



**The Young
Foundation**



**COMMUNITY
FUND**



Beyond the 'foggy and uncertain': supporting young people's futures

**Synthesis report
Youth-Led Peer Research Network**

The Young Foundation, March 2022

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Our approach

We understand

Working with local people, governments, businesses and policymakers, we develop original research to uncover insights, new evidence and data to support social innovation.

We involve

Actively involving people in research and innovation, we strengthen the relationships between communities and the organisations that influence their wellbeing.

We innovate

Creating initiatives that involve people from diverse sectors, we support game-changing ventures and incubate ground-breaking organisations, working to shape a fairer future.

The Young Foundation is the UK's home for community research and social innovation. As a not-for-profit, The Young Foundation brings communities, organisations and policymakers together to shape a fairer future, driving positive change and supporting collective action to improve people's lives.

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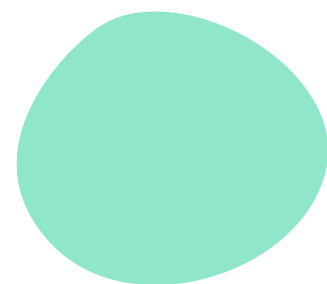
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Executive summary

Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on young people from the onset of the pandemic and the potentially lasting impact on their futures is important. The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK, commissioned, as part of the #iwill Fund, The Young Foundation to lead and conduct research into the experiences and priorities of young people across England. The aim of the research was to amplify young people's voices to highlight their priorities for their region going forward, and to inform the decisions and actions of funders, delivery organisations and youth organisations.

Peer research is a participatory research method in which people with lived experience of the issues being studied take part in directing and conducting research. In this project, The Young Foundation recruited and trained 59 peer researchers to form the Youth-Led Peer Research Network with young people aged between 16 and 20 years old in six regions across England: London, South East and East, Midlands, North East and Cumbria, North West, South West, Yorkshire and Humber. These peer researchers interviewed 209 young people to explore their visions for the future beyond Covid-19, and to help funders, delivery organisations and youth organisations understand the priorities of young people. The research aimed to identify what would make a difference to young people in their region, now and in the future.

The findings clearly show that Covid-19 has had a significant impact on young people, leaving them uncertain about their future and worried about the opportunities

they have missed over the last two years. What is evident in their visions of the future beyond Covid-19 is that they're hoping for a world where young people are at the centre of change and where change is fair, equitable and inclusive.

The key priority areas for young people include:

- **improving support for mental health**
- **ensuring access to opportunities that support their aspirations beyond education**
- **tackling poverty and hardship**
- **improving and expanding access to local assets and facilities**
- **reducing inequalities**
- **helping young people stay safe**

While there is some regional variation in the priorities of young people, there is also a high level of consistency and commonality. Regional variations often reflect differences between urban and rural areas, and/or the north-south divide in terms of access to opportunities. This is particularly important in relation to activities that enable young people to gain exposure to and experience of sectors that are often concentrated in major cities, such as creative industries.

Through involvement in this work, many of the peer researchers report increased confidence and skills in areas such as communication and teamwork. The report ends with reflections on key principles for working with young people in this way.

Introduction

The #iwill fund

The #iwill Fund is an England wide £54 million joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The #iwill Fund launched in November 2016 to support the goals of the #iwill campaign in England, now known as the #iwill Movement since the end of 2020. The #iwill Movement spans the UK, aiming to make social action the norm for young people aged 10 to 20.

The #iwill Fund distributes its investment through working in partnership with other funders. A collaborative group of 30 match funders have joined the #iwill Fund to date, match funding the investment on at least a £1: £1 ratio, and developing funding programmes that enable more young people, to take part in high-quality social action that builds a habit for life – particularly supporting people from less affluent communities.

The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK, commissioned this piece of work as part of the #iwill Fund, working alongside The Young Foundation to lead and conduct research into the experiences and priorities of young people across England.

Research aim and objectives

At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, organisations including UK Youth, BBC Children in Need and The Children's Society conducted research into the impact of Covid-19 and measures to contain it on children and young people. Their findings highlight a largely detrimental impact. Young people's mental health, reduced access to education and activities, worsened financial situations and young people's safety were the primary concerns. Over the last two years, the pandemic has adversely impacted the lives of young people in different ways with implications for young people's futures and the transitions they face. Targeted investment is needed to support young people's priorities and to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 as recovery plans from the pandemic evolve and are implemented.

Consequently, the aim of this research is to amplify young people's voices to highlight their priorities for their region going forward, to inform the decisions and actions of funders, delivery organisations and youth organisations. It will also shape the development of the #iwill Fund and regional youth spend by the Fund.



This research seeks to:

- enable funders (public, private and third sector), delivery organisations and youth organisations to better understand the priorities of young people across their region.
- help funders (public, private and third sector), delivery organisations, and youth organisations identify what would make a difference to young people in their region, now and in the future.
- explore young people's visions for the future beyond Covid-19.
- uncover voices that are unheard.
- help young people from communities across the region join together.



Peer research methodology

Peer research is a participatory research method in which people with lived experience of the issues being studied take part in directing and conducting research.

Given the aims and objectives of this research project, adopting a peer research methodology allows access to 'less heard' voices because peer researchers can often connect with young people who might be unwilling to engage with professional researchers. Peer researchers can also draw on their networks and relationships to involve people that may not otherwise have been included. Young people may respond more honestly and openly, and feel they can speak more informally, to an interviewer they relate to on a personal level. Peer research also deepens insights on an issue because of the added value of lived experience, providing 'insider knowledge' and understanding of the issues being studied. Therefore, peer research can deliver more nuanced data.

This methodology empowered young people to effect positive change by participating in research in their own communities and with their peers through the creation of the Youth-Led Peer Research (YLPR) Network. The YLPR Network brought together young people within and across regions including: London, South East and East, Midlands, North East and Cumbria, North West, South West, Yorkshire and Humber, with between seven to 10 young people in each region.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the YLPR Network is a diverse group of young people in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, place, and disability, and included individuals with lived experiences of being in care being a young carer, speaking English as a second language, homelessness, and refugee/asylum-seeking status. For a full demographic breakdown of the Network, see Table 1 in the appendix.



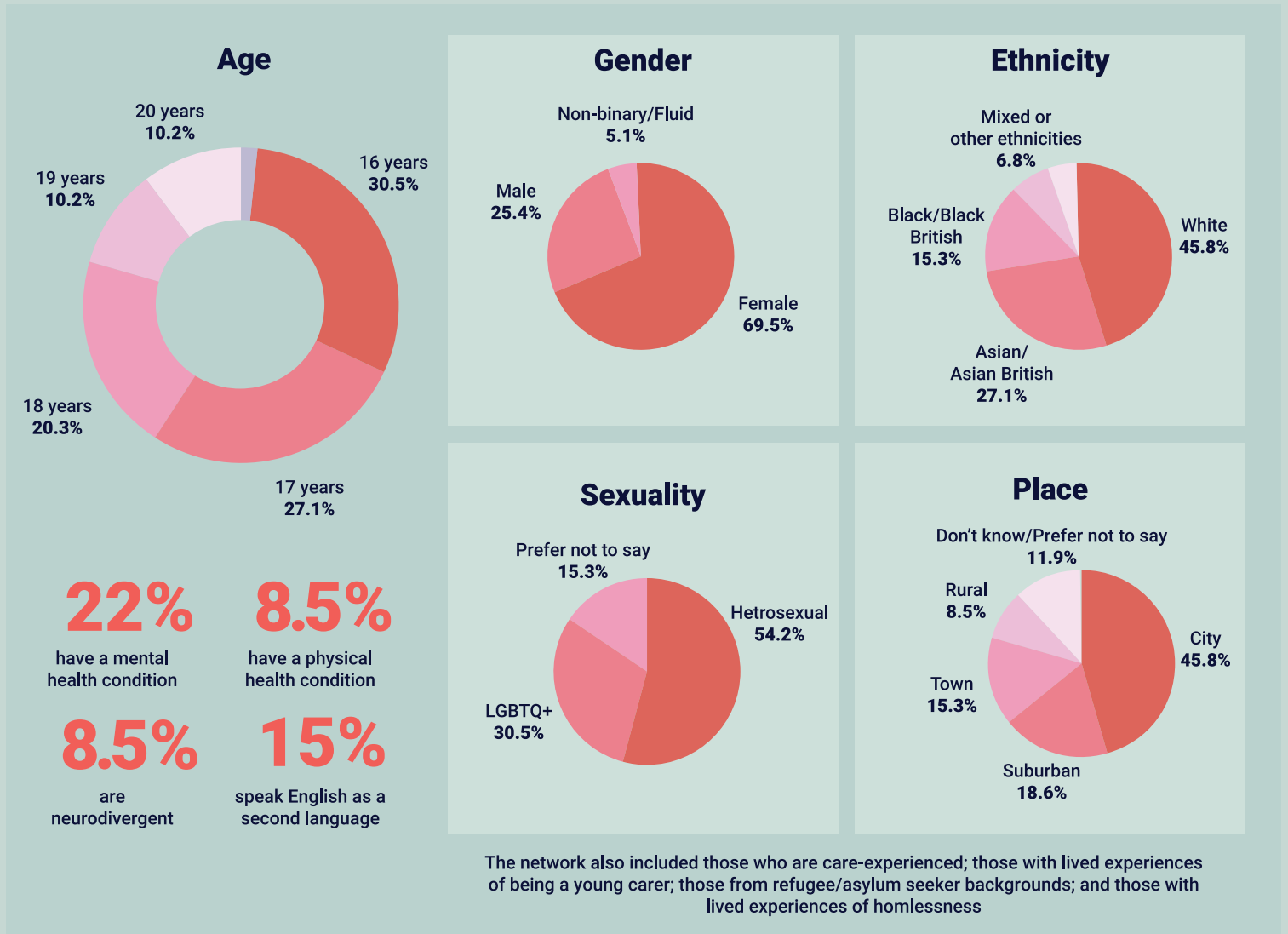


Figure 1: The demographic profile of the peer researchers

The project ran from November 2021 to January 2022 and involved 59 peer researchers¹ in the research design. Of these peer researchers, 45 went on to interview 209 young people, either face-to-face or online.

