

WINTER EDITION DEC 2025

# The Londoners

## *Christmas Special*

Ultimate last-minute gift guide

Celebrate the festive season  
with us at Kew Gardens

Charities who fight against  
loneliness during the holidays

...and more including:

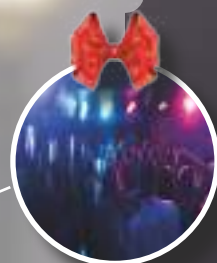
How far-right are Gen Z  
compared to boomers?

Breaking the stereotype of  
men's mental health

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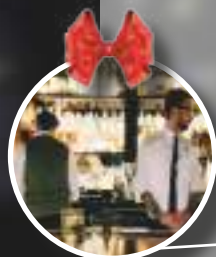
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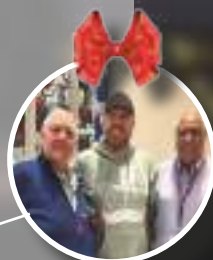
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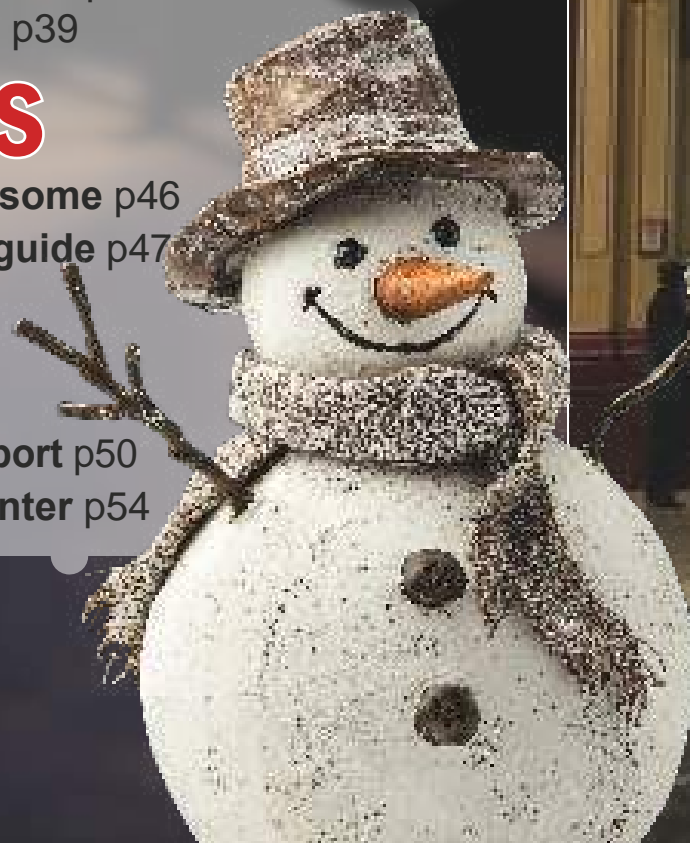
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# NEWS





# The animal testing festive shoppers never see

Dr Cinzia Allegrucci and Dr Jenny Ashworth, both at the university of Nottingham, creating animal breast cancer models using plant-derived cells

## From cosmetics, medicine and cleaning appliances, what are the hidden procedures behind the products?

By **SARA MECIBAH**

50% off. No, 60%. 70%. Make it 80% - the best deals of the season.

London's Christmas sales are relentless, and so is the shopping consumerism. But what shoppers don't see are the animals paying the real price: rabbits blinded by cosmetics, mice poisoned by household products, and rats locked in laboratories.

All so Londoners can save a few pounds.

From Oxford Street to both Westfields, London's popular shopping districts pulse with the same energy.

Christmas lights glow. Hot chocolate stalls steam. The crisp winter air settles

over the city. But what draws the crowds isn't just the atmosphere, but the discounts too. It's understandable. The cost of living crisis bites, wages stagnate, and any discount feels like a lifeline right now. But what shoppers don't see is the laboratories.

Animal testing remains legal in the UK for medicines and chemical safety.

While the classic Draize eye test on rabbits and the traditional LD50 test on mice have largely been replaced by newer methods, animals (including rabbits, mice and rats) are still used in regulatory toxicity and safety experiments under licence.

Nevertheless, the cost is animal lives.

Most shoppers will never know. The information isn't on the packaging. It's not advertised. You have to dig for it.

On paper, the UK has some of the strictest animal testing regulations in the world. In early November, the UK government announced plans to phase out animal testing as alternative methods become available. The strategy includes £75 million in funding to develop new non-animal testing methods and has been welcomed by both animal welfare groups and life sciences organizations.

Isobel Martin, Public Affairs Director at Animal Free Research UK, said: "Ena-



**Professor Julian Ma at City St George's University of London, using genetically modified plants to producing monoclonal antibody treatments, directly replacing animals. Below, Isobel Martin**

bling a phase-out of animal testing, by working with policymakers and supporting scientists to transition to human-specific methods, lies at the heart of our work.

"While we fully support this goal, we feel that the strategy is not ambitious enough to achieve this and lacks a clear timeline, firm targets and binding legislation that are critical to bringing about change."

Contextually, brands that test on animals refer back to The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, which operates on the '3Rs': replacement (use alternatives

**"Even when drugs are found to be safe in animal tests, this still does not guarantee that they will be safe for patients"**

where possible), reduction (minimum animals necessary), and refinement (minimize suffering). Every facility, research program, and individual researcher requires Home Office licensing.

But here's what those regulations don't require: clear labeling for us consumers.

A product can be legally tested on animals under these frameworks, pass all

regulatory checks, and end up on a shelf with nothing on the label to indicate what happened in the laboratory.

The scale of testing remains significant. According to Animal Free Research UK, 2,637,578 procedures involving animals were carried out in British laboratories in 2024. The breakdown reveals the scope with over 1.2 million procedures involving breeding genetically altered animals, while 48,224 experiments were classified as 'severe', the highest suffering category under UK law.

Then there are the 'specially protected species.' In 2024, laboratories used 1,651 dogs, 1,478 monkeys, 60 horses, and 35 cats, animals that outside laboratory walls would be considered pets.

What were these animals used for? An-

imal Free Research UK reports that 52% of procedures were conducted for 'basic' research, and 24% for applied or translational research, categories where,

according to animal welfare advocates, alternatives to animal testing exist but remain underutilised.

Martin explained her organisation's mission: "Is to champion animal-free, human-specific technologies that deliver better treatments for human diseases faster."

"Since 1970, Animal Free Research UK has awarded

over £11.5 million in grants to fund more than 300 pioneering medical research projects that place ethics at the heart of the science of human disease."

"Animal-free science offers faster, more reliable results for patients while sparing countless animal lives from pain and distress.

"What we need now is leadership and ambition to match the promises that animal-free technologies offer."

"At Animal Free Research UK, we are





calling for the Government to implement Herbie's Law. This would set a fully funded, time-bound framework for putting an end to animal experiments and commit these plans into law," Martin explained.

But what about medicine tested on animals, amid the rise of the common flu during winter?

She explains: "Paracetamol is poisonous to cats.

"This underlines the significant problems in attempting to translate the results of animal tests to people.

"Over 92% of drugs that show promise in animal tests currently fail to reach the clinic and benefit patients, mostly for reasons of poor efficacy and safety that were not predicted by animal testing."

"Even when drugs are found to be safe in animal tests, this still does not guarantee that they will be safe for patients as this can lead to serious and unexpected side effects in patients, with hundreds of drugs being withdrawn over the past few decades, and sadly several notable disasters where patients have lost their lives after taking a drug designed to help them."

"Unfortunately, there isn't currently an option for consumers to choose products that are free from animal testing, as is the case for cosmetics and household products.

"However, we would always encourage people to follow medical advice and would never suggest that they should avoid taking medicines due to animal testing."

"Most common medicines, such as paracetamol, were tested on animals during their development, but this would often have been many years ago," she added.

Beyond institutional advocacy, individual activists are working to raise awareness through social media.

Holly Reggie, who works in Finance but uses her social media platforms to protest against animal testing with Camp Beagle,

**Holly Reggie protesting with Camp Beagle and with her pet**



noted that her activism stemmed from getting her pet dog, Reggie, three years ago.

She said: "This completely shifted my attitude towards animals and I went vegan and started working with Camp Beagle."

She primarily uses TikTok, Instagram and Facebook, where she fairly splits her activism from social to in person, stating: "Nothing beats seeing these places for yourself and sharing that with your circle."

"Not sure if anything I've done personally has made a difference, but being a small part of Camp Beagle who have undoubtedly made a world of difference to people's awareness of animal testing and the wider campaign presenting petitions.

"Friends and family have been hugely receptive to my work particularly because I have been hands-on with the campaign."

"Ultimately we vote with our purchases

and it is hugely important for everyone to be more aware and demand change. It sounds cheesy but change does come from the people. Change takes a lot of people and a lot of time," Reggie said.

On the government's announcement, she said: "The government is not doing enough.

"The recent announcement is pretty poor and feels like a PR attempt to make us back down.

"There is no science to support animal testing and non-animal methods offer a 78% accuracy rate for liver toxicity tests.

"Animal testing has a 96% failure rate, so the government is failing us; ethically, scientifically and medically."

"Everyone says animals don't have voices, but they do. They just don't have the same voice as us so let's get out there and let their voices be heard." She added.

However, Melody Lee takes her activism strictly online.

From a background in mathematics

and software engineering, Lee specialised in identifying accountable actionable improve opportunities using data.

This approach to problem solving is what led her to take the mission of finishing what the government started 11 years ago: changing the laws that criminalise disclosure of information about scientific experiments using living animals.

The law she refers to is Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA), widely known as the 'secrecy clause'.

Lee said: "My activism started with two years of research about animal agriculture for my own interest after going vegan, driven by a family member asking if there are laws to make sure animals are treated right, right?"

"I couldn't and haven't stopped looking at the stats and laws in how we use animals."

"On a public level, the educational impact is clear as I often get comments on my videos along the lines of 'I didn't know that' and 'thank you for educating.'"

"On a legal level, my work on Section 24 ASPA is ongoing as I currently have a live case with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) against the Home Office, challenging their refusal to release the consultation report on revising Section 24," she added.

"I am anticipating a push back and preparing to take this to tribunal, and

**"Despite being vegan, I was shocked to only have found out about the scale of animal testing six months ago"**

I'm now connecting with animal welfare groups to hopefully amplify this work and hold the government accountable."

Regarding the high amount of sales in London at these times, she said: "There are a lot of people living in London, that alone means that we hold a lot of consumer power. Despite being vegan, I was shocked to only have found out about the scale of animal testing six months ago.

"I believe awareness is the first step to lasting change.

"As a nation of animal lovers, I believe for one, if people become aware of the way animals are treated, and two, realise that there are easy alternatives to not contributing to animal suffering, that most people would choose to be kind to animals."

But what did she think about the government's



phase plan?

"London is a global hub, we have already seen a big shift in veganism in restaurants, we should lead that shift in the same way with cruelty-free products.

"The government's roadmap to phase out animal testing faster is exactly what the UK has been missing and much welcomed but I will continue to keep my eyes peeled until the implementation of the plan has been worked out and announced."

"However, I do not believe the government has done enough historically.

"The government had good intentions to reduce unnecessary animal testing, but the execution has been lacking, for example, the NC3Rs (the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement, Reduction of Animals in Research) was created in 2004 to promote the 3Rs (Replace, Refine, Reduction), which is enforced by law (ASPA).

"Yet, there is evidence (The Rawle report, 2023) that shows the 3Rs principle

ple isn't always followed rigorously. True change needs leadership from the government, not leaving it up to those with vested interest to mark their own homework." As Christmas shoppers hunt for bargains across London, most remain unaware of the hidden cost behind their purchases.

Would they shop differently if they knew?



**Melody Lee above, outside Parliament. Below, with her dog**



# An escape from daily struggles

## How one local charity is helping people in need

By **SARA MECIBAH**

It feels like a restaurant. Walking into FoodCycle Camden on a freezing Tuesday evening, that's my first thought – not charity, but a proper meal service. Warmth spills from the kitchen where volunteers prepare meals. Tables are set with care. Some people are regulars, greeting each other warmly. Others are new, taking in the scene. But as plates are served, the atmosphere settles: this is a place to belong. The motto: no questions asked. No sign-up sheets. Just walk in. 'Would you like your soup with buttered or non-buttered bread?' one volunteer asks. 'Interested now for the second course?' another questions. Three courses: starter, main, dessert – address three aims: food poverty, loneliness, and food waste. FoodCycle is a community dining charity transforming surplus food into free meals across England and Wales. Since 2009, it has served 3.5 million plates at projects across the country, including over 20 London locations. Demand is surging. Nationally, FoodCycle meals rose 17% between April 2024 and April 2025, with over 10,500

people accessing meals monthly compared to 8,966 the year before. As winter sets in and the cost of living crisis deepens, these meals are becoming lifelines. Diane, a volunteer who left her teaching assistant job in July to give back, started three weeks ago. She said: "It's wicked working here – I'm doing this as often as I can, I like that I can feel as if I'm cooking for my mates."

She added: "The way money is now and how food has gone up, it's stupid."

"Even if you got a job, I don't blame anyone for coming here as you can socialise and get a warm dinner."

"What can the government do with

what's left in the kitty?

"Maybe they could speak to the supermarkets and ask them to lower the prices down."

The need is stark. A November 2024 survey of 1,741 FoodCycle guests revealed: 95% cannot afford to keep homes warm, 75% struggle to pay rent or buy food, nearly half

lack a hob, 41% lack an oven, 36% have no microwave and many can't store food: 41% lack a freezer and 29% lack a fridge.

Beyond hunger, there's isolation. Two-thirds eat most meals alone, 40% live alone entirely.

70% have skipped meals and 41% rely on food banks yet still need FoodCycle. Arash Mohammed, using an alias, fled

Iran in 2021 due to political issues.

He now lives in a hostel with no friends or family, relying on disability allowance.

He told me: "The food here is good – I come here so I can eat because hearing people in the background makes me feel less lonely."

"It's good to have company."

"I really miss my family, I have no one here."

"You're rich because you have everything here."

When London guests were asked what would happen

without FoodCycle, responses were bleak. Responses included: "I would feel more lonely and depressed", "We would have



nowhere to go, we might skip a meal", "Very lonely and with less food to eat" and "Anxious and depressed."

**Diane and another volunteer (above) and, right, Carly Shutes at FoodCycle, Camden**

Credit: food images, FoodCycle



In the UK, poor diet contributes to 13% of all deaths and costs the economy £250 billion annually, while 7.2 million people live in food-insecure households.

Viv, project leader and part-time producer, has worked here for a year.

He said: "There's one particular guest who got troubles with his heating where he pays for his electric on a fob."

"He was telling me how he would run through his meter earlier in the month."

"At this specific location, we are making

"Since 2009, it has served 3.5 million plates at projects across the country, including over 20 London locations"

sure people are still getting here."

Viv added: "Here, it definitely makes a difference in winter. Winter, summer. It always does."

"When it becomes part of someone's routine to come here, it has to be making a difference."

"Two branches have shut down in London – I'm guessing because there's not enough funding to keep it going."

Carly Shutes, FoodCycle's head of marketing, explained the winter surge.

Shutes said: "We definitely see an increase in winter, but in general people want a hot cooked meal through the winter months."

"In the past year, we have seen a 17% increase across all of our projects."

"That need and want for a hot meal is definitely higher throughout the winter months."

"The cost of living is impacting everything all the time, but I think Winter becomes more expensive. A lot of our guests have told us in the past that they would be choosing between whether they heat their home or eat."

"It just becomes a bit more challenging making their budgets stretch as far as they need it to during the Winter."

She added: "Food makes a huge difference – not only are they getting a hot meal, they also have somewhere where they can come and sit in the warm for a few hours."

"We see all sorts of people come here: they could be families and it's a few hours where they don't have to put their heating on."

"Homeless people coming here are an escape for them as the winter months feel particularly needed."

The impact is measurable: 83% feel happier after attending, 78% feel less lonely, 91% have met people from different backgrounds.

