

Just One Question Insights

This month we asked: How are you reaching the most marginalised or underserved groups?

Key Message:

Organisations best reach the most marginalised young people when they are rooted in the community, remove barriers to access, give young people real power and voice, and support the whole person, not just immediate needs but also their future aspirations.

The findings highlight:

1. The commitment of youth workers to support not only the young people who can access youth clubs, but also those who cannot.
2. The mindful and wholistic approach of youth work.

Key Findings

The analysis of the findings highlighted four practical approaches that youth workers feel make the biggest difference in reaching and supporting those often excluded from youth provision, these are outlined below.

1. Being part of the community

Youth organisations reach young people by being rooted in the same places and committing to the communities' needs and requirements. Staff and volunteers often live locally, share lived experience, and work with families and neighbourhood networks. This creates trust and lasting relationships which helps practitioners to engage the most marginalised or underserved groups in their communities.

- *"Listen. Invest and commit to the community. Love people. Value people. Start young. Support the family around the youth. Champion youth... People not programmes."*
- *"Our team and trustees have lived experience of the challenges our young people face, from racism and poverty to exclusion and mental health issues."*

2. Making access easy for young people

Youth practitioners stated that they make the effort to meet young people where they are such as in parks, estates, fast food outlets, online, or through outreach, instead of waiting for them to come to them. They also remove certain barriers for marginalised or underserved groups by offering free food, travel, interpreters, equipment (e.g. cameras and laptops), personal health care items and flexible times.

- *“Rather than expecting marginalised young people to come to us, we go to them - meeting them where they are, both geographically and relationally.”*
- *“Embedded in our community... we directly support and welcome young people to free food/drinks, toiletries, period products, SIM cards, data, devices, support and friendship.”*

3. Encouraging young people to lead

Another way in which youth practitioners reach marginalised or underserved young people is to get young people involved as active leaders, not just attendees. They encourage young people to design the spaces, programmes and activities, offer peer-led support following receiving training, sit on youth boards, and act as mentors or ambassadors. This gives them ownership and ensures activities reflect what they really need.

- *“Marginalised young people are not just participants - they are co-creators and leaders in this project.”*
- *“By providing a unique base – a youth café designed by them, for them to hang out and talk to trusted adults allowing them to be themselves whilst being supported.”*

4. Offering holistic support

Support goes beyond single issues. Youth organisations and youth workers recognise the different needs of young people's and try to offer a combination of services, including creative activities, sports, support, therapy, and mentoring. Often this is achieved through connecting with organisations from other sectors, like mental health, housing, or education. Recognising young people's wider needs they offer a more holistic approach that boosts resilience, confidence and wellbeing, and enables young people to think about and prepare for their future.

- *“By giving them a platform for expression and exploration, allowing them to think of their dream future, we are able to unlock small steps for individuals who otherwise do not engage.”*
- *“We work with marginalised and underserved groups in a wide range of ways, including evening classes, delivering Arts Award qualifications sessions, delivering alternative education for school students, adult learning that works with 16 -25-year-olds (as well as older adults), and creative therapy.”*

How UK Youth is Responding

At UK Youth, we are taking action to address these challenges. [Our barriers and enablers research](#) helps us understand the barriers that prevent young people from engaging in youth activities, and we share examples of good practice across the sector so that others can learn and

adopt. It highlights practices and policies that can improve access, equity, and satisfaction with youth services. The findings from this month's JOQ emphasise youth workers' high awareness of these challenges and suggest that they are already adopting a lot of the recommended practices. For example, practices that facilitate reaching traditionally marginalized communities respond directly to accessibility barriers. This research and this month's JOQ highlight that improving overall scale and equity of access to youth activities relies on individual youth organisations tailoring their approach but also structural changes. Structural changes such as limited changes and few dedicated spaces limit what providers can offer and how consistently they can deliver. It points to the importance of long-term funding to ensure that there is enough provision and that it stays around long enough to build trust and awareness locally and among young people.

Through our grant-making, we focus funding and delivering programmes to organisations that work with young people who are most marginalised, and alongside this, our programmes create opportunities and open new doors, including:

- [Summer Jobs](#) – The programme offers paid employment and highly skilled youth worker support to hundreds of young people aged 16-25 at risk of violence in Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and several London boroughs.
- [Active Future Cohort](#) – This initiative offers a unique opportunity for professionals working across outdoor education, sport, and youth work to come together and develop bold, evidence-informed, inclusive ideas that work towards integrating movement experiences which will reshape how young people experience physical activity in their communities.
- [#iwill](#) – enabling young people to lead change in their own communities and develop their skills and profile. The #iwill campaign aims to ensure all young people, regardless of background, are supported to make a positive difference in their communities through youth social action including volunteering, campaigning, and fundraising.
- [Adventures Away from Home](#) – is focused on ensuring equitable access to nature-based learning for young people from disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds, or minoritised groups – including young carers, those living with disabilities, and others facing significant barriers to engaging with the outdoors.