



YOUTH ACCESS

Championing Youth Advice and Counselling

Impact & Learning

report

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2023-2024

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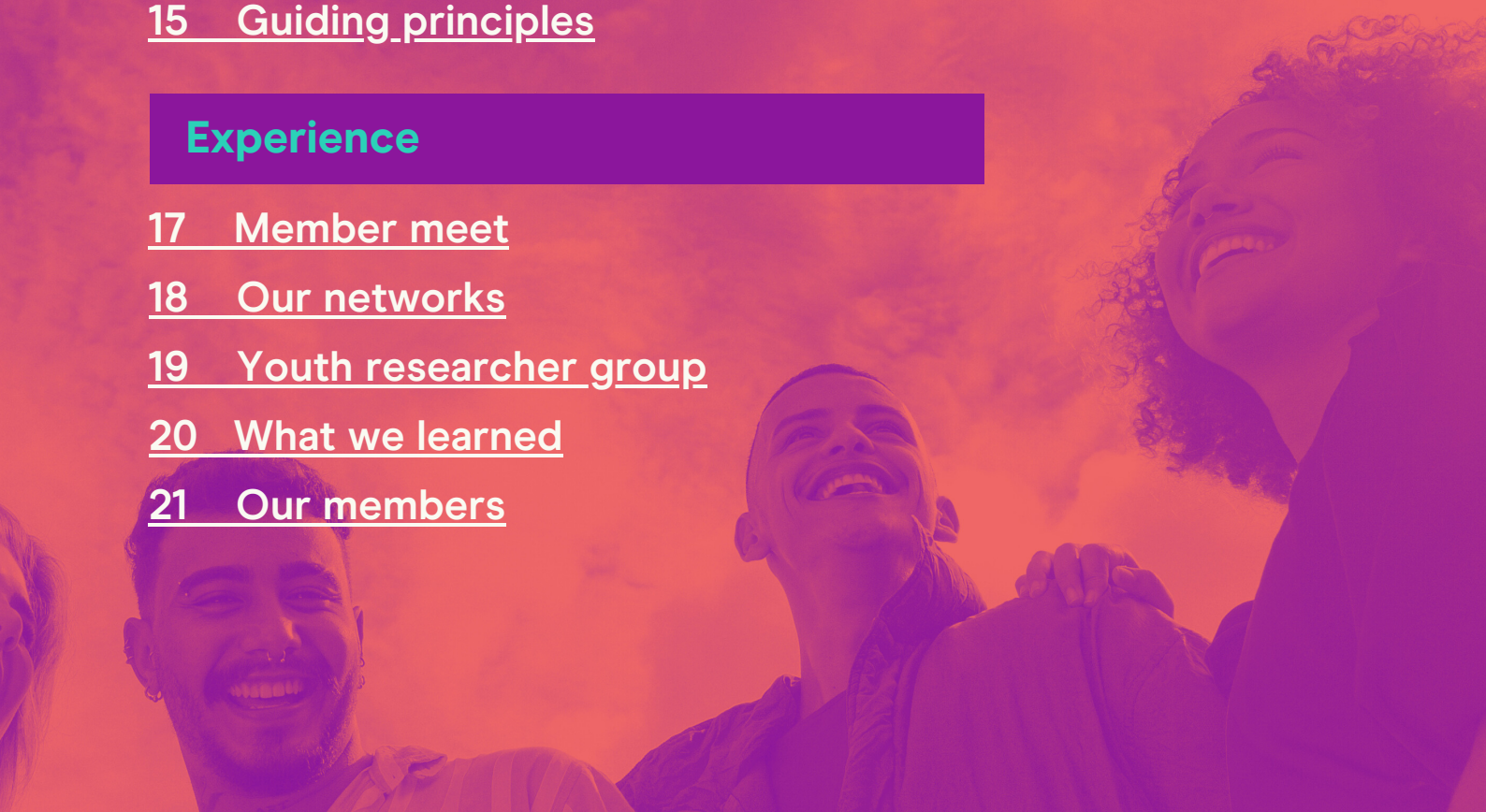
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Executive

Summary

Youth Access is the national membership network that champions and supports organisations delivering support for young people.

Along with our community of **133 'Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Service' (YIACS) members**, we advocate for young people's right to access high-quality local services which offer a range of support to help them tackle the diverse challenges they face as they move into adulthood. We also support young people to campaign for services and systems that meet their needs and fulfil their rights.

Across our membership, nearly 400,000 young people were supported through their grassroots Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (in 2023-24).



