CONTENT PAGE

LOOKING FOR A BIG LISTEN?

ADVOCACY ACADEMY

WHO WE ARE
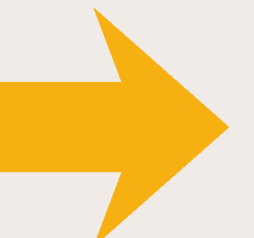## A HOME FOR YOUTH ORGANISING IN THE UK

The Advocacy Academy (TAA) is a home for youth organising in the UK.

For us, this means we build the power of young people with lived experience of injustice to develop their own political identity, organise a community rooted in joy and solidarity, and take action to address the most pressing issues of our time.

TAA is *not a lone voice in this work*.

Youth workers, organisers and practitioners in the UK and across the world have gifted their ideas, hard-won lessons, and heartbreaks. We are not the first to walk the path towards something we believe is better.

*Every day, **we learn from the extraordinary acts of bravery by young people**, both near and far, who have shaped our world for the better.*

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CHECK OUT OUR LISTENING CAMPAIGN ➔

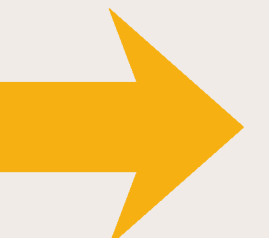# THE BIG LISTEN
IN WORDS

This summer, The Advocacy Academy's Member-Led Governance and staff team worked together on carrying out a listening campaign - The Big Listen.

Over 8 weeks, we had 107 relational conversations (121s) with Members of The Advocacy Academy and our local community.

We wanted to hear what people are angry about and what is bringing people hope.

READ ON FOR THE RESULTS →

THE BIG LISTEN
IN NUMBERS

ADVOCACY ACADEMY

8   WEEKS

11   TEAM MEMBERS

4815   MINUTES OF CONVERSATIONS

107   121S

1   BIG LISTEN

Our 121-o-meter on our fridge!

LET'S START WITH HOPE

BECAUSE DESPITE BEING ANGRIER THAN EVER, OUR COMMUNITY ARE HOPEFUL

Action is the life blood of the movement and the people we spoke with.

When asked about what gives them hope broadly, a lot of people mentioned action - going on marches, attending Pride, seeing and **taking action in their local communities gives them a lot of hope** and motivates them to stay in the fight for a better world. Palestine protests came up a lot as an example of a revitalising thing to take part in and see to show up in solidarity against a great injustice. Others spoke of winning and hitting campaign goals - the high of knowing you have achieved something in your organising work.

Some mentioned how **movement history can be a motivator** - learning about how people overthrew systems of inequality, racism, and colonialism in the past teaches you no injustice is inevitable and no system is infallible.

Many talked about the importance of community - naming mutual aid groups, communities of care, sharing food and thoughts with friends and loved ones. Some people also talked about the importance of seeing hope represented - seeing people who are like you do well in their careers and in their life.

Many spoke about how hope is something they have to keep stoking as **it is hard to be hopeful in a time of so much crisis.**