The online interviews were conducted through a web application, Fatima, which recorded and transcribed the interviews. With support from The Young Foundation, the Network received training to develop their research skills and members co-designed the interview guide used to collect data from other young people.

Each regional group of peer researchers co-analysed data from the interviews and developed creative outputs to support the dissemination of research findings. In addition to the training provided, the Network also had opportunities to attend masterclasses on topics such as influencing stakeholders.

¹The Youth-Led Peer Research Network started with 59 young people but due to other commitments such as work and examinations, some of the young people did not complete the data collection stage of the project.

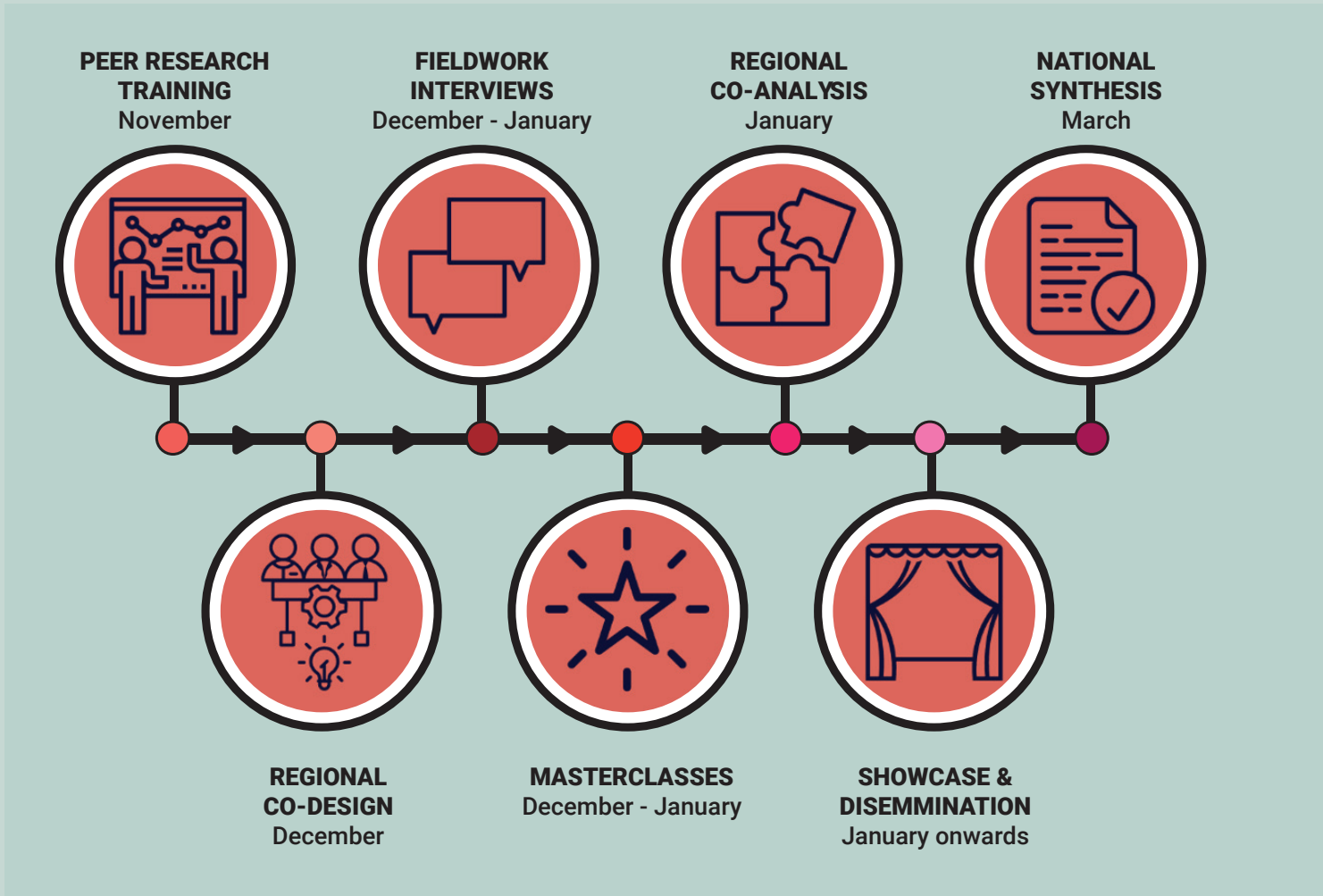



Figure 2: The programme timeline

The research findings presented in this report are from a sample of young people across the regions and are not intended to be representative of all young people. These findings elucidate our understanding of and give us deeper

insights into the priorities of young people. They provide a good indication of the different experiences of young people and the types of things young people would like to see happen in their regions.

Findings

Impact of Covid-19 on young people's futures




**“My future is incredibly foggy”
– male, 19, South West**

Young people face uncertainty: socially, politically, economically and environmentally. As Covid-19 **“really limited what young people would ordinarily do”** (female, 20, North East and Cumbria), norms have shifted and young people's futures no longer feel so predictable. An 18-year-old commented, **“now you don't know, which makes the future quite scary”** (female, London, South East and East).

This sense of unease about the future is compounded by growing concern over physical health risks, mental health issues and social isolation during the pandemic. Navigating a period of severe turbulence has clearly impacted young people's wellbeing: **“those times during the lockdowns that we were sent home [from school] and we couldn't meet our friends, or go out of our house, it was emotionally distressing”** (female, 16, North East and Cumbria).

Yet, the profound changes to their lives have also offered new perspectives and outlooks on the future: **“the world has kind of gone a bit pear-shaped, so it's almost like a reset button for society”** (male, 20, North West). A minority felt that the impacts were only temporary or short-term, but several young people agreed the pandemic has **“given people a lot of creativity to think about future plans”** (male, 17, South West) and prompted more conversations on the importance of issues such as domestic abuse, mental health, climate change, and inequalities.

A 17-year-old stated, **“Covid has changed my outlook on life in general, because it kind of reinforces the idea of safety, happiness, and the importance of mental health and health in general, and the virus has definitely made me realise that these are the most fundamental concerns in my life”** (female, London, South East and East).



**“I feel like it’s just closed a lot of doors”
– female, 20, North West**

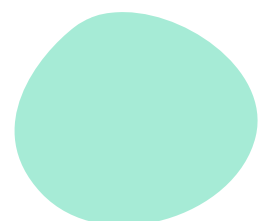
When discussing the impacts of Covid-19, many young people focussed on disruptions to their education and employment. These have shaped young people’s plans for the future, affecting options and opportunities, and leaving some feeling that their potential has been curbed. An 18-year-old explained, **“I think Covid has affected a lot of people’s choices. With me ... it was really difficult to find work placements or work experience ... and obviously, education [was also impacted]. I think we were affected a lot with all the lockdowns. I feel like some people did have the potential to do better at school, getting better grades, but because of Covid it was really hard for them to reach it”** (female, Yorkshire and Humber).

Beyond education and employment, many young people also described how limits on extracurricular activities (including arts, sports, travel, and volunteering) meant they missed out on opportunities that could enrich their lives and horizons. Fewer opportunities to socialise in-person also impacted on young people’s

relationships with their friends and communities. A 20-year-old described, **“despite all the technology we have, it’s still very, very isolating for a lot of people ... it feels like you’re stuck behind a computer screen, it never feels like you can actually interact with [other people] or interact with your hobby directly”** (non-binary, North West).

Ultimately, young people felt that many of their aspirations were effectively ‘put on hold’ during the pandemic: **“I had to postpone some of my plans for the future – I literally lost two years”** (male, 19, North East and Cumbria). A 16-year-old considered the impact of these ‘lost years’ on young people: **“my life has just gone by and I didn’t do anything, or accomplish something new ... and now in comparison to an older generation, who haven’t had this year in the pandemic at this specific time in their lives, it feels like maybe [my generation is] behind”** (female, Midlands).

In contrast, some shared how they had been able to take up new hobbies, learn new skills, and realise new career ambitions during the pandemic. They also acknowledged some benefits for their futures (such as remote working and technological change). For example, a 15-year-old said that, with the time he had, **“it made me try out coding, which I enjoyed, and made me think about possibly doing that in future”** (male, Yorkshire and Humber).



Imagining post-Covid futures



Figure 3: Word cloud displaying responses to ‘Beyond Covid, in up to 10 years’ time, using one word, what would you like to see happen in your area for young people? (n= 148).

