

ALTOGETHER BETTER

A charter created by young people for person centred mental health and wellbeing services

INTRODUCTION

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for young people's information, advice and counselling services (YIACS). Youth Access has consulted with over 170 young individuals across the UK, asking what young people should expect when accessing mental health and well-being services.

These things include making it easy to gain access to services and being able to speak to skilled workers who are welcoming and understanding. My local YIACS does this really well which makes it easy for people to access their services in various different ways.

The information that was gathered from the consultations, along with other feedback taken from events such as the Mental Health Takeover Day have helped to form this document. The young editorial board made up of 6 young people from across the country helped to finalise and produce this document.

We believe it is important for young people's voices to be heard. They have expectations and needs when trying to access services and these expectations should be upheld. If the points outlined in this Charter are achieved, we believe that young individuals are more likely to be able to access and continue to access mental health and well-being services where necessary.

This therefore gives all individuals equal opportunities to get the help they need whilst setting and achieving realistic goals in their treatment.

By Rachel Kennedy, member of the young editorial board

👏 Provide a key role for the voluntary and community sector to encourage an increase in the number of one-stop-shop services based in the community. They should be a key part of any universal local offer, building on the existing network of YIACS (Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services). 🗨️

Future in Mind, Department of Health and NHS England, 2015

This charter forms part of the Department of Health funded IQ Project, which aims to implement recommendations made in *Future in Mind* to support a new vision for young people's mental health and wellbeing; one in which accessible, self-referral YIACS are a key part of every local offer.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S YIACS CHARTER

It takes a lot of courage for us to turn up at a service and ask for help, especially if we are dealing with a range of problems or going through a crisis. We need to know what we can expect when we walk through the door, and that we will be treated fairly and consistently.

By signing up to our charter, you promise to always:

1 TREAT US WITH RESPECT

- Value us as individuals
- Treat us as equals
- Be non-judgemental
- Be inclusive and celebrate our differences
- Be confidential
- Value our opinions and trust us
- Remember, "I am a person, not a problem"

2 MAKE IT EASY FOR US TO ACCESS THE SERVICE

Your service should be:

- Easy to find
- Free
- Friendly
- Flexible

Always offer an option to self-refer

3 HAVE ALL THE HELP WE NEED IN ONE PLACE

A YIACS should primarily aim to offer:

- A drop-in
- One-to-one therapies such as counselling
- Advice on social welfare issues
- Support groups for specific issues
- Information on a wide range of issues
- Emotional and personal support
- An online service for information, referrals or counselling

Or show us where to go if you can't help:

We accept that sometimes one service can't do everything, but don't fob us off

4 PROVIDE A WELCOMING AND AGE APPROPRIATE SETTING

- Staff on the drop-in or reception area should be professional yet approachable
- The 'feel' of the building should be friendly and non-clinical. You should have good links with other services and support us when referring.

5 PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE UP TO THE AGE OF 25

When we turn 18, we still need a service that understands young people. We can cope better with a move to adult services at age 25.

6 HAVE SKILLED WORKERS WHO TAKE US SERIOUSLY

All workers should be professional, knowledgeable, properly supported and actually like young people!

7 INVOLVE US IN DECISION MAKING

- Show that you value our opinions by consulting us on all important decisions
- Regular groups, feedback surveys and interview panels are all good ways of involving us
- Make sure you take our feedback on board and let us know what changes will be made



Remember, we are your clients and you are accountable to us.



THE CHARTER IN PRACTICE

1

TREAT US WITH RESPECT



The most important thing that a service can do is treat us with respect. When we enter a service that is respectful, non-judgemental and that listens to us, we are more likely to open up about our issues and get the help we need.

A service that respects young people...

Trusts us

Believe us when we say that something is wrong.

Doesn't judge us

We need to feel safe before we feel comfortable enough to talk about our problems.

Is young person-centred

Treat us as a 'whole' person, not just a set of problems to be solved.

Treats us as individuals

Don't assume that all young people want the same thing. Avoid a 'one size fits all' approach. Ask us what we want!

Is flexible

Don't make it difficult for us - offer flexible appointments that are on our terms.

Values our opinion

Empower us by giving us a choice in how we receive care. Let us know what options are available and what the processes are.

