

UK YOUTH

Response to the mental health and wellbeing plan: discussion paper

July 2022

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About UK Youth

1. UK Youth is a charity that exists to ensure all young people are equipped to thrive and empowered to contribute at every stage of their lives. With an open network of over 8,000 youth organisations and national partners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we are focused on unlocking youth work as the catalyst of change that young people need now, more than ever.
2. This response is informed by the experiences of this network, together with insights gathered through interviews with youth workers and young people. We also held two dedicated workshops with over 30 youth organisations and cross-sector partners. We are grateful to everyone who took the time to talk to us about this response and in particular the young people and youth workers at Aik Saath in Slough who dedicated their Tuesday evening session to discussing these issues.

UK Youth's work on mental health

3. **Supporting young people's mental health:** Youth workers play a crucial role in supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing. The intensity of this work has only increased over the course of the pandemic. Over the last two years, we distributed nearly £2m of emergency funding to the youth sector. Youth organisations told us that they were seeing a significant increase in the number of young people presenting with mental health problems and going without support. In 2022, we partnered with the Julia and Hans Rausing Trust and the Westminster Foundation to launch the 'Thriving Minds' fund. Over three years this will see £11m invested in youth organisations to support them to improve young people's mental health and well being. Through the programme, we will also offer youth workers specialist mental health training and capacity building - supporting them to strengthen their relationships with other mental health providers from across the statutory and voluntary sectors.¹
4. **Creating change in mental health services:** Following the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests across the world, we partnered with others to launch the #YoungAndBlack campaign, as a space to share, listen and learn from the experiences of young Black people.² One of the initiatives which grew from that campaign was Young Changemakers - a programme supporting young people from racialised communities to take action on mental health inequalities. The programme supports young people to influence policy, change attitudes, engage frontline practitioners, and offer peer support.³ You can read more about their views in the Young Changemakers' separate response to this consultation.
In 2021 we partnered with YoungMinds to produce research exploring the support that young people need from the adults around them.⁴ We set out some of the findings in our response to Chapter 3 of this consultation.
5. **Tackling youth loneliness:** In partnership with Youth Focus North East, we lead the 'Belong Collective' a cross-sector network which is focused on connecting practitioners to share learning, challenges, good practice, and new thinking about youth loneliness. The Collective will improve cross-sector working, influence policy making, and provide support to practitioners.⁵

¹ UK Youth, 'The UK Youth Fund: Thriving Minds'

² UK Youth, '#YoungandBlack campaign'

³ See Centre for Mental Health. 'Young Changemakers: Tackling mental health inequalities in racialised communities' (2022)

⁴ Young Minds & UK Youth. 'Someone to turn to: being a trusted adult for young people' (2021)

⁵ UK Youth, 'Leading a national network to tackle youth loneliness' (2019)

6. **Driving cross sector change to improve young people's mental health:** In partnership with Volunteering Matters, UK Youth co-ordinates the #iwill Movement - a cross-sector, UK-wide collaborative group of funders, organisations, young people and the co-chairs of national and sector groups working together to champion the voice of young people. The #iwill Health & Social Care group brings together cross sector partners and young people to improve and change health and social care services through increasing and engaging young people's voice through social action and volunteering.

Summary of recommendations

- **Increasing access to youth services:** The Department for Health and Social Care should work across Government to secure a cross-departmental strategy and funding plan for young people. This plan should include developing shared outcome measures for investment in youth work provision and outdoor learning activities, including measures relating to mental health and wellbeing. The Government should set out annual milestones towards meeting its existing Youth Guarantee, and measure progress towards this aim.
- **Increasing investment in children and young people's mental health services:** We support the proposals put forward by YoungMinds and more than 50 other organisations for a national network of early support hubs to make sure that young people can get early help, close to home. These hubs should allow young people to access support from multi-disciplinary teams that bring together mental health professionals, youth workers, and others.
- **Recommitting to local children and young people's mental health plans.** The new mental health and wellbeing plan should carry forward NHS England's existing commitment to develop cross-sector children and young people's mental health plans in every local area. These should bring together schools, mental health services, youth services and other partners to plan services, develop referral pathways, and deliver on outcomes that are shaped by young people.
- **Supporting systems change in local areas:** Through the mental health and wellbeing plan, NHS England should provide dedicated funding for local areas to integrate youth services into their overall package of mental health support for children and young people. This funding should cover initiatives including:
 - Co-locating youth services and mental health services.
 - Helping youth services, mental health services, and schools to share learning.
 - Clinical supervision for professionals supporting young people in the community.
 - Developing reciprocal referral pathways.
 - Involving young people in designing services and influencing education provision.
 - Improving data sharing across youth services, mental health services, and schools.
- **Involving young people in decision-making:** The new mental health and wellbeing plan should set an expectation that all areas will co-produce local plans for children and young people's mental health using the Power of Youth Charter as a framework. This expectation should be accompanied by funding to carry out this work as we recommend above. Those delivering this work should draw on the expertise of local youth organisations when it comes to youth engagement and leadership.

UK YOUTH

- **Developing the evidence base on youth services and mental health:** To accompany the new mental health and wellbeing plan, the Department for Health and Social Care and NHS England should commission longitudinal research in order to evaluate the long-term impact of these commitments on the population's mental health and wellbeing. This should include collecting data on young people's engagement with youth services, with questions designed with input from the youth sector.



Chapter 1: How can we all promote positive mental wellbeing?