This is our Impact and Learning Report, guiding you through our work in the last twelve months. This report aims to provide an overview of our work and impact, helping us to be more accountable and reflect on our learning as an organisation.

Cassandra Harrison
Chief Executive

C Harrison

Delivery

highlights

FOR OUR MEMBERS

We supported members with a vast online offering, including our CEO, Counselling, Advice and Evaluation Networks ([Page 18](#))

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

We developed a blueprint of practical tools and resources to build member's skills and confidence in delivering youth action work ([Page 9](#))

FOR THE COMMUNITY

We delivered an in-person event, with an inspirational speaker and breakout sessions to deep dive into the issues that matter to members ([Page 17](#))

FOR THE ELECTION

We consulted with members and young people ahead of the General Election to support the development of our manifesto ([Page 10](#))

FOR EVERYONE

We helped secure £8 million in funding for existing early support hubs for young people in England ([Page 11](#))

Our strategy

2022-2027

Our vision is that all young people can access free support on their journey into adulthood from community-based advice and counselling services that respect their rights and meet their individual needs.

Our strategic goals

Increase access

Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services with sufficient capacity can be accessed by young people from all local authority areas.

Drive equity

Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services engage with and support more young people from worst-served groups.

Improve experience

Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services are designed and run effectively according to evidence, good practice and young people's voice.

Our values

& vision



1

Collaborative

We are a powerful collective
advocating for change

2

BOLD

We are progressive in our
thinking and courageous in our
challenge of the system

3

Responsive

We adapt to meet the changing needs
of our members and young people

Our vision

Our vision is that all young
people can access free support
on their journey into adulthood
from community-based advice
and counselling services that
respect their rights and meet
their individual needs.

6



Increase Access

Youth Information, Advice and Counselling services with sufficient capacity can be accessed by young people from all local authority areas

Our Reach

133

members across the UK,
up 4% from last year

148

staff attended our online and
in person member events

58,061

visits to our service directory

3,007

young people seen on average
by each member

399,876

young people supported
by our members approx*

*Data sourced from members surveys, members external
impact reports and Charity Commission data

Working with young people

This year, we continued to develop our new approach to working with young people through members, to empower more young people to lead the changes they want to see in the youth mental health system and beyond.

We know that member services are at different stages of development in their youth participation journeys. That's why we acted on the recommendations from a member social action consultation, and a pilot project with Youth Access member Young Person's Advisory Service (YPAS) Liverpool, to develop a blueprint of practical tools and resources.



We have

- Co-produced guiding principles for equitable and inclusive youth action with member services, specialist organisations and young people they work with
- Developed a step-by-step campaign guide and online resource for members and young people to lead change

These resources form the foundations for a new approach to supporting members and the young people they work with, helping them to develop the skills and confidence needed to lead local and national-level campaigns.

General election

We want to ensure that the issues impacting young people's lives are on the agenda for the upcoming General Election and beyond.

In partnership with our member organisation No5 Young People, we worked with two Young Advisors to co-develop a collective manifesto, through a programme of activities over 10 weeks. Together, we consulted member services and the young people they work with to understand the challenges facing young people and identify what the next Government must do to improve all young people's mental health and wellbeing.

The strength of this project came from the unique skills, creativity and ideas brought by Young Advisors who co-developed a survey, video and zine (a short visual booklet) to encourage young people to have their voices heard. The manifesto will be the pillar of our upcoming influencing work alongside members as we approach the General Election.

“I’m taking away the knowledge of what a lot of young people are going through nowadays and also what help and support they are looking for, which I can use in my role as an ambassador.” *-Young Ambassador*

Alongside work to elevate our collective policy asks, we want to support members to encourage the democratic engagement of young people, who are currently the least likely age group to vote in general elections.

Our workshop for members with the Politics Project covered important topics, such as how to inform young people about their right to vote and the practicalities of voting, plus activity ideas to encourage young people to explore their values and have their voices heard. 100% of attendees said they took learnings from the session that will help them in their work.

We also launched an Election Hub to provide members with a one-stop shop of relevant events, webinars and useful resources to support voter registration and democratic engagement.

Fund the Hubs

In October, the Department for Health and Social Care announced funding of £4.92 million to support interventions at existing early support hubs (otherwise known as YIACS) to support young people in England. Later in January, an additional allocation of £3 million was made to the 15-month pilot programme. In total, 24 organisations received funding to either expand their existing community-based interventions or deliver new ones.



