

Youth Access General Information

Mission and Vision

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for young people's information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS). We believe all young people have a right to locally accessible, free, confidential and impartial information, advice, counselling and support. We work in partnership with our members, The National Youth Agency and other organisations to promote the development of high quality, young people-centred services.

Through our 250 + membership of largely local voluntary sector services, Youth Access is the largest provider of advice and counselling services in the country. YIACS offer 13-25 year olds a universal access point to targeted and specialist services on a self-referral and confidential basis: dealing with issues as diverse as sexual health, mental health, relationships, homelessness and benefits.

Values

Youth Access believes services must:

- **respect the dignity and self-worth of each young person**
- **respect and value individual differences**
- **recognise and be sensitive to the growing autonomy of each young person**
- **respect every young person's right to be a voluntary participant in any helping process**
- **recognise the potential of each young person.**

Intended Impact

Youth Access wants to improve the lives of young people aged 13-25 years: both the current and potential users of information, advice, counselling and support. We primarily work with and through our members, together with other organisations, government bodies, as well as individual practitioners to secure provision that:

- **Responds to the information, advice, counselling and support needs of young people**
- **Achieves high standards of ethics and good practice**
- **Demonstrates a commitment to evidence-based practice**
- **Advocates for individuals and groups of young people**
- **Involves and encourages the participation of young people**

Principles and Standards

As the national membership body for YIACS, Youth Access advocates the delivery of information, advice, counselling and support within a framework of nationally agreed core principles and standards.

Statement of Core Principles

- Young people are central to the service and member agencies are committed to responding to their needs.
- Member agencies believe that young people have a right of access to quality information, advice and counselling services.
- The basis on which young people are able to make use of a service is made clear to each of them individually and a contract is agreed where appropriate.
- Member agencies of Youth Access aim to empower young people and treat them with respect based on an understanding of their individual culture and background.
- In all aspects of their work, member agencies of Youth Access aim to counter the oppression and discrimination faced by young people.
- Member agencies of Youth Access are working towards equality of access for all young people for whom their service is designed.
- Member agencies of Youth Access take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and well being of young people and workers in an agency.
- Member agencies of Youth Access are committed to ensuring their workers are competent to perform the range and depth of duties offered by the agency and provide a framework for staff development that includes support, supervision and training.
- Member agencies of Youth Access are committed to establishing and maintaining procedures for monitoring and evaluating the service they provide.

Standards

Youth Access' nationally agreed standards cover all aspects of the delivery of information, advice, counselling and support services underpinned by clear definitions of the interventions offered and a framework that encompasses our values, principles and the three key policies of equality and diversity, confidentiality and involvement and participation.

All full members of Youth Access are expected to abide by our core principles and meet our minimum standards of quality by having in place the three key policies of equality and diversity, confidentiality and involvement and participation.

Legal status

Youth Access was established in 1975 under its former name the National Association for Young People's Counselling and Advisory Services (NAYPCAS). The organisation is a registered charity with company limited by guarantee status and its registered office is at 2, Taylors Yard, 67, Alderbrook Road, London SW12 8AD.

Governance

Since 2005, the National Youth Agency, as the sole legal member of the company has had the power to appoint the trustees of Youth Access Board. Since then the practice has been for the NYA Board and the Youth Access Board to comprise the same group of individuals. Following the outcome of a governance review in March 2010, the NYA Board has determined that the future Youth Access Board will comprise the following: a Chair; two trustees who also act as trustees for the NYA, a further two trustees. This new Board is expected to take over the governance responsibilities for Youth Access from September 2010.

Staff

Youth Access employs a small core team of ten staff based in offices in Clapham South, London. Youth Access aspires to excellence in its work and aims for staff to be national experts within their field. The organisation is committed to equality of opportunity and seeks diversity within its workforce.

Members

Organisations pay an annual membership subscription to Youth Access and are described as 'associates' for the purposes of the organisation's constitution. At the core of Youth Access' membership is a range of local and national voluntary sector providers of information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS), as well as some local authority managed provision. Many voluntary sector members employ a combination of trained paid and volunteer staff to deliver their services. Members are primarily, though not evenly spread throughout England, with a few operating in other parts of the UK. Full members of Youth Access contribute to and are expected to share the collective vision of information, advice, counselling and support services for young people articulated by Youth Access. Other categories of Youth Access membership are for those agencies and individuals with an active interest in the development and provision of YIACS.

Members of Youth Access are currently eligible to sit on a National Advisory Group. There are currently twelve members of NAG representing agencies across the country. The role of NAG is to act as a source of information and advice to the Board about issues related to the direction and delivery of YIACS.

Partners

Youth Access has secured a number of partnership and joint working relationships across the youth, advice and mental health sectors. In addition to our relationship with the National Youth Agency, we also work with the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS). Key relationships with the advice sector are through Advice Services Alliance, particularly with Advice UK, Citizens Advice, Law Centres Federation and Shelter. We also work with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and have well-established relationships with the Mental Health Foundation and Young Minds. Youth Access also has positive working relationships with a number of Government Departments, including the DCSF, the Legal Services Commission, the Ministry of Justice, Department of Health and the Greater London Authority.

Resources

For many years Youth Access has received funds from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Other government departments/agencies providing funds have included the Department of Health and the Legal Services Commission. Other funding is raised through applications to trusts and charities, including the Big Lottery and our own income generation activities, including membership, training and sales of publications.