People of all ages spoke about how **young people give them hope.** Young people spoke about how great it is to see other young people take action and speak truth to power and how that makes them feel better about the world.
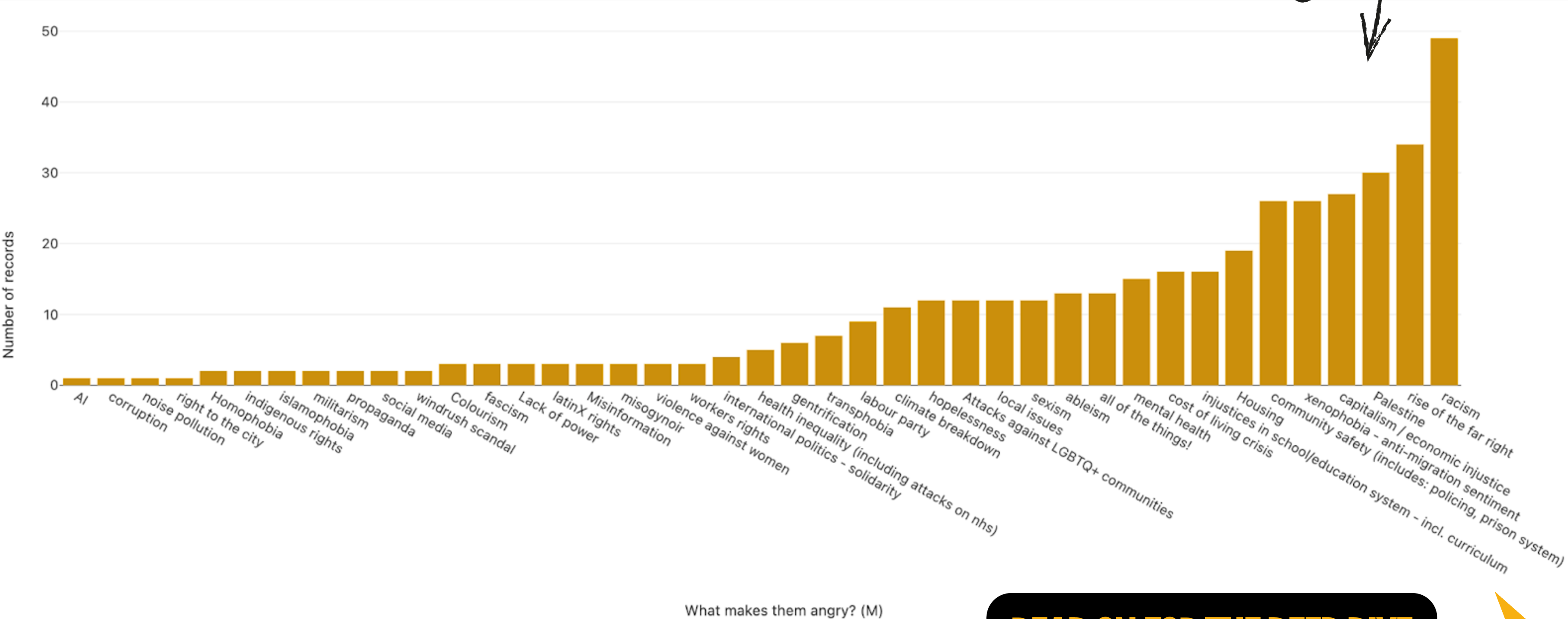Older people in our networks spoke about how young people's anger and energy is something they really value and how it gives them energy to stay and fight.

"There is meaning in showing up for each other, even when it won't sway those in power."

OK, LET'S GET INTO ANGER

THE CATALYST OF MANY MOVEMENTS

Number of records

What makes them angry? (M)

READ ON FOR THE DEEP DIVE

RACISM IN THE UK
AND THE RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT

Racism and the rise of the far right is the issue most on our members and wider community's mind.

Many members spoke of moving around the country, either with their parents or for university and work, and **experiencing racism and ostracisation due to the colour of their skin** and perceived class marker.

A majority of the young people we spoke with were **scared, worried, and anxious about how emboldened the far right are** - with flags being put up to 'intimidate communities of colour' rather than 'for genuine patriotic purposes'. They spoke of how seeing people like them **being demonised in the media** has affected them negatively, how they feel unsafe in their places of work and study and increasingly feel worried about safety also in London.

Many spoke of the task of organising against the far right seeming almost 'impossible' as the attacks are happening on so many fronts - from attacks on asylum seekers accommodations to demonising communities to trying to ban carnival to increased calls for stops and searches in areas with higher numbers of racialised peoples.

Some spoke of how precarious they are as migrants - how moving here meant experiencing alienation and racism for the first time, and being penalised very harshly for things outside of your control. **One person shared how their friend who has been waiting for a passport now has to have their life on hold until 2031 due to a mistake in a form**, and how unfair it is that as a young person who has grown up here they don't have proper access to higher education, the chance to travel, or to live as they wish.

Many spoke of how **the Hostile Environment policies have bled into other parts of public life**, making it increasingly insufferable for migrants to live in the UK.

'Face recognition at carnival but no one got arrested for attacking the police at the far right demos'

'It gets to the point where you gotta call it what it is. Racism.'

'Migrant policies are designed to humiliate those in the system and break their spirits'

ORGANISING FOR PALESTINE
AND GLOBAL JUSTICE

Many of the people we spoke with mentioned Palestine in particular as something they are angry about and taking action on. They spoke about **feeling silenced and constrained in being able to talk about Palestine in their schools and workplaces,** and worry about the ability to take action on Palestine broadly in an increasingly hostile political landscape.