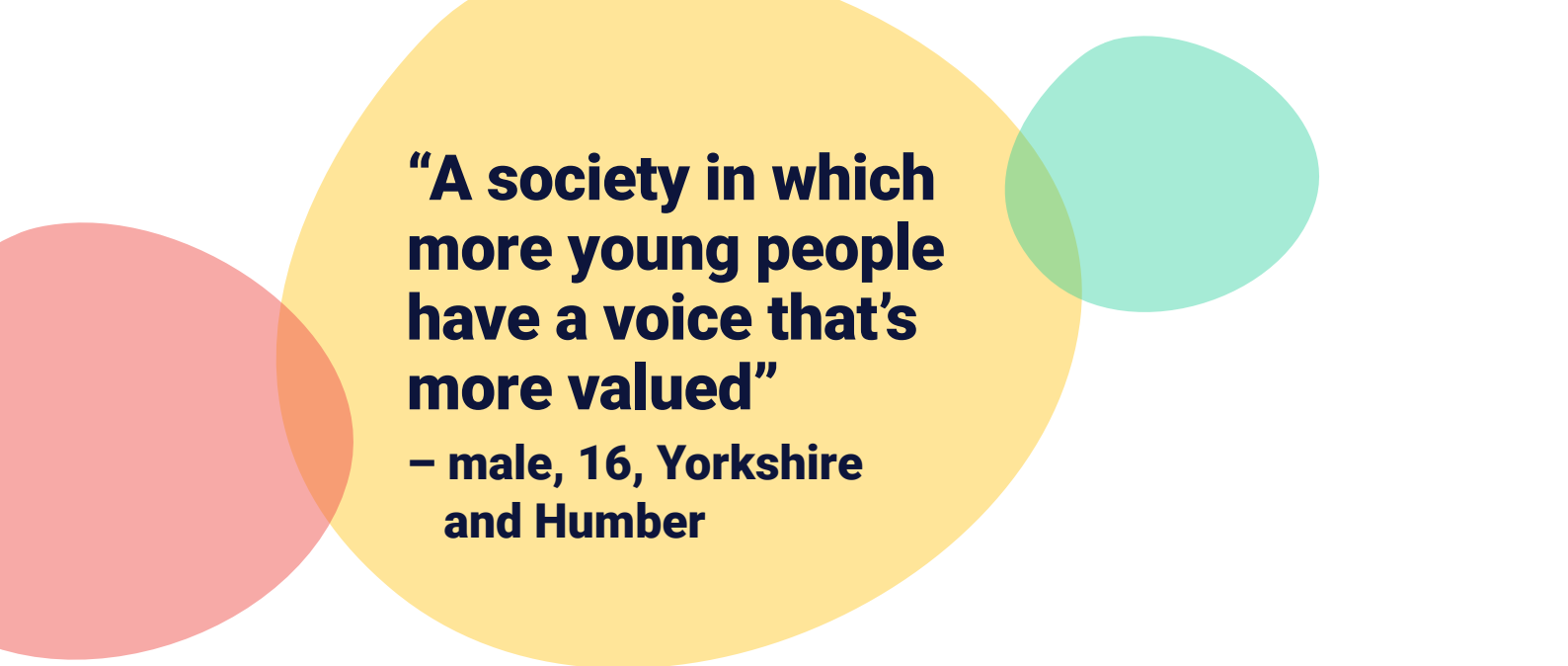
The youth researchers encouraged their peers to creatively explore their visions for the future post-Covid in their local area. Starting by describing what they’d like to see happen, in one word, the most common responses² reveals gaps and deficits experienced by young people during the pandemic. The most popular word, opportunities (n=25), reflects an ambition to make up for the ‘lost years’; while the second most popular word, support (n= 10), reflects a need to provide a buffer against uncertainty. This emphasises how young people are eager for opportunities to broaden their horizons, but these must be accompanied by wrap-around support for their wellbeing. The

third most popular response, change (n= 8), suggests young people feel this would require a shake-up of current practices.

Exploring these visions further, young people were asked to imagine what solutions would enable this change to occur. Cutting across a wide range of priority areas (discussed in the following section), their ideas followed two key principles:

1. Putting young people at the centre of change
2. Ensuring change is fair, equitable and inclusive

² See Appendix Table 3 for further details of the responses displayed on Figure 1.



“A society in which more young people have a voice that’s more valued”

– male, 16, Yorkshire and Humber

Young people envision changes that fit around the rhythms of their lives and are embedded in their communities. Many imagined solutions which would take place at or with schools: **“I think bringing it up in a school environment would be a great start ... considering that the majority of the youth are still in schools, I think that education would be the most efficient place”** (female, 17, London, South East and East).

Opportunities and support would be bundled up in things they are already doing, with proactive initiatives integrated into their everyday activities. For instance, an 18-year-old suggested, **“I would probably do sports but mix it up, do a couple of sessions speaking about safety, online safety, a mixture of stuff”** (female, Yorkshire and Humber). A 19-year-old said **“one thing that I always think should have happened is, in school or colleges, each student should get a monthly meeting with someone to talk about their mental health, even if they’re fine”** (male, South West).


For young people, youth-centred approaches³ make engagement easy and attractive. This also includes investing in dedicated youth spaces, but some cautioned these must account for

“what people themselves want, rather than what so-called professionals think is correct, and having them trying to cut costs ... in some horrible room with like no paintings and no windows” (female, 18, London, South East and East).

A 17-year-old described her ideal: **“one thing would be having a really good youth club in the town, with leaders who are really, really proactive in getting things organised and getting young people together and understanding what young people want”** (female, Yorkshire and Humber).

Ultimately, the young people engaged in this research are clear about what they want for their future; and when they speak up, they want to be listened to. The young people reported that they are tired of being treated like problems are too ‘grown up’ for them. They have views and opinions on society’s most pressing issues and said they feel frustrated when these aren’t taken into account by decision-makers. An 18-year-old explained, **“I would make it so that the people that have the power, actually do something with their power, because I feel like I want to make a change and I want to make a big difference, but there’s not a lot that one person can do”** (female, South West).

³ Youth-centred approaches mean that young people are meaningfully engaged across all stages of decision-making, yet the level of participation can sit on a continuum.



“I would change the prejudice that is deep rooted in systems in society”

– female, 16, London, South East and East

Many young people recognised that their local peers did not all want the same things. They see that **“a lot of the time, young people are pushed into this box”** (female, 16, London, South East and East), reflecting that this one-size-fits-all approach doesn't cater for a diversity of needs and interests.

Moving away from standardised approaches, several young people asked for investment that would open up more options, whether for different extracurricular activities, such as **“more creative activities and ... sports that aren't as popular”** (male, 13, Yorkshire and Humber), or alternative post-16 education and employment routes: **“I know that they always say that [university] is the best option but it's not the best option for everyone, so it would be nicer to have more opportunities given to us about apprenticeships or the ways of being in education, differently suited to each person cos university is not the end all and be all for everybody – just cos it works for someone doesn't mean it's going to work for another person”** (female, 17, Midlands).

Overall, it was important to many young people that the ideas they suggested

were accessible for all, irrespective of their circumstances. An 18-year-old described, **“I would make it accessible and affordable for everyone to get the help and support that they need, make sure that people have a home that is affordable and able to be lived in ... and schools should be fully equipped to help autistic students, disabled students, anyone who needs support”** (non-binary, Yorkshire and Humber). They also acknowledged the importance of inclusivity, ensuring **“safe spaces, where they feel welcome, feel safe”** (female, 16, Midlands) and of fostering a **“sense of community outside family or school, because some people hate school and some people have a really time hard time with family”** (male, 19, South West).

To make this happen, most young people interviewed feel there needs to be better education: **“teaching people how to behave, the importance of not being mean to someone else and just being respectful”** (female, 17, Yorkshire and Humber) with **“lessons in school about how to treat someone who's different, ... especially with race and gender, because it leads to an unfair and unhappy society”** (female, 15, North East and Cumbria).

Priority areas

Through interviews, young people highlighted a wide range of issues that were important to young people's youth futures in their local area. We summarise each of these priority areas here, linked to the thematic areas in which The National Lottery Community Fund can contribute to wider change by funding organisations working alongside institutions. The research findings can also influence and inform the work of other funders and stakeholders who have greater leverage to create systems change.



Mental health

Mental health is clearly an important priority for many young people across the country. In interviews, young people discussed the widespread impacts of Covid-19 on mental wellbeing, and how the issue has risen to new prominence over this period. Nonetheless, they recognised it remains stigmatised across society and highlight some cultural differences. For instance, a 17-year-old described, **“where I live ... it's the kind of place where stuff like mental health and all of that, it's very stigmatised ... I feel like in [some people's] eyes it doesn't really exist and getting help is [seen as] such a bad thing. Like it's just not the norm to get help for mental health”** (female, South West).

Many were aware of, and some discussed personal experiences of issues when accessing support services. Several young people also advocated for preventative approaches: **“I think our mental health is something that we need to take care of, and we should [invest in] early intervention and educating people on self-care [...] That is very important because we shouldn't wait until people are struggling and suicidal or really damaging themselves before we give them support”** (female, 19, North West).



Education and preparing for the future

Young people want their education to better prepare them for the future. This includes reforming assessment approaches. One young person reflected their experience of the current system is that it's focused on **“constantly comparing us to each other and making us compete against each other and pretending like they have our own best interest in mind, when in reality they just want the school to look better on paper instead of us actually doing better in our future lives”** (non-binary, 18, Yorkshire and Humber).

They also want the curriculum to include **“education on real life things. School has never told me about taxes or businesses or entrepreneurship, for example, or careers like going into business or social media or computers ... We have ‘learning for life’ but it didn’t talk to us about like taxes or laws which are really important” (male, 18, Midlands).**

Several young people also discussed equality of opportunities to access further education and/or employment, depending on their different potential paths and aspirations, with neither route being privileged above the other. Some also highlighted employment issues related to job insecurity, low pay and poor working conditions: **“I think they should be providing more jobs for young people, which are paid sensibly, not just minimum wage” (female, 18, North East and Cumbria).**

While some young people focused more on education and others on employment – typically reflecting their age and life stage - many were concerned about the period of transition and how best to ensure they are qualified and prepared for the future they want.

