



**POETIC
UNITY
10 YEAR VISION**

WHO WE ARE

Poetic Unity is a **Black-led charity** committed to **addressing systemic racism** and its **impacts** on children and young people by using **poetry** and **social action** as tools for **joy, connection,** and **empowerment.**

Since founded in **Brixton** in 2015, we have engaged over 60,000 programme attendances in **safe, creative** spaces for young people aged 10-30, providing inclusive **mental health** support, transformative **education** and accessible **employment.**

Our spaces, whilst **open to all,** place a dedicated focus on supporting young people of **Black** and **mixed Black heritage,** ensuring they are **seen, heard,** and **celebrated.**



OUR TEAM

What being community-led means to us:

- Founded by a local community member
- George The Poet patron of Poetic Unity
- 87% of our trustees are of Black heritage
- 100% of our staff team are of Black and Global Majority heritage
- 100% of our trustees and leadership team have lived experience of the issues we address
- 100% of our programme facilitators are recruited directly from our community, previously engaged as young people in our projects - trained and upskilled to serve their community as specialists



OUR FOUNDERS STORY

“Growing up in 90s Brixton, I was surrounded by an incredible sense of community, but also a lot of struggle. As a mixed-race working class boy, I often felt **marginalised** at school, dismissed by teachers, subjected to **racism** and made to believe that my voice didn’t matter. That experience had a lasting impact on my **mental health** and **education**, which later made it harder for me to find **employment**.”

Things began to change when my grandma was diagnosed with dementia. That moment, although devastating, gave me a sense of purpose. In 2012, I decided to take action, and **produced an album with my Grandad**, which we sold to raise funds for Alzheimer’s Society. This was my first spark of social activism, where my real journey began.

Exploring my creativity, I found poetry. Spoken Word became my way to express what I couldn’t as a young person. It gave me a voice when I didn’t have one, and that’s why I say **we give a voice to the voiceless**. The work I do is deeply personal. It’s for the younger version of me, the boy who didn’t have the support he needed, but found his way through creativity and community.”

Ryan J. Matthews-Robinson, Founder & CEO, Poetic Unity



VISION + MISSION

Our vision is to create a world free from racism and injustice through the power of poetry.

Our mission is to use poetry and social action to cultivate joy, connection and empowerment for young people impacted by racism.

Through collective action, care and creativity, we equip Black children and young people with the tools to thrive, using poetry as our foundation for transformative education, inclusive mental health support and accessible employment opportunities.

Our work centres three core pillars:

Joy – creating spaces of celebration, healing, and hope

Connection – building community and collective strength

Empowerment – nurturing confidence and leadership



WHY POETRY?

Poetry is community

Over 95% of our young people said our spaces helped them to build new friendships. We've built community on shared solace, solidarity, and strength. Bringing people together through shared experiences of racism, we rise through a collective love of poetry and the unbreakable power of community.

Poetry is revolutionary

It has always been a tool of resistance, wielded by Black and Indigenous communities across the world, across history carrying messages of hope, justice, and freedom. Today, it continues to be our instrument of truth and our language of change.

Poetry is healing

Over 90% of our young people said our spaces have helped to support their mental health. It soothes our minds and strengthens our spirits, with proven benefits for mental health - reducing anxiety, easing depression, lifting loneliness, and growing confidence. It sharpens memory, nurtures communication, and gives us the courage to dream boldly.

Poetry is empowering

Through poetry, we find not only hope but power, the strength to reimagine our futures, build new possibilities, and fall deeply in love with our lives.



“Poetic Unity is one of the first events I went to when I started writing and I haven’t looked back since. **Their space is inclusive** and they have given me a **platform to share my poetry** which has helped me deal with whatever life throws at me.”

Thomas, 18 years old, North London

Mental Health

The problem:

- **Higher prevalence, lower access** - 6% of Black adults receive mental health care vs. 13% of White adults, despite displaying higher prevalence of mental health needs (NHS, 2016)
- **Involuntary treatment** - young Black people are twice as likely to be referred to involuntary mental health services (Edbrooke-Childs and Patalay, 2019)
- **Criminalisation** - Black adults are 4 times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act, and 10 times more likely to be issued a mandatory Community Treatment Order, than White adults (NHS, 2025)

Our response:

- We deliver a range of poetry-based mental health community support groups, engaging 354 participants across 64 group sessions in 2024
- We are producing research with the Centre for Mental Health to evidence poetry's role in increasing mental wellbeing amongst young Black people, to be published in 2027
- We provide specialist and creative mental health support to young people in prisons and schools, addressing needs at an early stage, engaging over 1,500 young people in 2025

