Contraception Service relaunched to enable community pharmacies to initiate oral contraception. Almost 3,000 pharmacies have already signed, making access to contraception easier

Between launch in July 2023 and early January, there were 102,872 visits to

the new women's health area on the NHS website and 1.26 million visits to its new hormone replacement therapy area.

The government also announced £12.4 million to help change choices about work, which included six

ground-breaking projects including an investigation looking at how endometriosis impacts women in the workplace.

But as Sarah said, we are 20% of the way through this strategy - surely there is more that could have been done in that time.

"Getting the NHS to a point

where it works for most, if not all, people, is a priority.

"I think it's important, though, that the women's health strategy isn't sidelined within that."

You can find Sarah's book *Rebel Bodies: A guide to the gender health gap revolution* online.

Credit: Joanna Malinowska on Wikimedia Commons



The silent grief of miscarriage:

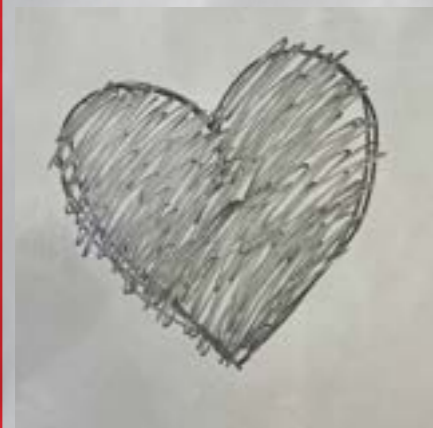
How is the Pregnancy Loss Review changing the narrative for women?

Words & images by Cymbeline Young

Seeking to address the huge challenges faced by women who have experienced pregnancy loss, the UK government has announced significant updates to its Pregnancy Loss Review, pioneered under Rishi Sunak's Conservative government.

The Pregnancy Loss Review document contains 73 recommendations that outline the long-awaited, essential support needed for the estimated 250,000 pregnancies that end in miscarriage each year, impacting roughly one in five women (in the UK).

Awareness of pregnancy loss and its profound impact on women and families is steadily growing, driven by key initiatives such as Baby Loss Awareness Week each October, and vital support offered by bereavement charities such as The Miscarriage Association, SEEN, and Sands.



Sarah, 38, who has experienced five of her own heartbreaking miscarriages, said: "I think miscarriage is, unfortu-

nately, something that is common, and with common events, it takes some of the empathy away from what is actually happening to an individual. "I was sent home with a leaflet. That miscarriage had to have medical intervention because my body wasn't miscarrying, so I did have to have an operation. I was sent away with a leaflet telling me when to take painkillers.

"This huge event is happening to an individual, but the world carries on turning."

Sarah also explained the psychological impact a miscarriage can have on a person's well-being. She said: "When you have a miscarriage, whether that be from a medical termination, or whether that be your body is naturally miscarrying, you don't have anything at the end of it except the lost opportunities and, of course, your lost baby.

"You lose a part of your future as well, in that moment, in that time."

Recommendation 61:

Recommendation 61 in the Pregnancy Loss Review introduces Baby Loss certificates with no backdate limitation. This means that parents who have experienced a pregnancy loss before 24 weeks gestation, regardless of the date, can now access a certificate via the voluntary government service. Previously, certificates were

only available to those who had experienced a pregnancy loss after September 2018. According to the UK government, over 50,000 voluntary certificates have been issued since the new scheme launched in February 2024.

To qualify for the certificate, applicants must be a parent or surrogate of the baby, be at least 16 years old and reside in England. While Baby Loss certificates are not a legal document, they serve as a formal recognition of the loss, offering parents a memorial of their experience.

Sarah said: "I think it will bring comfort in a time when you're really going through something traumatic and you're vulnerable."

When asked if a certificate would have been comforting to her at the time of her miscarriages, Sarah said: "It would have been an understanding that we've suffered a loss.

"It will certainly bring me comfort knowing that I have a certificate recognising that we lost a child."

Sarah explained that even if parents who have experienced pregnancy loss feel that applying for a certificate isn't right for them, it's important that they are aware such certificates are available.

She said: "If they feel that it's right for them to have some form of recognition, then they can explore that option."



The official NHS definition of a miscarriage is the loss of a pregnancy during the first 23 weeks. Pregnancies lost after this time are then classified as stillbirths.



Accurate statistics on the rate of miscarriages among women are difficult to gather because they are not recorded in a standard way.

If a pregnancy is lost before 24 weeks, it is not necessarily recorded on a person's medical records.

For instance, an individual may experience a miscarriage before realising they are pregnant or without seeking medical assistance, depending on the situation.

This gap in medical reporting raises an important question:

Are these unreported losses an indicator of unreported grief amongst women?

Silent grief.

In the ministerial foreword of this review, former Women's Minister Maria Caulfield stated: "I read with dismay and sadness about the lack of compassion shown to those who had suffered pre-24-week pregnancy loss and how, in some instances, families were not provided the emotional support they so desperately needed.

"We must do more to support those who lose their babies

in early or mid-pregnancy." The significant impact these certificates can have on women who have experienced pregnancy loss is also being increasingly recognised by professionals across the NHS.

There is a growing understanding that miscarriage can deeply impact an individual's journey with future pregnancies and shape the way they process their past experiences.

Community midwife for the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust, Vivian Simmons, 71, said: "A miscarriage from any gestation in pregnancy affects women in different ways because there is no one thing that covers all emotions, so you also have to realise that some pregnancies find women in a difficult situation, especially those with mental health problems; the effect varies.

"There isn't one way of dealing with it.

"In all women, I have found, whether they lose the baby and are sorry to have lost the baby, or whether they lose the baby and it actually makes their lives a little bit easier, they all grieve that loss.

"I have women who will talk for a long period of time about

their baby that they've lost and the distress they feel that it's not been acknowledged.

"They feel an anxiety with the following pregnancy and worry that they will lose another baby and another baby, and it isn't until you have a miscarriage that other people say they felt exactly the same."

When asked how she thinks these certificates will make women who have experienced baby loss feel, Simmons said: "You are not ignoring their grief, and you are not ignoring their first or their second or their third, or whichever pregnancy it turns out to be.

"They have a certificate and can say, this is not my first pregnancy, and my first pregnancy is acknowledged as a miscarriage, and it is acknowledged as my baby."

Other guidance within the review outlines the importance of adequate support for individuals who experience pregnancy loss and their partners.

Recommendation 69 states that the NHS should lead other employers by example in offering their staff, who have experienced a loss pre-24 weeks, paid leave.

Recommendation 69:

"We recommend that up to 10 days of paid leave for the person who is pregnant and five days for the partner should be provided for any pre-24-week baby loss.

"A 'fitness for work' statement from a GP should not be required unless additional time off is needed."

