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MAGAZINE!

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MORE VOICES,
MORE POWER.



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SINCE LAST TIME...

LEADERSHIP UNLEASHED



18 young changemakers joined us for our first-ever residential retreat. From fireside reflections to energising outdoor challenges, young people worked side by side to co-create the future of Youth Leads UK.

TRAILBLAZING GRADUATES



31 young people from Bolton, Manchester and Salford celebrated their graduation from the Youth Leads UK Leadership Programme - sharing powerful stories of overcoming challenges, making new friends, and growing their skills.

CIVIC YOUTH LEADERS



Our Civic Youth Leaders are diving deep into the world of policy - exploring how decisions are made and how young people can influence them. Plans are already underway for a series of youth-led events across Greater Manchester. Stay tuned!



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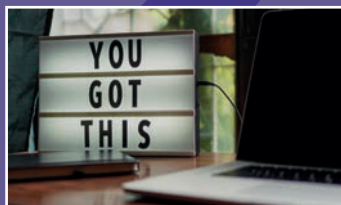
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PROGRAMME VOICES



"One of the best parts of the programme was the social action project. We wanted to do something for homeless people in our area. We did loads of research, found out about the gaps in services and created info packs to help people access support. It felt powerful to be part of something that helped others."

Nicole, Programme Participant

"The Civic Leadership programme taught me about the importance of civic roles and encouraged me to get involved with civic roles myself. For example, I became the steering governor in my college and also Co-chair of the GMYCA, where I can contribute to policy making and also empower youth voice."

Hannah, Civic Youth Leader & Youth Advisory Board Member

WELCOME TO YOUTH LEADS MAGAZINE!

This isn't just a magazine - it's your space, your voice, and your power. Youth Leads Magazine is brought to you by Youth Leads UK, the charity that's all about helping young people like you thrive. Whether it's training in media, business, or employability skills, we're here to guide you from dream to reality.

This magazine showcases the talent of young people - writing, photography, design, and more - all created to inspire and empower. Outside these pages, we're making waves across the UK, helping thousands of young people land jobs, ace interviews, and unlock their potential.

We're proud to do what we do, and even prouder to have been recognised by decision-makers and the Royal Family. Want to get involved, join our team, or support our work? Head to youthleads.uk to find out more!

HERE'S TO MORE PAGES, MORE VOICES, MORE POWER. LET'S GET STARTED!

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UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES: THE POWER OF APPRENTICESHIPS IN TODAY'S JOB MARKET

By Peace Adeoye

As confirmed by the Department for Education, on average, a UK graduate racks up around £45,600 in student debt, with an interest rate of 7.3%, and that's before considering any additional loans taken out during their studies. Recently, it was reported by Standout CV that 96,000 graduates in the UK are unemployed. So, is there a way out of this educational and financial dilemma?

Word is spreading fast about a path to debt-free education, an exciting route for young professionals, school leavers, and hands-on learners seeking financial freedom. A bridge between theoretical learning, which sometimes doesn't have real-world experience, and a fully sponsored programme offering practical knowledge, competitive income, and a career to be proud of. But it almost sounds too good to be true, like a scam that most people wouldn't fall for.

Yet, apprenticeships could be the progressive solution to unexpected unemployment. They hold the key to launching a career in highly competitive fields like engineering, finance, law and now even medicine! Could this be the answer you've been waiting for?

Me and my peers are tired of seeing "entry-level" jobs demanding three years of experience.



Others are frustrated by closed doors before they've even had a chance to knock. Apprenticeships offer a hands-on approach. You earn while you learn, gain real-world experience from day one, and avoid student loans altogether. They're a brilliant choice for people who learn by doing, want financial independence early on, or are ready to step into the workplace straight after school.

I've recently secured an engineering degree apprenticeship. I'll even get a degree, which I've not had to take out a loan for.

Apprenticeships aren't just an alternative, they're a powerful opportunity. For young people questioning the traditional route of university, apprenticeships might just be the smartest move of all!

To find out more about apprenticeships, go to apprenticeships.gov.uk

THE FORMULA: HOW SPONSORSHIPS DRIVE F1 TEAMS

By Alishba Amir

In Formula 1, sponsorships might seem like nothing more than logos plastered on cars. But some would argue that they are the true backbone of the paddock, powering every aspect of this ever-evolving motorsport. So, what do sponsors bring to the track?



HOW SPONSORSHIPS HAVE PAVED THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Formula 1 is one of the most expensive sports in the world. Many of today's top drivers have had help from wealthy families to reach the top, and running an F1 team is just as costly. Teams often spend over \$300 million a year to stay competitive.

That's where sponsorships come in. They help cover the massive costs of building fast cars, paying team staff, travelling to races around the world and doing all the research needed to improve. Without sponsors, many teams wouldn't be able to afford everything they need to race at the top level.



WHY DO COMPANIES INVEST IN F1?

F1 gives sponsors access to a global stage. From luxury giants like Rolex to broader brands like Best Water Technology, sponsors see Formula 1 as a golden opportunity to showcase their image to millions of fans worldwide. By having their names on cars, driver suits, team facilities and even as part of a team's name, these companies boost visibility and align themselves with innovation, precision, and prestige.

DO SPONSORS SUPPORT THE TEAM OR THE DRIVER?

Sponsorships in Formula 1 often support both the team and individual drivers, depending on brand identity and audience fit. For example, Oracle's partnership with Red Bull Racing doesn't just offer funding, it also promotes Oracle's cloud technology, which is integrated into Red Bull's race strategies. Similarly, Petronas has long been tied to Mercedes, becoming so closely associated that it appears in the team's official name. These partnerships are team-centred and built for long-term success.

However, some sponsors follow the drivers when they move from team to team. Brands like Tommy Hilfiger, Puma, and Monster Energy are reportedly preparing to follow Lewis Hamilton to Scuderia Ferrari. So, while many sponsors invest in teams, others are more focused on the star power of individual drivers.



JUST BREATHE: SURPRISING LESSONS ASTHMA HAS TAUGHT ME

By Tara Russell

For as long as I can remember, my inhaler has been just as essential to my daily routine as brushing my teeth. Two puffs, twice a day, without fail. Living with asthma has taught me more than just how to manage my breathing. It has brought unexpected lessons about listening to my body, setting boundaries, and even dealing with some pretty strange side effects of medication.

'No pain, no gain' is a common mantra people apply to working out. Gym-goers can often be heard saying things like, "Just one more rep!", "Push through!" or "You've got this!".

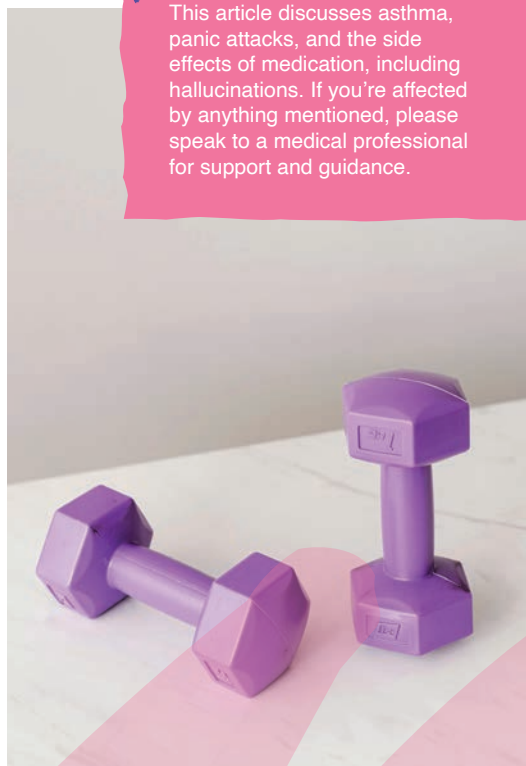
But as someone with asthma, I've learned that pushing myself too much isn't just painful, it can be dangerous. Overexerting myself can trigger asthma attacks, which puts my health at risk.

