



Rent-Move-Repeat

Participatory Action Research Approach

Report written by Toynbee Hall
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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Rent-Move-Repeat is a Toynbee Hall Participatory Action Research (PAR) project exploring how renting can be made better for young people in East London. Along with a project report highlighting key findings and actions, we summarise our Participatory Action Research process and learning in this document.

1. Building a team

This project started with Toynbee Hall's research and policy team actively recruiting a group of peer researchers. Over the course of 2.5 years, 23 peer researchers have taken part in the research, and a core group of seven in the co-design of recommendations and action phase. Peer researchers were all aged between 18-30, and either currently rent from a private landlord in East London, or have done so within the last five years.

2. Developing the project focus

The research and policy team and peer researchers worked together to decide the project focus. The project group felt that while tackling affordability would make the largest impact in preventing homelessness amongst young people, this was not achievable within the scope of the project. Instead, it was decided that understanding how young people might be better supported to access and understand their housing rights would be the most effective focus for the project.

3. Data collection and analysis

The peer researchers decided that surveys and interviews were the best methods to use and worked with the research and policy team to decide on questions and wording. 80 young private renters filled out our survey and 14 took part in in-depth interviews. The peer researchers and the research manager came together to analyse the findings.

4. Choosing a focus for action

The peer researchers reviewed key findings from their research and generated initial proposals based on recommendations from participants and learning from their own experiences. A SWOT analysis helped to decide the strongest ideas. Our steering group member, the Private Renting Policy Officer from London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Housing Team, helped the group to assess the strongest proposals to take into the action phase.

5. Co-designing with renters and landlords

The peer researchers ran a sharing workshop with landlords to get their input into which proposals should be developed through the co-design process. Based on their feedback, the renters ran three further proposal development workshops with landlords.

Co-design workshops with renters and landlords:

1. Improving access to advice and information

2. Better communication between renters, landlords and letting agencies

3. Tackling bad practice by letting and property management agencies

The team took the proposals they developed with input from landlords to the steering group for feedback on feasibility. The steering group consisted of representatives from the Greater London Authority, local authorities, housing charities, renters rights organisations and a university housing team. The peer researchers discussed and refined their proposals based on the steering group's recommendations and shared the refined recommendations with the landlords for them to have final input into the co-design process.

6. Taking action

From January 2021 until September 2021, the peer researchers took action to share their learning with a variety of stakeholders and attempt to influence policy and practice.

7. Learning from the approach

A variety of learning has emerged about the Participatory Action Research process. Toynbee Hall have been developing the Participatory Action Research approach since 2017. We have been learning a lot through each project. This report is an attempt to reflect on our learning from the Rent-Move-Repeat project, with the aim to inform our future work and to share with other practitioners working on co-producing research and policy work.

For more information about our approach, please contact research@toynbeehall.org.uk.



23 Peer researchers involved



18 Research training workshops delivered



80 Surveys completed



14 Interviews carried out



5 Landlord-renter workshops held



14 Actions taken



14 Landlords consulted



34 Organisations supporting the project

1. Building a team

This project started with Toynbee Hall's research and policy team actively recruiting a group of peer researchers. A team of 23 peer researchers were involved across the research and policy influencing process.

They were recruited through diverse networks, including Queen Mary University, Tower Hamlets Housing Options Service, housing and homelessness charities, local youth organisations and volunteering websites. Peer researchers were recruited using two main criteria: they had to be aged 18-30, and they had to be currently, or within the last five years, renting from a private landlord in East London.

A key aim of the project was to understand how action taken within the private rental sector could reduce homelessness amongst young people. However, we realised in early conversations with the initial group of peer researchers that some

young people didn't consider themselves at risk of homelessness, even in situations where they were. For instance, some members of the group had considered their ability to sofa surf, or move to other parts of the country to stay with friends, evidence of their not being at risk of homelessness. Accordingly, we decided to frame our recruitment around whether young people had experienced difficulties in renting – in this way, we were able to recruit young people who may not have self-selected otherwise. This framing brought together a group who had faced a number of different issues whilst renting in the private sector, with diverse backgrounds and experience. Some discussed being rejected from housing due to being employed on zero hours contracts; others brought up their struggles with illegal behaviour on the part of landlords or letting agents, and how to challenge it; problems with deposits and contracts were also common. Most noted that these situations could have a significant impact on their mental and financial health.