The relationship between youth services and wellbeing

7. There is a growing research consensus about the key drivers of young people's wellbeing. These include positive relationships with others, physical activity, and connection to the local environment and community.⁶ Studies like the #BeeWell Survey- which measures the wellbeing of secondary school pupils across Greater Manchester - have found that young people also see wellbeing as being connected to having a good understanding of oneself. That includes being able to maintain positive self-esteem, cope with stressful situations, and regulate emotions.⁷
8. In our engagement for this consultation, young people told us about growing pressures on their wellbeing including those relating to poverty, the climate crisis, the effects of the pandemic, and negative body image. For more on this, see Annex A.
9. Youth work aims to contribute to the personal, social, and educational development of young people. It can take place in a range of settings but all forms of youth work share a common goal of empowering young people to overcome the challenges they face.⁸ Young people who have experience of youth work tell us that this support makes a difference to their wellbeing by:
 - Giving them a place to build positive connections with other young people.
 - Connecting them to their local community and the places where they live.
 - Providing opportunities to be physically active and experience the outdoors.
 - Allowing them to talk about their problems and feelings with a trusted adult.
 - Acting as a bridge to other kinds of help and support
10. These effects are also reflected in the data we collect through our youth work programmes. In 2020-21 we supported nearly 15,000 young people. 72% saw an increase in their 'emotional and social capabilities', a measure which includes resilience, self-confidence and communication skills. For those young people, youth work gave them tools to promote their own wellbeing and navigate the world around them.⁹

Young people being able to engage in various different activities in their local communities is a great remedy to mental health challenges. We have an open access multi sports session between five and eight o'clock every Friday. Some weeks you get 60 young people, sometimes you get hundreds, in other weeks, you only get 30. But that's where young people can come and have that space. Those numbers sound really big, but actually, when you're there, youth workers know each and every one of those young people. It's absolutely amazing to see. They can really pinpoint where some of those young people have got additional support needs and create that trust relationship with that young person. UK Youth network member

⁶ What Works Wellbeing, 'Measuring Children and Young People's Subjective Wellbeing', (2021)

⁷ #BeeWell, 'What is wellbeing?' (2021)

⁸ For more see: National Youth Agency, 'What is youth work?'

⁹ UK Youth, '2020/21 Impact Review'

You already feel so much isolation when you're new. You're trying to find your community. And I think youth groups and youth organisations can be such a wonderful way to find community, as I've personally experienced. Young person

Supporting the youth sector to promote young people's wellbeing

11. The pressures that the pandemic has placed on young people's mental health and wellbeing are well-documented.¹⁰ This increase in demand for help has also thrown into relief some of the long-standing challenges facing the organisations that exist to support young people. In our 2020 survey of the sector, close to one in five (17%) of youth organisations said that they feared permanent closure, with almost a third (31%) planning to reduce staff hours.¹¹
12. Youth workers provide vital support for young people's wellbeing in every part of the UK. However, currently there is no central strategy to join together the organisations and services which support young people, and to make sure that they have the infrastructure, strategy, and funding they need to realise that potential. Instead, small youth organisations often find themselves struggling to stay afloat while navigating fragmented and short-term sources of funding from different commissioners across the healthcare, local government, education and criminal justice systems.
13. These challenges mean that youth organisations often do not have the capacity to meet the level of demand for their help, or are not funded to help young people at an early stage. As a consequence many young people miss out on support that could make a difference to their lives and are only able to access help from mental health services once they have reached crisis point.

If organisations close, it will be incredibly hard to pick up the pieces and vulnerable young people will not get the support they need and deserve. For those who have suffered trauma in their lives this could cause further trauma and lead them further into mental ill health, physical ill health and reduced life outcomes. The repercussions of this crisis are unthinkable. UK Youth network member

14. **Recommendation: The Department for Health and Social Care should work across Government to secure a cross-departmental strategy and funding plan for young people.** We set out this recommendation in more detail on page 13.
15. **Recommendation: The new mental health and wellbeing plan should carry forward NHS England's existing commitment to developing a cross-sector children and young people's mental health plan in every area.** We set out this recommendation in more detail on page 16.
16. **Recommendation: Through the mental health and wellbeing plan, NHS England should provide dedicated funding for local areas to integrate youth services into their overall package of mental health support for children and young people.** We set out this recommendation in more detail on page 16.

¹⁰ NHS Digital, 'Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021 - wave 2 follow up to the 2017 survey' (2021)

¹¹ UK Youth, 'The impact of COVID-19 on young people & the youth sector' (2021)

Chapter 2: How can we all prevent the onset of mental ill health?

17. For young people at risk of developing a mental health problem, youth work and outdoor learning can play a protective role for many of the reasons we outline in our response to Chapter 1. However, we also know that some young people are at greater risk of developing mental health problems. Some of these risk factors include living in poverty, experiencing trauma, and facing racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination.¹²
18. Tackling the root causes of these problems requires action across Government and wider society. This needs to go alongside practical and emotional support for the young people who are navigating these realities and who face additional barriers to finding help.
19. Youth work programmes and services have the power to give young people a space to process their own experiences, find community with others who have been through similar things and their peers, and build hope for the future. For example, our EmpowHer programme brought together young women and girls to take action in their communities. Participants had opportunities to discuss issues including negative body image and gender-based violence, to find inspiration from historical and contemporary activists, and to recognise their own power to change things for the better. The programme led to a more than 15 percentage point increase in the proportion of young women and girls who reported that the things they do in their life were worthwhile. In our response to Chapter 5 of this consultation, we set out more about the relationship between social action and mental health.¹³
20. Outdoor learning is essential to a young person's wider social, personal and community development, particularly as we recover from the pandemic.¹⁴ Outdoor learning has been shown to strengthen young people's self-confidence through engagement with challenging outdoor activities; improve their interpersonal skills through connecting with others outside of home and school; and help develop their sense of place.
21. Our response to this chapter sets out three areas where we have seen youth work and social action play an important role in supporting young people at particular risk of developing mental health problems:
 - poverty and employment inequalities
 - racism and racial inequalities
 - online harms