According to the Miscarriage Association, a UK-based charity that has been supporting individuals affected by pregnancy loss since 1982, the lack of legal protections for bereavement leave in the case of early pregnancy losses leaves many people struggling to balance their recovery with workplace demands.

In addition to the physical recovery, which may include symptoms like bleeding and pain, pregnancy loss is an emotionally distressing experience.

For many, this emotional toll makes it particularly difficult to return to their normal routines, and some are forced to take unpaid leave, compounding financial challenges at an already difficult time.

The Miscarriage Association not only provides support and information to those experiencing pregnancy loss but also played a vital role in campaigning for the abolition of the backdate limitation on Baby Loss Certificates.

As a result, there is now no longer a limitation on eligibility for parents who experienced a pregnancy loss prior to September 2018.

Now, anyone who has suffered a loss and meets the criteria is eligible for a Baby Loss certificate.

The Miscarriage Association's

CEO Vicki Robinson explained they campaigned hard to see the certificate scheme extended, and their success marks a significant milestone for those who have waited for this recognition.

She said: "For many, even the earliest of losses can be deeply distressing, both emotionally and physically, but having formal acknowledgement as a marker of their loss can be a meaningful part of the grieving process."

Vital services offered to individuals by the Miscarriage Association include a pregnancy loss helpline, a live chat and email support service, support groups, and leaflets.

They can also signpost individuals to quality and specialised counselling services.

Robinson went on to say: "Everyone has their own unique experience of pregnancy loss, and the support received can vary depending on the care they receive from health professionals, employers, friends, and family.

"More needs to be done to break down the taboos of miscarriage and pregnancy loss so individuals feel able to talk about their experience more openly.

"The Miscarriage Association exists to address these challenges through emotional support, practical resources, and advocacy.

"We aim to provide a safe space where individuals and partners can find understanding, information, and community, helping them navigate their loss."

The summary report of the Pregnancy Loss Review, published by the Department of Health and Social Care, acknowledges the immense

challenges faced by individuals experiencing pregnancy loss (currently or historically).

While some of the review's recommendations are set to be implemented immediately, others are part of a longer-term strategy.



Combined efforts from charities like The Miscarriage Association, key updates made to the review, and the courageous families who have campaigned for greater recognition have all played a key role in creating a more compassionate and open dialogue about miscarriage and its significant impact on people.

These efforts have shed light on past mistreatment, offering hope for a brighter future, including better workplace bereavement policies and stronger recognition within society, the government, and the NHS.

Matters of the Mind: The Cibyl 2024 student mental health report

Two in five students report that financial pressures stemming from the cost-of-living crisis have prevented them from engaging in mental health maintenance strategies.



By Cymbeline Young

Student research initiative 'Cibyl' and its partners, which launched in 2019 to better understand the challenges faced by students and graduates, published its 2024 findings, highlighting a strong correlation between a poor diet and lifestyle and, low mental health scores among students.

The report found the impact of financial stress and the cost-of-living crisis has a significant effect on a student's mental health and quality of life.

The 2024 findings highlight many students are forced to forgo eating healthily, engaging in extracurricular activities, and socialising due to financial constraints.

Head of research at Cibyl Lisa Marris said: "This year's research shows a marked increase in respondents reporting a mental health disability.

"Raising awareness of the importance of mental health remains relevant, however, our focus should shift towards prevention of decline and intervention when needed.

"The cost-of-living continues to contribute to students' stress and limits their ability to maintain a physically and socially healthy lifestyle – buying healthy food is becoming less affordable, and socialising is rarely completely cost-free.



Designed by Cymbeline Young

"Our research consistently shows the importance of friends and community on mental well-being, and this year we're starting to see a link with diet too.

"Educators and employers can

and should do more to implement and encourage healthy working practices to improve mental wellbeing. The time of listening has passed, the time of action has come."

In the form of a survey, 12,644 respondents from over 145 UK universities took part in answering various questions which covered lifestyle and eating habits, stress relating to a graduate job search, engaging in employment and, community and social involvement.

The majority of respondents were full-time students (85%), while 4% were part-time students.

Additionally, 1% were completing a placement year, another 1% were studying abroad as part of their program, and 1% were engaged in an apprenticeship at the time of the survey.

The report stated the data was weighted by gender and university to ensure the results were representative of the national student body. Worrying about money and how it negatively affects a student's mental health was emphasised within the report, stating that 71% of respondents

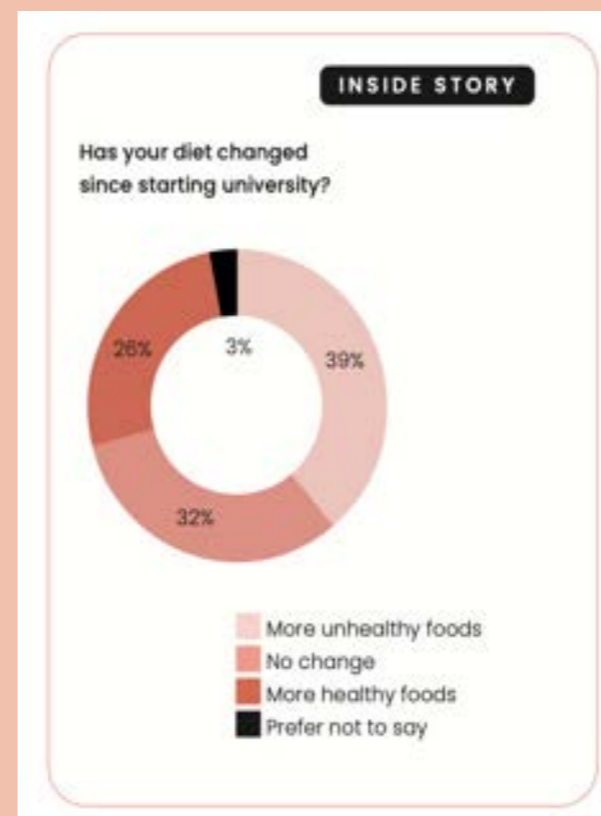
attributed their mental health difficulties either or partially to the cost-of-living pressure.

A staggering 43% of respondents stated financial constraints as a barrier to using strategies for maintaining their mental health.

This raises important questions about how financial pressures are affecting students' lives to the point where it undermines their well-being.

Cibyl asked students whether their eating habits had improved or declined since attending university.

Examples of 'unhealthy foods' include takeaways, sugary drinks, and ultra-processed meals.



Credit: Cibyl 2024 Report

The report also found that nearly half (43%) of students are eating unhealthy foods a few times a week, and 23% said they indulged in unhealthy foods a few times a month.

However, a smaller group (16%) stated they eat unhealthily every day, while only one in 50 stated they never ate unhealthily.

