Youth Investment Fund: Learning and Insight Paper Five

Understanding how open access youth provision works: findings from the YIF case study process evaluation

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November 2020

Introduction

This is the fifth in a series of Learning and Insight papers published as part of the learning project for the Youth Investment Fund (YIF).

In this paper, we report on the findings from our qualitative process evaluation, which is part of our overall YIF Learning Project (see Appendix 1). Qualitative process evaluations are increasingly valued by evaluators and funders of complex interventions as they help to explain why an intervention worked or failed to work as planned. The approach can therefore be used to test an intervention's theory of change by assessing whether the activity and how it is delivered and implemented (the mechanisms) achieves the intended changes in outcomes.

By understanding how an intervention works and what affects implementation, programme managers and funders can improve the design and delivery and provide clear guidance on what contextual factors need to be considered for successful implementation.

This qualitative process evaluation therefore forms an important and insightful part of the YIF Learning Project, the largest shared evaluation of open access youth provision in the UK to date. The themes we've identified will be used to better understand the findings from our larger-scale quantitative impact (outcomes data) and process evaluation data (data on young people's engagement with provision, feedback data, and self and external assessment data on the quality of open access provision, gathered by peer and external observation) which is due to be published in the spring of 2021.

We adopted a qualitative case study approach to the process evaluation, which involved our researchers visiting and capturing qualitative insights into seven YIF funded projects. The aim of the process evaluation was to explore the *processes* and mechanisms through which open access youth provision (in its various forms) works to effect change in young people's lives. This includes exploring how provision is experienced by young people; when youth provision is perceived as 'working' or 'not working'; and how this relates to positive change for young people over time.

Who is this paper for?

This paper is for anyone working within, supporting or providing funding and resources for informal and non-formal learning provision for young people in the UK. YIF only covers England, but we believe that the learning is relevant across the UK. Our intention for each of these insight papers is to draw out reflective learning and share actionable insights.

Within the YIF, open access youth services are broadly defined and include both traditional youth club provision and more targeted and structured provision across a range of areas including sports, arts, social action and employability. The main unifying feature is that young people do not need to be referred to a provision. Access is 'open' and engagement is voluntary on behalf of the young person.

There is a relatively weak evidence base for **how** open access youth provision affects change in young people's lives (alongside broader challenges about measuring and 'evidencing' this change). As a result, individual youth organisations face significant challenges in explaining the importance of **what** they do with young people and

how they work with them. The YIF process evaluation represents an exciting opportunity to explore these questions in greater depth.

A specific contribution of the process evaluation is the focus on understanding the 'mechanisms of change' that are hypothesised to lead to change for young people, as identified by grant holders in the YIF theory of change (Figure 1 below). We hope this will progress understanding of how open access youth provision works, the contribution it makes to the lives of young people, and more effective ways of describing and evaluating practice.

To contact us about getting involved in shared evaluation approaches for the youth sector, please contact the Centre for Youth Impact: hello@youthimpact.uk, @YouthImpactUK

To find out more about the YIF programme, please contact YIFlearning@thinknpc.org and visit www.YIFLearning.org

Acknowledgements

The YIF evaluation team would like to thank all those who participated in the YIF process evaluation, particularly the staff and young people from the seven YIF grant holder organisations.

These include the OneWalsall consortium, who co-ordinated the three 'Walsall Youth in Unity' partners, Young People's Advisory Service (YPAS), Access to Sports Project, BoomSatsuma and Romsey Mill, and to all the young people, staff and other stakeholders who gave their time so generously to speak to us.

Finally, a special thanks to The National Lottery Community Fund evaluation team and our research partners who guided the design of our process evaluation and provided feedback on the evaluation as it progressed.

The Youth Investment Fund

The Youth Investment Fund (YIF) is a joint investment between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The National Lottery Community Fund (the funders) of £40m, to expand delivery of open access youth services in six regions of England,± and to enable funded organisations to invest in their own development to increase the sustainability of this youth provision.

The three-year programme (2017-2020) aimed to provide new opportunities for young people to get involved in their communities and to support the personal development of thousands of young people across England, building their confidence and supporting their transition to becoming happy, healthy and economically active adults.

The Youth Investment Fund Learning Project

As part of the investment in local voluntary and community youth organisations, the funders allocated £1m to a learning project led by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) in partnership with the Centre for Youth Impact and a wider consortium of research partners. The learning project commenced in May 2017 and is due to be completed in January 2021. It aims to:

Build a base of knowledge and insight into young people's engagement in informal and non-formal provision, and how it makes a difference to their lives.

Co-develop a shared approach to evaluation that is adaptable and appropriate across all provision.

Leave the sector with what they need to self-evaluate long after YIF funding has ended.

The Youth Investment Fund Shared Evaluation Framework

In our first insight paper, we described the YIF shared evaluation framework, which is made up of two key elements: a shared grantee level theory of change (see figure 1) for open access youth provision and a shared approach to collecting five types of data. More recently, in our third insight paper, we described the design process of our YIF shared outcomes framework approach and the choices we made on outcome domains to include. Outcomes data collection has been undertaken with a sub-cohort of the YIF grant holders.

± The six regional areas that received three-year funding from the Youth Investment Fund in 2017 were East London, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, Tees Valley and Sunderland, Bristol and Somerset, and Eastern Counties

The shared evaluation framework has been developed through building consensus among YIF grant holders on how open access youth provision, in its various forms, impacts on the life chances and wellbeing of young people. This includes identifying common **mechanisms of change** (the ways in which activities and experiences lead to change) that unify open access provision and, to some extent, distinguish it from other models of youth service delivery. These mechanisms of change are hypothesised to support young people's social and emotional learning, which in the long-term is linked to improved life chances.

Each element of the YIF theory of change has been carefully considered and developed with the input of experienced practitioners. **The YIF process evaluation has an important role to play in helping to contextualise and provide explanations for potential findings from the wider YIF learning project, whilst also seeking to test the underlying assumptions in the YIF theory of change.** Using data triangulation (an analysis approach whereby all data collected through our process evaluation and other data collection strands e.g. attendance, feedback, quality and outcomes are analysed together), we will explore similarities and differences, and use the process evaluation findings to test our overall research findings.

For more details on the YIF shared evaluation approach, and the rationale behind it, please read our first Insight Paper 'A shared evaluation framework for open access youth provision.' Read our third insight paper for more details on the YIF shared outcomes framework for open access youth provision.

Figure 1: Youth Investment Fund grantee level theory of change
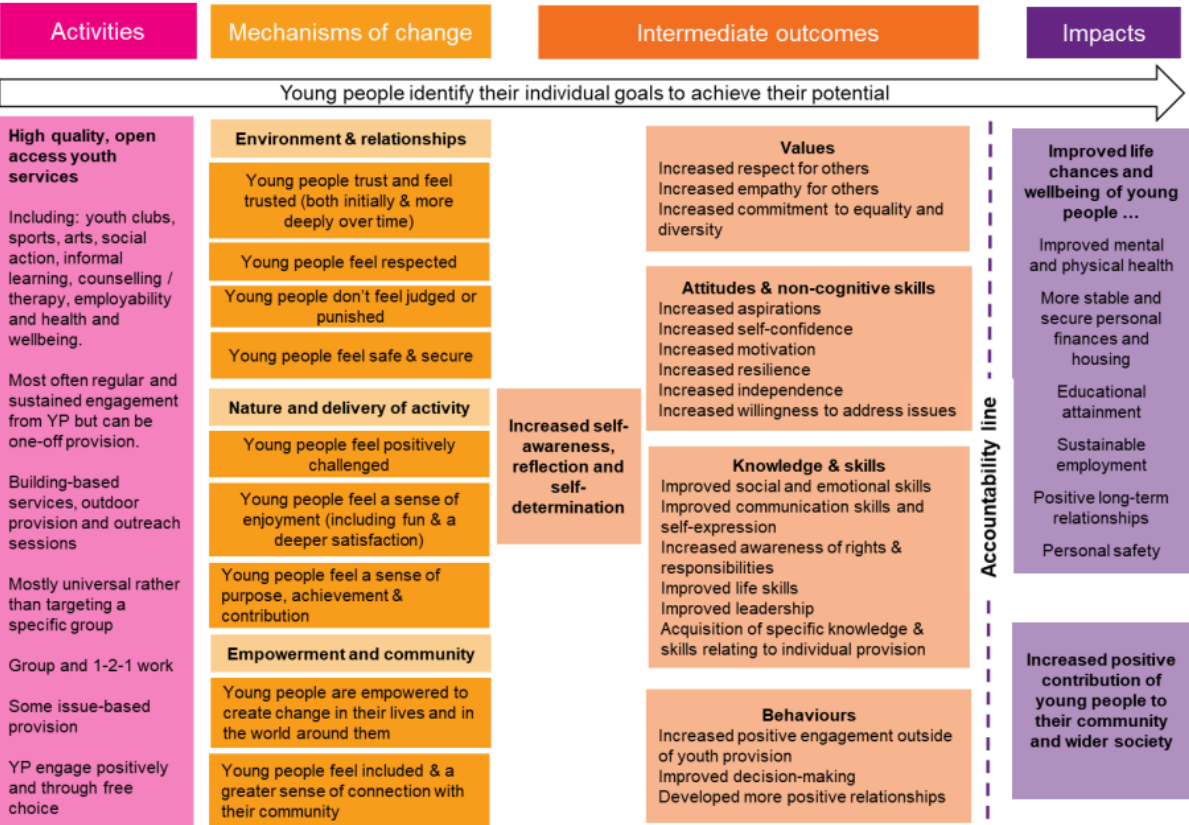
The YIF qualitative case study process evaluation

Aims of the YIF qualitative case study process evaluation

The overarching aim of the YIF qualitative process evaluation is to explore the *processes* through which open access youth provision (in its various forms) works to effect change in young people's lives. This includes exploring how provision is experienced by young people; when youth provision is perceived as 'working' or 'not working'; and how this relates to positive change for young people over time.

The process evaluation also sought to examine whether the YIF theory of change is reflected in the experiences of young people and youth workers, and elicit greater understanding and explanation of how change occurs, whilst testing some of the assumptions made in the YIF Theory of Change.

As analysis of the quantitative data progresses throughout the remainder of 2020, the findings from the process evaluation will also provide insights to aid understanding of findings from the quantitative YIF evaluation data sets (e.g. attendance and quality; feedback and quality) and the impact evaluation.

Research questions

The process evaluation sought to answer the following specific research questions:

1. Which young people are being reached/not reached by the projects and what factors influence this?
2. How are young people engaging with open access youth provision and what, and how, do different mechanisms and processes of delivery influence patterns of engagement?
3. How is open access youth provision being delivered: what are the common features of provision and how do these relate to young people's participation, engagement and experiences of provision? And what are the barriers and successes of different types of provision and particular features of provision?
4. What outcomes do young people experience as a result of engaging with open access youth provision and how do these relate to the features identified in research question 3?
5. How is open access youth provision perceived by the wider community and what, if any, wider community impacts are experienced?

Methods and approach

Similar to all aspects of the YIF shared evaluation approach, we drew on the support of both our external research partners and our co-design advisory group (made up of YIF grant holders) to inform the purpose and design of the YIF qualitative case study process evaluation. With their support, we identified the following research design:

Qualitative case study approach

The process evaluation is intended to complement the other strands of the YIF learning project (see appendix 1: 7 Strands of the YIF evaluation) by adding rich depth and description of a small number of YIF funded projects and their mechanisms for delivery.

A qualitative case study approach was used as it helps us to understand **how** open access youth provision works, **why** youth organisations take the approaches they do, and the effect and relevance of **contextual factors**. Through this approach we are able to gather multiple perspectives (including young people, youth organisations and community stakeholders) in different local and delivery contexts, that provide a deeper understanding of how open access youth provision improves the lives of young people.

Purposive sample

The 'purpose of this evaluation cases' were YIF funded organisations. To answer our research questions, we required a sample that (as far as possible) captured the variety of provision and contexts present in the YIF, allowing us to identify factors that were common across organisations. Through consultation with the core-group, it was recommended that we focus on organisations that represent the most common types of provision, as it was felt this would provide the greatest opportunity for understanding open access youth provision.

To meet these requirements, we aimed to achieve a sample that provided:

- A mixture of organisations delivering different types of activities (based on the YIF activities characteristics), of different sizes (based on annual income and reach), and who were expanding provision or creating new activities.
- At least one organisation that represented the following: worked with black and ethnic minority groups, based in a rural setting, part of a YIF funded consortium (made up of more than one smaller organisation), used funding to develop their youth co-design approach and activities.

Further information about eligibility criteria and the selection process for YIF case study organisations is presented in the appendix 2. In total, five YIF grant holder organisations that we invited to be a YIF case study agreed to participate, and one declined due to significant staffing and organisational changes that were taking place within the organisation at the time. This organisation was not replaced as we had reached data saturation[1] with the five existing organisations, so an additional organisation was unlikely to add new insights.