For a long time, I assumed I was just unfit and tried to push through the sharp chest pain during exercise, believing it was something I could overcome. But asthma doesn't work that way, and it turns out it isn't normal to be in constant pain while exercising! Sure, asthma can be managed with exercise, but only up to a point. Learning to listen to my body and knowing when to stop isn't giving up; it's protecting myself.



CONTENT NOTE:

This article discusses asthma, panic attacks, and the side effects of medication, including hallucinations. If you're affected by anything mentioned, please speak to a medical professional for support and guidance.





A few months ago, I pushed myself a little too hard at the gym doing dreaded Bulgarian split squats...if you know, you know. My chest tightened, my eyes welled up, and I couldn't breathe. I assumed I was heading straight into an asthma attack. But after taking a few minutes to calm down outside, I realised it wasn't an asthma attack at all, it was a panic attack.

Since then, I've had a few more asthma-induced panic attacks. And while that might sound scary, I've come to see them as my body's way of telling me: 'Hey, slow down before you get hurt!' It's like my body has installed its own alarm system. Panic attacks aren't fun, they can be really overwhelming, but I've learned not to let them scare me. Instead, they remind me to respect my limits.

Asthma medications have always been part of my life, but recently I started a new one, a little pill called Montelukast. I'm happy to say I've finally had a breakthrough with my asthma. For the first time in years, I can breathe without that constant, nagging chest pain.

But of course, no medication comes without side effects. Montelukast has a black box warning, with some people experiencing neuropsychiatric effects like sleep disturbances, low mood, or even hallucinations. And lucky me, I got one of the rarest ones: hallucinations. During the first few weeks on this medication, I'd wake up in the middle of the night, convinced I could see someone in my bed or across the room. Once, I even saw a floating dog above my chest of drawers, I wish I was joking.

As amusing and bizarre these experiences were, I was glad when the teething troubles eventually passed. They were a humbling reminder of how powerful and unpredictable medication can be.

Asthma has taught me that managing a chronic illness goes beyond just dealing with symptoms. Whether it's recognising when to take a break, understanding the messages my body sends, or navigating the ups and downs of medications, asthma has helped me become mindful in ways I never expected.




Breathing might be something most people take for granted, but for me, it's a daily reminder that strength isn't always about pushing harder. Sometimes, it means knowing when to pause, take a breath, and trust my body to guide me.

SPOTLIGHT: CREATING A SPACE TO 'TALK IT OUT'



Meet Zenab, our 17-year-old Youth Leads UK's Alumni and a changemaker who took part in The Bolton Agency programme. As one of three young leaders awarded £2,000 in funding, Zenab stood out with her passion for mental health and youth wellbeing. After presenting her idea to a panel, she launched Talk It Out, a project aimed at helping young people manage stress and connect through creativity. Motivated by the lack of support around stress, Zenab wanted to create a safe, social space where teens could take a break from everyday pressures. The last session was an adventure day at the Anderton Centre where reflections of the previous sessions were shared. Faizan asks Zenab about her experience.



WHAT WAS THE PROJECT?

"Talk It Out was a free programme in Farnworth that gave teenagers a chance to build key skills like stress management and confidence, all through fun, engaging activities. The project ran across six sessions with a group of young people aged 15-18. Each session included creative activities like team-building and drama games."

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE THING ABOUT LEADING THIS PROJECT?

"Working with the young people was definitely my favourite part. I got the chance to meet new people and build healthy, positive relationships with the participants."

WHAT DID YOU LEARN WHILE RUNNING YOUR PROJECT?

“This experience really boosted my confidence, especially around leading and facilitating. It also helped the young people grow in confidence. I learned how to manage a budget, which was a big skill for me. Venue hire was one of the biggest challenges. Next time, I’d choose a more open location, closer to colleges and schools.”

HOW DID THE YOUTH LEADS UK LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME HELP YOU IN CREATING AND DELIVERING YOUR PROJECT?

“It was honestly a major turning point for me. The programme helped me grow both personally and professionally, even before Talk It Out began. What stood out most was how supportive the Youth Leads team were. Even after I graduated, they kept helping, spreading the word about my project and giving me great advice on recruitment. That support really boosted my confidence.

Through the Leadership Programme, I learned so much about social action and how to make real change in my community. I picked up key skills like communication, leadership, and planning, which I used when developing Talk It Out. Having that solid foundation made a huge difference; it helped me stay focused and structure everything properly. Plus, the employability sessions really helped me get into The Agency Bolton programme and turn my idea into reality.”

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE THINKING ABOUT RUNNING THEIR PROJECT?

“Don’t be scared! There’s loads of support out there to help you in every way possible. At first, I was nervous when I spoke to Boo Consulting, I thought they might be too busy to help, but they were actually really excited about the project and even spoke to other youth organisations like Youth Leads UK, who were just as enthusiastic about supporting it.”



EUTHANASIA: A KIND CHOICE OR A CRIME?

By Aisha Kedir

TRIGGER WARNING:

This article contains themes of death, medical interference, and morality.



Would you end a loved one's life if they begged you to? Well, David Hunter did just that, and the charges he faced might surprise you.

Euthanasia, often referred to as “pulling the plug”, is the practice of ending a person's life to relieve them from unbearable pain and suffering. It's one of the most debated moral questions in medicine and science in the world today. This issue is currently being debated in the UK Parliament, with lawmakers from both sides presenting their arguments. David Hunter was charged with murder and faced a mandatory life sentence after suffocating his wife, who had been battling cancer for years. Eventually, the charges were dropped, and he was released after spending 19 months in prison.

Many people believe euthanasia gives individuals the chance to die with dignity, especially in cases involving terminal illness and extreme suffering. They see it as a compassionate option that respects a person's right to choose how and when they die. In fact, under strict conditions, euthanasia is legal in several countries, including the Netherlands and Belgium.

However, not everyone agrees. Many religious groups and some healthcare professionals argue that euthanasia undermines the value of human life and goes against the principle of its sanctity. They worry that legalising it could lead to a slippery slope where vulnerable people, like the elderly, disabled, or those with mental health struggles, might feel pressured to choose death so they're not seen as a burden.

This debate is packed with moral, ethical, and practical questions. It makes us ask how much we value life, how far individual choice should go, and what role doctors and nurses should play in helping people at the end of life. While some countries have accepted euthanasia to ease suffering, others are still deeply divided, showing just how complex and emotional this topic is.

So, what are your thoughts on 'pulling the plug'?



HM Government

NHS

**“I didn’t think
I’d feel
happy again”**

NHS Talking Therapies can help

Struggling with feelings of depression, excessive worry, social anxiety, post-traumatic stress or obsessions and compulsions? A trained clinician can help.

The service is effective, confidential and free.

Your GP can refer you or refer yourself at nhs.uk/talk

**Mental
health
matters**

**Help us
help you**

MY TOP 5 NIGERIAN FOODS

By Shalom Ayomide Oluwasola

Nigeria, often called the Giant of Africa, has a lot going for it, thanks to its rich culture, and when it comes to food, it's no exception. Nigerian cuisine is among the most delicious in all of Africa; some might even say it's the best. I know I would! Today, we'll be looking at the top 5 best Nigerian dishes. If you're curious about trying Nigerian food and don't know where to begin, this list is for you.



