

# A blueprint for Young Futures hubs

March 2025

**FUND THE  
HUBS**



Children & Young People's  
Mental Health Coalition



**YOUNGMINDS**



# Foreword

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*This foreword was written by Fiona Annis, Warith Rawahi and Grace Ward. They all have experience receiving support at local community based early support hubs and have participated in Fund the Hubs workshops that informed this Blueprint.*

Young Futures hubs should support young people to meet their potential, regardless of their background, troubles, or aims. As a group of young people from across the country, we are recommending the model for hubs that has been outlined in this blueprint based on our own experiences of accessing services.

We should have equal access to services that are flexible, feel safe, and have been co-designed with us. Young Futures hubs must reflect young people's needs at a most basic level and uphold our rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). This includes involving young people in these decisions that directly impact us.

In this blueprint, you will find two charters that have been co-produced by young people, which demonstrate how participation can be carried out successfully with them in order to create services that are relevant to them. Young people, experts by experience, should not be taken for granted in how much they know or trivialised when they are involved. The whole point of the Young Futures programme is to help us, so how can that be done without listening to what we say?

The world right now feels unfamiliar, hostile, and too fast-paced for even the best of us to cope. We are lost and sometimes alone, and the Hub model set out in this blueprint is just what most of us need. Have a housing problem? Hubs have connections to the local authorities and agencies. Have a mental health issue? Hubs welcome you into their many mental health support services. And on it goes.

The Government spends billions of pounds on public services trying to rebuild young people's lives after they reach crisis. In comparison, where these hubs already exist, they cost little yet do so much for us and thousands of young

people around the country – people who will go on to work, pursue education and train for a career. The Government needs us now more than ever; we need not mention the socio-economic situation to stress the importance of providing the proper support for us now.

Investing in hubs is an investment in our future. Work with us to build a positive and healthy future, or we may not see it. Young people, your future voters, will remember the choices you make.

We are a trio of passionate young people from starkly different backgrounds. Each of us has goals, hopes, and dreams. None of this would have been possible without the excellent support of our local hubs. Support that must be available for every young person wherever they live.

**Fiona Annis, Warith Rawahi, Grace Ward**

# Executive summary

The Government's commitment to roll out Young Futures hubs to deliver open access mental health support to children and young people in local communities provides a unique opportunity to truly integrate and invest in early intervention for children and young people.

Hubs of this kind are not new. For many years, co-located services have demonstrated their effectiveness in providing holistic support for children, young people and families. Youth, Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS), otherwise known as 'early support hubs', already offer flexible, community-based advice and mental health support to children and young people aged up to 25, on a self-referral basis.

The Fund the Hubs campaign group has long been calling for a national network of early support hubs to ensure that children and young people receive timely mental health and wellbeing support. There are over 60 of these hubs across the country, but they are not yet universally available in every community.

The Government does not need to re-invent the wheel. The aims of Young Futures hubs align closely with the services that many pre-existing early support hubs are providing to young people. The Young Futures hubs policy represents a timely opportunity to consolidate and build upon the existing network of open access, early support hubs operating around the country.

Through establishing sustainable funding for existing hubs, alongside the development of new hubs in areas currently underserved, the Government can ensure that every young person has access to a trusted, welcoming support hub within their local community.

In this blueprint, we set out a vision for Young Futures hubs:

- Young Futures hubs are **co-created** with young people to ensure successful engagement and impact. Young people should be involved in all stages of service development and delivery at both a national and local level.
- Hubs are designed and delivered against the **values and principles** set out in the Youth Access 'YIACS' model.

- Hubs are centred on **mental health and wellbeing** as the core service offer and cater for young people from 10-25 to cover the whole of this crucial transitional period in a young person's life.
- Young Futures hubs **build on, and integrate with, existing youth support infrastructure** and expertise within local areas.

We therefore call on the Government to **set out a roadmap to deliver a hub in every local authority area**, sufficiently resourced to offer accessible outreach provision beyond the physical hub, **with the aim to have achieved 70% coverage within the next five years and 100% by the end of 2035**. To achieve this, the Government should:

1. Use the upcoming Spending Review to commit to a multi-year funding package for the roll out of Young Futures hubs. We estimate that £169-£210 million per year is required to roll out a hub in every local area, with a further £74m to £121m needed for capital and set up costs.
2. Carry out a comprehensive, cross-government consultation on delivering open access support for children and young people. This should include meaningful engagement with existing service providers, as well as establishing a 'national design panel' to co-design these services with young people.
3. Take a cross-departmental approach throughout the development of the Young Futures programme, ensuring that it aligns with long-term, cross-departmental strategies such as the Youth Strategy, the Child Poverty Strategy, and the 10-year Health Plan.
4. Develop joint commissioning guidance for local areas on implementing Young Futures hubs. This should include a mandated level of funding for hub services to ensure they are adequately resourced.
5. Work with existing hub providers to design a clear and consistent outcomes framework that captures both quantitative and qualitative data.
6. Set out a workforce development plan to support the roll-out of hubs.
7. Put in place a mechanism to capture and share learning and quality practice from hubs to support continuous development.