Poverty and employment inequalities

22. Young people living in poverty are disproportionately likely to experience problems with their mental health. In 2022 we opened our 'Thriving Minds' grant funding programme for applications. The programme aims to help youth organisations support young people's mental health and wellbeing. Of the more than 1,000 organisations that applied, two in three cited poverty as a

¹² See for example the Association for Young People's Health, '[Drivers of inequalities](#)' (2021)

¹³ UK Youth, '[EmpowHer Report from 2018-2021](#)' (2021)

¹⁴ HM Government, 'School Sport and Activity Action Plan' (2019)

significant factor in the deteriorating mental health of the young people they support.¹⁵

Many of the young people we support are extremely worried about money and are very stressed out. It sometimes feels like money is the only thing that young people can think about, it stops them focusing on anything else. They worry about credit card debts, store cards and catalogue debts, bank and payday loans, loans from friends and families, overdrafts, water and sewage bills, rent arrears, gas and electricity. Many of the young people in financial difficulty are having feelings of hopelessness, which cause great distress. For some young people, these feelings become overwhelming and lead to a mental health crisis like psychosis or suicidal thoughts. Morrish Walsh, Co-ordinator of Sandwell Youth in Action

23. Anti-poverty experts including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Child Poverty Action Group have produced clear recommendations for how Government could tackle the cost of living crisis including through immediate action on social security and housing.¹⁶ But we also know through our work with partnerships like the Hope Collective, that young people need help to be able to see possibilities for their own future and feel a sense of control of their own lives.¹⁷

Young people in poverty are ambitious and ready to contribute to levelling up their disadvantaged communities. How long do they have to hold on and wait for a chance to speak? Tyrell Douglas, Co-Chair of the Hope Collective's Youth Management Group

24. In 2020 we launched the Reach Up programme - designed to support young people not in education, employment or training to move closer to finding sustainable work. Reach Up uses creative youth work and social action to help young people build their confidence, resilience, and self-esteem. Delivering through youth workers, means that the programme is able to recruit young people who would not otherwise engage with Jobcentres. Participants reported increased practical employability skills, as well as increased confidence in their own abilities and hopes for the future.¹⁸
25. Youth workers told us that a unique advantage of youth-work-based approaches to employment support is the ability to connect young people to other people who have been in similar circumstances. Those peer relationships can help build a sense of possibility and hope.

Where we've had young people who have gone on to achieve a career or gone on to overcome some of the barriers - we can link them to other young people. They can say 'Three years ago I was thinking the exact same thing as you. I've done this so you can do it.'

Youth services manager

Racism and racial inequalities

26. There is a well-established connection between racial inequality and poor mental health. In the UK Black people are nearly five times more likely to have a diagnosis of schizophrenia than White people.¹⁹ The incidence rate of schizophrenia among Black Caribbean people in the UK is one of the highest in the world - and is not reflected in the incidence rates of schizophrenia in Caribbean

¹⁵ Data from UK Youth Thriving Minds grant applications (2022)

¹⁶ See for example: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'From pandemic to cost of living crisis: low-income families in challenging times' (2022)

¹⁷ For more on this see: The Hope Collective, 'Changing the Conversation' (2022)

¹⁸ UK Youth, '2020/21 Impact Review'

¹⁹ Synergi Collaborative, 'Ethnic inequalities in UK mental health systems' (2017)

countries. Likely drivers of racial mental health inequalities include experiences of racism, as well as the effects of disproportionate levels of poverty, poor housing, and school exclusion.²⁰

27. In Autumn 2021, we partnered with the Centre for Mental Health and The Diana Award to launch Young Changemakers, a programme which supports young people from racialised backgrounds to promote equality in mental health and to advocate for culturally competent mental health services. For more on these issues, see the Young Changemakers' separate response to this consultation. It contains recommendations on issues including addressing racism within the health and education systems, increasing representation in the mental health workforce, and tackling stigma in racialised communities.

Online harms

28. Developments in the way we use social media have created new risks and opportunities around young people's mental health. Social media can be a space where young people can be open about mental health problems, get advice and support, and feel less alone. However, the ability to share images easily with peers can cause or exacerbate problems with bullying, body image and low self-esteem. It can also be easy for young people to access harmful or misleading information about topics including self-harm and eating disorders.²¹
29. In 2020, we launched the Be Internet Citizens programme, an initiative which aimed to use youth work to support young people to navigate the online world. Throughout the programme youth workers were able to act as trusted adults, allowing young people to have open conversations about their relationships with the internet in a way that they had not felt able to do in a traditional educational setting. This reflects the wider way in which youth work is able to tap into conversations that young people are already having about issues that matter in their lives.

Young people are talking about this when they come to the youth centres. It's a live issue. At the moment Love Island is on. They're having discussions about that. The young people are enriched with this material. We don't have to raise any awareness. They've got the awareness already. We can use that in a more positive way to get them to think about decisions and consequences, and to have more in-depth, reflective conversations. UK Youth network member

30. The programme gave young people a space to reflect on the way they used social media and feel empowered to make choices that would keep them well. 78% of participants said that they would act differently online as a result of the programme, with many saying that they would undergo a social media 'cleanse' in order to remove content from their timelines that cause negative feelings about themselves.²²

I only follow people who have a certain body type and that is what I see as beautiful, they make me feel bad about myself but I thought following them was what I should do. I am going to start to follow some plus-size models so I get a different perception of beauty. Young person

²⁰ See Mind, '[Inequalities for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in NHS mental health services in England](#)' (2020)

²¹ NSPCC '[Children's experiences of legal but harmful content online](#)' (2022)

²² Institute for Strategic Dialogue, '[Be Internet Legends and Be Internet Citizens: Impact Report](#)' (2020)

Chapter 3: How can we all intervene earlier when people need support with their mental health?