Is inclusive

Acknowledge and celebrate our differences. Provide visual cues to show that you are open and inclusive.

Is confidential and trustworthy

Where possible, let us be in control of who knows about our issues. If you have to break confidentiality, be very clear about the reasons why, who you will speak to and what will be said.

“It was good because they understood me and listened to what I was saying and took me very seriously.”



2

MAKE IT EASY FOR US TO ACCESS THE SERVICE



There is no point in having a service for young people if we can't access it. It is your responsibility to remove the barriers to accessing your service so that we can get the help we need when we need it.

You should have the option to self-refer:

- An informal drop-in is the easiest way for us to get help quickly and on our terms
- Offering an online self-referral option can help if we are feeling anxious about 'walking in'



Your service should be free to use:

- Most young people don't have money, and having to ask parents for money can act as a barrier to seeking help
- No one should be denied the help they need because they can't afford it!

Your opening hours should be flexible and work around us:

- Have permanent staff available at weekends
- If you can't be open 7am-7pm every day, try to stagger your opening times throughout the week to cater for different groups of young people
- Have an outreach worker who can come to us if we can't make a certain time

Your staff should be helpful and make us feel welcome:

- We do not always know what help we need. Take the time to support and advise young people who come into your service. Every young person is important and should not be given up on.
- Make sure the workers are well trained, properly supported and actually like young people!

We need to know where to go and how to get there:

- Make sure you advertise the service. Not just in schools, but anywhere we might be: GPs surgeries, hospitals, youth centres, libraries and pubs!
- Help us with the cost of transport or offer outreach workers in rural areas

Consider our access needs:

- Make sure your building caters for those with accessibility needs. If this isn't possible, you should make arrangements to meet the client somewhere that is easy for them
- For those of us who are suffering from anxiety, being given clear instructions of where to go and what to expect on our first visit really helps us. Ask us what we need to 'get through the door'.

“ My local YIACS has been flexible in offering appointments. When I didn't know when my appointment was and missed it they let me rearrange it for a few days later so I could still come in.”



WHAT WORKS

“ My local YIACS offers regular drop-in sessions where you can just walk in and you don't need a referral. You can get an initial assessment to help you decide what type of help you need, so you don't even have to know what to ask for when you turn up. This helps when something may be going on, or you're struggling to cope with things and your appointment isn't till the following week. This then helps with early intervention and to prevent you from feeling alone.

The initial assessment helps in the sense of not knowing what the problem is or not knowing exactly what you're looking for.

They have contact details and a map on the website, so that the information needed is on hand and readily available. Having this information online also helps new service users, this way they can contact the service and gather as much information as they can prior to their initial assessment.”



3

HAVE ALL THE HELP WE NEED IN ONE PLACE

Problems with housing, unemployment and money can pile up and cause our mental health to spiral. It's easier to get everything sorted in one place.

A YIACS should primarily aim to offer:

- A drop-in
- One-to-one therapies such as counselling
- Advice on wider issues that impact our mental health (see fig.1)
- Groups for specific issues or communities of young people
- Information on a wide range of issues
- Emotional/personal support
- An online service for information, referrals or counselling

Fig.1. Wider issues that impact our mental health:

- Money and debt
- Housing/homelessness
- Drugs and alcohol
- Sexual health
- Relationships
- Education, careers and training

Our ideal service would also offer:

- Youth club style activities
- Referral services
- Practical support
- A social space that serves food, like a cafe
- A food bank
- Psychiatric interventions
- A telephone helpline
- Some presence on social media
- Mentoring/befriending
- Outreach services in emergency departments
- Peer support
- GP based in service
- Specialists such as legal advisors or solicitors



...If the organisation isn't able to offer all of these services then they must be able to show us

where to go for help. We accept that sometimes one service can't do everything, but don't fob us off. You should have good links with other services and support us when referring. Be honest with us and help us get the help we need.



“ Everyone in the place was very friendly and welcoming, we felt really at ease.”

“ Everyone was supportive and caring and I felt really welcomed. The staff were lovely.”