Education

The problem:

- **The curriculum is absent of Black voices** - Only 0.7% of mandatory GCSE English literature reading is written by a Black or Global Majority author (Lit in Colour, 2021)
- **Black history erasure** - the current curriculum does not accurately represent colonialism, imperialism and enslavement, restricting important learning for all students
- **Disproportionate discipline** - Black children are up to 5 times more likely to be excluded than their White peers (McIntyre et al, 2021)

Our response:

- We provide cultural representation in our content, by campaigning for increased Black literature in reading lists and syllabi across the UK
- We bring young Black creatives into prisons and schools to lead workshops, performances and programmes, delivering over 100 workshops since 2024
- We run training for cultural and systemic change, delivering anti-racism workshops to equip educators and foster inclusive school cultures, working with 10 partner schools across London in 2025

Employment

The problem:

- **Disproportionate unemployment** - 27% of Black 16-24 year olds in the UK are unemployed, compared to 10% of their White peers (House of Commons, 2024)
- **Unsafe workplaces** - One third (33%) of young people have experienced direct racism in the workplace (Youth Futures Foundation, 2024)
- **Discriminatory recruitment** - almost half (48%) of young Black and Global Majority people seeking employment have faced discrimination (Youth Futures Foundation, 2024)

Our response:

- Our Cultural Leaders programme equips young Black creatives with leadership skills and access to the arts and charity sectors, employing 15 young people last year
- We develop career pathways through strategic creative partnerships to support young Black people into employment beyond our programmes, including our upcoming Senior Leadership Training that will upskill and employ our first Chief Operations Officer in 2027
- We're implementing a framework of best practice for creative industry employers to implement fair hiring, inclusive workplaces and equitable opportunities for all

WHAT WE DO

Mental Health



We support **500 young Black men** each year through our Mental Health programmes such as Mandem, Lets Talk in prisons and schools with partners such as **Black Thrive**

Education



We engage **1,500 young people** yearly into Black British history and creative writing through our education programmes in communities and schools with partners such as **Black Cultural Archives**

Employment



We have supported **200** and directly employed **40 young Black people** upskilling them to further their careers at organisations such as **YoungMinds, BFI and V&A**. In partnership with **Save the Children and Theatre Peckham**



PROTEST POETRY SOCIAL ACTION

To support our priorities and move us closer to **racial justice**, we deliver **social action campaigns** to raise public awareness and influence social and political change. You can find all of our campaigns [here](#).

One example is *Clean Air for the Ends*. Where we bring together **hundreds of young Black people** for a fun, empowering cycle protest, advocating against the impacts of air pollution, **disproportionately affecting Black and global majority communities in London**.

So far, supported by **Forest Bikes**, we have successfully engaged **Southwark Council**, presented our campaign to **Parliament** in partnership with **Asthma & Lung UK**, and had **Deputy Mayor of London for Environment & Energy, Mete Coban**, attended in support of our mission.

Find out more about Clean Air for the Ends [here](#) and watch the full campaign video [here](#).



NATIONAL WORK CARDIFF, WALES

Through our **Youth Employment work**, we have recruited Tia-zakura to lead our programmes in Cardiff, delivering quarterly events and regular workshops, filling a much needed gap in available **safe, creative spaces for young Black and marginalised people in Wales**.

“Becoming part of the Poetic Unity family has meant so much to me, not only personally, by **surrounding me with a community of like-minded Black leaders**, but also through what it’s allowed me to bring to Cardiff’s creative scene.

Compared to other major UK cities, Cardiff’s spoken word landscape is still growing. I often had to travel to find performance opportunities and connect with other poets. Becoming a **Community Leader** at Poetic Unity now means I can help young, aspiring poets in Wales to access the kinds of events that first inspired me, spaces that show **poetry can be everything we weren’t taught in school**: relatable, rhythmic, and contemporary.”

Tia-zakura, 21 years old, Cardiff, Wales.

BRIXTON TO THE WORLD

We are proud to take our work *from Brixton, to the world*; supporting young people on a **global scale**. The challenges they face from poverty to racism and mental health struggles, are universal. **Racism** continues to affect our communities everywhere, and we have a dedicated focus on helping to address it through **joy, connection, and empowerment**.

By connecting with communities across the world, we're able to share experiences, learn from others, and strengthen our **collective resilience**. This international work not only builds understanding and global solidarity but also creates meaningful partnerships that help our charity **grow and evolve**.

So far, we've travelled to **New Orleans, Los Angeles and Canada**, giving the young people we support in London a once-in-a-lifetime experience, inspiring them to travel, share knowledge, dream bigger, see beyond their environment, and realise that **their voices can create change anywhere in the world**.