Our peer researchers were aged between 21 and 30, came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and there was a fairly equal gender balance. Most of the group rented privately in Tower Hamlets.

Approximately half of the group were studying, with the others employed on a part-time or full-time basis. The peer researchers were joined by two experienced researchers and a policy manager to train, support and guide them. Training received by the peer researchers throughout the project ensured that the project was well developed and relevant safeguarding, confidentiality and ethical standards were met.

We worked together to design and implement each stage of the project. In the research phase, there were 18 training workshops and 3 group field trips, alongside one-to-one support for peer researchers where required. Additional support came from a steering group made up of experts in the field.

2. Developing the project focus

“It upsets me that renting is quite expensive, bad value for money, not very well regulated [...] I was and am excited about the prospect of effecting positive change” – peer researcher

We began with a broad question: how can the rental sector be improved to prevent young people experiencing homelessness? As a group, we spent time exploring the problems the peer researchers had faced whilst renting. Five key areas which arose in discussion were: access to information and support about renting, affordability, the quality of housing, discrimination in the market, and relationships with landlords or letting agents. We recognised that whilst intervention was needed in all of these areas, the time restraints of the project would require us to narrow our focus.

Our prioritisation utilised the following framework:

- the impact the issue might have on mitigating risk of homelessness;
- how imperative it was that change was made in this area;
- consideration of work already being done on the issue by other organisations;
- our suitability as a group to do research on this issue;
- the potential for co-designing with landlords in the action phase of the project.

As a key aspect of Participatory Action Research (PAR) is using research to bring about community-driven change, we all agreed that we wanted the change we would work towards to be realisable given the scope and scale of our project. Whilst we agreed that tackling affordability would make the largest impact in preventing homelessness among

young people, we also recognised that larger structural changes to the market were required in order to make change, and that sustained campaigning efforts which were not achievable within the scope and scale of our project would likely be required.

Reflecting on our own experiences, we decided that understanding how young people might be better supported to access and understand their housing rights would be a useful and fruitful focus of our research. Several peer researchers had struggled with this problem: one of our group had not realised that as a lodger their rights differed (to being a tenant) before renting with a live-in landlord; another had been unaware that their eviction notice was served incorrectly. Most of our group had not understood their housing rights until they were put in unacceptable positions, and those who had better knowledge reported not feeling comfortable exercising those rights. It was felt that this area was one in which our research and subsequent action could make a significant contribution to supporting young people in the private rental sector.