The five grant holders are:

- Access to Sports Project (based in East London)
- Boomsatsuma (based in the South West)
- OneWalsall (based in the West Midlands)
- Romsey Mill (based in the Eastern Counties)
- Young People's Advisory Service (YPAS) (based in Liverpool City)

A summary for each of these case study organisations is included in the appendix 3.

One of the case study grant holders that agreed to participate in the process evaluation was the OneWalsall 'Youth in unity' consortium, which is made up of three individual organisations: Bloxwich Community Partnership,

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[1] Data saturation refers to the point in the research process when no new information is discovered in data analysis, and this signals the researcher to case data collection.

Kics and Youth Connect. For the purposes of this report, we will refer to seven organisations who participated in the YIF process evaluation and five case study settings, because although the three organisations who formed part of the OneWalsall were collaborating, they delivered different activities, in different localities, with different groups of young people, whilst also sharing the experience of being part of a consortium and being supported by OneWalsall.

Data collection approach

To gather a range of perspectives and understand the processes for how different types of open access youth provision are delivered and experienced by young people, the research team opted to use a combination of the following qualitative research methods when visiting each case study site, depending on what was felt to be appropriate and relevant to the setting (See Table 1: Methods of data collection used in YIF case study process evaluation):

- **Researcher observation of provision:** researcher(s) observed a minimum of one activity at each case study site. These observations were undertaken overtly and allowed researchers to examine behaviour of young people and youth workers in a setting's activity.

- **Small group workshops with young people:** researcher(s) undertook a minimum of two small group workshops (no longer than one hour in length) at each case study site with groups of young people attending different types of provision (made up of a minimum of three people). Creative and engaging methods were used to facilitate discussion in the workshops with young people (see appendix 4)

- **Small group/ individual interviews with sample of youth workers, volunteers, trustees, and parents:** researchers offered face to face individual or group interviews with youth workers employed or volunteering at each case study site, and both approaches were used. In one organisation where it was not possible to meet a trustee face to face, a telephone interview was arranged. Individual interviews ranged from 40-60 minutes in length, whereas group interviews with staff ranged from 50-90 minutes. We interviewed two trustees from two different sites and had small group interviews with parents at two different sites.

- **Face to face/telephone interviews with organisational partners/other stakeholders:** researchers interviewed a range of different stakeholders who were linked to each case study site, either face to face or by telephone. These included representatives of the local community police force; an art gallery education manager; a local authority councillor; representatives from local youth service teams; and representatives from other local youth service providers.

See appendix 5 for further information about the data collection tools used.

Table 1: Methods of data collection used in YIF case study process evaluation and number of participants

Method	Total number of methods undertaken	Total number of participants	Access to Sports Project	Boomsatsuma	OneWalsall Consortium	Bloxwich Community Partnership	Kics	Youth Connect	Romsey Mill	YPAS
Researcher Observations	8		1	2		1		1	2	1
Young people workshops <16	2	15		1					1	
Young people workshops >16	5	20	1						2	2
Interviews with staff[2]	9	9	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Group interviews with staff	5	18	1	1		1			1	1
Group interviews with volunteers	1	2								1
Group interviews with parents	2	9		1						1
Interviews with trustees	1	1	1							
Interviews key stakeholders	9	12	2	1	3				2	2

[2] All interviews were carried out with managers of each of the 7 organisations

Consent process

All potential participants were given copies of the YIF process evaluation information sheets and consent forms prior to and on the day that the research was undertaken. Separate consent forms were prepared for parents/carers of children aged under 16, which were sent by the case study organisation to parents in advance (usually by giving the form to young people to take home). Informed written consent was obtained for all individual and group interviews and for all participants taking part in focus group discussions. However, it was not feasible for two of the three organisations who had arranged focus groups with young people aged between 10-15 years to obtain informed written consent from parents for practical reasons (i.e. young people attend provision by themselves and few are dropped off by their parents, or young people forgot to get their consent forms signed by their parent prior to the planned focus group session). Therefore, on the day the researcher opted to undertake observation of these open access sessions instead and the lead youth worker undertook the word association exercise as part of the session.

Approach to data analysis

The process evaluation research generated a large body of data in different formats, such as note form write ups of interviews and focus groups, researcher observation notes, and written feedback from young people on flipchart paper. The qualitative data was analysed using framework analysis, which was developed by NatCen in the 1980s. This approach is well suited to our YIF qualitative case study process evaluation design, as we had "*specific questions, a limited time frame, a pre-designed sample and a priori issues*"[3] that were intended to be examined. It also allowed researchers to interpret and make sense of what was happening[4].

A framework helps to organise and manage research data through the process of summarisation, which results in robust and flexible themed matrices that are linked to both the main research questions and emergent themes. This allows the researcher to analyse data both by case and theme, whilst remaining connected to the views of each participant. Three members of the evaluation team were involved in the data analysis process, so as to reduce any potential researcher bias.

Participant validation of results

We sought to verify the rigour and applicability of our YIF process evaluation findings by checking our analysis and interpretations of their contributions, as presented in their case study summaries, with each of the seven participating organisations to ensure they felt they were accurate and credible. We also held a research validation meeting with our YIF co-design advisory group in December 2019 to discuss and get feedback from the group on some of the initial top level themes that had emerged from the research teams' initial familiarisation with the YIF process evaluation data. We asked the group to consider two reconstructed accounts of fictional youth provision (based on the real case studies) and to reflect on how these resonated or conflicted with their own experience and practice. The process proved useful in confirming and exploring some of the challenges faced by open access youth providers and helped identify new questions and areas to explore in more detail during the full analysis.

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[3] Srivastava, A. & Thomson, S. B. (2009).Framework Analysis: A Qualitative Methodology for Applied Policy Research. JOAAG, Vol. 4. No. 2

[4] Ritchie, J. & Spencer, L. 1994. Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research" by Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer in A. Bryman and R. G. Burgess [eds.] "Analyzing qualitative data", 1994, pp.173-194

Findings

In this section, we begin with a description of the local context in which the YIF case study organisations are working and then the process evaluation findings are presented by each of the five research questions (see page 7 to provide rich descriptions of related themes. Much of this will be familiar to those working in or with youth organisations, and the data reaffirms what we've heard from grant holders through the YIF learning project so far.

The local context for YIF funded provision

YIF funded projects are working in areas of multiple disadvantage

YIF funding was intentionally directed towards six disadvantaged geographical areas in England[5]. Case study organisations identified numerous adversities faced by young people in their localities. The most common were low household incomes; high unemployment in families in the area; high levels of children with free school meals; high levels of youth anti-social behaviour; and high levels of young people with mental health needs. Others included high levels of children excluded from school compared with national average; limited career opportunities and prospects for young people in the local area/across town or city; substance abuse; drug dealing networks (such as county lines); and gang culture.

The degree to which young people experience these issues varies across the multiple communities supported by each youth organisation. Walsall was identified as an area where young people were particularly prone to facing many of the issues listed above. Liverpool and London described how 'pockets' of their local areas were prone to many of these issues, whilst recognising that there was a lot of diversity in these areas.

"If you grow up in this street, you just grow up in that community. Here it's a large Muslim community. Strong South Asian, new Eastern European community, but that's it. If you go to another community, the make-up is different. In [other areas] our young people are different, they are probably more high achieving, usually more stable family background, more money, holidays, more opportunities available to that group of young people. Here, there may be more single income families, low income families, or families on benefits, and complex relationship issues at home. There's a lot more poverty, a lot more around drugs. Around here, it's known to be a red-light district area as well, and you've got drugs, more youth violence in this area, even had an incident just this weekend, and police are looking for those who did it…

Some young people are scared to go out, or their parents are scared… in this community sometimes it's hard for girls to be given the freedom to go out, some parents can be very protective. We do have female workers as well and try to engage parents with the workers and develop that level of trust."

Youth work manager, Youth Connect – OneWalsall

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[5] These areas were chosen based on measures of deprivation, to help ensure that YIF funding reaches areas of greatest need and maximises the impact of this investment.

Youth workers spoke about the challenge that some young people faced as a result of ingrained poverty in their family and community that left some without positive adult role models, and a perceived lack of control over their future.

Services for young people are under increasing pressure

Case study organisations described a reduction in local youth service provision over the past decade, resulting in fewer places for young people to go after school or during school holidays and increased demand on stretched social services, alongside physical and mental health services.

Young people are restricted by perceived social and geographical boundaries

Six of the seven organisations (including one organisation working in a rural area) highlighted that many young people are reluctant to travel to particular estates or other parts of the same town/city due to perceived social and geographical boundaries. These can be a result of postcode or gang rivalries, 'turf wars' or ethnic and socio-economic cultural segregation.

One Youth Work Manager described how, as a result, young people often feel "confined within the small worlds of the community in which they have grown up". Another youth worker explained how he felt that this phenomenon was trapping young people in mindsets that bred fear and mistrust of others causing young people to be reduce their social contact with others and become more isolated. This finding was validated by young people attending ATSP, who reported,

> *"There's a lot of parents who may not feel comfortable sending their children far… they're safe staying at home in their environment… they want them somewhere they can observe…so the fact that ATSP are going to parks near estates… it just helps children to feel near home."*

In contrast to these divisions, youth workers also described a strong sense of belonging among many young people with what they perceived to be their local community. They described how young people feel connected, safe and have a strong local identity and sense of pride.

1. Which young people are being reached/not reached by the projects and what factors influence this?

The organisations were looking to reach all young people in their locality, including young people who are harder to reach or less likely to engage. The organisations sought to do this by reducing barriers to access and making the provision as accessible as possible to the broadest range of young people.

The process evaluation has revealed the different ways in which open access youth providers seek to appeal to and engage with different groups of young people within their local areas, and how their reach is heavily influenced by both local contextual factors and the needs and interests of young people. It also highlights the challenges for open access youth provision in reaching some of the most disadvantaged young people and some of the older age groups (i.e. those aged 15-18 years).

Youth organisations described how they get different groups of young people involved in their activities, and the challenges associated with this. Overall, they describe a need to offer varied activities, through multiple channels, to appeal to a wide audience of young people. This can be achieved by:

- Combining open access, targeted and detached youth provision;
- Engaging with younger age groups;
- Overcoming geographical and social boundaries;
- Creating safe, inclusive and appealing spaces; and
- Establishing a positive reputation in the community.

Combining open access, targeted and detached youth provision

Open access provision: All case study organisations provided open access building-based provision on a regular (usually weekly) basis to different age groups of young people. Some considered open access provision to be "the very foundation of all our work". (Youth Worker, Romsey Mill). Because any young person, within the specified age range, can attend, it enables organisations to connect with many young people.

Organisations referred to a 'funnel effect' of open access provision, where staff can identify, from the larger group, those who would benefit from additional support. This enables staff to refer or signpost young people to more intensive targeted support or to develop support based on identified needs. In addition, some organisations offer open access provision to young people after they have been supported with more targeted structured provision.

"*In our open group work…we'll often refer young people on who've come here for counselling, so it becomes like an extension of therapy…but its not about creating dependence, it's about young people knowing they can access us for support when their needs change, on their journey.*"

Targeted youth work: All case study organisations identified how targeted youth work enables them to provide more intensive support for those who need it. Targeted provision provided by case study organisations either focused on specific groups of young people (e.g. LGBTQ+ group) or specific needs of young people (e.g. mental health sessions, one to one mentoring for young people identified at risk).

"*Reach is not all about numbers of attendance. Through targeted work, our impact on a smaller number of young people is huge, and it requires more regular, structured and dedicated engagement.*"

Detached provision: Whilst the majority of YIF provision was building-based, six of the seven organisations had been able to expand detached work because of YIF funding[6]. These organisations highlighted the role played by detached youth work in reaching young people who are not currently engaged with provision by "going on to their territory, rather than expecting them to come to us" (Youth Worker, Romsey Mill).

For example, the manager at Youth Connect reported how they have proactively undertaken detached work through sports activities, such as street cricket tournaments, which enables them to reach and speak to a broader range of young people. This helps to raise awareness of the organisation among families and senior community members, who are then more likely to be accepting of their child engaging with the provision (see box 1 for an example of detached youth provision).

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[6] 90% of attendances at YIF funded activity being building based and only 10% being detached in our early findings report (YIF Learning and insight paper four)

Box 1: Why detached youth provision is a valuable feature of open access youth provision

"Our workers going out on the streets, into the parks, where young people hang around, congregate, and our workers go and meet on their ground, where they feel comfortable, and engage with them, offer them opportunities to engage with our sessions or deliver some type of targeted project that suits those young people….