As winter deepens, more face impossible choices between heating and eating. These Tuesday meals matter more than ever in the community. **L**

"A lot of our guests have told us in the past that they would be choosing between whether they heat their home or eat"





CREDIT: Freya Najade

No doubt, December brings a buzz of anticipation in the air. But for many, this month marks one of the most challenging times of the year

By **AMY COLLINSON**

When you hear the word 'Christmas,' what comes to mind?

The garish decorations...?

Or the meticulously wrapped presents, perfectly placed under a softly lit tree?

Perhaps it's the spread of delicious food all being shared among loved ones?

Chocolate share boxes, cheese boards, roasted turkey and towering gingerbread houses.

While this may seem like the pinnacle of the festive period, it is not the reality for millions of families who have to use food banks this winter.

Their Christmas consists of worry, hunger and guilt.

Sarah Chapman, who is advocacy and communications manager at Wandsworth Food Bank, said: "People often feel very stressed and anxious because they're not able to put food



CREDIT: Wandsworth Food Bank

on the family table.

"That is true all year round but I think it becomes particularly acute at times like Christmas."

Unable to cover the soaring costs of food, electricity and rent, they are faced

with no choice but to use a food bank.

Ends simply don't meet.

And while this is not a new concept, it is a worrying trend that is on the increase.

In the past year, London's food banks distributed over 455,000 food parcels, which is an astonishing 123% increase compared to pre-pandemic levels.

"It's really tough, just really tough",

says Jenna Fansa, who is head of communications and fundraising at Hackney Food Bank.

Jenna tells me: "In the 13 years of the charity, it's never been as bad as it is now. "We are bracing ourselves now because numbers will go up massively at Christmas."

Working families have to turn to a food bank.

Pensioners and parents with multiple jobs.

Demand has been soaring at an unprecedented rate.

So what happens when these momentous occasions, such as Christmas, roll around every year?

How on earth do food banks cope with

the demand?

The foodbanks tell staggering stories of struggle.

The cost of living crisis has not only impacted the numbers food banks are seeing, but it is also responsible for the decline in donations received as the wider community feels the pinch.

Joanna Read, who is executive director at Bow Food Bank, said: "The cost of living crisis has meant that our funding used to be a third from neighbours."

"Obviously, everyone's struggling at the moment so there's not as much coming in from personal giving and neighbours."

This squeeze has been felt by foodbanks in more ways than one.

The cost of living crisis has also changed the demographics of food bank users.

Dwindling donations coupled with an increase in those in need has resulted in immense pressure being put on the foodbanks.

Charlie Neal, who is press and strategic communications manager at The Felix Project, told me: "There used to be a lot of pensioners and people that were facing mental health crises or were out of work."

"There are still there, but there are more working people, working families and people who wouldn't have expected to see themselves use a food bank."

"We are seeing more and more working people, people that have part-time, full-



CREDIT: Wandsworth Food Bank

time, even two jobs, having to turn to a food bank."

Shockingly, a survey by The Felix Project found that 56% of parents in London have used a food bank in the last 12 months.

David Logan, who is CEO at Vineyard Community & Richmond Foodbank, said: "We've had people come along who formerly were donors to the food bank and now are using the food bank as guests."

The increased demand for food banks in the winter months can be affected by many factors, but the main reason is the cold weather.

People's stretched budgets in the warmer months don't cover the cost of warming up their homes in the winter.

Joanna said: "We definitely see an increase, particularly when people's heating needs to go on."

"Particularly those who are on metres as they're directly choosing what they're buying that week."

Christmas is such an expensive time of year for the vast majority of us.

So that coupled with the pressure to spend money on celebrations, presents and food can become all-consuming.

Particularly for parents who want to create the magic of Christmas.

"Emotionally, the stress on parents is huge because they want their children to have a lovely Christmas with everything

they need", Sarah says. But sadly, Christmas is not just a cold or expensive time of year.

It can also be a lonely one.

Divides within communities can become particularly stark.

While some joyfully celebrate, others silently struggle.

Joanna said: "Poverty is a lot more than what you do and don't have - it's about how you feel included in your community."

"It's a lonely time of year for a lot of people, so we try to remember that their visit to the food bank that week might be the only time that they've seen a friendly face."

"It might be the only time that someone wishes them a happy Christmas."

It became clear to me that food banks don't just give out food.

They are a hub for the community.

A safe place for the most vulnerable to go. And despite the difficulties faced by the food banks, their volunteers and users, there was an overpowering amount of gratitude for help and donations.

The pride they feel for their communities.

Their appreciation for the work their volunteers put in.

Their desire to not give up, despite the uphill battle. Optimism.

Simply the only word for it.

The precise planning it takes to run a food bank, to ensure food is fairly given out, that food donations are preserved and donations are looked after.

It all wouldn't be possible without their volunteers and the entire community.

Maria van Ommen, who is a manager at Ealing Food Bank, said: "We have so many people who just come together."

"People really look out for each other and really help each other."

While speaking about the generosity of Hackney, Jenna said: "We have amazing visitors and amazing volunteers and I've never known a community like Hackney, in terms of giving and support and this feeling that we are all in it together."

"It's quite amazing." ❶



There are many ways you can support your local foodbank.

The most obvious way to help out is by giving food back, either straight to the food bank, or through a supermarket drop off point.

Make sure you are donating food and essentials that are most needed, to ensure your donation goes the furthest possible, such as:

- Tinned fruit and vegetables
- Fruit juice
- Long-life milk
- Soup
- Tinned fish
- Jam
- Coffee
- Biscuits
- Cereal
- Sugar
- Pasta and rice

Another way to help your local food bank is by volunteering your time.

Volunteers are incredibly important when it comes to ensuring the food banks run smoothly and that visitors are met with a friendly face and a smile.

Whether you volunteer every day or once every month, you will be making a huge difference to your local community.

Speaking on the important role volunteers play, Charlie says: "We have an incredible, amazing army of people but we always need more."

"If you have time over Christmas, you can do as many or as little days as you want."

"We would love to have you and welcome you in."

Finally, you could consider donating money directly to the foodbank.

The money gives the foodbanks freedom to buy whole-sale food at a cheaper price, and allows them to stock up the shelves with necessities.



CREDIT: Freya Najade



# Are coffee shops the new rave?

As the UK's nightlife shrinks, a quieter movement is emerging as Gen Z embrace "soft clubbing" – swapping heavy nights out for softer, gentler ways to gather...



By **TIA MELVILLE**

When we look at nightlife today, we see a shift. People are out less and drinking less; the nightlife culture is declining, with so many nightclubs, bars, and clubs closing in the UK.

But a new culture seems to be among Gen Z, 'soft clubbing'. It's the new go-to term to describe the shift in party culture, whether that's sober raves or DJ pop-ups in coffee shops. So, has Gen Z become the face of soft clubbing?

"We found new ways to socialise that weren't going out and spending loads of money on drinks," Olivia Bennet said in a TikTok addressing the shift.

But first, what is soft clubbing?

Soft clubbing involves a few major cul-

tural shifts, such as de-centring alcohol and drugs; prioritising less expensive events; prioritising authentic connection through immersive experiences, including entertainment, art, and music; and offering safer, more accessible forms of socialising.

There are examples everywhere. The music festival, Creamfields, introduced a daily 5K run and on-site gym to its program.

At the same time, alcohol free raves have been popping up across the UK, such as Bristol's The Trinity Centre's first-ever day-long sober rave and The House of Happiness' sober raves in London.

"We knew we wanted something that was proper clubbing, centred around

having a great time, just minus drugs and alcohol," said Neil Hudson-Basing, one of three co-founders of the House of Happiness.

Eventbrite has reported a 478 per cent increase in coffee clubbing events, a 20 per cent increase in morning dance parties, and a 1,105 per cent increase in attendance at thermal gatherings.

"This movement isn't about giving something up, it's about choosing more," says Roseli Ilano, Eventbrite's Head of Community & Trends Expert.

"More presence, more intention, more joy. Gen Z is redefining what it means to go out, and they're turning to experiences that nourish the body and soul as much as they entertain."

We're seeing more of these events pop

## Coffee shops are becoming the new hotspot to go out, favouring partying during the day

up, with Coffee Culture UK and The Coffee Gen hosting pop-up parties in local cafes, combining a love of coffee and clubbing – totally sober.

Why has 'soft clubbing' seemingly taken over the nights out we once knew?

People are prioritising their health and well-being a lot more. A 2024 report by UKActive found that 11.5 million people aged 16 and over had gym memberships, an increase of 1.6 million from 2022, a trend primarily driven by younger people.

This is undoubtedly reflected in Creamfields' introduction of the 5K run and on-site gyms. Additionally, Global News reported that a Berenberg study found that Gen Z drink about 20% less alcohol

per capita than Millennials do. People are

more inclined to nurture their bodies and engage in healthier activities than to wake up hungover and ill.

In addition to prioritising health, Gen Z crave connection and community.

**"I think run clubs are becoming really big in the UK, and instead of people going out and getting really drunk, they're replacing that with getting up really early in the morning"**

Young people feel lonelier than ever, with COVID lockdowns stunting friendships and a chronically online generation, so it's no wonder people are seizing every opportunity they can get to form genuine connections, sober and with their memory intact.

This focus on well-being and connection in the 'era of soft clubbing' comes in many forms, not just Creamfields or sober raves, but also run clubs.

Run clubs are another example of the new rave, combining community, cardio, and catharsis all at once, appealing to the needs of Gen Z in this 'era'. For example, Midnight Runners, a run club in London, is a combination of a bootcamp

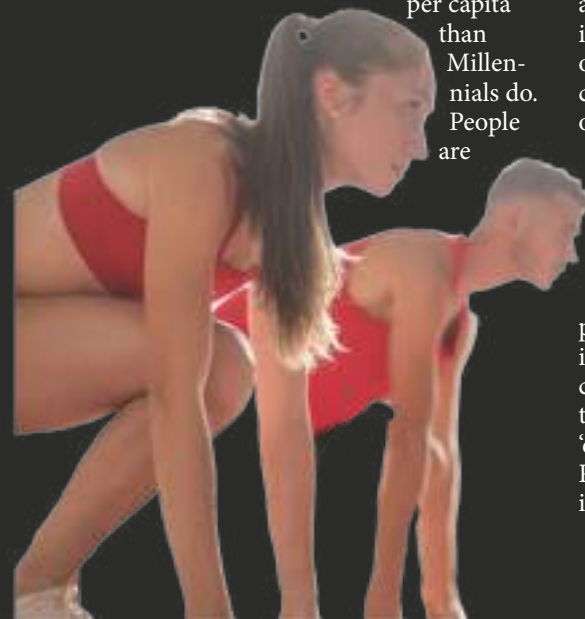
and a street party, with a portable speaker leading the crowd.

When asked about this shift in club culture, Finn James Craig, 19, said: I think run clubs are becoming really big in the UK, and instead of people going out and getting really drunk, they're replacing that with getting up really early in the morning

"culture has been replaced by other activities, which may be healthier and cost less."

Furthermore, going out is undeniably expensive.

In recent years, everything has increased in price, and people are more mindful of how they spend their money. People have to take into account how much club tickets cost, drink prices, travel, cloakrooms, and more; it all adds up to be overwhelmingly expensive, and for most, this is why clubbing has become a rarer occasion.







More of Gen Z are swapping out beers and cocktails for coffees and soft drinks whilst on nights out

Prices aren't decreasing anytime soon either, with the price of booze set to rise after the budget announced that alcohol duty will increase by 3.66%.

Drink prices are a major contributor to why Gen Z are consuming less alcohol, in addition to a focus on health and community.

In a statement addressing the budget, Michael Kill, CEO of the Night-Time Industries Association, said: "This Budget is a hammer blow to an already fragile night-time economy.

"Its impact will be felt across every high street and town centre in the UK.

"With inflation now higher than it's been for some months and the cost of living becoming increasingly unsustaina-

ble, disposable income has all but disappeared, swallowed up by rising everyday costs."

Lastly, sometimes it's just convenient and safer.

**"The reason everyone goes clubbing is to escape the 9-5; it's a space to be free and not restrained by their everyday life"**

Going out earlier means you don't have to worry about getting home because the transport is still running, and you don't need to be out on the streets so late.

Additionally, some people enjoy having a good time sober, and there's nothing wrong with that.

But is soft clubbing really this big movement? Does it reveal a bigger issue in today's culture?

There's no denying that 'soft clubbing' is a real thing, with the many examples stated above.

But that doesn't mean everyone's partaking in soft clubbing or even likes the term.

When asked about her thoughts on soft clubbing, Charlotte Mudd, 21, said: "The reason everyone goes clubbing is to escape the 9-5; it's a space to be free and not restrained by their everyday life.



"It's something you look forward to after work, not do in the day."

Personally, as someone who is Gen Z, I'd never go to a coffee shop or sober rave, and none of my friends are particularly interested either.

Not because I see an issue with it, but because I balance my lifestyle in other ways.

I love a good night out, but I can't always afford it for the same reasons others can't, I acknowledge I need a break sometimes and put my energy into enjoying other things like museums, but I'm not proactively replacing my clubbing with anything 'soft'.

Clubs are subversive in nature, some might say hedonistic, there's nothing 'soft' about clubbing, and this era of 'soft clubbing' seems to go hand in hand with the sober curious wellness movement rather than a pull away from traditional club culture.

Although pubs, clubs and bars are closing across the UK, there's still plenty of these places that are packed and clubs/raves sold out.

There is a real point to nightlife declining, but perhaps it correlates more with rising costs than with a cultural shift in which traditional clubbing is being replaced by soft clubbing.

There's nothing wrong with partying so-

ber and prioritising wellness and health, but daytime clubs and fitness aren't new.

The push for the term 'soft clubbing' and the events/activities that fall under feel more like club culture is being rebranded, repackaged and sold back to fit into your 9-5.

It feels clean, optimal and aestheticised-not what clubbing is meant to be at all.

One TikTok user, BAF1's, commented on soft clubbing, saying it's only being sold because they're realising the younger generation is drinking and going to clubs less;

"They're missing the point that both of these, at their core, are because they don't have money.

"You can't capitalise it when they don't have money in the first place."

Money is a fundamental point here, and it's seen as a key factor in the move towards soft clubbing; yet, when looking at ticket prices for sober or coffee raves, they are similar to regular clubs, ranging from £9 to £20 for some events.

While 'soft clubbing' is a real trend, I think it's far-fetched to say that it's outright replacing or redefining party culture. [L](#)





# CULTURE

## Taking a glimpse into Cecil Beaton's fashionable world

The first exhibition dedicated to the journey of Beaton's photography has opened



**Worldly Colour (Charles James evening dresses), 1948 and, below, Best Invitation of the Season, 1951**

By **TIA MELVILLE**

The National Portrait Gallery is staging its first major exhibition of fashion photographer Cecil Beaton, also known as the “King of Vouge”, featuring many dazzling looks worn by icons of the 20th century.

While much has been written about Beaton, as a photographer, artist, playwright, essayist, interiors expert and triple-Oscar-winning costume designer, his photographic contributions to style have never commanded their own show, until now.

Curated by photographic historian and contributing editor to *Vogue*, Robin Muir, the exhibition titled ‘Cecil Beaton’s Fashionable World’ shows around 250 items displayed, including photographs, letters, sketches and costumes, showcasing Beaton at his most triumphant.

From Hollywood stars and titans of art, high society and royalty, this exhibition features some of the 20th century’s most iconic figures, including Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, Marlon Brando and Queen Elizabeth II; as well as iconic artists like Francis Bacon, Salvador Dali and Lucien Freud. It also features photos of the youthful aristocrats and socialites of the time, who became known as the ‘Bright Young Things’, including the model Nina De Voe, whom he captured gloriously in 1951, wearing a grand Balmain ballgown.

“There is no skull beneath the skin with Beaton – he is not like Avedon or Penn trying to make some sort of psychological statement about the real ‘you’. It’s all about the surface.

“It’s about the joy of photography, I think we need to be brought out of

ourselves occasionally and taken back to a lost era of glamour and elegance, especially when you think of the imagery that confronts us today in the media,” says Robin Muir.

‘Cecil Beaton’s Fashionable World’ is at the National Portrait Gallery from the 9th of October until the 11th of January 2026. 🍷







# Back to school

Acclaimed artist PRIEST brings the realities of childhood in the city alive

By **EVIE MCQUHAE**

Acclaimed street artist PRIEST has unveiled a major new solo exhibition where he exaggerates a primary school classroom in order to explore the stark and often unsettling realities facing young people in Britain today.