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# Introduction

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Successive governments have sought to integrate support for children, young people and families through 'hub' models. In recent years, we have seen the development of family hubs, youth hubs and early support hubs in local areas. These hubs act as a central 'gateway' into services within local communities, so that children, young people and families can either access direct support or be seamlessly referred into a variety of support services.

The Government has recognised the value of the hub model in providing an integrated offer of support, and has committed to developing this model further through the establishment of new Young Futures hubs in every local area (Labour, 2024). These hubs are intended to support the delivery of the Government's missions and have three main aims:

- to promote children and young people's development
- to improve mental health and wellbeing
- to prevent young people from being drawn into crime.

These hubs will sit under a wider 'Young Futures' programme aimed at improving young people's life chances. This programme will also include 'prevention partnerships' to identify and support 'at risk' young people. The Government has also committed to deliver a Child Poverty Strategy, a new Youth Strategy and a 10-Year Health Plan.

The establishment of Young Futures hubs provides a unique opportunity to build on the excellent hub services that already exist within local communities. Hubs providing early mental health support in the community already exist in the form of 'early support hubs', also known as the Youth Access model of advice and counselling services (YIACS). There has been growing momentum behind the early support hub model in recent years. These services provide easy-to-access, drop-in support on a self-referral basis for young people with mild to moderate mental health problems, up to age 25. They are community based and, most importantly, they put young people's needs at the centre of all they do.

The early support hub model was nationally recognised in the Future in Mind strategy, published in 2015, which set out the then Government's vision to transform children and young people's mental health services (Department for Health and Social Care & NHS England, 2015). The strategy included a commitment to increase the number of 'one stop shops' to provide mental health support to children and young people in their local area. There are currently over 60 early support hubs operating in England. However these services face uncertain funding environments, often relying on multiple sources of short-term funding to deliver a holistic service. Many of these services have been operating for decades, building strong, trusted relationships in their local communities, and becoming important social infrastructure in their neighbourhoods.

We believe that early support hubs can be used as a base from which to grow the nationwide network of Young Futures hubs and progress the Government's missions, including the opportunity, health and safer streets missions. Crucially, many early supports hubs, alongside other services within their local area, are already delivering the type of support envisioned within the Young Futures programme. It is therefore vital that the roll-out of Young Futures hubs builds on the existing provision, expertise, practice and evidence of services already embedded in local areas, supporting them to sustain and expand their provision in a way that centres the voices and experiences of young people in their communities.

Whilst some neighbourhoods are currently underserved and will require the establishment of new hub provision, in others the Young Futures investment would be best used to consolidate and complement existing hub provision. It is in this way that the Young Futures programme can best deliver the vision of ensuring that every young person has access to holistic, community-based wellbeing and mental health support in their community.

### **About this blueprint**

This blueprint has been produced by the Fund the Hubs campaign, which was founded in 2020 in response to growing mental health needs experienced by children and young people. This campaign is led by the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, Centre for Mental Health, Youth Access, YoungMinds, Mind, The Children's Society, Black Thrive Global and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.



In autumn 2024, the Fund the Hubs campaign group convened the children's mental health sector, existing hub providers and young people to gather insight into the early support hub model and how it can inform the roll-out of Young Futures hubs. This blueprint brings together these insights. We would like to thank the Prudence Trust for their generous support with this work. In this blueprint, we set out:

- The policy and practice context of the early support hub model
- How hubs can deliver the Government's missions
- Embedding youth voice
- Considerations for implementation
- A roadmap for implementation.

This blueprint is intended to support the Department for Education, the Home Office, and the Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Culture, Media and Sport as well as No.10 and wider government departments in the design and development of Young Futures hubs.

The considerations and recommendations set out in this blueprint have consensus from a wide range of organisations. This blueprint is endorsed and supported by:



# What are early support hubs?

Early support hubs offer easy-to-access, drop-in support on a self-referral basis for young people experiencing mental health or wellbeing difficulties, up to age 25. They are community-based and are often delivered in partnership with the NHS, local authorities and the voluntary sector (depending on local need and existing infrastructure). Hubs provide support on a range of different issues related to mental health and wellbeing, all co-located under one roof. This often includes, for instance, counselling and psychological therapies, employment advice, youth services, sexual health and housing support.

Whilst early support hubs respond to local need and therefore differ in the services they offer; they share some key characteristics:

- Dedicated services for young people, currently for those aged 10 up to age 25
- Available for children and young people without the need to meet entry thresholds for support
- A focus on what matters to each young person
- Services combining youth work skills with the expertise of advice workers and counsellors or psychotherapists
- A voluntary relationship directed by young people.

## Values and principles

Early support hubs are guided by The Youth Access Model principles (Youth Access, 2024). Importantly, these services are designed and developed with young people's needs and rights at the forefront, providing a holistic, person-first approach.