3. Data collection and analysis

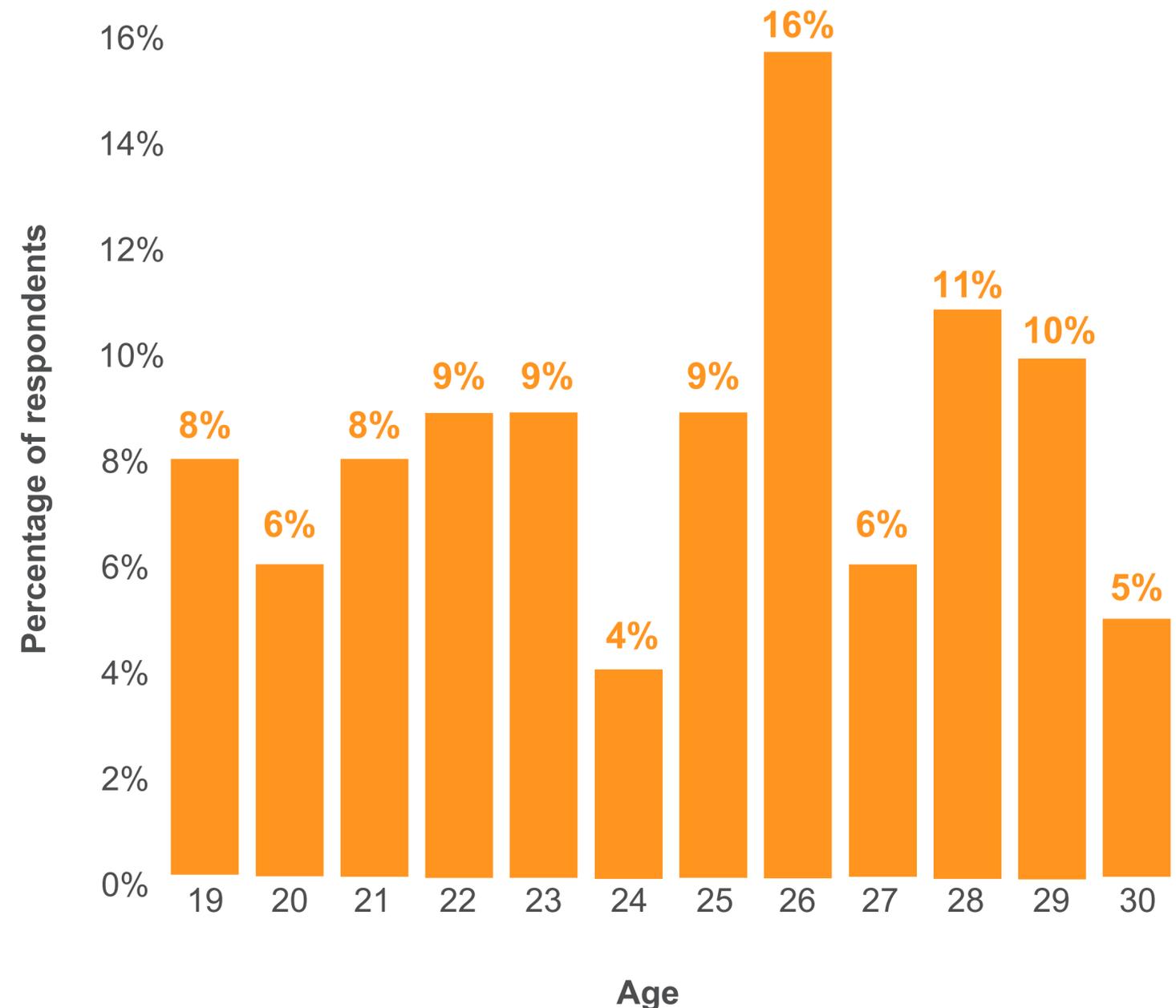
Surveys

The first phase of data gathering through the survey was completed primarily online, as we recognised this would be the most effective way of reaching our target group.

A small number were completed in person at Toynbee Hall’s Advice Centre. Our peer researchers shared the survey widely using their personal networks, primarily using social media; the research and policy team also assisted with distribution using our networks including advice, youth, homelessness, and housing organisations. The diverse personal networks of our group supported us to reach an audience who did not engage, or faced challenges in engaging, with advice providers and other support. We completed 80 surveys in total. Please see table and chart on survey respondents’ background information.

Background	Survey respondents
Gender	45% male, 54% female
Employment	59% employed full-time, 10% employed part-time, 26% full-time students, 4% part-time students, 8% self-employed, 5% unemployed
Ethnicity	56% White British, 24% White (Other), 4% White Irish, 2% Mixed ethnicity, 9% Asian/Asian British, 4% Black/Black British, 1% Arab
Age	See chart for age distribution

Age of Survey Respondents



Whilst our research focus was on East London boroughs, we recognised that online distribution would allow us to reach other young people across London. Many young people, including some of our peer researchers, have been forced out of East London due to price concerns, and we felt it was important to capture their views in this research. We agreed that the expanded geographical focus of our sample would help us build a stronger evidence base. 71 survey respondents were renting in London, and 9 were not currently renting in London but had done so in the last 5 years. There were a fairly equal number of participants from East London and other parts of London.

Our survey findings were co-analysed as a group. In the first instance, the research and policy team cleaned and visualised the quantitative data and compiled the qualitative data from the survey. This anonymised dataset was then shared with our group of peer researchers. Over a number of weeks we discussed each graph and qualitative question in turn, taking particular note of findings we found interesting and surprising. This allowed us to shape the interview questions for the next stage of research. For example, as a group we were particularly interested in exploring young people's aspirations for their housing. We then added a question on that in the interview guide.