Youth workers as trusted adults

31. Many of the young people that our network supports lack places to go when they first begin to experience problems with their mental health.

When I need to talk about my mental health. I never turned to somebody I've only known for two months. To have those in-depth conversations, I've always gone back to people I've known for a while who know me and who I know can give me a decent response and won't just throw something that's not useful at me. Young person

In 2021 we partnered with YoungMinds to produce research exploring who young people see as 'trusted adults' in their lives, and what they need from that relationship. That work identified barriers to young people talking to adults about their problems. These include:

- Poor responses in the past making young people reluctant to open up again.
- The stigma associated with disclosing a mental health problem.
- The worry of feeling like a burden.
- Fear that safeguarding policies will mean that adults will react in ways they do not want.²³

32. This research also found that many young people feel able to turn to youth workers in a way which they cannot do with other adults in their lives. The pressures to attain at school for example, meant that many young people would not feel comfortable talking to a teacher about their mental health. Many young people also fear that disclosing a mental health problem in a more 'formal' setting like school will lead to a response that is overly driven by safeguarding procedures rather than their own wishes.
33. During our engagement events for this consultation response, youth workers also told us that the long waiting times for support from mental health services had led to fatalism from many of the young people they work with, who believe there is no point in asking for support because none will be available.
34. Where young people do have access to youth workers, they are able to act as trusted adults and provide the opportunity for young people to disclose problems with their mental health at an early stage. In our 2021 survey of youth workers, 87% said that they regularly supported young people in this way.²⁴ Often young people will find it easier to have these conversations with youth workers both because they have an existing relationship and because they can talk about issues without risking the stigma that they worry would come with disclosing a mental health problem. Youth workers can use these conversations as a starting point, and act as a bridge between young people and mental health services.

Really what it is, it's going to an adult who will listen to you when you say 'I'm really struggling at the moment. Or you don't even have to tell them, you can just bethere and they'll give you

²³ Young Minds & UK Youth. 'Someone to turn to: being a trusted adult for young people' (2021)

²⁴ Ibid

some food and you can just hang out. And without that - where are they going for that? And in my experience young people are going online and what they find online is a real mixture of different influences, some that are very negative and toxic. Or they're going to friendship groups who aren't able to cope with that second emotional baggage. It's a genuine reason why young people reach out to universal youth clubs and youth programmes. UK Youth network member

35. This impact is reflected through existing research evidence. McPherson et al. (2014) found that children and adolescents reported fewer mental health challenges when they had a support network of high-quality relationships with peers and trusted adults outside of their immediate family.²⁵

Investing in universal youth work provision

36. For youth workers to be able to fulfil their role as a trusted adult to young people at risk of developing mental health problems, youth services need to be able to reach young people in their communities, without restrictive criteria for referrals. This is often known as 'open-access' or 'universal' provision. These spaces allow youth workers to build relationships with young people who would not otherwise seek help from family members, teachers or health professionals. They also create the conditions for youth work to play a wider role in supporting the wellbeing of all young people that we set out in our response to Chapter 1.

There is this absolute necessity for young people to feel a connection to their neighbourhood, to their place, and to their community, and to know that there is a youth worker there who knows them and who might know their family or their situation. For me, the role of open access youth work is absolutely critical. I've noticed there's less and less of that 'open access, three times a week, come and drop-in, participate in activities or chat to a youth worker [provision]'. That way of delivering youth work has been really damaged by the cuts but also compounded by the pandemic and now the cost of living because fewer people are able to volunteer.

UK Youth network member

37. Youth workers told us that while more targeted provision (e.g. support for young people who have already accessed CAMHS) still has a positive impact, it often misses opportunities for early intervention and so leaves young people with fewer options. We know that choice and control is crucial when it comes to effective mental health treatment.²⁶ Open-access youth work provision gives young people control over how they talk about their mental health, when they ask for help, and what support they need. Through this provision young people should also be able to access outdoor learning activities and adventures away from home, which help to prevent poor mental health and support ongoing positive wellbeing.
38. Youth sector organisations that deliver through a universal setting can struggle to access funding to support young people's positive mental health against specialist mental health providers. Small grassroots youth organisations are reporting a significant increase in young people presenting with a range of mental health conditions and concerns. UK Youth is addressing this need through the UK

²⁵ McPherson et al. 'The association between social capital and mental health and behavioural problems in children and adolescents: an integrative systematic review' (2014)

²⁶ Stanhope, Victoria et al. "Examining the Relationship between Choice, Therapeutic Alliance and Outcomes in Mental Health Services" (2013)

Youth Thriving Minds Fund.²⁷ Demand is such that this £11 million fund received requests totalling £90 million to impact the mental health needs grassroots organisations are seeing. To adequately address the issues and priorities youth services are seeing locally, they require funding that is rapidly distributed, flexible and consistent. Thriving Minds is directly meeting this need through the provision of unrestricted multi-year funding coupled with funder plus support in the shape of specialist training, communities of learning and shared practice. Youth providers are now sharing best practice and real time experience of supporting young people's mental health with fellow organisations across the UK.

