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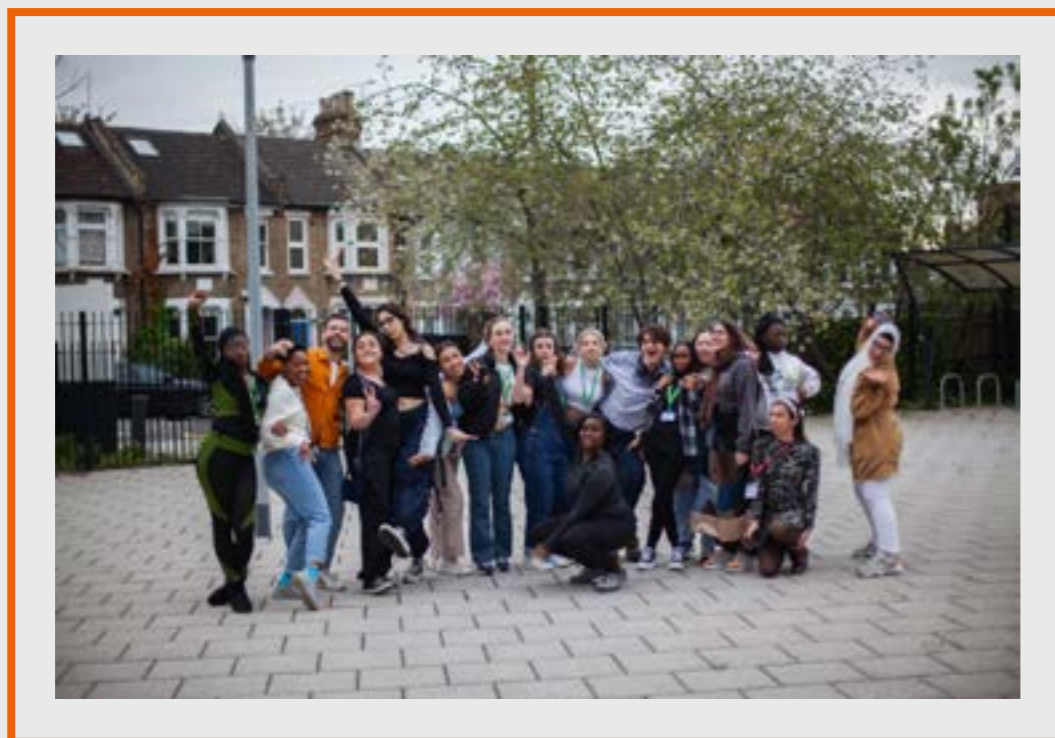
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Introduction

ReGo 2.0 is a participatory practice research project using fashion activism to shift narratives and address issues faced in East London, including youth violence, sustainability and emotional wellbeing, by providing educational and employment opportunities for young people in fashion and related creative industries. The second year of the ReGo fashion activist programme was supported by a grant from Foundation for Future London and delivered via a partnership between Catalyst in Communities (CIC) and London College of Fashion (LCF).

ReGo 2.0 contributed to addressing an issue raised by young East Londoners who, based on their previous engagement with us and other projects, stated that they and their peers feel isolated and excluded from the vast majority of learning or employment locally. Based on their feedback, whilst many projects are short-term, ReGo 2.0 offered on-going and long-term opportunities to participants, contributing to making them become healthy, productive, creative and valued East London residents.

This report analyses the key activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts of ReGo 2.0, as a result of the evaluation process of the year-long project. Throughout ReGo 2.0, we have monitored the number of people participating in the project's workshops, training sessions, work experiences, and public events, as well as the mindset change and technical and soft skills gained. The evaluation process entailed monitoring the participants' attendance, observations, participants' entry and exit questionnaires as well as feedback from trainers and project partners. Throughout the project, we have produced social media posts, evidencing the participants' journey and results of the project.



Participants after a photography workshop at Big Creative Academy (BCA) delivered by Eugenie. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



ReGo participant Tolu delivering a workshop session at Belmont Park. Photo by Eugenie Flochel

Project Monitoring

People gaining access paid work experience/internships



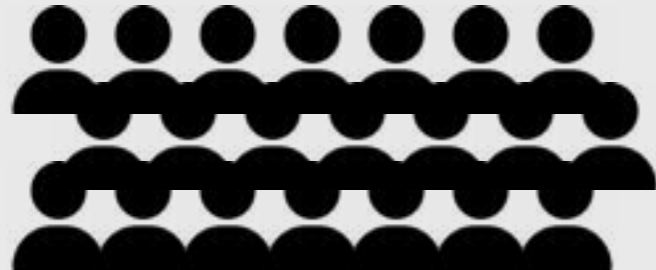
Total = 7

People gaining access to jobs



Total = 2

Participation in career workshops and related learning offers



Total = 21

Freelance and entrepreneur set up, development & training



Total = 8

Bespoke career and higher education path support



Total = 2

Accessing lifelong learning opportunities (early learning and schools through to late career, and post retirement)



