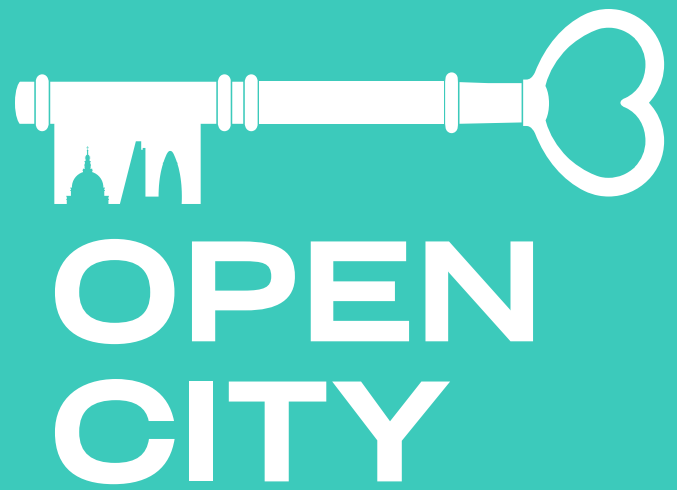


# OPEN CITY SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT

MARCH 2024



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# OPEN CITY SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT ABOUT OPEN CITY

Open City is a charity empowering communities to learn about, feel connected to, and have a role in shaping places where they live. We are on a mission to make the built environment more open, accessible, and equitable. We do this through:

- Our flagship event Open House Festival, opening up and celebrating London and its communities each September
- A year-round young people's programme which includes city-making workshops at primary and special educational needs schools, as well as the award-winning mentoring programme Accelerate for young people traditionally excluded from architecture.
- A year-round programme of events, award-winning podcasts, tours, publications, video reel content and merchandise to democratise public knowledge about cities and the way we live in them
- Supporting, growing and cultivating dialogue across a network of over 60 Open House Festivals around the world, from Lagos to New York.

# PRESIDENT'S PREFACE

## ALBERT WILLIAMSON-TAYLOR

“Open City’s educational programmes, from the world-famous Open House Festival to its life-changing work with young Londoners and year-round podcasts, are critical in shaping the future of the next generation and a more equitable future for our city.”



Albert Williamson-Taylor is co-founder of the design-led, interdisciplinary engineering practice AKT II. He is the first Black engineer to be awarded the IStructE international Gold Medal Award in its 100 years of existence.

# TRUSTEES' FOREWORD

## DEBORAH DENNER

In 2010 the late great designer and then trustee of our charity Jane Priestman wrote the foreword for that year’s Open House Festival guidebook explaining why the organisation had unveiled a new name. “Since 1992” she wrote, the charity had grown to include “research, training, advice and campaigns on the built environment that impact on the whole city.” No more simply a creator of tours and festivals, the newly-re-branded *Open City* would have a role in “education and policy making” as well as “events year round”.

Deborah Denner is an architect and founding director of Frame Projects, a consultancy that champions good design by facilitating design and community review panels.



It was a big step for the young charity but, over a decade on from unveiling our new name, I am delighted that the diversity of Open City’s programme has not dimmed. From podcasts to books to training courses to award-winning young people’s programmes and a better festival than ever, Open City has delivered on its promise to find new ways to have a positive impact on the whole city. I hope you will enjoy exploring that diversity and mission in this report. Many thanks to all the staff, volunteers, friends, donors and sponsors who make this remarkable work possible.



Open City Educator Zafir Ameen speaks at an Open City debate about low wages and low fees in the architecture sector. Photo, Phineas Harper.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PHINEAS HARPER

Phineas Harper is an architecture critic, curator and artist. They were chief curator of the 2019 Oslo Architecture Triennale on the topic of sustainable economics.



It's a true privilege to work for a charity whose programmes are as inspiring and impactful as Open City's. This year I've started pinning quotes from our audience on the office wall to remind the team what a remarkable and important job they are doing. Some of the quotes are so moving in describing the life-changing impact Open City's work has had that it's hard not to well up.

Since last year's social impact study the charity has achieved big things. The Open House Festival saw it's most socially-impactful year since the pandemic with 61% of visitors feeling more connected to London as a result. Our young people's programmes have also

grown, expanding beyond London to Birmingham, and for the first time we've studied the social impact of our year-round tours, training courses, podcasts and publications. Over the last year we enabled an estimated 227,000 visits during the Open House Festival and achieved 91,623 listens of our podcast. We enabled 4,361 people to experience the city directly through our tours programme and supported around 3,000 young Londoners to learn about the built environment via our schools work. We have also reached an eye-watering audience of over one million through Instagram and TikTok! Huge thanks to the team who helped create this report and the rich programmes it describes.

# PUBLIC

Open City delivers year-round public education programmes, most prominently the world-famous London Open House Festival as well as year-round urban walking, cycling and boat tours enabling broad audiences to experience, learn about and feel more connected to places, communities and neighbourhoods.

Our public programmes don't just help people learn about inspiring architecture and heritage, but bring people together, building a sense of belonging and community cohesion across the neighbourhoods where we work.

Image: Open House Festival tour at Somers Town Museum. Photo, Sonny Malhotra.



# PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE FESTIVAL

Open City's largest event of the year, Open House Festival is a city-wide celebration of buildings, communities and neighbourhoods across all 33 London boroughs supporting people of diverse backgrounds to explore and learn about architecture and heritage.

The festival generates huge social value with tens of thousands of people visiting new neighbourhoods for the first time and feeling more connected to London and its communities as a result. This year a stunning 98% of visitors enjoyed their visit to Open House Festival and the same number would recommend the event to their friends.

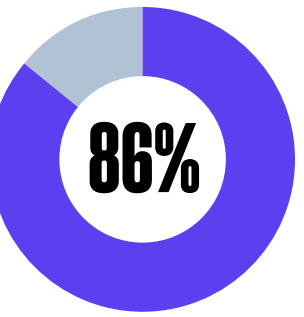
Right: Open House Festival tour at the Royal College of Physicians. Photo, Saul Perryman.



## 227,000

estimated visits to festival sites took place in 2023's Open House Festival.

86% of visitors to Open House Festival have no specialist training in architecture or build environment subjects.



“It is essential, invaluable and a true gift for the people of London.”

Open House Festival 2023 visitor.

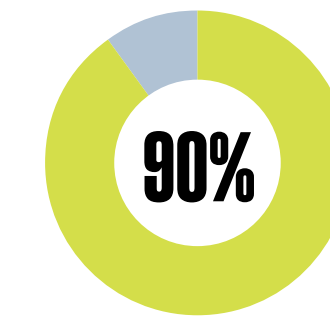
## 710

There were 710 sites in the festival this year including walking tours, housing estates, government buildings and many other places. 90% are not normally open to the public year-round.

## 61%

of Open House Festival visitors said they felt more connected to London as a result of taking part in the festival and 51% said it gave them a more positive view of the capital.

90% of visitors use sustainable transport including cycling and walking to access the festival programme.



## £7 million

estimated direct spend in the London local economy as a result of the festival.

“I felt like a stranger in the city, a newcomer, an immigrant, a refugee. After attending the Open House Festival, my feelings changed significantly. After visiting places that are usually inaccessible, I felt that the City trusts me, is ready to welcome me, and needs my input to protect, celebrate, and promote it.”

An Open House Festival visitor who was recently granted asylum in the UK.

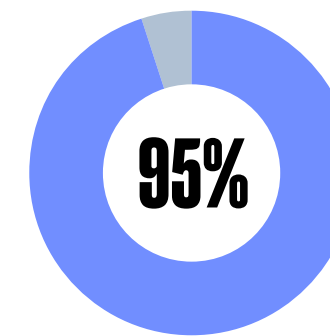
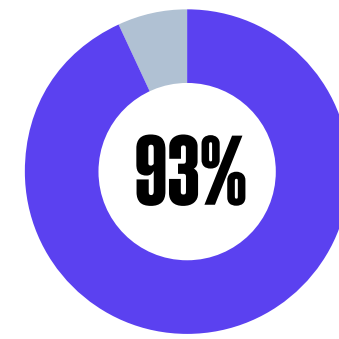
# PUBLIC URBAN TOURS

Open City runs educational and adventurous walking, cycling and boat tours critically exploring the stories behind the urban landscape. In addition to our guide-led tours we publish a series of free audio tours and also printed tours providing a diverse variety of accessible ways for audiences to explore the city in groups or alone.

Over the last year we ran 308 guide-led tours which reached over 4,300 people, sold 4,733 printed tours and connected with 8,018 listeners through our audio tours.

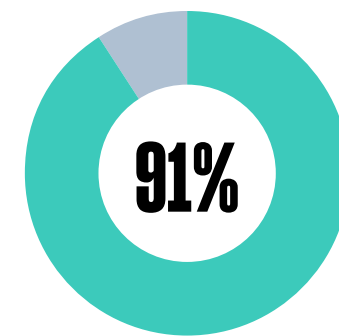
**4,361** Open City tour attendees in 2023 learned something that helped them in their wider work or in interacting with their friends, family or community.

93% of Open City tour attendees say they enjoyed or “very much enjoyed” their experience.



95% of Open City printed tour subscribers say they are enjoying their subscription.

91% of Open City printed tours subscribers say they feel more connected to London and to other people with similar interests as a result of the programme.



“[Open City’s] tours have deepened my knowledge and appreciation of London architecture. A wonderful experience.”



Right: Tour of Brixton during Open House Festival Photo, Sonny Malhotra.

# PUBLIC DIGITAL CONTENT

We use a variety of digital formats to engage audiences where they are. Our award-winning TikTok and Instagram channels are highly successful platforms where we regularly educate large audiences about the stories behind Britain's built landscapes. Open City also runs a successful website with over 300,000 unique visitors a year and a popular weekly email newsletter with approximately 100,000 subscribers.

The charity also publishes a popular weekly podcast, the social impact of which is discussed in the Professional Education section later in this report.

Over **1 million** TikTok and Instagram views over the last year.