39. In February 2022, the Government committed to a new National Youth Guarantee - pledging that by 2025 every young person in England will 'have access to regular out-of-school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer'.²⁸ However, we know that access to youth work and outdoor learning activities is currently inadequate and unevenly distributed. Only a third of young people in the UK can regularly access youth work.²⁹ When the National Youth Agency conducted the first-ever census of youth provision across England, it found that there was twice as much provision available in the most affluent areas as opposed to the most deprived areas.³⁰
40. **Recommendation: The Department for Health and Social Care should work across Government to secure a cross-departmental strategy and funding plan for young people.** This plan should include developing shared outcome measures for sustained investment in youth work provision and outdoor learning activities, including measures relating to mental health and wellbeing. The Government should set out annual milestones towards meeting its existing Youth Guarantee, and measure progress towards this aim.



²⁷ UK Youth, 'The UK Youth Fund: Thriving Minds'

²⁸ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. 'Government outlines ambitious plans to level up activities for young people' (2022)

²⁹ Understanding Society, Wave 10 (2018-19): proportion of 10-15 year-olds who attend to youth clubs, scouts, girl guides or other organised activities in last month.

³⁰ National Youth Agency 'Initial Summary of Findings from the National Youth Sector Census' (2021)

Chapter 4: How can we improve the quality and effectiveness of treatment for mental health conditions?

Funding children and young people's mental health services adequately

41. Without exception, all of the youth workers and young people we spoke with to inform this consultation response raised issues around a lack of access to mental health services. This included long waiting times for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and limited options for young people's treatment.

Often [young people] have to be in absolute crisis, to engage services. Some young people are aware of that, and put themselves in crisis situations, to access the services. That can't be healthy, you know? UK Youth network member

Locally there is little provision for moderate to severe mental health need, so young people bounce between crisis de-escalation and intervention that aren't substantial enough. UK Youth network member

42. While there is a clear need for increased support through CAMHS, we also heard from young people and youth workers about the need for a wider range of provision that can meet young people's diverse needs. That includes help based in the community and initiatives that help young people manage their mental health before they reach crisis point.

[In the past] CAMHS locally had some really good people in participation-type roles, where the young people were supported to have a voice in their treatment. Under their own initiative, they came out in the community and started to build relationships with other charities. Young people were talking to them about what they need. And the CAMHS staff would say 'this clinician is going to do this 12-week CBT course with you, but what you're saying is what you need is out in the community. I know the people who run that provision and you should go to it. And let's go together.'

UK Youth network member

43. **Recommendation: We support the proposals put forward by YoungMinds and more than 50 other organisations for a national network of early support hubs to make sure that young people can get early help, close to home.** These hubs should allow young people to access support from multi-disciplinary teams that bring together mental health professionals, youth workers, and others.³¹

Supporting sectors to work together to help young people

44. Youth workers need to dedicate a significant amount of time to supporting young people and their families as they wait for treatment. This can include providing emotional support, trying to de-escalate a mental health crisis, and supporting young people to navigate the 'bureaucracy' of their referral (for example helping to secure a GP appointment or to avoid being discharged from a service for a missed appointment).

³¹ See for example The Children's Society, '[The case for open access well-being services](#)' (2021)

45. This support to sustain engagement with mental health services is particularly important for young people who would otherwise risk falling through the gaps between children and adult mental health services. As youth workers often work across the 11-25 age range, they are able to provide a sense of continuity to young people who are otherwise facing disruption in their care.

I think that youth services provide lots of different ways of supporting young people to explore and better understand mental health and wellbeing but they are also part of a much bigger picture [...] They can improve engagement with statutory services if needed - bridge the gap by attending appointments, encouraging attendance, talking through worries, reducing stigma etc. UK Youth network member

Organisations signpost young people and refer young people. And it doesn't work. Invariably, the young person hits a barrier. We need to be creating services where young people are basically supported to the next step on the journey for them. Not a referral service or a signposting service, a support service. UK Youth network member

46. The youth workers and mental health professionals who helped to inform this response told us that those working in mental health services are often 'firefighting' in response to significant treatment backlogs. As a result, they lack the time they need to understand the help available to their patients from youth services, build relationships with professionals from different sectors, and make referrals accordingly. Youth workers told us that social prescribing initiatives for youth services could make a real difference to young people, but they felt that mental health services in their area were stretched too thin to engage in those kinds of partnerships.

