

YWF NEEDS ANALYSIS: RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE DURING COVID-19

INSIGHT FROM WESTMINSTER'S YOUTH WORKERS

THEME 1: FAMILY, FRIENDSHIPS, AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Youth practitioners reflected on the impact of Covid-19 on young people's friendships and social skills; the positives and negatives associated with young people spending more time at home with their family members; and whether some siblings returning to school had impacted those continuing to learn from home.

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Many young people have successfully kept in touch with friends during this time e.g. using group chats and the Houseparty mobile app. Others do not have a smartphone or PlayStation, or have found it tiring to sit talking on the phone and this has led to greater feelings of isolation



While some young people have wanted to get out of the house to get a break away from family members, others have enjoyed spending more time with parents e.g. playing board games and learning new skills



LGBT+ youth have described feelings of isolation and loneliness during Covid-19, however taking part in online activities based around shared interests has helped individuals to nurture new friendships

For young people who live by themselves, Covid-19 has created increased independence as they have not been able to access regular sources of support, for example going to a family member's house for dinner.



PRESSURES ON PARENTS AND FAMILIES



Parents are feeling pressure related to finding childcare as they go back to work. Siblings in different year groups or schools are needing to be dropped off and picked up at varying times and this can be challenging to fit around work commitments

Both parents and young people have found home schooling difficult and some parents are now having to support learning whilst working



Parents have expressed feeling that they are having to choose between putting their family at risk of Covid-19 and maintaining their income when making decisions about returning to work

While some siblings are returning to school and others are still learning from home, those at home have expressed feeling left out and have questioned why their school does not want them. There are also concerns from young people that those going back to school are getting a head start in their studies



Many parents were anticipating that young people would be going back to school in June and July and the realisation that this will not happen for some until September has resulted in a “dip in their morale”.

THEME 2: EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA

Practitioners discussed their concerns around young people’s experience of trauma during Covid-19, for example experiencing a bereavement, isolation, or domestic abuse. The group explored the ways in which school or youth work environments could be adapted to meet the needs of young people, considering potential experience of trauma, including any practical assistance that should be made available.

CONCERNS ABOUT TRAUMA

Practitioners described being concerned that some young people are being guarded about their true feelings. It can be difficult to have open conversations with young people remotely if family members are in the room or the phone is on loudspeaker.



While some young people will have found isolation during lockdown traumatic, others have “flourished” while not having to attend school (which they may have previously found traumatic)

While a significant proportion of young people were recognised to be “resilient” and able to “bounce back”, this should not mean that they are denied opportunities to reflect on and process the impact of Covid-19 on their lives

For those young people living by themselves, the main concern for practitioners has been around whether they have all that they need to successfully live independently.

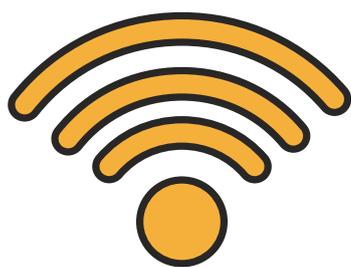


ADAPTING SERVICES AND SUPPORT TO MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE



Youth workers explained the importance of asking young people open questions and giving them the opportunity to talk about their experiences

At the same time, it was felt to be important for youth workers themselves to have time to reflect and process what they have been through. This will enable them to provide better support for young people in the coming months



It was recognised that youth workers will need to spend time building up young people’s trust after months apart

Youth work environments will have to be adapted to increase safety during Covid-19 in terms of e.g. their physical environment, opening times and make-up of activity groups. Creating videos of the new environments to send to members prior to their return was felt to be useful, particularly for neurodivergent youth



Supporting young people to engage in physical activity and eat healthily was felt to be important to address concerns about weight gain during lockdown, however youth workers expressed that they will need to ensure that young people do not feel picked on and can “go at their own pace”.

THEME 3: THE 'NEW NORMAL'

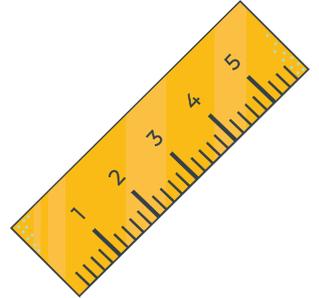
Youth practitioners described the extent to which they expected that their services would return to 'normal' in the coming months and highlighted the views of young people around when 'normal' was likely to return.

A RETURN TO 'NORMAL'?

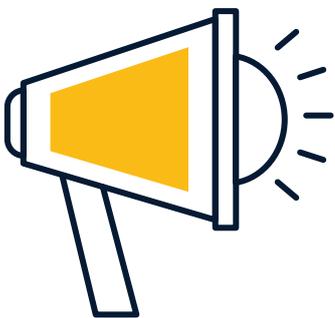
·Many young people are anticipating a return to 'normal' in September once they go back to school or college, however practitioners felt that young people would need to prepare for a new normal including social distancing at youth clubs and year group bubbles at schools

If a second wave were to happen in the autumn, there was concern that young people would not adhere to lockdown rules as closely, in comparison to the first lockdown

Practitioners expressed concern that while face-to-face services are now expected to open, there is still significant demand for newly established online activities to continue – it will be challenging to deliver both in the context of limited staff and resources.



HOPES FOR THE FUTURE



·Practitioners were positive about the new interests and skills gained by young people since March, for example one youth worker described two members starting their own businesses during lockdown

There was hope that young people would have used the time to reflect and ask "deep questions" about what is going on around them, alongside considering "bigger picture thinking."

It was felt that a greater sense of community and social consciousness had emerged amongst young people during Covid-19.

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