This funding was a direct response to our collaborative Fund the Hubs campaign and recognises the vital work that our members and similar services provide for young people. While this funding is an important stepping stone after years of campaigning, we know that more sustainable funding is needed.

That's why we submitted a joint response to the Spring Budget 2024, calling for a nationwide implementation of early support hubs. This model would ensure that young people in every area across England can access mental health support and advice in their local communities.

Our cross-party engagement has led to widespread recognition of the need for community-based mental health support for young people. In the lead-up to the General Election, we will continue to work with members to make the national case for the value of YIACS.

THE CAMPAIGN PARTNERSHIP INCLUDES

The Children's Society

CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Global Black Thrive

YOUTH ACCESS YOUNGMINDS
fighting for young people's mental health

Children & Young People's Mental Health Coalition

bacp | counselling changes lives mind

Local influencing

Members are operating in unprecedented circumstances. In the context of NHS reorganisation, local government reform and over a decade of austerity, it has never been more important for local decision-makers, commissioners and partners to understand the positive outcomes that member services achieve for young people.

We know that members across the country are doing amazing work to influence local systems and services but often find they lack opportunities to reflect on their work and learn from others. Our local influencing programme aimed to build members' skills and confidence to influence change in their local areas in the interests of young people and our member organisations.

We held four online learning sessions which were attended by 52 staff members. Through member case studies, the sessions explored different topics, from evidence to governance. Members were particularly interested in supporting young people to campaign for change and in persuading commissioners to approach service delivery differently.

Following this, five members took part in a four-month action learning set to focus on local strategic problems and receive bespoke support. Participants reported increased confidence in their ability to influence local stakeholders and an improved understanding of systems change.

“A huge thank you for the opportunity! This has been brilliant - such a valuable experience and learning opportunity” *-Member*

Whilst action learning can require a big commitment from participants, it is a brilliant way of problem-solving with big pay-offs in terms of learning, connections and confidence, as explored in our [Youth Access Podcast](#).

We have utilised the insights gained from these different activities to produce an online [library of resources](#) (launching May 2024) to support member's continued work in this area.



Drive Equity

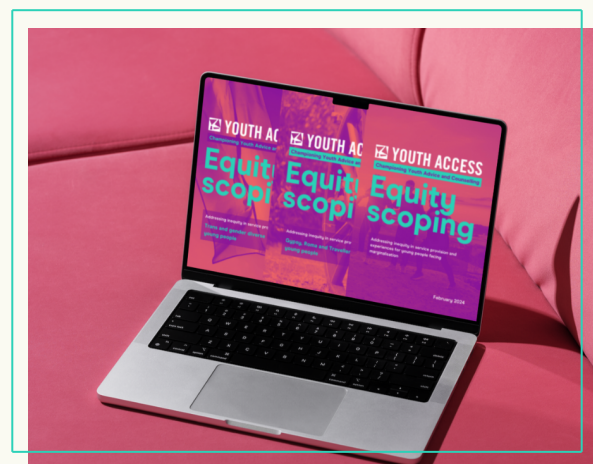
Youth Information, Advice and Counselling
services engage with and access more young
people from worst-served groups

Equity scoping

All young people deserve access to support that respects their rights and meets their needs. We know that community-based, early support services like our members have a better reach to young people from some of the worst-served groups than statutory services.*

However, much more must be done to dismantle institutional barriers and systemic discrimination, improve understanding and provision across our network, and spread good practice.

Our scoping review aimed to better understand which groups of young people remain under-served, the barriers these young people face in accessing support, and how YIACS and other services can ensure young people can access resources, opportunities and outcomes equitably.



We drew on knowledge and expertise from our member network and specialist services, and set out specific findings in addressing inequity in service provision for the following young people:

- Black young people and young people from racialised communities
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people
- Refugee and asylum-seeking young people
- Trans and gender-diverse young people
- Deaf young people

As we progress into the next phase, we will build on this initial scoping to identify further opportunities, shared and collaborative learning and to develop meaningful partnerships.

*www.youthaccess.org.uk/yiacs-effectiveness

Guiding principles

Young people have the right to be involved in the decisions that affect their daily lives, in the services that support them, and in the political decisions shaping our society. Our scoping last year also showed that taking part in social action is positive for young people's wellbeing.

To truly embed the voice of young people in our work and implement our new approach of engaging young people through members, it is crucial to provide inclusive spaces where they can come together to drive change and make a difference.