Not all young people feel comfortable coming into the youth club, or don't thrive in that environment. But they may thrive in their environment. You have seasonal trends, nice day like this they want to be out in the park… For us it's about being agile really and having agile approach to delivery…. Your connection and your engagement with a young person is the same, it's just a different environment. You can still offer them support, same level of guidance, and in an environment where they may more likely listen, take it on board….

I think when we're working out there we're working with young people who are feeling even more marginalised, even more disengaged, not part of any project, maybe NEETs, not be going to any education, so they are more vulnerable. When you engage those young people and slowly over a period time you develop that level trust, then you can offer some of the most needy young people that support. You can't do it within the confines of a room and hope that young person will come through the door. They may never do, and you've not created any opportunity for any young person to do that."

Engaging with younger age groups

Organisations find it harder to engage young people as they get older. Two organisations described how the overall average age of the young people they work with has lowered over recent years. The findings suggest that this is, in part, a result of cultural and societal norms where young people mature and become independent at a younger age, and are therefore more inclined to want to 'do their own thing' away from a youth club or feel that they have 'outgrown' the activities being offered.

The transition from primary to secondary school was identified as a key time-point for either seeking to maintain young people's engagement with provision or attracting new groups of young people who were now becoming more independent. For one organisation, the 8 to 14 year old age group is considered to be "where some of our most vital work takes place, where we can instil positive attitudes and behaviours early and make them a norm in the longer term" (Project Manager, Boomsatsuma).

All the organisations used similar mechanisms to engage younger age groups. These included using promotion materials and school visits, speaking to parents, and holding promotional events for parents to visit and see the provision in action, and through word of mouth from people attending their provision. In addition, organisations sought to attract different age groups by offering a variety of age appropriate activities at different times. Three of the case study organisations explicitly stated that they wish to work more with groups under the age of 14, but that they find it challenging to secure the resource for this as, in their experience, many funding streams tend to be targeted towards 'older' young people.

All the organisations tried to "stay current with the trends that young people are into", and did so by asking young people for ideas about the types of activities or trips they would like or co-designing a programme of activities with young people (see also section Youth voice and co-production, page 29)."

Overcoming geographical and social boundaries

Perceived boundaries limit the extent to which young people will engage with provision outside of their immediate locality. Case study organisations described the following ways of overcoming these boundaries to broaden the world view of these young people beyond their local neighbourhood:

- Where feasible, ensuring the organisation has venue space to deliver building-based provision in many different areas across a locality, so that they can be accessible to and have a broader reach of young people.

- Running detached sessions in many different areas across a locality, and/or in communal spaces that are outside of territorial rivalries, so more young people feel safe and able to engage.

- In two instances, organisations deliver a mobile youth service (one through a 'pop up' service and another through operating out of a mobile bus), so that they can deliver in different areas (See Appendix 3 for summary descriptions of the case studies BoomBox project (BoomSatsuma) = and OneWalsall's Kics project).

- Talking to young people about the artificial boundary issue, supporting them to see it differently through exploring where their fears have come from, potential reasons for these fears and how and why they might wish to overcome this fear. This is done whilst encouraging them to come to sessions regardless of any perceived stigma of engaging with a youth service provider.

- Employing staff from varied backgrounds (e.g. different ethnic groups) with which the young people attending can identify.

- Engaging with other key local stakeholders (e.g. faith leaders, sports coaches, schools) to build referrals and signposting to the youth provider and to build local awareness of the work being done through open access youth provision.

- Running events with other stakeholders/organisations to bring different groups of young people together (e.g. community art projects in Walsall; Art Museum in Liverpool).

"ATSP work on many estates… [parents] only want to send their child somewhere they can observe… so the fact that ATS will go into parks near estates… it just helps children to just feel near home… also just building a community near the house, because sometimes you'd rather be in the park with your friends with ATS than at a really big centre where there's lots of other people that aren't there for your purpose"

Young person, The Access to Sports Project

Creating safe, inclusive and appealing spaces

'When you come here it's like the environment's really calm and stress-relieving rather than being in school where it's all really stressed and really chaotic because there's so many people in there. You come in here and there's not that many people and it's time to chill and calm down and enjoy yourself and be yourself'

Young person, YPAS

Values, identity and environment are all important factors that organisations consider when assessing how to extend and broaden their reach, and ensuring they are providing inclusive activities.

Organisational values: All YIF case study organisations spoke passionately about how the values of their organisation underpin their approach to working with young people, which play an important role in appealing to different groups of young people. They commonly described: being person-centred; taking a holistic approach to

the needs of young people; ensuring young people feel valued and respected; caring for young people and being non-judgemental; being welcoming and comfortable; and being accepting and respectful of everybody.

'It feels like a place where I can actually truly be myself… I feel like I'm censored a lot of the time… here it's more accepting and you can actually be yourself without getting judged all the time, and I don't think there's really very many places like it'

Young person, YPAS

Gender: Three organisations reported that there is sometimes a tendency for activities to become dominated by boys, particularly in outdoor sporting activities. As a result, these organisations have consciously made an effort to increase inclusive spaces for girls, for instance, through creating an all-girls football or cricket club.

For one organisation, this issue is particularly pertinent because they are working with young people from cultural backgrounds where girls are typically expected to have less independence and agency. Therefore, staff perceive that an important part of their role is to build confidence in these young girls to refute cultural barriers that might stop them from taking part.

Race and ethnicity: Two case study organisations predominantly engage with white young people and they lack engagement from young people from other ethnic backgrounds, despite growing racial and ethnic diversity in the local community. One strategy used to address this is to recruit a diverse staff team, so all young people feel there are youth workers with whom they can identify.

These two organisations also reported rising community tensions in the local area in recent years, against the political backdrop influenced by Brexit. To address this, they are promoting values of equality, diversity and representation in their conversations and activities with young people. For example, running celebration events for Pride and religious events.

The three organisations that make up the OneWalsall partnership in particular have worked together to run events and bring groups of young people to visit each other's organisations where they learn about differences and similarities in their backgrounds and localities.

"We've learnt a lot from each other…south Walsall compared to north Walsall is a different make-up of a community in terms of its demographic around ethnicity, around faiths, but us working together has allowed us to do stuff like the social mixing, like getting young people from south Walsall to meet with young people from north Walsall, taking part in activities like bowling or arcading…or go to each other's different areas for the first time….Looking at the environment, the shops, the people. It was a fantastic learning opportunity for them"

Youth work manager, Youth Connect - OneWalsall

Sexual orientation and/or gender identity: One case study organisation highlighted their work as an LGBTQ+ youth provision organisation supporting young people of all sexual and/or gender identities. Partnership working with other LGBTQ+ organisations and building these connections has enabled them to take an active role in shaping the local pride parade with young people. YPAS was the only organisation who delivered open access provision specifically for LGBTQ+ young people. 'The Action Youth' which is part of the LBGTQ+ service at YPAS is the only Trans project that is CCG CAMHS funded in the country. The YPAS LGBTQ+ service have specialist staff members who have many years of experience providing information, advice and guidance to young people as well as therapeutic interventions. This service is delivered from their city centre based building to enable young people to have greater anonymity and to be accessible to young people from all areas of Liverpool. The LGBTQ+ provision is accessible to young people when they live outside of Liverpool due to the increased need for support regarding their mental health. (See appendix 3 – for summary description of YPAS case study organisation)

'I exclusively used to wear dresses in this place. This was the only place I could be out as female safely and happily'

Young person, YPAS

Physical environment: The space where youth provision is delivered should provide a physical environment in which young people want to spend time. Our research suggests that the setting needs to be non-clinical and non-intimidating to young people. This can be achieved by involving young people in co-designing the space. This was directly mentioned by five of the organisations, and included things such as deciding the colour scheme, furnishing and layout within the providers setting, and deciding on equipment (e.g. musical instruments, table tennis, games consoles, recording equipment) that they'd like to be available. (See also section Youth voice and co-production, page 29)

"We aren't just delivering activities… but a key value of the project was to instil the idea of young people being involved in decision making. For example, young people were involved in the design of the Boombox bus. We let young people decide what activities they want to do. It's important we provide tasters as they often aren't sure what they want because they haven't had experiences. This broadens their horizons… they may even decide to do things in the future otherwise couldn't (music, technology, sports, mountain climbing)"

Youth worker, BoomSatsuma

Four organisations described the challenges of finding suitable venues for service delivery and being "priced out" of some options because of rising venue hire costs over recent years. The closure of many youth centres over a decade ago has left many otherwise suitable buildings derelict or sold by the local council.

"The challenge is funding and physical space. They've had trouble (finding) places for ATSP to use...and there is a serious lack of venues to use. So many buildings have been sold off as the area has become gentrified by the hipsters, and we have limited green spaces."

Local councillor, The Access to Sports Project (ASTP)

For one organisation, the decision to deliver a mobile open access youth service was made, in large part, due to the lack of suitable buildings in the local area to deliver youth provision, and they found that operating out of a bus offers a valuable alternative. Developing community partnerships is also useful for overcoming the challenges associated with venue space and enables shared use of space across different youth and community organisations. This is explored further below.

Establishing a positive reputation in the community

Our research suggests that open access youth providers put considerable time and effort into establishing a strong presence and reputation in the community, through communicating their role with local stakeholders and developing positive and trusting relationships to reach and engage new and different audiences of young people.

Having a positive reputation in the local community is vitally important to open access youth providers because young people often attend, in the first instance, due to hearing about an organisation through siblings, friends and social networks, and through trusted professionals such as teachers and social workers. Furthermore, developing and maintaining positive and trusting relationships with parents and carers is important as they often play a significant role in supporting and encouraging young people to attend.

"ASTP manager won European money (EC) to get more girls participating in sport. The European partner was so impressed by the confidence and professionalism of ATSP, which is their hallmark"

The seven YIF participating organisations vary in terms of how long they have been established within their local communities. Many have been delivering provision in their local area for many years, and in some cases, several decades, whereas one organisation represented a newly established service that has been set up using funding from the YIF. Unsurprisingly, those organisations that have existed for longest tend to already have established relationships within the community and, relatedly, a large audience of young people that are already engaged.

For the newly established organisation, actively building community relationships was critical in their first few months of operation. This can be done informally (such as through conversations between staff and parents/carers in community spaces or through holding community events) or formally (such as through holding consultation meetings with parents and police about keeping young people safe in the area). The latter can also help enable parents/carers and others to feel they have ownership over the organisation so that it is interwoven with the needs of the community, as opposed to feeling it has been "parachuted in" from an external source.

2. How are young people engaging with open access youth provision and what influences patterns of engagement?

In this section we report on factors that both youth workers and young people identified as influencing why and how young people engage in open access youth provision.

How young people first heard about their open access youth provision and reasons why they first engaged

Young people reported the following common ways they had first heard about their open access youth provision:

- Friends were attending and recommended some of the activities.
- Parent/carer or a sibling recommended the activities or signed young people up to try them.
- Referred by school or other service provider, such as child and adolescent mental health services. For organisations such as YPAS, Bloxwich Community Partnership and Youth Connect, where more specialist targeted and/or structured provision is provided, young people are often referred or signed posted to their services (e.g. by school, social services, local youth services, GP).

The reasons why young people first engaged with their open access youth provision included the points above and:

- Wanting something to do outside of school, that gets them out of the house. Youth organisations added that young people are bored being at home, and do not want to be 'hanging out' on the street as young people are aware of some of the youth anti-social behaviour that occurs locally and potential dangers (gangs) that it would expose them to. Furthermore, their parents are frightened of these potential risks.
- A desire to learn something new or improve knowledge/skills in a specific area, such as sport or music.
- Wanting to meet new people and have fun.
- One young person described how the provision helped to give them an outlet to escape worries and responsibilities for looking after younger siblings.

- For young people attending YPAS's LGBTQ+ group (GYRO) for young people aged 12-25, there was a need to be able to meet other young people who shared similar identities or who were questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Factors that influence ongoing engagement

The case study organisations reported how their young people are more likely to engage with services over time if young people experience and feel the following from participating in their activities:

- Being practically accessible and conveniently located, near to their home or to good transport links.
- Safe, inclusive and appealing spaces (as outlined above) where young people can be themselves and both parents and young people feel safe.
- Positive, trusting and respectful relationships with friendly and approachable staff and volunteers.
- Autonomy to choose when and how young people engage with services.
- Free services, particularly as many families in the case study areas cannot afford to pay for their children to attend activities.
- Tailored and adaptive services that are responsive to the interests, needs and circumstances of the young people attending, including sub-groups of young people who may have particular needs.
- Opportunities for young people to share ideas and inform the types of activities on offer.
- A sense of progression in the types of activities on offer and ways for young people to continue engaging as they get older, for example becoming a young leader, being on the board or being local advocates.

In addition, young people highlighted the importance of the following factors in influencing ongoing engagement with youth provision:

- Opportunities to meet up with peers and make new friends.
- Enjoying the activities and having fun.
- Something to do, keeping them off the streets.
- Provides them with new opportunities to do things and learn things, that they would not otherwise have.
- Relationships built with youth workers.