According to the collated results within the whole Cibyl report, students with unhealthy eating habits are proportionally more likely to have a low mental health score, social anxiety and

not use any mental health strategies to cope.

Law and criminology student at the University of West of England Freya Stait said: "The cost-of-living crisis has definitely impacted me as my rent is considerably more than my maintenance loan.

"I'm lucky that my parents help me out in the sense that we half the remaining money due on rent, which works out at about £350 each.

"Also, it's definitely noticeable now having to buy my own food since moving to uni that it's expensive even getting the basics.

"I definitely think the student finance system is broken and nobody's trying to fix it!

"I know people whose parents have retired very early, and they therefore get the maximum student loan whereas people whose parents earn just over the threshold get the minimum but have no spare money to help their child at uni.

"In my case, I get the minimum student loan which is just over half of my rent, meaning I have to pay out of pocket the other half as well as having no spare money free.

"I wouldn't be able to attend uni if I didn't have a job."

To gather comprehensive insights for their research, Cibyl partnered with Accenture, Universities UK, and Student Minds to use their expertise in student lifestyles and mental health trends.

The 2024 Cibyl report includes key recommendations for universities, aimed at easing the burden on students and increasing their awareness of available support systems for a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

These recommendations not only stress the importance of providing mental health support for students but also emphasise the need for universities to genuinely care about students' mental well-being.

This includes offering flexible study options that support mental health and nurturing a strong sense of community and belonging.

Such initiatives can significantly improve students' overall mental health experience while they pursue their studies.

Is PRIME By Logan Paul x KSI past its prime?

By Libby Jennings

In 2022, I moved from Manchester to London for university. When I returned home, instead of the typical ‘hello, I missed you’ from my younger male relatives, I was bombarded with demands for information. Where had I seen the last bottle of PRIME? And if I had spotted one, why didn’t I have it with me? At the time, my mum worked at a place that stocked PRIME and had a stash ready to hand out as Christmas gifts. So while some may think going to university is a significant life event, in my family, PRIME was a much bigger deal.

Fast forward nearly three years, and the once-scarce bottles of PRIME now sit fully stocked on store shelves, devoid of the grappling hands. While it once held 32% of the UK’s £350 million sports drink market in 2023, sales have since plummeted, according to Nielsen. NIQ reports show a year-on-year decline of over 50%, and retailers are now heavily discounting stock, with The Grocer reporting that the 500ml bottles at times have been priced at a mere 31p in Tesco, far from the £2.50 launch price. This shift makes me wonder: has this once-coveted drink passed its prime?

PRIME, co-founded by YouTubers KSI and Logan Paul, exploded into the mainstream thanks to their massive online

influence, boasting nearly 50 million YouTube subscribers combined. Initially known for their public rivalry, including A well-publicised feud and viral boxing matches watched by millions, the two unexpectedly transformed their competition into a profitable partnership.

The transition from enemies to business partners seemed inevitable with so much money, and online attention, on the table. However, despite its success, PRIME hasn’t escaped controversy over its marketing tactics aimed at a young audience and the scrutiny of its nutritional content.

Nutritionist Katerina Gordanian warns that the sweeteners in PRIME could alter children’s taste preferences, making them favour sugary drinks over healthier options. She raises important questions about PRIME’s identity:

“**Is it a hydrating drink? Is it a sports drink or energy drink? It feels a bit mismatched on the market.**”

While PRIME markets itself as a health drink rich in electrolytes, it falls short in sodium content compared to traditional hydration options like water.

Gordanian warns that consuming too many electrolytes and unnecessary vitamins can cause side effects like dizziness and muscle cramps, especially

in children and those not exercising strenuously.

Countries like New Zealand have banned the energy variant of PRIME, while Australia, Canada, the UK, the US, and South Africa have restricted it in schools.

Parent Dawn Mellors voiced her concerns, stating:

“**It should be banned; it’s immoral. People think it’s healthy because it’s marketed as a sports drink. They have 100% profited off their child audience.**”

Gordanian acknowledges that indulging in less healthy options isn’t inherently wrong, stating: “Sometimes we’re not holy people; all of us can eat not-so-great things. It’s okay to have PRIME sometimes, but you have to be conscious about sweetener consumption.”

Three years later, while PRIME still has its fans, many parents are becoming more cautious about buying it for their children.

The bans in schools show that there are real concerns about its nutritional content and how it affects young kids. Although PRIME was once the must-have drink, families are now looking for healthier choices, and as time goes on, it will be interesting to see if PRIME can keep its popularity or if it will become just another short-lived trend.



The importance of social media for the awareness and visibility of female sport

By Lucianne Bell

Latest research by the Women's Sport Trust (WST) has highlighted the role of social media on the visibility and awareness of female sport.

Team GB athletes led on social media during this year's Olympic and Paralympic Games, some describing it as the first 'TikTok Olympics'.

During the games, content from women dominated with 67% of total TikTok views of Team GB athletes competing coming from female athletes, according to the WST report.

66% were female and their videos accounted for 69% of the total content output.

This year's Olympics marked a significant shift in athlete storytelling due to more relaxed social media guidelines, allowing Olympians to share their experiences and connect with fans.

Tammy Parlour, CEO of Women's Sport Trust, said: "In Paris the creativity of our female athletes on social has allowed more stories to be told and a wider, more diverse range of voices to be heard, which is always positive for women's sport.

Four of the six most viewed TikTok videos uploaded by British athletes during the games came from female athletes

Lina Nielsen, Bronze medallist in the women's 4 x 400m relay, attracted the highest number of TikTok views of any British athlete, with over 28 million views.

Rugby sevens athlete Ellie Boatman achieved the highest number of views, 10.6 million, for one video with her Team GB kit run through TikTok.

Of all the competing Team GB athletes, 57% had a TikTok account, and of this group 58% are female, according to the WST report.

Parlour added that increasing the visibility of women's sport is about providing the opportunity, which was demonstrated this summer.

60% of total views of ParalympicGB athletes competing, came from content by female competitors

Lottie McGuinness, female powerlifter, received the most video views of the ParalympicGB team on TikTok with 2.3m views

Didi Okoh, T63 100m sprinter, closely followed with a total of 2.2m views

On the ParalympicGB account 52% of TikTok videos were mixed, 22% dedicated to female athletes.



"Female athletes had the freedom to document the games from their own perspective and this allowed the stories to flow, from haul videos to behind the scenes of the Olympic village and capitalising on the 'Muffin Man' craze.

"It was fun, engaging and provided space for lesser-known athletes to make a name for themselves."



The report also found that out of the British athletes active on TikTok during this year's games,



According to the latest report, most major rights owners use social media to showcase women's sport and mostly provide equitable coverage on their platforms.

During 2022-23 season of the Barclays Women's Super League TikTok had 92.2 million views, this increased to 147 million in the 2023-24 season, according to a previous WST report.