Total = 72

Training and secondments, employment and access to next level careers



Total = 2

One to one careers and relevant coaching/ mentoring



Total = 4

Business set up and development support



Total = 2

Activities

We have been building on the success of the first year of our project, strengthening the partnership between CIC and LCF, whilst also building collaborations with schools, colleges and youth centres (Belmont Park School, Big Creative Academy, Spotlight) and fashion brands (BEEN London, Michelle Lowe-Holder, CQ Studio, Sabinna, RAEBURN) in each of the four targeted boroughs (Waltham Forest, Tower Hamlets, Newham, and Hackney).

One of our collaborating brands, Sabinna, offered 3 mentoring sessions to one of our project participants, who is currently studying a BA at London College of Fashion and wants to establish a sustainable fashion brand. In partnership with Sabinna and The Trampery, we also delivered a public engagement event at the newly opened Fish Island Village, providing our ReGo participants, local community and the wider public with insights into entering the fashion industry in the context of climate justice. Three ReGo participants pitched their creative and entrepreneurial ideas to a panel of experts at the event who gave feedback and advice on how to shape meaningful change in the industry and community.

With another partner brand, BEEN London we have delivered a co-design workshop inviting local young people to develop ideas for transforming - through design and water jet technology - the metal of knife blades into bespoke hardware for a limited collection of sustainable bags. 5 people participated in the workshop, developing a large number of design concepts, which were assessed by a panel of experts. (Monica Buchan-Ng of Centre for Sustainable Fashion, Dr Laura Santamaria of Sublime magazine, Cosima Hornak of BEEN London). The winning design was then produced by the brand, whilst the second and third place were offered - respectively - a mentoring session with Genia Mineeva (Founder of BEEN London) and a visit to their studio in Hackney Wick.



ReGo participants at a collaborative workshop delivered in partnership with BEEN London, and hosted at The Lab E20. Photo by Francesco Mazarella.



ReGo participants developing design concepts at a collaborative workshop delivered in partnership with BEEN London, and hosted at The Lab E20 (above).

ReGo participant Tolu presenting winning design (right).

Photos by Francesco Mazarella.



The products made by our collaborating brands (a limited edition of 9 pouches by BEEN London, 12 pieces of jewellery by Michelle-Lowe Holder, and 1 bag by CQ Studio) promoted via social media activity, launched at an event at The Trampery in Fish Island on 6th September 2023 and sold via the brands' e-commerce platforms. The funding raised will contribute to supporting on-going youth-led fashion activism activities to address social issues through the newly formed 'ReGo Collective' - led by young people wanting to access opportunities in the creative industries.

"I liked that each week there was someone different to come in to tell us about what they do, e.g. Eugenie (photography), Tola (ex LCF student)"

"The amount of support we got was very helpful and I learned a lot of new skills".

[Students at Big Creative Academy]

Throughout the year-long project, participant Oliver Selic has set up ReGo FORUM, which has progressively grown into a diverse collective of emerging designers and artists. We have supported him in the design and delivery of 4 events at The Lab E20 (in November 2022, February, April and June 2023), which included presentations and showcasing opportunities for 21 emerging artists / designers. This has resulted in an intimate and inclusive series of meet-ups for some of London's best 'unseen' designers, artists and performers who are using innovative and unique processes and materials within their work. FORUM has contributed to nurturing young people's talent through critical feedback from over 200 people in total, including industry professionals, academics and local community members, supporting them in improving their presentation skills. This will directly impact and support the ReGo Collective's activities going forward.

In the initial phase of the project, we have delivered 6 training sessions for our ReGo participants to equip them with crucial interpersonal and technical skills to deliver effective workshops in schools. We have covered issues such as ethics, safeguarding, risk assessment, DBS, freelancing, invoicing, as well as communication skills, technical aspects of designing and making, knowledge of fashion, activism and sustainability, social change. We have also shared insights on how to generate the depth of connection with participants to ensure effective workshop delivery through creating 'teachable' moments with purpose.