- Open access: Hubs are free at the point of access and delivery, and there are no thresholds for young people to access support.
- Accessible: Services are accessible to all young people with a range of needs, particularly those experiencing the greatest inequalities, for

example, young people from racialised communities and LGBTQ+ young people. This also includes the physical environment being non-clinical and welcoming, as well as ensuring support is available outside normal operating hours. This includes, for example, being linked with overnight helplines whilst the service is closed.

- **Safe and confidential:** Hubs are informal settings where young people can explore their needs and access a range of support. They offer non-judgmental and non-stigmatised support and are located in places where young people feel comfortable.
- **Flexible:** Hubs recognise young people as individuals, and work flexibly to respond to young people's differing needs, such as adapting opening hours, offering a range of avenues to engage and working at a pace that young people determine.
- **Responsive:** These services are committed to understanding and responding to young people's individual needs as well as understanding their local communities.
- **Integrated:** Hubs build on, and integrate with, existing infrastructure within local areas that is already working to support young people.

### **The core service offer**

Services delivered by hubs currently vary depending on local need and available funding streams including from NHS Trusts, local authorities, grants and donations. Below key considerations of a core service offer are set out:

**A range of access points:** A range of options to make initial contact easy and accessible. Informal drop-ins enable young people to get help quickly and on their own terms, with no thresholds to support or waiting lists for initial contact. Online and phone offers are important for young people who might feel anxious about walking in, and outreach provision can lower barriers to access.

**Young person-centred and rights based:** Creating spaces where young people are valued, heard and respected can have a profound and lasting impact on building agency and empowerment. Young people want non-judgmental, age-appropriate support and to be treated with respect and dignity. Hubs should be uniquely tailored to young people and enable them to engage on their own terms, which will often mean independently from their family and with assurance of confidentiality.

**Range of support options:** Providing counselling and mental health services alongside other forms of support and advice helps address the social determinants of mental health and wellbeing, such as financial and job insecurity, discrimination and poor living conditions. A flexible approach is also important to respond to young people's differing preferences and capacities to engage. Young people say they want help within one place, with services collaborating and building partnerships to ensure access to the highest quality support in their localities.

**Supported signposting and referrals:** Hubs are well integrated and have good links to other services. This includes supporting with specialist referrals to housing or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) based on young people's need. Where specialist expertise is not available in house, such as immigration advice or sexual health, young people are supported to access alternatives and are advocated for where required.

**Cultures of safety and care:** Safety and wellbeing are embedded through the environment, workforce, practice and approach. Staff are skilled, competent and well-supported with access to clinical supervision. Structures of oppression are acknowledged and challenged, and services offer anti-racist, inclusive and culturally competent support. Young people's psychological safety is supported through clear communication, choice and transparency.

**Positive outcomes and experiences:** Tailored and flexible support offered in a friendly and non-stigmatised environment results in positive experiences and high satisfaction for young people (Youth Access, 2024). This in turn promotes positive help-seeking behaviour supporting young people to know where to go in the future when they need help for emerging issues, or feel ready to engage in a different way.

**Feedback and evaluation throughout:** Services utilise a range of clinical measures for mental health support alongside goal-based outcomes and are transparent and accountable to young people, local communities, funders and commissioners. Young people are involved in coproduction and decision making, and services adapt to feedback and the changing environment young people face.

### **Case study: The value of open access drop-in at No Limits (Southampton)**

No Limits is based in Southampton and provides a wide range of support including counselling and a drop-in Advice Centre, where young people up to age 25 can get help with anything they are going through. This includes mental health, sexual health, relationship support, housing and homelessness and other welfare concerns.

The Advice Centre provides support to young people on any issue they present with and also acts as a host for other agencies, such as a sexual health clinic. The youth workers at the Advice Centre also offer support over the phone and through an online chat service. In addition, they manage the single point of access to triage referrals.

The drop-in Advice Centre enables young people to receive immediate practical support and advice on the same day with no waiting lists and no thresholds for support. It is particularly useful for those who may only need to visit a couple of times, those who don't have the confidence to engage with more formal services and those whose lives are too chaotic to manage appointments. The open access service also helps young people get to know No Limits, in turn lowering barriers to engaging with longer-term support in the future, such as counselling or support through the drug and alcohol team. The Advice Centre is based in an easily accessible location in Southampton and is open for over 40 hours a week, including some evenings and weekends, and provides outreach after hours.

### **Providing age-appropriate support**

It is important that early support is extended to young people over the age of 18 in order to address the cliff edge in support that many young people face when they reach adulthood. Many young people, supported by parents, friends and school manage the transition into adulthood successfully, however some young people require additional support. By working with young people up to the age of 25, early support hubs:

- Support young people through key life transitions such as leaving education, leaving home or the care system, joining the workforce and gaining financial independence.
- Support young adults who fall through the gaps between Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) and Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS) due to not meeting high clinical thresholds or facing long waiting lists.