In cricket, The Hundred's TikTok account featured 47% of videos focused on the men's game, 46% on the women's tournament and 7% were mixed.

England Cricketer Lauren Bell said: "Social media has been a huge part of the transformation in women's cricket, a cliché we repeat in camp a lot is you have to see it to be it.

"So having strong female role models so easily accessible online gives young women the ability to inspire the next generation like never before."

She added: "Having platforms that can reach thousands if not millions of people at a time is such a privilege, and something that can often be overlooked.

"For professional players, social media has boosted viewership, sponsorships, and media coverage, making women's cricket more financially sustainable and visible."

However, coverage of women's sport on traditional platforms contrasts this growth of the visibility of women's sport on social media.

According to the WST report, in 2023 only 8% of TV sport coverage hours on key channels was dedicated to women's sport, down 5% from 2022 where it was 13%.

Meanwhile, data from the WST report found that only 3% of all sport print mentions were dedicated to women's sport in 2023.

Broadcast data from Futures Sport and Entertainment showed the impact of the Lionesses not competing in a major international tournament this year.

Viewing figures of female only sports are down by 8.4 million in comparison to last year.

In 2023, there were 34.6 million viewers between January 1 to September 15, there were 26.2 million viewers of women's only sports events for the equivalent period in 2024.

However, some of this year's major sporting events had larger proportions of female fan attendance.

Of BBC's audience for the Olympic Games 52% were female, 55% of the Paralympic Games viewers were female, and 58% of the Wimbledon audience was also female.

Parlour concluded: "2024 was always going to be an interesting year without the Lionesses playing in a major international tournament.

"But what's exciting is that the hard work by domestic leagues across women's sport can be seen in isolation and the numbers are growing.

"This report clearly demonstrates that there are a lot of opportunities to work on when it comes to increasing the visibility of women's sport, from embracing the storytelling of female athletes to championing equality within social publishing strategies."

Head to the Women's Sport Trust website to read the full report at www.womenssporttrust.com/.

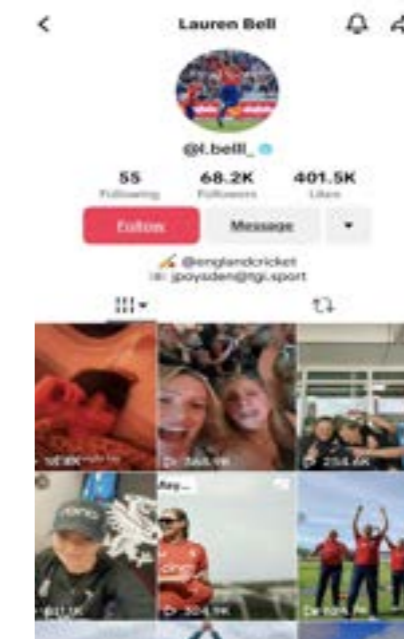


Image credits to: Team GB TikTok, ParalympicGB TikTok, WSL TikTok, Lauren Bell TikTok, and The Hundred TikTok

The Londoners' Premier League review

By Daniel Mulhern

We're well into the Premier League season, so how are the London sides fairing?

We've reviewed and graded each of London's Premier League representatives with the help of fan groups and content creators.

Brentford

Brentford have had an exciting season, scoring plenty of goals (especially in the first minute) thanks to Bryan Mbeumo and Yoane Wissa's partnership.

We spoke to Sean Takeram, a content creator on YouTube and X with The Brentford Hive.

Sean said: "The season so far has definitely been a lot better than I expected given our tough fixture run at the start.

"Our home record is clearly better than our away but that is expected with the matches played."

Brentford faced Liverpool, Manchester City, Spurs and Manchester United in their first four away games.

Despite losing those four games, The Bees made up the points with impressive home wins against Crystal Palace, Southampton, Wolves and Ipswich.

Sean singled out the key players so far this season.

He said: **"I've been especially impressed with Nathan Collins and Mikkel Damsgaard and also Mbeumo and Wissa carrying the attack as usual since Toney's ban and transfer."**



Image credits: Sky Sports Premier League via YouTube



Brentford's former star man Ivan Toney left over the summer to Saudi Arabian club Al-Ahli.

The bees have fared excellently without him scoring 22 goals in their first 11 games.

Brentford seem well on course to having a fun season with plenty of goals, but they seem too inconsistent to mount a charge for Europe as of now.

The Londoners' Grade: C+

Crystal Palace

Crystal Palace have had a nightmare start to the season.

They were tipped by many to be sniffing around the European places but they find themselves in the bottom third a third of the way through the season.

We spoke to Crystal Palace podcast, Team Called Palace (TCP), run by Ben and Matt Watts.

They said: "There's no getting away from it - it's been a disappointing start to the new campaign for Palace."

They pointed at Palace's hectic summer window as the root cause of the issues.

"The departure of Michael Olise has understandably taken the headlines, but selling Joachim Andersen and Jordan Ayew after the season had started and signing four new players on Deadline Day was also far from ideal."

They also mentioned that seven Palace players reached major finals over the summer.

"The extra workload, disruption to pre-season and subsequent hangovers certainly haven't helped.

"Key players such as Adam Wharton, Ebere Eze and Jean-Philippe Mateta have all been searching for either form, fitness or both."

Before Palace's loss against Fulham, it looked like they'd turned a corner.

However, a selection crisis before the game resulted in Palace being forced to start an academy player.

"We were back to something like our best in the victory over Spurs and, despite our growing injury list, we managed to see off Aston Villa to reach the last eight of the Carabao Cup."

Palace are back to playing with a similar intensity to last season but injury problems have halted their progress back up the table.

Palace's manager Oliver Glasner has had a headache so far this season but is no doubt capable of turning it around given his run after coming in last season.

With a tough run of fixtures incoming, it looks like it will be a bleak Christmas period for the Eagles unless they get their key players back.

There's no doubt that given the expectations before the season, it has been an utter failure so far for Glasner's Eagles.



Joachim Andersen

Fulham

The Cottagers have had a solid start, finding themselves currently in ninth.

They've had impressive wins over Palace, Newcastle and local rivals, Brentford.

We spoke to X content creator Kish from @CottageTactico.

Kish praised the work of Marco Silva claiming Fulham's high position is a testament to his work.

"His latest reinvention of the side is built on the foundation of one of the league's best defences.

"Here the returning

Joachim Andersen has added calmness and craft to an energetic and tenacious unit."

Andersen re-signed from Crystal Palace over the summer and has mostly thrived so far.

Kish said: "Going forward Alex Iwobi has shone in a creative role wherever he's been asked to play."