We have designed a student project brief linked to ReGo, based on strategic decisions within the core project team, co-creation with our young participants, and in consultation with our collaborating schools and partners. The brief invited school pupils to develop activist statements through fashion, exploring social issues relevant to youth safety that they feel strongly about shifting perceptions on. We designed a series of 7 workshops in each school supporting the students throughout a process of collaborative and experiential learning to develop meaningful research, concepts and products contributing to their manifesto for social change.

We concluded the project with a showcase of the students' designs at a public event taking place at The Lab E20 in Stratford on 22nd June. The event brought together all the schools taking part in the project, and gave the students the chance to show to a wider audience the clothes and accessories made and the zines capturing their design process. Throughout the day-long showcase, two of our ReGo participants facilitated a printing workshop for the general public. This was a paid opportunity for our ReGo participants, and a learning experience for the school pupils and community members who attended the event, developed a new skill, and took away an upcycled tote bag which they customised. The event also included a panel discussion featuring a ReGo participant, a collaborating brand, a school pupil and a teacher, discussing the mindset change and the experience gained in fashion activism and sustainability.

ReGo has been featured across many exhibitions (e.g. installation display at LCF in Oxford Circus from September to October 2022, and 'Material Witnesses' in Walthamstow from May to September 2023), talks (e.g. ESDA Social Design Days in Zaragoza, Spain, The Commonwealth Youth Work Conference in Reading, University of East London's Creative Industry / Sustainability Forum, 'Redesigning Youth Futures' at Central Saint Martins) and various events (Genesis Talks & New Deal For Young People, Green Gown Awards Ceremony at Loughborough University, etc.).

To consolidate the success of the project so far, we are now setting up ReGo as a Creative Collective, registered as an unincorporated community group to be run by young East Londoners who have participated in previous programmes and who will start trading independently, with support from Catalyst in Communities and London College of Fashion.



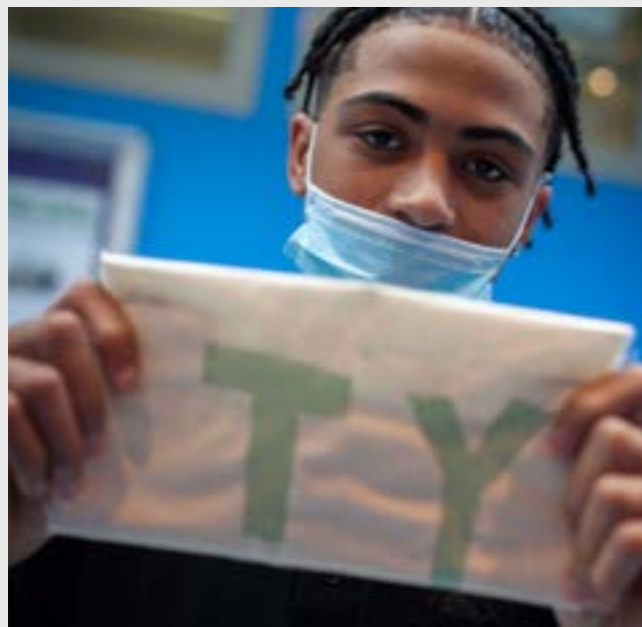
Young creative presenting their work during the third edition of ReGo FORUM, hosted at the LAB E20. Photo by Oliver Selic.

Outputs and Outcomes

As an unexpected outcome of the project, one Lecturer from London College of Communication, UAL decided to set up a project brief for his MA Design Management students linked to ReGo F0RUM, inviting the 41 students to work in teams and collaborate with external partners to develop strategic ideas for the development of F0RUM as a sustainable entity. Oliver, one of the ReGo participants acted as the 'industry client' for this project brief, and was hired (and paid) as Associate Lecturer at London College of Communication to deliver lectures, tutorials and crits to the students' project, contributing to enhancing his confidence, professional experience, playing a mentoring role for other young people, and supporting the development of new ideas for the future of F0RUM.

The school workshop series built on the learning from our previous year of ReGo, and contributed to engaging and inspiring further local young people, raising awareness of the project, and amplifying its impacts. The student project had positive impacts on the workshop facilitators who developed new skills, made new connections and gained income. Moreover, the school pupils benefitted in terms of mindset change, awareness of fashion sustainability and activism, exposure to education and employment pathways. They developed a range of physical and conceptual pieces. Although they couldn't use metal from knives in their designs, we provided the students with relevant knowledge to suitably understand and design for the water jet technology.