- Support young people who are too old for family hubs, not in education and/or unable to access Mental Health Support Teams in school.
- Support young people early and when the need for support is first identified, with three quarters of adults with diagnosable mental health problems experiencing their first symptoms of poor mental health by age 25 (Kessler et al, 2005).
- Recognise and respond to young people's unique experiences in entering adulthood:
  - Some young people experience 'accelerated' or 'fast track' transitions, where independence and responsibility are thrust upon them at an early age such as young parents, young carers, early school leavers and young people leaving care.
  - Some young people experience protracted transitions to social and financial independence which are not linear and require specialist advice and support.

Hubs are experts in providing age-appropriate support and are able to effectively manage meeting the needs of different age groups within one space. They are also aware of the associated safeguarding risks, and carefully manage these in the support provided.

For group-based activities and support on specific issue areas, hubs will typically ensure closer age ranges to ensure support and content is age appropriate, and safety and risk are adequately managed. Some services also run groups for specific age groups, for example, dedicated groups for 10 to 16-year-olds and for 16 to 25-year-olds.

On the other hand, open access, advice drop-in sessions are often open to wider age ranges, from 10 to 25. This is important because the drop-in provision aims to reduce barriers for young people in accessing support. Open access provision is also a gateway for young people to be able to explore different projects in more detail and develop initial relationships with hub staff, getting a feel for the space and what is on offer. Risk is managed through sufficient and skilled staffing. Whilst sharing the same space, young people are often seeking individual and tailored advice on their issues with an appropriate professional – hubs are adept at hosting multiple 1:1 confidential conversations at the same time within their space.

## Case study: Providing support to age 25 at Centre 33 (Peterborough & Cambridgeshire)

Centre 33 is a service based across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire offering support to any young person up to the age of 25 with various needs. Despite its affluent reputation, Cambridgeshire is one of the most unequal areas in the UK (Cambridge City Council, 2023), and many young people face high levels of social and economic inequality. Over 50% of Centre 33's work is focused on deprived rural areas where there is a lack of access to services, poor transportation and limited employment opportunities. In these neighbourhoods, young people are more likely to present with isolation and loneliness.

At Centre 33, 84% of young people attending the drop-in sessions are aged 17-25, demonstrating the crucial gap this service fills for young people making the transition into adulthood. By providing a range of services under one roof with no thresholds or exclusion criteria, young people can access holistic support across multiple aspects of their life in one place. This includes offering flexible support around housing and homelessness, mental health, sexual health and food poverty. Personalised 1:1 coaching and advice help young people to reach their goals around money, employment and training. This breadth of support is an essential aspect of the model, since almost half of young people seeking support approach Centre 33 with as many as eight or more presenting needs.

## Workforce

The workforce for early support hubs varies depending on the services offered and is typically multidisciplinary in make-up. However, the type of roles that you would expect to see in an early support hub include:

- Service manager
- Safeguarding lead
- Counsellors and psychotherapists
- Youth workers (including outreach workers)
- Employment, housing and debt advisors
- Health workforce (including sexual health and substance misuse)
- Administrator
- Clinical supervisor
- Peer support workers
- Volunteers (e.g. volunteer 'welcomers').

# How can hubs achieve the Government's missions?

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Young Futures hubs contribute to the Government's missions including the safer streets mission, the opportunities mission and the health mission. Hubs themselves are mission-led services, sharing a collective drive to ensure young people in local areas have access to effective advice and mental health support, helping them to navigate challenges and make a successful transition to adulthood. We believe that a full roll-out of the early support hub model, through the Young Futures Programme, can make a meaningful contribution to all four of these Government missions if delivered effectively.

## **Breaking down the barriers to opportunity**

Young Futures hubs form part of the opportunities mission through supporting and promoting children and young people's development. Hubs can help break down barriers to opportunity by providing holistic support for young people ensuring they have the building blocks in place for a good standard of living. Early support hubs go beyond a simple offer of counselling or advice – by offering a range of services simultaneously, they can help unlock young people's challenges, such as difficulties in accessing education or work, more effectively and enable them to reach their full potential.

Early support hubs provide an accessible model of mental health support for young people. Today's young people have the poorest mental health of any age group, impacting education and employment, with a record number of young people unable to work because of mental ill health (Resolution Foundation, 2022). Through prioritising mental health and wellbeing support, hubs are able to support young people's employment opportunities.

The open access holistic provision provided by hubs reaches young people who typically face poorer access, experience and outcomes in statutory provision including a greater proportion of 'older' young people, as well as higher proportions of LGBTQ+ young people, Black and racialised young people and young people with experience of contact with the youth justice



system. By taking a young person-centred approach, responsive to local needs, hubs can tackle barriers and spread opportunity by offering specialist help and advice on issues like housing, drugs and alcohol, debt, benefits and employment.

To achieve this mission, the Young Futures hub policy must:

- Avoid reinforcing the cliff edge by ending support at age 18, when young people face upheaval in multiple aspects of their lives, whilst simultaneously losing access to vital support from various children's agencies.
- Avoid focusing on careers advice in isolation: without putting support in place to address basic needs around mental ill health, harmful substance use, or housing.
- Avoid combining youth provision with family or early years offers. This risks increasing barriers to access for young people by undermining the confidentiality of the support offer where young people are seeking advice on personal issues; or through young people experiencing an environment that feels childlike, disempowering or irrelevant to their needs.