"With Emile Smith Rowe starting to hit the heights fans know he is capable of, the Whites find themselves look-

The Londoners' Grade: F



Justin Devenny celebrating at Villa Park

Image Credits for Andersen, Eze and Devenny: Sky Sports Premier League via YouTube



Eberechi Eze

ing up the table, dreaming of getting their passports out rather than nervously over their shoulders."

Fulham find themselves just one point off European football after 12 games.

It has been mostly smooth sailing so far but the Cottagers will have tough questions asked of them in their upcoming fixtures.

After a thrashing from struggling Wolves at Craven Cottage they'll need to get their act together quickly.

In December alone, they face Tottenham, Brighton, Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea.

The Londoners' Grade: B-

Below image Credit: Sky Sports Premier League via YouTube



Emile Smith-Rowe

Chelsea

Chelsea have had a strong start under new manager Enzo Maresca.

The Blues find themselves in third place, just one point off the champions Manchester City.

We spoke to Charlie Patrick from the Blue Brother YouTube channel.

He said: "I think we've done really well, definitely exceeded expectations compared to the start of the season."

"Maresca has come in and it's hard to know what to expect, but he's come in and he's made a really big impact, players understand their roles."

Chelsea's form has also been



down to a couple of massively improved players, including Moises Caicedo and Nicholas Jackson.

Charlie said: **"Caicedo has elevated to the levels he had at Brighton, he's one of the best midfielders in the league if not the best."**

"Jackson has also really impressed. He had a good last season but was heavily criticised for the chances he missed. He's improved massively."

Despite Chelsea's position, Charlie has kept his expectations in check. He believes the aim should still be to get top four and get back in the Champions League.

Chelsea have improved

massively under Maresca, they have had a difficult run of games and come away with a solid amount of points.

The Blues look like very strong contenders for top four this season, but a title charge still seems out of reach for this inexperienced squad.

The Londoners' Grade: A-



Levi Colwill

Credits for Chelsea images: Sky Sports Premier League via YouTube

West Ham

It has been a disappointing start for the Irons under new manager Julen Lopetegui.

They find themselves in 14th, nowhere near their pre-season expectations of a European place.

We spoke to Gary Killington from the Bobby Moore Stand YouTube channel and website.

He said: "It has been an unmitigated disaster, there are no upsides about it."

"We've been in touch with quite a few thousand West Ham fans and this is the broad consensus."

"We throw bodies forward recklessly and get caught out on the counterattack which is the antithesis of what David Moyes did last season."

Gary was happy with the business to bring in Max Kil-

man, Aaron Wan-Bissaka and Crysencio Summerville.

The issues have been Kilman not having a solid centre back partnership, Wan-Bissaka playing too far forward and Lopetegui not playing Summerville early enough.

Gary is convinced that West Ham chairman David Sullivan will eventually sack Lopetegui.

He said: **"It's inevitable that we'll get a new manager, whether it's in two games' time or in four games' time."**

"We'll stay up but it will be grim."

West Ham have had some impressive wins such as most recently away at Newcastle,

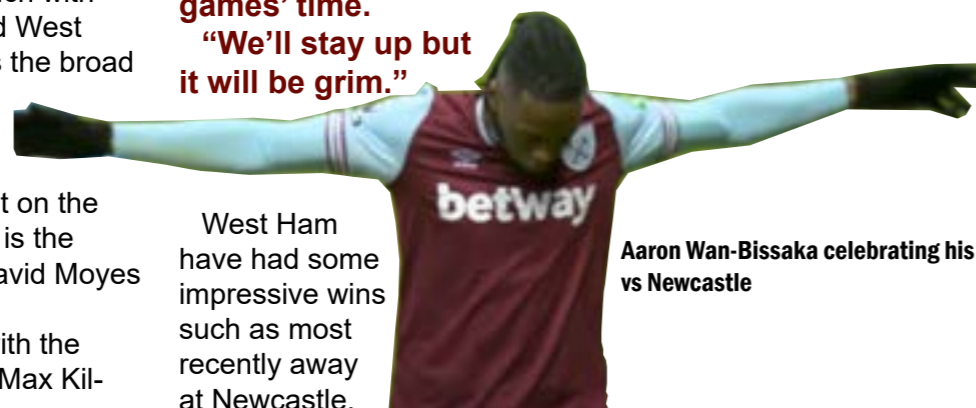
a win over Manchester United and a win at Selhurst Park.

However they've just been way too inconsistent as they've taken thrashings from Chelsea, Tottenham and Forest.

Overall West Ham have been a major disappointment so far.

The Londoners' Grade: E

Image Credit: Sky Sports Premier League via YouTube



Aaron Wan-Bissaka celebrating his goal vs Newcastle



Arsenal players react to Leandro Trossard's red card against Manchester City and John Stones' late equaliser



Credit for above images: Sky Sports Premier League

Arsenal

Arsenal haven't quite lived up to their lofty expectations of a title charge so far.

Mikel Arteta's men currently sit in fourth and nine points off league-leaders Liverpool.

We spoke to Luke, a content creator from the ClockEndGunner YouTube channel.

He said: **"I think the season hasn't really gone our way. We don't deserve to be in a better position than what we are in."**

"The season isn't over yet."

"We just need to find our form and have a good run, then we'll be back on track."

Arteta's tactics have changed since last season, Arsenal have set up in a much more cautious manner in many games this season.

Luke said: "Arteta has been a bit scared, he doesn't want to go at teams, he's scared to get caught out."

Luke highlighted Bukayo Saka as Arsenal's most important player.

Saka has made eight assists this season and netted four goals in Arsenal's 12 games so far.

Despite being nine points adrift, Luke hasn't given up hope of a title yet.

He said: "If we go on a good run and find our form, we could easily be back in the title race."

Arsenal have been decent this season, but nowhere near good enough to mount a competitive title charge.

The Londoners' Grade: C

Tottenham Hotspur

Tottenham have had an unpredictable season so far, currently finding themselves in sixth place.

We spoke to podcaster on JAFFN, Football Between The Lines and Lads Anonymous, Flav Bateman.

Flav has kept his optimism despite Tottenham's inconsistency.

He said: **"It has been evident throughout the season that on our day we can blow anyone away."**

Tottenham have had dominant wins away to both Manchester clubs, as well as statement victories at home to West Ham and Aston Villa.

Flav said: "The problem is these performances have been punctuated by losses to Palace and Ipswich, as well as a couple of others."

"Only once have I seen a

performance so poor that we actually deserved to lose a game, and that was against Palace where they just outperformed us.

"While five losses at this stage isn't good enough for Tottenham, the underlying stats and data tell you that we're much better than our league position would suggest."

According to Opta's expected Premier League table based on the underlying stats and data, Tottenham should currently be in third.

Flav highlighted Dejan Kulusevski as Tottenham's key player.

He said: "He's press resistant, he collects the ball in midfield and somehow always finds his man."

