

2022-2027

YOUTH ACCESS STRATEGY

Our vision for young people and those who support them

YOUTH ACCESS STRATEGY *on a page*

We are Youth Access, the national membership organisation supporting Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) all over the UK.

Everything we do is underpinned by our values and strategic goals - developed with and for our member organisations and the young people they serve.



OUR VISION

Our vision is that all young people can access free support on their journey into adulthood from community-based advice and counselling services that respect their rights and meet their individual needs.

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS



Increase Access: A Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Service in every local authority area



Drive Equity: Greater engagement with least-heard and worst-served groups



Improve Experience: Member services designed around young people's needs

OUR VALUES



Bold: We are progressive in our thinking and courageous in our challenge of the system



Collaborative: We are a powerful collective advocating for change



Responsive: We adapt to meet the changing needs of our members and young people

Our Theory of Change guides us as we turn our words into actions.

Forward

Supporting young people in the post-pandemic world



The youth mental health system was failing to meet many young people's rights and needs prior to the pandemic, which has exacerbated inequalities and disproportionately impacted young people's mental health, wellbeing, and social determinants such as poverty, debt and abuse.

The pandemic has also highlighted that mental health does not exist in a vacuum. Many other aspects of our lives affect, and are affected by, our mental health. Young people say what they need is the 'whole person' support that our members provide, that treats them as more than a diagnosis. Evidence also tells us that this approach is effective.

Yet these vital services continue to be neglected and struggle to patchwork together funding to keep supporting their local communities. The Government's focus on statutory CAMHS services and schools-based provision has been welcome. But we know that these do not work for a lot of young people. It's not about either/or, but providing a range of routes and environments to access support. Community-based services are the missing piece of the puzzle.

There are, thankfully, lots of organisations working to bring about the many changes needed to the mental health system for young people.

As the national membership body for Youth, Information Advice and Counselling Services, Youth Access is unique in its reach to, and through, local community-based, open-access, holistic services for young people up to age 25 across the country.

We have developed our new strategy against the backdrop of the pandemic and the gaps it has exposed in the structures that exist to support young people.

Being true to our stated values of being Bold, Collaborative and Responsive will be vital in the years to come; our work has never been more needed.

Cassandra Harrison
Chief Executive

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What is Youth Access?

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for youth information, advice and counselling services (YIACS). We:

- Advocate with and for our members and young people, to influence national policy and funding decisions
- Facilitate networking and collaboration across our network, enabling challenges and solutions to be shared
- Develop and disseminate evidence, training and guidance to support members to develop their services and advocate for change locally
- Through training young people and centring their voices, we support them to campaign for transformational change to ensure services and systems fulfil their rights



WHERE DO WE WORK?

Membership of the Youth Access network is open to all Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) in the UK that sign up to our core values and principles.

All members benefit from being in the network: connecting with other services; sharing challenges, solutions and learning; and accessing resources and training.

We recognise that the devolved nations have specific contexts, policy and legislative environments that we do not have the capacity, knowledge or connections to directly influence effectively.

Our direct national policy and campaigns work is therefore focused on the Westminster government, but we work with organisations in the devolved nations where there are opportunities for UK-wide collaboration.

The YIACS model

Our members - Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) - are organisations rooted in their local communities. Also known as 'early support hubs' or 'one-stop shops', they provide easily-accessible support to young people aged 11-25 with a wide range of issues.

Our members come in all shapes and sizes, and we're here to guide and support them. Our strength is in the diversity of our membership, supporting them to deliver services in a way that is responsive to their communities and to learn from each other to improve and adapt.



YIACS are:

▶ EFFECTIVE

Comparable clinical outcomes to CAMHS and schools-based counselling

▶ OPEN-ACCESS

Young people are never turned away because they are "not sick enough"

▶ WIDER REACH

Better reach to young people from worst-served backgrounds who may otherwise slip through the cracks of statutory services and school settings

▶ A BRIDGE, NOT A CLIFF EDGE

Support up to age 25, bridging the all-important transition into adulthood

And crucially...

▶ WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people repeatedly tell us that they want "whole life" support

Strategic Goal 1



Increase Access

YIACS with sufficient capacity can be accessed by young people from all local authority areas

THE PROBLEM

- Levels of need outweigh service provision¹ and most young people are not getting the help they need².
- Levels of need are increasing³: Rates of probable mental disorders increased from one in nine in 2017 to one in six in 2020⁴
- The pandemic severely impacted socioeconomic issues faced by young people, including education, employment, debt, poverty and housing⁵

OUR RESPONSE

To address the problem, we will:

- Be a passionate and vocal advocate for the services our members provide, to champion support that meets young people's needs and rights
- Campaign for change, galvanising members, young people and our sector partners, including for long-term, dedicated funding
- Maximise our impact by building alliances and working in partnership with other national organisations
- Support our members to make the case for their services to local decision-makers and commissioners
- Empower more young people to advocate for the changes they want to see by working with and through member organisations
- Increase our capacity to build the evidence base for YIACS, including working with members to make use of the huge amount of data they collect
- Consult on improving recognition of the YIACS model
- Build an up-to-date picture of gaps in provision

OUTCOMES

- Existing YIACS are able to support more young people
- Existing services are bolstered to provide the full YIACS model
- New YIACS are set up where there are gaps

Strategic Goal 2



Drive Equity

YIACS engage with and access more young people from worst-served groups

THE PROBLEM

- Young people from worst-served groups face barriers to support, with services often not designed for, or reflective of, them⁶
- Young people have complex and intersecting needs⁷ which are often not addressed holistically⁸. Support is too often not tailored to need
- Discrimination and oppression impact on mental health⁹
- Existing inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic¹⁰
- We know that our members have better reach to young people from some worst-served groups than statutory services¹¹, but there is much more to be done to:
 - Dismantle institutional and systemic barriers and discrimination¹²
 - Improve members' understanding and provision, and spread good practice¹³