The BCA students' responses to the brief explore the systemic connections of youth violence with the drugs market and complex family relationships, as well as the impacts of knife crime on mental health. They represented the concepts of postcode wars, betrayal, brainwashing, and celebrated the lives of stabbed young people who, like lost angels, look down on us. The students investigated the emotional effects of music on youth, were inspired by futurism and warriors in video games, and used fashion as a way to find and express their own purpose and make connections. They made creative use of found resources, and developed upcycled garments, jewellery and accessories.



Work created by students at Belmont Park School. Photos by Eugenie Flochel.



Zine produced by one of the students at BCA, capturing their design process. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



BCA student innovatively adapting soda can lids. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.

The Belmont Park School students responded candidly and with open hearts about their experiences over the last few years and produced eye-opening results. Their zines and artefacts have centred on the balaclava: a short-hand symbol for antisocial behaviour. Yet, they have embellished their balaclavas with symbols of grief and hope: broken hearts, a blooming rose, pink leaves, and their own names.

As an outcome of the school workshops, the students learned new skills from pattern cutting to hand-stitching, screen printing and using a sewing machine. They also learned about the fashion industry and how fashion activism can be used to talk about a range of subjects personal to them. They learned how to communicate with professionals from the fashion world, and how to convey their ideas, personalities and interests. Although some students expressed some frustrations with some not being able to finish their products, a lot of this was to do with lateness or absence from school.

Discussion

Reflecting on the delivery of the workshop series, we realised that we needed to have a plan for the whole programme, and for each session (also so that the facilitators could feel confident in delivering it), but we needed to be flexible, as things often did not go to plan, and we needed to adjust each session, based on the students' engagement. We also had to make sure that the facilitators were aware of what happened the previous week, and what would happen the following one. This is particularly important when we had different facilitators every week. The role of the 'supervisor' (Robin Lockhart, Francesco Mazzerella and Cassie Quinn) contributed to overcoming this issue as one of them was present at every workshop, and we set up a 'live document' in which we collated notes and feedback week by week, whilst Cassie also met up with the facilitators regularly to make sure they were always up to date.

Another important learning was related to the fact that the audience of our project was very different in every school, and therefore we had to tailor our programme to the needs and aspirations of diverse students. For instance, the special needs students at Belmont Park School didn't engage well with listening to presentations, but preferred jumping into the making. Therefore, we shortened or avoided the presentations at Belmont Park School, whilst we kept them for Big Creative Academy as they were deemed an invaluable resource for the teacher and students, who could ground their design and making process into something good conceptually. Moreover, whilst the students at BCA produced good designs from a technical point of view, the students at Belmont Park School improved their behaviour, bonded with the ReGo facilitators, and openly engaged with discussions around youth violence; this in itself was very powerful in terms of social impact.



ReGo Showcase panel discussion. Photo by Aran Knowles.



Sabina hosting pitching event for ReGo participants. Photo by Francesco Mazzerella.

Our contact at Spotlight Youth Centre was very supportive and spent considerable effort 'rounding up' some young people to participate in the sessions. She also explained that Friday evening is their 'open drop in' session and that the young people are encouraged to try out any of the sessions on offer; she reassured us not to be concerned if the young people popped in and out of the sessions. This meant that our workshop facilitators had to 'start' the sessions several times during the allocated 2-hour slot. Based on feedback received, we also decided to start the sessions slightly earlier to better cater to the needs of the young people. The quieter sessions allowed us to focus individually with the young people at Spotlight have different access needs that require us to give more attention.

The workshops at Belmont Park School were attended by a small group of students only, and the retention of the students across sessions was challenging, because the students sometimes got excluded by the school or returned to mainstream education. Based on feedback received by the teacher, considering the special needs of the learners, perhaps the brief could have been more focused and lead to the decision to make balaclavas sooner. The teacher suggested that in the future we could work with a younger group who are more engaged, but she was pleased that we worked with this students' cohort, as the project was very impactful on them.

Conclusions

The project has provided a wide range of learning opportunities for all those involved, and ensured the employability prospects for the project participants were maximised. Based on feedback received from our participants and project partners, ReGo has contributed to raising awareness of opportunities available locally to study and work in the creative industries, whilst offering a chance for young people to act as agents of change within their own communities, showing the potential for fashion activism to shape better lives and tackle social issues.

The project has met the main funding priorities and the intended outcomes, as it contributed to improving the lives, wellbeing, education and employment opportunities, as well as entrepreneurial capabilities of local young people. Such learning and business experiences were created directly within the project and through the close working partnerships established with other fashion businesses and organisations in the four target boroughs. The project has contributed to increasing the local capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship, whilst also increasing the diversity of the creative sector in East London.

