

ECONOMIC (IN)JUSTICE

FACTSHEET - STORY

Name	Costa Christou
Details, area of experience	Young man who grew up in South London in communities where majority are people of colour and experience economic and social inequality, and where the post-colonial movement has impacted most of his peers, family heritage-Cyprus. Member of Advocacy Academy which trains young people to engage in collective action to improve their communities and tackle social issues which directly affect them. Aged 20 Costa led a campaign to provide affordable housing in Lambeth and is now working to deliver new homes through a community land trust. Supported by Citizens UK (Lambeth branch) and London Community Land Trust.
Interview date	December 2020
Issues addressed	Originally an affordable rent campaign, it became a campaign for affordable housing. Gentrification has caused a local housing crisis
Injustice category (linked to economic injustice)	ability <input type="checkbox"/> age <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> faith <input type="checkbox"/> gender <input type="checkbox"/> neuro-diversity <input type="checkbox"/> race <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sexuality <input type="checkbox"/>
Dates mentioned	2015, 2018 and 2021
Locations referenced	Brixton, Lambeth, South London, Croydon
Campaigns, movements, protests	Properly affordable and sustainable housing; re-defining 'affordability'; opposing gentrification of Brixton. Campaign to obtain local land to develop affordable housing for community. Christchurch Road Land Trust Project.

Historical context	Demographic changes in Brixton, London during last 10 years.
Tactics	<p>Grassroots campaign to tackle the local housing crisis. Young people took part in creative direct action e.g. consulting local people/knocking on doors/picnics/photography/ pamphlets. Then collaboration with Citizens UK to lobby local councillors about community-led housing.</p> <p>Taking advice from the experience & knowledge of elders in the community, when beginning the campaign ask “Is it worthwhile and is it winnable?” Belief that most successful campaigns are where the two intersect.</p>
Key words	<p>Perseverance – “It’s been a long road ... 5 years now”</p> <p>Partnerships</p> <p>Solutions</p> <p>Citizens</p> <p>Gentrification</p>
Key points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partnerships with other activist groups. ● Working well with local council; solutions not just anger and rage about injustice. ● Importance of involving all ages, backgrounds, religions, those with different political views but with a common goal. ● Importance of training leaders with lived experience of the issues.

Story summary	<p>Costa Christou is a young man from Lambeth, South London, who, who, with the organisation Advocacy Academy, took part in creative direct action to tackle the local housing crisis. By lobbying local councillors, and taking advice from a range of community members and organisations, the group obtained a site on which to build affordable housing.</p> <hr/> <p>The campaign was first conceived back in late 2015, when a group of young South Londoners (participants in social justice youth organisation, Advocacy Academy) decided to start orchestrating a housing campaign in Brixton to secure community-led housing for local people. This was the result of Costa attending meetings of the Advocacy Academy in Lambeth.</p> <p>Supported by staff of Advocacy Academy and Lambeth Citizens, young people were encouraged to decide a common topic for action in which they would be supported to create specific and tangible ‘asks’. They chose the issues of gentrification in Brixton and the lack of ‘affordable’ housing.</p>
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	<p>Young people are aware of the changing demographic in the area and felt hostile & negative effects of this, such as beginning to feel unsafe and not wanted. Local businesses started losing out to chains. Because housing is a structural issue, how planning works and how to acquire land in London is not usually open to community groups, only those with capital.</p> <p>The first wave of direct action was taken to raise the issue locally, then through collaboration with Lambeth Citizens (Citizens UK) and London Community Land Trust. Local councillors were lobbied for two years to bring them on board with concept of community-led housing. During this time the group created <i>Christchurch Rd Community Land Trust Project</i>. They managed to obtain a site (via auction at City Hall, London) on which to build affordable housing. A steering group was then formed, which has been crucial in driving the campaign.</p> <p>Now working with local council and Greater London Authority (GLA)/Transport for London (TfL), local residents have chosen architects and worked with planning consultants to prepare the site for affordable housing. Having won the site in 2018, the group are now in final stages of preparing a bid for funding to GLA This bid went in, in Jan 2021. This is a huge task and process, but the group remains optimistic because affordable, sustainable housing is now a key issue in London and UK. Indeed, Covid has increased the need.</p>
Stand-out quotations	<p>“Concept of community is inter-generational; inter-faith , inter-political spectrum ... united by a common goal.”</p> <p>“We show we are providing solutions as citizens.”</p> <p>“Don’t do for others what they can do for themselves.”</p>
Main themes for learners	<p>Importance of challenging injustice constructively.</p> <p>Citizen’s action.</p> <p>Creative tactics.</p> <p>Providing solutions to injustice.</p> <p>Housing (shelter) a fundamental human need.</p>

<https://www.economicinjustice.org.uk>