A Safer Camden, On and Offline

What does safety look like to others?
Is it a street with brighter lights?
A stronger lock?
A police car driving by?
Maybe.
But I think safety is something deeper than that,
It's walking into a room without shrinking yourself.
It's talking without fear.
It's laughing without being judged by anyone.
It's knowing that no matter where you are, whether it's a school, a park or behind a screen, we all deserve safety.
To me that's what a safer Camden looks like.
Not just safer,
Kinder. Stronger. Together.

People always say football is a sport that brings strangers together.
People of different backgrounds,
Different cultures. Different stories.
We were all one team with only one goal.

I believed every word.
Football excited me. It made me happy.
No matter what day, what time, I was ready to play.
Football wasn't just a game to me.
It was where I would go to find happiness every time…
Friendship. A place where I belonged.
I joined a youth girls team because it was close to me and I believed it was a safer Camden.
A place where everyone played as one.
But sometimes, the places that promise safety are the places that test you the most.
The comments started quietly.
Little whispers. Little jokes.
Little looks when I did anything out of the ordinary.
At first I would just ignore all of this.
I smiled when I wanted to cry.
I stayed quiet because I thought maybe tomorrow would be different.

Maybe if I worked harder.
Maybe if I played better.
Maybe if I stayed invisible.
But tomorrow came...
and nothing changed.
The bullying grew louder.
The racism cut deeper.
I wasn't judged by my passes.
Not by my effort. Not by the way I played.
Sometimes it felt like the only reason I was being judged was because of my skin colour
Because of who I am.
That hurts.
But what hurt even more...
was the silence.
I kept waiting for someone to step in.
A teammate. A coach. Anyone.
Because standing up for someone costs so little.
Yet silence can cost someone everything.
Phone calls were made.
Conversations happened.
People listened.
Promises were spoken.
"We'll sort it."
"We'll take care of it"
"It won't happen again."
But words mean very little when no action is taken.
So eventually, my family made the hardest decision.
We left.
Now, every training session means travelling almost two hours.
Two hours there. Two hours back.
Some people hear that and think, "That's too far."
But I think...
Peace is never too far.
Respect is never too far.
Safety is never too far.
Because sometimes the safest place isn’t always the closest one.
I found Girls United
And there I finally remembered why I loved football so much,
Not because everyone is the same.

But because everyone deserves the same respect.
That journey taught me something I will never forget.
Safety isn't somewhere you should have to search for.
It should already be there.
Every child deserves to step onto a football pitch feeling proud.
Not scared. Confident.
Not judged. Included.
Not ignored.
That's the Camden I dream of.

But safety doesn't only live on football pitches.
Sometimes...
it lives behind a screen.
When I was nine years old, I had an iPad
I was still new to the UK.
Still learning. Still growing. Still trusting.
I had no insight into online safety and what it meant.
One day I had received a message from what appeared to be just another game character online.
As at the time nothing seemed strange.
Then the questions changed.
"Are you at home?"
"Are your parents at home?"
"Are you by yourself?"
I answered.
Not because I wanted to cause harm to me or my family.
But because I didn't know what harm I was putting myself in.
Children don't know everything.
That's why adults are there
Thankfully my mum came into the room while this was happening.
She saw what was happening, she saw the danger I didn’t see.
She stepped in immediately.
She told the man to leave me alone as I am a minor and she is my parent.
And just like that...
I was safe again.
Looking back now, I realise how different that story could have been.
That moment changed me
It taught me that not every person behind a screen is who they say they are.

Not every message needs an answer.
And no online stranger deserves your trust.
Now I know better.
Never share your address.
Never tell strangers whether you're home alone or not.
Never give away your school.
Never feel embarrassed to tell a trusted adult if something doesn't feel right.
Because asking for help isn't a bad thing,
It can save you from harm and danger.
Sometimes the strongest thing you can do...
is block.
Report. Walk away.
Because online safety isn't about being scared.
It's about being smart.

My story has two different places.
A football pitch. And a screen.
But they both taught me important lessons for life.
Safety isn't created by walls.
It's created by people.
People who choose kindness over cruelty.
People who choose courage over silence.
People who choose to speak up instead of looking away.
People who choose to do the right thing.
Imagine a Camden where every coach listens.
Every teammate includes.
Every friend stands up.
Every child knows about online safety.
Imagine a Camden where differences are celebrated instead of criticised.
Where everyone belongs.
No matter their background.
No matter their skin colour.
No matter who they are.
That is the Camden I would like to grow up in.
Because a safer Camden doesn't begin with buildings.
It begins with choices.
The choice to include.
The choice to respect.

The choice to protect.
The choice to care.
Every kind word matters.
Every brave voice matters.
Every action matters.
So, what does safety look like?
To me...
It looks like a football team where every player is welcomed.
It looks like a coach who refuses to allow bullying in a team.
It looks like a parent who notices when something isn't right.
It looks like a child who knows their safety on and offline.
It looks like friends who stand beside each other instead of bystanding.
Safety sounds like laughter.
Safety feels like belonging
Safety means being able to be yourself without being judged.
That is the safety I hope for,
Not just for me.
Not just for my friends.
But for every child.
Because a safer Camden - on the pitch, in our schools, on our streets, and online - starts with every single one of us.

By Chioma Nwabufoh