Local facilities and assets

Young people want their local area to thrive. This includes supporting local business and industries, as well as ensuring places, groups, clubs and facilities for young people to meet and access a range of opportunities. They connect this with benefits for individual young people, as well as their wider communities – for instance, a 20-year-old discussed the benefits of investment in **“grassroots music [and] things to help the grassroots of as many industries as possible really. Because if kids at a young age are surrounded by a nice environment, where they can maybe carry out performance, better than what they would just see on the street, like a not very nice environment where they’re gonna be almost discouraged from a career because they haven’t got the right facilities or anything to want to enjoy what they do” (male, North West).**



Several young people, particularly in rural areas, discussed improving the quality and affordability of local transport links: **“obviously you could get a bus into town or something, but that does cost money and it takes time ... I would make it cheaper, probably reducing the cost of tickets, and having the investment in transport to help you get around, as where I live buses aren’t as frequent”** (male, 17, South West).



Equalities

Many young people are passionate about equality: **“I quite strongly believe in feminism ... if I could click my fingers, I would make it so that there is gender equality”** (female, 16, Yorkshire and Humber). They want proactive efforts, including **“work towards anti-racism and LGBTQ+ equality cos ... [inequalities] affect so many people all the time and they link to every part of your life if you’re a member of one of those groups”** (female, 18, London, South East and East).

Ensuring equality of opportunities is also important, so that young people have **“a fair chance in life. I feel like a lot of people don’t have a fair shot in my area, mostly because we’re in a kind of deprived area. I don’t think the schools are the best in my area, so I feel like young people are set back a little bit [compared to] other people who are a bit more privileged”** (female, 20, Midlands).



Safety

Safety is a key concern for many young people. This spans a range of issues, from online safety to safety on roads and streets in their local area. **“One big thing that still terrifies me now is women’s safety at night, trying to take trams or just walking places at night is genuinely the most terrifying thing I’ve ever done, so I think building an awareness around that is quite important”** (female, 20, North West).

With concerns about gang-related crime, violence and antisocial behaviour, young people want **“more safety for younger people, because there’s a lot of people who get involved in crime and drugs so [we should be] investing in ... more protection for these people”** (female, 20, London, South East and East).

Some young people also discussed issues of domestic abuse and sexual violence.



a 16-year-old described how **“over-consumption is a big thing [and] fast fashion contributes to a lot more waste going on because you have people buying so much stuff ... it’s not very sustainable”** (female, Midlands).

They also see the benefits of protecting their local environments: **“I love nature, I feel like parks and nature should be utilised a bit more and I feel like people should be encouraged to enjoy nature and take a walk and take a moment to yourself”** (female, 17, London, South East and East).

Poverty and hardship

Many young people face poverty. While some young people discussed their lived experiences of hardship, and others felt it was important for funding to be prioritised to help their peers **“who can’t find themselves jobs, who are starving, like young teens or young parents who can’t afford to feed their kids”** (female, 17, London, South East and East). As well as making opportunities and support more affordable, they highlighted the importance of dealing with the sharp-end of financial issues and youth homelessness.

Environmental issues

Young people are taking the climate crisis seriously: **“I think climate change is a big issue for everyone, but especially young people as climate change will affect our future the most”** (male, 14, Yorkshire and Humber). They want support to achieve more sustainable futures – for example,



Covid-19 and physical health

Leading healthy lives, and helping those coping with illness, is a central priority for many young people, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. An 18-year-old described the importance of **“making sure everything’s kept safe and making sure that most people have gotten the vaccine, to make sure no one gets affected [by Covid-19] ... [and] more physical activity that is much more flexible because the obesity rate is increasing extraordinarily”** (male, Midlands).

Politics and democracy

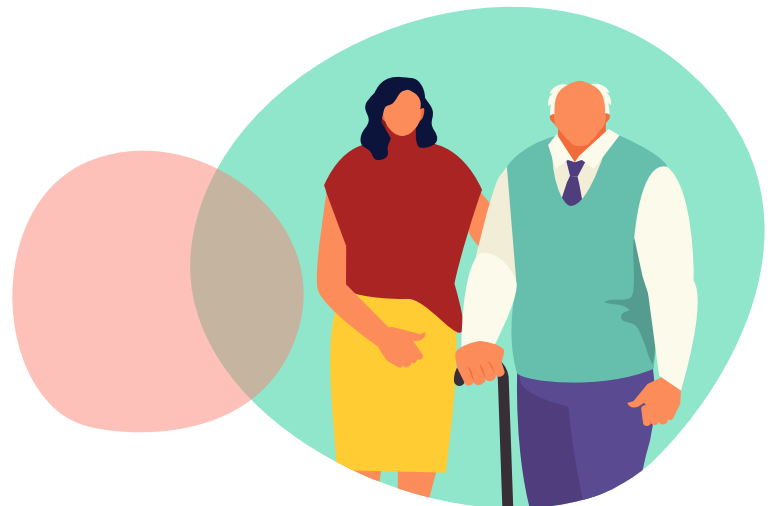
Young people have opinions on political issues and want to encourage greater awareness and engagement with politics among their peers: **“when we see political relationships, and how that will affect us in our lives ... that’s something definitely young people do feel strongly about because we don’t really have much of a voice. I’m only 16, I’m nowhere near voting, so someone else would be deciding on our lives; adults are making the decisions for us but we don’t really have choice on our future”** (female, 16, London, South East and East).



Relationships between young people

Particularly with the impacts of Covid-19, young people want to combat loneliness and social isolation among youth. **“They should be investing in making sure that we meet good people. If more young people are meeting different young people, if we all meet each other, socialising, having all these events, it actually brings us all closer together which also forms connections, we can all communicate with one another we can all share ideas ... events for youth to socialise, gaining different life skills, just enjoy the outdoors. Phones off social media and just actually enjoy being outside”** (male, 21, London, South East and East).

Some also touched upon issues related to bullying and peer pressure, as well as the role of social media in this.



Intergenerational relationships

While the focus of this research is young people’s priorities for fellow young people, some highlighted the importance of improving relations with older generations. A 20-year-old described how **“intergenerational things are also really important, especially for university students, because you often get in e a university bubble and a lot of the time generations are kind of set up against each other. Actually, they should be working together”** (non-binary, North West).

Regional findings



Art by Anna Barganski

The peer researchers analysed the data from interviews conducted in their region to identify key findings. The peer researchers chose what they felt were the most salient issues from the data collected. Here, we provide a summary of the creative outputs designed⁴ by the YLPR Network to present their research findings.

While there were variations across the regions, two cross-cutting themes emerged: mental health and opportunities. In the Midlands, a lack of life skills to support transition into adulthood was a matter of concern.

In London, South East and East, North East and Cumbria, North West, South West, and Yorkshire and Humber, the peer researchers wanted to draw attention to young people's mental health.

In the Midlands, North East and Cumbria, North West, South West, and Yorkshire and Humber, the peer researchers wanted to highlight the lack of opportunities for young people in their region. It is also of note that issues relating to the urban-rural divide came up strongly in all regions outside of London and the South East, and the Midlands. The issue also came up in the East of England, which forms part of a wider region overall, and is dominated by urban areas.

⁴ Some of the images in this section were designed by YLPR Network members and are clearly labelled.

Regional Map



London, South East and East

50 young people spoke to the peer researchers about the issues and corresponding solutions they would like funding to be prioritised for.

Inadequate mental health support

Young people spoke about their difficulties accessing mental health support, and a lack of awareness of the support available: **“there’s no billboard signs, adverts, anything” (female, 21)**. They also highlight a lack of choice in the range of therapies available, and in the referral process. **“If you go to a teacher with a problem, they’ll just refer you to somebody else who has more qualifications to talk to you, but you might not know this person” (female, 19)**.

Drug and alcohol abuse

There was some concern about **“the increasing use of [drugs and alcohol] in young people” (female, 18)**, particularly in terms of how it affects their future chances. **“There are new drug gangs. That definitely affects a lot of people here and I think it can ruin a lot of lives” (female, 19)**.

This issue arose far more strongly in this region than elsewhere in the country.

Employment

Young people felt that they lack transferable and employability skills to support their transition into employment and that they are not knowledgeable about opportunities available in post-16 education. One young woman commented on the need for **“interview help, especially with people applying for unis or for jobs ... I guess just a helping hand to guide people in the right direction” (female, 17)**.

Some were also of the view that they lacked education on their employment rights. One young person thought young people were exploited **“because you’re a child you don’t really get paid [an] adult’s wage so like it it’s kind of a benefit to them” (male, 18)**.

With the different minimum hourly pay rate for different age brackets within youth, the research points to a sense of unfairness that younger people in the youth age bracket are being paid less due to their age than others who are doing the same job as them. One young person said, it is **“borderline exploitation where they’ll put you on the lowest wage getting you doing the same job ... They’re getting paid their minimum wage, which the government fusses [about], however it feels wrong and a lot of people my age don’t like that understandably - because they’re doing the same job and getting paid almost half for it”** (female, 18).

Hopes for change

In co-producing the research, the peer researchers from London, South East and East identified four priority solutions that they felt were feasible and would have the most impact on young people.

