

Now more than ever

Ensuring sustainability and expansion of youth support services post-Covid

Sept 2021

This is the third of three briefings developed by Youth Access to support our members, the wider youth sector, commissioners and policymakers to anticipate and respond to the scale of socio-economic and mental health need among younger generations over the coming year and beyond. It outlines a series of recommendations

for what needs to be in place at a local, regional and national level to ensure the sustainability and expansion of integrated, youth-focused support for young people, in the model of the Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) that make up our membership.

Introduction

Briefing two showed:

- **Comparable clinical outcomes with higher rates of satisfaction**
- **Improved accessibility for young people from marginalised communities**
- **Advice is a cost-effective mental health intervention**
- **Young people benefit from a range of support under one roof**

As the previous two briefings in this series showed, mental health does not exist in a vacuum and the route to a successful adulthood throws up a host of psychosocial, economic, cultural and identity issues that impact young people's wellbeing. They underlined the effectiveness of recognising the interdependence of these needs, by providing accessible, quality, early mental health and advice support for young people up to 25, under one roof.

The 'whole life' approach exemplified by YIACS [has long been recognised by decision-makers as an exemplary model of support for young people](#). It is achieving increasingly global consensus and – most importantly – [is what young people say they want. It's also what human rights say young people are entitled to](#). Moreover, we know that lots of young people who have emerging needs, and who don't necessarily require

specialist mental health care and are not at crisis point, [would benefit from support of some kind](#) – particularly in light of the pandemic. Some Youth Access members have witnessed unprecedented levels of referrals into their services in the past year, for young people experiencing a complex range of mental health and advice needs.

Despite this, too many youth information, advice and counselling services struggle to obtain the financial and infrastructure support they need to provide this vital work. With a lack of dedicated, sustainable local funding, many Youth Access members are forced to 'patchwork' funding together to keep vital services running, while a lack of representation of young people and voluntary sector organisations in local decision-making prevents the kind of transformational local change that could see this model become the norm for mental health provision across the country.

To tackle these challenges, we formed a temporary policy 'task and finish' group, made up of representatives from seven Youth Access organisations, to help us map the key needs of voluntary sector youth services to respond to the prevailing needs of young people as we emerge from the pandemic and in the long-term. Over two sessions, and drawing upon our wider evidence and expertise, we narrowed these down into seven specific recommendations for decision-makers.



1. Funding

Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services need adequate, sustainable funding, that reflects the value, impact and scope of their work. This means:

- **Understanding what effective services are already out there**, what is working well, and ensuring that commitments to expanding these services is backed by the funding to do so.
- **Protecting funds for what they were intended for.** When funding has been committed, establish protections to ensure that money is not used to plug other funding gaps.
- **Thinking long-term.** Too often YIACS are forced to “patchwork” small amounts of short-term funding from multiple sources. The burden of sourcing and reporting on these absorbs precious time, and prevents organisations from being able to plan and grow - and ultimately places vital services for young people at risk of being discontinued year on year.
- **Flexibility.** Numbers of young people seeking help have shot up in the past year, and services cannot operate at the same levels as before the pandemic. To support them cope with the aftershock of Covid-19, organisations need opportunities to negotiate their contracts, for example to obtain bigger amounts or mobilise funding in a different way.

2. Youth-Led

At the heart of the [YIACS approach](#) is the principle of youth-leadership, to shape and guide services. Any commitment to invest in, and expand, such services must champion key roles for young people. This means:

- **Listening** to what young people say they would like to have from services designed for them.
- **Engaging youth representatives and service users** within local and national decision-making structures.
- **Equity.** Decision-making structures must create leadership roles for all young people, and make particular efforts to engage those from marginalised, underrepresented communities, and those with lived experience.

3. Youth Specific

Commissioning of services and contracts, and allocation of funding, must honour commitments in the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) to provide age-appropriate mental health support for young people aged up to 25. This means:

- **Better identifying where young people are falling through the gaps** between child and adult services, and better mapping of the young adult services that do exist.
- **Creating young person-specific local commissioning and funding structures** that support transitions and that doesn't separate child and adult services.
- **Embedding a rights-based approach** to supporting young people, led by their needs, preferences, learning styles, skills and experiences.

4. Joint Commissioning

Young adults are particularly vulnerable to experiencing social welfare problems, especially relating to housing and money, and these often come hand-in-hand with mental health issues. Commissioning of services must reflect these interdependent needs. This means:

- **Supporting organisations that provide a range of services across advice and mental health** – such as YIACS and early support hubs – in one place, that bridge the transition to adulthood and are tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of young people.
- **Improving connections between services and institutions**, and embed multi-sector, multi-agency working at national and local level, spanning health, social care, education and employment.