OUR RESPONSE

- Challenge discrimination and work to dismantle inequality wherever we see it: in our own work, in data, in policies and communications, in service provision
- Advocate for models of delivery that recognise and respond to the individual complex and intersecting challenges faced by young people from all walks of life
- Develop mutually beneficial partnerships that share power with specialist and grassroots organisations supporting young people from worst-served groups
- Prioritise and centre young people who are currently worst-served and least heard in youth mental health provision in our work, and inspire members to do so too
- Increase support to our members to upskill the workforce and improve their service provision for young people from worst-served groups, by facilitating networks, sharing practice and insight and providing training
- Interrogate and disaggregate data to prioritise and centre least heard young people and contribute to building the evidence of what's effective in supporting complex and intersecting needs

OUTCOMES

- New YIACS are set up where there are gaps
- YIACS support typically excluded young people
- YIACS are co-designed to meet the needs of local young people

Strategic Goal 3



Improve Experience

YIACS are designed and run effectively according to evidence, good practice and young people's voice.

THE PROBLEM

- There is no agreed national data set or core outcomes for YIACS. Our members collate a wealth of data for commissioners and funders that is largely untapped
- There can be a perception of voluntary sector organisations as less professional or impactful. There is a need to demonstrate effectiveness to commissioners
- There is no national approach or framework for measuring and comparing quality across our membership
- Pockets of good practice are not always shared or implemented systematically
- Services can be isolated, lack capacity to innovate and implement good practice
- The evidence base would benefit from being strengthened
- Young people's participation in members' service development and design is mixed¹⁴

OUR RESPONSE

- Facilitate a vibrant, active community of members. Provide opportunities to connect members – from practitioners to CEOs – to share challenges and solutions
- Develop an approach to quality assurance that enables the highest quality support for young people, and which can inform commissioning decisions
- Support members to design services for and with young people
- Help members to understand their own data to shape service delivery
- Provide training, and produce good practice and guidance

OUTCOMES

- YIACS are co-designed to meet the needs of local young people
- YIACS are committed to and supported with continuous improvement

Our values

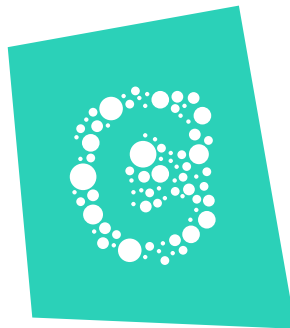
We have created this strategy during a period of global instability and uncertainty.



BOLD

We are progressive in our thinking and courageous in our challenge of the system. We take a rights-based approach and are committed to dismantling inequalities in society. We trust in the power of young people's lived experience and passionately champion the support our members provide to meet young people's needs and rights.

To achieve our three strategic goals we will need to live our organisational values as we approach the challenges ahead and navigate the constantly evolving world that young people face today.



COLLABORATIVE

We achieve our goals arm-in-arm with others. Working alongside young people and our network of members across the country, we are a powerful collective advocating for change. We bring this unique contribution and insight to collaborations with partners across the youth, mental health, and advice sectors.



RESPONSIVE

We are driven by the views of young people and our members, the evidence, and knowledge from practice. As these change, so do our approaches. We are tenacious, but adapt our methods to the external environment, so that we can make the most of opportunities to achieve our vision.

Youth Access

Theory of Change

OUR VISION

All young people can access free support on their journey into adulthood from community-based advice and counselling services that respect their rights and meet their individual needs

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

ACCESS: YIACS with sufficient capacity can be accessed by all young people

EQUITY: YIACS engage with and access more YP from worst-served groups

EXPERIENCE: YIACS are designed and run effectively according to evidence, good practice and young people's voice

THE DIFFERENCE WE'LL MAKE

More young people supported

Range of services expanded

More YIACS where there are gaps

Support for typically excluded young people

Local services co-designed with young people

Commitment to continuous improvement

WHAT WE'LL DO

Advocate for our members and young people, to influence national policy and funding

Facilitate networking and collaboration across our network

Develop and disseminate evidence, training and guidance to support members

Support young people to campaign for transformational change

OUR WORK

Everything we do in our day-to-day activity will aim to work towards the Youth Access vision

ENDNOTES

- 1 Improving children and young people's mental health services (nao.org.uk) and [OCC]
- 2 <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/well-being/mental-health-statistics>
- 3 COVID-19 pandemic hits mental health, especially of the young and of women, and widens inequalities - Institute For Fiscal Studies - IFS
- 4 Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey - NHS Digital
- 5 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/downloads/resources/generation-covid.pdf>
- 6 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/post/46-black-young-peoples-rights-are-under-threat-a-itas-time-the-mental-health-community-addressed-tha>
- 7 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/resources/practice-resources/79-generation-covid>
- 8 <https://www.ourmindsourfuture.uk/england/>
- 9 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/resources/practice-resources/79-generation-covid>
- 10 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/resources/practice-resources/79-generation-covid>
- 11 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/resources/practice-resources/80-the-case-beyond-covid>
- 12 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/post/46-black-young-peoples-rights-are-under-threat-a-itas-time-the-mental-health-community-addressed-that>
- 13 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/post/45-being-a-racially-responsive-mental-health-practitioner>
- 14 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/downloads/youth-access---now-more-than-ever.pdf>

Be part of our journey

Find out more about what we do at youthaccess.org.uk