The exhibition consisting of a super-sized classroom is called PAPER CUT and it has transformed the Saatchi gallery in Chelsea this month.

PRIEST said: "I have always had a love-hate relationship with 'white box' art spaces, so this show really started from my own childish desire to present macaroni art inside a polished, high-end gallery.

"If it is seen as a satirical jab at the seriousness within parts of the art world, I'm fine with that."

The show, which is darkly playful and visually arresting, blends bold humour with uncomfortable truths.

PRIEST invites visitors to view the challenges of modern childhood through a child's eyes, using supersized crayons, gluesticks, colouring-in sheets, magnets and other classroom detritus as a lens to examine issues such as knife

crime, shoplifting, police harassment, AI and the pressures facing families across London.

At the heart of the exhibition is an installation called 'Free Mobile' - a 3.5 metre-long spray paint box. It is sliced open to reveal a cardboard diorama of a phone being snatched by a youth riding a bike in the shadow of Big Ben.

The installation is partially prevailing as last year in London there were around 80,000 phone thefts, which is around 70% of thefts reported in the capital. This can be linked to cases of adult gangs coercing disadvantaged young people into criminality.

PRIEST explained: "My partner works in children's social care, and the darker, more complex elements of young people's experiences have become part of our everyday conversations. Some of the works will be tough to digest, but sadly they show the reality for many kids today."

The exhibition also surrounds a second installation which reflects the precarious situations many children

**PRIEST at the exhibition (right)**

live in today. It showcases Government figures which suggest that around one in 20 of London's children (4%) are homeless and living in temporary accommodation.

Scattered throughout the space are monumental versions of everyday classroom objects which creates an immersive environment that melds childhood memory with razor-sharp social commentary.

PRIEST said: "I just don't think most people grasp how tough life has become for young people today, especially in cities like London. I hope this show gets more people thinking about that and how we start to fix it."



A guest looks over the Heritage exhibition and, below, the Culture Entrance and a dance performer (buraanbur)

# Bringing Somali culture to the streets of London

By **HALIMA ABDI**

The first emergency began during a time when many were looking for jobs, specifically jobs related to merchants.

Somalis went to the major cities like Cardiff, Liverpool and London and the records of Somalis arriving in London dates back to 1914 when a lot of them were sent to fight in the First World War. In the 1990s there was a mass migration of Somalis arriving in London to seek a better life.

Historically, Somalis established themselves in boroughs like Camden and Tower Hamlets and to this day there's a strong presence.

To bring somalis and non somalis together a festival runs every year in October to celebrate Somali culture and arts. Kayd Somali Arts and Culture is an organisation that helped set up Somali Week, it was founded in 2009 by Ayan Mahamoud.

The first permanent Somali exhibition

space in the UK for Somali artefacts curated by the community opened their doors in May 2025.

Culture House aims to diversify the heritage landscape in the UK by preserving tangible and intangible Somali cultural assets and presenting them to a diverse audience in the community through collecting different types of pieces that reflect Somali culture.



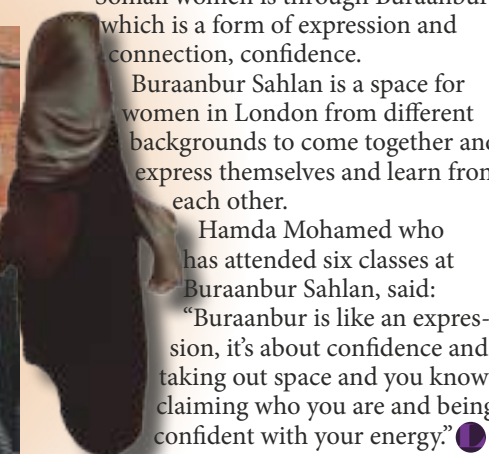
Picture credit: The Culture House  
Cut out credit: Halima Abdi

Abeer Ali, the learning officer and Intisar Yusuf, the operations director said: "We are very lucky to have such creative and inspiring people in the Somali community who are putting themselves out there to contribute to the arts and culture scene in London and across the UK."

Poetry plays an impactful role in Somali culture and a way that is popular among Somali women is through Buraanbur which is a form of expression and connection, confidence.

Buraanbur Sahlan is a space for women in London from different backgrounds to come together and express themselves and learn from each other.

Hamda Mohamed who has attended six classes at Buraanbur Sahlan, said: "Buraanbur is like an expression, it's about confidence and taking out space and you know claiming who you are and being confident with your energy."





# A rise from the grave, why horror lives on



Picture credit: Michele K. Short / © 2024 FOCUS FEATURES LLC



Picture credit: Aidan Monaghan / © 2025 FOCUS FEATURES LLC

## Why horror films have made a comeback recently

Picture credit: Courtesy of Focus Features / © 2025 FOCUS FEATURES LLC

By **TIA MELVILLE**

Horror films have been taking over cinema screens in recent years, but they've especially seen their comeback in 2025.

"Last year, no horror film reached £10m at the UK or Irish box office. This year, five films have," said Charles Gant, box office editor of Screen International. The big hits of the year: *Weapons* (£11.4m), *Sinners* (£16.2m), *The Conjuring Last Rites* (£14.98m) and *28 Years Later* (£15.54m). So why has horror risen once again?

Horror as a genre has always been popular in times of uncertainty and change. It reflects people's anxieties and fears.

But over the last two years, horror has thrived, bringing gothic horror into the mainstream.

"I think there is something to horror films that I really find incredibly eerie, and it's from a time when I didn't exist,

**"They have this strange ability to seem old-fashioned and up to the minute, both at the same time"**

which I think also adds to that, and newer films typically seem to be playing to all of my current fears and worries of the human existence," Said Paul Vick-

ery, Head of Programming at the Prince Charles Cinema.

The groundwork for the horror resurgence has been laid for a while now. By 2023, "elevated horror" had already moved into the mainstream, normalising atmospheric, driven scares and paving



Picture credit: Michele K. Short / © 2024 FOCUS FEATURES LLC

### Gothic tales have long reflected people's fears and anxieties since the genre was made

the way for a broader stylistic shift coming from studios like A24. Additionally, films like *Lisa Frankenstein* (2024) signalled a growing appetite for playful, stylised takes on classic horror stories, while early anticipation for Robert Eggers' *Nosferatu* remake hinted at a renewed hunger for all-out gothic cinema.

And 2025 has been the year Gothic horror enters the mainstream.

Two highly prolific releases this year, Robert Eggers' *Nosferatu* and Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein*, signal a shift back to the genre's oldest roots. They're lavish reinterpretations that treat gothic storytelling as something alive and relevant, harking back to anxieties and fears that resonate today.

*Nosferatu* warns of repression, shame, and the destructive nature of evil.

Its atmosphere of slow, collective unravelling feels uncomfortably familiar in times of political uncertainty.

Whereas *Frankenstein* warns about power and creation in an age of AI and political unrest.

The Monster becomes a symbol of the things society has built, like technologies, systems, and crises, that feel beyond our control.

"Ambiguity is one of the great branches of romanticism. Gothic is both sensorial, sensual, and spiritual. The other is always present in horror and Gothic romance and in that light renders it not something to be afraid of, but as something

to recognise in yourself and that there's great beauty and great liberation in that," says Katie McCabe, reviews editor at Sight and Sound, on gothic horror, and quoting Del Toro.

"Whether you like them or not, you can't argue that the quality of what is presented to you on screen, for all the various costumes and production design, everything else is just something that's worth holding your attention," Vickery said about Eggers and Del Toro.

"For me, Gothic horror certainly, especially in the modern sort of iteration, broadens that palette of horror and places us in a time that we don't necessarily exist in as well, so it could be quite fantastical."

The retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has always been popular, but it's not just Del Toro's adaptation that shows the relevance and popularity of the Gothic tale. *Lisa Frankenstein* (2024) takes a story that explores themes of scientific hubris, social rejection, and creation and turns it into a playful, witty, feminist tale of a

teenage girl who represents Mary Shelley, exploring grief, transformation, and identity.

Whereas the symbolism of vampires used in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Nosferatu* (2025) to explore fears of immigration and corruption of innocence was also reimagined in *Sinners* (2025) to explore themes of white supremacy and colonialism.

The horror genre, particularly the Gothic, is flexible and can be reimagined and appropriated by popular culture in many ways to fit our current society. It is cyclic in nature and therefore can always be relevant, which perhaps explains its constant revivals.

"They have this strange ability to seem old-fashioned and up to the minute, both at the same time," Christopher Frayling, author of *Vampire Cinema* and *Frankenstein: The First 200 Years*, says.

Alongside the re-emergence of the mad scientist trope, he predicts we will see horror films in 2026 and 2027 that respond to our current anxieties: about AI's dominance in the near future and "vampires living in the Trump Tower."



Picture credit: Aidan Monaghan / © 2025 FOCUS FEATURES LLC



# “Some days I felt like prey, something easy to use and play with.”

For decades women have faced harassment and power imbalances in the workplace, and hospitality is one of the most prominent sectors for this. Through conversations with young women working in some of London’s busiest pubs, we hear what really goes on behind the bar



CREDIT: Bob Harvey via Wikimedia commons

The experiences and opinions reported in this article are from the writer and the interviewees. Names have been changed and identifying details omitted for privacy.

By **ELLA MCINTYRE**

It was the beginning of 2022 when I, a naïve 18-year-old girl, working towards my A-levels was offered my first job.

I was to start work at a pub in Central London and was ecstatic to start making my own money.

I wish my younger self knew just what she had signed herself up for.

Those who have never had to work in hospitality will never quite understand how young girls get exploited by the industry, and how that shapes the young mind.

**“I soon found out the dark side of the industry”**

I start the job expecting everyone there to be kind and friendly, because people are kind by nature.

I believe they’ll want me to feel safe and welcomed.

I assume I will be seen as a child (which, I am) and will be treated with the same attitude as one.

I soon realise that no matter how hard I work, none of it matters.

90% of hospitality workers say they’ve been sexually harassed at work.

For women aged 18–24, over 70% say they’ve been touched without consent while on shift.

And yet, only 20% of incidents are ever reported to management.

From chatting around, I gathered that many staff members had this feeling that a ‘boys club’ culture existed, where the younger women felt overlooked or disrespected unless they fit in socially.

I noticed the girls who would get the attention of the managers; young, flirty and fruitful.

I began to wonder why I wasn’t treated the same as them.

Why I was made to clean the toilets, never got invited out for drinks and was made to work the closing shifts, which left me in Central London at 4am on a 2-hour night bus home, shaking and afraid.

I soon found out the dark side of the

industry.

I was glad not to be a part of it, but I felt as though I was missing out on something big: acceptance, respect and acknowledgment of my existence.

Some time passed by, and it was hiring season for the summer.

Like a modelling call I witnessed girl by girl coming to be interviewed; it seemed that appearance played more of a role than experience in who was hired.

I started questioning this and heard my manager has said one of the most disturbing comments I have ever heard: “There aren’t enough ham sandwiches in my pub.”

There is a wider systemic issue at hand here.



CREDIT: ProtoplasmaKid via Wikimedia commons

For context, the pub where most of these stories come from is one of London’s busiest and best-performing pubs.

Staff claimed that younger workers, some under 18, often felt uncomfortable with how much attention they received from older colleagues.

Several members of staff described managers showing romantic interest in newly adult colleagues.

**“Women aren’t able to break through the glass pub ceilings, you don’t get promoted on merit, you get promoted on how shapely your ass is”**

Zara Khan, 20s, said: “A girl was 17 when she was employed, turned 18 in February and by March she was at his [the managers] house.”

Many of the women interviewed believed promotions were influenced more by personal relationships than by performance.

If there were two women competing for the role, interviewees said they often perceived that those in relationships with managers advanced faster than those who were not.

Zara said: “Women aren’t able to break through the glass pub ceilings, you don’t get promoted on merit, you get promoted on how shapely your ass is.”

**“Makes me feel humiliated that these are the type of men I work for”**

The teaming-up of the ‘boys club’ culture, Zara recalled often resulted in managers exchanging looks during interviews which she interpreted as judgments based on appearance.

She said: “I feel like this perpetuates really weird power dynamics at work, where you have men in positions of power who are much, much older, who literally have their brains fully developed.

“They go after younger girls because they’re naïve, because they’re more eager to impress, because they are going to confuse respect and admiration with attraction.”

She said: “The way that this paradigm is set up is for a reason and it’s working very-very well.

“As one of the top three pubs in the country, we are doing so insanely well that it’s going to be really hard to break the system.”

For many young women, the attention from older staff could feel manipulative, some even described it as bordering on grooming.

Zara said: “You’ve got a lot of older men around you who

do pander to you.

“Essentially, they are grooming and specialising you and when you’re put in a situation like that while you’re still learning, it’s really going to affect you in a different way than if you were just stacking shelves at 17.”



These double standards continue.

Another member of staff Mia Patel, 20’s, said: “My manager cannot stress enough the importance of keeping work strictly professional and your personal life as private.

“Yet he would form relationships with the other staff and take their private arguments and air it out to the whole team causing nothing but chaos and drama - not professional at all.”

**“They’d only abide the rules if they weren’t easy to get away with being broken”**

Some of the comments that staff, including myself, have heard managers use when discussing women were described as derogatory and objectifying.

Mia said: “I’ve heard my managers talk about female customers that come in who they deem as ‘attractive’.

“However, the words they choose to say are disgusting and degrading.

“One example would be “Her ass is so fat I would love to grab it and mmmm”.

“Makes me feel humiliated that these are the type of men I work for.”



Lucy Harris, teenager, who was employed as a minor, reviewed her time at work whilst being under 18.

She said: “The work environment felt inconsistent; sometimes I felt like management were more gentle and understanding towards me as I was still quite young, however they’d pick and choose to use the ‘minor card’.

“They’d only abide the rules if they weren’t easy to get away with being broken.

“Some days I felt like prey, something easy to use and play with.

**“The way that this paradigm is set up is for a reason and it’s working very-very well”**

Younger staff members felt they would often get exploited due to higher expectations because of their youth.

Lucy said: “Child labour laws are always on the brink of being broken.

“If you can’t complete the 15 tasks you given to do and at rapid speed you’ll be bullied and belittled for it.”



CREDIT: Leon Israel via Wikimedia commons



## Accusations of harassment

- One in three women working in pubs received sexual harassment from a manager or senior colleague.
- 89% of women in hospitality say regular sexual harassment is built into the job.
- Half of women aged 18–24 say sexual harassment at work is a ‘regular expectation’.
- One survey found that about 67 % of women working in hospitality and leisure reported having experienced some form of sexual harassment at work.
- Another study showed that around 47 % of workers in hospitality had experienced sexual harassment and 69 % had witnessed it.
- In England & Wales in 2023, roughly 1 in 10 people aged 16 or over reported experiencing harassment that made them feel upset, distressed or threatened in the previous 12 months. Among 16-24 year-olds the rate was about 20-21%.

While these personal stories told may seem unique, they are not isolated to just one pub.

Young women in all industries, but especially hospitality face a disproportionate amount of harassment, poor treatment and power imbalance.

These statistics reveal the nature of the problem and prove that these stories combine with others and show the issue is more widespread than people like to think.

## Young and female workers

- More than 60% of girls say harassment began when they were under 18.
- Around 10% of the workforce are aged 16-24, rising to much higher levels in specific roles and 48% of bar staff are under 25.
- Women make up approximately 60 % of the hospitality workforce, yet only around one in three leadership roles in hospitality are held by women.

This age and gender depiction means that many workers are young, relatively inexperienced, and often working late shifts into the AM. A combination that, research has linked to higher risk of exploitation and harassment.

## Risks and conditions

- Women in hospitality are five times more likely to experience sexual abuse at work than in any other UK sector.
- Two-thirds of workers say management ‘did nothing’ when harassment was reported.
- Hospitality is the industry with the highest rate of customer-perpetrated sexual harassment in the UK.
- Workers on precarious contracts or insecure hours (very common in hospitality) are more likely to experience harassment: one report found that such workers were about 60 % more likely to report being victims of sexual harassment.
- The recently passed Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 establishes that employers in the UK must now take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment among employees in the course of their employment.