The project has also engaged with the wide-ranging demographics of East London, as reflected in the participants and beneficiaries of our programmes. Having a core focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion, we have engaged with all ethnicities, genders and levels of ability, and this has been essential to make meaningful connections with our participating peers throughout East London and generate holistic responses to the systemic issues affecting our community.

"Thanks for organising my mentoring sessions with Sabinna. [...] She is a lovely, helpful and inspiring businesswoman and has really helped me gain confidence and structure with my growing side hustle of Mimimakes[...] She has offered me contacts and helped me begin my LinkedIn journey but also helped create a timeline where I can continue to actively promote and create for the business amongst my other commitments."

[ReGo project participant attending mentoring sessions with Sabinna]



ReGo participants Tolu and Tola delivering a creative session during the ReGo showcase at The Lab E20. Photo by Aran Knowles.

Overall, all the young people who participated in our workshops were passionate about our proposed social cause. In fact, since the pandemic and compounded by the on-going brutal budget cuts to schools, social services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), young East Londoners have been deeply affected by knife crime. Sadly, many participants have been impacted directly, and have lost friends through this epidemic. As stated by one of our collaborating teachers, our work is "a powerful testament to the importance of including young people's voices in the conversation around tackling knife crime, and clearly evidences the need to trust, nurture and support young people in creating positive social change, through their creative endeavours."

Going forward, we are turning ReGo (currently set up as a project) into an independent Creative Collective. Having piloted collaborations with several local schools (including FE colleges / pupil referral units) and fashion businesses, The ReGo Creative Collective will take such partnerships to the next level by embedding workshop delivery within the curriculum of Big Creation Education and the strategic plans of local sustainable fashion brand RAEBURN.



BCA student in a photoshoot of her work. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.

Testimonials

"You guys are doing a wonderful job, and the students are given an opportunity to talk. [...] I think honestly it's a terrifying time to be a young person, and violence surrounds and colours so much of their day to day lives. It's so good of you to keep the conversations open and flowing, gently challenging them, and also exploring the deeper reasoning behind some of their beliefs. [...] The students were particularly interested in ReGo's use of recycled blades, and it inspired lengthy conversations about youth violence and safety on the streets. This is a subject painfully close to most of the students' experience in recent years, as many of them have personally experienced the repercussions of knife crime. [...] It was the first time I've heard some of the students speak so candidly about knife crime, with personal stories and honest insights into how they perceived the problem. [...] I loved seeing the students grow in confidence and how their interest was piqued by well-thought out and clearly presented slide shows. The slide shows and discussions around wider issues using activism helped show the students how they could communicate their ideas and experiences with the wider world. [...] What I appreciated most of all was the warmth, empathy and kindness shown by the ReGo team towards the students. They worked so hard to establish trust and respect with each of the students. [...] I think of the young people as having roots which grow and make connections deep below the surface. You may not see progress for a long time, but it's happening under the surface. Eventually, and when they are ready, things shift and their learning becomes apparent. Often this won't be for months, or maybe years, but it does happen. Thank you for all your input and energy - you guys are just amazing"

[Teacher at Belmont Park School]

“When I heard about this project and the work they had previously done to engage at-risk young people (particularly those vulnerable to youth violence and knife crime), through fashion, design and sustainability, it really spoke to my heart and I knew I had to get involved. [...] Working with these young people has been such a learning experience; funny at times, chaotic at others but really inspiring to see them creatively express themselves. Most of the young people [...] developed a variety of skills from week to week: sewing, simple pattern cutting, printing and knowledge about sustainability. The workshops also gave them a chance to build their confidence and provided a safe space to creatively channel their thoughts and feelings. It has been such a pleasure working with the team at Project Re.Go 2.0”.

[ReGo project participant delivering workshops at Belmont Park School]



Belmont Park School students. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



ReGo participants during a natural-ink screenprinting training session, hosted at The Lab E20. Photo by Cassie Quinn.



Waterjet cutting knives by Octagon Precision. Photo by Aran Knowles.



ReGo x BEEN pouch. Photo by BEEN London.



Spotlight participants in a photoshoot with ReGo products. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



Spotlight participants in a photoshoot with ReGo products. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



Belmont Park School student producing their work. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



Belmont Park School student in a photoshoot with their work. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



BCA student in a photoshoot of her work. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



BCA student in a photoshoot of her work. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



BCA student in a photoshoot of her work. Photo by Eugenie Flochel.



The ReGo core project team: Robin Lockhart, Cassie Quinn, and Francesco Mazzarella. Photo by Aran Knowles.

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