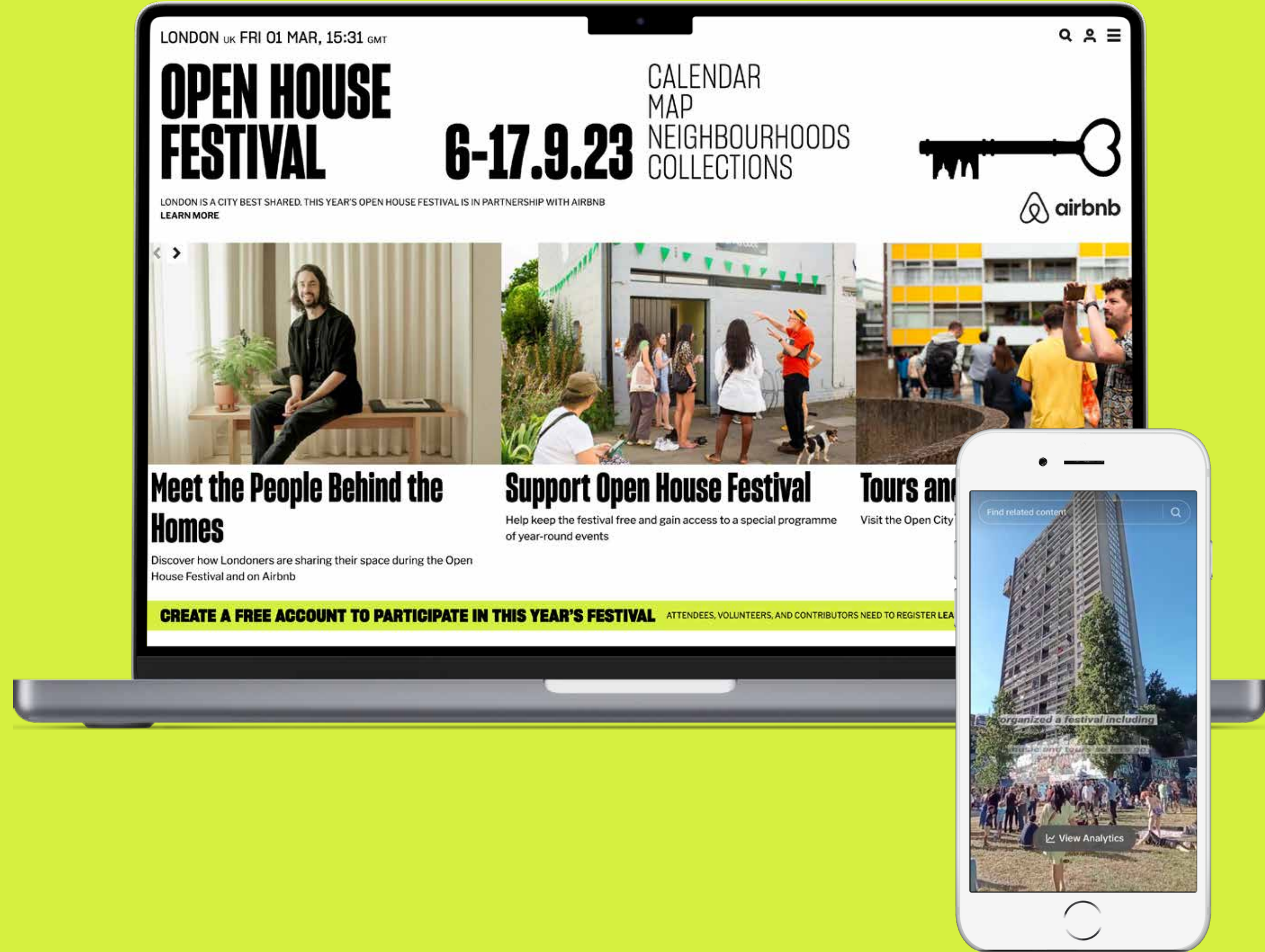
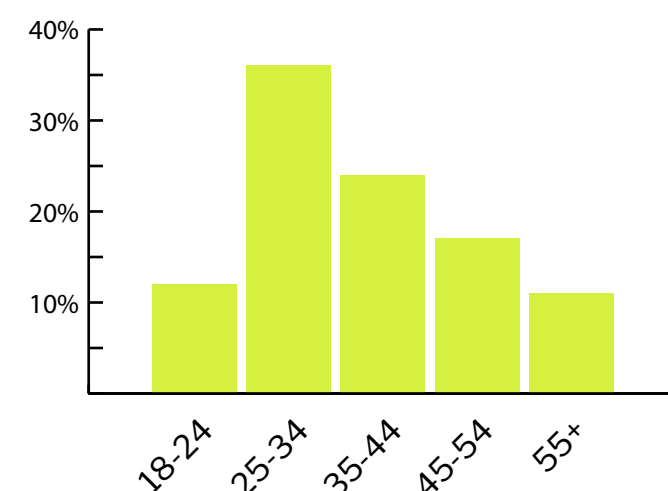
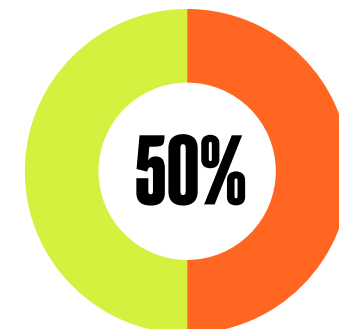
**302,000** unique users of the Open House Festival website.

Around **100,000** weekly email newsletter subscribers.