Now, almost four years down the line, I can’t say attitudes and imbalances have changed, but the driving force behind it is people speaking up.

Conversations between likeminded women who have felt the harsh hand of the industry and been frustrated for far too long, bond over their mistreatment and form friendships over their experiences.

Finding your co-worker crying in the bathroom mid-shift over the way her manager has treated her, watching her break down then pull herself back together and continue to serve is empowering.

These shared stories are starting to reach the surface and young women need no longer feel afraid to stand up for themselves and be the ones who call out this behaviour.

Public awareness is growing through hospitality unions and campaigns such as Unite’s #NotOnTheMenu.

Unite are demanding safer workplaces specifically tackling sexual harassment complaints and making sure women’s complaints aren’t ignored or penalised.

They want to enforce anti-sexual harassment policies and are working with hospitality workers to plan future steps and encourage them to join the union, fighting together for change.

Unite the Union reported a 25% rise in hospitality workers seeking advice about harassment between 2021–2024 which proves women are fighting back.

The Worker Protection Act 2023 imposes a new legal duty on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

As well as this, The Equality Act 2010 enforces employers to be proactive and take initiative.

If an employer is found to have breached this new duty, there are provisions for a potential 25% increase in compensation.

**“Almost any under 18-year-old girl, has a story to tell about an older coworker who they’ve been sexually harassed by”**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is responsible for enforcing this new duty, and they can take action even if no specific incident of sexual harassment has occurred.

As UKHospitality’s CEO Allen Simpson said: “There can be no place for sexual harassment within hospitality.”

Looking at the future of the industry, Lucy Harris said: “The biggest change

I would like to see is not putting young members of staff on a pedestal.

“Just because we’re young we’re not these robotic machines that will work endlessly.

“The other change needed is that older men need to face stricter punishments for preying on young members of staff.

“Almost any under 18-year-old girl, myself included has a story to tell about an older male coworker who they’ve been sexually harassed by and said man has faced zero consequences.

“It’s a well-known fact that men who work in hospitality aren’t typically the best of people and it’s especially known between them how they all take a liking to these little girls.”

If Lucy could tell managers one thing about creating a safer and fairer workplace for young people, she said: “Managers need to be considerate.”

“What teenager would challenge an intimidating 30-something-year-old male manager’s authority?”

She said: “It takes absolutely nothing to be considerate especially if you’re in management and you’re seeking to create a safer work environment.

“You never know what’s going on in someone’s life/head and your critical mean comment that u made towards them out of spite could really be their last straw.”

To play devil’s advocate, not every manager turns a blind eye to employee’s problems.

Some genuinely want more training and guidance on how to handle misconduct or support young staff.

James McConnel, 40’s, Pub Manager said: “The industry obviously needs to do a lot more to protect and support young women.

“Training should be more than a 2-minute online multiple-choice exercise, I would like to see it focusing more on changing people’s attitudes and beliefs.

“Managers need to make it their job to take responsibility for the kind of environment we create, and we are always looking out for what’s best for our staff.

“More action is needed when calling out inappropriate behaviour, setting clear boundaries and making sure staff know they can come to us without fear of losing shifts or hours.”

**“It’s a well-known fact between these men how they all take a liking to little girls.”**

A few pubs have started calling for proper training, they have introduced anonymous reporting systems, women’s safety champions and posters reminding staff of their rights.

But even with these steps forward, fear still lingers and speaking up feels intimidating when you’re young, new and easily replaced.

If I could change anything about my time working in pubs, I wouldn’t, because it gave me the knowledge and experiences I have today to hold myself with a higher regard and with higher expectations than I did before.

My younger self wasn’t prepared for what she was about to face, but now she has high self-esteem and won’t back down when she feels like she’s being mistreated, and she knows when it’s time to leave and start anew.

If relevant government policy and training changes to help raise more awareness, then the future of hospitality looks bright, as young women should feel safe in their work environment. **L**



# Matcha made in heaven for Gen-Z

China made it, Japan perfected it and social media transformed it to a global phenomenon, now matcha is everywhere. But what is the appeal of the drink?

By **HALIMA ABDI**

Keiko Uchida is a Japanese company based in Notting Hill, West London, where they create the finest teas and they are a tea merchant that focuses on Japanese tea and ceramics. They sell a bunch of Japanese teas with a high-quality range to choose from and they also host events like Tea Ceremonies. In their workshops, they go into the equipment you need to create sweet and high-grade matcha teas while explaining the history and philosophy behind their teas.

Uchida works directly with tea makers and tea farmers across Japan, particularly in Kyoto they have been collecting matcha for 10 years.

Keiko Uchida said: "For the customer

to avoid disappointment, they should try and find a trusted tea maker who is properly selling matcha they have to do their own research, otherwise it's just wasting

**"In my opinion, I think everybody could make the best matcha tea and there is a reason that it's nice at home"**

money. "

Keiko Uchida is a huge advocate for authentic matcha being sold to customers so it can boost customer trust between them and the tea makers.

For those who haven't tried matcha,

they tend to travel to coffee shops like Jenki and Blank Street, Black Sheep, to get their first matcha by the judgment of people trying matcha for the first time on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Keiko Uchida is trying to break that cycle by saying it's best to make your own matcha at home.

Keiko Uchida said: "I think that they are in need to find a trusted tea matcha and to buy the matcha powder from them so they could make the best matcha and it's reasonable at home. It's much cheaper than going to the cafe."

CREDIT: Keiko Uchida



Keiko Uchida a Qualified Japanese Tea Master  
Tea Ceremony Workshop

Londoners December 2025

## The background of the beverage

By **HALIMA ABDI**

Did you know that matcha has a connection with Buddhist monks who brought it from China to Japan.

In the 18th century, the sort of green tea production started in the 12th century, where it gained popularity. In the 16th century, Japan had a tea ceremony, which elevated tea drinking to an art form. It wasn't invented for taste, it was created for mental clarity, which monks used before their concentration when meditating.

Matcha has high levels of caffeine and is a great alternative to coffee.

Many people don't know that making matcha at home is very accessible and easy first you soak and rinse the bamboo whisk in warm water and leave a one to two minutes to soften the bristles making it easier to whisk then get a sieve and push the scoop of matcha through so we can remove any clumps or lumps 70 to 100 milliliters of warm water should do the job.

Then make sure that the hot water isn't boiling because that can damage the quality of the matcha you whisk in ZigZag motions up and down up and down.



Ice Matcha Latte, like this above, are among the most popular

Halima Abdi recommends her three top Matcha spots in London...

BLK CAB is a coffee shop that was established in 2017. I initially heard about it through my sister, who showed me some images on a TikTok slide. I have been there three times, I kept getting the same order. The service was relatively quick for a coffee shop that blew up on TikTok.

HEYTEA is a Chinese beverage chain that was founded in 2012. There are many locations of HEYTEA in London. I heard about it as they were doing a deal to buy one matcha and get

the other one for free. They not only do matcha, but they also make bubble tea drinks. I tried it and was overpowered by the sweet taste of tapioca. Next time, I will stick to their matcha. They have large reusable cups, which are not only good for the environment but also very cute and reliable.

ARTISAN BREW is a cosy coffee shop that has a variety of matcha flavors to choose from: strawberry, vanilla, and blueberry. I went to the one in Holborn and the service was incredible. I planned on visiting again. They had an accessible prayer space downstairs and also hosted book clubs.



Picture credits:  
Above - Unsplash  
Below - Halima Abdi



# Finding a small taste of Palestine in Notting Hill

From Bethlehem to London, one chef's mission to tell their story through food

By **SARA MECIBAH**

The aroma of za'atar and freshly baked bread drifts through the streets of Notting Hill, drawing passersby toward a shopfront adorned with Palestinian embroidery.

Inside Akub, the warmth isn't just from the kitchen; it's in the conversations, the community, and the quiet acts of resistance served on every plate.

The restaurant takes its name, Akub, from Arabic for cardoon: a wild thistle that grows predominantly in Palestine. It opened in 2022.

Co-founders Fadi Kattan, whose family comes from Bethlehem, and Rasha Khouri Bruzzo brought the vision to life: a high-end Palestinian restaurant telling stories of the land through food.

Kattan designs every menu, testing and creating recipes. His inspiration?

His grandmother, who encouraged him to go bold with the food. Mafghoussa, a traditional Palestinian dish he would eat at his grandmother's, has a twist because of the way he ate it growing up.

The chef said: "I think London is a fantastic foodie city with a lot of curiosity, diversity and I felt there was a place for more high-end Palestinian restaurants to tell the story of the land and produce.

"But, different: with a twist - I don't serve traditional Palestinian food, but it's dishes created and inspired from the Palestinian Taybeh."

The menu reflects this philosophy: from Musakhan (sumac-marinated chicken with caramelized onions on taboon bread) to a slow-cooked lamb shoulder that arrives with freekeh, the ancient roasted green wheat. The signature Akub

salad features cardoon, the wild thistle that gives the restaurant its name and grows along regions of the Middle East.

The restaurant celebrates Palestinian farmers and artisans. Olive oil, freekeh, and wines are sourced from Palestine.

"When someone buys a bottle of wine which is Palestinian, it allows us to tell them the story of the first human beings who planted grapes," he added. "The

most famous wine during the Roman period was from Gaza."

The space itself evokes Palestine.

"We're lucky to have a very talented designer who created this space - it's a lot of elements that are reminiscent of Palestine," he added. "In our bar, our wall is a painted frisco inspired by Palestinian cards from the 1920s, a Palestinian landscape, an arch-way made with stones and olive trees a bit all over.

"I'm not a fan of orientalist because there's a fine line between celebrating a culture and being very orientalist about it," Kattan said.

Akub hosts regular supper clubs and donates part of its proceeds to charities providing

medical aid to Palestinians.

"Every dish is inspired by either my own family history or by the collective: stories of Palestine.

"When you are serving fresh produce, the only way to preserve the link

to the land is by working with the local producers wherever you are," Kattan said.

"Everybody's journey is different - I think when we did the restaurant, it becomes a space where all of those different journeys find a piece of itself."

Them coming to Akub means they are finding their Palestine within it. "Palestinian food is under-represented."

**"I'm not a fan of orientlists because there's a fine line between celebrating a culture and being very orientalist about it"**



**Chef Fadi Kattan and some of his dishes**

Credit: food images, Akub's restaurant.

# The Death of the Garage Band

GET THOSE WHITE BOYS BACK IN THAT GARAGE!

By **ELLA MCINTYRE**

When I think of the early 2000s, a group of angsty teenage white boys rocking out in their garage, with dreams of making it out of their small-town pops into my mind.

They form an alliance over their love for the likes of Green Day, Blink-182 and The All-American Rejects and kickstart their own garage band.

All their bottled-up frustrations over:

- Feeling trapped in this same old town
- Their ex-girlfriend
- How this life just isn't for them

Translates into a symphony of Punk-Rock/ Midwest-Emo realness and the birth of iconic bands such as Modern Baseball, Mom Jeans and The Front Bottoms.

The white boy had successfully found a way to express himself, in a healthy, artistically creative form.

The point of this lost art was that it was messy, unpolished and accessible.

These teenagers spent their pocket money on cheap guitars, drum-kits and amps all to fuel their cheap dreams of hosting their basement shows which they'd advertise on Myspace.

But this artform and this specific genre of male seems to have gone extinct.

There are doubts in many fans' minds whether they will ever get music with this same sound again.

One Reddit user on r/Pop-Punkers said: "2000s pop punk was a little more raw."

"Today's pop punk is a little more produced and has largely left the emo (melodramatic attitude) behind."

But how has the culture died when the fanbases are still so alive?

Once our phones stole our need for real life social connection and replaced boredom where creativity used to be born, boys were no longer hanging out in their garages.

These spaces weren't seen as ideal for band practice as teens became isolated to their bedrooms and glued to their screens.

Part of this digital shift took the music industry with it.

Bedroom producers emerged, using only their computers to create beats and sounds, which nowadays is much more cost efficient and successful than trying to start a band from scratch - the driving force is missing.

TikTok became the new medium where artists blew up, and having your music go viral is what artists need to go mainstream.

Other genres surfaced in the early 2010's like Hyperpop with its distorted and futuristic sound which is heavily influenced by internet culture and gained popularity through platforms like TikTok.

The internet's need for the depressed whiney white boy vanished and DIY rock became niche vs. algorithm-friendly pop/rap, with bands being less culturally central than solo artists.

Interest shifted towards experimental, PC Music sounds with the likes of A.G. Cook and SOPHIE being some of the

most influential early producers.

A reddit user on r/decaology said: "Emo was the last big youth rock movement."

"Technology and streaming helped destroy the traditional enclaves of music."

Other factors include the prices of equipment, lack of practical rehearsal space and transport for practice all comes with a cost, and being able to form a garage band became a luxury.

So, what's left of this passage in time, except old drum-kits and band posters collecting dust in storage?

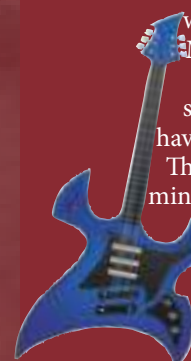
Some think there may be a comeback, one Reddit user on r/decadeology said: "Gen Alpha are the kids of Millennials; they may bring back the popularity of emo/scene culture in the early 2030s."

Thanks to TikTok and everchanging trends, this type of music is always at the edge of revival.

Nostalgia for a simpler time leaves the children eager for pop-punk, with older fans praising artists Olivia Rodrigo and Machine Gun Kelly for keeping the sound alive today.

There is a whole community of Taylor Swift fans who have been begging her to go punk for years; to the extent band Call it Off have made a career covering her music if it was punk or 'swemo' (Swiftie x emo).

The genre may not be dead, just mutated, with the garage just waiting for the next bored teen to come along and make something worth listening to.



CREDIT: Issan Sumisu via Wikimedia commons  
Vecteezy.com





CREDIT: Kwh1050 via Wikimeida commons

# How Far Right are Gen Z Compared to Boomers?

As online radicalism grows, young people are showing displays of leaning right, expressed through memes and ‘ragebait’. But how far does this radicalism go?

By **ELLA MCINTYRE**

To older generations, Gen Z are often viewed as sensitive, obsessed with labels, and glued to their phones.

But after Charlie Kirk - American right-wing political activist’s - assassination (bottom right) there began a massive shift in trends and tensions online.

A generation of Leftists and those who were once described as ‘snowflakes’ began showing less progressive ideological beliefs and more radical and outspoken ones instead.

Recent polls suggest that a growing number of young voters - particularly young men - are backing parties like Reform UK.

**“It’s not so much that Gen Z are turning Tory; it’s that traditional ‘left’ and ‘right’ labels are now breaking down”**

According to YouGov and Ipsos polling across 2025, Gen Z - born between 1997 and 2012 - remain the most socially progressive group in Britain.

Majorities support same-sex marriage, trans rights, and climate action.

Around 60% say immigration benefits the UK; double the rate among Boomers - born between 1946 and 1964.

But beneath this progression, there lies frustration.

Gen Z are the least likely to trust politicians or the media, and the most likely to describe themselves as ‘politically homeless’, meaning they do not feel like any political party can accurately support their beliefs.

Nabeel Rahman, political sociologist, suggests that recent polls are hinting towards political fatigue among young people.

He said: “Gen Z voters aren’t particularly showing strong signs of leaning one way or the other, they’re simply showing signs of frustration with a political system that hasn’t delivered them stability, housing, or economic security.”

“Young people are voting more reactively; if the mainstream parties feel too similar, protest voting becomes the more attractive option, including parties on the more extreme side.”

## Generation Gap: Who’s Really Moving Right?

- 64% of voters aged 65+ backed the Conservatives in 2019
- Nearly 3 in 10 men say they’d consider voting Reform UK
- 7 in 10 young people say tackling climate change should be a top priority
- Almost 80% of Britons now support same-sex marriage

An October YouGov poll about voting intentions for those aged 18-24 saw The Green Party gathering 40% of votes and in second came Labour with 21%.

But, perhaps most shockingly, Reform UK saw 12% of these votes - double that of the Tories’ 6%.

Another YouGov survey deduced that 15% of men aged 18-24 said they’d consider voting Reform UK, up from 5% the previous year.