4

PROVIDE A WELCOMING AND AGE APPROPRIATE SETTING



It is your responsibility to be welcoming towards us when we contact you. You should always consult with your service users to find out their specific needs, but here are a few hints to get you started:

Staff in the reception and drop-in area should be friendly and approachable. This is our first experience of the service, and it is important to get it right. Remember, we are already feeling nervous and vulnerable. A grumpy receptionist can make us feel ten times worse or make us want to leave the service without getting help.

The reception and drop-in area should feel welcoming and age-appropriate.

“ I felt as though I was comfortable enough to say what may have been on my mind or bothering me.”



DO

- Have a few sofas or beanbags for us to sit on while we are waiting
- Paint the walls or hang some paintings to add a homely touch
- Provide an information stand and keep it updated with relevant leaflets
- Provide some refreshments like something to drink and some biscuits
- If possible, create a quiet space for people who may be anxious
- Provide a bookshelf to help us pass the time while we are waiting

DON'T

- Make it feel like a hospital. Grey chairs, white walls and tiled floors all add to a 'clinical' feel which can make us feel anxious and nervous.
- Have children's toys all over the reception area. This makes us feel belittled before we have even seen anyone.



5

PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE UP TO THE AGE OF 25



All services should offer support for young people up to age 25. Young people aged 16-25 face specific issues relating to our age, and many statutory and Government services for young people stop at 18.

Mental Health support

Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CAMHS) stop supporting you when you turn 18. Many of us aren't ready for the transition to Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS) so early on, and find the process daunting. Often, transitioning between services makes our mental health issues much worse.

In some areas you won't be seen by CAMHS if you are 17 because of the long waiting lists, and because you are still too young for AMHS you can't get any support when you need it most.

Additionally, many of us can feel 'pushed away' and won't seek the help we need after we turn 18.

Wider support

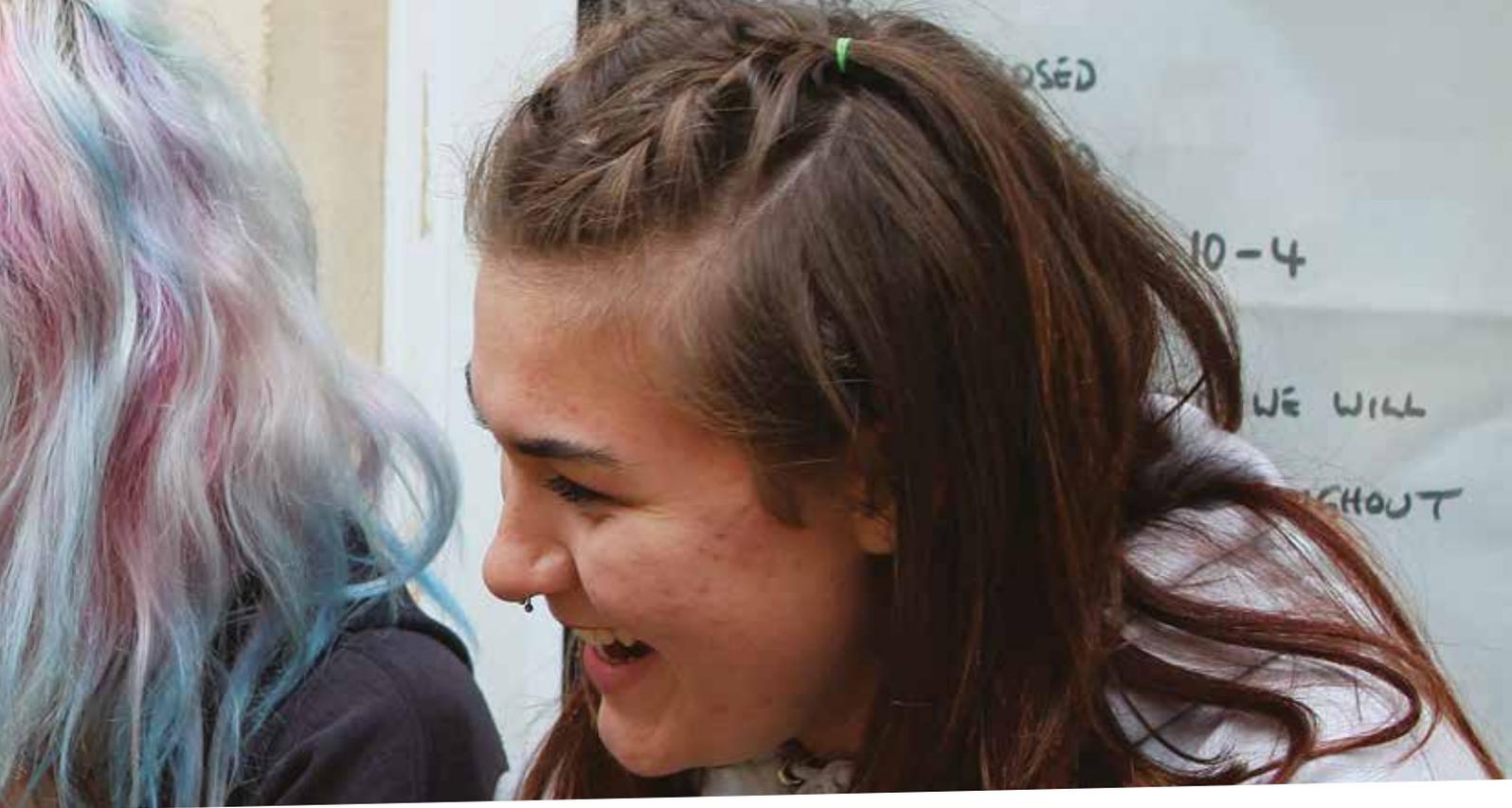
Because of the specific needs of the 16-25 age group, we need specialist help and advice on issues like housing, drugs and alcohol, debt, benefits and employment. All of these issues are related to our mental health and it makes it easier to cope when a service can support us up to the age of 25.