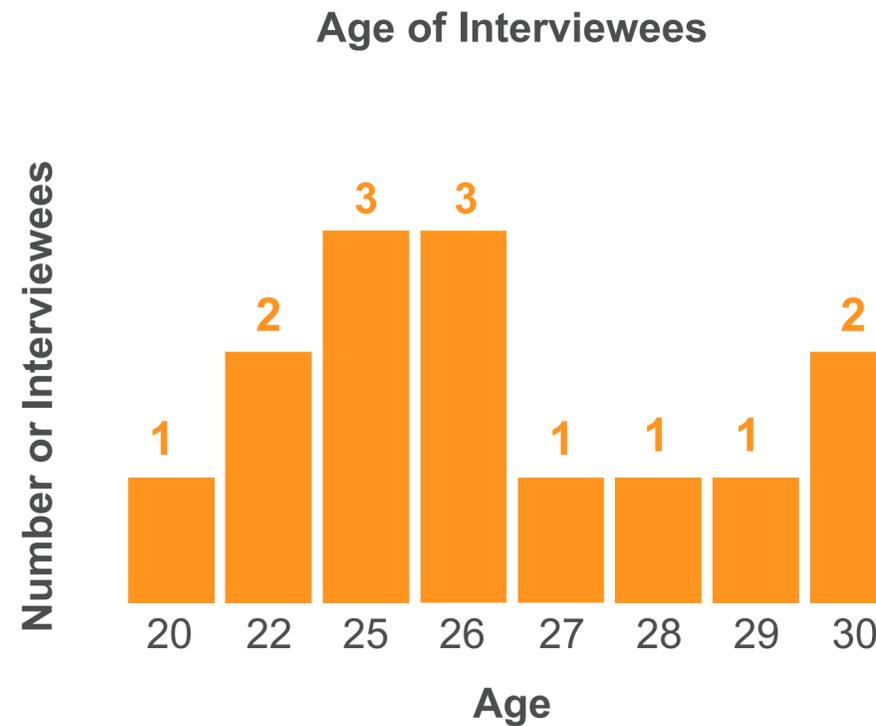


Interviews

For the interview stage of the research, we strengthened our East London evidence base by reaching out primarily to young people renting in East London.

14 in-depth interviews in total were conducted, with 11 of these currently renting in East London and three elsewhere in London. This recruitment was done via our peer researchers' own networks as well as links with local youth organisations.

Background	Interviewees
Gender	57% male, 43% female
Employment	42% employed full-time, 7% employed part-time, 29% full-time students, 14% self-employed, 7% unemployed
Ethnicity	64% White British, 21% White (Other), 7% Asian or Asian British, 7% Turkish
Age	See chart for the age distribution



We used thematic analysis to analyse our interview findings. Peer researchers were encouraged to take notes and reflect on key points made by interviewees whilst they conducted interviews. These notes were used to discuss findings during a group session, where we shared and reflected on our various

interviews and their points of similarity and contrast. Several key themes emerged from the discussion.

The research and policy team then conducted thematic analysis on the interview data with the guidance of these key themes. We then met as a group to finalise the analysis, shape recommendations, and discuss our next steps in the action phase of the project.

4. Choosing a focus for action

The peer researchers reviewed key findings from their research and generated initial proposals based on recommendations from participants and learning from their own experiences.

A SWOT analysis helped to decide the strongest ideas. The Private Renting Policy Officer from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Housing Team helped the group to assess the strongest proposals to take into the co-design process.



5. Co-designing with renters and landlords

The renter-landlord co-design workshops were built into initial project proposal by the Toynbee Hall research and policy team. of discussion by participants in our research. An element of renting which had a surprisingly prominent place in respondents' comments were the other people they lived with.

The premise for including both landlords and tenants in solution and proposal development was that success in tackling intractable issues is dependent on insight and input from all parties. We also wanted to test a hypothesis that the prevailing narrative around renters' and landlords' interests always being in direct opposition was potentially flawed, and itself acting as a barrier to creating win-win solutions in the private rented sector.

However, the research and policy team were aware of the need for careful preparation to manage the inter-personal dynamics between landlords and private renters. It was necessary to ensure both parties had an equally powerful voice, that harmful renter-landlord dynamics exposed in the research were not replicated, and that participants with particularly difficult experiences were not re-traumatised. As the private renters were considered the least powerful stakeholders, the research and policy team designed the workshops with them to create an environment that felt safe.

To prepare for successful co-design, the renters discussed and agreed to the following:

Why work with landlords?