Simply Recipes / Ciara Kehoe

1. JOLLOF RICE

This should come as no surprise: Jollof rice is the most iconic and popular dish in Nigeria and across West Africa. It's just that good; it'll have your taste buds dancing! Made with rice, tomatoes, onions, and a blend of spices, Jollof rice bursts with a rich, spicy, and savoury flavour. It's often served with fried plantain, chicken, beef, or fish. This dish is a cultural favourite and a must-have at any Nigerian party, so expect to see it there if you're invited to one.



Sugarcane Glasgow

2. POUNDED YAM AND EGUSI SOUP

Another beloved favourite, this dish combines starchy pounded yam with rich and hearty Egusi soup. Pounded yam is made by boiling yam and pounding it until it becomes smooth and stretchy. Egusi soup, also known as melon seed soup, is made with ground melon seeds, leafy vegetables, and often includes meat, fish, and kpomo (cow skin). This combo makes a filling and flavourful meal that keeps you coming back for more.



Sisi Jemiima

3. SUYA

Suya isn't quite a full meal but more of a popular Nigerian street snack, and it's perfect for eating on the go. It's made from thin slices of beef or chicken, marinated in a spicy peanut mix and grilled on skewers. Suya is famous for its smoky, spicy taste and crunchy texture from the roasted peanut seasoning. Whether you've had a long, tiring day or just fancy a treat, Suya will definitely hit the spot.



Sisi Jemiima

4. PEPPER SOUP

Pepper soup is a hot, spicy broth flavoured with pepper, ginger, garlic, and local spices. It can be made with various meats like fish, goat, or chicken, though typically just one meat is used per dish. A fun fact: the type of meat gives the soup its name, e.g. goat meat pepper soup, chicken pepper soup. This comforting, warming dish is perfect for cold nights or when you're under the weather.

5. FRIED PLANTAIN (DODO)

Dodo, or fried plantain, is a beloved side dish in Nigeria. It's usually served with rice or beans, but it can also be eaten on its own as a snack. Feeling indecisive? Dodo with fried red stew is an underrated combo you'll love. It's easy to make, just slice ripe plantains and fry them to golden perfection. The sweet, caramelised flavour makes them irresistible across the country.

Happy Foodie



Whether you're exploring Nigerian cuisine for the first time or reconnecting with familiar flavours, these top 5 dishes offer a delicious glimpse into the heart of Nigeria's vibrant food culture. Give them a try, your taste buds will thank you!



KICKSTART YOUR GYM JOURNEY

By **Abrham Brhane**

I want you to give the gym a go! It's a great way to lead a healthier lifestyle, it helps build muscle, improves your physical health, and boosts your mental wellbeing. Hitting the gym can increase your confidence and even reduce symptoms of depression by releasing feel-good chemicals called endorphins.

I get it, going to the gym isn't always easy. It can feel a bit intimidating, especially if you've never been before. But don't worry, I've got some encouragement to help you get started:



MAKE TIME FOR THE GYM

Finding time to exercise can be tough, but the best way to stick with it is to make it part of your routine. For example, you could commit to going to a gym class every Monday after school or work. A regular schedule not only helps you stay organised but can also boost your time management skills and give you a sense of achievement.



IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR BODY AND MIND

Just 30 minutes of exercise can make a big difference. It strengthens your heart, lowers your blood pressure, and generally helps you feel better. If going to the gym feels like a big step, you can start at home. Everyday items like soup tins can be used as makeshift weights, building up your strength and confidence bit by bit.

If you don't have a gym membership or find the idea of the gym too overwhelming, here are a few low-cost home workouts you can try:

- * **YOGA**
- * **SKIPPING**
- * **SQUATS**
- * **PUSH-UPS**
- * **SIT-UPS**



Here's a simple workout you can try that targets your whole body. It's designed to help you become stronger, leaner, and more toned:

- * **LEG PRESS (10 REPS)**
- * **SEATED SHOULDER PRESS (10 REPS)**
- * **LAT PULLDOWN (10 REPS)**
- * **BODYWEIGHT LUNGES (10 REPS EACH LEG, 3 SETS)**
- * **PLANK (30 SECONDS, 3 TIMES)**
- * **LEG RAISES (10 REPS, 3 SETS)**



SCAN ME



Nuffield Health has a helpful **beginner's guide** with visual instructions for all these exercises, definitely worth checking out.

Keeping healthy is important, and the gym is just one way to do that. If it's not your thing, no worries! You might enjoy alternatives like swimming, football, or dancing. Any physical activity is great for your mental and physical health. You'll likely start feeling better even before you notice any physical changes. Don't be afraid to try something new. You've got this!



GAMING YOUR WAY INTO HEALTHCARE

By Zane Turki

If you're a gamer, you might already have the superpowers needed to revolutionise healthcare. From Virtual Reality (VR) surgical training to designing apps that help patients recover, the collision of gaming and medicine is creating epic opportunities for teens like you who have a passion for problem-solving,

Got good hand-eye coordination? You're basically a surgeon-in-training! One big way gaming is shaping healthcare is through simulation-based training. Video games and VR simulations are becoming more common in teaching critical skills to medical professionals, like surgeons and students.

A study published by the Society for Simulation in Healthcare shows that VR can improve surgeons' performance in complex procedures by giving them the chance to practise in a safe, controlled environment. If you're great at handling tricky in-game situations, you might already have the hand-eye coordination and spatial awareness needed for tasks like surgery or using robotic medical systems.

Want to know more? You can check out the Society for Simulation in Healthcare **by scanning the QR code.**



Healthcare apps are becoming more gamified, and gamers like you can now contribute to medical research in loads of exciting ways. According to UserWay, games for rehabilitation and therapy are growing in popularity. Developers are building fun, interactive platforms to help support people to improve their health.

Whether you're into coding or game design, this growing market offers chances to build recovery apps that help people bounce back from injuries or support mental health by combining healthcare and gaming.

Gaming also connects with healthcare through esports medicine, a new part of sports medicine focused on keeping esports players healthy, safe and performing at their best. Pro gamers face real physical challenges, like carpal tunnel syndrome and eye strain. A review in Sports Health highlights how esports medicine is growing fast, with physiotherapy playing a key role in keeping competitive players healthy throughout the year (Esports Medicine: A Comprehensive Review, 2021).

By mixing a love of gaming with an interest in health, you could help develop new medical technologies, design health-focused video games or even specialise in treating esports athletes. As healthcare becomes more tech-focused, there's a growing need for people who understand both worlds. For gamers, it's a chance to make a real impact while doing what you love.



THE GENDER GAP IN AUTISM DIAGNOSIS

By Annie Ramskill



There is a clear and concerning imbalance in the rate at which autism is diagnosed across genders, with boys being diagnosed approximately four times more often than girls. Autism is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that affects how people interact, communicate, learn, and behave. While the causes of autism are biological and largely hereditary, a genetic variation found in one autistic person may be absent in another. The traits of autism can vary greatly between individuals, which makes diagnosis and identification more challenging.

Historically, women were largely excluded from clinical trials until 1993, due to the assumption that there were no significant differences between the sexes. This has caused problems for many aspects of women's health and continues to act as a barrier for autistic women seeking a diagnosis. Much of the standard diagnostic criteria were originally based on studies of boys, which means they don't always reflect how autism appears in girls and women, for example, in camouflaging or masking behaviours.

One issue with these outdated criteria is that many psychologists failed to recognise the special interests of autistic girls as signs of autism. Just as the typical interests of girls and boys often differ in childhood, the same is true for autistic children. Boys are more likely to have active, technical, or factual hobbies, whereas girls often focus on socially accepted topics such as animals or literature. Psychologists need to be trained to notice the intensity of these interests, rather than only looking for stereotypical autistic traits.