These factors for ongoing engagement reflect those originally identified for engaging young people in youth provision in the first instance, which highlights the importance of these mechanisms in how services are delivered. This finding is reinforced when we examine the words used by young people (written on post-its or on flip chart paper during youth focus) to describe their experiences and feelings about their provision. These words replicate all the themes identified by youth workers, reinforcing the validity and credibility of these findings and the importance of these factors as mechanisms used by youth providers in engaging and maintaining engagement disadvantaged young people. (See appendix 3: Summary descriptions of the seven YIF case study organisations)

Reasons why young people disengaged from youth provision

Three main reasons were cited by youth organisations for young people's disengagement from youth provision:

Suitability and accessibility: Different groups of young people can feel excluded from activities or have a limited range of activities that are suitable or appealing to them. The YIF organisations emphasised how important it was

to enable young people to receive age appropriate activities but also to have opportunities to mix with young people of a similar age.

Boomsatsuma described how, due to the nature of their outside activities, only older groups of young people are able to attend but they often get younger age groups wanting to attend. Boomsatsuma recognise that the very nature of their service (via a bus) means it is not physically accessible for people with a disability. Two of the organisations (BoomSatsuma and ATSP) reported that they find that their outside sports activities are more frequently attended by boys compared to girls. Both organisations had looked at ways they could improve the inclusiveness of their activities.

Competing demands: Many of the organisations working directly with older secondary school age children explained that attendance often declines during exam time when young people have less free time due the demands of studying. This theme was identified in one researcher observation sessions, where two young people spoke to their youth worker about not being able to attend the session for three weeks until their GCSE exams were complete. Youth workers did not report any issues related to re-engaging young people after exams.

Seasonal trends: Attendance declines during the winter months, when both young people (and their parents) do not want to go out as much, whereas in the summer young people are more likely to want to spend time outside.

Patterns of attendance and engagement

Although seasonal trends and competing priorities outlined above provided some explanation for differences in youth engagement with open access youth provision, this did not appear to overly concern the participating organisations. They felt that so long as these young people had enjoyed coming and had developed relationships with staff and other young people this would make it more likely they would re-engage when the time was right for them.

Those who provided summer holiday programmes stressed the importance of these in reaching new groups of young people and offering them a positive experience which might lead to ongoing engagement after the programme ended. These programmes provided important opportunities to develop trust with parents/carers of young people, and often provided some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people with a 'safety net' during the holidays.

The seven participating organisations did not express a set or recommended pattern of engagement that would be more likely to achieve a positive change in outcomes for young people. However, they described how young people are more likely to benefit and develop and change over time if they regularly attend OAYP activities over a series of months and even years. Regular engagement over time enables youth workers to develop trusted relationships with the young people through participating in activities, and use these as the 'tools' to have conversations and support young people with their individual personal, social and emotional learning needs (see next section below) at different time-points in a young person's development.

Regular engagement also enables young people to develop a broader range of skills and experiences that promotes a consistent positive approach to young people's learning and personal and social development (see 'consistency and longevity' on page 28'). What staff from these organisations emphasised was that there is no 'optimal' or 'prescribed' length of engagement to achieving outcomes, as each young person will have their individual journeys. These journeys are not a linear in nature but are often interrupted and disordered.

 As one young person attending Romsey Mill describes,

"I started coming here in Year 9. It really sorted me out at school simply because I wanted to get to music studio, and I knew if I got detention I wouldn't be able to. Now I'm 18 and I run the music sessions in Trumpington."

Open access is considered a key component of provision because it enables organisations to connect with many young people, providing an opportunity for youth workers to identify young people who require additional support. Staff at YPAS advocate that, where possible, open access and targeted provision should co-exist to allow young people to engage in the manner that best suits their needs at the time.

Having a variety of models of open access youth provision on offer for young people (either within their own provision or among the different youth providers operating locally) was felt to be key because all have an important role to play in serving the needs of young people and promoting personal, social and emotional development. All seven YIF case study organisations reported operating a variety of provision (see appendix 3: Summary descriptions of the seven YIF case study organisations).

There was also recognition by one organisation that if they were able to maintain regular attendance among smaller numbers of young people who have high levels of need, they would be able to have a bigger impact on their lives. However, the challenge for youth workers is that, due to the complex needs and circumstances of these young people, their lives can be chaotic and thus their attendance is sporadic. It is therefore the ongoing commitment of youth workers in their relationships with these young people to find ways to contact, engage and offer them support in ways that will work best at the time.

The case study sites were keen to emphasise that "attendance in itself is not a marker of quality". Although it is important for youth providers to know attendance rates as one indicator of how well they are engaging young people, other indicators such as the quality of provision delivered to, and with, young people is more important in being able to support and have a positive impact on young people's lives.

3. How is open access youth provision being delivered? What are the barriers and successes?

This section explores the key features and processes involved in how the seven YIF case study organisations deliver services and support for young people, and the importance and value each organisation places on them in relation to engaging young people, providing good quality open access youth provision and enabling outcomes to be achieved.

The key features and processes for how open access youth provision works effectively, as identified by the case study organisations include:

- Activities as tools of engagement.
- Partnership working.
- Building an effective staff team.
- Building trusted relationships.
- Consistency and longevity.
- Youth voice and co-production.

Activities as tools of engagement

The activities carried out with young people as part of open access youth provision are diverse and wide-ranging, as represented in the YIF shared Theory of Change. A full description of the types activities being delivered by each of the seven participating organisations are featured in appendix 3: Summary descriptions of the seven YIF case study organisations. They are summarised below:

- Youth clubs, table tennis, pool, games consoles, team games.
- Sports sessions, music studio sessions, dance sessions.
- Practical activities, including cooking, arts and crafts.
- Multi-media activity sessions – including film making, music, IT, photography and animation.
- Quizzes.
- Enrichment trips.
- Mentoring.

The YIF case study process evaluation research highlights three specific purposes that these activities serve:

- To provide young people with a sense of enjoyment, entertainment, and the opportunity to socialise with youth workers and their peers.
- To support young people's learning, skill development, and to broaden their horizons by providing new experiences, opportunities, and trips that they may not otherwise have.
- To serve as 'tools of engagement', offering an avenue to encourage young people to 'open up' and to generate organic and meaningful conversations with youth workers and with their peers.

The third area identified above is a particularly important component of open access youth work. Many youth workers emphasised that "the conversation is key" in their work with young people. They highlighted the role of activities in sparking conversations, allowing young people to speak openly without feeling that they are under pressure or being 'put on the spot'.

This process can take place in a number of ways, including conversations over preparing and eating a meal; opening up discussions through arts activities such as song writing; and activities designed to focus on specific topics such as a Jenga game where the name of a drug is written on each Jenga piece, which creates an open dialogue for young people to get information and advice on drugs and substance misuse.

When these relationships are built between youth workers and groups of young people, youth workers can then look to develop topic-based sessions that address key concerns or issues that young people may be experiencing. For example, issue-based work covering topics such as relationships and safe sex, bullying, and drug and alcohol awareness.

Partnership working

The importance of local partnership working stood out as one of the key features of how our case study organisations deliver effective open access youth provision for young people in their local areas. Multi-agency working was considered key to reaching young people and addressing the often-complex needs of young people they serve. It allows for an integrated and holistic approach to improving the lives of young people, whilst also making the most effective use of limited resources and different areas of professional expertise (see Box 2: Key benefits of partnership working for a summary of the benefits of partnership working).

All organisations reported having a mix of formal and informal partnerships including working as a formal consortium (see appendix 3 for a case study of the OneWalsall consortium), or working with schools, community groups, families, the police, other children and young people's services, social services, charities, housing associations, and local authorities.

During the process evaluation research, families, the police and schools were highlighted as the most prominent avenues for partnership working.

Families: Two organisations (YPAS and Bloxwich Community Partnership) have formally adopted a "whole family approach" over the past three to five years and most organisations describe working with families in some way. This has involved making a conscious effort to develop sustained and trusting relationships with young people's parents/carers, siblings, and other relatives in the local area and in some settings offering formal services and support to parents/carers and families. This can include co-attending meetings between parents/carers and schools or social services; supporting them to respond in writing to letters received from school or local agencies; or in applying for benefits if they are facing financial difficulty.

The organisations taking a family-centred approach to some of their service model delivery, provide a range of interventions for families (i.e. mother and toddler sessions; mums coffee mornings). This approach affords the organisations a deeper insight into the young people's backgrounds, enabling youth workers to work closely with parents/carers and families to address issues that their child might be experiencing. Building trusted relationships with families is particularly important to reach and engage young people in youth provision.

"The way they speak to parents and deal with things is good. If you need to say something, you don't feel intimidated, you can always talk to someone. I have dealings here with my son, because he can be a rascal, he really can, but the same again, either I'll come and speak to them (staff) or they'll come and speak to me and him (son), and its discussed and dealt with, forgotten about and moved on… I would rather that, being able to speak to them (staff), if I wasn't able to, I wouldn't trust them. I think dealing with it straight way is good."

Parent at YPAS

"Families get invited to some of the trips and activities, and some of us wouldn't have met each other if it wasn't for BB. Being 'family-based' is unique and BB plays a vital role in the community. Staff are friendly and trustworthy… they are like the parents everybody wants. Many young people don't have dads, so male youth workers provide a really important role model for our kids"

Parent at BoomSatsuma

Police: Some of the case study organisations find it beneficial to do action planning with the local police, using their intelligence to consider what topics to focus on in the sessions and which young people to target. Additionally, some organisations arrange for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to visit on an infrequent basis at sessions, to deliver an issue-based session (e.g. on knife crime) or for an informal drop-in.

Many youth workers felt that this was helpful in being able to break down some of the fear, misconceptions and stigma that some young people have about the police, and that these opportunities help to increase respect and understanding among young people about the role of police.

There are, however, some instances where young people will leave or "go quiet" when PCSOs arrive at a session, highlighting ongoing challenges in tackling some young people's perceptions of the police. This likely stems from a lack of trust embedded early on in young people's mindsets as a result of either previous experience themselves or with a family member, and/or beliefs and attitudes held by families and peers in the local community about police.

Schools: Partnering with schools can be useful for publicising services and increasing the organisation's reach. Some youth organisations play an intermediary role between schools and young people and their families, particularly for young people who are having difficulties with friendships and behaviour at school, or who find school challenging and may be at risk of exclusion. Their support can include providing young people and their families with advice; acting as a representative at school meetings; and discussing young people's behaviour and circumstances directly with schools.

Box 2: Key benefits of partnership working

Strategy development: Gathering intelligence, from a range of stakeholders, to identify the issues that are most pertinent to young people's lives (e.g. knife crime, social media, body confidence, substance misuse). This enables youth providers to ensure their offer is 'current' to the ever-changing issues facing young people and to learn from each other on what approaches have previously worked.

Infrastructure support: There are practical advantages to partnership working, such as sharing venue space or skill sharing (e.g. offering mentoring, consultancy and training between organisations that have specialist areas of expertise) and access to resources such as training, peer support and funding.

Developing a coordinated approach: Many youth providers work with their partners to create a coordinated offer to young people, such as by making sure there is some form of activity available on every night of the week (to increase opportunities for engagement) and avoiding duplication of services (so young people have more diverse opportunities on offer). This also includes signposting between services so young people have the best chance of receiving the support they need and want.

Supporting young people during the referral process: All case study organisations described how they had referral processes in place with local NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) where they identified a young person in particular need. However, it was noted that CAMHS are often highly oversubscribed and young people experience long waiting lists before they have access to the services, which meant that the case study organisations often play an important role during the waiting period, to ensure that young people have access to some level of support from their youth provision.

Collaborative approaches to tackling systemic issues: Partners in the OneWalsall consortium spoke about the opportunities for their staff and organisations to work together to share good practice and experience amongst their staff team, and to develop an integrated collaborative approach to supporting cross-community youth events and visits as part of their ambitions to promote better social cohesion across the metropolitan borough of Walsall.

Promoting services: This involves sharing leaflets and posters to promote the provision in schools, other youth clubs, hostels, or community spaces, as well as delivering taster sessions in these spaces, which is beneficial for increasing the reach of the organisation.

"YIF has allowed them (the three Youth in Unity partnership OAYP) to test approaches, reflect more, develop their approaches, better understand what works and why, be more directed in developing and offering their service (due to added capacity, and expertise e.g. through training which has been very helpful), being able to resource programmes more easily. Partnerships formed locally have been really good, and we're looking at sustainability of continuing these projects e.g. working with housing partners, other sports groups, water sports centre etc."