### **Build an NHS fit for the future**

Young Futures hubs, if based on the early support hubs model, will also play a central role in supporting the Government's ambition to raise the healthiest generation in our history by addressing the mental health epidemic amongst young people and relieving pressure on the NHS.

New data showing that hospital admissions for mental health issues among 11 to 25-year-olds have increased by 20% since 2017 indicate that young people are reaching crisis point (Education Policy Institute, 2024). Research has shown that the wider help provided by existing early support hubs through advice services is highly effective at improving young people's mental health (Youth Access, 2012). By seeking to address the drivers of poor wellbeing and mental ill-health together (such as poor housing, unemployment, and economic inequality) rather than treating individual symptoms, hubs deliver comparable improvements to the life outcomes of young people as statutory services, for a fraction of the cost (Ibid).

As an integrated service, early support hubs work with the wider mental health system and have been proven to help reduce demand on NHS services and achieve significant upstream savings. For example, an external evaluation by the Anna Freud Centre found that 42nd Street's Integrated Community Response Service (delivered within its hub) achieved significant individual and system impacts, creating savings of £806,040. These savings were due to improved mental health outcomes, and reductions in the number of referrals and emergency calls to NHS CYPMHS, and in the number of presentations at A&E (42nd Street, 2020).

For hubs to successfully support mental health and wellbeing, they must:

- **Avoid clinical environments:** Hubs must be welcoming and informal community environments that are co-designed by young people to meet their preferences and needs. Whilst there can be important roles for clinicians as part of the multidisciplinary team, hubs must avoid replicating the feel and model of delivery of clinical environments which can be alienating, trigger anxiety and nervousness.
- **Avoid one size fits all support:** Hubs should be flexible and localised in the support they can offer to young people, offering adaptable meeting times and locations, and varied forms of support and engagement, so that they lower barriers to involvement and meet young people's diverse needs. A one-size fits all approach will perpetuate inequalities in access and outcomes.

### **Case study: Addressing multiple aspects of young people's mental health at Mancroft Advice Project (Norfolk)**

Mancroft Advice Project (MAP) is a local youth advice and counselling service in Norfolk working with young people aged 11-25. In response to elevated local self-harm and suicide rates in Norfolk, MAP and the local NHS mental health trust work in partnership to deliver a community-based rapid response pathway. Children and young people who present in A&E with self-harm are assessed by the Central Norfolk Crisis Assessment and Intensive Support Team (CAIST) and contact is made by a qualified mental health professional at MAP within 48 working hours of referral to arrange a first session.

Sessions are shaped around the young person's individual needs and goals for treatment, informed by NICE guidance. They include counselling interventions and/or specialist advice-giving on areas such as relationships, debt, housing and health, as needed by each individual young person. Working within a multi-systems approach, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust and MAP regularly liaise about those on the pathway and together monitor increasing risk; escalating back to CAIST/higher care where required.

This approach has proven outcomes in reducing the frequency and severity of self-harm, reducing A&E attendance and supporting children and young people to achieve their goals. Young people say they value the friendly, responsive and non-judgmental practitioners, the speed at which they were contacted and seen, the individually tailored care, and the useful tools discussed during the sessions which they can continue to utilise.

### **Make Britain's streets safe**

Under the Safer Streets mission, the Government committed to introducing a network of Young Futures hubs to stop young people being drawn into crime, with the aim of halving knife crime in a decade. We agree that Young Futures hubs can play a central role in addressing the root causes and social determinants of knife crime, such as mental ill health, poverty, exclusion, and a lack of opportunity. Reductions in crime and violence are important long-term benefits of earlier and better mental health support and social welfare advice for young people – but these reductions should not be the primary performance metrics by which hubs are measured.

A systematic review found that a tailored, needs-based approach to tackling knife offending was the only evaluated intervention that led to a reduction in recidivism and that increasing access to tailored support on housing, education and employment showed an impact in reducing weapon carrying (Browne, et al 2022).

Early support hubs are effective because they enable young people to find their way on their own terms, by identifying their strengths, tailoring the service to their needs and providing them with guidance to understand their legal rights, responsibilities and choices available to them. It is this voluntary relationship, led by the young person, that fosters trust and enables these services to positively engage higher proportions of young people who have had contact with the justice system than statutory services (Duncan et al, 2018).

This strengths-based approach with its focus on meeting young people's welfare needs has been proven to effectively reduce the occurrence of challenging behaviour (Creaney, 2012).

The open access provision of hubs further encourages healthy help-seeking behaviour in young people, enabling them to build up confidence and familiarity within the service, helping to remove barriers to seeking support and advice for emerging needs in the future. This is especially important for young people who might not have access to support systems within their family or wider networks or who want to seek someone outside of their network to talk to. A study from the Youth Endowment Fund highlights the importance of youth-centred provision, particularly for children affected by crime (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024).