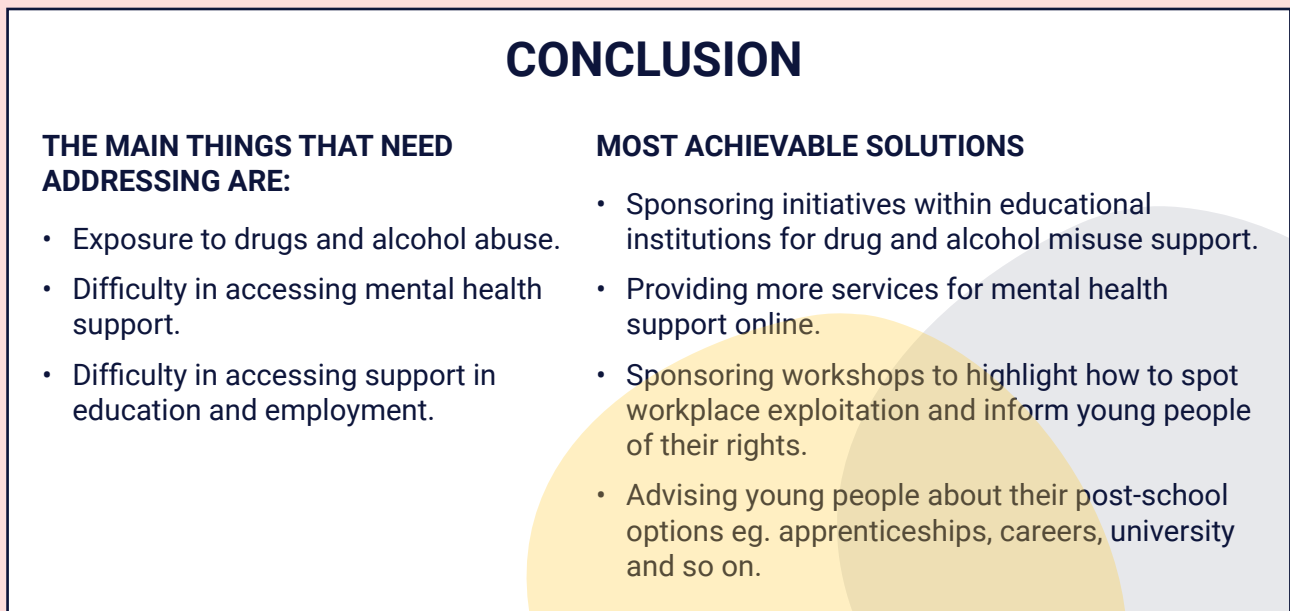


Figure 4: Extract from the young people’s research output

Midlands

In the Midlands, the peer researchers spoke to 22 young people and identified three priority issues to which they would like funding allocated.



Figure 5: Extract from the young people's research output

Education on employment

Young people felt that support to find jobs is inadequate, resulting in them feeling ill-equipped to write CVs, find work experience, and attend job interviews. They said they need **“actual sessions to build employment skills ... so an extracurricular club that is purely based on how to write the CV, how to ace an interview”** (female, 18).

In addition to these practical skills, guiding young people through the process of choosing careers was highlighted as a need. One stressed the need for funding to help young people **“find out what they want to do and what they love to do and are passionate about - but [make] it realistic”** (male, 19).

Lack of creative opportunities

The Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult to take part in creative opportunities where young people could express themselves, so they are now keen for such activities. As one said, **“obviously the pandemic has made it hard to go to art galleries, made it hard to go to music concerts ... it's been hard for us to get that experience and into a career”** (male, 17).

Education and jobs - careers fair and workshops.

Art - venues for young people to perform and display their art.

Unpreparedness - a youth centre for people to help overcome their feelings and a place to turn to for example - sports classes, music classes to help give people a hobby to turn to and to help set them up for later life with key skills and abilities.

**The solutions they produced
for the funding to help.**



Figure 6: Extract from the young people's research output

Lack of preparedness

Young people believed they were unprepared for the stages of life they are going into: **"we're getting at that age where we have the option to move out and drive and stuff, and we haven't really had that many lessons that take the time to explain those kinds of things to us"** (female, 15).

Hopes for change

The peer researchers from the Midlands identified three priority solutions with a focus on providing places and opportunities for young people to come together.

North East and Cumbria

The peer researchers spoke to 33 young people living across North East and Cumbria.

Inadequate mental health support

Young people spoke about difficulties in accessing mental health support for a variety of reasons, including a fear of being judged. **“I think people can be quite judgmental and opinionated around here sometimes, so I think that stops people from wanting to open up”** (female, 15). Another reason was a lack of information on how to access support. **“I think they’re not as well known about like right now I can’t think of a place where I could just go to and access mental health support”** (female, 18).

Others pointed to insufficient education for teachers on mental health issues and coping mechanisms. **“In schools [staff should be] be more like open to the idea that it’s not just like hormonal issues - like it’s actually a problem, cos they’re not very open”** (female, 17).

Lack of opportunities

The rural-urban divide and class inequalities in this region were clearly highlighted as having an impact on the lack of access to opportunities some young people in this region have, potentially due to the lived experiences of the peer researchers themselves. Young people in rural areas reported either no opportunities locally, or opportunities being out of reach because of inadequate public transport. **“For people living in more rural areas, like in little villages or where it would be harder because there wouldn’t be probably buses running there or it’s just out of reach and just not possible”** (female, 17).

This lack of opportunities also means young people are less likely to stay in an area. **“There’s no available options, maybe that’s why I can’t see any young people - because they don’t want to stay here and I can understand that because I don’t want to stay here either”** (male, 15).

There is also unequal access to opportunities in education for working-class families, materially and digitally, as captured by this young person: **“I’ve come from a working-class background - single mother, free school meals not having access to a laptop, I didn’t have a desk in my room. How am I supposed to do my A-levels when I can’t even access the Internet? I’m not able to afford the textbook [and I have] to work part-time on weekends. I work Saturdays and Sundays when all my peers would be revising and studying, and that took away from study time because I was saving up for a laptop”** (female, 19).

Hopes for change

The peer researchers from North East and Cumbria identified five broad areas they wanted to see prioritised, with two focusing on the potential of schools as a route to reaching all young people.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES	SUMMARY OF SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Questions: Lack of education/awareness on import issues eg. mental health, racism, sexism etc. • Mental Health Young people don’t feel they can talk about problems due to stigma and fear of being judged. Help is too often not available • Opportunities: Lack of social and educational opportunities available. Limited transport access in rural areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More education in schools on these issues • More social activities for young people • Easier access for mental health support and reduced stigma. • More support from schools about future options other than university. • More access to public transport.

Figure 7: Extract from the young people’s research output

North West

In this region, 34 young people spoke with the peer researchers, sharing the key issues and related solutions to which funding bodies and youth organisations should allocate funding.

Inadequate mental health support

Young people thought that, although there is less stigma surrounding mental health issues than there has been in the past, it has not been eliminated. **“I think there’s still a massive stigma around mental health, which we need to continue tackling”** (female, 19).

For some ethnic minority communities, this stigma is heightened. **“I think mental health is such a taboo topic in Asian households”** (female, 21).

In seeking support, some young people felt their **“mental health issues have not been taken seriously enough”** (female, 17).

There is also a sense that mental health support is not person-centred and does not cater to the preferences of the individual. For example, one young person wanted therapy but was instead given medication. **“They just discard me to the GP with antidepressants ... people tend to get antidepressants more easily than to get actual therapy, which shouldn’t be the case. It should be the other way around”** (female, 18).

Lack of opportunities

The rural-urban divide means some young people **“don’t think there are enough work experience opportunities for more creative careers”** (male, 14). Where there are opportunities, these tend to be concentrated around cities in the region and so the cost of transportation is a barrier to access. Another noted that, in terms of things for young people to do, as they **“live in a relatively small town, more like a village there isn’t much”** (male, 18).

Hopes for change

In co-producing the research, the peer researchers from the North West identified four potential solutions that focused on mental health as the priority issue to be addressed.

Peer Research Times

NORTH WEST EDITION THURSDAY 27TH JANUARY 2022 DAILY 50p

A HEALTHY MIND IS THE GREATEST TREASURE TO FIND

By the North West Hub

Issues Outlined By Young People

In a new study by the North West hub of the Youth-Led Peer Research Network, it has been found that improving mental health is a huge priority for young people in the region. Some of the issues highlighted include:

- Lack of community spaces (including youth clubs) which has been made worse by isolation and COVID restrictions
- Issues around therapy being generic and not person-centred enough
- Stigma around mental health issues acting as a barrier to accessing therapy and mental health services
- Lack of support for young people in marginalised groups, including LGBTQ+ people, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people from working class areas

Peer Research Network
Powered by The Young Foundation

COMMUNITY FUND

Designed by the North West hub, a mental health toolkit has been identified in order to tackle mental health issues amongst young people in the North West.

Solutions Identified By Us

Ensuring that young people can manage their mental health is just as important as promoting physical health. A number of solutions have been identified that could improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people in the North West. These solutions include:

- Integrating mental health support into community spaces through group activities such as different clubs and volunteering opportunities
- Normalising open discussions around mental health and wellbeing, starting at a primary school age
- Introducing and promoting easily accessible resources - both in person and online - that can be used to manage mental health
- Increased community support for those belonging to marginalised groups

"Young people don't feel like their mental health is being taken seriously."

"More awareness of mental health issues is needed."

"With men and teenage boys ... having depression or anxiety or PTSD is seen as unmanly."

"Access to mental health support should be easy and any discussions should remain private."

Figure 8: Extract from the young people’s research output, designed by the North West cohort of the YLPR Network

South West

In the South West, the peer researchers spoke to 30 young people who highlighted issues of concerns alongside suggestions of how these could be tackled.

Inadequate mental health support

As in other regions, some of the issues with mental health support for young people are long waiting lists and lack of awareness of available support. **“I think there’s genuinely the lack of knowledge on where they can get help” (female, 19).**

Although severe mental health conditions were reportedly less common, the young people engaged in this research had some concerns about a paucity of mental health support, and some worried that education settings were not being sufficiently equipped to handle these situations. **“So, let’s say you’ve got one issue, a lot more complicated, so let’s say you go inside a college where they have wellbeing mental health support [staff], they probably won’t know what other disorders mean, probably other things like BPD [bipolar disorder] but they only know anxiety” (female, 18).**

Peer researchers in this region also wanted to highlight that, in their view, if mental health support services are not providing patient-centred care, they are unlikely to be meeting the needs of young people. **“They very rarely involved service-users as much as they should” (male, 16).**

Lack of opportunities

The rural-urban divide without the necessary public transport infrastructure affects young people’s ability to access employment and extra-curricular opportunities. As one young man commented, **“public transport’s not cheap enough and it’s not good enough” (male, 20).** A lack of access to public transport limits how young people live their lives, both now and in the long term: **“you just feel quite stuck especially when everything’s so far. You feel very limited” (female, 19).**

Youth voice

Young people often believed they were overlooked with regards to everyday issues affecting their lives, as well as the big issues facing the UK. They want to be able to influence decisions that are being made. This issue came across more strongly in the South West than in other regions.