So, it’s not so much that Gen Z are turning Tory; it’s that traditional ‘left’ and ‘right’ labels are now breaking down.

Nabeel also emphasised the effects of gender divides in voting.

He said: “For young women, polling shows their political identity still leans strongly liberal and progressive.”

“On the other hand, young men are the ones becoming more oppositional.”

“They aren’t becoming more conservative but are veering more towards whoever sounds most anti-establishment.”

Therefore, the pull of parties like Reform UK and the impact of online influencers is stronger amongst men.

On the role of media affecting voting patterns, he argued that information feeds also dramatically differ by gender.

Nabeel said: “Young women tend to consume community-oriented, socially progressive content, while young men are more exposed to adversarial and algorithm-driven spaces where outrage and reaction performs better.”

Finally, he pointed out the underlying economic story.

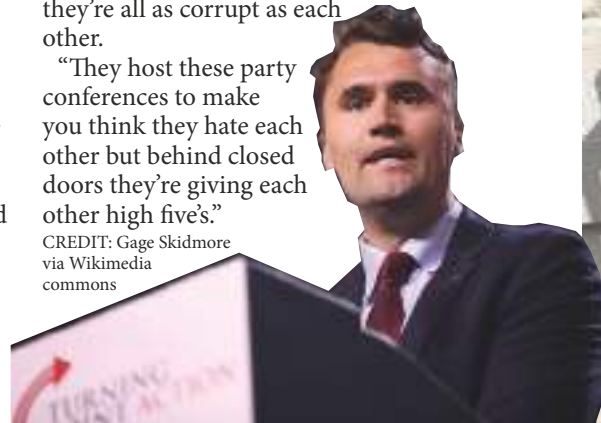
He said: “When a generation feels economically stuck, locked out of housing and stable work, they become more open to narratives that blame ‘the system’ or ‘the elites’, that doesn’t automatically make them far-right, but it makes them more volatile as voters.”

James Brown, 22, self-employed, chooses not to vote in any election.

He said: “All parties are the same, why would I bother voting for any when they’re all as corrupt as each other.”

“They host these party conferences to make you think they hate each other but behind closed doors they’re giving each other high fives.”

CREDIT: Gage Skidmore via Wikimedia commons



It’s clear that gen Z’s rebellion isn’t ideological, it’s emotional.

**“Yet that’s how radicalisation often begins, not with manifestos, but memes”**

Much of this shift happens not in party conferences but on TikTok, Instagram and Reddit.

Controlled by algorithms that reward outrage, irony, and contrarianism which all in effect creates what researchers are calling the ‘ironic right.’

This phrase is used when describing the use of irony, humour and memes as a cultural strategy by right-wing groups to shape political ideas for those of a younger age.

The Organisation Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) said: “Extreme right-wing movements have used



memes to condense complex, radical ideologies into a more appealing and ‘palatable’ format for younger audiences and that humour/irony helps lower the barrier for participation.”

They said: “For instance, the meme character Pepe the Frog began as a harmless comic figure but was co-opted by far-right circles to carry extremist narratives.”

Far-right memes are often used to transmit cultural ideologies, disguised as dark humour and politically incorrect jokes to attack progressive and liberal thinking.

**“It’s not just memes; it’s propaganda with a laugh track”**

This meme culture attempts the blur the lines of what political ideas are socially acceptable by gradually normalising extremist ideals wrapped in these jokes.



CREDIT: secretlondon123 via Wikimedia commons

From Andrew Tate’s self-help sermons to culture-war memes about masculinity, young men are specifically being targeted by an online culture that blurs humour and hate.

Some dip their toes in to reactionary ideas without fully buying in and enjoy the shock value more than the ideology itself.

Yet that’s how radicalisation often begins, not with manifestos, but memes.

It’s not just memes; it’s propaganda with a laugh track.

While Gen Z’s politics appear to be divided, Boomers’ conservatism has remained remarkably stable.

More than half of voters over 60 voted Conservative in 2019, and even during the cost-of-living crisis, many held tight to their right-leaning values: nationalism, lower immigration, and traditional gender roles.

**“The generational contrast isn’t just ideological, it’s informational that each group is stuck in its own feedback loop”**

This is largely due to the media they consume that reinforces this.

Where Gen Z get news from TikTok clips and podcasts, Boomers rely on newspapers and television; mediums still dominated by right wing and centre-right narratives and nostalgia politics.

Many also depend on talk radio, print tabloids, and Facebook groups that all produce familiar stories about national pride, stability, and ‘the good old days.’

This environment rewards continuity over change, making it less likely that Boomers will abandon their loyalties.

Their political outlook is shaped as much by memory and media as by the ideology itself.

The generational contrast isn’t just ideological, it’s informational that each group is stuck in its own feedback loop.

If most of Gen Z are left-leaning, why are some young people still drawn to far-right ideas?

A weak economy leaves many young people to feel like they have no financial stability and can’t buy a home, save money or find secure work.

**Far-right ideas don’t always show up in manifestos, sometimes they slide in through memes. Here’s how the pipeline works:**

- Hide it in a joke – humour makes edgy opinions feel harmless.
- Play dumb later – if called out, it’s just a joke.
- Blur the line – is it satire or serious? You’re never entirely sure.
- Normalise the extreme – repeat the joke enough times, and it stops sounding that shocking.

This frustration can make them more open to political movements that promise to shake up the system or challenge those in power.

Some young men choose to rebel against what they see in online activism and the pressure to show support for public causes and calling others out.

As a reaction to feeling pressured or judged by this culture, they sometimes push back by mocking, rejecting and distancing themselves from it as they believe it to be performative.

Furthermore, the masculinity crisis void where schools and families once offered role models, influencers are now filling and reframing misogyny as “self-improvement.”

Nabeel said: “The numbers are still small, but the online reach of far-right content means the cultural footprint is bigger than the polling suggests.”

Ironically, Gen Z are also the generation most likely to protest for Palestine, climate action, and racial justice.

Political identity among Gen Z isn’t linear, instead it’s fragmented, emotional, and constantly reshaped by the internet.

Boomers remain the UK’s most reliably conservative voters and Gen Z are still largely progressive, but a vocal minority are questioning the left-wing consensus.

Whether that small, but loud voice grows into a broader right-wing movement or fades into just a meme will all depend on who listens to their frustrations first. 1



# What is Eldest Daughter Syndrome?

Eldest daughters walked so their siblings could... relax. A sociological look at why the firstborn girl is always the CEO of the household, whether it's 10,000 BC or 2025

By **ELLA MCINTYRE**

Since the dawn of time, eldest daughters have been taking the largest share of the family's emotional labour, responsibility and burdens passed down through generations.

Whether it be the Stone Age family's eldest being the one trusted to watch the fire, calm the crying toddlers, or drag home the least threatening piece of mammoth because everyone else "didn't know how to do it properly."

Or when my family comes to me if something needs organising, fixing, or emotionally deconstructing.



Eldest daughters have always been seen by parents unconsciously as the ones who are meant to just know what to do.

This phenomenon has been popularised online as 'Eldest Daughter Syndrome' (EDS) because the eldest are treated as the third parent and default caregiver, with no choice in the matter.

Her job description comes with unofficial, unpaid, and universally understood labour which seems to have survived every era.

User eyc on Medium said: "Most of my life, I've been the one to accommodate others, I followed my mum around to help translate at the bank, school, and doctors' appointments."

"I realised that I didn't feel worthy of love or attention unless I was able to offer something"

Even Taylor Swift wrote for her most recent album: "Every eldest daughter was the first lamb to the slaughter."

Psychologists have noted that EDS over-

laps heavily with the idea of parentification; a well-studied phenomenon where eldest children take on caregiving roles.

Naydeline Mejia wrote 'Signs You're a Parentified Daughter' comparing the concept to EDS.

She noted how parentification disproportionately affects girls, especially eldest daughters, because of gendered expectations.

Daughters are often socialised to be emotionally aware, helpful, and selfless.

In unstable or traumatic family environments e.g. parental illness, addiction, emotional immaturity, these burdens tend to increase.

She said: "Parentified daughters often carry chronic over-adaptation; they learn early to monitor their environment and adjust their behaviour accordingly."

This child becomes an adult and struggles to form healthy relationships, as they grew up meeting everyone's emotional needs but their own.

The long-term impacts of parentification can be as severe as anxiety, depression, burnout and co-dependency in adulthood.

## The signs of a Parentified Daughter include:

- **An overly calm or mature persona = wise beyond her years**
- **Default caregiving mode = the 'mum-friend'**
- **Perfectionism = need for control**
- **People-pleasing = worth depends on their ability to cater to others**
- **Difficulty asking for help = haven't learnt to rely on anyone but themselves**
- **Guilt around expressing their needs = they feel their own needs are secondary**

Naydeline said: "Vulnerability feels risky, and emotional closeness without caregiving can feel unsafe or unearned."

"Their nervous system can stay locked in performance mode, meaning that even as adults, rest or receiving care feels threatening."

Psychologist Alfred Adler came up with the "Birth Order Theory".

His theory claims that eldest children often grow into responsible, organised, hyper-competent adults.

Eldest daughters specifically become the unofficial third parent because they're the first to be "dethroned" by younger siblings.

They learn to stay in control, overachieve, and look after everyone else.

It's no shock that the modern idea of Eldest Daughter Syndrome aligns almost perfectly with Adler's century-old theory.

This 'diagnosis' is even more prevalent in immigrant families, where cultural expectations overlap the modern-day climate and even with equal pay and rights, the eldest daughter's birthright is a life of burden.


Ruth Madievsky writes about online discourse and immigrant eldest daughter identity.

She said: "The eldest-immigrant-daughter-meme subgenre has very particular tropes: she is an invisible labourer, as second mother to her siblings, as the glue holding her family together."

"The expectation that she carries the family honour on her back; her behaviour is a verdict on her family as a whole."

With awareness on EDS becoming more popular and the term being coined in everyday conversations, eldest daughters are more knowledgeable on how to look after themselves as well as their families.

These responsibilities won't just disappear or displace, but younger siblings are beginning to step up more to help and families are becoming more aware of the emotional labour toll their daughters endure.

If the cavewoman's eldest had to fight the woolly mammoth and I had to regulate my family's emotions, we can only hope that the tomorrow woman stands up for herself and breaks the curse. 

# HEALTH





# London's life hack



CREDIT: The Walk and Talk Movement

London has frequently been named the UK's loneliest city. With its vast parks, do the capital's green spaces hold the solution to the loneliness epidemic?

By **AMY COLLINSON**

The NHS is encouraging doctors to 'prescribe' outdoor walks to help improve both patient's mental and physical health.

But why is this?

And what are the benefits?

It's no secret that London simply does not rest; and neither do its residents.

This restlessness can have detrimental effects on your mental health.

It has been proven that connecting to nature through green spaces can dramatically reduce stress levels.

In fact, research shows that exposure to nature helps to improve your sleep and even lower blood pressure.

One local charity which runs nature prescriptions is called Dose of Nature, where individuals are referred by their GP to undertake an eight week programme.

When discussing how nature walks helped her own mental health, chartered psychologist and clinical lead at Dose of

Nature, Dr Georgina Gould said: "When I was on maternity leave in the middle of COVID, nature was really my saviour."

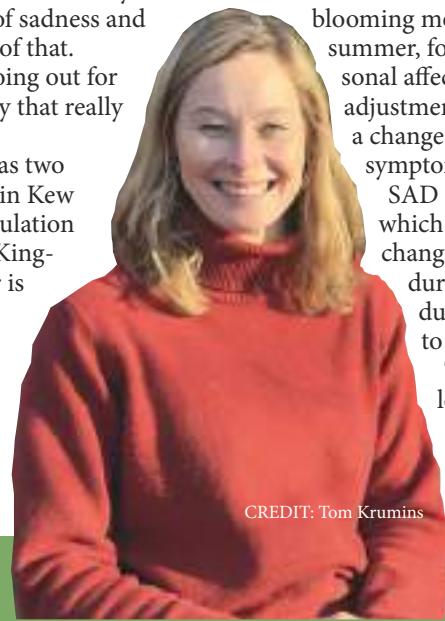
"It was getting out for walks with my newborn baby at a time when I couldn't connect with others, go to the baby groups, or see friends or family."

"There was a lot of sadness and anxiety around all of that."

"And yet it was going out for walks with my baby that really got me through."

Dose of Nature has two hubs, one is based in Kew and serves the population of Richmond and Kingston, and the other is in Guilford.

The programme encourages participants to spend time in green spaces and find a deeper connection to nature.



CREDIT: Tom Krumins

Even a 15 minute walk outside can help boost serotonin and vitamin D levels, which leads to an improved mood and a reduction of stress, research shows.

And yet, the transition into winter can be a difficult adjustment.

While it is normal to long for the blooming months of spring and summer, for some people with seasonal affective disorder (SAD), the adjustment in weather also marks a change in the severity of their symptoms.

SAD is a form of depression, which is linked to seasonal changes and is most apparent during the winter months, due to the lack of exposure to sunlight.

The lack of sunlight can lead to lower serotonin levels, which is linked to depression and anxiety.

While it's important to get outside to prevent

SAD, Georgina said: "People need to accept that we need to rest and hunker down and recover, and realise that renewed energy and motivation to get out there and socialise will come back in spring."

"There needs to be an acceptance of slowing down."

"We need to make sure that we get out into nature throughout the winter every day, regardless of the weather and really appreciate the beauty of fresh air and viewing the patterns in nature."

For a lot of us, getting outside and connecting to nature goes hand in hand with connecting with people.

Nature walks often feel like a reset button.

Particularly after the pandemic where we saw a 25% increase in the rates of anxiety and depression, is it any wonder that people are flocking outdoors to calm themselves?

While the pandemic had a detrimental effect on both physical and mental health, it also helped to bring communities together and slow down the pace of life.

The Walk and Talk Movement was founded in September 2021, and stemmed from wanting to combat loneliness and isolation which ran rife, both during and after the pandemic.

Walks, which are open to all ages and abilities, take place every Saturday morning for free, meaning it is an extremely accessible way for people to meet and build a wider community.

Andy Yates, co-founder of The Walk and Talk Movement, said: "We wanted to make it as friendly and welcoming as possible to everybody in the community."



CREDIT: The Walk and Talk Movement

"We've found it sets up a weekend where people feel energised and happier."

"The walks are an anchor at weekends when a lot of people are feeling lonely, and it's a way of creating your own community within the community that is friendly, welcoming and gives you more of a social life going forward."

The walks have helped residents build a local community in London.

There are currently nine Walk and Talks taking places across London, from Crystal

Palace Park to Putney Heath, all of which are run by volunteers.

People attend Walk and Talks from all walks of life.

Some are retired.

Some work a nine to five.

Some are widowed.



CREDIT: The Walk and Talk Movement

Some feel isolated.

All love being outdoors.

Rob Noble, who is lead volunteer at Wimbledon Common Walk and Talk, said: "I've always really liked being outdoors and being out in the fresh air."

"I moved from Wimbledon to Germany, and when I returned, I suddenly realised that I was in the middle of Wimbledon Village and I didn't really know anyone and felt quite lonely."

"The people I've met have become very good friends and we have regular lunches, meet regularly, meet for coffee during the week and so on."

The walks have created a strong community bond across all ages.

Andy said: "Every week, we hear how it's changed people's lives, and in a very simple way."



CREDIT: The Walk and Talk Movement



CREDIT: The Walk and Talk Movement



“A lot of people have told us this is their one time to meet people every week, including younger people.

“They might be working from home, they might not be in the office all the time or finding it difficult to make connections as they’re stuck at home on a computer and don’t know the local community very well.

“So it’s all ages that have benefitted from coming together.”

Clearly, the walks are not just walks.

They offer isolated and lonely members of the community the opportunity to meet their neighbours in a relaxed and welcoming setting.

Rob said: “I’ve heard a number of times from different walkers that they say things like ‘this is the most that I speak to anyone during the week’

“And when you hear that, you get a little lump in your throat, but you realise that this is really helping people.”

You may feel hesitant to join, over not knowing anyone or not feeling fit enough.

However, Andy assured me that the walks are open to all abilities and are at a gentle pace to make everyone feel welcomed.

Andy said: “That is our whole ethos; try and engage all ages, all abilities.