People with recent family experience of war and displacement spoke about recognising their families and struggles in Palestine, and speaking out and taking action because it is something they also have been through even though they are not Palestinian themselves.

Many spoke about **the moral duty to speak out about genocide,** and about how we need to be disciplined in boycotting and keeping pressure going. They spoke about how the racism and violence we are seeing in Palestine but also in Sudan and elsewhere will 'happen here too' and how shocking it has been to see international norms and systems break in real time.

A lot of people also mentioned Palestine without going into too much detail about it - like just saying the thing will make those in conversation understand why it is important. **A signifier for violence, displacement, racism, double-standards,** and breakdown of norms which can also be seen in other areas of political life.

One person also talked about how polluting terrorism data in the UK with Palestine Action (a now proscribed group) will have a long-term impact on being able to track terrorism activity in the UK and how dangerous that is.

COMMUNITY SAFETY
IN SOUTH LONDON

'We should talk about young people's right to loiter without being criminalised.'

Due to the nature of our work, the vast majority of people we spoke with either lived, worked, or had family in and around South London. We also **spoke with traders on Brixton Station Road,** the street we are based on, who shared their views on safety and the community.

One issue shared by people across generations is a worry about what is perceived as **more public and rampant use of substances** on the streets. Young people spoke of other students using in their schools without anyone intervening, traders spoke of people using outside of their shops and openly on the streets. Many shared they feel intimidated by this and feel unsafe, with one young person speaking on how **they can never predict what will happen** making it hard to come up with good safety strategies for getting around the area.

Others spoke of policing - with **police restricting people's movement and organising** but not being seen as proactive on issues of safety. Many racialised community members shared being targeted by police and how they have seen their friends and family members channeled into the prison system rather than be met with empathy and humanity when they started being drawn into illegal networks.

Traders in particular spoke about the **unpredictability of behaviour of unhoused and mentally unwell community members,** meaning they were put in harm's way during working hours, that they felt unsupported in their business, and saw very little future in the community. One person spoke about fighting to stay in 2015 after his neighbours were evicted, and how he deeply regrets it now as he had 'sunk his life's savings' into a business which is no longer viable due to this deteriorating safety situation. Others spoke about having adapted their work to suit new safety habits - for example getting rid of cash payments, having more staff in their unit, but that it has come at a high cost.

Finally, **many people shared different views on public space** - with some young people speaking about the right to exist and loiter without being seen as a threat, and how violence which is often associated with young people is actually just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to young people's safety in the community. Most people shared feelings of worry about how these situations are affecting young people in the community, including **young people expressing concern for the wellbeing of their peers** that are witnessing a lot of distressing situations and violence when just walking to and from school.

CLASSISM AND INEQUALITY
THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

"It's not normal' what we're living through. Capitalism isn't normal!"

Economic insecurity, the cost of living crisis, and classism were issues affecting many in our community.

For some, it manifests as a feeling of constant precarity and stress - **worrying about how you will cope**, worrying about your family, worrying about whether you will always feel like this. One person described it as feeling they have sacrificed their chance at being a child - always studying and working hard because they are really worried about their and their family's future.

Others described it as a marker you can't get away from and take with you - **a feeling of alienation, a feeling of being treated differently and seen differently because you are poor** - one which only gets worse if you are also racialised, long-term sick, or have other markers of difference.

Many spoke of the harsh realities of living in **a system which doesn't give you enough to get by on,** and how impossible it is to live on universal credit while also renting for example. One person mentioned the use of bailiffs - how families across the UK are being publicly shamed and put in violent situations over debts to council and other actors in a time of cost of living crisis.

Finally, many spoke about how **this issue cuts across race but that some people are using it to fuel racism** - and how hard it is to build solidarity when you think others would rather 'burn the world down than acknowledge the humanity of people of colour'.

HOUSING AND GENTRIFICATION
FALLING STANDARDS, RISING PRICES

'Overcrowding poor young people is a crime against their mental health and future prospects.'

Housing and gentrification issues brought up addressed the insecurity in the housing sector, the poor and falling standards, the power landlords in the system, and how **those who are poor suffer the most in the existing system.**

They spoke about how temporary housing solutions, whether they are to house care leavers, people fleeing violence, people in the migration system, or otherwise are a real threat to health and wellbeing for people.

