



*The* Youth Access  
model of youth advice  
and counselling  
services

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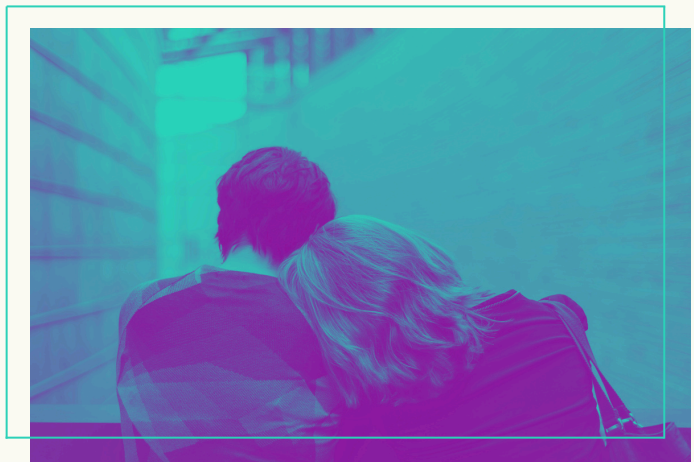
# About the Youth Access model

The Youth Access model of advice and counselling services, formerly known as the Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) model, has been used to describe local services delivering a range of support under one roof to meet young people's health, wellbeing and social needs, since 1998.

The Youth Access model as presented here sets out the common purpose, values and principles that are core to delivering impactful and effective provision for young people. The content of this briefing was developed as part of our IQ Project, funded by the Department of Health, where we consulted with over 170 young people, and local services and commissioners.

An agreed model of youth advice and counselling services is important because:

- Policymakers expect community-based advice and counselling services to meet nationally agreed standards
- Young people deserve access to high quality services
- Commissioners want to know exactly what kind of service they should be commissioning



## Policy context

In the absence of any specific national policy directive, local advice and counselling services have grown out of a 'bottom up', rather than a 'top down' process of development. The strength of these services has been their commitment being responsive to local young people's needs, taking a joined-up and flexible approach to supporting young people across every area of their lives, and nurturing trust and established relationships within the wider community.



The Youth Access model, which evolved from the expertise and practice of these local services, has long been recognised by decision-makers as an exemplary model of support for young people [1]. Most importantly – young people have told us they want this type of ‘whole life’ support, that doesn’t treat mental health in a vacuum. Despite this, there has been a lack of dedicated, sustainable funding, with many advice and counselling services forced to ‘patchwork’ funding together to keep their accessible support services running.

The Government’s 2024 manifesto committed to fund Young Futures Hubs to ensure ‘every community has an open-access hub for children and young people with drop in mental health support’. This is an important opportunity to see more young people able to access integrated, accessible and effective support that meets their rights and needs.

For the roll out to be a success, it must build on the existing 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.

## Why the Youth Access model?

### Effective:

At addressing the range of challenges faced by young people and improving young people’s mental health [2], comparable clinical outcomes to CAMHS and schools-based counselling [3], plus young people report higher levels of service satisfaction [4].

### Open access:

Young people are never turned away because they are “not sick enough.”

### Wider reaching:

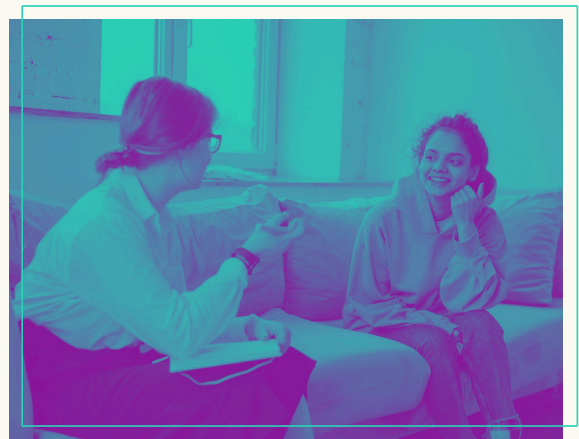
Better reach to young people from least-heard and worst-served backgrounds who may otherwise slip through the cracks of statutory services and school settings [5].

### A bridge, not a cliff edge:

Support up to age 25, bridging the all-important transition into adulthood.

### What young people want:

Young people repeatedly tell us that they want ‘whole life’ support.