“We loved the simplicity and consistency of Open City’s account and its strong sense of community and liveliness.”

Judges of Archiboo Awards in which Open City’s video content received first prize.

Open City’s TikTok audience is exactly gender balanced at 50:50 and includes a good spread of different age groups.



Right: Open Hose Festival website and TikTok screenshots.



# YOUNG PEOPLE

Open City runs award-winning education programmes supporting children and young people from under-represented communities to learn about and pursue careers in design and city-making.

Our young people's programmes, help create a more diverse built environment sector and lead to more equitable outcomes for communities.

Image: Open City educational workshop with young people. Photo, Luke O'Donovan.



# YOUNG PEOPLE IT'S MY CITY TOO (SEN)

Too many young Londoners feel excluded from decision-making contributing to an increasing sense of isolation and lack of belonging. The situation is even starker for those with additional access requirements who too often feel dismissed and overlooked.

Open City's It's My City Too programme supports students, teachers and families across multiple Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools by delivering tailored workshops and visits. The programme puts co-creating with young people at the heart of its approach; exploring the city together, making and modelling together and sharing a vision for a more inclusive, equitable and accessible city.

Right: Open City facilitators at the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School.  
Far Right: A young participant of It's My City Too.



“What an opportunity! It was an amazing immersive experience for our SEN learners.”

Teacher, Queen Elizabeth II School”.

**66** students across **3** SEN schools in Westminster and Brent.

**40** teachers and assistants.

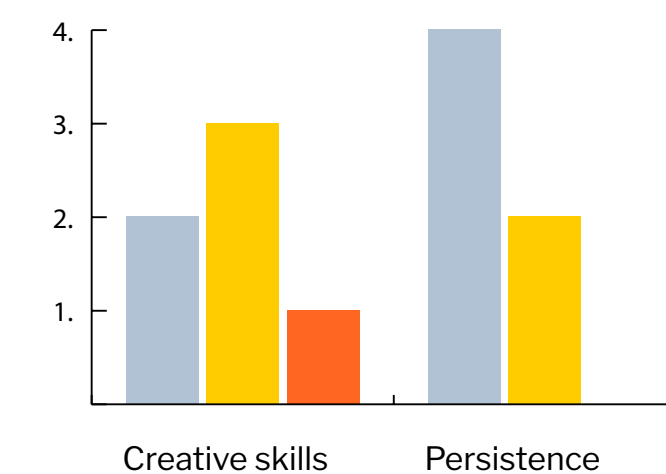
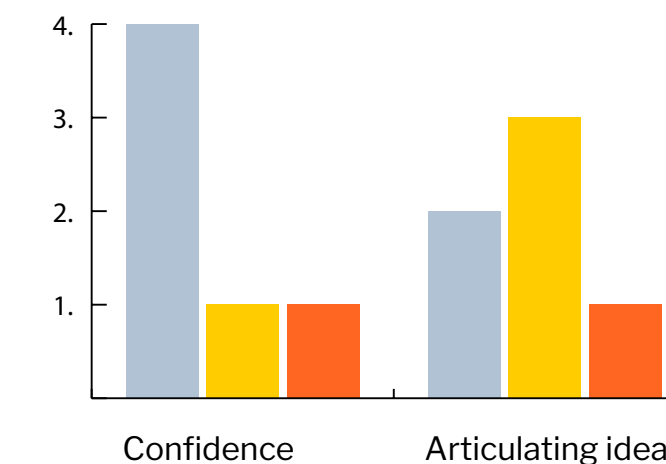
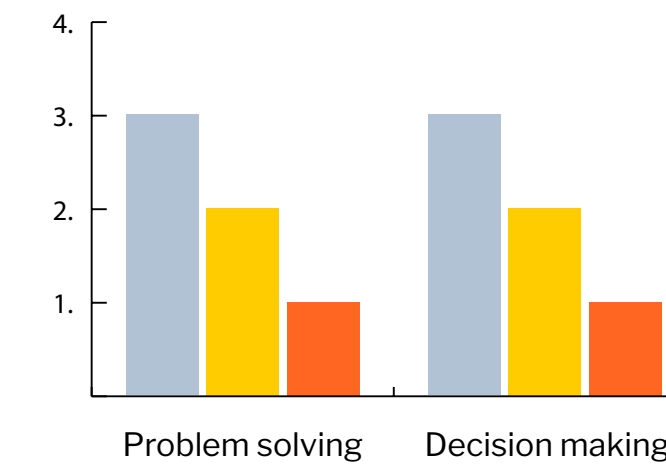
**32** workshops and **5** visits.

100% of SEN teachers who took part in It's My City Too say they now feel more confident using architecture and design in their wider curriculum.



When asked how much It's My City Too improved their students' skills. The SEN teachers we worked with reported the following levels of development:

- Improved a lot
- Improved a little
- No change
- Worsened



“It's My City Too is a most excellent project. The Open City team are innovators. Our learners and staff all benefited greatly with their pupil-centred approach, immense energy, adaptability and creativity.”

Teacher, Westminster.