A lot of **young people talked about how overcrowding has negatively impacted their life** and their housing situation being a source of stress, anxiety, and shame for them. For some, it was really hard for them to speak about the issue as it is something they still live in. Some spoke about how difficult it is for them to transition into adulthood as they can't move out, and some said they are considering moving out of London against their will because of how expensive the housing situation is.

When it comes to the planning system, those who talked about it spoke about how racist and classist these systems are and how **they are being weaponised against communities in Brixton.** One trader we spoke with said that they (developers and the council) will not be happy until they have 'push[ed] everyone poor and not white out of the community'.

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THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
IGNORANT STEREOTYPES & WAKE UP CALLS

' [I] wish [we] had the resources richer and whiter schools do so they could reach their full potential, and was sad to see [our] teachers burnt out from bad working conditions.'

Schools continue to be a topic of concern for many of the young people in our movement.
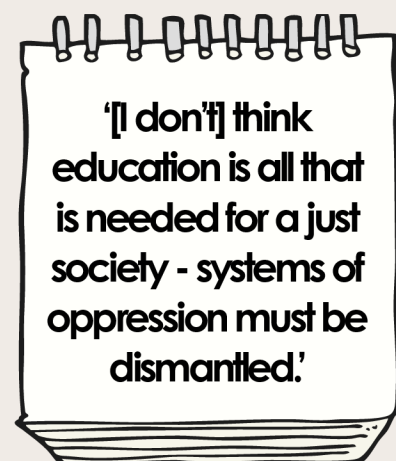
Many spoke of how their school system enforced and amplified injustices in wider society - how their **schools amplified ignorant stereotypes,** treated pupils differently based on their race, mistreated racialised pupils, and systemically failed poorer, disabled, and racialised students.

Many spoke of how these **instances of injustice are their wakeup call and drive to take action** - but also as a source of painful memories in spaces that are meant to be for your benefit and growth.

Many adults we spoke with talked about having to take on more work to ensure the young people in their lives were not left behind - and **how hard it is for young people who don't have adults championing them the same way.**

Some also spoke of pockets of change and positivity - of under-resourced but **committed teachers making changes** to policies and curriculum which ended up making a huge difference in pupil's lives. Many shared they wished these teachers were championed better and their sadness in losing those allies when they left the education sector.

Neurodivergence in particular was discussed as an under-served identity in schools - and how when it interacted with race, it is even less understood and addressed.

'[I don't] think education is all that is needed for a just society - systems of oppression must be dismantled.'

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MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING
PART ONE

'Everything is seen as a 'mental health issue' when actually, most people don't feel good or happy because they live under capitalism and their lives are worse than the lives of generations before them.'

People we spoke with veered a lot between anger and despair. Some even went as far to say that their anger and their sense of right has diminished, turned into cynicism about the state of the world due to experiences of racism, of transphobia, of ableism, and of how difficult it is to get by as a person regardless of age anymore.

A lot of younger people we spoke with spoke about being angry but also scared and worried about the world, with some saying they are finding it **hard to regulate their emotion and turn it into action.** Others spoke about being burnt out, how the pressures of finding work and a decent housing situation or going through a schooling system that is hostile to you has meant it is hard to keep organising.

People over the age of 30 we spoke with spoke of isolation and worried about what this means for young people. They also spoke of feeling alone and isolated in what they are doing - finding it hard to maintain friends and find support, particularly those who are raising children with special needs spoke of isolation as a real issue for them.

Some people spoke about how **'wellbeing' shows up as a political concept which means everything and nothing.** They spoke about how there is a conversation about mental health, but how some communities are still not allowed to tap into negative emotions outside of a private space. They spoke of how anger in particular is allowed to show up and who it is seen as being for.

Disabled and Black women we spoke with talked about being seen as irrational if angry, Black men talked about being seen as problematic, racialised people spoke of it as something that was broadly negative if explicitly stated in mainstream spaces. Queer Black and racialised people, when seeking mental health support, spoke about **having to 'pick and choose' what struggles to bring up** as spaces are not safe for them to be their full authentic selves and heal as whole people.

'I think it is really hard to stay hopeful and positive about making change when we are in a big backlash moment.'