The benefits of providing a specialist service for young people up to the age of 25:

- We can maintain the support of a worker who we have built up a relationship with
- We can continue to use a service that we feel comfortable with
- If needed, we are supported throughout the 'transition period' of moving from CAMHS to AMHS
- We do not have to worry about our personal information getting 'lost in the system'
- We know that the advice we receive is specific to our age group
- We continue to get the support we need, when we need it
- We decide when we are ready to move on
- We are not forced out of a service because of our age

WHAT WORKS

“ I believe that you should be able to receive support from organisations up to the age of 25 and for very simple reasons. I feel that most people, including myself, are only just starting to find genuine confidence and begin to be able to open up after the age of 18 – which is now the age where you can no longer receive support from CAMHS. After the age limit is reached, support will have to be sourced privately; which most cannot afford, or from adult services. This problem then causes them not to fit into any support category, and most adult services will get them to seek support from young people's services if there is one in the area, such as my local YIACS.”



6

HAVE SKILLED WORKERS WHO TAKE US SERIOUSLY

It is important to have the right people working in your service so that we can build trust and get our problems sorted properly.

A good worker

Treats you with respect:

- Doesn't patronise you
- Takes you seriously
- Validates your experience
- Treats you in an age-appropriate way
- Gives you a choice in your care

Cares about young people:

- Makes the effort to get to know you and build a relationship
- Checks in to make sure you are ok
- Trusts you

Is non-judgemental:

- Open to anyone
- Understanding
- Accepts your problems

“I was very nervous and was calmed down quite quickly with a friendly face and a smile.”



Is a good listener:

- Gives their full attention
- Doesn't rush you
- Remembers what you've said
- Can relate to your experiences



Is 'person-centred':

- Treats you as an individual, not a problem
- Responsive to your individual needs

Is professional:

- Polite and well presented
- Punctual and well organised
- Has boundaries
- Polite
- Has good communication skills
- Knows when to lead the session, and when to let the young person lead

Is knowledgeable:

- Gives good advice
- Is a specialist in their area and qualified in their field
- Will refer you to someone if they can't help
- Offers strategies and provides resources



Is honest with you:

- Genuine
- Doesn't sugar coat things - tells you the truth



Personality traits of a good worker:

Friendly; patient; firm but fair; approachable; motivated; reliable; understanding; enthusiastic.