In order to achieve long-term outcomes, we advise Young Futures hubs to:

- **Avoid a deficit-based approach:** A deficit-based approach focuses on what young people are doing wrong and seeks to restrain a young person's agency to achieve changed behaviour. Deficit approaches can reinforce negative labelling and increase social exclusion, with knock-on consequences for mental health and beyond. Instead, hubs should focus on taking a strengths-based approach.
- **Avoid stigmatised service provision:** Hubs need to be places that young people feel safe and listened to and places they want to be. Hubs being linked to, and viewed, as a 'crime prevention' programme could make it challenging to win the trust of many young people, including those who may be 'at risk' of involvement in crime.
- **Avoid limited interventions:** Receiving support and advice at Young Futures hubs should not be conditional upon meeting set criteria or thresholds, and support should be delivered flexibly to accommodate young people's differing needs, rather than subject to strict time or session limits.
- **Avoid enforcement approaches:** Hubs must not operate as part of a pathway into the criminal justice system or form attendance requirements as part of conditional cautions. This undermines the importance of support being provided on a voluntary basis, which is vital for developing trusting relationships.

### **Case study: Dedicated support for young people in contact with the justice system complementing the core early support hub offer at Next Steps (Southampton)**

Next Steps was a partnership project which ran across Southampton for 10 years until 2024. No Limits hosted a strand of the programme supporting young people released from custody as well as those who had been in contact with the justice system. Young people could self-refer, and also come from the youth justice, police and probation services. The approach was based on a range of core principles which included support being young person centred and directed, the length of engagement depending on their needs and utilising a youth work led approach with access to counselling. Other principles included confidentiality, trauma responsiveness, being strengths based and relational. The success of the programme was based upon the trusted relationship between the young person and youth worker which is built over time.

An evaluation of the programme identified that the average rate of offences committed by participants reduced from 0.39 per month prior to starting the project to 0.2 offences per month.

The programme was embedded within the wider offer at No Limits and enabled the Next Steps worker to informally introduce young people to other staff members from specialist services. For example, the advice team was on hand to provide practical support around housing, benefits, relationships and low mood. There was also collaboration with youth workers in hospital emergency departments and drug and alcohol support services.

# Embedding Youth Voice within the implementation of Young Future hubs

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Young people have previously outlined clear priorities for early support hubs mental health services, which should be considered in the roll-out of Young Futures hubs. For instance, the Youth in Mind project in Norfolk and Waveney has developed a Children and Young People’s Mental Health Charter, which defines key aspects of mental health services that are important to children and young people (MAP Norfolk, n.d.). Similarly, Youth Access (2017) collaborated with young people to create a charter focused on person-centred mental health and wellbeing services. The core characteristics of both these charters include:

- Caring services that treat young people with respect
- Accessible and welcoming spaces
- Timely support that meets the individual needs of each young person
- A skilled workforce capable of providing effective support
- Regular communication
- Services that actively listen to the voices of young people.

Young people must be involved at every stage of the design and delivery of Young Futures hubs – this means at both national and local levels, as well as within individual services. This involvement is not only necessary for the design of the hubs but also for the continuous improvement and adaptation of the services they offer.

From the outset, young people should have a meaningful role in the co-design of hubs and decision-making. This should include efforts to audit which demographic groups are currently accessing hubs and consulting with underrepresented service user groups to ensure that all services are culturally appropriate and offer holistic support which is responsive to local strengths, needs and difficulties.

We believe the following steps need to be taken to ensure young people play a meaningful role in the design and delivery of Young Futures hubs:

- A 'national design panel' should be established and convened by the Department for Education comprising of young people and practitioners to help shape a minimum national specification for Young Futures hubs. This should include the creation of national guidance on the inclusion of youth voice and influence, to ensure that every hub meets a minimum standard for youth engagement and feedback.
- These 'design panels' should be replicated at a local level bringing together local stakeholders, youth service practitioners and young people to decide the details of what hub provision should look like in their local area. This should involve scoping what is available locally, what can be built on and the local approach required to deliver the hub specification. This information should be used to develop local Young Futures plans. There should be adequate time and resources built into the local delivery of hubs to enable this co-design process.[1]

[1] 'Local Design Teams for Young Futures Hubs' (unpublished) by Luke Billingham

# Implementing Young Futures hubs

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The development and implementation of Young Futures hubs provide a vital opportunity to build on existing expertise and services within local communities. We also believe there is important learning from the early support hub model that should be considered and addressed within the roll-out of Young Futures hubs to ensure the programme's success.

## **Funding and commissioning**

There are challenges within the funding landscape that need to be addressed when determining funding mechanisms for Young Futures hubs. To begin with, funding for services is often short-term resulting in challenges to sustainability and longevity, particularly impacting the maintenance and development of the workforce. Short-term funding cycles have negative consequences for staff retention, with skilled staff being put on notice, or forced to look for their next role as they approach the end of their contract.

Existing hubs are commissioned and funded by a mixture of ICBs and local authorities and often have to rely on philanthropic funding to plug gaps. An overall lack of adequate funding means that providers within local areas are often in competition with one another to win new contracts. This can disproportionately impact smaller charities who are unable to compete with larger organisations which have a bigger national footprint and greater capacity to secure new funds. Funding arrangements further disadvantage smaller organisations as contracts are often paid in arrears, which can create cash flow issues.