The research and policy team ran a workshop with the renters to discuss the pros and cons of working with landlords. Some of the reasons agreed to include “to understand landlords’ perspectives”, “our chance to tell a different narrative”, “to educate landlords about tenants’ experience” and “come to a shared understanding of responsibilities and rights”.

Should we aim to work with reputable or disreputable landlords?

At the beginning of the research process, some members of the group said that they would find it difficult to work with landlords who are dismissive of the issues or treated tenants badly. However, at the point of workshop design, a core group of peer researchers had been working together for over a year, and felt that as a group, with the support of research findings and the Toynbee Hall team, they would be interested in challenging landlords who brought these views.

The group agreed to run a sharing session with landlords, see if there were any unexpected challenges from their point of view that could be tackled that the group had not considered, and to test out what the group dynamics would be like. This workshop would also act as a filtering exercise. Landlords who renters felt were disrespectful or abusive could be “weeded out”.

Should we co-design the focus together or set the frame of reference ourselves?

The group decided to have an initial workshop (see above) to share research findings and initial ideas with landlords and get any early feedback on other solutions the landlords felt would be helpful. Ultimately the renters decided which proposals to co-design after landlord feedback, though one new proposal from landlords was taken on which was to explore how to improve letting agencies.

“We need to get landlords focused on tenant issues a bit more, and then get their opinion on solutions. Often landlords forget that many other landlords are not as considerate as themselves. Sharing our findings with landlords and getting a barometer would help: ‘This is what we think the problem is, how could we tackle them. These are some of our ideas, what do you think about them?’ Then (we can) refine what we want to engage them on.” - peer researcher

How should the workshops be facilitated?

The renters agreed that the research and policy team would chair meetings and support conflict resolution but that all other roles such as facilitation, note-taking, chat monitoring and discussion would be rotated within the group.

Recruitment of landlords

The group agreed on wording for a leaflet to be circulated through Toynbee Hall’s networks to recruit East London landlords.

Recruitment was successfully completed through landlord forums and QMUL Housing’s network of landlords providing student accommodation. The possibility of researchers recruiting through their friends and colleagues was discussed and renters agreed not to do this to prevent unexpected/unhelp repercussions for the researchers. It was also decided that landlords would be paid the same incentives as peer researchers to participate. This decision was made to honour one of Toynbee Hall’s key principles of co-production - “Everyone is equal and has a valuable contribution to make”.

The online workshops

Initial workshop

The team hosted an initial sharing workshop took place with 13 landlords:

The peer researchers shaped a presentation to share findings and agreed open questions for landlords in attendance like ‘Did any of these findings surprise you?’ and ‘What is your perspective on the issues raised?’

Renters facilitated discussions on the two key areas of focus:

- Improving communication, accountability and transparency between letting agents, landlords and private renters so rights can be exercised;
- Making sure landlords/private renters can both access good advice resources and improving access to personalised advice for renters.

Following the initial workshop, the peer researchers shared reflections and agreed that:

- At some point we need to “fix the options” for the landlords, and keep in mind this project is focused on the problems for renters. They may not like everything and that’s ok.
- There were fewer renters than landlords at the session. Everyone felt comfortable and not worried about being “outnumbered”, they were happy to have new landlords join the next session as long as they caught up with discussions so far in advance.
- The group decided to expand their initial focus to put some “dreaming time” with landlords to think about the idea letting agency. They also decided to discuss one big idea for each workshop and have space to discuss some of the smaller ones too.

Subsequent workshops

- Workshop 1 – Advice website/hub
- Workshop 2 – Communication portal
- Workshop 3 – Not for Profit Letting agent
- Workshop with steering group to sense-check recommendations so far
- Workshop to share recommendations with landlords

Preparation

We prepared for the sessions together, over Microsoft Teams at first but then via email once the format was familiar. We adapted our approach after the first meeting, where the first step was to have an open discussion about possible solutions to check we hadn't missed anything from the landlords' perspective. For subsequent workshops, the team shared their "big idea" and then landlords shared any other thoughts afterwards.

Roles

Renters had different roles at the sessions such as chair, facilitator, chat monitor, agreement/disagreement monitor and someone summarising learning points. We had recruited a volunteer housing expert who offered support in clarifying legal positions but also challenging participants who inadvertently got the law wrong in discussions.