Tottenham are possibly the most difficult side to grade, being absolutely sensational in some matches and utterly pitiful in others.

The Londoners' Grade: C+



Above image credits: Tottenham Hotspur and Sky Sports Premier League via YouTube

The Londoners' Paddy Power World Darts Championship preview

By Daniel Mulhern

The World Darts Championship is quickly approaching, with the biggest darts spectacle of the year taking place as usual at the Alexandra Palace from December 15.

Here is all you need to know ahead of the tournament, including some predictions from darts experts.

Last year Luke Littler broke onto the world stage with a stellar performance, reaching the final, but who will surprise us this year?

Journalist Connor Cain from Darts Now gave us his predictions on how the championship may play out.

Connor tipped the defending champion Luke "Cool Hand" Humphries for the win.

He said: "He is undoubtedly the best player in the world and though rivals such as Michael van Gerwen are still capable of monumental brilliance, they lack the consistency of the world number one."

'Mighty Mike' hasn't won the World Darts Championship since 2019, where he defeated Michael Smith.

Since then, he's lost the two world championship finals that he's been in to Peter Wright and Michael Smith.

Connor said: "Humphries' closest challenger is Littler, who he beat in last year's final though he succumbed to the teenager in the Premier League final."

He believes that while Littler has won the most titles this year, Humphries is less likely to have an off game.

Littler stormed to a win in

the Grand Slam of Darts most recently and is Paddy Power's favourite to become the next world champion.

The 17-year-old also defeated Michael 'Bully Boy' Smith in the final of the World Series.

Connor also gave an honourable mention to two-time world champion Gary Anderson.

"The Scotsman has captured the Sid Waddell trophy twice before and has had a resurgent year in 2024," he said.

"If Anderson can come anywhere close to matching the performances he has shown on the Pro Tour at Alexandra Palace this year, he could pose the biggest threat to Humphries' crown."

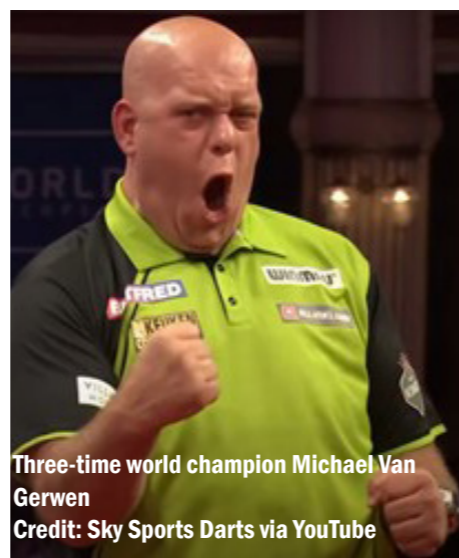
Anderson also produced an impressive performance in the Grand Slam of Darts recently.



Two-time world champion Gary Anderson
Credit: Sky Sports and the Professional Darts Corporation via YouTube



Credit: Sky Sports Darts via YouTube



Three-time world champion Michael Van Gerwen
Credit: Sky Sports Darts via YouTube

He made it to the semi-finals where he just fell short to eventual winner Littler in a thriller.

We also spoke to content creator and professional darts referee Jack Garwood.

Jack also tipped Humphries to come out on top.

He said: "Cool Hand has taken to being the World Number 1 and World Champion like a duck to water.

"He continues to be head and shoulders above the field, whilst having the Taylor/Van Gerwen-esque trait of turning it on when he most needs it."

Phil Taylor won 14 PDC World Darts Championships, the most of any darts player and 11 more than anyone else.

Jack also mentioned his concerns for Humphries, believing complacency let him down in The Grand Prix and European Championship.

Humphries fell short against Mike De Decker in the final of The Grand Prix and was stunned by Jermaine Wattimena in the quarter finals of the European Championship.

He was then knocked out in group A of the Grand Slam by James Wade.

Cool Hand will need to get his act together soon if he wants to retain his crown.

Jack also gave a special mention to Anderson, saying he's been back to his 'silky- smooth

best'.

He said: "His issue has been converting that into wins on the telly, which seems strange for a player of his calibre and experience.

"However, the rest of the field beware. The Flying Scotsman's record at Alexandra Palace is one of the best of all time, and if he's going to put it right in front of the cameras anywhere this year, it just might be for the largest pot of all."

Last year, Littler set the world alight with an exceptional breakout tournament, but will we see another breakout talent?

Martin Lukeman was the surprise package at the Grand Slam, making it all the way to the final where he was dismantled by an in-form Littler.

Most notably, Lukeman pulled off a surprise victory over former world champion Rob Cross.

Jack said: "Keep an eye out for Alexis Toylo this year. The Phillipino thrower has just topped the PDC Asian Tour rankings, in a field that just keeps getting better and

better. The sooner we can get more players from Asia integrated into the full tour the better!"

The tournament runs from December 15 2024 to January 3 2025.



Martin Lukeman, breakout star of the Grand Slam

Images of Littler, Humphries and Lukeman credited to: Sky Sports Darts via YouTube

Last years world championship finalists Luke Humphries(Left) and Luke Littler(Right)



Is a new game plan needed for the growth of American football in London?

By Libby Jennings

Back in October, I attended my first NFL game at Wembley Stadium, not knowing quite what to expect. As I settled into my seat, I was struck by the sheer number of Brits around me cheering on this stereotypically American sport, myself included. The matchup? The New England Patriots versus the Jacksonville Jaguars. Over the loudspeakers, the commentators announced an attendance of over 86,000 fans. Everywhere I looked, there were Jaguars onesies, Patriots jerseys, and even a few iconic cheese hats. One thing was clear: almost everyone was decked out in merch, ready to embrace the full NFL experience.

As someone who came largely for the experience rather than loyalty to either team, it dawned on me that American football isn't just a novelty in London but a growing phenomenon. In recent years, the NFL has been making bold moves to solidify its place among the nation's top sports. Wembley and Tottenham Hotspur stadiums now host games to packed crowds, rivalling the numbers seen in

traditional football matches.

This enthusiasm isn't new, but it's been steadily building.

Between 2007 to 2019, the NFL hosted 28 games in London, with 25 of those drawing crowds of over 83,000 fans, according to The Athletic's Vincent Bonsignore. Although the data reflects earlier years, it marked a key period where the NFL's strategy to expand in the UK gained serious momentum, setting the foundation for its present success.

In the post-COVID era, the NFL has maintained its commitment to London. Three games were held in both 2021 and 2022, while 2023 and 2024 saw an increase to four games. Today, matches consistently sell out, highlighting the unwavering demand for American football in the UK, with no signs of slowing.

However, while NFL games in London attract huge crowds, building the sport at the grassroots level remains a challenge, developing a strong foundation in local communities is where the real work lies.