Children with higher-functioning autism are usually raised with the same social expectations as their peers. As children often separate themselves by gender when socialising, boys and girls tend to interact differently. Boys usually play in large groups through activities or games, while girls form smaller, more exclusive groups and engage in deeper conversation. This social structure can help autistic girls learn to mimic the behaviours of neurotypical girls to 'fit in'. Their ability to mask autistic traits is one reason why they are often missed during diagnosis. It's not uncommon for autistic women to be misdiagnosed with mood disorders or anxiety due to their masking skills and professionals not being trained to recognise autism in these cases.

More research into autism in women is urgently needed so that diagnostic criteria can be updated to better detect autism in high-functioning women, who are currently the most overlooked. Receiving a diagnosis can give an autistic person access to the support they need and help them understand themselves better, which can greatly reduce inner distress.



Learn More: www.neurodivergentinsights.com/special-edition-autism-awareness-series/

NAVIGATING EVERYDAY LIFE AS A NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUAL

By Bee Rawlinson

Growing up can be challenging for anyone, but for those who are neurodivergent, everyday situations can feel especially daunting. Neurodivergence refers to brains that differ from what is considered “neurotypical”. Neurodivergent brains are wired differently; they develop and function in unique ways. If you find yourself struggling, know that you’re not alone. Here are some tips that might help you navigate everyday life.



HAVING A ROUTINE

For neurodivergent individuals, a sense of predictability can bring a great deal of comfort and reduce anxiety. Try waking up at the same time, planning your day, and setting time for work, rest, and fun. Example routine:

8:00 AM



WAKE UP



10:00 AM TO
5:00 PM



STUDY OR WORK



5:30 PM



HOBBIES



9:30 PM



WIND DOWN



Planning tools like Google Calendar and Trello can help you stay organised and make tasks easier to manage.

MAKE SELF-CARE A PRIORITY

Self-care isn't just a trend, it's essential for your mental and emotional health. Get enough sleep, eat well, and do things that help you relax, like hobbies, sports, or creative activities. Even small things like playing with Play-Doh or watching your favourite show count! If you're sensitive to certain sensations, try support tools like noise-cancelling headphones, fidget toys, comfy clothes, or sunglasses. Mindfulness techniques like deep breathing or meditation can also help you stay calm and focused.

COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS

Telling others what you need can make everyday life easier. Be honest and open, there's no shame in asking for support. Whether it's needing quiet time to manage your emotions or preferring to wear headphones in noisy places, it's okay to do what works best for you. Explaining your preferences helps others understand how to support you better.

CELEBRATE YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Your achievements, no matter how small they may seem, are worth celebrating. Recognising these wins can boost your confidence and keep you moving forward. Share your successes with someone who supports you, whether that's a friend, family member, or mentor. Every achievement counts, eye contact in a chat, going into a busy place, or making a phone call. You could even keep a journal to write down your daily wins. Over time, you'll see just how much progress you've made.

Living with a neurodivergent brain has its challenges, but by understanding your needs, building support systems, and advocating for yourself, you can shape a life that works for you. Embrace your neurodivergence, it's a unique and powerful part of who you are.

You're doing better than you think, and you will find your way!



BREAKING TASKS INTO SMALLER STEPS

Big tasks can sometimes feel impossible, leading to procrastination and stress. Try breaking them down into smaller, more manageable steps. Instead of thinking, "I have to clean my room," you might start with something specific like, "I'll begin by sorting my teddies," or "First, I'll tidy up my bedside table." This approach can make things feel less overwhelming and help you stay motivated.





LEARNING ENGLISH IS HARD WORK!

Abdulla Naseri

Before learning English, I never experienced any language barriers. This was because everyone around me spoke my native languages, Pashto or Persian (Farsi), both of which I'm fluent in. When I speak Persian (Farsi) or Pashto, I don't feel shy at all. I can tell jokes, share stories, and even complain, which are all things I struggle to do in English.

Two months before I started the Youth Leads UK Leadership Programme, I could barely speak any English. I only knew basic greetings like "hello" or "how are you?". This made me feel uncomfortable around others, as it was hard to express what I really wanted to say. Since I couldn't say what I truly meant, I stopped speaking much at all. But since then, I think I've made some great progress.

To improve my communication skills, I started watching YouTube videos of native speakers with different accents and practising English more with friends. I also began the Leadership Programme, which gave me the chance to speak with more native English speakers.

Now, I can speak English with different groups of people. I can understand most of what they say, too! And if I don't understand something, I feel less scared to ask questions. I still have a long way to go before I'm fluent. For example, I find it hard when people speak too quickly or if they have an accent I haven't heard before. There are also some words I struggle with. The English accent I find the strangest by far is the Salford accent.

Next year, I'll start studying for my English Language qualification. I'm really excited about this because I think being fluent in English will unlock so many opportunities for me. I'll be able to go to university, for example, or get an office job someday. Until then, I'll keep working hard to improve, one day at a time!



FASHION

In this feature, we're serving up a throwback to 1950s/60s Americana with a twist made for today. From bold dresses that channel diner glam to a powerful look in blazer fits that scream sharp and confident. These looks are perfect for a day out or snapping pics with friends, as vintage style never goes out of fashion!



MODELS:

Shalom
Sharon
Amanda

PHOTOGRAPHER:

Nauman Haye



ALL EYES ON ME: This black mesh dress brings sleek elegance with a fierce edge. Paired with classic white slingback heels and a statement pearl choker, it's giving Old Hollywood with a twist. This is your go-to look when you want to make an entrance and leave a mark.



Dress - £20.00
Boohoo

Shoes - £15.40
Boohoo

Necklace - £5.30
ASOS



**BOLD, BRIGHT, AND
UNAPOLOGETICALLY YOU:**

This retro-inspired fit brings main character energy. With a red-and-white halter mini dress, matching cardigan and lace tights topped off with a padded headband. It's the perfect combo of sweet and statement, ready for pics, plans, and everything in between!



*Cardigan - £24.00
ASOS*

*Dress - £27.00
ASOS*

*Lace Tights - £12.00
ASOS*

*Headband - £3.60
Pretty Little Thing*



DIFFERENT MOODS, SAME ENERGY:

Confident, polished, and ready to take up space wherever you go. The first look keeps it sharp in a grey blazer and trousers, a satin tie-neck shirt and lace-up leather shoes that mean business.

Shirt - £28.00
ASOS

Blazer - £36.00
BoohooMAN

Trousers - £21.00
BoohooMAN

Shoes - £21.00
BoohooMAN



Shirt - £14.00
Boohoo

Blazer - £38.00
Pretty Little Thing

Trousers - £24.00
Pretty Little Thing

Shoes - £24.00
Pretty Little Thing



This second look goes bold in baby pink, pairing a classic white blouse with matching bow heels. It's the fit you wear when you're not just in the room, you own the room.



BLAST FROM THE PAST

By Amanda Kelly

We had a fashion shoot themed around 1950s–60s Americana, and we brought vintage vibes to life. Think bold colours, blazers and diner-style outfits. It was more than just dress-up; it was a celebration of classic retro fashion and creative expression. Here's what everyone had to say when I interviewed them.

"I enjoyed seeing what goes on behind the scenes as well as the photos themselves. **IT WAS GREAT TO SOCIALISE WITH OTHER PEOPLE.** I might not have spoken to them much throughout the programme, but the photoshoot gave me the chance to connect."