This year, we collaborated with young people from member and specialist organisations to develop a set of guiding principles for promoting inclusive and equitable engagement in social action. We focused on learning from and working with the worst-served and least-heard communities to ensure that equity and participation are integral components of the process and outcome. And what we've heard from young people through this process is loud and clear:

“Young people - all young people - have the power and the passion to make real change in the world. Our participation isn't just ‘nice to have’ or the ‘right thing to do’ - we are skilled experts! We understand the issues faced by our peers better than anyone, we are well connected to our community, we have skills, insights and ideas that older adults won't have, and most of all - we have the passion to drive change!” *-Young person involved*



Improve Experience

Youth Information, Advice and Counselling services are designed and run effectively according to evidence, good practice and young people's voice

Member meet

We held our first face-to-face member event since the pandemic in Autumn, bringing members from across the UK together for our Member Meet.

The day began with an inspiring talk from Kelda Wood MBE before delving into group discussions exploring:

- Local partnerships
- Equitable spaces
- Youth led change

Members had open valuable discussions about their shared challenges, the innovative ways they were working, and shared ideas and concepts.



Members said that the event was valuable for a multitude of reasons. When asked how, members noted that they were ‘inspired by the speaker’, while others felt they had great conversations with lots of practical take-homes and made valuable connections. Notably, the event gave many members a sense of power and strength from being a part of something bigger, the Youth Access community, noting that ‘you’re not on your own’.

“Thank you! Inspiring day. Lovely to have in-person.” - *Member*

95%
of attendees would
recommend the event

Our networks

Thanks to positive member feedback, we have continued to grow our network offering this year. We now offer four networks for members to take part in:

- CEO Network
- Evaluation Network
- Counselling Network
- Advice Network

Plus a new Communications Network will launch soon thanks to member appetite.

Our network groups provide the perfect opportunity for members to meet with colleagues in similar roles from other organisations in an informal setting. They can shape the conversations and space in a way that suits them.



Feedback from our Evaluation Network highlighted that being ‘part of a community’ was beneficial for ‘sharing issues’. Similarly, colleagues attending the CEO Network said:

“It is insightful to hear from others”

“It is good to know you’re not in it alone”

Feedback from a practitioner attending the Advice Network said that the space helped them feel less isolated. While a practitioner attending the Counselling Network said it has widened their sense of what is happening around the country and has helped them feel part of a wider movement. The network has explored several different themes as suggested by participants including neurodiversity and gentrification.

The networks are also an incredibly valuable space for us as an organisation to keep in touch with our members. The range of insights and challenges raised in our networks help guide our thinking and decision-making in many other areas.

Youth researcher *groups*

We recognise the importance of involving young people in all areas of our work. As part of the Our Minds Our Future programme, we launched a new project this year to train a group of young people as researchers. They received expert training and conducted semi-structured interviews with the partners involved in delivering this programme.

Now the interviews have been conducted, young people are working collaboratively with the support of the trainers to conduct a thematic analysis to understand the findings, write a report for the funders and present it to Youth Access.

The feedback we received from the young people involved was overwhelmingly positive.

“Working as part of the young researcher group has been really empowering - its been so interesting working on the project, learning research skills and interviewing staff that worked on the project. It’s shown me a different side of the project and shown its true impact and meeting other young people who were involved from different nations has been pretty cool too!” *-Lizzie*



“Working as a young researcher for OMOF gave me an opportunity to feel like an integral part of something bigger for the first time in my life. It has been a really great experience for me and the things I have learnt from it will stick with me for a very long time.” *-Tilly*

What we *learned*

INSPIRING

Our members are passionate, creative and resilient in the face of very challenging circumstances. They are endlessly inspiring.

COMMUNICATIONS

Members like to hear from us in lots of different ways! From podcast listeners to report readers, our members love a bit of variety.

CONNECTION

Members value us holding spaces to connect both online and in person.

RECOGNITION

There is widespread national recognition of the vital role of our member services in providing early intervention for young people through open access advice and counselling.

PARTNERSHIP

Persistence and partnership are crucial to bringing about change - the funding won from the Department of Health and Social Care took lots of collaboration and was years in the making.

SOCIAL ACTION

Getting involved in social action is positive for young people's wellbeing.

Our members



Streetwise
→

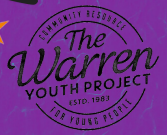


The Market Place



42

ND SHINE STREET



Sheffield Futures



CHILYPEP
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The What? Centre Ltd



YOUTH WORKS



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the



NO LIMITS

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