Manager, OneWalsall

"Seeing what works for them (partner orgs), and seeing if we can try that. For us t's been learning, it's a positive way of working….I think it's important for them (Onewalsall) to co-ordinate what's going on (activities, evaluation & reporting) and bring us to together at times and help promote us. I think the balance is right. It's helped open doors, we're now putting in a bid for other projects, around youth ambassadors, youth leaders – which is a borough wide opportunity. Us as a partnership already puts us in a better position, we can apply for some of the larger projects (grants) by working together. Together we cover the whole borough, so it has opened up doors, opportunities. It's been a really good positive experience."

There was only one key consideration that youth workers felt was important to recognise when working in partnership, which is that to have effective partnerships organisations need to invest time to develop and maintain reciprocal relationships of support. Despite the clear benefits of partnership working, organisations noted funding challenges; it is often a hidden cost underpinning activity that is not costed into funding proposals.

Building an effective staff team

For all of the case study organisations, investing in team building among the staff is seen as important for effective service delivery. Many organisations place an emphasis on creating an honest, open culture, where staff share their successes, mistakes, ideas, and problem-solve together. They do this informally, as well as in structured spaces such as meetings, debrief sessions, team activities and away days. This is particularly important due to the mental and emotional demands that can be placed on staff when they are working with young people with high-level needs. Ongoing skill-building for staff was also highlighted by all the case study organisations, with staff encouraged to attend training opportunities and to identify and work towards professional goals. However, one organisation reported that activities like team meetings, supervisions and training opportunities can quickly slip if there is not adequate capacity and resource. Recruitment is another important factor when building the staff team. All the organisations highlighted that recruiting staff members from the local area is valuable where possible, because they tend to have a more in-depth understanding of the social and economic challenges faced by young people in the region. Alternatively, some organisations actively build diversity into their team when recruiting new members of staff. Recruitment was, however, highlighted as challenging for some open access youth providers. Four of the organisations reported that there is a lack of skilled and experienced youth workers available to recruit in their local areas, and that not all youth workers are willing or able to commit to some of the anti-social hours involved.

Many emphasised the negative impact of cuts to youth services over the past decade which had resulted in a huge loss of experienced and talented youth workers, and that a career in youth work was definitely more challenging with many being placed on time-limited contracts. This has led one organisation, Romsey Mill, to develop its own training courses, so they can cultivate the skills and talent needed as it is not already there.

Building trusted relationships

In the YIF shared Theory of Change, the mechanisms of change are grouped under three contextual headings: 'environment and relationships'; 'nature and delivery of activity'; and 'empowerment and community'. Relationships were considered important because existing evidence and frameworks suggest that relationships between youth workers and young people are crucial in supporting their learning and developmental experiences, as well as being critical in engaging young people who might not access other services such as education or employment.

"Part of our role is often encouraging young people to try new things….and they (young people) have to know we have their best interests at heart and trust us for this to work."

Youth worker, Romsey Mill

Our research has reaffirmed that developing and maintaining positive and healthy relationships sits at the very core of how effective open access youth provision is delivered. The following aspects of relationships were identified as particularly important:

Trust and care: Youth workers from all the YIF case study organisations described how a young person's belief that youth workers care for them and are acting in their best interests helps break down barriers, creating an environment where they are more willing to try new experiences, engage in meaningful conversations, talk openly about their lives, listen to youth workers and follow their advice. To summarise this aspect of their work, during the process evaluation research one youth worker at Romsey Mill cited the expression: "people don't care what you know until they know that you care".

Respect and empowerment: Youth workers across all seven organisations described how they use their interactions with young people to purposively demonstrate that they value and respect their feelings and opinions. Part of this respectful relationship is setting clear and transparent boundaries of appropriate behaviour. Additionally, youth workers encourage young people to have self-determination, by avoiding directly telling them what to do, and instead give them the support, advice and information to make their own independent informed decisions. This applies both within the context of youth provision, such as when a young person is choosing which activity to take part in, and to broader issues in their day-to-day lives.

"They listen to us'; 'You're able to talk to staff if you feel you need to, rather than bottling up what's going on'; other services might be 'condescending' - one other service 'only spoke to my father directly' and made her 'uncomfortable' and got 'kicked out' after a few sessions whereas 'with YPAS, I've known *** (youth workers) for 7 years, she's been with me for 7 years, she does proper care about my life'; 'They treat us really nicely, which I haven't had much experience with youth workers in some places… here it's more of a sense that actually they care'; 'they're really nice and they're funny as well… they treat me like normal people'; 'the youth workers have been really helpful and really easy to talk to'; 'I feel safe and I feel cared for while I'm in here"

Young person, YPAS

Accepting and non-judgemental: The research highlighted that organisations work to create an environment where young people feel comfortable in who they are, accepted, and believed. Youth workers focus on young people's strengths, assets and achievements, looking out for opportunities to praise and encourage them. This takes place through ongoing conversations as well as special events, such as awards nights, where the achievements and progress of individual young people are acknowledged and celebrated with the young people's peers, family or the wider community. Staff also remind young people that it doesn't make them a 'bad person' if they make a wrong decision or if they get into trouble in other areas of their lives, such as at home, at school or with the police. They are encouraged to talk about their experiences and their feelings in an environment that is safe and non-judgemental.

"(some) young people feel badged with a label…it's about this is what they say they have, but how can we treat them like the rest of the group. That's all they want, they want to be treated like everyone else. So if you've got autism or ADHD or something else, we just cater for their needs…That's no different to asking them about their concerns or issues, you're still reacting to what they need, it's just on a medical term. We are still able to integrate them with the rest of the group, and basically treat them the same."

Youth worker from Kics, OneWalsall

Safe and secure: A fundamental aspect of high-quality open access youth work is that young people feel comfortable knowing that the provision is a safe space where they can engage with other young people and with trusted professionals. All organisations described how a key aspect of their role is to teach and support young people to manage their own behaviour, and to learn to have respect for the boundaries and rules set by the organisation. This process of teaching 'self-regulation' was identified by both staff and young people as an ongoing skill development process that underpins the relationships and social interaction between young people, their peers and staff/volunteers at the youth organisation. Organisations focus on supporting young people to deal with the underlying causes of challenging behaviour rather than only on punishment. This can involve introducing a mentor; having more regular one to one time with a youth worker to develop trusted relationships; creating opportunities to discuss challenging behaviours within sessions with groups of young people and asking them to mutually agree behaviours they feel are acceptable in the group (group self-regulation); and on some occasions temporary exclusions. Three of the youth providers highlighted that they will always try to deal with incidences of challenging behaviour or conflict internally, and they will only get others, such as parents, schools or the police involved where it is in the best interests of the young person or if there is a safeguarding issue.

"The schools give up on difficult kids. In my area there are two main schools. If you're not gonna get a grade C by the time you get to grade 10 they're selling you straight off, not because you can't achieve it but because they think you can't… at RM there is no boundary, you feel free to talk about them about pretty much anything, whether you were in trouble with the police or some drug dealer down the road, they'd always give you the right advice, always support you and do it in the right way"

Young person, Romsey Mill

Consistency and longevity

"At its heart the organisation is about building relationships with young people. Relationships are also very long term, often last 10-15 years. Longevity is what you need with young people, to know you are there week in and week out, throughout the good times and the bad times. We journey with them consistently no matter what's happening. For many we are the only consistency they have in their lives…we play a vital role in the messy chaotic worlds of young people."

Youth worker, Romsey Mill

"Romsey Mill gave me the opportunity, and now I'm here doing what I love. Despite a really tough upbringing and experiencing trauma, they supported me on a journey to a stable place. If it wasn't for RM and all the work and effort they put into me I don't know where I'd be. Through all my struggles in life, the good and the bad they've been there".

Young person, Romsey Mill

"What I like about BB is they are consistently there. Constant support that you don't get elsewhere (school not helpful). Reliable all year round, still going even if it's raining."

Family member, BoomSatsuma

Our research emphasised the importance of consistency and longevity in delivering open access youth work. Trusting and meaningful relationships between youth workers and young people are developed through regular, long term contact, where young people know the organisation will be there to support them regularly and whenever they are in need. For young people, particularly those from challenging backgrounds, open access

youth provision may be the only consistent stable feature in their often chaotic lives. It can therefore play a vitally grounding and supportive role.

Organisations work hard to ensure young people develop trusted relationships with a range of different youth workers. This prevents young people from developing a dependency on any one youth worker, instead ensuring they feel able to speak to any of the staff. The organisation places importance on building up consistent relationships with young people the organisation, through its workforce and the way services are delivered. This is facilitated by organisations having team planning and debrief sessions after each activity session, so that all staff are aware of particular issues that a young people might be facing or of staff concern for a particular child.

Three of the case study organisations emphasised being one of the only services in their local area to run consistently all year round, including during the school holidays or in adverse circumstances like bad weather, as part of maintaining consistent relationships with young people. As described by one youth worker at Boomsatsuma: "even if it's raining and all we can do for a detached session is huddle under a tree and have a conversation with young people about how their day has gone, then that's what we'll be there to do".

In response to the challenges youth organisations face in engaging older young people, two of the organisations highlighted how they have made a conscious effort to continue engaging young people as they get older, so that their relationship with the service does not come to a sudden stop as they reach adulthood. This is particularly important because this age is often when young people are confronting big life changes and navigating complicated systems within their education and careers. The organisations have found engaging ways to do this by offering young leadership programmes and/or youth work training opportunities for young people, as well as maintaining ongoing informal contact, such as through contacts with family members, running or attending local events (including informal football and other street based sporting events) or through detached work.

There are some associated funding challenges in delivering consistent open access youth provision, because funding cycles in the youth sector tend to operate over two to three year periods. If an organisation is unable to renew its funding, it can result in a service being quickly removed once it has been embedded within a community, or the service being changed to meet the requirements of a new fund. This can be disruptive to the need for long term and consistent service delivery that facilitates the development of continuous positive relationships and outcomes for young people.

Youth voice and co-production

All YIF case studies organisations reported that their services are developed in an 'organic' way that is highly responsive to local young people's interests, needs and experiences. Youth voice is therefore a core value of open access youth provision. Incorporating youth voice is beneficial not only in determining the nature of the provision but also the quality of provision. It also has a secondary benefit in empowering young people and supporting their skill development in decision-making, leadership and communication.

Youth voice can be incorporated at different levels of an organisation. At a basic level, this can include:

- Young people having input into the activities run by the organisation. One organisation also considers that it is important to give young people 'tasters' of different activities, as they may have had limited experiences. This helps them to make informed choices that will broaden their horizons.
- Young people having opportunities to co-design the planning and delivery of activities, trips and events (e.g. what food to eat, how to travel, programme for event). Both Boomsatsuma and Kics gave opportunities for young people to design the interior of the bus and the types of equipment and activities that could be carried out on their buses.

- Young people being encouraged to give input into the design of the physical space where youth provision is delivered (e.g. inviting them to decorate the space).

Youth voice can also take place at 'higher influencing levels', such as by inviting young people to be on interview panels to recruit new youth workers, creating a youth board, or being speakers and ambassadors for the organisation at external events. Two organisations had been able to develop both basic and high-level aspects of youth involvement. For many of the other organisations, it was more common for them to focus on more basic aspects of youth voice. They noted that higher level aspects require additional capacity and investment. However, there was broad consensus among all seven participating organisations that the growth in youth involvement in open access youth provision was beneficial and good for future development and sustainability of provision.

The research also highlighted that it is important for organisations to have a flexible planning strategy to respond to young people's needs. Most of the case study organisations discussed how even with planning activities in advance, they always remain open to changing the activity or session plan in response to changing circumstances and feedback/ideas from young people. One organisation avoids putting out a set curriculum or timetable of activities for the term/year, as they believe this goes against an ethos of responding to young people and involving them in the design of youth provision on a continuous basis.

"Here (YPAS) they are thorough in logging in the background of the new person and understanding where they come from (background)….There is a lot of flexibility and adaptability in the sessions, but at the same time they are structured – there is a framework. It feels like the session structure is developed and negotiated alongside the young people, and with full involvement of young people. There is a life skill element to social and engaging activities such as when cooking and being aware and sensitive to young people's needs, for example if the young person wants to spend time separately. Awareness is really important."

External stakeholder: Education Manager at Walker Art Gallery Liverpool

The following quotes from young people participating in a workshop at YPAS described their experiences of high-level youth involvement activity.

One young person aged over 16 years who had been attending YPAS for approximately four years, described how valuable she had found being asked to be on the interview panel of new staff who were applying to be a youth worker at YPAS. She said:

"Being involved in interviews you then know what other people are looking for when you're being interviewed."

Another young person from YPAS described how she had been part of an initiative that YPAS was contributing to with the University of Liverpool. This involved the design of a GP training tool, and the young person was asked to present the work at a GP conference. She said:

"I was asked to speak on behalf of YPAS at a conference in Manchester. I did a presentation. To do something like that and to have it young person-led compared to a lot of other stuff, to be a part of it, it is quite an accomplishment, to be standing there addressing a lot of professionals. Through those opportunities you gain a lot of skills that you can take with you literally anywhere, whether it's a job or if it's education, you gain a lot of confidence from the opportunities that YPAS offer."