'Used to have fire in her but doesn't any more'

Advocacy Academy

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING
PART TWO

Many talked about the experience of accessing support services.

How **these services don't meet people where they are at**, particularly for young people, and are overly prescriptive (for example: prioritising Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) treatments over more expensive but impactful counselling treatments) and how it is often even harder to access if your first language is not English.

Many people connected **experiencing 'organising burnout' with deteriorating mental health,** and how systems of inequality manifest as depression, isolation, and apathy for them. They pointed to how the demonisation of communities of colour has made them feel unsafe and unwelcome in their communities, and the negative impact this has had on their wellbeing.

Finally, most agreed **this issue cannot be tackled individually** – they spoke of anger and despair being cyclical, spoke of making space for collective grief, and allowing for community to be nurtured and leaning on each other to feel better and act for a better tomorrow together.

'I think it is really hard to stay hopeful and positive about making change when we are in a big backlash moment.'

'Used to have fire in her but doesn't any more'

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QUEER LIBERATION AND SAFETY
THE FIGHT FOR LGBTQ+ RIGHTS IN THE UK

Many are speaking with heaviness and sadness about what is happening to LGBTQ+ rights in the UK, but none more than trans young people.

One person mentioned how hard it is to navigate safety thinking for themselves in their everyday life, and the disappointment of seeing safe spaces disappear and feeling left behind.

Another person spoke about how **anti-queer sentiment means that a huge part of UK culture is under threat** - for example drag culture which has been around for thousands of years in the UK.

One person talked about **how isolated they were growing up** - but also how they found community and education with other people in other places online, and the importance of nurturing those spaces in times of LGBTQ+ backlash.

THE STATE OF THE WORLD
AND FAILING POLITICAL SYSTEMS

'[I am] tired and don't think there is a window of change in the UK. If things change, they only change for the worse.'

The people we spoke with felt a sense of anger, hurt, and betrayal by the political systems.

They believe career politicians are working to advance their own interests and careers, not common ones. They are worried about the future of the country and the world, and they think people in power are making bad decisions. Even those who are working from the inside of the system that we spoke with, for example engaging in policy or electoral politics, speak about a **narrowness in analysis and a system which rewards factionalism** and short-termist decision-making.

Many are angry about the Labour Party - who people name as having shattered the broader left, deceived people into electing them, and are seen as **fanning the fires of racism, xenophobia, and transphobia to win electoral points.**

A lot of people spoke about having very little hope in the electoral system and those engaging with it, and **wanting a fresh start with people who are not invested in a broken system**. Others spoke about cautious optimism in alternatives, but worried the system is designed to stay broken. They also spoke about how the shrinking space to act and organise is making them fear for what future governments might do to democratic organising.

Finally, we heard many reflections about the state of the world broadly – and how Trump and others like him are continuously **putting vulnerable communities, such as migrant and trans communities, at risk of violence.**

'Going into and engaging with the political system feels like a sepsis shock to your system - you quickly realise how out of touch people making decision are'

'Makes you feel helpless - coz what are you meant to do? You get angry like fuck this. It's smart by the government - because it sucks the fight out of everyone.'

ADVOCACY ACADEMY

WHAT'S COMING NEXT??
OUR BIG COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN

Over autumn 2025, The Advocacy Academy's Members have been developing three potential campaign strategies for the movement to organise around.

In December, the Member-led Governance (MLG) group are hosting The Big Vote, where our Membership will come together to vote on the campaign that they want to work on.

Check out our socials for more information on how you can take action as part of the community campaign that is chosen!!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ANGER
AND FOR YOUR HOPE

ADVOCACY
ACADEMY

We want to say a huge **thank you to the 107 people** that shared their rage and hope with us over teas, walks in the sunshine and Zoom. Our relationships are what this work is all about and the action we take together is the fuel that keeps us moving.

We hope that you feel seen in how we've documented our BIG LISTEN and that you feel valued as a vital part of the TAA movement.

We cannot wait for the next year of getting organised with you!!

Thank you to all of the young people in our movement, you are the best leaders we know. **Thank you to everyone** who chooses to invest their money, time and resource into our organising work as this is not possible without you.

Finally, a huge **thank you to Hiba Ahmad** for compiling all 107 conversations into this wonderful report, you are the best of us!!