Building consensus in the co-design process

For each of the "big ideas", we built in the landlord's feedback to our proposals on how the ideas would work well for them and looked for where there was consensus amongst them. There was full consensus in some areas, for example with the not-for-profit property management agency, where each party could easily specify areas of common interest to improve the experience (for example, no pressure to sign contracts without having time to look at them). Renters and landlords were in broad agreement. However, there often was not full consensus even amongst landlords about the key features of the other two "big ideas" (Online Tenancy Portal and Advice and Information Hub) or at what level they should be implemented (locally, at a GLA level, in a social enterprise etc.). In these cases, landlords contributed ideas and alerted us to risks of these ideas being adopted by landlords depending on how we pursued each idea.

After workshop reviews

After each workshop, the team stayed on the call to review how the session went, including any interesting learning and any problems with facilitation.

Steering group session

We took feedback from the GLA, Crisis, renters' rights groups, a local university and a local council on the feasibility of the proposals after the co-design sessions.

The renters reflected on feedback from these stakeholders and adapted the proposals they had made

Final session with landlords

A final session was held with the landlords to discuss the adaptations based on steering group feedback. We also did a show of hands of which landlords would support us for each action if we were to decide to pursue it in the next stage.

6. Taking action

Participatory Action Research requires action to follow on from peer research to push for positive social change. The learning and policy influencing stage for this project was six months.

The peer researchers and the research and policy team worked together to decide how to prioritise actions to take. The peer researchers developed a VOST (Vision, Objective, Strategy and Tactics) to guide the work plan.

Vision: An East London where young private renters can easily access information and advice to overcome the challenge of renting as a young person; for young renters to have a strong voice in shaping solutions that fix the systemic insufficiencies of the rental market.

Objective:

- Giving them information and tools to improve their private renting experience.
- Supporting them to manage their relationship with their landlords.
- Making it standard practice that renters should have a voice in decisions made about them.

Strategy

- Single point of access advice, information and record-keeping hub, co-designed by young people and accompanying app to support them and therefore relationship with landlords.
- Promoting need for co-designed content and communication strategies at local authority/regional/national level
- Promoting importance of renter involvement in policy-making.

You can see some of the tactics they used to achieve these objectives in the policy influencing timeline.

Policy Influencing Timeline	
Feb 2019	Tower Hamlets Private Renters Forum: Presented projects to members
August 2019	Pizza and policy meeting on deposit reform: An evening with renters and housing experts to put together a joint response to MHCLG's call for evidence on deposit reform
March 2020	Research findings launch: Peer researchers present to stakeholders from Greater London Authority, advice services, renters rights forum and young people's advocacy groups and lead discussions on initial proposals to improve the sector
June 2020 (Pandemic response)	COVID-19 renter-landlord workshops: Peer researchers organise workshops with landlords and renters to understand whether steps to mitigate harm to both landlords and renters during the pandemic are proving effective. An article is published in the East London Guardian, and can be found here, as well as a blog post on the findings Peer researchers co-created a communication strategy aimed at young private renters and other groups with barriers to accessing advice: Toynbee Hall and peer researchers work with Tower Hamlets Council and the Tower Hamlets Private Renters Charter Forum to contribute to a short-term communication strategy to make sure all young private renters in Tower Hamlets know where to go to get free housing advice
October 2020	Renters Reform Coalition: Toynbee Hall were invited to join the Renters Reform Coalition. Peer researchers contributed to development of key principles for the coalition and shaped Toynbee Hall's response to decisions within the coalition's work
February 2021	Partnership for Young London's Peer Research Network: Peer researchers shared findings and methodology with third sector stakeholders
April 2021	Website-app development meeting: Peer researchers pitched website/app idea to 9 tech-for-good orgs and funders. They partner with two tech for good innovators to explore next steps in scoping the website-app proposal