4. What outcomes do young people experience as a result of engaging with open access youth provision?

When reflecting on outcomes for young people, youth organisations typically focused on a combination of mechanisms of change (i.e. subjective reactions and feelings experienced by young people in response to the provision) and intermediate outcomes that were strongly aligned with the YIF Theory of Change. This is unsurprising as the Theory of Change was co-produced with YIF grant holders, and these changes are more likely to be seen within the timeframe in which organisations are working with young people (as opposed to longer term impacts).

A summary of outcomes identified through the YIF qualitative case study process evaluation, mapped onto categories from the YIF Theory of Change, is presented in Box 3 below.

Three of the participating youth providers (Boomsatsuma, Bloxwich community Partnership & YPAS) specifically stressed the importance of their work in increasing a sense of empowerment among young people to make informed behaviour and lifestyle choices. They described how they often incorporate group discussion around topic areas that emerge during conversations with older young people (e.g. 13-18 years) or on topics that have special days (e.g. International Women's Day; Mental health awareness week, religious days). For example, they will run sessions around topics such as knife crime, anti-social behaviour, drugs, sex and relationships, bullying and mental health. In these sessions, youth workers will support young people to explore risks and choices, whilst providing information to help dispel myths and misconceptions. This responsive method of addressing the needs and concerns of young people, and promoting young people's agency, is where some youth workers feel they are really able to help young people develop their self and social awareness.

"We have regular discussions about relevant issues to young people. For example, knife crime - as there were incidents in *** area a couple of months ago which a couple of our young people got involved in, which caused feelings of being unsafe in the community and parents reluctant to let them walk to get to places. So we ran a four week project with parents and kids to give reassurance about safety and importance of safe places. We invited police to talk about what they're doing to keep people safe, and we ran a consultation with young people and parents about what makes them feel unsafe…Other topics we've had discussions on… like bullying, cyber safety, mental health."

Youth work manager, Kics, Onewalsall

"Offering support on their grounds, when they need it, not forgetting that it's got to be a place for positive place, where they can come and relax and have fun…we don't want it to be too curriculum based…they have that school, college. It's good to cover certain topics, but you want them to relax, unwind and socialise, and kind of almost drip feed the knowledge stuff, the important stuff over a period time. That's what lasts with us, when we're slowly drip feed the information."

Youth work manager, Youth Connect, OneWalsall

Multiple youth workers described how they feel able to reflect on the impact that their provision has had on young people's lives when they meet young people later on in their adult lives. During these encounters, the individuals recall the fun times they had and how the service kept them out of trouble and inspired them.

"I think it's good to take into perspective, like how far you've actually come…Like I've not changed much in the past two weeks, two months…but if you met me 5 or 7 years, if you met me like when I met (youth worker), like I hardly say three words to her in one month. I looked like I didn't want to talk to anyone, I didn't feel confident to

talk one on one or in groups, I sat on the side, I was the only person in the drop-in session who didn't want to be there, I didn't want to be involved... but to see how far I've come, and so many things I've overcome... Through YPAS I've just grown and grown in confidence. Over time I made new friends and began participating and my mental health improved... before that because like I was depressed and I just stopped going to school, I was avoiding, I didn't want to see anyone... and when I went to college I made new friends and I was no longer bullied and people wanted to be my friend, and that gave me more confidence. At the time I was getting more involved in YPAS, they were giving me lots of opportunities (sat on interview panels, gave a presentation to room full of GPs), and I think that's when I thought I'm ready for a job (part-time) and that gave me confidence... Through the opportunities I've had here (YPAS), I've had a chance to think about what to do with my life, and they encouraged me to apply for uni for 2019, which I've done."

<div align="right">Young person, YPAS</div>

Box 3: Summary of mechanisms and outcomes identified through the YIF qualitative case study process evaluation that are mapped onto category headings from the YIF Theory of Change

There was consensus between young people and youth workers on the majority of the outcome themes listed below. Those which were identified by youth workers only are highlighted in italics.

Mechanisms: Environment and relationships

Increased ability of young people to share problems and worries with a youth worker that they had built a trusted and respected relationship with.

Increased respect and acceptance among young people of difference, equality, and inclusivity of others.

Sense of belonging within the provider community.

Sense of agency within the provider community through having opportunities for their voices to be heard.

Opportunities to learn from mistakes and develop an increased self-awareness about their choices in decision making and the resulting accountability and responsibility for their actions.

Opportunities to develop new and existing friendships.

Increased confidence to mix and communicate with others effectively.

Mechanisms: nature and delivery of activity

Increased access to opportunities to try new things that they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to do. In particular, young people highlighted opportunities to get involved and shape services offered by their youth organisation as well as opportunities to be an ambassador.

Increased awareness among young people about opportunities available to them in society through offering them experiences of going to new areas (locations/ places of interest), having holidays, learning about particular aspects of society (e.g. culture and arts), and meeting new people, which serve to broaden the horizons of young people who may otherwise not have access to these opportunities.

Mechanism – empowerment and community

Increased community cohesiveness and feeling of safety among young people.

Intermediate outcomes: Values

Develop greater understanding about difference and diversity that exists in society, helping to promote tolerance of others, bring marginalised communities together and challenge stereotypes and prejudices.

Intermediate outcomes: Attitudes and non-cognitive skills

Growth in self-confidence and self-esteem (feeling good about themselves, feeling of being valued, and that they have potential).

Increased understanding of self-identity among young people.

Increased awareness of options and their choices available for them, including: lifestyle, behaviour, education and training, and careers.

Learning to tackle challenges and disappointments and not give up (resilience).

Intermediate outcomes: Knowledge and skills

Increase interest and motivation among young people to think and make decisions about their future career path through offering information and opportunities to learn about different careers and to offer progression to training, volunteering and in some cases careers.

Increase and improve social skills through meeting new people and respecting others' opinions.

Increase and improve basic life skills (cooking, hygiene, awareness of risk) and personal skills (e.g. time-keeping, team working).

Increase awareness and ability of young people to self-regulate their behavioural and emotional responses to 'triggers' in their lives (e.g. attitudes/behaviours of others or events that cause disruption in their lives). This helps young people to feel a greater sense of control on how they respond, and can reduce conflict with peers and support young people to cope with conflict within their family unit, and in some cases helps to reduce their level of risk taking as coping mechanism.

Improved emotional wellbeing, the ability to overcome or better manage worries and anxieties, and realise they are not alone and that these are common to other young people – so they are not the issue/to blame.

Hard skills (e.g. learnt new sport or improved technical skill).

Intermediate outcomes: Behaviours

Develop sense of responsibility among young people to help integrate into the community, and to give back/ contribute.

Develop greater self-awareness that enables young people to shape their own behaviours and make independent decisions for themselves.

"Some of the key things that young people gain from coming to Romsey Mill is confidence and self esteem…a greater understanding of who they are and that they have value and potential.... While we're interested in (young people shaping) activities, we're also interested in encouraging them to think about their future lives."

Youth worker, Romsey Mill

"Key thing we know we've made a difference (are) young people wouldn't go onto other estates and the stigma was really high. As a result of the mobility of the bus it has encouraged movement and reduced the segregation… (this) brings community cohesiveness, plus young people feeling safer and better well-being."

<div align="right">Youth worker, Boomsatsuma</div>

5. How is open access youth provision perceived by the wider community and what, if any, wider community impacts are experienced?

All seven case study organisations are embedded in their local community. They are, or aim to be, known as a trusted and familiar presence by key stakeholders and partners in the area. Only one organisation was new to providing services to their local area (Kics – part of the OneWalsall consortium). Case study organisations, and community stakeholders, identified the following ways in which they work with or have a positive impact on their local community:

- Representing and advocating for young people.
- Community cohesion and integration.
- Offering and engaging young people in opportunities to get involved in the local community.
- Celebrating young people's successes.
- Tackling anti-social behaviour.

Representing and advocating for young people

By being active members of their local communities, and working closely with other partners in the area, open access youth providers are in a strong position to advocate on behalf of young people and influence key decision makers and stakeholders. For example, some organisations described how they played an intermediary role with other community stakeholders such as schools and local council services, advocating for the importance of building relationships and support for young people, rather than criminalising or excluding them.

By working with local organisations to amplify young people's voices, and increase understanding of young people's needs, youth organisations have a positive impact on the way in which members of the local community value and respect their young people.

Community cohesion and integration

A range of community stakeholder interviewees from across the five different locations described how open access youth provision played an important role in improving cohesion and integration within communities. Open access youth provision provides a forum for young people from different social and cultural backgrounds to come together and mix, helping to break down boundaries, stigma and prejudice. By encouraging young people to mix socially, visit other people in their communities, and build new relationships, young people can play more of a role in community life and integrate into their local area.

Many organisations reported that some members of their staff themselves lived in the local communities and may even have attended their sessions as a young person. Many emphasised how this helped young people relate to

youth workers and trust them. It also ensures that youth workers have a vested interest in understanding the community and allows them to adapt sessions to suit local needs more effectively.

Several providers talked about the importance of establishing a local presence through informal as well as formal networking with local stakeholders, and the importance of becoming a well-known, friendly and trusted organisation within the community.

"There will be some workers who come from that community (ethnic community), not exclusively. It's about getting that right balance of skills. We've got teachers, a probation worker who gives his time, people from all walks of life, who have youth work qualifications, get pre-requisite training, DBS… and the key experience is that they have knowledge about the community, they have knowledge of the factors that are affecting young people… because kids can relate to the worker that is trying engage them, they understand what's going in the community, what's happening in the mosque, if there's an issue/ problem in the community."

Youth Worker, Youth Connect, OneWalsall

Offering and engaging young people in opportunities to get involved in the local community

Often young people have increased feelings of belonging and feel more inclined to 'give back' to their communities as a result of taking part in open access youth provision, reflected in the fact that several YIF grantees employ staff or volunteers who were once young beneficiaries of open access youth provision.

Celebrating young people's successes

Some youth organisations hold awards nights or events for young people which bring together different members of the community – families, local service partners and businesses, and councillors for example – to celebrate and take pride in their young people's achievements, helping to create a supportive and excited atmosphere that brings the local community together. Many invite the local press to cover these events as a way of promoting more positive messages about young people locally, and to support the local community to have pride and respect for the contribution young people make.

Tackling anti-social behaviour

Multiple external stakeholders reported that YIF case study organisation positively help tackle anti-social behaviour among young people in local communities. Some believed anti-social behaviour and knife crime had got worse in areas where previous youth provision was cut and where there are no longer youth services available.

Two local community policy support officers that were interviewed in Liverpool described the importance to the police of working with open access youth provision to deliver education sessions with young people that are tailored towards issues prevalent in their local areas, such as anti-social behaviour, petty crime or knife crime. They reported that with the increase in provision that YPAS was able to deliver through YIF funding, they had experienced less reported anti-social behaviour and petty crime in the local area. Ideally, they would like more funding to be given to youth services, like YPAS. They felt this was key to preventing many of the challenging youth anti-social behaviours in local communities and directing young people away from a path of drugs, gangs

and criminal activity. They believed this to be true because young people trust youth services more than the police. They would like to see more integrated approaches to addressing some of the problems faced by young people and local communities.

"Drug misuse is rife amongst McDonald's, car parks, etc. common with young people. Starting with weed, and when I was first dealing with these (young people), we'd deal with 14/15 year olds now it's as young as 9/10 year olds. Again they might just be carrying for the older kids, but dealing with younger kids and drugs… as they progress its likely they go on harder drugs. It's not a natural progression for everyone. It seems cultural now."

Local community police officer, YPAS.

The risk of short-term investment

Staff from numerous case study organisations and many of the external stakeholders we spoke with described the loss and harm to young people, families and the wider local community caused by the often temporal nature of funding for open access youth provision. The lack of sustainable continuous provision means young people and families are only able to benefit for a short time while funding exists, and they are unable to benefit from consistent and long-lasting relationships with trusted youth workers who could support them with ongoing learning and development outcomes as described above.

Youth workers described their previous experience of being forced to reduce or close some services when short-term funding ends. They observed how this left some young people feeling a huge sense of loss and abandonment, both in terms of opportunities available to them locally and relationships built with staff and other young people.

In both Liverpool and Walsall, staff and stakeholders reported high levels of social deprivation and, consequentially, a strong dependency on local youth service providers as a means of supporting young people and their families – particularly when local youth services had reduced so significantly in recent years. These communities were acutely aware of the fragility of some of their youth services, and familiar with "feeling forgotten and left behind".

The challenges of funding: who and what gets funded?