A Brief History

American football first gained serious traction in the UK during the 1980s, often called its "Golden Decade" thanks to

Ben Coulthard in action.



Credit: Ben Coulthard.

Wembley Stadium: Jacksonville Jaguars vs New England Patriots.



Credit: Libby Jennings.

Ben Coulthard at his final game for Great Britain u19s.



Credit: Ben Coulthard.

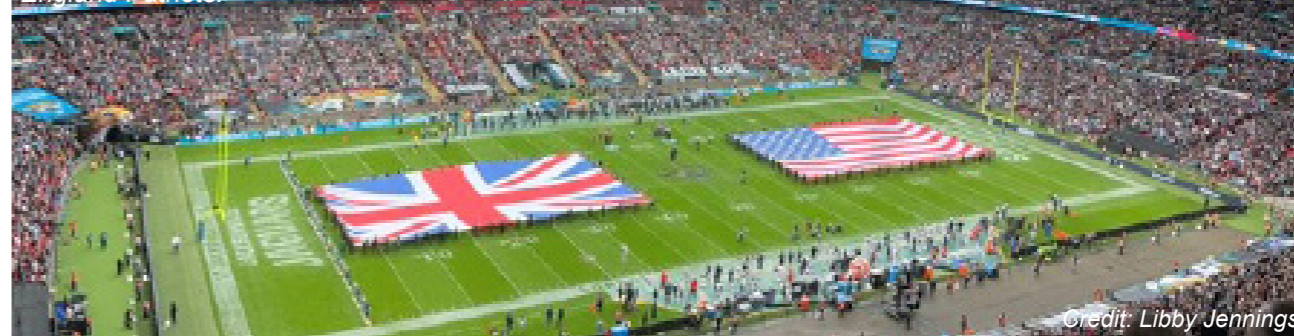
The World League was restructured into NFL Europe, but it failed to maintain the same appeal. Reflecting on the challenges the sport faced during this time, Smart said: "There were just less people who were still enjoying it. It took itself a lot longer to get reorganised than it should have done." As a result, American football in the UK experienced a significant decline, as the NFL shifted its focus back to its home base.

Resurgence in London

For many new fans, the journey into American football begins with a simple recommendation. City Wolfpack's linebacker, Ben Coulthard said: "People that I know have started because a friend has been recommended to them or that they've seen on TV in the NFL." This growing interest is partly driven by the way the sport lends itself to short, snapshot-style clips.

As Smart pointed out, NFL content is ideal for platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram, where fans can quickly engage with highlights and key moments.

Wembley Stadium: Jacksonville Jaguars vs New England Patriots.



Credit: Libby Jennings.

However, media exposure is only part of the story. The NFL's growing presence in London, with regular games since 2007, has also played a major role in boosting the sport's profile. Initially held at Wembley Stadium, the games have recently expanded to Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, which now plays a central role in the NFL's UK strategy. A key milestone in this expansion is the NFL's agreement with Tottenham Hotspur Stadium to host at

least two regular-season games each year through the 2029–2030 season. This partnership solidifies the stadium's status as the "Home of the NFL in the UK," designed specifically to cater to NFL needs with a dedicated retractable pitch and facilities tailored to the sport.

The NFL London games have become an annual highlight, drawing packed stadiums with over 80,000 fans. This partnership helps cement the NFL's presence

NFL broadcasts on Channel 4.

Warren Smart, chairman and head coach of the Wembley Stallions, remembers: "It got very, very popular in the 80s, it's re-establishing itself now."

Smart recalled that this growth led to the formation of UK-based American football leagues. At its peak, there were approximately 200 teams across the country, with London alone boasting teams in nearly every borough.

During this time, the sport also saw the rise of the World League of American Football, with teams like the London Monarchs participating.

However, despite this early success, the sport experienced a decline. The London Monarchs struggled with attendance and logistical issues and were eventually dissolved.

in the UK, driving lasting interest in the sport that trickles down to local leagues.

Clark Gardener coaching Kingston Cougars.



Credit: Deniz Karagulle.

Ben Coulthard in action for Great Britain Lions u19s.



Credit: Ben Coulthard.

Funding Challenges

As American football grows in popularity across London, the rising demand for the sport is met with a significant hurdle - funding.

Coulthard explained firsthand how funding is affecting local clubs. "It's getting far more popular, which is great," he said, "But funding isn't increasing financially. So, what's happening is that fewer resources are available, and certain teams can't keep up with the demand."

Clark Gardener, assistant head coach of the Wembley Stallions and head coach at Kingston University, echoed a similar point to Coulthard, stating: "Funding determines what equipment we can buy, the quality of the kit, and even whether people can afford to play at all."

Coulthard added: "The biggest challenge is the fact that it's not a widely recognised sport in the UK. So, Sport England and the National Lottery don't provide funding, whereas sports like football or rugby do." This disparity underscores the uphill battle many grassroots clubs face in trying to secure the resources they need.

Local clubs are especially hard-hit by the lack of financial support from national organisations or local initiatives, and often face the risk of closure, according to the British American Football Association (BAFA).

Smart stressed that: "There's a lot less money, especially since COVID, for supporting grassroots sports.

"I think sports are very important, but there's certainly a lot less money and support for clubs to remain successful," he added. "With the pressure of the cost of living, you can't cover the increase in costs from

the membership by putting up club fees. So you've got to cut your cloth."

Visibility Challenges

It's not just about the funding, though, visibility plays a major role in fostering growth. For many grassroots teams, the issue is not just attracting fans but creating an environment that keeps them coming back.

Gardener was candid about the need for a more engaging experience: "The biggest thing to further the game in the UK and in London is creating a product worth watching," he said.

He believes that teams need to offer more than just a game, they need to offer an experience. "If you're going to try to entice sponsors, then you need a captive audience that they can advertise to. Right now, very few teams in the UK put on a full game day experience that is worth going to watch."

Gardener also explained how many games are still played in parks or school venues, far from the professional-grade atmospheres seen in sports like football or rugby. "If we could create atmospheres that entice people to come watch, we would see the game go from strength to strength," he explained.

Gardener emphasised the importance of creating an experience that draws fans in, but how do you cultivate that awareness and connection?

It's not just about the game itself, it's about awareness Smart expressed. "Their mind isn't on American football," he said. "Once you're aware of something, like when you're looking for a car, and you say, 'Oh, I see a Mini,' suddenly you see minis everywhere. It's the same with American football. Once people start noticing it-

they start paying attention."

Coulthard shared a similar sentiment, suggesting that the sport's visibility in London needs to be amplified. "The big universities need a bigger focus, and in London, that's not happening," he said. "England can have a European professionalism; it's going to be based in London, so they need to do more to promote it as a centre for one country." One breakthrough on the horizon is the 2028 Olympics, which will feature flag football.