A bad worker

Doesn't respect you:

- Patronises you and doesn't take you seriously
- Makes you feel judged
- Doesn't tell you what is going to happen
- Lies to you

Doesn't care about you:

- Gives up on you
- Talks to your parents without consulting you
- Doesn't like young people and won't make an effort to get to know you

Gives bad advice:

- Doesn't explain things properly
- Is scared to tell you the truth
- Fobs you off
- Not properly trained

Doesn't listen:

- Doesn't focus on you
- Looks away and doesn't properly engage with you
- Seems distracted
- Interrupts you



Is unprofessional:

- Unreliable and always late
- Scruffy
- Bad attitude
- "All talk no action"
- Bad communication skills

Doesn't have boundaries:

- Talks about their own problems
- Over-friendly
- Cries in your sessions
- Makes you feel bad about your problems

Discriminates:

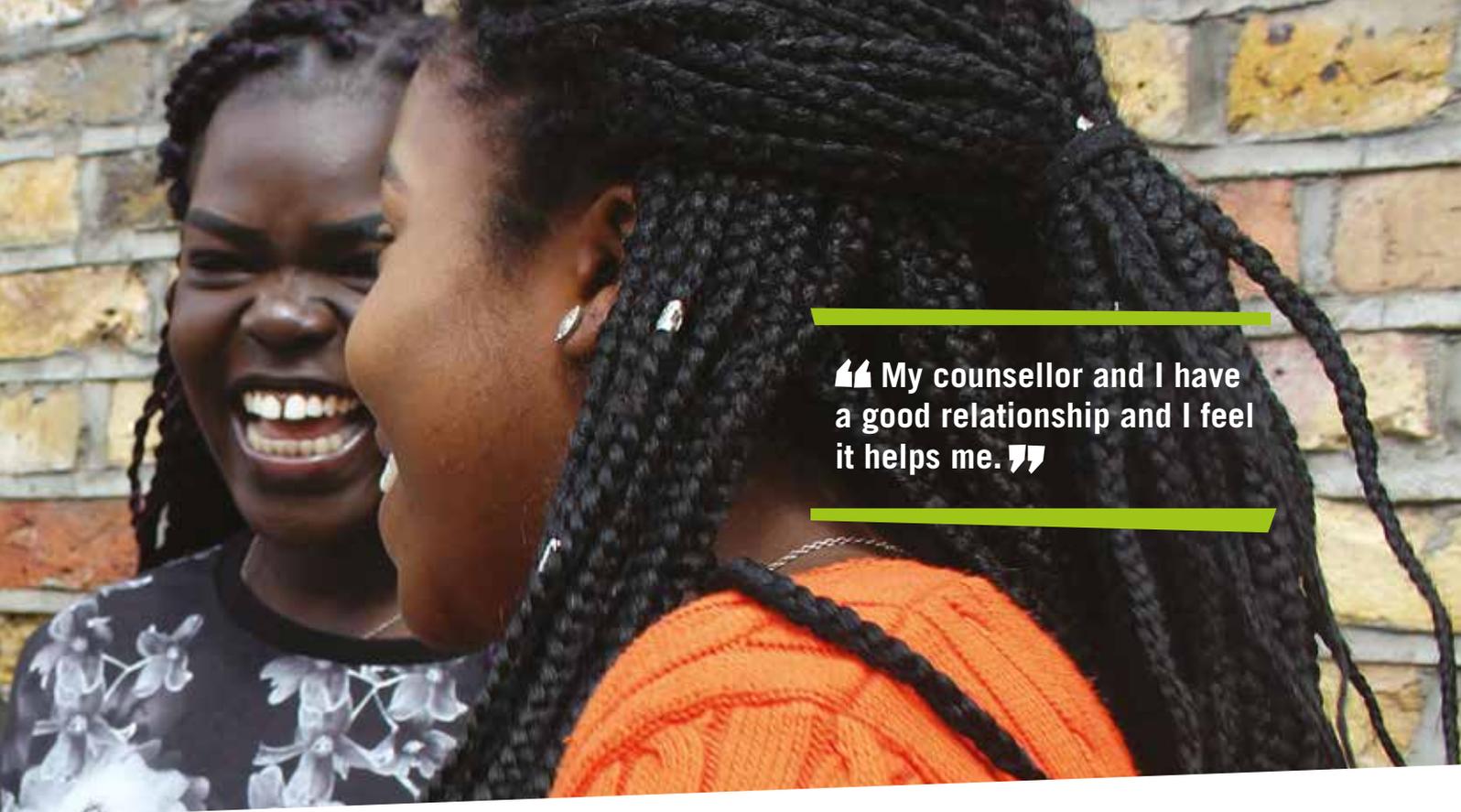
- Closed minded
- Judgemental
- Racist
- Sexist