WHY WE DO IT

To provide joy:

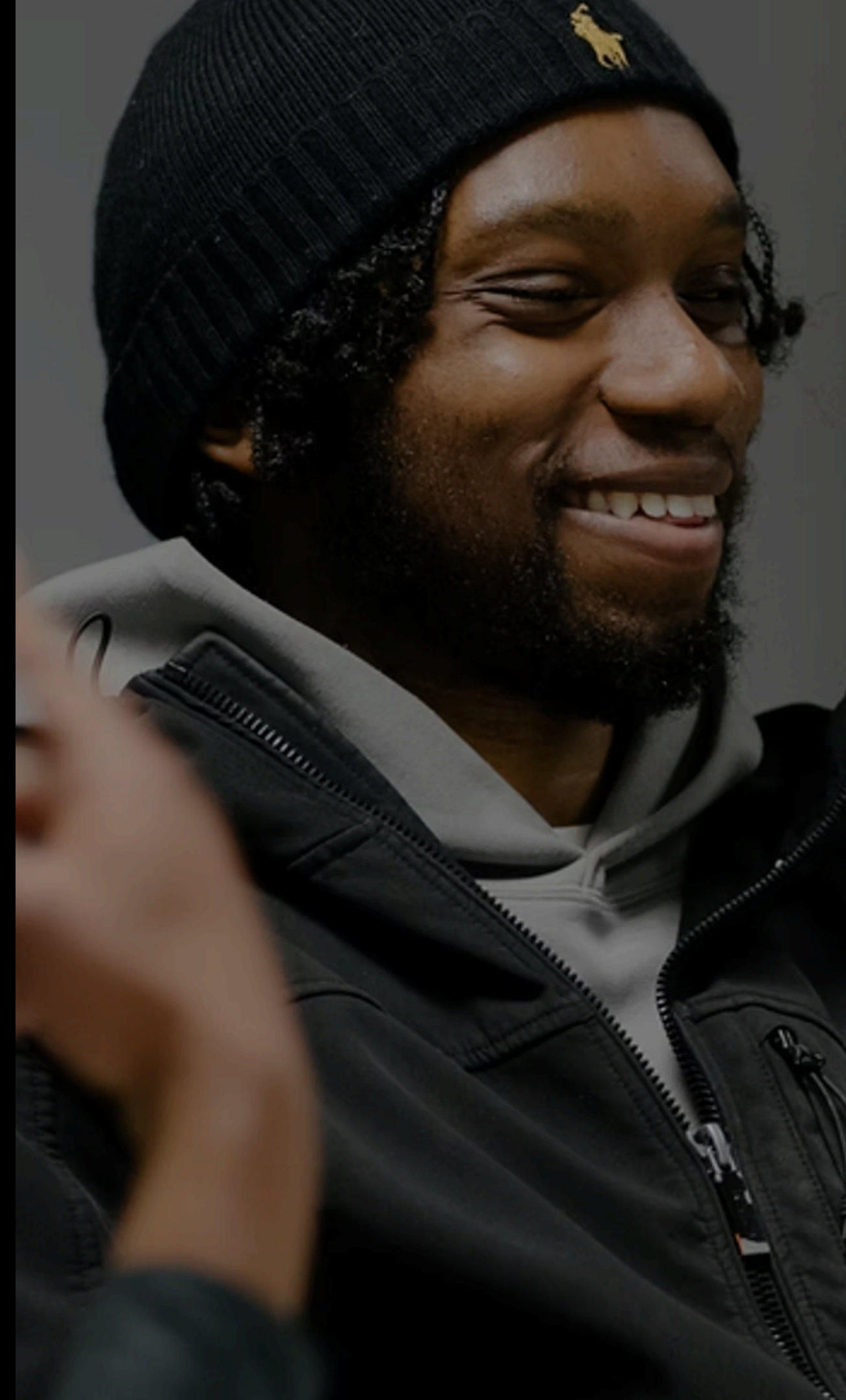
Joy is not a luxury, it's a necessity. In a world that often pathologises and polices Black existence, joy is a radical act. It is restorative, energising and deeply political. Young people deserve spaces that centre celebration as much as struggle, where laughter, creativity, and expression are part of the process of liberation. At Poetic Unity, we hold joy as a core part of our work because we know that healing, learning and leading are only sustainable when joy is present.

To provide connection:

Thriving isn't an individual pursuit, it's collective. Our communities need spaces where young people can connect with each other, build relationships across generations and feel a deep sense of belonging. Whether it's through shared stories, creative collaboration, or simply being in community, connection is what helps us heal and grow. It reminds young people that they're not alone, that their struggles are shared, their happiness is valid and their voices matter.