# YOUNG PEOPLE ACCELERATE (KS5)

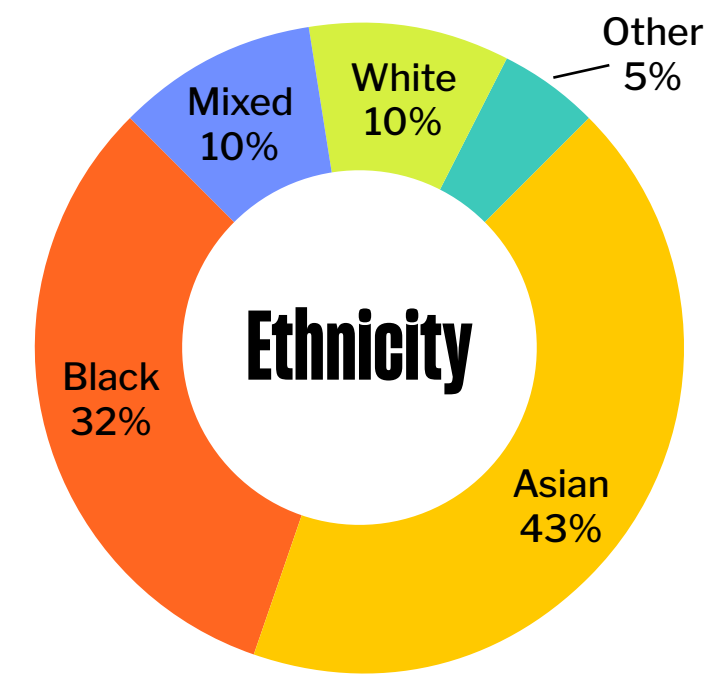
Open City’s free built environment education programme for sixth form students from under-represented backgrounds, Accelerate, supports young Londoners aged 16-18 to explore careers in architecture, landscape, planning, engineering and related fields. The course equips participants with the skills, portfolios, networks and confidence to make informed progression choices and to thrive in university and beyond.

Since its inception, Accelerate has supported more than 500 young people from historically marginalised backgrounds to create, express and develop their ideas and skills.

Right: Accelerate workshop at Central Saint Martins. Photo, Phineas Harper.

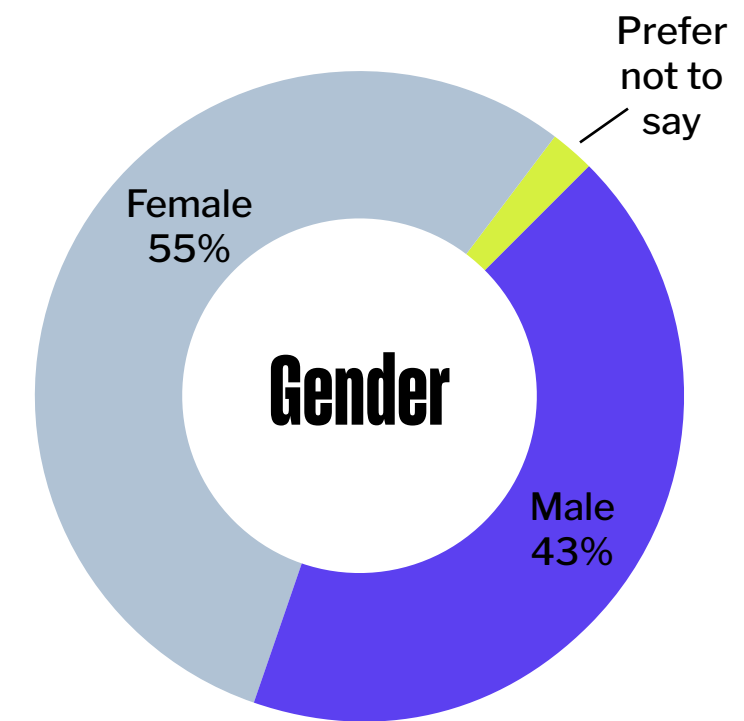


Accelerate supports nearly **100** students a year making it the largest free year-long design and mentoring programme dedicated to supporting young people from under-represented communities in the country.



**100%** of Accelerate participants say the programme gives them a better understanding of how the city is constructed.

During 2023, **88** Accelerate participants developed new skills during the course that will help them pursue careers and university studies.



Accelerate achieves a **93%** retention rate over the duration of the programme making it one of the most effective comparable initiatives at supporting young people to complete the course in full.

In 2023, 90% of Open City’s Accelerate students were from ethnic minority backgrounds, 39% were eligible for Free School Meals and 43% were first in their family to go to university. 55% of our students identify as female, and 42% as male. 100% attend non-fee paying schools.

“Accelerate has helped me grow as a designer and as a man.”

Oluwatobi Morenikeji, Accelerate participant.

“The Accelerate course gave me the opportunity to explore and learn about my city. I feel prepared for the academic path I want to take from this experience.”

Yesha Panchal from Brent, Accelerate 2023 participant.

# YOUNG PEOPLE ACCELERATE STUDIOS (KS4)

Accelerate Studios provides in-school design workshops for GCSE students aged 14 to 16 delivered by young adults who have themselves been supported by Open City's education programmes. The social impact of Accelerate Studios is double – providing outstanding classroom workshops and events for nearly 1,000 young Londoners and meaningful paid employment for 20 young adults from under-represented communities.

For schools, the programme is free, with all materials provided by Open City thanks to the generous support of our sponsors. Accelerate Studios is the first Open City programme to have launched not just in London but in Birmingham also.