Personality traits of a bad worker: Impatient; rude; negative; shy; snobby; immature; insulting; aggressive; rude; no empathy

WHAT WORKS

“ It is important when the counsellors are themselves inside and outside of the sessions. It gives a sense of comfort to the young people who use the service as they really connect with them on a deeper level; which builds a large amount of trust. All counsellors at my local YIACS have had to have counselling as a part of their qualification, so they know what it is like to be a client – it increases the amount of empathy for the young person and builds more trust between them, so you feel you can disclose more if you want.”



“ My counsellor and I have a good relationship and I feel it helps me. ”

7

INVOLVE US IN DECISION MAKING



If you are going to offer a ‘young person-centred’ service, you need to involve us in all decisions. We are the experts in our lives and we know what we need. Knowing that you care about our opinions makes us feel valued and empowered.

Some good examples of user involvement:

- **A regular consultation or steering group:** This is a group of young people who meet regularly with staff to discuss decisions and to provide feedback on all aspects of the service
- **A suggestion box:** This should be placed in a discreet area so that we can provide anonymous feedback
- **Young person’s interview panel:** Involving us in recruitment of all new staff helps you hire young person-friendly candidates
- **Focus groups:** These are in addition to the regular consultation/steering group and help you to get more opinions on specific things, for example a new service or feedback on a workshop

Remember

User involvement only works if you take on board what we say. We can tell when it is just tokenistic – don’t waste our time on a box-ticking exercise. Let us know what you are going to do with the feedback. If there is something that you can’t change, explain why so that we don’t think you are ignoring us.

What happens when our feedback is ignored?

- Staff make assumptions, and this can lead to bad outcomes
- Disengagement of young people in the service
- The service gets a bad name
- The service becomes outdated
- Young people won’t go back

WHAT WORKS

“ My local YIACS includes young people in decision making in a number of ways. They have set up a youth group called ‘Youthwise’, who meet on a weekly basis. The group does a range of things like enhancing our CVs through gaining accredited training. It also helps organise workshops for other young people, like workshops discussing exam stress at high schools and others about healthy relationships and attitudes toward sexuality. The group also assists in planning events, like the 25th anniversary celebrations, suggesting themes and acts that could perform. They also ask young people to take part on interview panels when hiring new staff to get a young person’s perspective on prospective staff and whether they think they’d be suited to the role. Apart from the Youthwise group, the organisation tries to gauge opinions of service users through suggestion boxes and also shows the improvements through a ‘You said, we did’ board.

It makes me feel empowered, valued and understood. I feel like my local YIACS is a service that I can rely on and will ensure that I am comfortable using it. Being part of the decision making process also prepares me for the real world of work and gives me an insight into what I can expect when I have finished education. ”



This Charter has been developed by hundreds of young people all over England who participated in consultations, Mental Health Takeover Day, a national study of youth counselling in YIACS' community based settings and a youth editorial board. The development of this Charter has been co-ordinated by Youth Access and made possible thanks to funding from the Department of Health.



Thanks in particular to the staff and young people at: CAYSH – London; Interchange – Sheffield; No Limits - Southampton; Off The Record – Bristol; Royal Association for Deaf people – London; Service Six – Northampton; Streetwise – Newcastle; Youth Advice Centre – Brighton; YASP – Manchester; YPAS – Liverpool; Youthworks CIC – Kettering.



Youth Access is the advice and counselling network. We believe that every young person has a right to access free, high quality advice and counselling. Working with our members, we promote the YIACS model as part of local services for young people everywhere.



Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) offer young people support on a range of issues in a young person-centred environment. YIACS are open to a wide age range, typically 13-25. Because of this, they are able to tackle the tricky 'transition' period by supporting the young person into early adulthood. Whilst most YIACS work with all young people, data shows that many are highly vulnerable and their issues increasingly complex. The issues that young people come to services with are often inter-related. YIACS therefore provide a holistic response to young people's emotional, health, social and practical needs.

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