For one young person, this means having young people's representation: **"there needs to be young people's representation in everything. There's so many big discussions going on right now**

about politics, about environment, and about mental health, and just everything in general. We're always, as young people, getting told about these situations and getting told what we have to do and told how to go about things, but we never actually have an input" (non-binary, 19).

Hopes for change

The peer researchers from the South West identified three priority areas for action – with an emphasis on building the ability of young people to independently access opportunities and influence for change.

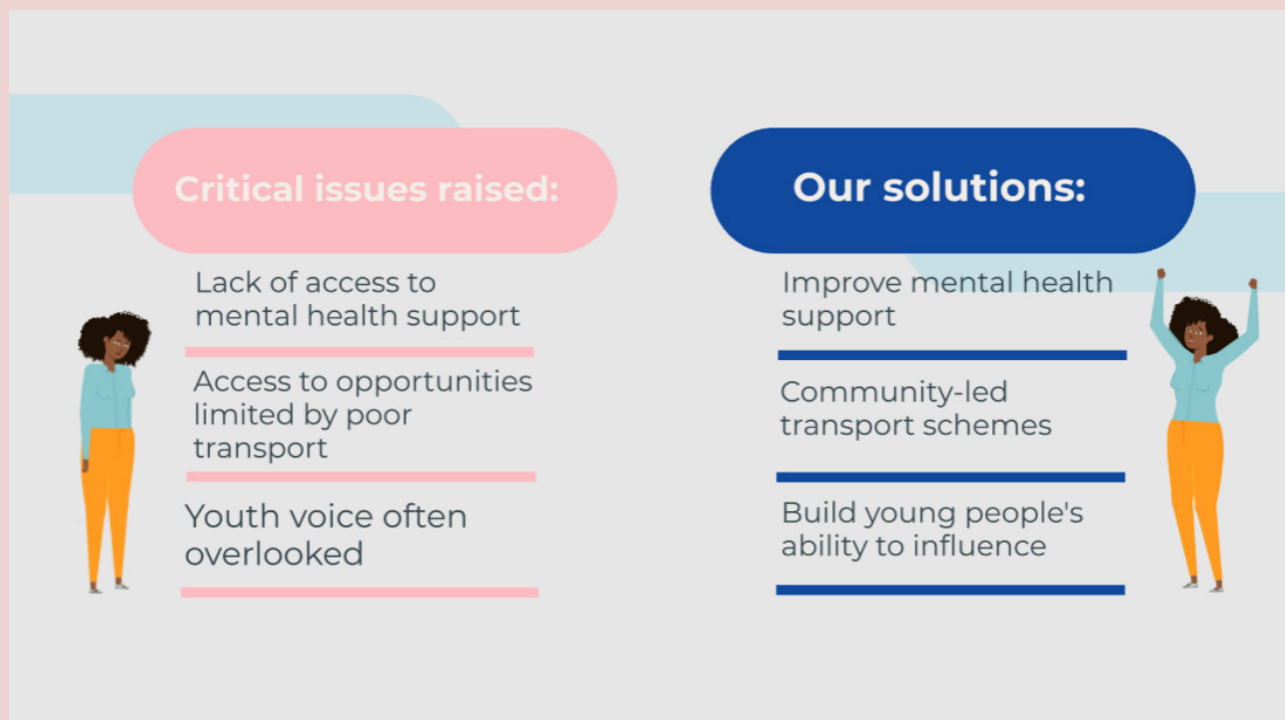


Figure 9: Extract from the young people's research output

Yorkshire and Humber

The peer researchers from Yorkshire and Humber spoke to 40 young people and identified three priority issues to which they would like funding allocated.

Inadequate mental health support

Long waiting lists, not enough counsellors, and the lack of professionals in schools who know how to handle mental health issues are some of the reasons young people feel that the mental health support in this region is inadequate. The impact of long waiting lists is that **“a lot can happen in six months and a lot can change and it can make you feel like there’s no point even like applying for help ... that stops a lot of people including myself from of reaching out to get help because it feels really inaccessible”** (female, 19).

Young people recognise the long waiting list is linked to the **“provision of mental health counsellors, support groups, things like that - but there isn’t really enough of that”** (male, 16). Where there is an insufficient number of counsellors, schools are not able to handle mental health issues well: **“They just observed me ... basically I was like the guinea pig”** (female, 14).

Opportunities

Young people are aware of the unequal opportunities for young people across geography, education and career options. There was a sense of a north-south divide in terms of opportunities: **“generally, the amount of opportunities here are a lot less than London; there’s not much here, there’s not much opportunities”** (male, 17).

Unequal access to information about opportunities relating to future careers and available pathways also has an impact on young people. **“They didn’t really know about [widening participation programmes] until I told them and some of them regret not doing the research and finding them earlier because it could have meant something different to them [in terms of career choices]”** (female, 19).

Some young people were not receiving the extra support needed to be able to equally access education. For example, one young person felt that **“there isn’t any support or anything being done about that because a lot of people brush autistic people under the rug”** (non-binary, 18).

Hopes for change

The peer researchers from Yorkshire and Humber identified three areas for attention – two focus on ensuring opportunities and services are accessible to all, one identifies the need to better understand the inequalities and barriers that limit young people.

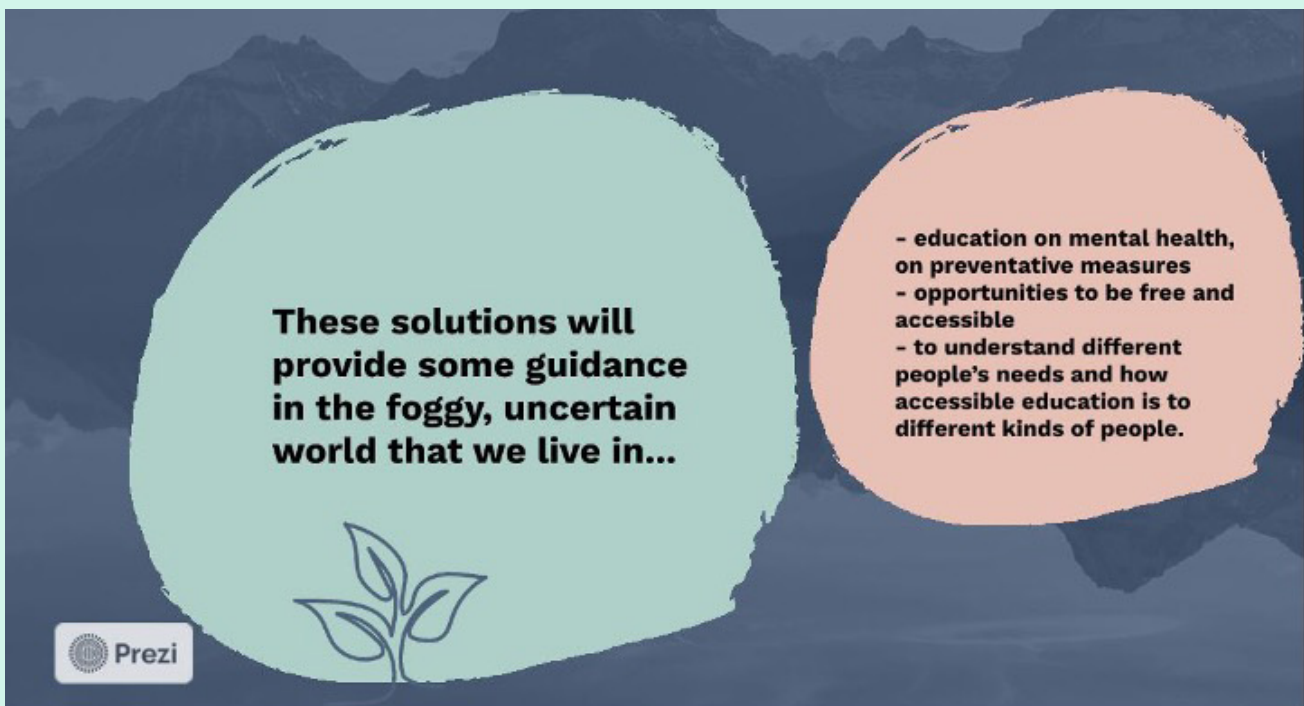


Figure 10: Extract from the young people’s research output

Impact of the Youth-Led Peer Research Network

At the end of the project, a survey⁵ administered to the YLPR Network to evaluate the impact of being members. Results show it has been a positive experience for the young people involved. Of the survey respondents, 87% reported feeling 'very confident' or 'quite confident' in explaining different researching methods, 97% reported feeling 'very' or 'quite' confident in analysing qualitative research data, and 93% reported feeling 'very' or 'quite' confident in reporting research findings. There was an overall feeling of increased confidence from taking part in this project. The young people also developed soft skills, such as their communication, listening and teamwork skills.

“My communication skills have enhanced as I feel more able to speak to new people. For example, by the end of the session I was more confident in putting forward my ideas. My teamworking skills have also improved as we were able to work well together as a team putting forward ideas” (female, 16).

“I’ve developed my listening skills when talking to others as a peer researcher - the ability to properly listen without butting in to say something. I would say that I’ve also developed my communication skills through the interviews that I conducted. I’ve also developed my confidence, recruiting people and speaking to them. [That] was very nerve-racking for me but gave me the ability to push myself outside of my comfort zone” (female, 16).