“Lots of new people turn up as well, so it’s a constant meeting of new people as well as friendly faces.

“It’s a combination of community, conversations and those green spaces that really improve mental health.”

Breaks are taken throughout the walk, which serve as socialising opportunities,

or an activity takes place.

One activity which happens at stops are educational speeches, which help the walkers engage in other aspects of the community.

Rob said: “We stop three or four times during the walk, mainly to allow people to catch up, but the guest speaker will just talk for a couple of minutes.

“The feeling of community through chatting so easily and openly with others has been amazing, and the discoveries of the information that they’ve received during the walks has really opened their eyes.”

So, it’s obvious.

Walking outside not only helps improve our physical health dramatically, but also our mental health.

“While it’s not a cure for financial woes or other stressful situations, it does definitely help improve your mental health and your ability to cope with other problems in life”, Andy says.

Clearly, walking in green spaces offers a practical tool for dealing with life’s ups and downs.

The Walk and Talk Movement is proof that communities desperately wish to build close connections, and improve their health.

Optimistically, Andy’s ambition doesn’t end there.

He hopes to encourage other communities to run walks in every single borough in London.

Andy said: “The more we can do that, the more we can help people with their mental health and physical health and just make communities happier.”



CREDIT: The Walk and Talk Movement



CREDIT: The Walk and Talk Movement



CREDIT: The Walk and Talk Movement



CREDIT: The Walk and Talk Movement

# Amy’s walking diary



Feeling inspired after discovering the importance of exploring green spaces, I wanted to see the benefits for myself. I decided to set a challenge: to go on an hour’s walk every day for a week

I hate this time of year. Without fail, every single time this season rolls around, I give myself the same exact new year’s resolution.

To get outside. In London, you can sometimes forget how lucky you are to have acres of wildlife and nature on your doorstep, and to watch the ever-changing seasons without the need for a calendar or clock. And I take it all for granted. But, I’m changing my ways. Being from rural northern England, I have grown up with dales, moors and coasts all in easy reach.

So moving 250 miles away to London was a culture shock to say the least.

Bright lights, screeching sirens, towering skyscrapers and chaotic crowds.

Moving to London meant leaving all that sprawling nature and greenery, literally, miles away. At least that’s what I thought.

If I’m honest, I was a bit daunted by the idea of this challenge, as I didn’t know how I was going to fit an hour’s walk into my day.

But whatever the weather, I decided to go.

With the days getting shorter and shorter, I felt I had less time to get outside.

And I won’t lie: the first few days were a struggle.

I didn’t have enough hours in the day and very nearly didn’t stick to the challenge.

But I persevered and forced myself to go.

And after a few days, the walks slotted into my routine.

Taking a different route every day ensured I wouldn’t get bored.

And unsurprisingly; I felt much

better after the walks.

I didn’t even take my headphones, to listen to music or a podcast.

I remembered speaking with Georgina who spoke about the importance of listening to nature.

Georgina told me: “Sometimes, people take nature for granted.

“They might go for a walk in the park but they’ll be distracted, maybe on their phone or listening to music or a podcast.

“We need to be more conscious about how you are when you are in those natural environments.

“Are you noticing? Are you paying attention? Are you engaging?

“Because that’s when you’ll feel the positive effects.”

This stuck with me.

I was one of those people.

I’m lucky to live so close to nature that I almost don’t notice it, and certainly don’t explore without my phone or headphones.

And since taking this into consideration and making a conscious effort to be more present in nature, I feel I’ve reaped the benefits. 1



CREDIT: Illiya Vjestica via Unsplash



Picture credit: The Proper Blokes Club

One of the walks and talks with The Proper Blokes Club

# Breaking the stereotype of men's mental health

A staggering 12.5% of men are suffering from one of the common mental health disorders. One group is trying to tackle it through walking and talking

By **HALIMA ABDI**

The Proper Blokes Club is an organisation that aims to break the taboo around men's mental health through walking and talking.

Bringing men from London, from different backgrounds with different stories, to a space where they are appreciated and respected, to share their experiences with mental health.

The Proper Blokes Club hosted a walking and talking event that was set up during the pandemic to support and break the stigma around men's mental health.

Scott Oughton Johnson is the founder of The Proper Blokes Club. During the pandemic, he was going through a breakup and found it hard, so he thought of creating a group for dads who are going through a similar situation.

But he later realised that the pandemic was causing people to crave social communication, as he felt like a lot were isolated and their only use of

communication was social media. Scott started his idea small in Bermondsey, and five years later, the group had developed into 25 groups.

Walking and talking is more suitable than going into a room full of strangers and debriefing them about your feelings.

Scott's idea is more effective for both physical and mental well-being, as it allows you to spend some time around nature and people who are going through a similar situation, which brings a sense of belonging.

The Proper Blokes Club promotes an inclusive and safe environment, which isn't intense, but you can have a laugh, which not a lot of people are exposed to since the pandemic.

Kevin Tobin, who runs Team Brent on Wednesday nights around Kilburn and Willesden Green for The Proper Blokes Club, acknowledges that men have gained confidence in speaking about how they are feeling. Kevin said: "It's


good that men talk about their mental health and things that affect them.

Invariably, they find themselves surprised when they realise that most of us have similar doubts and anxieties about life."

Men's mental health is a topic that not all men want to touch upon due to race and societal expectations, and the response of those around them.

The Proper Blokes Club is working hard to break that down.

They have partnered with other local charities, Wallington Community Wellbeing Charity, St Paul's Church, Roundshaw and the Wallington NHS Integrated Neighbourhood Team, to deliver sessions in the area, as they saw the need for emotional and mental support.

Online support doesn't work for everyone for sustainability, there needs to be some sort of funding to make in-person support more accessible to the public. 

# The tsumani of OCD hitting young adults

From 1 in 3 to 3 in 1: data shows the disorder is the second most common

By **SARA MECIBAH**

Intrusive thoughts, compulsions, rumination rituals that consume hours each day - OCD has long been misunderstood as a personality quirk.

But it's not just about being organised or neat, it's a debilitating condition that traps sufferers in cycles of fear and ritual. Now, a BBC survey shows cases among young people are surging, and a charity and forum discussions are sounding the alarm about a mental health crisis hiding in plain sight within London.

About 370,000 young people in England reported OCD symptoms in the financial year 2023/24, according to analysis of the latest NHS Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey.

That is more than three times the number from 2014, when the figure stood at around 113,000. OCD is now the second most common named mental health disorder among 16-24 year olds, behind only generalized anxiety disorder. But why?

The Brain Charity offered explanations, but what they revealed went deeper than data could present.

Snoof Kattekop, senior training associate at The Brain Charity since mid-2023, points to improved diagnosis as part of the explanation, but stresses the bigger picture. Kattekop said:

"Some of the increase is the result of better detection as we're diagnosing more accurately and we're working on including all parts of the population. "Essentially that's making up for historical underdiagnosis" they added.

"Young people have fewer prospects, an ongoing cost of living crisis, climate collapse and many other issues to factor into their views of the future they should be looking forward to," Kattekop added.

"What support is available to people of any age, is often a postcode lottery.



"Hopefully, they can find local support groups and meet others who share their struggles and know what they're going through."

Kattekop explained: "prevention of conditions like OCD is not something we can tackle - that would require significant change in how society is currently structured.

"Raising awareness is always important - conditions like OCD are still widely misunderstood, and people can easily become ostracised from society.

"People may also become aware of their own condition - some folks struggle for many years without realising what's causing their difficulties, and an article in the mainstream media can help with that.

"You don't have to have a diagnosis, or even the same condition, to be able to share compassion or get relief from the same adjustments."

A Reddit forum discussing the BBC article revealed divided opinions. Some users claimed the surge is due to improved awareness: "I suspect the numbers are the same as they have always been and that we're just more


aware of it and people are actually being diagnosed with it," wrote one commenter, comparing it to cancer detection rates.

Others pointed to societal pressures: "Why the increase? It could be because of more awareness and the fact that it is a very human condition."

"And also the fallout from Covid lockdowns and the cost of living being horrendous with no positive in sight."

One user connected untreated anxiety to OCD: "OCD is the extreme end of anxiety cases.

"Untreated anxiety often turns into one of the major forms of anxiety disorder."

The thread shows that there is a mix of opinions, but being more aware is a common agreement. 

**The Brain Charity's centre (above)**



Credit: image above, The Brain Charity





# Health is wealth

A guide on how to stay fit over this Christmas period

By **EVIE MCQUHAE**

The tempting tub of Celebrations left open on the coffee table. The aroma of freshly baked gingerbread wafting from the kitchen igniting your nostrils. The bottle of Baileys sitting idly on the kitchen table calling your name.

Christmas is deemed the most wonderful time of the year, however it is also the most gluttonous and lazyfied. Lets face it, it's full of food, booze, late nights and lazy mornings. Your calendar is full and you're exhausted. December is full of distractions and temptations. It is easy to fall off the wagon with your health conscious eating and exercise regimen. Or if you aren't currently health conscious but are planning to become a gym bunny in the new year and are ditching the sugar as one of your new year resolutions. Why not start now? Why is December seen as such a write off for health and fitness?

All I want for Christmas is to exercise

Zenith Fitness Company Director, Thomas Bohling 29, said: "Christmas is a time of indulgence, why not indulge in your workouts as well".

Thomas runs Zenith Fitness in Twickenham alongside his mother. The gym is class based and community driven. Thomas and his mother Sandra pride themselves in knowing all of their members by name. He said: "our aim is to make Zenith fitness as good as it can be and to make each other proud".

Thomas, who has previously worked as a freelance personal trainer for around eleven years and has worked in commercial gyms explained how Zenith fitness differs. He remarked how fitness seekers sign up to commercial gyms in the new year to abide by their resolutions. These commercial gyms oversell their gym memberships giving individuals the best rate possible that locks them in for 12 months.

Thomas said: "Most individuals will then attend for two months which normally averages out that they come to the gym only 15-20 times and because they get no results they then stop attending". Thomas gave the shocking statistic that he believes one in three people

who join gyms with no guidance lose motivation and give up on their gym dreams altogether.

Thomas explained how Zenith fitness doesn't run into this oh so familiar New Years issue. He confidently said: "It's all about results. When things start happening, you start seeing your body change, you feel fitter, you feel better and I think you're inclined to do it more. The idea is if you do classes properly and lift properly and are persistent with it your body will change."

Due to Zenith Fitness being classed based, gym goers will without a doubt see results as they are being instructed by trained professionals. They are told to do the most efficient exercises in the right way to avoid injury.

This is compared to when someone who doesn't know what they're doing attends the gym and becomes overwhelmed dilly dallying about for 45 minutes. Zenith fitness offers classes ranging from boxercise to yoga.

Unlike other gyms, Zenith fitness doesn't notice a decline of members attending the gym over the Christmas period. They have actually noticed the opposite.

To get everyone in the festive mood Zenith fitness schedules Christmas themed workout classes. Which involves team based work, christmas trees and burpees. So

you can feel festive and workout at the same time! "The music is thumping, it's christmassy themed, there are remixes of Christmas songs which are quite funny." Thomas added: "Last year it was rammed- we had 35 to 40 people". Class-goers are also rewarded in workouts if they turn up in Christmas themed attire.

**"In a class. everyone else is doing the same thing you are, you feel part of something, you feel motivated you want to work harder so you get more calories burnt"**

Thomas explained that for each Christmas item you wear it can benefit you in your workout. For example if you turn up wearing Christmas socks you get a five second time deduction.

Zenith are offering an exclusive 21 Day offer which includes unlimited access to all of their classes and their open gym. This trial gives trialist the opportunity to fully experience Zenith fitness before deciding whether they want to commit to a membership.

For many the most exciting thing about Christmas is the food. Each morning in December Christmas enthusiasts get to open a little door which presents them with a chocolate. The Marks and Spencers Christmas catalogue is handed out across the nation for households to pick out their gobbler and Christmas day nibbles. And gingerbread houses are perfectly constructed to be demolished by the fire on Christmas Eve.

All I want for Christmas is nurishment

Kristina Ericsson Richards, 57, is a Nutritional Therapist and Health Coach at Cloudberry Nutrition in Twickenham. Kristina, who trained as a nutritional therapist three and a half years ago said: "We are eating without actually savour



The Zenith team in the festive spirit





ing and enjoying what we are eating. We must be mindful of what we are actually doing”.

According to The Association of UK Dietitians the average person consumes 6000 calories on Christmas Day.

Kristina said: “What the issue is, is that we eat so fast that we don’t actually allow our stomach enough time to send signals to the brain telling us we are full.” Kristina wants to remind people to slow down, taste the food and appreciate it.

Kristina explained the key to staying healthy over Christmas and it is simple. ‘Balance’. She almost describes it as a mind game; she said “restriction never works.

When we tell ourselves we aren’t allowed to eat a certain thing our brains cannot stop thinking about it and you

end up gravitating to the banned food more”.

**“We are eating without actually savouring and enjoying what we are eating. We must be mindful of what we are actually doing”**

Over half of adults are said to binge drink on Christmas day. That means drinking six or more units for women and eight or more units for men.

When talking about a Christmas tippie Kristina said “Alcohol can really wreak havoc with so many things, the biggest being sleep and sleep is one of the key things when

it comes to our health”. Kristina, who

admits to enjoying her own Christmas bevy, emphasized that we should not not drink (because who’d want a sober Christmas!) but she recommends water in between drinks and opting for lighter alcohol like a dry wine or gin and tonic.

Kristina’s top tip when drinking alcohol over the Christmas period is to take B vitamins. B vitamins are essential enzymes that are used in the process of turning carbohydrates and alcohol into energy.

Therefore, taking more B vitamins can assist your body in efficiently metabolising (breaking down) alcohol which equals no hangover.

A dinner that we have been feasting on once a year can be traced back to a thousand years ago.

The roots of Christmas dinner first appeared during the Medieval period. And

so it’s shocking to find out we have been eating it wrong. Kristina says the main thing to think about in regards to your Christmas plate is blood sugar.

Kristina explained: “Blood sugar affects your body in more ways than you would think. For example energy levels and cravings.”

Over indulgence is the real issue at Christmas and the only way to balance your blood sugar is to balance your plate.

She said: “A quarter of your plate should be protein, half should be non-starchy and green vegetables and the last quarter should be your starches.


“That big slump that you get at the end of the day on Christmas- that’s because your plate wasn’t balanced.”

The most interesting piece of advice that Kristina gave was the order in which you

eat each piece of your Christmas dinner. She recommends your first bite to be either the turkey or the vegetables. You should not go straight in for your roast potatoes.

That way you’re giving your body some protein and fibre first which slows down the absorption of sugar from the rest of your food which ultimately means no big slump at the end of the day.

Who would have known that all along we were eating our Christmas feast wrong?

Christmas is a time to feel your best and be your best so there is no better time than now to start working on yourself. 

**Alcohol and sweet treats can play havoc with a good diet, nutritionist Kristina Ericsson Richards warns**





# The art of doing nothing

Why taking a break can be crucial to our well-being and our mental health



**Niksen, the art of doing nothing, is the antithesis to modern day hustle culture**

By **TIA MELVILLE**

What is the art of doing nothing? Fundamentally, it's about self-love and acceptance, to be able to sit with yourself in peace, to let your mind wander and race about whatever thoughts, no matter how shallow or deep.

It's not an easy process, to do nothing, some of us get restless, feel the need to be on the move, to push our thoughts aside, but what are we running from? The most brutal truths, the ones we feel most uncomfortable with, are when we face ourselves, are alone, and do nothing with ourselves.

In a culture where work, hustle, and an insatiable ambition for achievement are praised, how do we tear ourselves away from the mentality that to feel accomplished, we have to be constantly working towards the goals society has imposed

on us?

We need to be constantly working towards a good education, a good job, a good relationship, and if we only have two of these things, then we need to work to get them all to prove ourselves so that we aren't lacking, so people can't turn around and say well, what about marriage?

But if all we do is chase after the next big thing, where does that leave the time for ourselves?

The art of doing nothing isn't just nothing, it's being present, calm and unhurried- there's no rush, no chasing, no running and no stress.

Abigail Hepper, 20, said: "Doing nothing on occasion is crucial to my well-being."


"It helps me relax and get back in touch with myself, especially when I feel burnt

out from work or my social life, it's like a mental recovery."

