

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

INSIGHT FROM WESTMINSTER'S YOUTH WORKERS

UPDATE ON THE PAST TWO WEEKS

Westminster youth continue to experience frustration, boredom, and isolation while their social contact remains limited. Many young people do not have a garden, space for themselves or their own device at home. Despite this, youth practitioners reported that some young people are keeping positive, engaging in creative activities, and are starting to '**see the light at the end of the tunnel**'.

Young people are beginning to meet up with friends outside, however there is some level of **confusion** about how careful to be in their social contact now that lockdown is easing. For younger children, there has been less change as parents have not generally become more lenient in allowing them to socialise.

Young people and communities are **unhappy with the heavy-handed operations of the police**. There is concern that years of building up good relations with community police could be undone, and there is a need to think of ways to turn this around and impact better policing.



THEME 1: MENTAL HEALTH



KEY FINDINGS

- Young people experience day-to-day **uncertainty** where it feels their situation is changing rapidly.
- They are generally **open** to talking about mental health, sharing how the experience of lockdown is making them feel and which services they would like access to.
- While there are generally feelings of **anxiety** and **low mood**, some young people have experienced a **reduction in the stresses associated with attending school**.
- Some young people are holding onto the idea that everything will be fine in September and things will be back to **normal** by this time.
- Being required to stay at home is particularly difficult for **LGBT+ youth** who have not come out to family members - this can feel like living with strangers.
- Children can be **fearful** about the prospect of going back to school, particularly if they are living with **older family members** who are concerned about becoming ill with Covid-19.

HOW CAN MENTAL HEALTH BE SUPPORTED?

- Recreating **activity groups** (that were previously provided in person) online i.e. with the same group of young people that previously attended.
- Providing young people with **creative outlets**, for example with care packages that include art supplies and games.
- **Celebrating good news and 're-framing lockdown'** – encouraging young people to plan their days and see this time as an opportunity to achieve their goals.
- Youth practitioners gathering the **direct contact** details of young people to avoid always having to go through parents to reach them.
- Promoting the use of **existing** mental health resources amongst young people,
- Mental health support organisations providing **clear** information about what they provide and how young people can **access** services.



THEME 2: ACCESS TO EDUCATION

KEY FINDINGS

- The extent to which schools have supported ongoing learning varies – some have been more proactive and provided young people with guidance and structure
- There is **anxiety** amongst young people that they will not be able to **catch up** on learning missed whilst schools have been closed, particularly if they feel they have not been fully engaged during this time.
- Many did not realise that content covered during this period would not be taught again once schools reopen. It can be **difficult** for staff to provide adequate learning support for pupils online
- Pupils **cannot** as easily support one another as they would while sitting side by side in the classroom and it is often too time consuming for teachers to provide one-to-one support for all 30-35 pupils.
- While some parents can provide ongoing support with learning, others have less time or do not speak English as a **first language**
- It may be **hard** for pupils to adjust back to attending school full-time after months away from their usual **routine**.

HOW CAN ACCESS TO EDUCATION BE SUPPORTED?

- It will be important for schools and youth organisations to provide opportunities for young people to **catch up** on any missed learning so that they can successfully continue their education once schools open.
- The distribution of **electronic devices** will help to ensure young people can engage in online learning
- Schools can **learn** from one another about successful approaches to engaging pupils and supporting learning.

- Efforts to improve consistency in approaches between Westminster schools will reduce inequalities in youth access to education during this time.
- Where possible, youth workers can provide educational support or facilitate young people helping one another with schoolwork.

View from a Westminster School

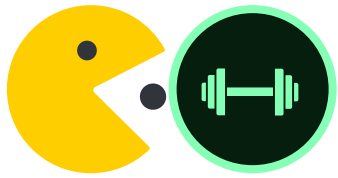
The school, like others, has had to adapt quickly to Covid-19. It has benefited from having community-focused staff who are highly motivated to support pupils at this difficult time. Teachers have been ringing all pupils and their families to catch up, with pupils who have been identified as vulnerable being contacted more frequently and invited into school. Various communication methods have been utilised including sending letters and using ClassDojo (a mobile app). A food bank and food parcel sharing service have been made available and community groups have provided books for distribution.

Overall, there has been inconsistency in approaches between different Westminster schools with some proactively setting work, issuing timetables, and engaging parents whilst others have provided a more limited response. There are significant logistical challenges in planning for pupils to return to the classroom environment and a lot is being asked of teachers who now must both provide face-to-face learning and support remote learning.

While some parents are happy for their children to go back to school, others are voicing concern about the potential risks. School staff have found that it is important to be reliable, keep up contact and not put pressure on parents who are often trying to hold down full-time work and may be facing their own mental health problems.

To prepare young people to resume classroom learning, the school is designing a 'recovery curriculum' which will focus on resetting boundaries and routines. There is a need to consider how emotionally ready children will be to resume learning as some will have experienced trauma such as bereavements or experience of domestic violence during lockdown. At present, it is unclear what the expectation will be for schools to support pupils to catch up on missed content as funding for booster sessions has not been provided. While pupils are very likely to be behind on academic learning as a result of lockdown, non-academic learning should not be undervalued (for example learning new skills at home).





THEME 3: PHYSICAL HEALTH, EATING AND EXERCISE



KEY FINDINGS

- Many young people report feeling **less fit** and healthy. Some have described now increasingly **appreciating** the importance of exercise and access to sports facilities
- For others, lockdown has been an opportunity to **exercise more** and try new sports or activities. For example, one practitioner explained that their organisation's online yoga classes have attracted young people who would not have previously engaged with face-to-face classes
- Access to food is **restricted** in cases and many families have struggled to access food vouchers, however families are generally **willing** to ask for help when it is needed
- Youth services have faced a **dilemma** in knowing how to distribute needed contraception whilst trying to encourage young people to not have sex with those living in other households.

HOW CAN PHYSICAL HEALTH BE SUPPORTED?

- Organisations can **actively distribute food** to families – it was felt that many great services had mobilised during this time, for example Magic Breakfast
- Offering **online exercise** activities (either live or pre-recorded) such as Judo, HIIT workouts, yoga, dance and football skills. One practitioner described recording videos from within the youth service building and that this increased familiarity for young people made the exercises more accessible
- **Reassuring** young people that they can exercise outdoors and encouraging daily exercise such as short walks
- Providing **paper sheets** which detail exercises that young people can try (reducing the need for digital access)
- Youth workers helping young people to **set goals** in terms of food and exercise and then checking in to support those who are concerned about their weight or fitness.

NEXT TIME:

Sleep and routines
Access to public spaces
Youth voice and action

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