All organisations described the ongoing challenge of obtaining enough sustainable funding to maintain existing core provision, particularly when funders are looking to fund quite specific programmes or activities that are new and innovative. Furthermore, all described the impact on their local communities over the past ten years of significant cuts in local authority youth service provision, which had in effect resulted in a growing need and demand for locally based open access youth providers.

The three Youth in Unity partners (OneWalsall consortium) reported how they had been too small in size and turnover to apply for the YIF funding originally and had been subsequently pleased to be given the opportunity to apply as part of a consortium with OneWalsall. One of the partners explained how he felt the YIF funding was set up unfairly due the eligibility criteria, which had prevented them as a small youth organisation from applying independently, and yet these smaller organisations are skilled and experienced in their local communities, and often share similarities in culture and background with the local community.

"If anything from this funding is learnt, it has to be in terms of funders assessing who is delivering what on the ground before making the decisions about what to fund. They (YIF funders) really got it wrong (by excluding smaller youth organisations in their grant eligibility criteria), and I reckon that there's lots of towns and organisations like ours who have fallen by the wayside...There has to be learning from that, you can't make those type of mistakes again."

Discussion and conclusions

Key themes about the nature of open access youth provision

1. Emotional safety is the foundation on which open access youth provision is built

Throughout the case studies, and from multiple perspectives, the role of creating safe spaces for young people is described as foundational in youth provision. Young people are more likely to join, and continue engaging, if they experience a positive environment. They are also more likely to try new things – an important part of development – if they feel supported, and that it is safe to fail.

Our findings support and reinforce aspects of safe spaces as set out in the YPQI pyramid of programme quality (see Figure 2), which was used in the quality strand of the YIF evaluation, and which cover the following aspects of safe spaces:

- Fostering a positive emotional climate that is mutually respectful, equitable and encouraging;

- Conveying warmth and respect, with staff using sincere positive and warm words, with a warm tone of voice and body language;

- Creating safe spaces in which young people share and support each other, such as being able to speak without being interrupted;

- Demonstrating positive group management styles, characterised by proactive or positive approaches such as role modelling and calm redirection that promote emotion management;

- Demonstrating mutual accountability, with staff holding themselves and young people accountable to agreed standards of behaviour; and

- Actively including young people, without bias, from all backgrounds including different genders, religions or sexual orientation.

Figure 2: YPQU Pyramid of programme quality

2. Consistency and trusted relationships are important factors influencing engagement and outcomes for young people

Young people and youth organisations alike described the importance of long-term engagement with youth provision. This allows young people to develop the trusted relationships that are fundamental to young people's experiences of youth provision.

Young people and their families need to feel confident that they can rely on youth organisations, and the staff with whom they have built relationships, to be there when they need them in the future. The short-term nature of funding regularly undermines the ability of organisations to guarantee they will be there for young people and their families in the longer-term. When this happens, bonds between young people and youth workers are broken, which can lead to feelings of abandonment. The impact is worse for young people who do not have other people on whom they can rely.

The temporal nature of current funding models therefore significantly undermines the ability of youth providers to be effective in supporting young people's personal, social and emotional development over time. Furthermore it potentially reduces their ability to achieve the very change in long-term outcomes that funders are keen to fund.

3. Different types of provision are needed to engage and support the needs of young people

Open access youth provision is not just one set of interventions that can be replicated for all young people. Instead, it is made up of a complex mix of different types of interventions that can be delivered in different ways (i.e. by level of intensity[7] or setting[8]) that will enable different young people to voluntarily choose to engage in the manner they are comfortable with and which offer them support with their needs at a given time, but which then provides a young person with different routes on a social and emotional learning developmental process.

What these interventions have in common is a shared goal of supporting young people in their complex lives. This can pose challenges for providers in a number of ways:

- It requires organisations to understand their place within the local community context and develop partnerships and good relationships with their local authorities, local police force, schools, families and broader local community.
- It requires funders to understand the complexity of their work and the value of delivering different types of provision.
- It requires physical resource (i.e. venues and space) that is for young people.
- It requires organisations to be adaptive and flexible in how they deliver high quality activities and support for young people to meet changing needs and respond to young people's feedback
- It requires a skilled workforce who are committed to engaging and supporting young people through developing consistent relationships.

Organisations therefore need to be both inward and outward looking and be flexible and resilient to changes in the external environment. This can be tough when resources and management time are limited.

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[7] Different types of characteristics of OAYP that have different intensities include: drop in or fixed; time limited or open ended; and structured or unstructured

[8] Different types of characteristics of OAYP that have different settings include: detached or building based; group or individual; targeted or universal

4. Importance of detached provision

Detached provision plays a vital role in reaching and supporting some of the most marginalised groups of young people in local communities, who would not otherwise engage in the more traditional building-based provision. YIF funding enabled our case study organisations to deliver more detached work and support young people who are often not engaged in education or employment, and who are likely to be involved in risk-taking behaviours.

However, this work is challenging and not always fully understood by funders or local communities. It also takes time to develop trust and relationships with young people and local communities, and its effects and outcomes for young people and the local community are not understood[9]. It is also difficult for youth organisations to find youth workers prepared to commit to the unsocial hours that are involved.

5. Activities play multiple roles in young people's experiences of open access youth provision

At a surface level, activities are designed to attract and entertain young people, but they also act as a mechanism through which to engage on a deeper level. For example, something as simple as cooking and eating a meal together can open up important conversations through which youth workers can support young people. Activities also provide mechanisms through which young people can learn and develop practical skills alongside social and emotional learning.

6. Being embedded in local communities is key

For organisations to be able to effectively engage and support young people, they need to be embedded in their local communities. New organisations coming into new areas often have a long lead in time to develop awareness and trusted relationships with the local community before they can effectively serve young people.

Organisations who have been around for some time benefit from the connections and relationships built up with local communities. As the make-up of communities change over time, it is important for them to remain focussed on maintaining relationships and remaining relevant for their local communities.

7. The value of open access youth provision extends beyond young people to their families and local communities

Youth organisations provide holistic support to young people and their families. This can include practical support (e.g. help accessing other services) and emotional support. Such holistic support has a positive impact on families, which in turn is likely to result in even greater benefits for the young person. It also helps youth organisations to get a better understanding of young people's situations, and therefore the ways in which they can best be supported.

In addition, youth organisations support local communities through offering young people opportunities to engage and contribute to positive local community activities and events, which also help young people develop a greater sense of being part of their local community and how they can be contributing citizens. Youth organisations play a

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[9] More insights on the measurement challenges posed by evaluating detached youth work will be explored in our upcoming Insight paper 7.

vital role in partnership with local police forces and schools in tackling youth anti-social behaviour and promoting community cohesion and integration.

8. Young people have positive experiences of open access youth provision

Despite variation in types of open access youth provision and the different activities delivered, young people from our case study organisations reported positive experiences of attending, which is illustrated by their descriptions of the high quality of provision (mechanisms of change). They also described several common outcomes.

To help us verify these findings, one of the case study organisations sought feedback from a different group of young people about how much they agreed with the findings from this research on young people's experiences and outcomes of attending open access youth provision, and whether the findings resonated with them[10]. The young people agreed with the findings but emphasised the importance of the relationship and the support given by their youth workers. They explained that their provider is important "…because we can speak to them, they give good advice, and they have a positive influence on us." The young people felt this was more evident for them during the coronavirus pandemic, "…youth workers kept in touch even though they couldn't open… We needed and only wanted talk to them as we didn't want to talk to anyone else."

Key learning for the wider YIF evaluation

1. The YIF theory of change is well aligned with the findings from the process evaluation, but there are some potential gaps

Generally, findings from the YIF process evaluation reflect the [YIF Theory of Change](). This research has highlighted the importance of the mechanisms of change, specifically 'environment and relationships' and the 'nature and delivery of activity.' Outcomes referenced by youth organisations and young people were also aligned with the intermediate outcomes in the YIF theory of change.

Potential gaps in the theory of change include:

- **Partnership working:** This is highlighted by youth organisations as a key enabler of their work with young people.
- **Working with families:** As outlined above, supporting and understanding young people's families enables youth organisations to provide better support to young people.

2. Findings from the process evaluation are aligned with and provide additional understanding of the early findings from the quantitative evaluation

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[10] See appendix 6: research validation exercise shared with new groups of young people.

Early findings from the quantitative evaluation were reported in Insight paper four in September 2020 and full findings will be published in the spring of 2021. The following findings were found to be consistent across both the early findings and the process evaluation.

- Youth provision is highly valued by young people, they feel safe whilst attending YIF provision and place high levels of trust in staff;

- There is room for improvement in co-production of youth services. Whilst organisations place high importance on this, and the quantitative data showed improvement over time, the process evaluation suggests that opportunities for youth involvement mostly happens at a basic level (e.g. through input into activities) than a more strategic level (e.g. through a youth board).

- A focus on quality of provision creates positive experiences for young people.

- A focus on quality of provision and youth voice aligns with the reflective practice of youth work and supports organisations on a continual journey of learning and improvement. YIF funded provision is reaching 'high need' young people who are facing significant challenges in their lives.

3. Early thoughts on implications for evaluation of open access youth provision

The YIF qualitative case study process evaluation has provided us with in-depth knowledge and insight into young people's engagement in informal and non-formal youth provision and how it makes a difference to their lives. By working with a relatively small sample of YIF funded organisations (n=7) we were able to closely examine how these organisations operated within their local community contexts, and how they were experienced by both young people and the wider community.

This approach let us identify and understand the wide range of *processes* and mechanisms through which open access youth provision (in its various forms) works to effect change in young people lives. A key strength of our case study research design is that it allowed us to compare differences and similarities across different settings and identify commonalities between them. This provides us with a rich data source from which to understand and interpret our main quantitative research findings.

We appreciate that the number of YIF case study organisations (n=7) was relatively small compared with the total number of grant holders (n=90), and that not all types of provision delivered by the 90 funded grant holders will be fully represented in this report. The purposive sample of YIF case study organisations participating in our research reflect a broad range of YIF funded provision and variety, in terms of the types of provision and activities being offered, their size, setting and geographical location. Our research has found that despite these differences, core commonalities were found across the case study organisations.

By continuing to undertake our research with case study settings until we reached a point of data saturation, we are reasonably assured that adding any further case studies would have yielded similar results and would have only served to confirm emerging themes and conclusions.

Using insights from this qualitative case study process evaluation, we propose the following initial implications for future evaluation of open access youth provision, which are aligned with early findings from the quantitative strand of the YIF learning project (see YIF insight paper 4):

- Patterns of young people's engagement with open access youth provision, including frequency, intensity and the nature of the activities they attend, all of which matter for understanding the contribution it makes to young people's lives.

- It is important to understand the mechanisms (e.g. the environment and relationships, and the nature and delivery of activity outlined in the YIF theory of change) through which open access youth provision activities lead to change.

- Evaluation approaches that are learning focussed are more aligned with the values and practices of open access youth provision and can provide organisations with real-time feedback that organisations can use to learn, adapt and improve.

- Youth voice is a key feature of good quality youth provision. Young people's perspectives should be a central part of the evaluation of youth provision.

- Evaluation should take a holistic perspective, taking into account the role of family and communities in the development of young people.

- Where feasible, evaluation of open access youth provision should include the use of mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) so that a fuller understanding of what works and what has been achieved can be reached.

Our learnings from the YIF shared evaluation approach are emerging as we continue with data analysis[11]. Our upcoming Insight Paper 6 (due in early 2021) will provide a more thorough exploration of our evaluation approach, examining what worked well/less well and the lessons learnt from the process of designing, delivering and managing this large shared complex evaluation. In addition, our final findings paper (Insight paper 7 due in the spring of 2021) will provide a comprehensive overview of our recommendations for future evaluations of open access youth provision.