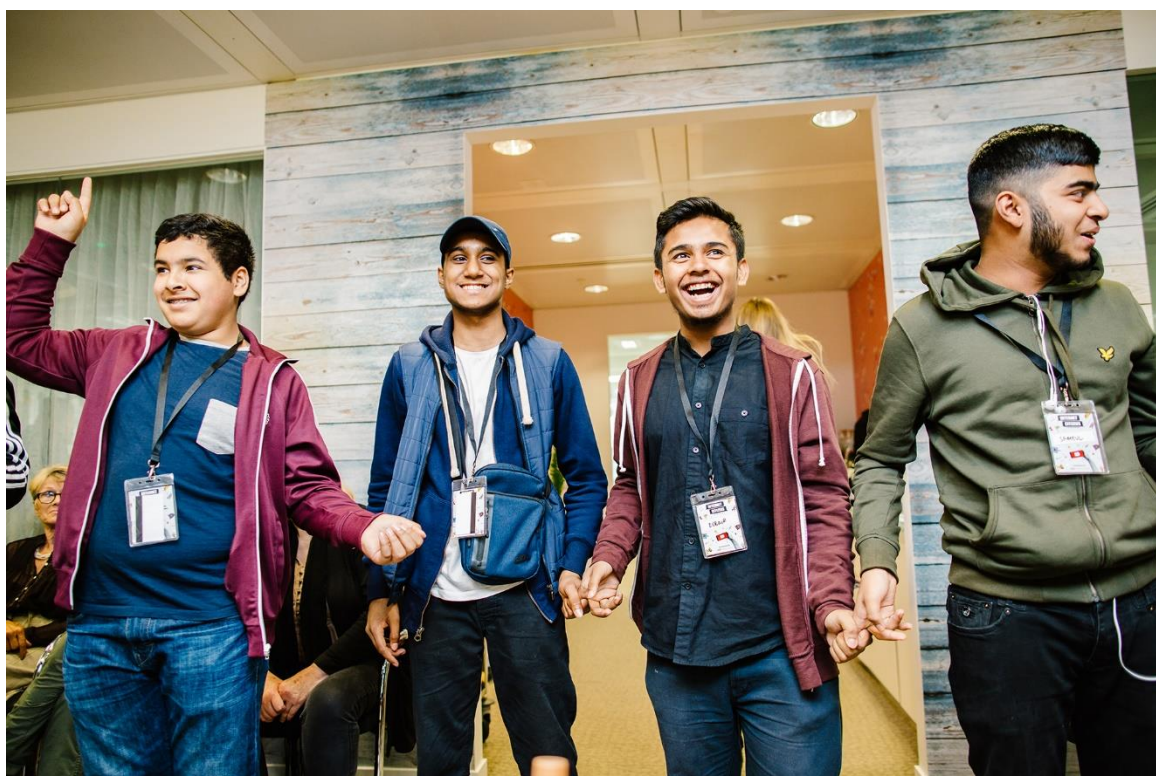
If we had better relationships with mental health providers and were having regular planning meetings with them, then we could create a better offer for young people, and take some of the pressure off the services that are dealing with these issues. We've got to create opportunities for relationships to build. And that takes capacity. It's not as easy as saying "okay, we will all get together". It needs to be part of the overall systemic approach, that there's more time. The funding isn't just about the delivery of the service, the funding has got to be about the design, the development, and the evaluation of the service. The funding has to be built in, to provide that capacity so that organisations can learn from each other. UK Youth network member

47. We also heard that there are clear opportunities for youth services and mental health services to learn from one another. Youth workers are increasingly supporting young people with more complex mental health problems including those coping with the effects of trauma. They play a key safeguarding role, and there is a growing demand for training and supervision to make sure that their work is underpinned by an in-depth understanding of mental health, as well as adequate support for their own wellbeing.

48. At the same time, young people have told us that they want to see mental health professionals learn from the core principles of youth work - including starting with the wishes and interests of young people and involving young people in decision-making.

If young people set the outcomes, it may be easier to plan collaborative work to deliver them. When mental health services set the outcomes they are often jargon-heavy and difficult for youth services or young people to buy into. Youth services start from a position that young people are the experts - on themselves and their lives. UK Youth network member

49. Those who run and manage youth services told us that fragmented and short-term funding arrangements for youth work programmes present one of the biggest barriers to being able to integrate the support they offer with their local mental health system. Where mental health commissioners fund targeted programmes, these can be effective at building relationships across a system and getting young people more joined-up help. However when the funding stops those relationships fall away and there is very little chance of sustaining any long-term change.
50. **Recommendation: The new mental health and wellbeing plan should carry forward the NHS England's existing commitment to developing a cross-sector children and young people's mental health plan in every area.** These should bring together schools, mental health services, youth services, and other partners to plan services, develop referral pathways and deliver on outcomes that are shaped by young people.
51. **Recommendation: Through the mental health and wellbeing plan, NHS England should provide dedicated funding for local areas to integrate youth services into their overall package of mental health support for children and young people.** This funding should cover initiatives including:
- Co-locating youth services and mental health services
 - Helping youth services and outdoor learning providers, mental health services, and schools to share learning
 - Increasing access to youth work and outdoor learning provision through social and green prescribing
 - Clinical supervision for professionals supporting young people in the community
 - Developing reciprocal referral pathways
 - Involving young people in designing services and influencing education provision
 - Improving data sharing across youth services, mental health services, and schools



Chapter 5: How can we all support people living with mental health conditions to live well?

52. Support for young people with mental health problems to live well needs to extend beyond access to clinical treatment. Spending time outdoors and being part of a community are two important components for living well. However young people with mental health problems often face barriers to building these things into their lives.

Supporting young people to stay physically active through access to outdoor learning opportunities

53. Young people with mental health problems are less likely to be physically active or have access to experiences outdoors.³² Youth workers in our network have told us that young people with mental health conditions often experience a lack of self-confidence, high levels of perceived stress and low mood which can cause them to neglect their physical wellbeing.
54. Interventions promoting physical activity are a key mechanism for improving anxiety and depression symptoms amongst young people. Finding ways to stay physically active can make a real difference to the quality of life of children and young people with mental health problems.³³ The connection between physical and mental health are inextricably linked; a number of studies confirm a positive association between physical activity and increased self-esteem, emotional wellbeing and future aspirations. Physical activity is also associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression.
55. We can encourage young people with mental health conditions to stay physically active by creating opportunities to ensure all young people have access to outdoor learning and adventures away from home. In 2020, the government announced a Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport-led review of youth services. The aim was to develop a clear direction for our out-of-school youth agenda, and to ensure that our spending and programmes meet the needs of young people as well as ambitions on 'levelling up'. Young people who took part in the review said that two of their priorities were giving young people experiences away from home and providing access to volunteering opportunities.³⁴
56. Unlike physical activity in schools, youth work and outdoor learning are accessible to young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), who are disabled and who have mental health difficulties. Equally, for young people who do not have a positive experience at school, external outdoor learning opportunities can provide a separate environment for young people to experience the benefits of physical activity. UK Youth are collaborating with Sport England to remove barriers to access to physical activity, and ensure all young people are supported to get more active. As a Sport England Systems Partner, we will engage youth sector leaders and youth workers to ensure young people are better able to access support through developing capacity and capability to develop local, cross sector networks to enable better planning, partnership working and ultimately better outcomes for young people.