ESMERALDA

"The energy was electric, and everyone was excited for the shoot. **THE ATMOSPHERE WAS REALLY POSITIVE, AND EVERYONE IN THE ROOM WAS SUPPORTIVE,** even if they didn't have a specific role. There were loads of good vibes."

OGECHIH

"**I REALLY LIKED HOW EVERYONE ENCOURAGED THE MODELS** so they felt at ease when it was their turn in front of the camera. I also appreciated how the team shared ideas, like suggesting poses and ways to use the props."

AISHA

"If you're getting into modelling, I'd say get to know other models and photographers through networking events. Also, find friends who enjoy photography and do shoots with them, even if it's just on a phone. **AND ALWAYS DRESS TO IMPRESS!"**

NAUMAN

"**IT WAS MY FIRST TIME MODELLING, AND IT FELT GOOD!** The photographer was really nice and made me feel comfortable during the shoot. It was fun, especially taking pictures with a friend; we got some lovely photos. The photographer helped us feel more relaxed in a new environment."

SHARON

"**I'D LOVE TO DO THIS AGAIN, IT WAS SO MUCH FUN!** I liked the studio vibe, and everyone was super kind and encouraging. I felt comfortable because the team behind the scenes were cheering me on the whole time."

SHALOM



"**THIS EXPERIENCE GAVE ME A MASSIVE CONFIDENCE BOOST AND HELPED SPARK MORE CREATIVITY** for when I take photos of myself and others in the future. **I ALSO FELT REALLY SUPPORTED BY THE TEAM AND THE OTHER MODELS,** which made me feel comfortable."

YOUNG MODEL

To wrap it up, from my point of view, it was an amazing day with a fantastic group of people, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. I loved the supportive vibes when people were modelling, and it was great to see everyone bonding over food and poses. I also made some lifelong friends.



He
makes
me
feel
used
wanted
pressured

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DYNAMIC WALKING: GOD + LIFE

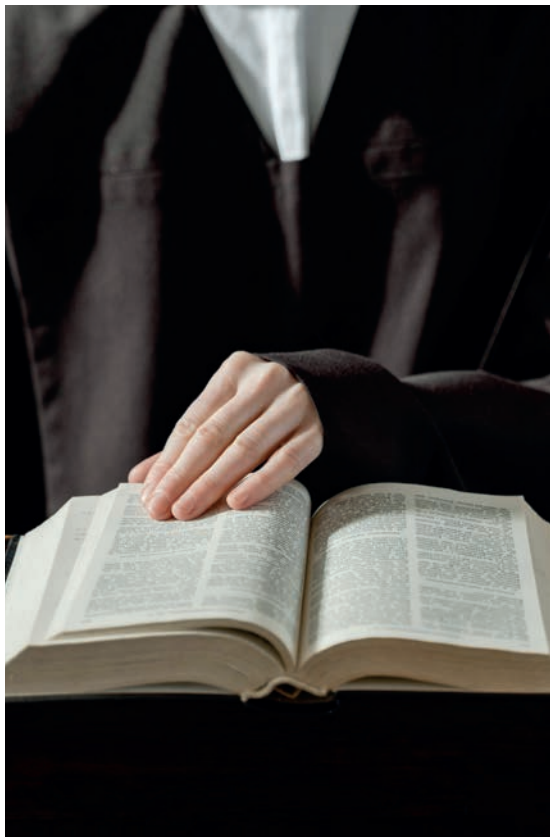
By Sharon Adedamola Oluwasola

The topic of God means something different to everyone, and I want to share how I personally understand God and what He means to me. As we explore this together, please be open-minded and respectful, and I'll aim to be, too.

Throughout our lives, we're told who God is and what He's like. But it's important to remember that society is diverse, and we all have our unique perspective. I'm a Christian and a child of God, but even I am trying to explore faith with fresh eyes.

Imagine coming from a place untouched by social media and society's opinions, and you'd never heard of God. If I asked you, "Who is God?", you might reply, "I don't know, who is He?" That curiosity, that openness, is something many people have lost. What might we discover if we asked that question anew?

Whether you've grown up with faith or are new to the idea, this question can take on different meanings: "Who is God?" Chances are, your answer will be very different, even compared to others in the Christian community. I've asked people this, and every response was unique. That's because God is so many things, and He can't be summed up in one way. Everyone sees God differently because we all live differently.



If we genuinely want to know God, we have to first ask ourselves that question, without outside influences. That's not blind faith, that's awareness. It's about consciously discovering who God is for yourself. We've all heard people talk about God, but now it's time to seek Him out individually, not just go by what others say.

As a Christian, I've heard people call God sexist or unfair. So, I turned to the Bible, and even in my own reading of Genesis, I found examples that challenged that idea. Here's what I learned:

GOD ISN'T PARTIAL:

In the Bible, there's a woman named Hagar who worked for Abraham's wife, Sarah. Even though God had a special plan for Abraham's family, He still cared about Hagar. When Hagar was upset and needed help, God heard her and looked after her. This shows that God listens to people, no matter who they are.

GOD VALUES WOMEN

In the Bible, there's a story about a man named Abraham who had several children. But even when his wife Sarah couldn't have children for a long time, God didn't forget about her. He made a special promise to Sarah, that she would have a son, and He kept that promise. This shows that God saw Sarah, cared about her feelings, and chose to bless her in an important way.

You might see things differently, and that's okay. I encourage you to explore further and draw your own conclusions. As the Bible says in John 8:32, "The truth shall set you free."

Whether you share my beliefs or not, I hope I've encouraged you to stay curious and open in your journey. He really loves each of us, and He's ready to answer your questions. So please stay mindful, stay open, and search for your truth.

**GOD BLESS
YOU GREATLY!**



VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING: HOW CAN YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE FROM HOME?

By Ogechih Ubochi

Who says you need to leave the comfort of your room to be the change you want to see? Volunteering might sound overwhelming at first, but with the rise of technology and social media, there are now loads of flexible and convenient ways to support ethical and sustainable causes all from your own home.

WHY SHOULD YOU VOLUNTEER?

DEVELOP NEW SKILLS:

Whether it's chatting with people, getting involved in fundraising, or offering a (virtual) helping hand, volunteering helps you build useful skills like communication, problem-solving, and even tech skills, depending on the role. These are super valuable for your future.

BOOST YOUR MENTAL WELLBEING:

It's no secret that volunteering can lift your mood and boost your confidence. A study published in the Journal of Happiness Studies in 2020 found that people who volunteered in the past year felt more satisfied with their lives and rated their well-being higher overall.

MAKE FRIENDS AND BUILD CONNECTIONS:

Virtual volunteering gives you the chance to meet loads of new people. By connecting with a diverse group online, you're more likely to find friends and build meaningful relationships. Plus, let's be honest, talking online can sometimes be easier than face-to-face!

ENJOY FLEXIBILITY:

One of the biggest perks of virtual volunteering is that you can fit it around your schedule. No need to worry about travel time or costs. You decide how much time you can give, which makes it perfect for anyone with a busy life or who just enjoys chilling at home.

MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE:

Just like in-person volunteering, your efforts can have a big impact, whether you're supporting a charity, raising awareness, or helping protect the environment. Your time and energy will be truly appreciated by whoever or whatever you're helping, and the rewards often come back to you in unexpected ways.



WAYS TO VOLUNTEER

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT:

This could involve running an organisation's social media account, hosting online events, or spreading awareness through posts and stories. Social media has a huge reach; your voice can help create real change.

ENVIRONMENTAL OR SOCIAL JUSTICE CAMPAIGNS:

You can support online campaigns by sharing posts, creating content, or helping to manage and promote causes that matter to you, such as Plastic Free July. Every post helps raise awareness.