<p>May 2021</p>	<p>Housing Quality Network (HQN) conference Peer researchers present as keynote speakers at HQN conference looking at how the sector can better support young people using participatory approaches</p> <p>Festival of Learning Panel: Peer researcher speaks on panel as part of London Funders' Festival of Learning about civil society's response to supporting young people at risk of homelessness during the pandemic</p> <p>Rent-Move-Repeat art piece: Peer researchers are invited to share findings and personal experiences of renting as a form of temporary accommodation to shape the priorities of two prominent charitable funders. The consultant recommends exploring the issues through a creative response. Rent Move Repeat website is designed as a tool to help decision makers understand the impact of temporary nature of private renting on young people</p>
<p>June 2021</p>	<p>Meeting with Shelter teams: Peer researchers shared learning about barriers to advice and information and discuss potential of co-designed information and communication strategies</p>
<p>September 2021</p>	<p>Event on affordability: Peer researchers designed and organised an event with panellists from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, IPPR and Renters Rights' London about what needs to happen to tackle the affordability crisis. This informed the peer researchers' national policy recommendations</p> <p>London Housing Panel: Toynbee Hall's Young Private Renters group were invited to join London Housing Panel. Representatives from the peer research group were interviewed and selected to sit on the London Housing Panel, informing the work of Mayor's team on improving housing in the capital</p>
<p>November 2021</p>	<p>Final event to launch report and proposals: To close this participatory action research, the peer researchers shared the story of their project, and were joined by Polly Neate (Chief Executive of Shelter) and Manny Hothi (Chief Executive of Trust for London) in a panel discussion about the role of young people in tackling the housing crisis</p>

The approach to making decisions and preparing to take part in the above opportunities were guided by Toynbee Hall's principles of co-production (which were co-designed with communities and stakeholders):

- Everyone is equal and has a valuable contribution to make.
- The process is accessible and inclusive with appropriate support for all who wish to take part.
- All interactions are grounded in mutual respect, trust and transparency.
- Everyone receives fair and genuine reward for their participation.
- Regular opportunities for self-reflection and group learning inform the project's evolution.
- The process is appropriately resourced and sustainable.



7. Learnings from the approach

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a radical approach which seeks to challenge the traditional research model and involve communities in research about them.

However, collaborative research is not without its challenges. From the outset of the project it was clear that recruiting peer researchers from groups which were at the highest risk of homelessness would be challenging. We deliberately reached out using a comprehensive network of organisations and sources, from social media and volunteering websites to advice services, charities and homelessness organisations. Whilst this approach did result in a diverse group of peer researchers, it also raised new and unexpected questions.

When we reached out to young people and their support workers from leaving care and youth homelessness services, we realised that few had ever rented privately. Most were homeless as a result of family conflict, and their homelessness most likely to have been prevented through family mediation. Another key issue for these young people was the inaccessibility of the private rental sector: they either could not afford market rents, or faced discrimination from landlords based on their being in receipt of housing benefit. As the focus of our project was around taking action within the

private rental sector to prevent homelessness, an exploration of the barriers to entering the private rented sector was beyond the project's scope. Further research is needed to explore how homeless young people can be best aided to leave supported accommodation, and enter the private rental sector in a sustainable manner.

For those recruited for the project, timing proved a key challenge. Initially, group sessions were trialled to coincide with a concurrent PAR project, but it soon became clear that these timings did not suit the young people we hoped to reach for this project. Meeting times and lengths were adjusted (settling on weekday evenings from 6-8pm) to enable as many from our group to attend as possible. Whilst this increased engagement, shorter sessions resulted in other challenges. For example, this sometimes limited in-depth discussion time on complex issues, and gave less space for perspective sharing and decision-making whilst meeting project deadlines. We often delayed decision-making until the following

week, allowing extended discussions and a more collective consensus. The circumstances of our peer researchers also contributed to issues with engagement. Some faced pressing deadlines at work or during their studies which resulted in their unavailability for certain periods. Their sometimes precarious position as young renters also had an impact: one member was sofa surfing and had to move at short notice; others had to move out of London or even the UK in order to seek employment. This has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.

Building flexibility into the project was essential to allow peer researchers to engage around their other commitments and feel their contributions were valued. Peer researchers valued opportunities to influence decisions and remain connected with the project at the times when physical meetings were not possible, for example through voting or feeding back by email. Allowing flexibility in engagement, as well as an ongoing recruitment process which allowed new members

to join during the course of the project, ensured a continued group dynamic. When working with peer researchers, particularly those who face acute difficulties in their lives, emphasising flexibility is important to sustaining engagement over the longer term – we recommend that other PAR projects take this into consideration and build this into the project from the start.