To provide empowerment:

Young people already have voices that are powerful but they're too often denied the tools to fully use them. Empowerment means more than motivation, it's about access to knowledge, skills and confidence. It's about nurturing leadership, building creative and critical thinking and supporting young people to shape their own narratives.





Binta first connected with Poetic Unity in 2022 when she attended our community programme, The Poets Corner. Through engaging with the space, she found a creative community that encouraged her to develop her voice, share her ideas and **grow in confidence**. Inspired to take a more active role in creating change, Binta joined our Cultural Leaders employment programme in 2023, where she gained valuable experience, **developed her leadership skills** and contributed to projects that **supported young people across our network**.

Binta's journey with Poetic Unity has been one of remarkable growth. In 2025, Binta became a **member of our Trustee Board**, helping to shape the strategic direction of the organisation and playing a key role in decision-making.

Her progression from **community participant to organisational leader** reflects both her dedication and talent, and our commitment to creating meaningful opportunities for young people to lead, influence and thrive.

Binta, 25 years old, South London.

SUPPORT PATHWAYS

1: Points of entry



85% of our community are self and peer referred.

Access to our support includes school programmes, self-referrals to our community spaces through digital or community outreach, peer-referrals from friends, and professional referrals, primarily from social workers and mental health teams.

2: Engagement



Over 75% of young people will attend more than one programme, more than once.

We maintain consistent engagement through trusted relationships and progressive opportunities for support, guidance and advancement within our spaces.

3: Development



100% of our programme facilitators are hired directly from our community.

Through our range of paid opportunities, including long-term programmes, project and performance roles, young people access inclusive economic developments in a safe and empowering environment.

4: Succession



20% of community members engaged are aged 30+.

Our focus is ages 10-30, however we run some intergenerational spaces for all. We also support those no longer within our age range through partnership programmes, referrals and advocacy for continued assistance.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

The problem we're addressing:

Across the Western world, Black communities, especially children and young people, are disproportionately affected by racism, discrimination and systemic harm. Too often, Black children are silenced, overlooked and denied the support they need to feel safe, seen and heard.

Many face barriers to mental health support, education and employment, while navigating a society that rarely reflects their experiences or values their voices. Our communities do not need fixing, but fueling, through empowerment, connection and joy. With Poetic Unity's support, **we will help our young people to thrive, lead and transform the world around them.**



THEORY OF CHANGE

Create a world free from racism and injustice through the power of poetry

01

OUR PRIORITIES

- Inclusive mental health support
- Transformative education
- Accessible youth employment

02

OUR WORK

- Programmes in community, schools & prisons
- Social action campaigns
- Long-term youth employment
- Systems change & sector development

03

OUR OUTCOMES

- Words that Heal, mental health research
- Published anthology and Black author representation in UK curriculum
- The Blueprint employment framework

04

OUR OUTPUTS

- Black authors within GCSE Literature to 10%
- 5,000 young people supported annually
- 150 young people in employment programme
- 40 organisations Blueprint accredited

05

OUR IMPACT

Poetic Unity are national experts with evidenced and influential models of practice. Supporting communities, shifting systems and moving society closer to racial justice, with the healing, wellbeing and advancement of Black children and young people central to our work.



60,000+ project attendances

2,000+ programmes delivered

1,500 young people supported annually

15 Countries reached online

10+ life changing, creative support programmes

OUR IMPACT SO FAR

A diverse group of young people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are laughing and celebrating in front of a stone building. They are dressed in casual, contemporary clothing. The scene is bright and joyful, with many people having their arms around each other and their mouths wide open in laughter. The background shows a stone wall and a doorway.

WINNERS THIRD SECTOR AWARD 2025

Best small charity film

We are proud to have won, in partnership with The African Caribbean Leukemia Trust, a Third Sector Award - considered the most prestigious charity sector award in the UK. Our winning project is *Turning Pain into Purpose*, a series of two sickle cell awareness short-films told through powerful, youth-led poetry. You can watch the award-winning films [here](#).

OUR FUNDERS



OUR PARTNERS

At Poetic Unity, we believe in developing aligned, collaborative and meaningful partnerships with trusted local and national organisations. Our partnerships are community-led, long-term and always with young people at the heart.



**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**

YOUNGMINDS

**dark
matter**

WE ARE PARABLE.

LIVE + BREATHE

NAYLOU  HOLISTICS

**RAW
MATERIAL**

**THEATRE
PECKHAM**



Lambeth
**Black
Thrive**


forest

**EROUND
US**

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