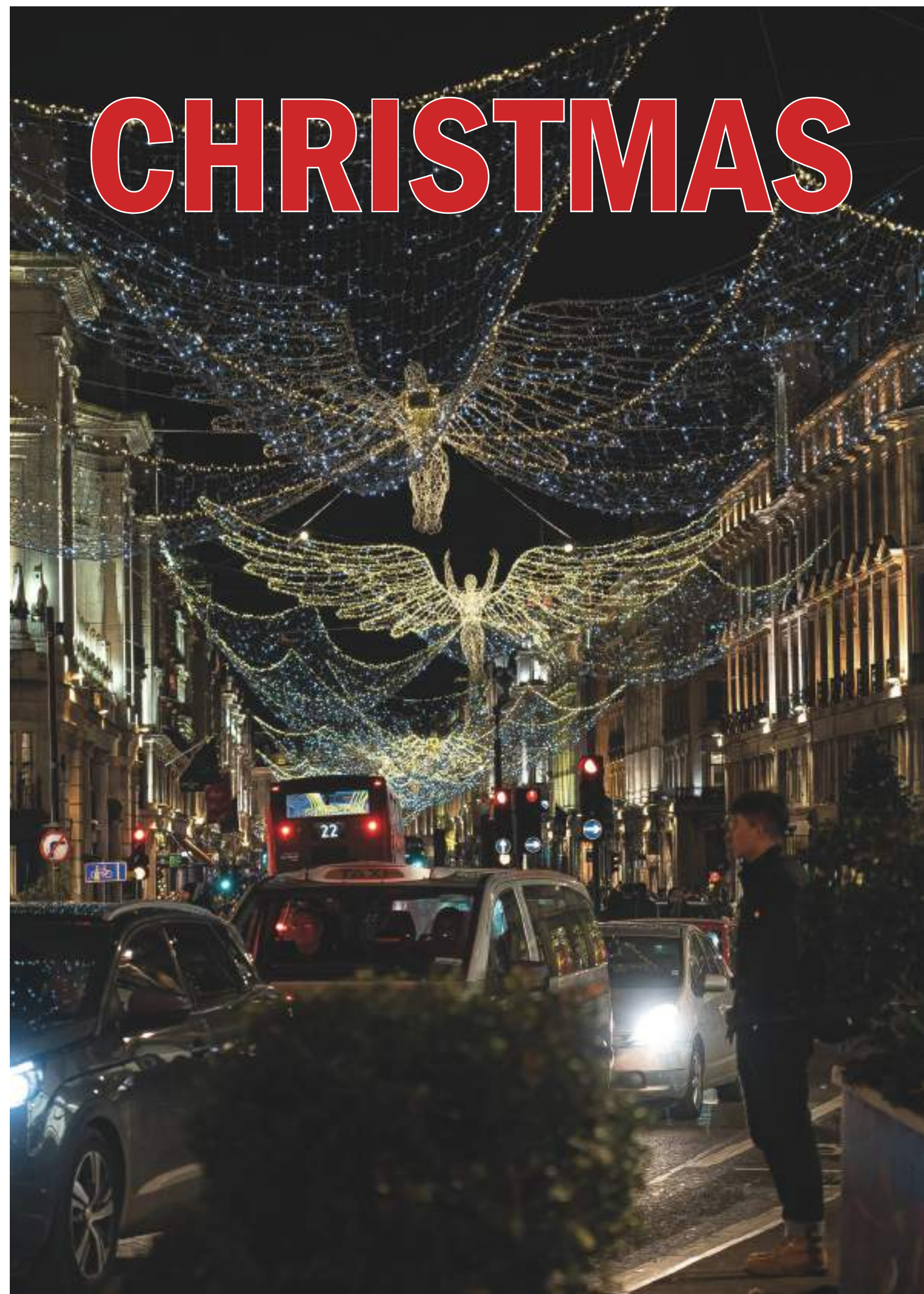
Not everything we have to do must have a purpose.

The Dutch have a term for this experience of doing nothing, Niksen. When loosely translated, it means doing nothing for the sake of doing nothing.

For some it could mean watching the sunset, going for a purposeless walk, lounging around without any TV or phone, or whatever suits you.

In a productivity-obsessed society, we may find Niksen a bit strange. But, with burnout and mental health being classified in medical records, accommodating some form of Niksen into our daily and weekly schedules can only be a good thing for ourselves, our health and our mind. 

# CHRISTMAS





# It's the loneliest time of the year

AgeUK is keeping the elderly company this festive period with phone calls

Oxford street busy with Christmas shoppers

By **EVIE MCQUHAE**

As Christmas spirit fills the air and days become 'merry and bright' it is easy to forget that for some Christmas is the loneliest time of the year. Age UK recently revealed that 1.5 million older people will be eating dinner alone on Christmas Day.

For a season that expects joy, laughter and the warmth of family gatherings and a festive period that's supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year, it can actually be a stark reminder of isolation and loneliness for some, especially the elderly.

The Silver Line Helpline, founded by Dame Esther Rantzen and now part of Age UK, is a free 24 hour hotline that is open for any older person who would like a friendly chat, even on Christmas day.

Over the Christmas week last year the hotline answered 3,535 calls, equating to 45,860 minutes of conversation and support to older people.

Audrey, 96, a former doctors receptionist from Bedfordshire, lost her husband of 73 years to a brain tumour and started using a similar helpline provided by Age UK called the Telephone Friendship Service.

She said: "After he passed, I felt alone. So my son arranged for me to try the service." Audrey for the past three years has had a telephone call with Andrew every Thursday. She said: "We talk about everything under the sun. We

know about each other's families- it's the highlight of my week. Andrew has filled a void and made me feel more alive again." Age UK is urging Londoners to help tackle the loneliness that they can't see by donating.

With routine services winding down, shops closing early or shutting com-



Elderly lady in a blur

pletely, colder weather, shorter days, it becomes harder for many to sustain social connections. Further amplifying how significant and serious loneliness is particularly among the older generation at Christmas.

Rosie Weatherley, Information Con-

tent Manager at Mind, said: "Spending Christmas in places like a care home or a hospital can feel lonely."

Particularly if others around you have been able to leave for Christmas or have people visit."

Individuals can often be left with a sense of isolation and despair.

These feelings can be influenced by lots of different factors such as, the loss of a spouse like Audrey or children living too far away to spend time with, as well as decreased mobility impacting their ability to join in with Christmas events.

Weatherley stated that, "In general, loneliness is increasingly common. The connection between mental health and loneliness is clear and research suggests that loneliness can increase stress."

Loneliness is often associated with a higher risk of depression, anxiety and even cognitive decline.

In a physical aspect loneliness can affect the body leading to an increase in blood pressure, heart disease and a weakened immune system. And so the festive season with its emphasis on social connections and laughter can amplify these feelings, making it a particularly hard time of the year for the elderly. Just £10 can pay for a telephone friendship call to a lonely person who has no one else to turn to.

So in the season of giving, why don't we give the gift of company. Donate via ageuk online. 🍷



## Scrub the soap and socks

It's that time of year. It's not just the season for festivities, but for panic-buying presents and frantically wrapping gifts, of course

By **AMY COLLINSON**

Now it's December, and the 25th is swiftly approaching.

And you should have started shopping in September.

But here we are - don't panic though.

So, forget socks and shower gel in the stocking, this guide showcases local independent businesses so that you can support the High Street, while running up and down it.

**For the fashionista-**

We all know at least one fashion lover.

And they can be the most tricky to buy for.

But a quick trip to Tit fer Tat will instantly dispel that panic.

Tit fer Tat is Mary Spiteri's boutique shop set in Richmond which displays hats from well-known milliners, as well as her own designs.

During this time of year, their best seller is their cashmere beanie with a silver fox trim around it.

Loved by celebrities, Mary told me that even Gabby Logan's a fan: "She wore it to rugby and when she wore it, everybody called in at the BBC asking where she got the hat from."

**For the perfect cards-**

Of course no Christmas is complete without the obligatory card.

So where better to stock up your festive stash than by visiting Earlybird Designs in Stoke Newington.

The shop displays cards and wrapping paper all designed by Dominic Early.

Dominic's wife Heidi, who is co-owner, told me: "Christmas is our biggest time of

the year so we really have to get our selection right.

"Without a doubt, funny cards are the bestsellers.

"Sprouts, cheese and overeating are top of the list."

**For the wellbeing lovers-**

For the majority of us, the new year brings with it motivation (at least for the first week).

To help kickstart a productive 2026, Lead Tin has everything you need to stock up on seasonal stationery.

The Battersea shop has a selection of art and stationery supplies, including this year's hottest trend: journals.

Andrew Wenrick, who is managing director of Lead Tin, said: "The health and wellness podcast genre recently had

an episode stressing the importance of journaling. "We are quite possibly the best local shop to get started on this healthier you for the New Year."

**For the relaxers-**

The festive period can only mean one thing. Relaxing.

That constant juggle between work and life takes a brief pause, but why not extend this period of calm throughout the year.

The Collecterie in Teddington stocks a mix of antique and new interiors and gifts, so you're guaranteed to find the perfect present here.

Owner and founder, Emma Hutton,

said: "As the evenings get darker and people spend more time inside, the candles we sell come into their own, tapered, bright, scented, you name it."

"For something more decadent, I always recommend our range of 100% merino wool gloves, hats, scarves and snuggly cashmere and merino blankets."

**For the homebody-**

Perhaps one of the best things about winter is the amount of time you can spend at home, guilt free.

So, don't overlook a homeware gift.

It may seem a tad obvious, but it's destined to go down a treat.

Run by friends Evelyn and Sandra, Mooch London has four stores conveniently located across London.

Sourced from independent suppliers, Sandra points to home fragrance as the knockout gift.

With the longer nights and colder weather, could there be anything better than a gorgeous smelling diffuser?

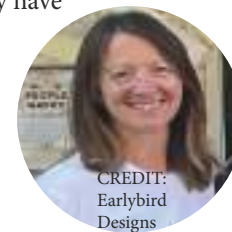
When speaking about the communities created around the shops,

Sandra said: "Shopping locally isn't just about supporting a single shop, it's also about keeping our community vibrant."

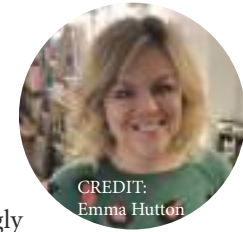
"People often pop in simply for a chat, and local shops provide valuable employment while acting as the true hubs of our neighbourhoods."



CREDIT: Lead TIN



CREDIT: Earlybird Designs



CREDIT: Emma Hutton



CREDIT: Mary Spiteri



CREDIT: Stevie Roberts



CREDIT: Mooch



# Join the Kew



Seeking out that festive feeling? Look no further as we've discovered a magical night out that will get you into the spirit

By **AMY COLLINSON**

Every year Kew Gardens, the world famous botanic garden situated in south west London, is transformed from an exotic oasis to a wintry wonderland.

And what could be better than glistening up the dark nights?

That is exactly what Christmas at Kew offers.

I have to admit, I was not sure what to expect.

I have been to Kew Gardens in the height of summer and felt this was the only way of seeing the gardens.

Everything was blossoming. Blooming. Bursting with colour.

So to go on a cold November night; it didn't seem right.

But how wrong I was.

The plants and flowers may not have been exploding with colour, but the lights sure were.

And a lot more impressive, I must say.

Weaving my way around the extensive grounds seemed daunting but everywhere I looked, I was greeted with more extravagant lights.

Time flew by, despite walking around in the freezing cold for over two hours.

Arriving in my fluffy boots and thick scarf, I was so excited to get into the festive spirit.

After strolling round on a Thursday evening, I can honestly think of no way better than to feel Christmassy.

The music softly playing.

The smell of hot chocolate.

And the sound of enthusiasm in the air.

It is clearly a great place to take young children, but definitely is not solely aimed at them.

All ages will thoroughly enjoy their time here.

Passing over a bridge, the spectacle of lights projected upon the famous Palm House are enough to impress the most modest of visitors.

Wandering through the tunnels of fairy lights and meandering past light-up orchestras, you can hear the gasps and exclamations of

excitement for people of all ages.

Not only is Kew Gardens stunning visually, but the experience is a real treat for all senses.

Each illumination had its own theme tune.

For me, a real standout was the rainbow lights by the Temperate House which was like a real Coldplay concert.

Forget your light up wristbands; Kew's glowing buildings are much more impressive.

Even though 'A Sky Full of Stars' was blaring, the stars in the night sky took a back seat.

And I'm sure they didn't mind.

The real spectacle was on the ground.

Each illumination was better than the last, so the weather certainly didn't dampen our spirits.


But it wasn't just lights that were stealing the show.

Kew has its very own amusement park and food court, making it an experience rather than a visit.

And if you're jet setting off to the North Pole to put in a good word, you might want to think again.

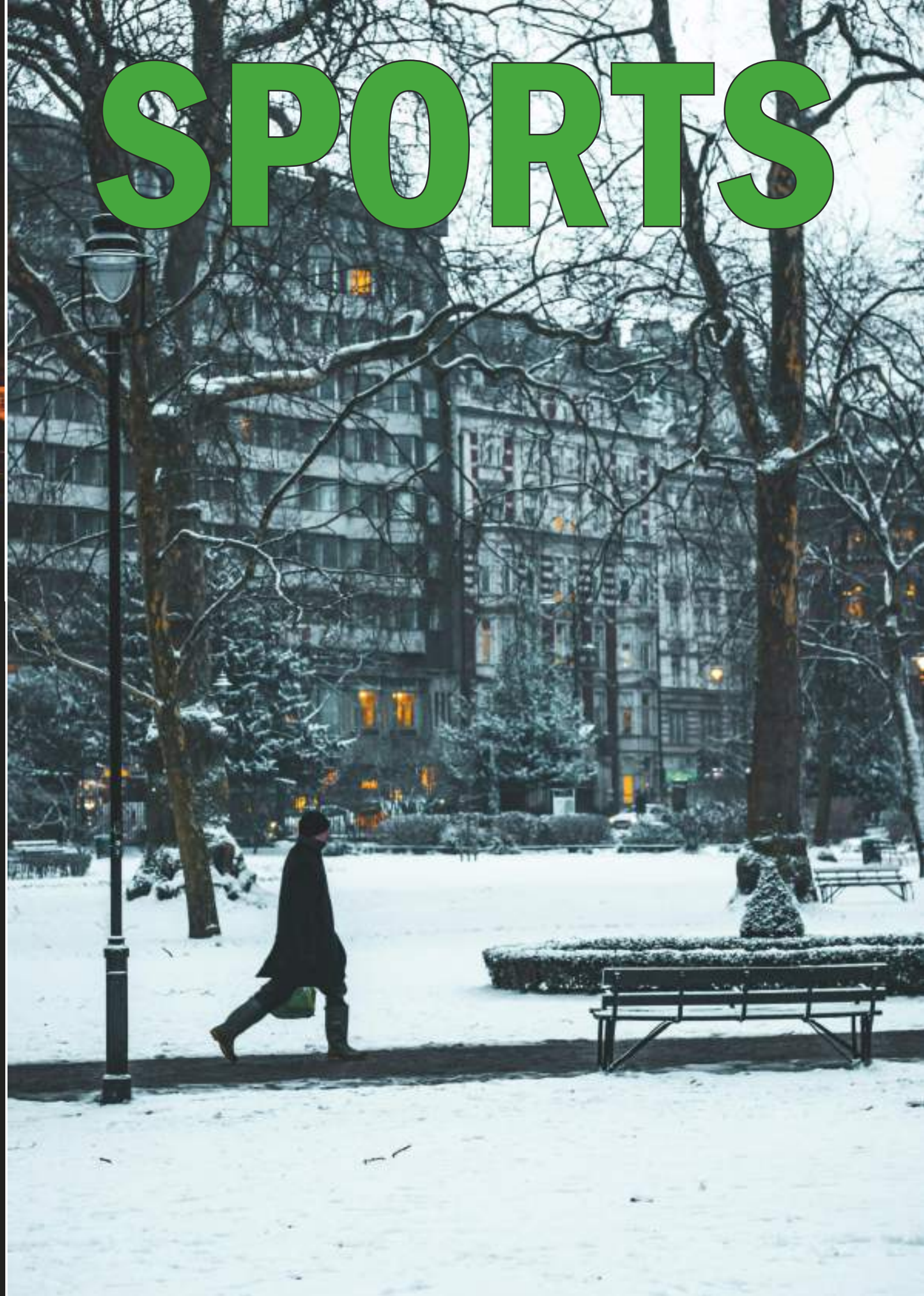
Yes, that's right - cancel your flights because Kew has its very own Santa Claus, who is spreading the festive cheer.