Smart sees this as an opportunity to increase visibility: "The introduction of flag football in the Olympics is impactful. Flag football is really that grassroots opportunity we should grasp. It's much easier to play, and I think in the next five years, we'll see teams everywhere." He believes that, as flag football grows in popularity, it could lay the groundwork for the contact version of the sport to solidify.

Coulthard echoed this optimism, stating that the Olympics could provide a major platform for exposure. He added: "For contact football, we need a domestic professional league to really take it to the next level."

Grassroots Advancement

Building American football from the ground up has never been more important as it grows as a sport in the UK. Smart emphasised the importance of grassroots engagement, stating: "I think people on a grassroots level, just being able to pick up a football, going to the park, and having a throw around is really important." For many, this is how the journey into the sport begins — not through a league or a team, but by simply giving it a go.

One initiative making a difference is the Wembley Stallions' "Get Into American Football" program, which is designed to give kids a chance to experience the sport without any pressure to commit. As Smart explained: "The idea is not to bring people into the team. It's just to give the opportunity to come and have a play. And if they want to stay, they can stay."

This relaxed approach allows young players to try out American football in a low-stakes environment, and the enthusiasm from participants speaks volumes. "At the moment, this course is getting [kids] into American football and helping them enjoy it," For some, this



Stef Atidazah in action for Kingston Cougars. Credit: Deniz Karagulle.

initial exposure to the sport through grassroots programs leads to further opportunities. University football, in particular, plays a key role in transitioning players from recreational to competitive play. These programs often serve as an entry point for many athletes, with some joining the sport for the very first time. For others, it's a chance to refine their skills and continue their journey.

Gardener said: "University sport is a big part of the growth of the game. A lot of the current GB team have come through playing university football in one form or another, which led them to play senior football and eventually for Great Britain."

Both Smart and Gardener emphasise the importance of fostering a supportive environment where players of all skill levels can come together, connect, and grow. Ultimately, they believe that whether it's through casual play or competitive university football, the goal is to give people the chance to discover and develop their passion for the game.

Clark Gardener congratulating Kingston Cougars after beating Imperial Immortals 27-6.



Credit: Deniz Karagulle.

A Lasting Impact

American football in the UK is on the cusp of something big. With grassroots efforts, the visibility boost from the Olympics, and an engaged fanbase, the sport has the potential to take off. But to make it a lasting presence, it needs greater financial support. Smart, Gardener, and Coulthard all agree that without more investment, the sport may struggle to reach its true potential.

Despite these challenges, the outlook remains bright. With initiatives like the Wembley Stallions' "Get Into American Football" program giving young players a no-pressure entry into the sport, and the 2028 Olympics offering a major visibility boost, the stage is set for American football to grow in popularity.

CHRISTMAS



Christmas gifting appeal: Giving back to those in need this Christmas

By Lucianne Bell

East London-based charity SMILE continues its fight against poverty and homelessness this Christmas.

As part of its annual Christmas Appeal, SMILE distributed 2,540 shoeboxes plus bigger presents to those less fortunate last year.

This year it is working with 26 different family homeless hostels across London and Essex to ensure they all have something to open this Christmas.

Founder of SMILE Maria Quaife said: "It's so important because these could potentially be the only presents that these children get.

"And knowing that these kids have a gift on Christmas morning is what keeps us going."

Each hostel receives two or three jumbo boxes of bigger presents containing bikes or scooters, which are distributed at birthdays or to families that need extra support.

Maria said: "Last year, we had a family where the mum of the family died a couple weeks before Christmas.



"So the hostel allocated a couple of the bigger presents for that family because obviously they were going through a really tough time – they were homeless and they had lost their mum."

Everything is done by hand at SMILE, with a team of volunteers they come together each year to sort-through and package up these shoeboxes.

Maria said: "On the packing days the atmosphere is amazing, we put Christmas music on, we get the mince pies out, everyone in their Christmas jumpers.

"People really get to feel where these gifts are going, especially when they walk past some of those hostels on their way here.

"We've got families who get their children involved, and it makes it so personal that way.

"You're not just packing a gift for anyone, they know it's potentially going to one of their classmates."

The appeal began in 2016, where SMILE worked with The Salvation Army to collect just under 100 shoeboxes.

Maria said: "Then it just snowballed, it became a project in my front room in my one-bedroom flat to then an actual registered charity with a warehouse."

Maria grew up in a single parent household with her father where she personally experienced what it's like to live in poverty.

She said: "As I got into work

and had more disposable income I used a portion to look after women refugees and the local family hostel.



"Then it slowly became a community project, it was never intended to be a charity, it was just a side hobby."

She added: "We are small but mighty, we are a small charity and we like to be small.

"We're not a big corporate charity, we are all from the local area with lived experiences of the cause we're supporting."

To find out more about SMILE's initiatives or to donate to this year's appeal head to www.smilelondonsex.com/.

Images credits to SMILE. Title image credit to Pixabay.

Are you dreaming of a green Christmas?

By Cymbeline Young

With Christmas fast approaching, it's time to dust off the decorations that have been sitting idle in the loft and prepare for the annual holiday invasion of food, family, friends and festivities, however you may celebrate!

To avoid excessive waste this year, why not give your loved ones—and the planet—the gift of sustainability with these eco-friendly gift ideas?

Sustainable handmade candles:

Who doesn't love walking through the door and instantly being greeted by the scent of fresh roses in the kitchen, or sitting down with a cup of tea surrounded by the warm ambience of sandalwood and smoky leather? If creating a sophisticated and cosy atmosphere is something your loved ones

enjoy, then sustainable handmade candles are a brilliant alternative to mass-produced ones (and also better for our furry pet friends). By buying from an independent company like Etsy, you're supporting small businesses, making it a win all around.

Grow-your-own herb kit:

Simple yet effective, a grow-your-own herb kit is a gift that keeps on giving!

Especially for those who excel in the the kitchen or, are proud plant parents!

The lucky person who receives this gift gets to go home and start creating a mini allotment for themselves. Enjoying the organic benefit of fresh herbs to add to their meals all year round. Unfortunately, they are not mess friendly.

Vintage clothing:

For those who don't mind rummaging through boxes of pre-loved clothes and have some spare time on their hands, gifting a one-of-a-kind garment is a sustainable yet sentimental way of showing your love for a persons style and the planet.

By buying thrifted goods, you reduce the demand for fast fashion and continue the life cycle of that particular garment!

The bonus here is that if your gift isn't well-received, it can be returned to a charity shop for someone else to love or, upcycled into something new.

Giving your loved ones a sustainable gift this year is not only a meaningful way to celebrate the Christmas holiday but also a great way to support the environment.

Let your gift-giving reflect a greener Christmas for all. this year—one gift at a time.

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