# What is the Youth Access model?

The Youth Access model of advice and counselling services (formerly known as Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services or 'YIACS') has been variously described as an:

- 'Under one roof' model
- One stop shop
- Open door, drop-in service
- Integrated health and wellbeing model
- Early support hub
- Open Access hub



## Purpose

The main purpose of advice and counselling services is to offer an integrated approach to young people's health and wellbeing concerns through a unique combination of prevention, early intervention and crisis work.



## Values

Youth advice and counselling services' relationships with young people are led by young people and offered on the basis of:

- Trust and respect
- Honesty and consistency
- Hope and optimism



## Service characteristics

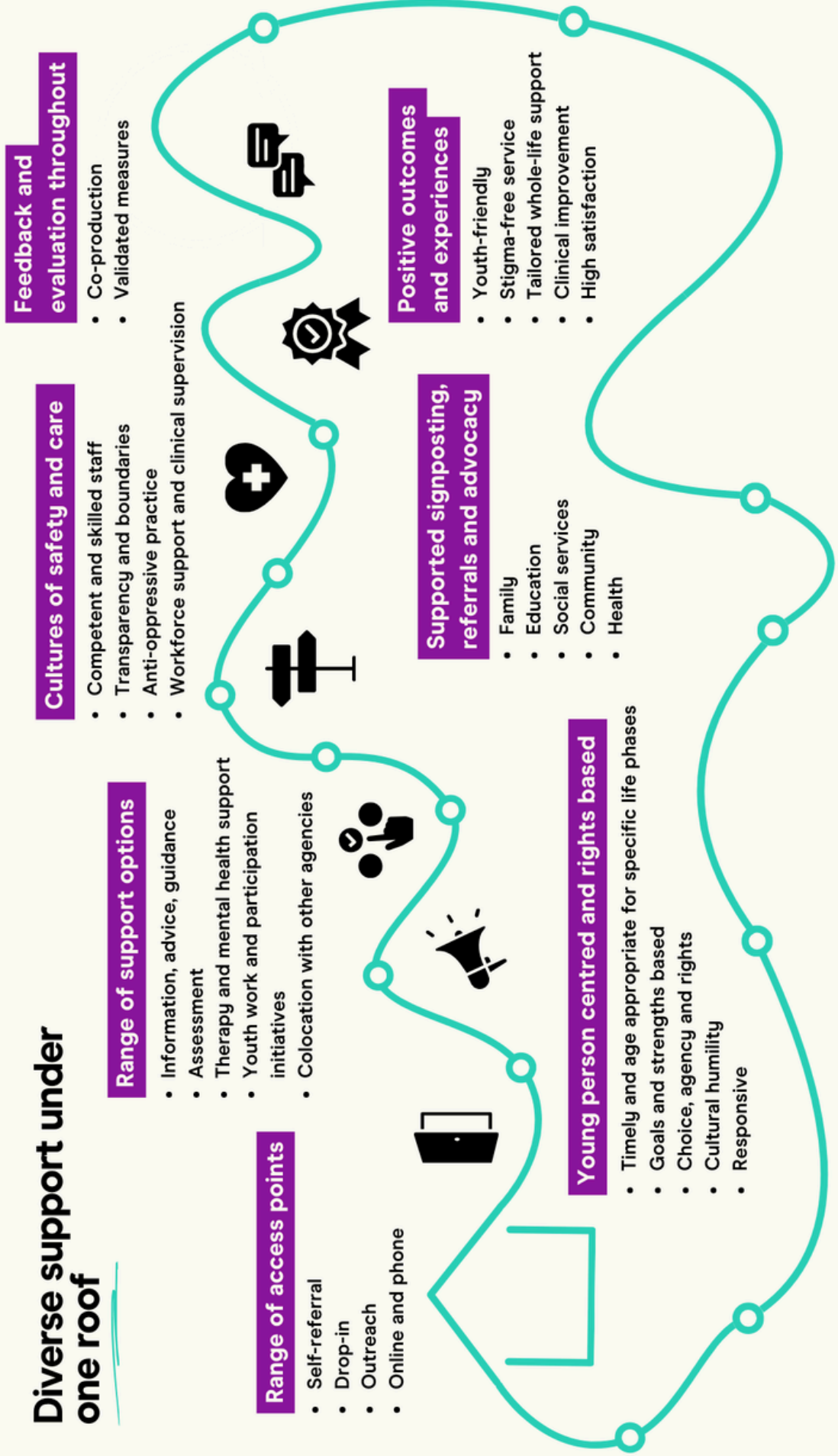
While youth advice and counselling services are primarily voluntary sector services responding to local need and differing in the range of interventions offered to young people, they share some common service characteristics. These include:

- Dedicated services for young people, up to age 25
- Available to 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 psychological therapists
- A voluntary relationship directed by young people



# The Youth Access model of youth advice and counselling services

## Diverse support under one roof



# Principles of the Youth Access model

## Open access

- **free** at the point of delivery and not for profit
- **no thresholds** on the type of need and/or level of distress a young person is experiencing in order to make initial access to the service
- at first contact, YIACS offer **respect, time and attention** to all those seeking help and assistance

## Young person-centred

- **built around the needs** of young people, not those of the system.
- **actively listen** to understand young people's needs and concerns and **proactive in identifying and enabling support**
- **offer self-referral**, and when accepting referrals from other organisations and professionals, ensure young people are aware their use of the service is voluntary
- **responsive to young people's preferences**, including in relation to appointment times; service location; the involvement of others (e.g. family or friends); and any requests to change a professional working with them

## Safe and confidential environment

- **informal, young person-friendly, community-based settings**
- **where young people can explore their needs**, identify their goals and are positively challenged and allowed to take appropriate risks

## Flexible

- **work flexibly and at a pace young people determine** to enable them to work towards their goals and aspirations
- **provide age-appropriate services to young people up to the age of 25**
- **creative, innovative and willing to adapt** in the ways they work with young people
- **offer a range of access points** for young people to receive support

## Responsive

- **committed to understanding the individual cultures, backgrounds and preferences of all young people** who approach and use their services
- **committed to understanding their local communities** and being inclusive and adaptable to all young people who may need their services

## Voice and rights

- **uphold and advocate for young people's individual and collective rights**
- empower them to identify their options and to make informed decisions and choices
- **support young people to have a voice in the decisions and issues that impact on them in the organisation and wider provision**
- collaborate and build partnerships to ensure young people get the best quality services in their localities

## Committed to best practice

- **committed to delivering best practice by offering high quality, evidence-informed services through appropriately trained and competent staff**
- offers support across all aspects of a young person's life, through multi-disciplinary staff teams able to work across and meet a wide range of social, emotional and mental health needs
- **trained and competent professionals able to work with them and their specific needs**
- recognises the limits of their expertise and ability and are pro-active in helping young people to access other services they need

## Accountable

- **transparent and accountable** to young people, their funders and local communities
- **consistently monitor, review, evaluate** and provide evidence of their effectiveness





# Core functions of the Youth Access model

1. Initial contact point for young people
2. Access to young person-friendly information
3. Young person-centred assessments
4. Evidence-informed one to one psychological therapies
5. Information, advice and/or advocacy on rights related matters
6. Advice, support and/or advocacy on health and wellbeing
7. Young people's feedback, involvement and participation
8. Safeguarding young people's welfare
9. Signposting and referral
10. Local and national partnership working
11. Monitoring and evaluation

## Additional functions

1. Opportunities for young people to share and learn together
2. Integrating specialist provision
3. Telephone and online help and support
4. Intensive/specialist housing support
5. Outreach services and activities
6. Social action

## Footnotes

[1] Department of Health (2015) Future in Mind. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/414024/Childrens\\_Mental\\_Health.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414024/Childrens_Mental_Health.pdf)

[2] Youth Access (2012) Youth advice: A mental health intervention? Available at: <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/publications/research-evaluation/youth-advice-mental-health-intervention>

[3] Duncan et al (2018) Counselling for young people and young adults in the voluntary and community sector. Available at: <https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/papt.12206>

[4] Youth Access (2020) Young people's experience of counselling in community-based settings. Available at: <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/publications/research-evaluation/young-peoples-experience-counselling-community-settings>

[5] Duncan et al (2018) Counselling for young people and young adults in the voluntary and community sector. Available at: <https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/papt.12206>



# About Youth Access

Our vision is that all young people can access support on their journey into adulthood that respects their rights and meets their individual needs.

Alongside our member network of 133 local youth advice and counselling services, we champion young people's right to access high-quality services in their community that provide a range of support, from mental health and wellbeing to housing and employment, all under one roof.

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