VINSPIRED:

A great platform for finding remote volunteering roles, with filters that let you search by age, interests, and time availability. Everything's in one place and easy to access on different devices.

IDEALIST.ORG:

Another brilliant search tool to help you find online volunteering roles that match your skills and age group.

Virtual volunteering is more than an easy option, it's a real way to help others, build yourself up, and connect with like-minded people.

So, why not give it a go from the comfort of your own space?



SMART BUDGETING: A GUIDE FOR YOUNG ADULTS

By Merab Sohail

Budgeting and finances are important topics, yet, surprisingly, they're often not taught in schools. This is something that needs to change. Young people should be educated about money management before heading to college or starting part-time jobs. Many of us start earning, but have no idea what to do with that money. So, we end up spending it quickly, only to realise we've run out by the end of the month. Nearly 40% of UK adults have less than £100 in savings.

Budgeting is all about understanding how much money is coming in and how much is going out. We all talk about wanting to be independent, and a big part of that is knowing how to manage our money. Whether you're earning a lot or a little, budgeting is essential.

WHERE TO START

Begin by dividing your expenses into categories, things like transport, bills, food, and shopping. Set a budget for how much you want to spend in each area for the month. Then, work out how much you earn and decide how much of that income you want to save or invest, maybe for a car or even a future house deposit.

The key is taking the time to plan and spending wisely. Track your spending and see exactly where your money is going. You might notice you're spending a lot on takeaways, for example. That adds up fast. Try meal prepping at the start of the week instead, it saves money and time. Treat things like takeaways as an occasional reward, not a daily habit.

One budgeting method I've tried and really stuck with is the 50/30/20 rule. You put:

- 50%** of your income towards essentials like food and transport
- 30%** towards lifestyle, like eating out or shopping
- 20%** into savings or paying off any debt.



This method might not work for everyone, but it's worth giving it a try to see what fits your lifestyle. A message that's stuck with me is this: 'Live within your means'. This means try not to spend more than you earn; this way, you'll have money left over for emergencies.

Budgeting doesn't mean missing out. Some people think budgeting means you can't enjoy life, but it's all about how you look at it. Eating out regularly is one of the fastest ways to spend money. But if you can find joy in home cooking, you'll not only save money but enjoy the experience too. Don't make eating out a habit; make it a treat. Most importantly, find a good balance between saving and spending so you can still enjoy life as a young person.

IS WORLD WAR III A BIG THREAT RIGHT NOW?

By Rachel Cowie

CONTENT NOTE: This article discusses global conflict, war, and the potential use of nuclear weapons. Some readers may find this topic distressing. If you're feeling anxious or overwhelmed, talk to someone you trust or seek support from a mental health professional.

In recent years, it feels like every global conflict sparks fears that World War III is just around the corner. Scrolling through X, Instagram, Reddit, or TikTok, you'll see loads of posts claiming we're on the brink of a global war. But how close are we? And could it happen in our lifetime?

Since the start of the 21st century, global tensions have noticeably increased. Events like 9/11 and tensions in the Middle East, eastern Europe and South Asia have led many to wonder if we're inching closer to World War III. There's growing concern that each major conflict could tip us over the edge.

According to the Guardian, people in the US and Western Europe believe that World War III could happen in the next 5 to 10 years. But does this mean it's going to happen? While we can't completely rule out the possibility of World War III, current evidence suggests that it's unlikely to occur anytime soon.



For one, even though there are lots of conflicts happening across the world today, most of them are separate from each other. This makes a large-scale global war less likely, as countries involved are generally keeping their disputes contained, rather than dragging the rest of the world into them.

Also, when it comes to nuclear weapons, there's no strong incentive for any country to actually use them. The world's major powers - Russia, the United States and China - have too much to lose and very little to gain by starting a nuclear war. Nuclear weapons are often seen as a symbol of power, but using them would mean losing that power. It would also bring massive damage to the environment, the climate, and future generations.

Because of this, countries that have nuclear weapons are generally reluctant to use them. The risks and consequences are just too high. So, while it's easy to feel anxious when global tensions rise and social media is buzzing with scary headlines, the truth is that a full-blown World War III isn't as likely as it may seem. Most conflicts are staying local, and the biggest powers know that using nuclear weapons would have devastating consequences for everyone. Staying informed is important, but so is staying hopeful.

NO WAR

TIKTOK: A PLATFORM THAT CAN MAKE OR BREAK YOU

By Esmeralda Mendes



People's lives have taken a complete 180. Many are reaching wide audiences, building their personal brand, and becoming popular. It's even reached the point where, in viral cases, after just one viral video, some people quit their job, move cities or even countries, and start a 'new life'. And no, this isn't an exaggeration.

TikTok is basically an open stage for anyone, regardless of age, race, or ethnicity, to showcase their talent, ideas, and personality. The platform has the power to either make or break your image. While some see TikTok as overwhelming or overly online, others find it a space where they can share real stories and receive unexpected kindness from strangers. Many users share personal stories, and in response, others often step in to help by buying items from their wish lists or even sending money. It's moments like these that restore your faith in humanity, showing there are still people with open and generous hearts.

Still, TikTok fame doesn't always show the full picture. Sometimes creators who seem positive online are later involved in controversies or harmful behaviour. That's why it's important to think critically about who we follow and admire.

Social media has a huge impact on mental health. People of all ages can become addicted to TikTok, and it's known to reduce your attention span. Many spend hours watching videos that don't really help or teach anything, like endless lip-syncing clips. These can also set unrealistic standards, leading you to compare yourself to others, often without even realising it. This comparison can affect how you view yourself.

So, be smart with how you use social media, especially TikTok. It's one of the most-used apps out there, so make sure it benefits you instead of bringing you down. Here are some tips on how TikTok can be used to benefit you:

1. LEARN AND GROW THROUGH EDUCATIONAL CONTENT:

Follow creators who share useful tips on topics like mental health, study hacks, personal finance, or creative skills, turning your scrolling time into a chance to pick up something new.

2. SHOWCASE YOUR TALENTS AND PASSIONS:

Whether you love music, art, fashion, or public speaking, TikTok can be your digital portfolio, helping you build confidence, connect with others, and even open doors for future opportunities.

3. CONTROL YOUR FEED AND SCREEN TIME:

Curate your For You Page by engaging with content that inspires or uplifts you, and set daily limits to avoid endless scrolling and protect your focus and mental wellbeing.

4. CHECK THE FACTS:

Not everything on TikTok is accurate, so always double-check advice before following it, especially when it comes to health or finance.

By using TikTok mindfully, you can turn it into a powerful tool for learning, self-expression, and positive connection, rather than a distraction! And remember, it's okay to take a break from social media altogether when you need to recharge.



SOLITUDE: FINDING WAYS TO NAVIGATE THROUGH SILENCE

By Oluwamayowa Vivian Adejo

Loneliness is an emotion many teens experience at different points in their lives. It can be tough to handle solitude during difficult times, especially when it feels like no one truly cares. This often creates a void, making feelings of isolation even stronger. Solitude can be one of our greatest challenges, but it can also be a source of strength. Here's how you can begin to tackle those feelings of emptiness and rediscover joy.



FIND A HOBBY

If you don't already have one, picking up a hobby can be a great way to ease feelings of loneliness. Activities like reading a book about something you're passionate about, crocheting, drawing, or any other creative outlet can help. When you pour your energy into something you enjoy, it boosts your mood and gives you a sense of purpose.