Young people and information, advice, counselling and support

Young people have their own unique experience of travelling the path from dependent child to independent adult. The complexity and severity of any difficulties encountered on this path and the degree of risk and resilience present arise out of a combination of factors: young people's individual experience of their family and carers, the communities in which they grow up and their own biology/genetic histories. While young people are clearly not an homogenous group and age, gender and ethnic background for example affect patterns of need, there are some young people who are more likely to have significant and specific needs; for example looked after young people and care leavers, young people with disabilities or mental health problems.

Information, advice, counselling and support can address a range of social, legal, practical, emotional and mental health needs as young people make their individual transitions to full adulthood. By offering these interventions/services in an 'under one roof' model of provision, young people are able to access a combination of help from multi-disciplinary teams of staff: enabling them to get advice for example with legal rights-based problems such as housing and benefits alongside separate therapeutic counselling for emotional and mental health difficulties. It is this proven holistic, accessible and flexible approach provided in informal and young-people friendly settings that Youth Access has consistently promoted.

Strategic Aims

Youth Access has four strategic aims, these are to:

- Promote and develop best practice and quality in the provision of information, advice, counselling and support services to young people
- Develop and improve young people's access to information, advice and counselling services
- Shape and influence the development of national, regional and local policy impacting on the provision of information, advice, counselling and support services
- Secure a vibrant, national membership of providers supported by a network of other partners and stakeholders.

Objectives

- Supporting YIACS service managers to improve the strategic positioning, funding and commissioning of their organisations
- Developing the achievement of high standards of organisational and individual professional practice
- Improving access to qualification and training routes for counsellors and advice workers with young people
- Developing and disseminating robust evidence of the contribution made by the services and interventions of YIACS
- Influencing and supporting the development of national and local policy, planning and commissioning related to the provision of information, advice, counselling and support services for young people
- Building and maintaining positive relationships with members and other partners and stakeholders.

Track Record

Youth Access is uniquely placed in the context of young people's services and in the advice and mental health sectors and has developed a national reputation for its leadership and support of YIACS. We have developed particular expertise in rights-based advice and counselling for young people; particularly championing the contribution of counselling to young people's mental and emotional health. The contribution by Youth Access to the role and development of YIACS has been endorsed by New Philanthropy Capital, which selected Youth Access as one of its nominated charities in 2009.

Current Activities

Youth Access main activities include information, advice, training, research, consultancy and representation. The following are some of the key areas of current activity.

Supporting good practice

Youth Access is a member of a major national consortium of the advice sector with partners such as Citizens Advice, Age Concern, Law Centres Federation and others. One area of the consortium's work involves the development of a new sector-owned quality mark for advice and Youth Access has contributed to the development of new standards and supported the testing of the standard in YIACS.

We also run a highly regarded programme of training for both practitioners and service managers. The programme includes the first national training programme for rights-based advice work with young people and a programme of Continuing Professional Development for youth counsellors. We are currently working with the University of East London to accredit the counselling programme at Masters level. Our events for managers are exclusive to members and respond to a varied range of organisational development needs. Youth Access has also contributed to national developments in the youth workforce which has included successfully lobbying for the recent inclusion of a new training and qualification route for rights-based advice with young people.

Building the evidence base

We aim to secure an evidence-based approach in all our activities. Both independently and in partnership with others, we undertake research and disseminate evidence on advice and counselling work with young people. Recent examples of our work include reports and briefings on young people's advice needs and the relationship between young people's mental health and their advice needs. We have successfully used our findings to influence central and local policy and service development.

One of our current projects – the Making Tracks Project – involves three local YIACS working with GPs to develop an improved local package of help for 19-25 year olds. The project is being independently evaluated and Youth Access is supporting the selected YIACS to implement outcome tools recognised by the statutory mental health sector to ensure the robustness of the data collected.

Youth Access has recently completed the testing of a new outcomes toolkit for advice. In addition to testing the robustness of the toolkit, the project also captured data from 500 young people about the outcomes of the advice received. An independent evaluation is now informing the production of a new training programme, plus guidance for providers, funders and commissioners.

Policy work & campaigning

Youth Access regularly responds to consultations, represents members on various Government-led policy groups and campaigns for changes to policy with the intention of improving young people's access to advice and counselling. Last October we led the launch of JustRights, a campaign for fair access to legal services for children and young people. Our main partners are CRAE, the Law Centres Federation and the Howard League for Penal Reform. We have also recently launched with a number of other national charities such as the Mental Health Foundation, Young Minds, Rethink and the Princes Trust a new Coalition on Children and Young People's mental health. Youth Access' Director has been elected as the vice-Chair of the campaign.

Further information about Youth Access' activities, publications and resources can be found on our website: www.youthaccess.org.uk.

Future Challenges

In common with other charities this year, the main challenge facing Youth Access is to secure its future funding beyond April 2011. The competition for funding is going to be tough given the reduction in public sector funding generally and the existing pressures on trust and other charitable funding. On Youth Access' side are its track record and its flexibility as a small organisation. In addition, the organisation is in good financial health, as it has managed to build its reserves over the past few years and is also fortunate in having a 45% interest in the building housing its offices (which will revert to a 100% interest in 2022). Plans are already underway to bid for new further funding, including a Big Lottery solicited bid from a consortium of the advice sector, plus an invited bid from a trust. However, there will need to be continued efforts to raise funds over the year, so that Youth Access can build on its success and continue to further its mission and vision.