I have to say that this topped off a very wholesome evening.

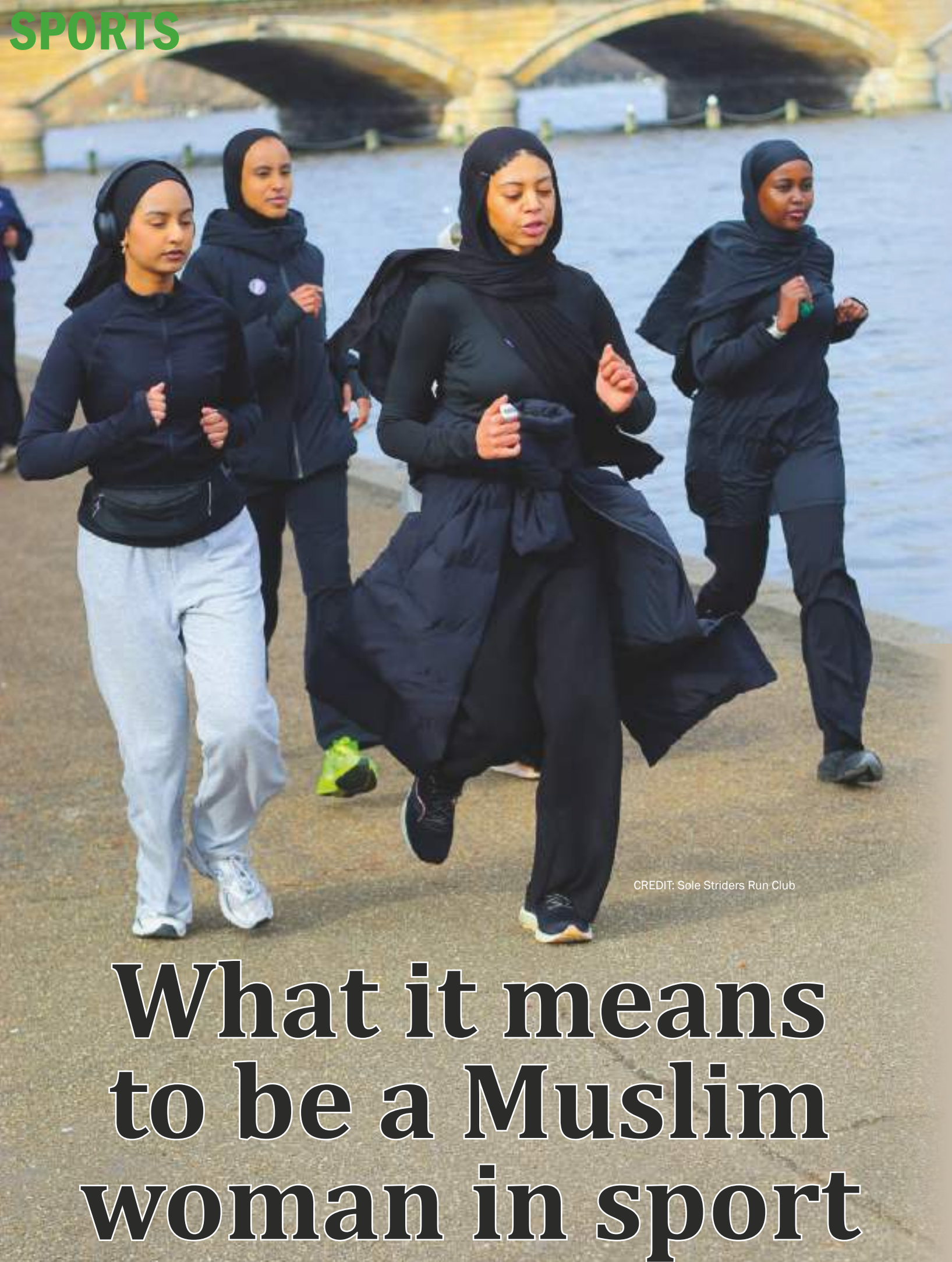
And I can say with great certainty that as you make your way back to Kew Garden station, you will be feeling much more festive than you were before.  Press event invite



# SPORTS







CREDIT: Sole Striders Run Club

# What it means to be a Muslim woman in sport

## Why faith, and modesty, is not a barrier for so many females

By **HALIMA ABDI**

Whenever I speak to someone about Muslim women who are in sports, some people want to hear more about it, but others see it as taboo.

But this isn't stopping Muslim women from taking part in various sports and encouraging other women to get involved, breaking the barriers of stigma, islamophobia.

There are a few different organisations and clubs which promote Muslim women to get into sports dotted around the capital. From run clubs to rugby and skating, it really brings out the inclusive and participation for more Muslim women to feel comfortable going out there and doing what makes them feel comfortable.

Muslim Sports Association is a charity that was set up in 2014 to work on empowering Muslim women in the world of sport. They do this by creating a safe, positive environment for women to participate in different types of sports, from rowing to football and archery.

Yashmin Harun the founder of Muslim Sports Association, said: "When we started all those years ago there weren't many Muslim women being shown in advertisements or campaigns and now, you'll see a lot of hijabis."

Sole Striders is a women led running community which was founded by two Muslim women in April 2024. Sole Striders are committed to empowering women through movement and building confidence, as well as to networking and connecting with others. They usually run clubs every Friday at 7pm for a new route each week.

Sole Striders said: "The representation of Muslim women in sports



CREDIT: Muslimah Sport Association

why we encourage our members to sign up for races, show up confidently, and take up space."

Skater Uktis is an international organisation that caters to Muslim women to get better at skating, as well as getting better spiritually.

Hafsah Mohammed, the head of media and communications, said:

**Tahira plays a Rugby match**

reason is to redefine the skate space, to simply empower Muslim women around the world, to feel confident in these spaces in which they feel they don't belong.

You're doing this for yourself, that's self-satisfaction. Then, of course, you can continue to inspire women through what you want to do and through what you're doing willingly, instead of having to feel like you're doing it."

Every time a Muslim woman steps onto a start line, it challenges stereotypes and shifts the narrative.

Named as the first British Muslim woman to play for England's rugby club Zainab Alim, whose nickname





A female rugby player

Women from The Muslim Sports Association on a Hike



is The Bulldozer, has been an inspiration for Muslim women who want to get into rugby playing, especially from a diverse background, from a British Ghanaian background. She has been advocating for more black Muslim women to get into Rugby.

Zainab played for Leicester Tigers in the Premiership and Richmond Women in the championships.

Along with her background in Rugby, she is also a mother and an NHS nurse.

The passion for rugby began at the age of 14 from her PE teacher who was a rugby fanatic and Zainab's curiosity about rugby balls and running through people drove her to keep pursuing her dreams in rugby.

Representation of Muslim women in sports used to not be as big as it is right now. Relatively, there weren't a lot of resources out there that were able to support Muslim women who had a passion for sports.

Zainab said: "When you see someone that looks like you in a space, it makes you think, Maybe I can do that too."

Representation is like a drive to believe in oneself that they can achieve and succeed.

As the media sees rugby as a male dominated sport and limitations of dressing according to the Shariah, it's been tricky for many sisters who have tried to pursue the sports and balance dressing modestly which consists of clothing not being too tight, or transparent.

Some companies have been putting out more modest clothing for Muslim women who are in sports which has been accessible but with rugby it's been an ongoing challenge this has been stopping

Zainab said: "It has allowed me to play rugby with confidence, to having to worry about my hijab coming off and has helped me stay true to my identity whilst playing a sport that I love."

Another rugby player is hira Martello, a university medical student



CREDIT: Muslimah Sport Association

who found her love for rugby while at university.

Tahira didn't originally start rugby when she was young.

It was more of a sport that she stumbled across as she was originally into PE and extracurricular activities.

It drove her to start with Kung Fu from a young age and then she moved on to Muay Thai, and then rugby.

Rugby is something relatively new to Tahira, and she found it in her second year at university, as she was searching for a society.

She joined a netball group and then later a rugby club, where she felt confident and extremely happy.

Tahira said: "Being Muslim and a hijabi is part of my identity both on and off the

pitch. Showing up for my first training session was the hardest and took lots of confidence, as I knew that I would be the only Muslim on my team and therefore something new to people.

"However, once you find the confidence to show up that first time, people adapt to you and are eager to learn what makes you comfortable."

There are a lot of misconceptions when it comes to Muslim women participating in a particular sport.

They are usually painted as fragile, unable to speak up for themselves or as not having a personality.

But as these Muslim women show, they are strong and the most capable, even stronger due to the Islamophobia they receive. ❶

Four Muslim Female Friendly groups in London:

Barakah Ldn -Award Winning Football Community centering Muslim & BAME women and girls

Skate Uktis - Global Muslim Female led Skate Crew

Asra Club - A community space centering Muslim woman in sports, wellness and sisterhood

Revolution Netball - 18+ netball community bringing Muslim Women together through sport!





# These girls can run

An alarming number of women feel unsafe running in the dark winter months. But what is being done to tackle it?

By **EVIE MCQUHAE**

The numbers are startling. According to 'Sports Shoes' annual report 70% of women have experienced an intimidating incident whilst running and one in two women feel unsafe on a run. 67% percent of female runners have admitted that they make sure not to wear revealing clothes whilst running, says an Adidas report in 2023 .

"I personally don't feel safe going out running alone," said Asha Rajoriya, 21, who lives in Twickenham. "I have felt unsafe due to cars honking at me and being in areas I am not fully acquainted with. I think the darkness just puts you on edge."

Asha took up running eight years ago, she recounted how she had been on a run through Richmond, Hampton and Feltham in September. When she approached Feltham it began to get dark and due to this darkness and moments on the run starting to make her feel un-

safe Asha had to jump on a train home.

She said: "I think it is sometimes hard to balance lifestyle with the fact that you've got to go out on a run, but I don't think the darkness should stop you from being able to complete a run."

Asha added: "But when its dark I do try to avoid pitch black areas."

It has gotten to that time of year again where female runners like Asha either stop running or have to adjust their running schedules due to the dark mornings and even darker nights. We live in a part of the world that spends half of the year fighting for those few hours of sunlight. Unfortunately, darkness is something we have to adapt to. But for the growing

**"I ring my parents or my boyfriend even if I am just walking 10 to 15 minutes in the dark"**

number of females taking up running, darkness plagues them and their personal safety.

Refusing to give up running, some women across the country have decided to take matters into their own hands by starting their own run clubs. Women like Megan Titterington.

The 25-year-old founded Oxford Girls Running in 2024.

"Women's safety was a huge factor in starting the club, it was February so the evenings were dark," she said. "Before Oxford Girls Running I basically didn't run for about five months of the year unless I could fit it into daylight hours."

"I hate going out running in the dark. I ring my parents or my boyfriend even if I am just walking 10 to 15 minutes in the dark."

Megan founded Oxford Girls Running with Harriet Day, who at the time was already known as a running influencer. The

club in Megan's words was "an instant success from the get go" with their largest turnout being over 60 people.

Unlike the elitist often exclusive world of influencer pretentious fitness like reformer Pilates or Hyrox, female run clubs are refreshingly real.

Megan said: "The atmosphere is incredible. Sometimes we have speakers and glowing batons on runs to hype up the energy. I think running in a group has ruined running solo for me because it can never compare to how much fun I have running alongside the girls at Oxford Girls Running."

Megan expressed how running in a group not only made her feel safe but it provided her with a sense of connection to other people.

Megan said: "It is no secret that it is difficult to make friends in your 20's especially when you move to a new place and the club makes me feel connected to so many amazing girls."

In 2024, Strava - a fitness tracking app popular among runners for posting their running times and routes - reported an 89% increase in women joining run clubs compared to the year before.

The unfiltered, accessible and social aspect of run clubs is refreshing. This

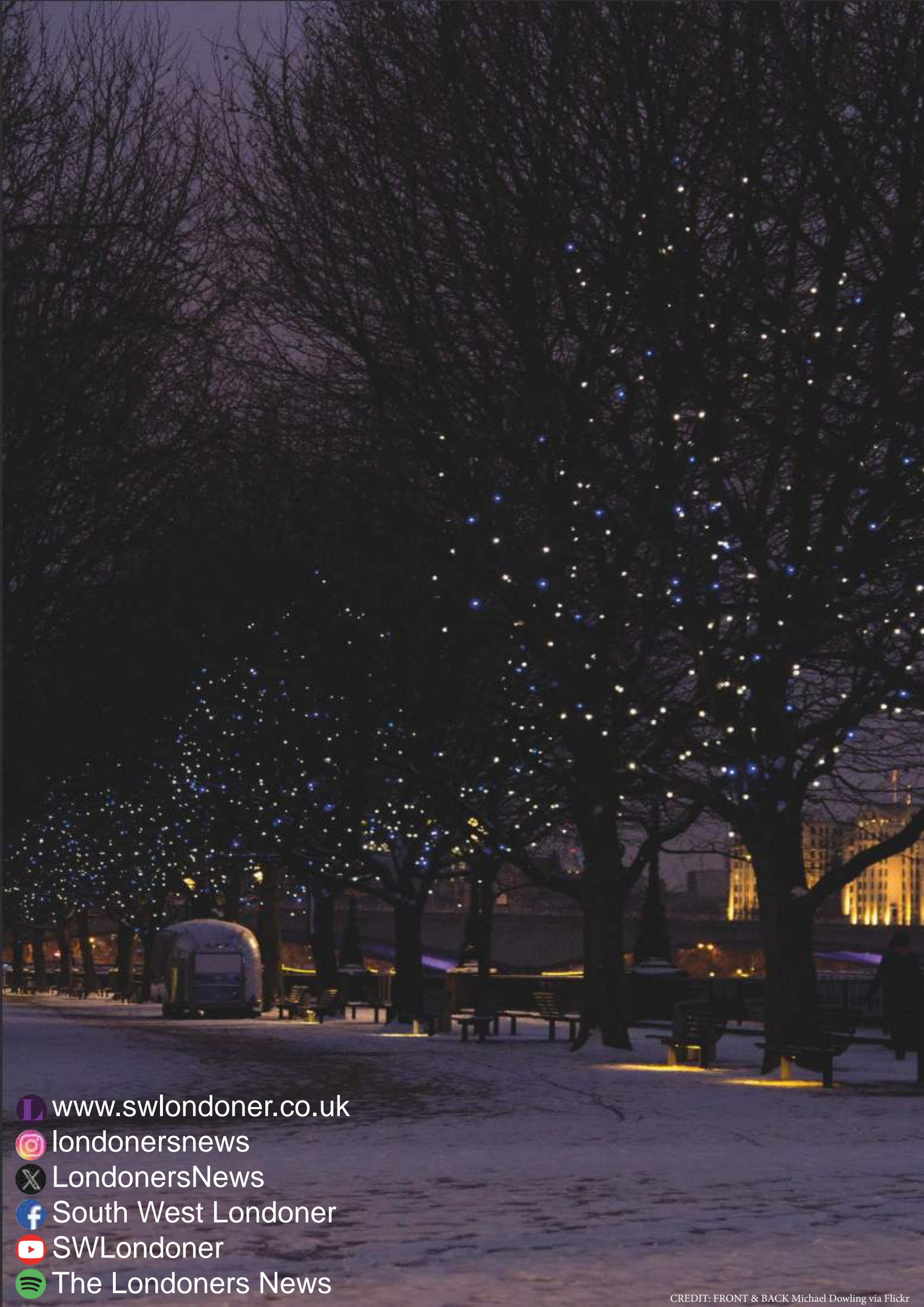
new wave of fitness isn't about personal bests or solo grind; it's about community, safety and female empowerment. There is most definitely a growing female culture of moving together spreading across the city.


**Oxford Girls Running together as a group (see left and below).**





Picture credits thanks to Greg Rosenke via Unsplash.






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