TALK TO SOMEONE

When you're feeling lonely, it might seem like the world is against you or that the people around you don't care, but that's not true! There is always someone willing to listen and help. Whether it's a friend, family member, teacher, helpline like Samaritans or a therapist, you're never alone. Your mental health matters, and the people who love you want to see you well. So don't hesitate to reach out.

JOIN A GROUP OR SOCIETY

Being part of a group can introduce you to new people and help you build meaningful connections with others who share your interests. If you're in school or university, look out for clubs or extracurricular activities you can join. If your school doesn't offer any, try searching online, but remember to stay safe and cautious when meeting people over the internet.

ENGAGE WITH YOUR FAITH

As a Christian, I often find comfort in turning to my faith during lonely times. Isaiah 41:10 says: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." God is always by your side. Talk to Him, share your feelings, and trust that He will guide you through.

NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO?

If you're struggling or just need someone to talk to, here are some organisations that can help:

The Mix: 0808 808 4994

Also offers a crisis messenger service

YoungMinds: Text YM to 85258

Free, 24/7 crisis text support

Samaritans: 116 123

Available 24/7 and completely free

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THE FIGHT AGAINST DIABETES: A SILENT PANDEMIC

By Khadijah Patel

The rising cases of Type 2 diabetes among young people are alarming. While diabetes is often seen as a condition that affects mainly older adults, it is increasingly impacting people of all ages. Recent data from the National Paediatric Diabetes Audit (NPDA) shows that in 2022/23, there were around 75,180 individuals

aged 0–25 living with diabetes in England alone and NHS figures from 2024 show that there are over 549,000 estimated to be at risk of developing diabetes within a year. In addition, Diabetes UK (2024) found that approximately 850,000 people are living with undiagnosed type 2 diabetes.

WHY SHOULD YOUNG PEOPLE CARE?

Type 2 diabetes can be often triggered by lifestyle factors such as poor diet and lack of physical activity. How many of us spend hours scrolling on TikTok instead of getting some fresh air? How many of us grab a 'nutritious snack' that's just chocolate, sweets, or crisps? How often do we use "boredom" to justify unhealthy habits?

These behaviours can contribute to rising blood sugar levels, which can lead to gum disease, tooth decay, and delayed healing after dental treatments. Diabetes doesn't just harm internal organs, it can affect your teeth, too! Some studies suggest that high blood sugar may affect how well your brain processes information over time - another reason to keep it in check.



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE FUTURE

SO LET'S MAKE CHANGES TODAY TO PROTECT OUR TOMORROW.

HOW CAN WE PREVENT DIABETES?

MAKE HEALTHIER FOOD CHOICES:

This doesn't mean going full-on health freak. Enjoying a sugary snack every now and then won't ruin you, but timing matters! Eating sugar after meals is better than snacking on an empty stomach. If you find it hard to resist that extra Galaxy bar, try swapping it out for a fruit now and then. Small changes add up to big results.



STAY ACTIVE: Sacrificing 15 minutes of scrolling each day to get outside isn't asking much. Bring your mates, your siblings, or your parents. Fresh air helps your body and your mind.



LOOK AFTER YOUR TEETH:

Brush, floss, and rinse with mouthwash regularly. Even rinsing your mouth after big meals can help keep your gums healthy.



Diabetes isn't just a distant worry, it's a challenge we need to face today. Whether it's changing your lifestyle or pursuing a healthcare path, young people have the power to make a real difference.

IF YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR HEALTH OR SYMPTOMS, SPEAK TO A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL.

HIDDEN GAMING GEMS

By Adam Foster

Video games come in all shapes and sizes, from traditional Role-Playing Games (RPGs) to experimental, story-driven adventures. Some push the boundaries of storytelling, while others refine classic gameplay mechanics to near perfection. Let's explore five unique games that stand out for their gameplay, storytelling and creativity.



DUST: AN ELYSIAN TAIL (2012)

Average Playtime: 10-15 hours

Why You Should Play It: A beautifully animated action RPG with fast-paced combat and a heartfelt story of redemption.

This 2D action RPG with Metroidvania elements, a subgenre known for exploration and unlocking new areas with new abilities, follows Dust, an amnesiac warrior who wields the mystical Blade of Ahrah. Alongside his quirky companion Fidget, Dust journeys through stunning hand-painted environments, battling enemies and uncovering a powerful story of redemption. The combat blends fast-paced fighting using melee weapons such as swords, spears, flails, and axes with RPG customisation, making fights both fun and rewarding. Although some encounters can feel repetitive and the backtracking slows the pace a bit, the game's striking visuals and heartfelt character work make it a standout indie gem.

VANDAL HEARTS (1996)

Average Playtime: 30-35 hours

Why You Should Play It: A classic tactical RPG full of strategy, drama, and retro charm

A classic tactical RPG from Konami, Vandal Hearts centres on Ash Lambert, a soldier entangled in political conspiracies and supernatural events. The game features grid-based, turn-based combat, where characters move on a grid and take turns to act, offering a good mix of strategy and progression. The exaggerated blood geysers from fallen enemies add a visual twist, even if the graphics now look dated. Themes like betrayal and justice keep the plot engaging. It may not be as polished as later games like Final Fantasy Tactics or Fire Emblem, but fans of older RPGs will enjoy the retro challenge and well-paced gameplay.



LOST WORDS: BEYOND THE PAGE (2020)

Average Playtime: 4-5 hours

Why You Should Play It: A touching, story-rich game perfect for fans of emotional journeys and creative storytelling.

This narrative puzzle-platformer explores grief through the diary of Izzy, a young girl dealing with loss. Players navigate both her journal and a fantasy world shaped by words. Written by Rhianna Pratchett, the game focuses on emotional storytelling, with simple platforming mechanics that let the narrative shine. While it's not aimed at gamers seeking intense action, it's a powerful experience for anyone who enjoys heartfelt, interactive stories.

THE STANLEY PARABLE (2013)

Average Playtime: 1-2 hours
(with multiple endings)

Why You Should Play It: A witty and weird game that plays with your choices and your mind.

In this experimental first-person game, you play as Stanley, an office worker guided by a clever narrator. With multiple endings based on your actions, it's a brilliant look at player agency and game design. It's more about thinking than winning, and it's full of surprises.

WHEN BROTHERS BECOME ENEMIES

By Emmanuel Lino Deng

CONTENT NOTE: This story contains themes of conflict and family trouble. If you find these themes distressing, please do not continue reading. This fictional story, told from a first-person perspective, explores how conflict can affect families. It is dedicated to Emmanuel's niece.



Before the war in Sudan, we loved each other so much. Now we barely recognise ourselves. We became enemies. Let me tell you how...

We were three brothers living under the same roof. Growing up, we played FIFA on the PlayStation together almost every day. Sometimes I'd win, sometimes my middle or eldest brother would. We were all competitive, but it was always fun. Afterwards, we'd sit down to eat *dama* and *gurasa* together, plates full of bright red stew, beef, and doughy flatbread. We loved it.

Then the war began. Two of us were called to fight, but on opposing sides. Suddenly, we were wearing different uniforms, standing for different causes. We knew what would happen if we came face-to-face.

I called my brother and begged him to walk away, so we wouldn't have to fight each other. But he refused. He said he had too much to lose. That was the last time we spoke over two years ago.

I left home. I heard he did too. Life moved on. My middle brother got married. I found out while I was away fighting, and it was the first time I felt happiness since I'd left. I couldn't go home; duty kept me away. But I wished I could have been there.

A year later, I heard they'd had a baby. I was overjoyed, but it also made me sad. I'd missed so much. I knew I had to visit them, no matter what. I asked my Commanding Officer for leave, telling him I hadn't seen my family in nearly three years. I said I knew where they were. He agreed for one week, no more.