Furthermore, the commissioning arrangements within local areas can be challenging for services to navigate. They can be fragmented and complex, with no set accountability arrangements as to who should be funding services of this kind. Whilst the creation of Integrated Care Boards aimed to bring commissioning arrangements together, this has – in some instances – weakened the ground for voluntary and community sector organisations, who can be excluded from commissioning conversations and decisions.



We believe that funding and commissioning mechanisms for Young Futures hubs should seek to address these challenges. At a national level:

- The commitment to establish hubs should be matched by long-term and sustainable revenue funding, from a minimum of five years, alongside required capital to ensure longevity and success of the model.
- There should also be a clear commissioning framework that provides specifications on the support that should be delivered, with flexibility for provision to be tailored to local children and young people's needs, demographics and geographies.
- The commissioning framework should include a requirement to map existing services and assets within each local area. This would ensure that the commissioning of Young Futures hubs builds on existing community assets and expertise, instead of duplicating support.

## **Integration**

The hub model has a crucial role to play in bringing together support for children and young people and taking a multidisciplinary approach. Co-locating professionals within the same physical building can be an effective way of developing seamless working relationships between different agencies and help everyone to develop a richer understanding of local young people's needs.

Early support hubs are also well integrated with other services within their local areas, meaning that young people can either access direct support or be seamlessly signposted or referred to a variety of other services in the community. Many hubs have developed outreach and partnership working with a variety of local community assets through the 'hub and spoke' model, enabling them to provide children and young people with a coordinated offer of support. As an integrated service, early support hubs work with the wider system such as NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services, Adult Mental Health Services, Mental Health Support Teams, and safeguarding teams to ensure they can get young people to the right support and address any risks.

If Young Futures hubs are to be successful, it is crucial that they are well integrated within local infrastructure and seek to collaborate and work with local system partners.

In particular, they should have strong working relationships with local education settings, social care, health services, VCS organisations, Violence Reduction Units, youth services and carers providers (Billingham, 2024). This should include clear pathways in place to refer children and young people on to specialist mental health and children's services when necessary.

## **Workforce**

The hub model relies heavily on a multi-disciplinary workforce to provide a holistic offer of support. Tackling current shortages in the children and young people's mental health workforce and expanding capacity are key considerations for the successful delivery of Young Futures hubs.

The biggest challenge services face in sustaining and developing their workforce capacity is short-term and unstable funding for youth work and advice. The current picture of short-term funding for services means limited job security for staff, whose roles are short-term and precarious, often subject to successful applications for continuation funding (Youth Access, 2021). This in turn makes workforce retention and capacity harder to manage, with trained and skilled staff leaving their roles prematurely.

Youth workers are skilled professionals who have strong understanding of the local and national context young people face. Through building trusting relationships, they support young people to build their life skills, confidence and to find their own way. They have been identified as a key part of the workforce for Young Futures hubs, but the youth work sector has been hit particularly hard by funding cuts in recent years. There have been 4,500 youth workers lost from the frontline in the past decade as public funding for youth work has reduced by 77% since 2010/11 (UK Youth and Frontier Economics, 2022).

This means that successful implementation of Young Futures hubs will require upstream efforts to rebuild youth workers that have been lost and invest in the leadership skills. The development of the new National Youth Strategy presents an opportunity to invest and grow the youth work workforce across government departments.

The Growth and Skills Levy can offer the opportunity to align this workforce development with the roll-out of Young Futures hubs and wider preventative programmes.

The Growth and Skills levy offers a valuable opportunity to fund professional development and create pathways into the youth work profession, helping to enhance the capacity of youth workers.

Counsellors and psychotherapists are also a core part of the multidisciplinary workforce within hubs. Analysis by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the largest professional membership body for the counselling and psychotherapy workforce, demonstrates that their members have additional capacity to support the development of Young Futures hubs. Based on BACP's workforce data mapping, over half of their children and young people trained members (approximately 19,000 members) have the capacity to take on more paid work, on average this works out at an extra five clients per week. Extrapolating these figures suggests that registered and accredited members from BACP are trained and available to work with over 51,000 additional young people per week.

Other professional membership bodies such as the National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society (NCPS) and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapists (UKCP) also have members with capacity for additional paid work.

## **Outcomes**

There are many outcome measures for assessing young people's mental health which are quantitative and robustly validated. They assess how a young person is feeling prior to a mental health intervention and then measure any change following the given intervention.

Outcome measures can consider symptom improvement (if they have a mental health diagnosis), functional improvement (such as attending school or work or engaging socially) or general wellbeing, and be objective (such as symptom severity scales and physiological indicators) or subjective (self-reported or hub staff/clinician reported).