100% of teachers whose students took part in Accelerate Studios said they would recommend the programme.



“We learnt a lot about different jobs in architecture and engineering. It was also useful to understand the university process and hear from current students.”

Year 11 pupil, Ealing,

“The students thoroughly enjoyed the session and the two facilitators were absolutely brilliant – engaging and supportive.”

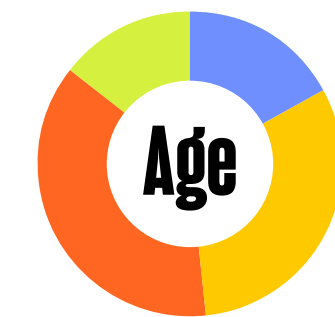
Teacher.

Image: Accelerate Studios training day at Zaha Hadid Foundation. Photo, Jazz Noble.

**952** secondary students taught during the first six of Open City's Accelerate Studios programme.

**20** young graduates of Open City's Accelerate programme trained to deliver the Accelerate Studios workshops as paid employment support their ongoing studies.

**41** classes at **24** schools.



Open City's Accelerate Studios programme supported young people across multiple secondary school age groups.

■ Year Nine: 17.1%  
■ Year Ten: 31.4%  
■ Year 11: 37.1%  
■ Mixed Age: 14.3%

“It was an amazing opportunity for the students to get hands on and learn about architecture and further education.”

Head of Art, Birmingham School.

**14** boroughs across **2** cities.

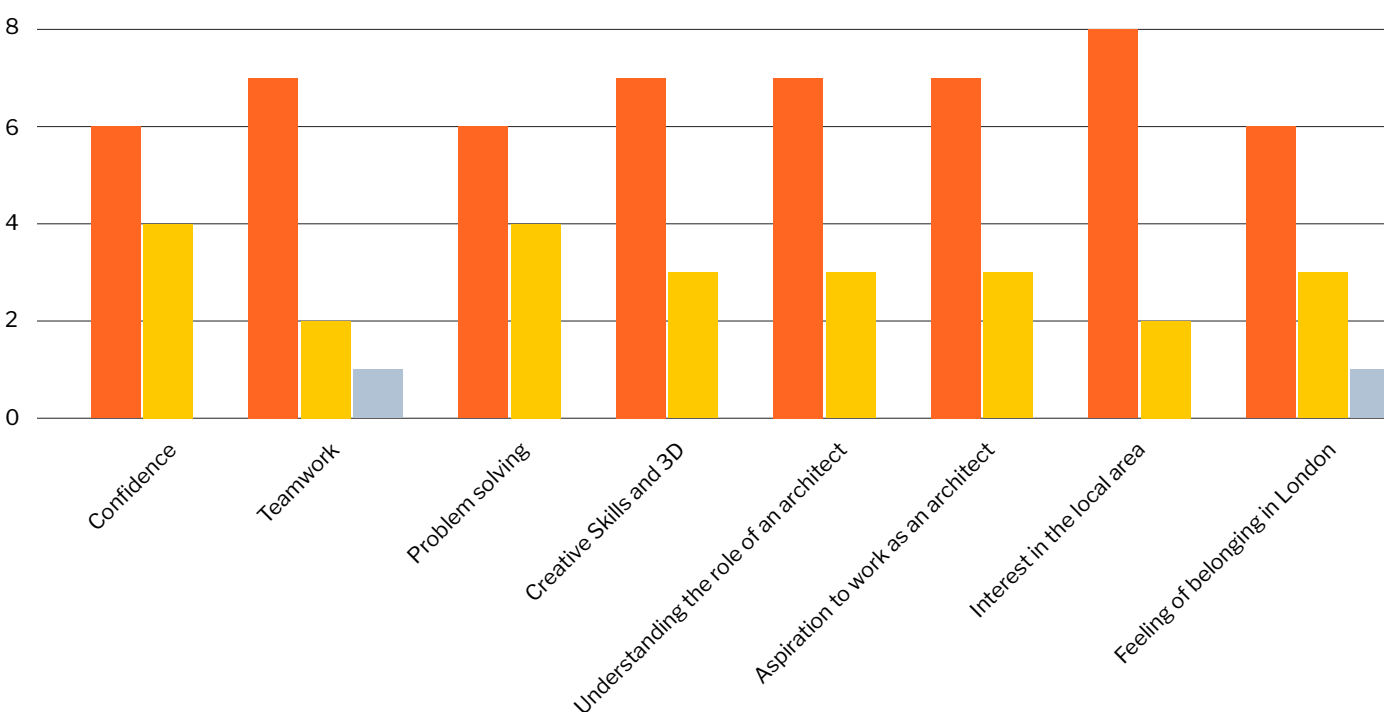


# YOUNG PEOPLE YOUNG CITY MAKERS (KS2)

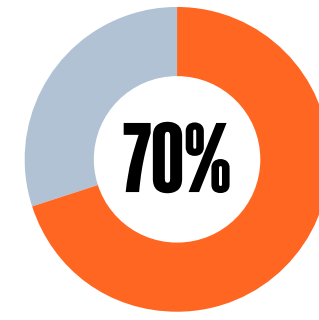
Open City facilitates hundreds of design workshops and study trips for primary school children across London. This year saw the biggest iteration of the programme yet with 72 events taking place in partnership with 24 schools and almost 1,500 students. Each primary school was partnered with a professional design firm and together, they explored ideas for careers and the future of London.

