

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

INSIGHT FROM WESTMINSTER'S YOUTH WORKERS

ARE YOUNG PEOPLE STILL IN 'LOCKDOWN'?

Youth practitioners felt that for those aged 14 and over, lockdown was largely over. This age group have started to go out and to others' houses, with a view amongst some that they are unlikely to become unwell with Covid-19. This has meant that youth clubs have had to carefully assess risks associated with opening up while young people may not adhere to social distancing guidelines. For those who are younger (up to aged 13), parents have tended to be able to limit social contact by keeping children at home.

THEME 1: SLEEP AND ROUTINE

Youth practitioners reflected on the impact of Covid-19 on young people's sleep and routines, whether time spent on digital devices was impacting sleep, and if young people need additional support to improve their routine, as follows:

IMPACT ON SLEEP AND ROUTINES

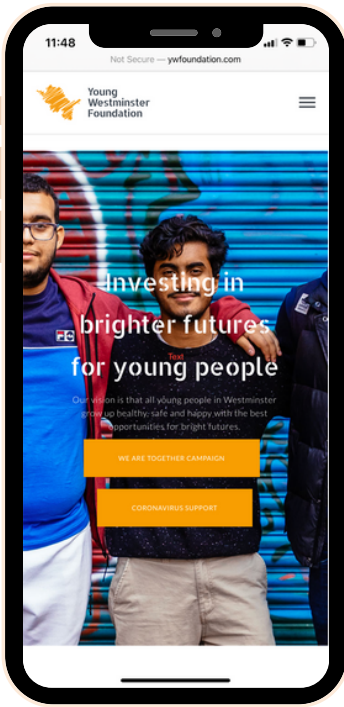
Many young people have reported disruptions to their usual sleeping patterns e.g. staying up very late, having trouble getting to sleep, or having vivid dreams. Irregular sleeping patterns appear to have worsened over time since mid-March.

Those who are going back to school are being required to get back into their usual routine, however if their siblings are still at home this can impact their ability to get to bed early. Coming back into school has been exhausting for many pupils with some falling asleep during the school day.

While there were concerns about young people being able to adjust back to school life in September, youth practitioners were generally positive that young people could be supported to resume their routine in a similar way to after the summer holidays.



TIME SPENT ON DIGITAL DEVICES



Westminster's young people have effectively built digital networks during this time and have used these to support one another and do schoolwork together. Individuals from different school year groups have increasingly mixed while schools have been closed.

Phones are being used as a distraction to reduce anxiety – young people often have their “phone glued to their hand”.

Young people are experiencing digital fatigue as they are spending many hours each day attending lessons, speaking to friends, and completing activities online.

There are concerns about an increase in cyber-bullying and parents have been asked to monitor what young people are up to on their phones.

However, many young people do not have access to phones or other digital devices which can leave them feeling isolated.

HOW CAN POSITIVE SLEEPING PATTERNS AND ROUTINES BE SUPPORTED?

- Practitioners have found that it can be helpful to ring young people at 9am to support their routine and give them someone to talk to when they wake up
- Giving young people access to offline activities can help them to relax and focus on something that is not schoolwork or current affairs
- Sleep diaries can be used to help young people identify what can trigger a bad night's sleep
- Encouraging young people to be active and exercise during the day can help, as boredom and inactivity is seen to contribute to poor sleep
- Parent or carer input is important in supporting young people to keep healthy sleeping patterns and routines.

THEME 2: ACCESS TO PUBLIC SPACES

Practitioners explored the extent to which young people are getting out and exploring new parts of Westminster while options for social contact are limited during Covid-19. A range of barriers to spending time in outdoors spaces such as parks were identified, and suggestions were provided for how these could be overcome, as follows:

GETTING OUT AND ABOUT

The extent to which Westminster's young people are getting out and about varies – most are tending to stay close to home, while some have taken up cycling and are exploring in groups.

There are a range of barriers that prevent young people from using large outdoor spaces such as parks, including coming into contact with park keepers who often disperse groups, and feeling cautious to access new areas due to postcode tensions.

While teachers could previously introduce young people and their families to new areas and outdoor activities, at present schools are unable to take pupils off-site on trips.

Parents and carers influence young people's ability and willingness to spend time outdoors e.g. if they have a high level of anxiety about the spread of Covid-19.



HOW CAN ACCESS TO PUBLIC SPACES BE SUPPORTED?



- Youth organisations can run group sessions in new locations to increase awareness about parks and support young people to independently access them in the future
- The Council can facilitate and encourage the use of outdoor spaces such as football pitches amongst individuals and youth groups
- Practitioners can boost confidence and provide suggestions to young people and parents about the various types of outdoor activities and spaces that they may want to access.

THEME 3: YOUTH VOICE AND ACTION

Practitioners described youth views on the police, youth engagement with the Black Lives Matter movement, and the extent to which young people feel that they have a say in the decisions that impact them. The group discussed ways in which youth organisations can create spaces for young people to reflect and act on important political and social issues, as follows:

VIEWS ON THE POLICE

Youth workers reported that they have built positive relationships with local community police officers. However, trusted relationships between youth workers, young people and police have been undermined at times by experiences of 'heavy handed' policing, with police officers coming into the borough who do not have local relationships including the Territorial Support Group. An example was cited of a 14-year-old being stopped and searched by six police officers was circulated on social media leading to concern and frustration.

Young people who previously engaged in Extinction Rebellion protests have had negative interactions “being pushed around” by the police.

Police officers have made efforts to break down barriers between LGBT young people and the police e.g. through LGBT police officers coming and talking to young people in a relaxed and informal way.

Schools need more information about police stop and search powers which will impact their pupils so that they can effectively prepare and inform them.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT



Westminster's young people feel a strong connection to the movement and are seeking outlets to explore their feelings and plan social action. As some young people are not able to donate or attend a protest, youth organisations have been developing ways for them to creatively contribute e.g. through dance and making content to share on social media platforms.

Year 6 pupils who have returned to school have been keen to talk about Black Lives Matter and want to be a part of the movement.

There has been some disappointment from pupils where their schools have not sent out any communication in support of the movement or provided spaces for young people to process and discuss the issues.

HOW CAN BETTER RELATIONS WITH THE POLICE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH VOICE AND ACTION BE SUPPORTED?

- While providing spaces for young people to talk is important, it is also crucial that discussions lead to policy change to demonstrate respect for youth voice and prevent further youth disenfranchisement.
- Youth organisations and schools can support youth voice and action by giving them a platform and the confidence to affect change. During this time, it has been useful for youth organisations to have fluid programmes to create spaces for young people to talk about racism as and when is needed, particularly as some young people are less able to talk to parents.
- Police officers could benefit from training around de-escalation and talking to young people, and young people should be supported to make complaints to the police where needed.
- Greater dialogue, trust and sharing of intelligence between youth workers and police teams.



NEXT TIME:

Family, friendships, and social skills
Experience of trauma
The ‘new normal’

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