⁵ The survey included a combination of standardised measures of individual resilience and career confidence, as well as bespoke questions relating to confidence in a range of skills related to peer research and experience of the programme. The latter form part of The Young Foundation’s pilot evaluation framework for peer research

“I definitely think I’ve learnt to be mindful and respectful of others’ situations” (male, 16).

Many reported that the new knowledge and skills gained will support them now and in the future with their education and careers:

“I think that I have become more confident in leading an interview and this is really valuable as I am about to start conducting interviews for my dissertation” (male, 20).

Some have also been inspired to social action by the work they have done as part of this Network:

“I hope to maybe set up my own football club in the future for young underprivileged females from a range of backgrounds and create a safe space for them” (female, 18).



Recommendations

Mental health support and better opportunities for all young people are the key priority areas to which the Youth-Led Peer Research Network would like The National Lottery Community Fund and other funding bodies to allocate funding. These recommendations are congruent with the Youth Review undertaken by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) in 2020, and align well with the government's 'Levelling up' agenda.

These priority areas are not surprising and are persistently key areas of concern for young people across all regions. The impact of Covid-19 has exacerbated mental health issues, but has also presented new opportunities, particularly in terms of the increasing use of technology to remove geographical barriers to accessing opportunities.

For the peer researchers involved in this research, what was clear from speaking to other young people was that they value having a voice and feel they can articulate the issues affecting them. However, the young people interviewed also recognise they might not have all the answers or solutions to these issues, and that they do not understand all of the systems that shape their experiences, or how to influence them effectively.

As one peer researcher reflected, what is most important is that young people are at the decision-making table and are supported to co-produce the solutions to issues that affect their lives.

With the peer research methodology, The Young Foundation have supported the Youth-Led Peer Research Network to develop the following recommendations. The Network hopes that, where funding is allocated based on these recommendations, the negative impact of Covid-19 is mitigated and the imagined post-Covid visions of the future become a reality for young people. These recommendations are transferrable to existing programmes supported by The National Lottery Community Fund or the design of new programmes.

Mental health support



Designed by Finty Royle

There are three areas to which funding can be allocated: mental health promotion campaigns, mental health education and community-based services.

Mental health promotion campaigns

Many young people who took part in this research are unaware of the mental health services available in their region – both those that are publicly funded and those provided by community and voluntary sector organisations. Young people want to see (more) promotional campaigns targeted at young people through multiple channels such as posters, social media and billboards telling young people how and where they can access mental health support services. Regular check-ins about mental health should become standard practice in schools, just like fire drills are for physical safety reasons

These campaigns should aim to further normalise speaking about mental health

issues and make it easier for young people to know how and where to access help when they need it.

Mental health education

Mental health education for both young people and adults working with young people is another recommendation. All young people should have access to mental health education, and it should start at primary school age. Mental health education should focus on preventative measures to safeguard their mental health and focus on giving young people coping mechanisms for mild mental health conditions.

One form of mental health education suggested by a participant, which resonated with peer researchers, is a Pen Pal system. Pen Pals are trained volunteers in schools who provide peer support on basic mental health issues on an anonymous basis.

For adults working with young people, especially in schools, education - such as mental health first aid on how to support child's mental health - should be a requirement. Where these adults are educated, they can take mental health issues more seriously, know how to signpost young people to the appropriate specialist colleagues and services, and support young people through the referral process.

Community-based services

To alleviate the impact of the waiting lists for NHS services or unaffordable private alternatives, investment into community-based mental health support services is required. These community-based services should provide generic and specialist support for a variety of mental health conditions and provide activities that support emotional wellbeing through a more preventative approach. Young people would like to see mental health and wellbeing services integrated into community spaces and group activities or support circles with people who have similar interests or who are 'like' them. For marginalised groups, having communal spaces to talk through issues specific to those communities is important.

As a result of the pandemic, some young people are now more comfortable accessing support online, so taking advantage of technology-enabled service delivery is another recommendation. For example, some young people talked about apps that provide basic mental health advice or online counselling sessions, which provide flexibility in terms of access to services. A plethora of these mental health apps already exist but the young people involved in this research felt many are not aware of them or know which to trust or choose. Raising awareness of technology-enabled services can form part of mental health promotion campaigns.

Opportunities

There is a myriad of educational, extracurricular, volunteering and social action opportunities that young people would like to take part in. As with mental health support, the recommendations made by young people do not point towards wholly new types of provision or funding. Rather, they illustrate the patchy nature of opportunities across the country and, likely, a need for greater promotion of existing provision in areas or with groups that are not accessing existing provision. This research suggests that young people living in rural areas and from low-income backgrounds feel they will be unable to benefit from these opportunities if funding is not also directed to removing barriers such as lack of information, public transport and other costs of taking part.

Enabling equal participation in school

To ensure everyone has access to high-quality and wide-ranging education, young people want to see improved, differentiated support that reflects a diversity of needs and situations. For example, those with disabilities seek person-centered support to access education based on their needs, and low-income families need financial support to buy or provide uniforms, textbooks and laptops for their children.

Developing life skills and experience

Whether provided within a formal education setting or through extra-curricular activities, young people want opportunities to build the knowledge and

skills they see as critical in enabling them to transition successfully to adulthood and employment.

These include:

- Influencing skills, gained through open conversations with people from a range of backgrounds who have a lived experience of particular social issues, such as substance misuse and knife crime. Young people want to use this knowledge to influence their peers.
- Financial literacy and capability. For example, managing money, taxes, and mortgage applications to help young people with financial decision-making.
- Employability skills, such as job-searching, CV-writing, interview preparation, and education on employment rights to prepare young people for the labour market.
- Careers planning and development, with a particular emphasis on understanding routes into different careers through fairs, talks, work experience and more comprehensive and personalised guidance. For some groups of young people, especially those in rural areas or from disadvantaged backgrounds, opportunities need to be made accessible and support provided to overcome barriers, such as the cost of transport or accommodation. These measures would help young people take up training and work experience outside of their local area.

Extracurricular activities

In addition to sports activities, young people would like to access more non-sports related extracurricular activities in fields such as creative writing, cooking,

archery, nature-related activities, music, and languages. For some young people there is a clear connection between these activities and their career aspirations and potential routes to employment, while for others they represent opportunities to take part in activities that support their wellbeing or simply enrich their lives. Again, considerations of how to mitigate geographic and socio-economic inequalities in access to such opportunities are essential.

Volunteering and social action

Young people want opportunities that build their capacity to influence decision-making through campaigning and social action. They also want education on how they can engage with the political process on a local, regional, and national level so they can get their voices heard.

It is clear in this research that young people know what causes they care about and are keen to connect with and act in collaboration with other young people. What is missing is an understanding of how they can connect to each other, or to organisations, which will support them to take action for change in relation to the causes they care about.

Nonetheless, there is a significant and growing body of evidence, such as the Youth Social Action and Outcomes for Young People and Adaptation and Youth Social Action: The Impact of COVID-19, around what motivates and enables young people to take part in social action. We also know that there are many local, regional, national and international groups that offer opportunities for young people to take social action on the issues that matter most to them (eg on climate

change, or issues of equality). However, as with mental health services, there appears to be a gap or disconnect between what is being 'provided', how young people become aware of those opportunities, and what serves as a trigger to action.

For many of the peer researchers, having these conversations has served as a clear motivation to take action, perhaps as a result of strengthening their personal connection to the issues they care about, and by raising awareness of their potential to contribute to change. Young people will likely experience multiple such 'moments' in school, community groups, and in their wider social and civic participation. Part of the answer may therefore lie in understanding how desires to make change can be better connected and harnessed to provide clear pathways for young people into social action when the moment is 'ripe' and before competing demands distract.

Accessing youth voice

As part of the overall recommendations, some of the lessons learnt from working with the YLPR Network relate to approaches to working with young people and particularly, this type of peer research. These are important to consider when seeking to access youth voice. The reflections shared here are based on this peer research project and are transferable to projects that seek to understand the lived experiences of young people through qualitative research or similarly participatory methods.

- **Schedule carefully**

Consider the timing of the project so the desired target demographic is able to fully participate. When working with students, for example, it's important

to avoid key times of the year such as examination or festive periods, when young people have limited time to spare. Avoiding these periods can reduce the likelihood of delays due to competing priorities.

In addition, consider the time of day the project will run. Education and work commitments impact on young people's availability, so flexibility in finding a time that works for the group is essential.

- **Allocate enough time to the project**

Learning to be a peer researcher takes time in order to build their capacity to access nuanced information from their peers. An optimal project timescale is one that builds in opportunities for pilot interviews, reflection and iteration, and space to feed in learnings into the main research. In addition, build in 'slippage time' to account for the multiple demands on young people's time and attention. Particularly at the moment, young people may be emotionally vulnerable and require the work to be more gradually paced. The impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on research also means that peer researchers and participants can become ill, which means more rescheduling and thus a longer period for data collection than in pre-pandemic research.

- **Use diverse recruitment channels**

It is extremely helpful to have strong connections to schools, colleges and youth organisations. However, as not all young people are in education or connected to formal youth groups, a strong social media campaign including targeted adverts on platforms such as Instagram can help to reach those less likely to traditionally participate in such activities.

Further, as is the case with most youth social action, young men are the hardest group to engage in this type of project. The sector needs to collectively learn and share more about how to effectively attract young men to these kinds of opportunities and ensure they find the experience engaging and meaningful.

- **Provide appropriate support for diverse needs**

The needs of a young person aged 16 for whom the project is their first social action opportunity will be very different to those of a 20-year-old with more life experiences. The design and delivery of support must be sufficiently flexible to respond to different needs including, for example, those of young people who are neurodiverse.

Youth peer research often focuses on difficult and challenging topics. Projects should therefore adopt a trauma-informed approach, which embeds peer researcher and participant wellbeing and safeguarding at its heart. Such approaches require time and resources, and the 2021 Diversity and Inclusion in Social Research report stresses the importance of funders investing to support inclusive project designs.