I travelled to my brother's house to meet his wife and baby. When I arrived, I was stunned to see my eldest brother, the one I'd once called my enemy. I asked why he was there. My middle brother said he'd invited him to meet the baby too.

After we'd all met the baby and my new sister-in-law, my middle brother called a family meeting. He told us to stop tearing ourselves apart. "We are not enemies," he said. "We are family." He said the baby was a sign that it was time to reconnect. He pleaded with us to find our way back to who we were.

I told them I had only been given a week. And I had to prove my loyalty to my side. I explained that if I brought my brother in as a 'prisoner', they'd promised no harm would come to him.

So I did it.

He was kept hidden for months. I checked on him every day.

Then, finally, the war ended. And we came home together. Now we help raise our nephew. After everything, we are brothers again.

If only this was actually the case in Sudan, maybe things would be different...



POEM: MY PLACE

By Sharon Adedamola Oluwasola

"My Place" by Sharon is a **POWERFUL REFLECTION ON PURPOSE, PRESSURE, AND PERSEVERANCE.**

It explores what keeps us going when everything, including the world around us, seems to question our path.

Have you ever wondered why I didn't stop?
Why didn't I give up?
Even when the world sniggered and questioned,
Even when they mocked and ridiculed.

Why?

Why didn't you stop?
What is it that drives you to numbness?
That pushes sleep from your eyelids,
That makes comfort your enemy?

What use would it be to lie idly in bed,
To let time pass me by just because I'm fed?
The marks of effort tell me I'm still on track,
My reflection shows I've been working hard.
That I am on the right path.
You speak in metaphors.

Why must the 'right path' be so long and
troublesome?
What offence so grievous must you repay?
Surely, there must be another way.

Faith makes it possible.
Love makes it easy.
Hope makes it work.
There are no shortcuts to any place worth going.
But why?





Why must suffering be the only way?
Why don't we have a say?
How do we wish to be?

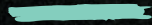
It's not suffering if the end goal is your victory.
It's not suffering if it is all in your best interest.
It's not suffering if you are growing.

Surely you remember your journey, world.
How you got here?

Pause. I've come far.

How long will you lie still, while the world keeps
turning?
Where has the world gone?
Its vibrant nature and adoring growth? All that's
left is an impostor with numbered days.

Your very nature turns on you.
My place is my journey.
And my journey is my work.
For I will journey onwards with purpose.



It invites you to **PAUSE,**
REFLECT, AND FIND
STRENGTH in the struggle.
While some lines touch on
fatigue and doubt, the heart
of the poem lies in a hopeful
message: that **GROWTH IS**
WORTH THE CHALLENGE,
AND PURPOSE GIVES US
POWER.



THE ART OF PROCRASTINATION – JUSTIFIED OR LAZY?

By Sarah Fathi

The Cambridge Dictionary defines procrastination as the act of delaying something that must be done, often because it is unpleasant or boring. Let's face it, most of us have procrastinated at some point, whether in school, at work, or just putting off chores. So, even though we deliberately put ourselves in a position that leads to high stress and burnout, why do we do it?



WHERE PROCRASTINATION COMES FROM

Procrastination often stems from the stories we tell ourselves. To avoid doing a task, we create excuses like “I’m too tired today” or “I’ll start tomorrow...” These narratives offer short-term relief but can result in greater long-term stress. Research shows that procrastination can be linked to increased stress levels and can be connected to poor self-discipline and heightened anxiety. Common causes include:

Perfectionism: The fear of making mistakes can lead us to avoid tasks that feel overwhelming. The pressure to be perfect often results in performance anxiety and complete avoidance.

Boredom: Tasks that feel dull or unpleasant can be easy to ignore. We naturally gravitate towards more enjoyable activities, leaving the boring stuff until later.

Low Self-Esteem: If we lack confidence in our ability to succeed, we can become demotivated. This low self-belief, or low self-efficacy, makes challenges seem meaningless and harder to face.

BUT IS IT JUSTIFIABLE?

Procrastination is often labelled as laziness. But is that really a fair judgment? While it isn't a mental health condition on its own, the American Psychological Association notes that it can be linked to underlying issues like obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), depression, or ADHD. That's why calling someone lazy without understanding what's really going on isn't just unfair, it can actually be harmful. Procrastination doesn't mean someone is lazy or not smart. Lots of things can affect why we delay things. What matters is recognising the root cause and looking after our mental health.

TIPS TO TACKLE PROCRASTINATION

Do a Cost-Benefit Analysis: Clearly outline the benefits of completing your task. Seeing the rewards can make the effort feel more worthwhile.

Limit Distractions: Step away from anything that tempts you to delay your work, especially your phone! Distractions are a major barrier to focus.

Think Long-Term with Rewards: Rather than giving yourself constant short breaks after small wins, try saving your rewards for when the task is fully done. This builds better self-discipline.

Procrastination is a normal part of life, everyone deals with it. But if it becomes a habit that affects your well-being, it's important to seek support. Understanding why you procrastinate is the first step to overcoming it. Procrastination is a normal part of life, everyone deals with it. But if it becomes a habit that affects your well-being, it's important to seek support. Understanding why you procrastinate is the first step to overcoming it.



SPOTLIGHT: HOW SAFA IS SHAPING CHANGE

We spoke to a young changemaker about their inspiring journey. Here's what Safa, a Youth Leads UK's Alumni, had to say about building a platform for others and using her voice to make a difference:

"At 17 years old, I'm co-managing One Voice Many Stories, a campaign project dedicated to amplifying the voices of refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers. Our goal is to challenge the stigma that surrounds these communities, raise awareness, and counter the negative media portrayals that often dominate the conversation.

My journey to creating One Voice Many Stories started with an opportunity shared by Youth Leads UK. After completing the Youth Leads Leadership Programme in the summer of 2024, I remained connected with the Youth Leads community and saw a post about The Agency Bolton opportunity. It immediately caught my attention.

I saw the opportunity and knew it was something I wanted to be part of, I say. It gave me a space to put all my thoughts, passions, and ideas into action and from there, One Voice Many Stories became the reality I'm living today.

The project began as an idea, a chance to share my thoughts and raise awareness about issues I deeply care about. Over time, it grew into a campaign that has allowed me to directly help those who have often been silenced. Through One Voice Many Stories, I'm able to provide a platform for refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers, and to change the narratives surrounding their lives and experiences.

The success of the project has been beyond anything I imagined. I've been invited to speak at events, raise awareness across Greater Manchester, and support people who need it most. It feels amazing to see how the project is growing and to know that it's making a difference. The project has opened so many doors. It's been incredible to help people, bring communities together, and inspire others to make change, and I know this is just the beginning.

A lot of my confidence and drive come from the skills I gained through Youth Leads UK. While One Voice Many Stories is an independent project, the leadership, communication, and advocacy skills I developed through the Youth Leads UK Leadership Programme have been key in shaping the campaign and making it successful."



I'm proud of what One Voice Many Stories has achieved so far, and I'm excited for what the future holds. There's still so much more to be done, but I'm more motivated than ever to continue using my voice to create positive change and advocate for those whose stories deserve to be heard.

STAND UP, STAND OUT, DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT!

**LEARN NEW SKILLS, CONFIDENCE, AND THE CHANCE TO
CREATE REAL CHANGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY.**

- * Gain employability skills (e.g., CV writing, interview prep).
- * Work on creative projects like magazine production and fashion shoots.
- * Carry out a Social Action Project to make a difference in your community.
- * Access exclusive opportunities, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.
- * Have something to say? Write an article for this magazine and get published!

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