A key challenge during the action phase of the project was the time needed to build consensus around decisions, to explore and develop new participatory approaches, and to understand the balance of decision-making between the research and policy team and peer researchers. This was most explicit in the decision-making about what actions to take during the final stage of the project. The policy manager put forward an approach to agreeing a small number of actions to take forward based on a prioritising framework. The peer researchers did not want to narrow their focus to this extent. Peer researchers and our housing expert proposed the use of a VOST (Vision, Objective, Strategy and Tactics) framework instead, where a variety of tactics could be taken to achieve the end vision. The impact of this decision was that the capacity of the research and policy team and peer researchers has at times been under pressure, as was the project budget, though an incredible breadth of action has been taken given the resources available.

One unpredicted area of learning was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our approach. This forced the project to pause for six months because the research and policy team felt that it would be more difficult to maintain healthy relationship dynamics between renters and landlords during the co-design phase online. We were able to test whether this was the case through a workshop looking at the effectiveness of the government's pandemic response through focus group with landlords, facilitated by the peer researchers. This workshop reassured us that with good facilitation in-depth discussion was possible and conflicts could be resolved and landlord co-design workshops took place entirely online. The move to online working also forced innovation, mostly led by peer researchers. Whereas before post-it notes and flipchart paper were our key tools for participation, peer researchers encouraged use of Miro boards and interactive online software to innovate new approaches.

There were major benefits to using a PAR approach in this project. Firstly, the perspectives brought by involving those with lived experience were invaluable in shaping and developing the project into one which would be truly beneficial to young people. Without such insight and experiences, it is possible that key areas for development may have been missed. Having young private renters working alongside staff

members on the project also opened up access to other young people through their personal networks.

“As a private renter I feel well placed to do research on people facing the same situation as me.” – peer researcher

Building in both research and action phases in our PAR approach enabled us to develop action based on robust evidence, and use research insights to push for change. Opportunities to influence policy arose from an early stage and continued throughout, and consequently peer researchers were able to produce impact throughout the project.

Co-production requires sharing ownership. By sharing decisions on every step of project development and the allocation of direct costs related to each step, we developed a collective sense of ownership, responsibility and commitment. The 14 items of action developed from this project, the number of presentations delivered by peer researchers, and the fact that the peer researchers want to continue to work together after the funding ends are testaments of our shared sense of commitment.

“I wanted to talk to other young people about their struggles with renting and see if my poor experience was unusual (it wasn’t!). I have had real struggles in renting and I know in many ways I am lucky to have had support – not everyone does and I want to make sure that I am contributing to a goal of having no one experience housing precariousness.”
– peer researcher

“I wanted to help people who were facing problems renting in London and hopefully finding solutions so that renting could be affordable in London.” – peer researcher

There was also a positive impact for the peer researchers themselves. A primary benefit was a greater understanding of their own rights, and knowledge of support and advice services which might assist them in exercising them. We were able to build our groups’ awareness of local housing advice providers, including Toynbee Hall’s Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC). A few members of our group went on to access support from FLAC themselves, helping them to deal with the ongoing difficulties they faced, whilst a few others encouraged friends/family members to do so. In addition, the groups’ discussion of problems experienced in their own rental journeys, and strategies used to cope, formed an element of informal peer support. Some of our group also felt

that the skills they had learnt during the course of the project might assist them in developing their career in the future.

“Other than being a matter close to me, I feel this role could help me with my future career introducing me to the field of research which I’ve never had the chance to explore.”
– peer researcher

Our peer researchers reflected on how their involvement in the project had helped to build their confidence that housing policy could be changed in a positive way through collective action and mobilising research. Many of our group, when they first joined the project, felt that little could be done to make renting better for young people, particularly as they felt that price was the key determinant, and that it would be a factor difficult to influence. Over time, our group realised that we could influence the rental sector through mechanisms other than price, in ways that could be potentially just as impactful.

Toynbee Hall have been developing our Participatory Action Research approach since 2017. We have learned a great deal through each PAR project we undertake. This report is an attempt to reflect on our learning from the Rent-Move-Repeat project, with the aim to inform our future work and to share with other practitioners

working on co-producing research and policy work. We want to encourage more and more institutions – working on both the frontline and/or on policy – to explore taking a PAR approach to identifying and tackling drivers of systemic inequality and unfairness. We hope this report can help practitioners and policy-makers interested in taking a PAR or co-production approach and extend an open invitation to discuss the work in more detail.

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