³² Pascoe M, Bailey AP, Craike M, et al. 'Physical activity and exercise in youth mental health promotion: a scoping review.' (2020)

³³ Wellcome Trust, 'What science has shown can help young people with anxiety and depression' (2021)

³⁴ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 'Youth Review: Summary findings and government response', (2022)

57. **In our response to Chapter 4 we recommended that NHS England recommit to children and young people's mental health plans in every local area, and make funding available for the practical work of integrating these services.** This work should include support to help young people with mental health problems stay physically active, and to engage in outdoor learning opportunities. Increasing the use of green and social prescribing would enable mental health providers to work more effectively with youth services and outdoor learning providers and provide a practical way to integrate these services. We set out more on this recommendation on page 16.³⁵

Encouraging young people to get involved in local social action projects and volunteering

58. Social action projects can help children and young people with mental health problems to understand their own experiences and channel them into creating change. There are several reasons why a young person living with mental health conditions may feel powerless or alone in their experiences. The YMCA's 'I Am Whole' report found that young people's confidence had been negatively affected when discussing mental health issues because of the stigma surrounding mental health.³⁶ Such feelings act as a barrier to young people accessing support.
59. As we set out in our response to Chapter 2, youth work programmes and social action initiatives have a particular role to play when it comes to support people with experience of stigma, discrimination and marginalisation. Both the #YoungandBlack campaign and the Young Changemakers initiative that we refer to earlier in this response were developed in response to hearing from young people who wanted to use their experiences to build power and hope.
60. Social action can drive youth wellbeing by allowing young people to understand individual experiences of trauma as the result of collective processes of marginalisation; providing them with a sense of community with other people who have had similar experiences; allowing them to feel empowered; and building skills to tackle systemic inequalities that might be the cause of their mental distress.³⁷ #iwill is a UK-wide movement helping more young people make a difference in their communities through social action. This includes activities like campaigning, fundraising, volunteering, befriending or mentoring. UK Youth is working in partnership to coordinate the #iwill Movement with Volunteering Matters— a cross-sector, UK-wide collaborative group of funders, organisations, young people and the co-chairs of national and sector groups such as Health & Social Care and Education. The #iwill movement is building a society that understands and champions the power of youth, where all young people are equipped and enabled to shape and lead change in their own lives and communities.

In 2020, I was nominated to become an #iwill ambassador... UK Youth had the Young and Black campaign, and I was able to talk on one of their panels, Young and Black in Rural Areas. Alongside that, the #iwill Black Ambassadors group has been a safe space and has been so valuable for me. The Black Ambassadors ended up working with Teach First to tackle racial injustice in education. That was in some ways healing for me because most of the racism I experienced was during my schooling. That's one of the biggest things social action has given me, is moving from feeling so out of place in my school to speaking to hundreds of teachers alongside powerful young people at Teach First. Being an #iwill Ambassador has given me a big sense of purpose – I know why I'm here now. I know that as long as I'm making change for my community then I'm doing the right thing. Young person

³⁵ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/green-social-prescribing/>

³⁶ YMCA, 'I am Whole: A report investigating the stigma faced by young people experiencing mental health difficulties' (2016)

³⁷ Wellcome Trust, 2021

61. Social action projects such as EmpowHER can help young people develop the emotional skills and resources they need to look after their own wellbeing. As we set out in our response to Chapter 2, EmpowHER is a programme addressing the worryingly low levels of wellbeing amongst young women and girls in the UK, supporting them to give back to their local communities with inclusive, meaningful social action. Young women and girls point to youth groups as places they can be themselves, learn new things and build positive and supportive relationships.

It can make a world of difference. Even just having conversations with people can touch them and change their mindsets and push them forwards. I think my future has changed because my mindset has changed. I think it's showed me that I can do things that benefit others. I feel more hopeful. It's proved to me that I have the power to make a difference.
Young person, EmpowHER

62. **In our response to Chapter 3 we recommended that the Department for Health and Social Care work across Government to secure a cross-departmental strategy and funding plan for young people.** This should include making sure that all young people, including those living with mental health problems, have suitable opportunities to take part in social action. We set out more on this recommendation on page 13.



Chapter 6: How can we all improve support for people in crisis?

63. In our response to Chapter 4, we recommended that the new mental health and well-being plan:

- Carries forward NHS England's existing commitment to developing a cross-sector children and young people's mental health plan in every local area..
- Makes funding available in order to facilitate integration between the services that support young people.

64. There are particular ways in which these initiatives would make a difference to children and young people who are experiencing a mental health crisis. For example local mental health services should involve youth workers in discharge planning as part of a coordinated effort to support young people to return home from hospital and avoid escalating back into crisis.

65. Youth workers are often deeply embedded into their local communities and so are uniquely placed to provide support around trigger points for mental health crises including bereavement. This includes when a young person is struggling to cope with grief relating to the death of a loved one by suicide or as a result of violence. As trusted adults who are part of those young people's immediate communities, youth workers are able to help young people process their feelings in a way that would be difficult for a mental health professional without that established relationship.³⁸



³⁸ Paul Hamlyn Foundation & Mental Health Foundation, 'Right Here: How to provide youth-friendly mental health and wellbeing services' (2014)

Next steps and implementation

66. For local areas to be able to transform young people's experiences of mental health support, they need to be able to meaningfully involve young people themselves in the work. They also need to collect data which can give a picture of the full range of help that young people access, understand the impact it has on their mental health and wellbeing, and drive continuous improvement.