5. Investment in Workforce

Youth information, advice and counselling services are driven by expert, qualified professionals who provide a range of tailored services to meet the complex needs of young people in their area. Any strategy to guarantee the longevity and expansion of this support must recognise and invest in this specialist workforce. This means:

- **Ensuring sustained funding for the existing workforce across youth mental health and advice**, to maintain expertise and key relationships, guarantee the longevity of services for children and young people accessing them, and reduce waiting lists.
- **Recognising that recruitment and induction is an expensive process for organisations**, and that investment is needed to supporting the training, employment and development of an expanded youth-facing workforce. For organisations that have been part of the [Recruit To Train](#) or equivalent schemes, ongoing investment is crucial to ensure newly trained staff can be employed longer-term.
- **Accounting for supervision in workforce investment and commissioning of mental health services.**
- **Recognising the key role of specialist, youth-specific information, advice and guidance in supporting young people's mental health** – and that young people's advice needs have risen rapidly in the past year – and designing workforce strategies accordingly for young people. Too often, advice work receives less funding than mental health, despite the fact that 16-25s are the age group most in need of dedicated support but much less likely to receive advice – or good advice – than the general population.

6. Oversight and Accountability

YIACS have a proven track record of achieving impressive outcomes and are proud to showcase the value of their work. However, we hear time and time again of the onerous, costly and inconsistent requirements of reporting their impact to often multiple funders. Streamlining these requirements, and supporting organisations in their reporting, would enable them to demonstrate the rich body of evidence behind their work and drive the dissemination of best-practice across the country. This means:

- **Rationalisation and standardisation** of outcomes measures required to report on.
- **Recognising young people's words, experiences and stories as valuable evidence of a service's impact.** Too often, qualitative outcomes that focus on clinical recovery are afforded greater importance than qualitative evidence, such as lived experience accounts and case studies. As one of our members from the task and finish group put it, "when will we be able to place value on young people's life stories?"
- **Funding for organisations, particularly those with lower incomes, to invest in the installation and upkeep of high-cost systems such as IAPTUS.** This may also require thinking more creatively about how to support organisations to use IAPTUS, such as pooling resource across agencies, and statutory support for staff training. Where this not possible, investment is needed into bespoke systems that work for smaller charities.
- **Trust building:** a commitment to partnership working, clarity and consistency in relationships with decisions-makers and the statutory sector as we move to statutory Integrated Care Systems, and transparency for voluntary and community sector organisations on where money is available and being spent locally.

7. Support for the Voluntary Sector

A system that is able to support the needs of all young people, including those who have been unable to get help during the pandemic or are experiencing issues for the first time, must have a clear role for the voluntary sector, including smaller organisations such as YIACS and early support hubs. This means:

- **A national approach**, to ensure that every area is able to provide young people with youth information, advice and counselling services that are tailored to their needs. This isn't about inventing new services where well-established, effective ones already exist – but rather ensuring that existing services have the support and funding they need, and mobilising their expertise to roll-out a national network of YIACS and early support hubs.
- **Building and strengthening support networks for services providing early, whole-life support to young people, and improving collaboration with the NHS and educational institutions.**
- **Recognising the important role played by non-commissioned VCS services.**

Conclusion

As we look for solutions to support young people in the wake of the pandemic, our request to decision-makers is clear: don't start from scratch. Instead, look to the organisations already doing this great work, listen to what they and young people need, and invest to ensure the sustainability and expansion of support that takes the whole young person into account.

This is also the core message behind the joint [Fund the Hubs campaign](#) we are leading with YoungMinds, The Children's Society, Mind, and the wider Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, which launched on 8 June 2021. Fund the Hubs calls for funding for a network of 'early support hubs' for young people across the country, providing easy-to-access early help for mental health and the issues that underpin it. We want to see concerted national and local efforts to support the organisations already providing this vital work, and to harness their expertise to create more hubs, so that young people in every part of the country can have access. All over England, individuals and organisations are helping to spread the word in their local area, by calling on their local decision-makers to back the campaign, and [you can join them here](#).

We hope that Fund the Hubs and this series of briefings will kick start a more joined-up, collaborative approach to mental health and advice, and take us one step closer to achieving a system that truly meets young people's needs and rights, both now and in the long term.