- **Provide value-added training**

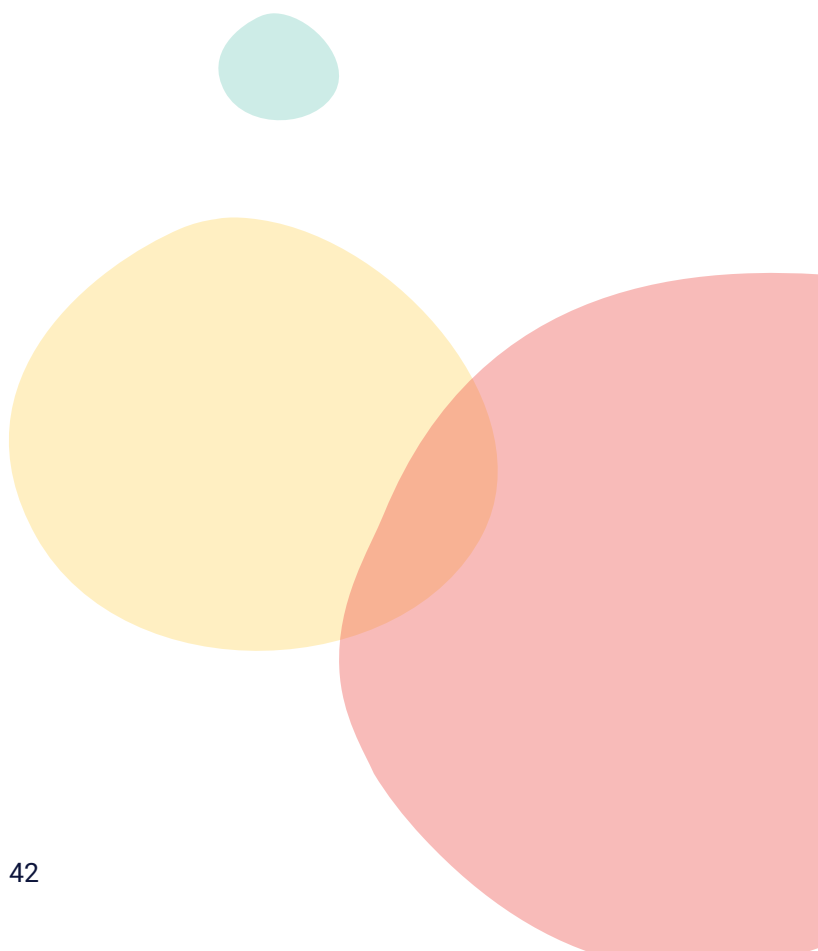
As well as the core peer research training, provide additional training to enhance young people's ability to design innovative research questions, develop more meaningful recommendations, and translate their insights into social action.

Training, such as masterclasses, will strengthen the research process and dissemination of findings. Masterclasses can include topics

like roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, contextual information about the topic and current evidence base, dissemination of research findings, and influencing stakeholders through the co-production of recommendations.

- **Aim for double impact**

Projects should be designed to benefit both the young people and the communities they are researching. Benefits to the young people include gaining or improving skills that will help them in their education and employment now and in the future. In addition, projects should seek to have a positive impact on the communities that young people are part of. For example, through amplifying the issues of concerns for young people in their geographical areas.



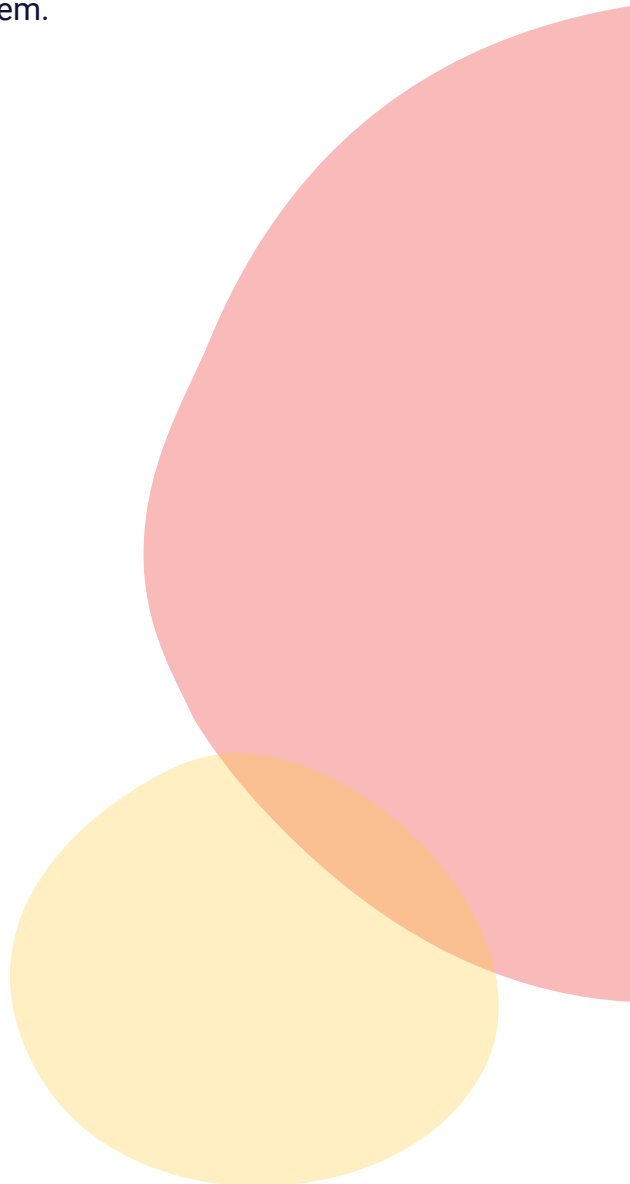
- **Dissemination of research findings**

Allow young people creative control over research outputs, encouraging them to produce outputs in a range of formats that suit them. Where young people are presenting their research findings, providing an environment in which they feel comfortable and confident to talk about their experiences is vital. Providing opportunities for young people to practice beforehand and having a familiar face when sharing can increase their confidence. Similarly, having a warm and encouraging audience signals to the young people that their voices are important and being listened to.

- **Recognise power dynamics**

To create an environment that supports young people to be independent researchers, a willingness to relinquish control over the design, collection, analysis of data and dissemination of findings is required. The relinquishing of control works best when research expertise is used to bolster young people's ideas. Finding the balance between research expertise and experiential expertise is key to ensuring that projects remain youth-led.

Finally, for lived experiences to effectively influence decision-making that improves youth opportunities and outcomes, and for young people to see the value in participating in activities as the YLPR Network, one guiding principle must be for decision-makers and funders to commit to responding to what young people are telling them.



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Appendix

Youth outputs

The creative outputs from the different regions in Youth-Led Peer Research Network are available below:

- London, South East and East
- Midlands
- North East and Cumbria
- North West
- South West: animation and poem
- Yorkshire and Humber

Demographics

Table 1 – Demographic breakdown of peer researchers (n= 59)

	Percentage	Number
London, South East and East	16.9%	10
Midlands	16.9%	10
North East and Cumbria	16.9%	10
North West	15.3%	9
South West	16.9%	10
Yorkshire and Humber	16.9%	10
Female	69.5%	41
Male	25.4%	15
Non-binary/ fluid	5.1%	3
16 years	30.5%	18
17 years	27.1%	16
18 years	20.3%	12
19 years	10.2%	6
20 years	10.2%	6
Prefer not to say	1.7%	1
White	45.8%	27
Asian/Asian British	27.1%	16
Black/ Black British	15.3%	9
Mixed or other ethnicities	6.8%	4
Prefer not to say	5.1%	3
Heterosexual/ straight	54.2%	32
LGBTQ+	30.5%	18
Prefer not to say	15.3%	9
City/ major urban area	45.8%	27
Suburban area	18.6%	11
Market/coastal/ small town	15.3%	9
Village/ rural area	8.5%	5
Don't know/ prefer not to say	11.9%	7
Mental health condition	22.0%	13
Physical health condition	8.5%	5
Neurodivergent	8.5%	5
English as a second language	15.3%	9

The network also included those who are care-experienced; those with lived experiences of being a young carer; those from refugee-/ asylum-seeker backgrounds; and those with lived experiences of homelessness.

Table 2 – Demographic breakdown of participants (n= 209)

	Percentage	Number
London, South East and East	23.9%	50
Midlands	10.5%	22
North East and Cumbria	15.8%	33
North West	16.3%	34
South West	14.4%	30
Yorkshire and Humber	19.1%	40
Female	63.2%	132
Male	29.2%	61
Non-binary/ Fluid/ Other	3.8%	8
Data unavailable	3.8%	8
10 years	1.9%	4
11 years	1.0%	2
12 years	1.4%	3
13 years	5.3%	11
14 years	7.1%	15
15 years	5.7%	12
16 years	10.0%	21
17 years	23.9%	50
18 years	15.3%	32
19 years	14.4%	30
20 years	10.0%	21
21 years	0.5%	1
Data unavailable	3.3%	7
White	44.5%	93
Asian/Asian British	15.3%	32
Black/ Black British	10.0%	21
Mixed/ multiple ethnicities	4.8%	10
Arab or other ethnicities	2.9%	6
Data unavailable	22.5%	47

Table 3 – Most common responses to ‘Beyond Covid, let’s say, 5 years’ time or 10 years’ time, using one word, what would you like to see happen in your area for young people?’ (n= 148)

	n =
Opportunities	25
Support	10
Change	8
Community	5
Education	4
Safety	4
Equal opportunities	3
Happiness	3
Improvement	3
Success	3
Connection	2
Equality	2
Freedom	2
Investment	2
More social	2
Respect	2