Involving young people in decision-making

67. The statement from NHS England's Lived Experience Advisory Network that introduced this consultation rightly says that 'positive change will come when things are done with people, not to people'. Too often this is not a reality for young people, with relatively few local areas investing in consulting young people about how mental health services work or involving them meaningfully in how services are designed.
68. Young people and youth workers raised examples with us of common areas where young people's involvement could make a difference to how mental health services run. They included:
- Treatment goals based on young people's own aspirations for their lives.
 - Less jargon.
 - More choice over digital v face-to-face support.³⁹
 - More support outside of both clinical and school settings.
 - Services that are inclusive for people from racialised minorities and LGBTQ people.
69. NHS England's Long Term Plan in 2020 made a welcome commitment to developing children and young people's mental health plan in every area. However it did not set an explicit expectation that these plans would be produced together with young people themselves or provide any central transformation funding for this work.⁴⁰ The youth workers who spoke to us as part of our engagement for this consultation were clear that local mental health services would need to free up dedicated staff time in order to meaningfully involve young people in decision-making and to act on what they hear. They also spoke about the need to learn from youth organisations' expertise when it comes to making this involvement meaningful and using it to drive action. One way that services can involve young people meaningfully is by signing up to the #iwill [Power of Youth Charter](#) which sets out a commitment and set of guiding principles for organisations to adopt.⁴¹

I think the Government and the NHS and CAMHS need to be running their own social action projects, and not just having advisory boards. In my experience, when I support young people to access these boards, they just feel like they're tokenistic. They're kind of brought on to share their story. And then everyone goes 'oh, we've done the listening piece, and then nothing happens. But [instead we should] say to young people 'come on to this project, you will have a budget, come up with the changes that you want to see. And then you're actually holding us accountable along the way and helping us to make it happen' That's what needs to be happening in a clinical environment. UK Youth network member

³⁹ Research from Mind in 2021 found a strong preference for face-to-face support from people accessing mental health services. See: Mind, '[Coronavirus: the consequences for mental health](#)' (2021)

⁴⁰ NHS England, '[NHS Mental Health Implementation Plan 2019/20 – 2023/24](#)'

⁴¹ #iwill, '[Power of Youth Charter](#)'

70. Youth organisations bring significant experience of involving young people meaningfully in decisions that affect them. Locally, youth organisations often have relationships and ways of working that allow them to hear from young people who would not otherwise talk to statutory services.

[A problem with] health-based forums is that they expect people to come to them. And unless you have a particular presence about you that says 'I'm going to put myself out there for that', you're not going to be listened to. The way to do it is to go to other places and be in other spaces but they aren't doing that. UK Youth network member

Young people have been working to improve mental health services and their own emotional well-being for years -look at the work of any local youth council. Let's celebrate and learn from this work. UK Youth network member

71. **Recommendation: The new mental health and wellbeing plan should set an expectation that all areas will co-produce local plans for children and young people's mental health using the Power of Youth Charter as a framework.** This should be accompanied by funding to carry out this work as we recommend on page 16 of this response. Those delivering this work should draw on the expertise of local youth organisations when it comes to youth engagement and leadership.

Improving data collection on youth services and mental health

72. The development of the new ten-year mental health and wellbeing plan presents an opportunity to gain a richer picture of the different kinds of support that young people draw on, and to allow policymakers and commissioners to understand the impact this support has on mental health and wellbeing outcomes.
73. While there is good evidence that youth services make a difference to young people's mental health and wellbeing, there is a lack of quality longitudinal data on these issues. Even where longitudinal studies do capture information about young people's access to youth provision, it is often not possible to tell what kind of intervention they received or how often they engaged with it.⁴²
74. **Recommendation: To accompany the new plan, the DHSC and NHSE should commission longitudinal research in order to evaluate the long-term impact of these commitments on the population's mental health and wellbeing.** This should include collecting data on young people's engagement with youth services, with questions designed with input from the youth sector and young people

⁴² See for example Centre for Youth Impact, 'Longitudinal perspective on the impact of youth provision: easier said than done?' (2018)

Annex 1 - Pressures on young people's wellbeing

1. The young people we spoke to as part of this consultation told us that they were finding their mental health and wellbeing increasingly affected by global events including the climate crisis, political instability and conflict.

You are turning on the news, and you're seeing millions of people fleeing Ukraine, and then you're seeing the fact that there are kilometres worth of plastic in the Atlantic Ocean. I completely see why [people] don't shave in the morning, and why [people] don't think shaving in the morning is that important. Young person

What's happening in the world has never affected me on a personal level more. You know, in the past, when I thought about my mental health, I always thought about things that were immediately related to my person - my education, where I'm going next. But now, so much of it seems to be larger discourses around war and conflict and the climate crisis. Young person

2. While the young people we spoke with were clear that these problems needed action from politicians and others in power, they also spoke about the need to find their own ways to contribute to change and feel a sense of agency.

What I've tried to do is maybe be more proactive in terms of the kind of support networks that I can access and in the kind of people that I surround myself with, and also just proactive in terms of kind of my own introspection about what I can control and how best I can spend my own time doing things which [may have] the kind of impact in the world that I want to see. Young person

3. Young people also raised the impact of the pandemic on their wellbeing, including through increased pressure to catch up on their education, and through the disruption, it caused to the spaces where they could meet other young people and build community.

There has been a lot of social isolation and now we are coming back to [...] forming those relationships in person and speaking to people. I think there has been a lot of concern and I've personally felt it too. Even now, I feel like I don't really connect that much with my university community. When I go on campus, it doesn't really feel like my campus. Young person

4. Other consistent pressures on their well-being that young people told us about included pressure to look a certain way, poverty and money, bullying and sexual harassment, problems within their families and experience of racism and prejudice.