Teachers whose students took part in Young City Makers said their students developed skills in the following areas:

KEY  
■ Improved a lot  
■ Improved a little  
■ No change



For 70% of children who take part, Young City Makers is the first time they have ever had the opportunity to learn about architecture.



“There is no better project in my experience that provides such cultural capital for children from all communities.”

Participating teacher, 2023.

**1,500** key stage two pupils took part in Young City Makers this year.

**8** Schools from across boroughs took part in Open City's East London branch of Young City Makers this year.

Right: Young City Makers participants receiving medals marking their participation in the programme. Photo, Jazz Noble.



# PROFESSIONALS

Open City creates thought-leadership programmes and CPD-acreditable training courses which support built environment professionals and policy-makers to engage with ethical and policy issues facing urbanism throughout their careers.

As a result of our professional education programmes a diverse community of built environment and regeneration professionals become more passionate about the ethical dimensions of their work and able to effect positive change in the sector.

Image: Open City debate at RichMix in Shoreditch. Photo, Zoë Cave.



# PROFESSIONALS PUBLISHING

Open City creates impactful media across print, audio and online platforms educating and engaging communities everywhere. Our publishing and podcasts reach a large audience, platform under-represented voices and shed light on important themes facing the built environment like sustainability, feminism, migration and the UK housing crisis.

Our publishing programmes help architecture and regeneration professionals in the public and private sectors become more knowledgeable and passionate about the ethical dimensions of their work. Over the last year our podcasts were downloaded by listeners 91,623 times and we sold over 1,000 books.

Right: Regular host Sahiba Chadha and special guest Neal Shasore on the Open City Podcast.

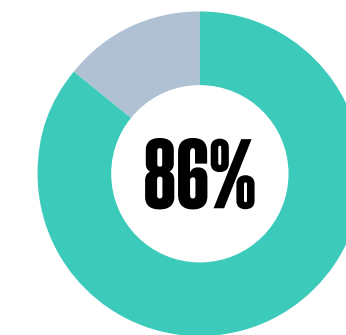
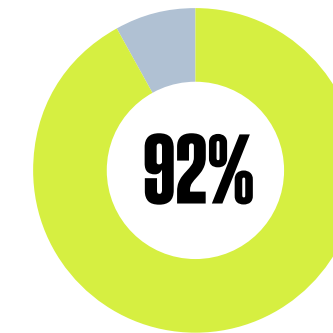


**100%** of listeners say they enjoy or “very much enjoy” listening to the Open City Podcast.

“Setting the agenda for UK architecture on the airwaves – keep up the good work!”

Open City Podcast listener.

92% of Open City Podcast listeners said they learned something from listening to the show that helped with their work or personal life.



86% of Open City Podcast subscribers say the show improves their wellbeing.

Informative  
Interesting  
Enjoyable  
Educational  
Inspiring

The five words listeners to the Open City Podcast most commonly use to describe Open City's shows.





