

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

INSIGHT FROM WESTMINSTER'S YOUTH WORKERS

LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, YWF had been working in partnership with King's College London, Rocket Science, Partnership for Young London and Westminster City Council to conduct a peer researched needs analysis; examining the experiences of young people across Westminster. This would be an update to our 2017 study, A City Within A City.

We hoped this research would support the YWF community to identify and address the challenges faced by young people growing up in Westminster, all the while ensuring that they are truly at the heart of the conversation. Following the lockdown, we took the decision to pause the project.

In the weeks that have followed it has become clear that we are witnessing one of the most significant challenges of our lifetime, the pandemic has disrupted the life of every young person and family in Westminster. Young lives have been disrupted at crucial stages of education and transition. Whilst we are yet to fully understand the impact this will have on young people & our colleagues in the sector; what is clear is that we will need to listen to young people to inform our long-term approach to the crisis, funding and future programmes. There is a great deal of research being conducted at a national level. We hope this project provides the hyper-local Westminster context to ensure we're responding as well as we can during these challenging times.

WHO ARE WE SPEAKING TO & HOW?

Following consultation with our research partners, youth workers and young people we have developed a new methodology; committing to flexibility in our approach as the situation changes over the months ahead. Our aim is to keep the research simple, report regularly and lean into the existing trusted relationships between youth workers and young people; which are more important than ever.

- Bi-weekly online focus group with 10 Westminster youth workers, working with young people in a range of settings.
- We will jointly set 3 themes of focus each week. Youth workers reflect on these questions in their interactions with young people and ask for young people's views.
- This insight will be regularly shared with the YWF community in a bi-weekly bulletin
- Long term aim to undertake meaningful youth participation as part of this research, potentially as part of summer programmes

THANK YOU

To all the youth workers & YWF members who are involved in the focus groups and help make this research happen. We look forward to our continued collaboration.



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WHAT DID WE LEARN IN WEEK 1?

CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE:

Practitioners raised a range of challenges faced by young people during lockdown including poverty; lack of certainty about the future; boredom and frustration; and restricted access to support and services.

KEY THEMES IN YOUTH EXPERIENCE IN WEEK 1:

This being the first in our series of bulletins, the insight in this edition will vary from the majority of the research. In future editions we will focus on young people's experiences across three key themes, jointly set by the youth workers involved in the focus groups. In our introductory focus group we looked to explore young people's experiences of coronavirus more broadly. Some of the key themes raised by the group were:

POVERTY & LIMITED ACCESS TO FOOD

Young people and families have been feeling pressure relating to food access, with parents being asked to make supermarket trips and provide three-four meals per day. One practitioner highlighted that young people have been asking for supermarket vouchers as prizes in online competitions, suggesting a pressing issue.

POOR LIVING CONDITIONS

Practitioners voiced concern about various elements of young people's living conditions including overcrowding, safeguarding issues, isolation, and limited access to support whilst a parent experiences a mental health condition.

BOREDOM & FRUSTRATION

Young people are experiencing boredom and frustration, alongside anxiety. There is concern amongst young people relating to not knowing what will happen next and not being able to plan their futures.

PERCEPTIONS OF COVID-19

It was felt that young people have received mixed messages about COVID-19 including being told to take it seriously and stay at home, whilst hearing that it will be very unlikely to impact their own health. Young people are largely receiving information about COVID-19 by word of mouth and many believe that it is a conspiracy. While young people usually look to youth workers for information and advice, access is limited during the crisis.

ARE THINGS GENERALLY IMPROVING OR WORSENING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AS THE CRISIS PROGRESSES?

Practitioners provided a mixed response on whether the situation for young people is improving or worsening over time, summarised as follows:

IMPROVING

- Those who are younger (under 13s) seem to be adapting to the situation
- People have more time with their families
- There is more time to reflect and pursue activities of interest

WORSENING

- It may be harder for those who are older to stay at home, particularly as the weather improves
- A longer time out of school or college will make it harder to transition back
- Tension and arguments online might come to the fore once lockdown ends
- It will be difficult for young people to access employment and there have been issues with access to benefits

WHAT HAS WORKED WELL IN SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE DURING COVID-19?

There have been limits to the online support available for young people during the lockdown. While specialist mental health support has been provided online for existing caseloads, services have not taken on new clients which has created a gap in support. Westminster youth organisations have sought to provide a wide range of activities online, however some young people are too shy or 'too cool' to engage and have limited access to shared electronic devices.

Despite these hurdles, the following approaches were felt to have been successful:

- Providing activity packs for young people to engage in creative activities offline
- Youth workers ringing around and checking in with young people, rather than waiting for them to seek support
- Distributing food packages to families
- Planning and circulating a fixed weekly agenda of activities, so that young people can schedule the use of shared devices

NEXT TIME:

Mental Health
Access to education
Physical health, eating & exercise

✉ info@ywfoundation.com

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