Following a consultation Fund the Hubs partners held with young people, services and wider professionals, a number of common themes were identified, with particular emphasis on the need for measures to be meaningful, valid and easily accessible for all parties. Other key considerations included the importance of:

- ensuring young people's bespoke needs are central to any routine outcome tool used, including ensuring the process of collection is easy and accessible.
- establishing buy-in from services and young people themselves, with a clear purpose and transparency around how data are used.
- recognising the value of wide-ranging measures to demonstrate the impact of holistic service provision, including symptom improvement, functional improvement, wellbeing measures, and objective and subjective measures.

It must be taken into account that existing services will already have a series of reporting requirements from current funders and different IT systems which can be obstacles to the collection of standardised data across services. Using a tool other services already rely on would allow efficient benchmarking against other available data.

There is a range of validated measures depending on service user age, used by other services including the [CORE-OM](#), [CORE-10/YP CORE](#), [PHQ-9](#), [WEMWEBS](#) or [GAD-7](#). The Experience of Service Questionnaire ([ESQ](#)) is also popular as a means of measuring service satisfaction, and includes what the young person feels can be improved about the service.

One of the main outcome measures regularly used is [Goal Based Outcomes](#). This validated and simple tool compares how far a young person feels they have moved towards a goal they have set for themselves at the beginning of an intervention, on a scale between 0 to 10 and where they feel they are at the end of the support. It is inclusive of a range of therapeutic interventions and models and is individualised to each young person.

Outcomes are not always linear, hence the importance of case studies highlighting a young person's journey in addition to collecting outcomes routinely. Case studies demonstrate more qualitative outcomes for young people by capturing the real life (anonymised) story around distance travelled.

Whatever measures are used, routine outcome frameworks need to be consistent and capture outcomes over time. A combination of both data sets and anonymised case studies provides added value.

We strongly recommend a mixed methods approach with a range of both quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate the success of hubs.

### **Embedding learning and supporting high quality provision**

Ensuring quality provision within Young Futures hubs will be key to delivering positive outcomes for young people. As part of the implementation and delivery of Young Futures hubs there must be clear mechanisms to capture and share learning from hubs to support continuous development.

The programme should align with existing expertise within the sector to embed learning, support workforce development and measure high quality provision. This should include connection to the Youth Access Quality and Improvement Programme, which aims to encourage and support local organisations to increase the depth, breadth and quality of their holistic service provision to meet young people's increasingly complex needs.

#### **Success criteria for implementing Young Futures hubs**

- Accessible and inclusive spaces, owned by young people
- Designed and delivered against the Youth Access (YIACS) model values and principles
- Long-term, sustainable funding and capital are in place
- Clear commissioning frameworks that empower areas to respond to local need and build on existing community assets
- Integrated within local infrastructure, with clear referral pathways to specialist services
- Set out a workforce development plan to support the roll-out of hubs.
- Consistent outcomes framework that includes a range of both quantitative and qualitative measures
- Mechanisms to share learning and measure quality practice.

# Roadmap for implementation

We welcome the work the Government are currently undertaking to begin the design and delivery phase of Young Futures hubs, including site visits and mapping existing offers of support. In particular, we believe that using the learning from services and from other hub models, such as the Sure Start and the Family hubs programme, puts the Government in a strong position to design and deliver an effective model of support. The evaluation of the Shared Outcomes Fund programme for existing early support hubs is also due to be published soon, and we believe this will be vital learning in shaping Young Futures hubs.

We will be monitoring progress closely and will continue to offer our expertise and support. However, we are clear that the Government needs to go further to reach the ambition of a national network of hubs. By the end of this parliament, it is our hope to see sustained funding for existing hub providers, so that they can continue their offer of support, alongside the implementation of new hubs where they are needed.

We therefore call on the Government to **set out a roadmap to deliver a hub in every local authority area**, sufficiently resourced to offer accessible outreach provision beyond the physical hub. **The Government should aim to have achieved 70% coverage within the next five years and 100% by the end of 2035.** To achieve this, the Government should:

- Use the upcoming Spending Review to commit to a multi-year funding package for the roll-out of Young Futures hubs. We estimate that £169-£210 million per year in revenue funding is required to roll out a hub in every local area, with a further one-off £74m to £121m needed for capital and set up costs.
- Carry out a comprehensive, cross-government consultation on delivering open access support for children and young people. This should include meaningful engagement with existing service providers as well as establishing a 'national design panel' to co-design these services with young people.

- Publish the evaluation findings from the Shared Outcomes Fund pilot programme on early support hubs and use these to inform the design and implementation of Young Futures hubs.
- Take a cross-departmental approach and ensure the Young Futures programme aligns with long-term, cross-departmental strategies such as the Youth Strategy, the Child Poverty Strategy, and the 10-year Health Plan.
- Develop joint commissioning guidance for local areas on implementing Young Futures hubs. This should include a mandated level of funding for hub services to ensure they are adequately resourced.
- Work with existing hub providers to design a clear and consistent outcomes framework that captures both quantitative and qualitative data and responds to existing requirements and limitations.
- Set out a workforce development plan to support the roll-out of hubs.
- Put in place a mechanism to capture and share learning and quality practice from hubs to support continuous development.

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## **A blueprint for Young Futures hubs**

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