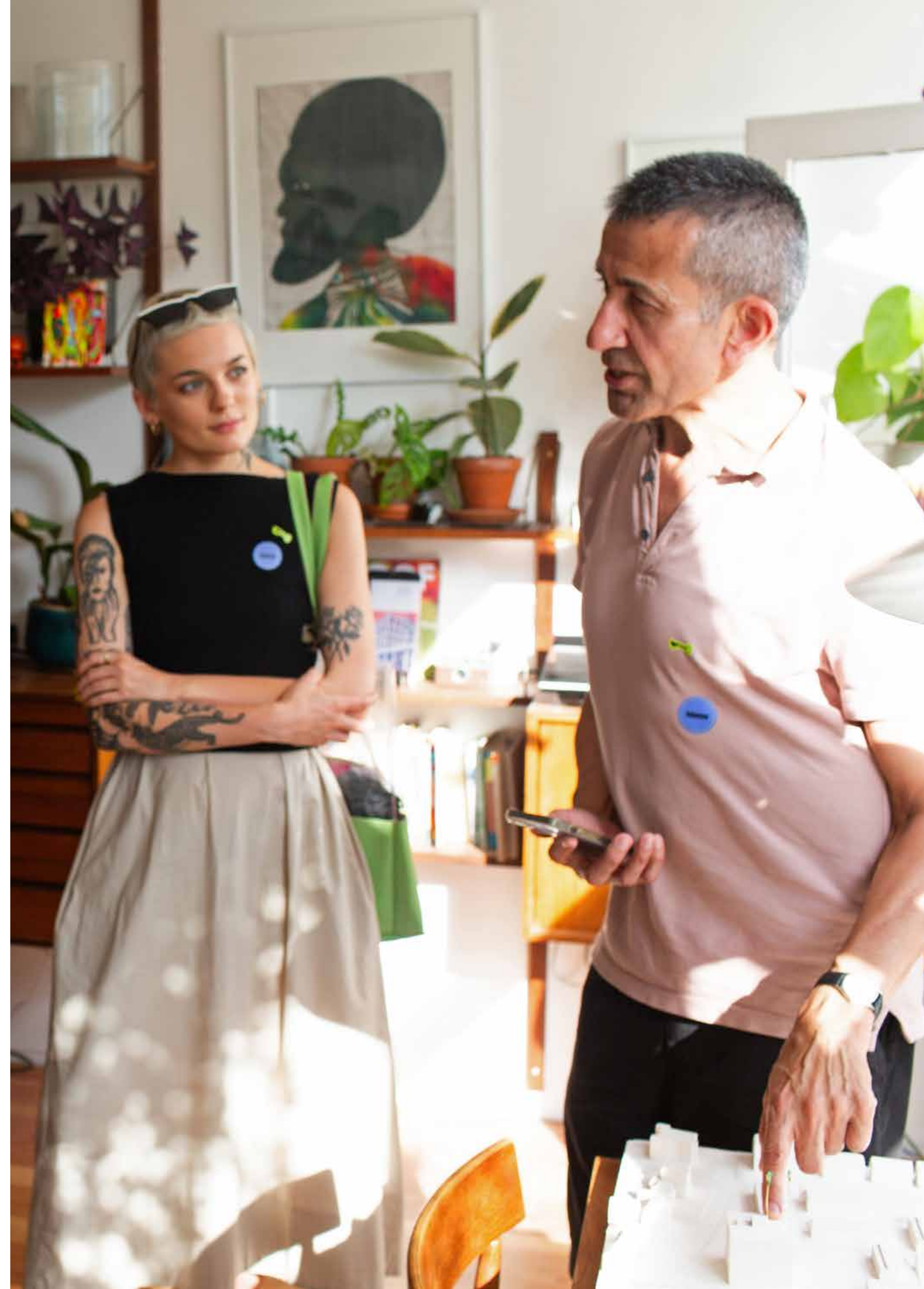


# VOLUNTEERS

Open City's work and programmes would simply not be possible without the remarkable contribution our many volunteers make to delivering our work. From built environment professionals leading workshops in schools all year round, to community groups delivering tours and events during the annual Open House Festival. Volunteers are the lifeblood of our work and impact.

Together our volunteers give tens of thousands of hours each year to enable Open City's programmes which we estimate to represent many thousands of pounds worth of donated labour. Volunteers don't just achieve social impact, but are impacted themselves, learning and deepening their relationship with London through donating their time.

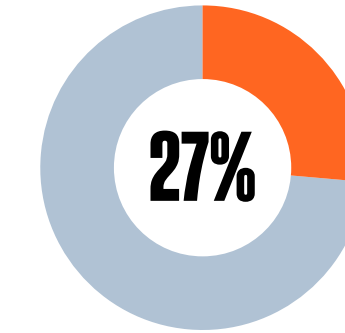
Right: Two Open House Festival volunteers explaining a housing estate in Greenwich to festival goers. Photo, Phineas Harper.



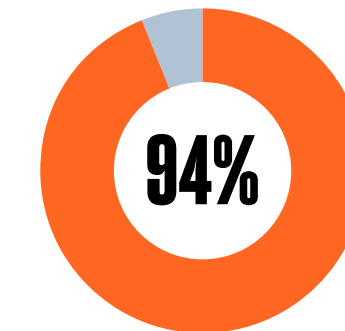
“Re-energised my love for London.”

Open House Festival volunteer

27% of volunteers at the Open House Festival were volunteering for the first time, a rise from 19% in 2022.



94% of Open House Festival volunteers say they enjoy the experience.



“Becoming a volunteer in the festival every year has only deepened, in a very satisfying way, my engagement with London's built environment.”

Open House Festival volunteer

Volunteers gave **3,171** hours to support communities through the Open House Festival in 2023.

Designers volunteered **1,056** hours of labour to support and mentor young people through Open City's Accelerate programme in 2023.

We estimated that **17,000** hours are volunteered each year across the Open House Worldwide network of which the London Open House Festival is part.

**72** events took place as part of Open City's Young City Makers project this year all of which were supported by built environment professionals volunteering their time for to enable the programme.

“Very inclusive. Great experience.”

Open House Festival volunteer

# OPEN HOUSE WORLDWIDE

Open House Worldwide is a network of 60 organisations sharing a mission to make cities more open, accessible and equitable. Founded by Open City, the network now reaches a combined global audience of 750,000 people a year across its festivals. The combined work of the network has an enormous positive impact on communities around the world helping citizens learn about architecture and feel more connected to cities everywhere.

Last year we helped launch new Open House Festivals in:

Miami, United States  
Bern, Switzerland  
Hong Kong, China  
Murcia, Spain  
Zaragoza, Spain  
Pristina, Kosovo

Right: National Library, Pristina Kosovo.  
Photo, amanderson2



# PARTNERS

Open House Festival Headline Partner



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Christina Smith

Foundation

## Young City Makers

**Partners (East)** Arup

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Tower Hamlets

## Young City Makers

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Society

Museum of London

# THANK YOU!

[www.open-city.org.uk](http://www.open-city.org.uk)  
Charity No. 1072104

Front cover, Open House Festival at Cody Dock. Photo, Sonny Malhotra.

Rear cover, Open City Accelerate teaching team. Photo, Luke O'Donovan.