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[11] https://yiflearning.org/2020/09/blog-framing-our-learning-reflections-as-we-start-to-share-early-findings-from-the-youth-investment-fund-shared-evaluation

Appendix 1: Seven programme strands of the YIF learning project

The YIF learning project consists of the following 7 work strands:
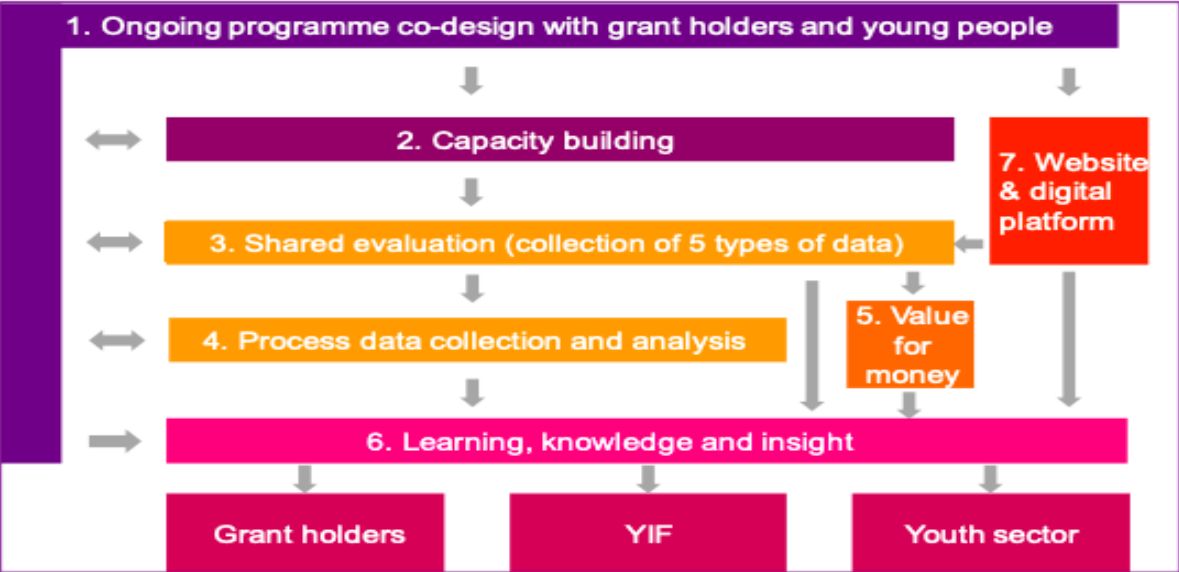
Throughout the lifetime of the project (May 2017 – March 2020), YIF grant holders have been given opportunities to co-design all seven strands of work.

Strand 3 has involved the collection of five types of quantitative data from YIF grant holders (May 2018 – August 2020) which were stored and analysed in the Impact digital platform (stand 7).

The findings from the outcomes data collected in strand 3 are being used in strand 5.

With a sub-cohort of YIF grant holders we have also conducted process evaluation data (strand 4).

Using the insights from strand 1-5, learning, knowledge and insight (strand 6) have been shared with grant holders, funders and wider youth sector through reports and articles, and on the dedicated YIF Learning website.

Appendix 2: Sample inclusion and exclusion criteria

Exclusion criteria

Grant holders with the following characteristics were not considered for participation in the process evaluation:

- YIF grant holders who reported to be developing their own individual evaluation approach or were part of a federated network of organisations who used a different evaluation framework, and so had informed the YIF evaluation team and TNLCF that they were not participating in the YIF shared evaluation
- Any organisation providing 'targeted' only provision
- Organisations providing structured open access provision but no general unstructured open access provision
- YIF grant holders who had not taken part in the quantitative YIF data collection strands between May 2018 and April 2019

Inclusion criteria

In choosing case study sites for the YIF process evaluation, we wanted to include organisations that represented as many different types of open access provision as possible, so that the findings can be of most benefit in developing our understanding of open access youth provision. We also wanted the organisations included to have already fully engaged with some or all of the quantitative data collection strands. This allows us to have comparative quantitative data for the case study sites, which we plan to use in our cross-strand analysis (final report due Spring 2021).

- ALL must have engaged with the YIF shared evaluation process and have collected user feedback and quality data/ or be collecting outcomes data between May 2018 and April 2019.
- ALL must provide open access provision that is untargeted as part of their portfolio of activities (which includes youth clubs and sports only clubs)
- ALL must be based in areas of social disadvantage (a stipulation for the YIF grant funding).

Total number of eligible YIF organisations

From a total of 88 YIF grant holders who had engaged with the YIF evaluation in April 2019, 57 were potentially eligible as they had collected quality and user feedback data or were participating in the YIF outcomes data collection.

Sampling frame

We developed the following sampling frame to help us identify a sub-set of YIF projects, from the 57 eligible grant holders, with whom we could sample from. We identified the following features that we felt were important to represent among our target sample of six organisations:

- Provide unstructured activities (e.g. sports/ music) that are either targeted (for specific group of young people) or untargeted
- Provide detached/ outreach activities
- Provide structured activities – which are generally fixed, time-limited activities, e.g. Courses, skill-based programmes or provision of Structured support (I.e. counselling)
- Provide structured targeted support to young people
- Are located in different regional areas (we may not include all 6 regions) and represent delivery in urban and rural areas
- Include big and small organisations (including 1 x consortium)

Appendix 3: Summary descriptions of the seven YIF case study organisations

The Boombox Youth Project

Organisational aims and mission

The Boombox Youth Project is governed and supported by Boomsatsuma Creative CIC. Established in 2011, Boomsatsuma aims to deliver high quality arts and creative opportunities for young people across the South West of England. Boomsatsuma prides itself as a leader in developing new models of cultural engagement, offering a range of opportunities that support the transition to adulthood and enable young people to reach their full potential.

Summary of YIF funded project

The Boombox Youth Project is a new initiative that was created through a grant of £239,612 from the Youth Investment Fund, to deliver open access youth work in the South Ward region of Weston Super Mare in North Somerset, an area ranked as being in the top 5% most economically and socially deprived in the UK. £50,000 of the grant was capital funding which enabled the purchase of a Peugeot Boxer van for use a youth mobile facility. As a mobile open access youth service, the Boombox Youth Project travels between and connects with young people across three estates in the Southward region, namely: Bournville, Coronation, and Oldmixon.

The Boombox Youth Project operates out of the 'Boombox Bus', which is decorated to not only appear as an engaging and welcoming space, but to offer a range of facilities that support the delivery of high-quality mobile youth work. Through regular open access and detached youth work sessions, the project aims to support the learning and skill development of young people, to empower them to make informed decisions about the issues affecting them, and to encourage them to take a positive active engagement in their communities.

Key activities for young people

While on board the Boombox Bus may appear to be a small space, the activities on offer are diverse and wide ranging: from arts, crafts, photography and animation, to quizzes, smoothie making, and ukulele tuition, to more structured, issue-based work covering topics such as relationships, bullying, and drug and alcohol awareness. Additionally, as the Boombox Bus travels between parks and other areas on the local estates, the exterior spaces are utilised for varied outdoor activities including sports, team games, creative activities like circus skills, and bike fix sessions. Trips take place all throughout the year, and have included air-hop, ice skating, and rock climbing, as well as residential trips, such as a recent excursion to climb Mount Snowden.

All these varied activities offered through the Boombox Youth Project are rooted in relationship building. As described by the Boombox Project Manager, "*we use fun activities as a way of engaging young people's interest, but it is within these activities that positive interactions with peers and youth workers takes place, and this is what lies at the heart of supporting their social and personal development*".

Young people reached

The Boombox Youth Project targets 10 to 18 year olds who live on the Bournville, Coronation, and Oldmixon estates in South Ward. As an area facing some of the highest levels of social and economic disadvantage in the UK, many of the young people are experiencing high levels of poverty, living in an area effected by generational unemployment, drug and alcohol use and abuse, crime, domestic violence, and family breakdown. Some of the young people are also dealing with self-harm, anxiety, school exclusion, low levels of aspiration and self-esteem, and anger management difficulties.

The Boombox Youth Project sets out not only to provide a safe and welcoming space to meet friends, have fun opportunities, and have support from youth workers who are skilled and professionally managed, but also to equip young people with the support, knowledge and skills to make positive progress towards further education, training or employment.

The impact on young people's lives

Through regular engagement with the Boombox Youth Project, staff report that young people quickly develop their social skills and cooperation abilities, and gain knowledge of constructive play and structured interaction. While there has been much change in young people's positive engagement with the project over the past three years, challenging behaviours are still exhibited: as described by one youth worker, "*at the Boombox we are some of the closest and most consistent people in many of the young people's lives, and this means we are often the ones they take their anger out on… they know this is a safe space where they can work through these feelings and it won't be held against them*".

The Boombox approach is to connect with young people and their families to obtain a holistic view of their experiences and their needs, and to generate open conversations where young people can reflect and speak freely, without pressure, judgement or punishment. This is part of an ongoing process to support young people to feel better about themselves, which can then impact positively on raising their self-esteem and self-awareness, and thus increasing their confidence and resilience in the longer term.

The Boombox Youth Project also has wider impacts on families in the community, who feel confident knowing that young people have somewhere safe to go and someone to talk, and feel excited that young people are given new opportunities that they often otherwise are not able to afford or provide.

What aspects of the programme contributed to making this difference?

Co-creation: a core value of the Boombox Youth Project is to instil the idea of co-creation and decision making. This applies to 'high level' decisions, such as consulting young people in the very design of the Boombox Bus, to 'low-level', day-to-day decisions, such as giving young people the opportunity to plan the details of trips, such as what food to eat or what time to go to bed. As described by one youth worker, in all aspects of the work "*we try not to tell young people what to do, we give them the guidance and information to let them make up their own minds*". This not only facilitates trust, but also supports young people to be self-determined and empowered in the future.

Rooted in the community: most of the youth workers on the Boombox Youth Project have grown up on the South Ward estates and so have in-depth understanding of the social and economic challenges in the community.

As discussed by one youth worker, "*it's not 'us and them' because we've grown up in their situation, which helps to dissipate any sense of hierarchy and allows us to build meaningful connections*". The project has developed positive working relationships with a range of organisations in the community including the local PCSO's who make regular visits to youth sessions which helps young people overcome the perceived stigma against authority.

Mobility: the mobile service that is offered by the Boombox Bus enables the project to overcome local infrastructural challenges, as there are few suitable buildings in the South Ward area to deliver open access youth work. A consequence of the project has also been improve community cohesiveness, as there had previously been a social stigma against young people travelling between the estates, but these barriers are being broken down through the mobility of the Boombox Youth Project.

Romsey Mill

Organisational aims and mission

Romsey Mill, a Cambridge-based Christian charity, started in 1980 through the combined vision of five local churches who sought to meet the needs of young people on the margins. Romsey Mill's Christian ethos is the inspiration and foundation for all its youth development work, with its core values including hope, justice, creativity, community, integrity and forgiveness. Romsey Mill's vision is of a transformed society across wider Cambridgeshire, in which all young people, children and families fully belong, positively contribute, and thrive.

Summary of YIF Funded Project

Romsey Mill received a grant of £746,767K through the Youth Investment Fund, for the continuation and expansion of its existing open access youth work. This has included the extension of Romsey Mill's youth development programmes into new areas of Cambridgeshire not previously reached, supporting the development of new youth centres in the regions of Peterborough and Trumpington. Through this expansion, Romsey Mill is now reaching over 1,200 young people across Cambridgeshire as of November 2019 (an increase of over 50% from before YIF funding).

Romsey Mill's focus goes beyond their own youth development programmes, as the organisation plays a core role in strengthening the wider youth sector across Cambridgeshire, supporting grassroots organisations through supervision, consultancy, partnerships, and training. Throughout the YIF funding period they have started a training course for a Level 2 Certificate in Youth Work Practice, and since 2019 have supported over 50 local people to achieve a qualification. Investing in youth work skills is an important component of Romsey Mill's work because, as described by one youth worker, "*we are fundamentally passionate about good youth work being done, not necessarily by us, but by a range of providers in the area working together for meaningful change*". Across all its work, Romsey Mill take an integrated approach, keen to engage in partnerships with any organisation that shares its core values.

Key activities for young people

Romsey Mill's open access youth work covers a range of activities, including youth clubs, sports projects, detached sessions, enrichment trips, music studio sessions, and a range of other positive activities such as

cooking, film and art. Romsey Mill take a nuanced and organic approach to the activities they offer, which are continually adapted and shaped to suit the needs and interests of the young people who attend.

Whilst open access provision is not the only aspect of Romsey Mill's work, it is a foundational component as it enables the organisation to connect with a high volume of young people, thus establishing a trusted and recognisable presence in the community, and providing an avenue to identify young people who would benefit from more targeted activities and support.

Young people reached

Romsey Mill actively promote inclusion, with their programmes open to all young people regardless of their faith or beliefs, as part of an aspiration to serve all unconditionally. In the words of one youth worker, "*we express God's love in practical ways showing young people they are of infinite value and worth".* Romsey Mill's particular focus is on young people aged 10 to 21 who need additional support to overcome challenges in their lives. This likely includes young people who are exposed to difficult home situations, care experienced young people, young people excluded or at risk of exclusion from mainstream education, young people experiencing poor mental health, and young people engaged in anti-social behaviour.

The impact on young people's lives

Through regular engagement with Romsey Mill's programmes, staff report that they observe improvements in the short and intermediate term in young people's self-confidence and self-esteem, well-being and mental health, and the development of social skills through spending time with peers and youth workers in a supportive and structured environment. Romsey Mill emphasise that progress across all these areas look different for each and every young person, and comparison of young people's outcomes is challenging and potentially unhelpful as each will have different starting points. Sometimes, even seemingly small changes can be hugely significant to an individual young person: as described by one youth worker, "*something as small as a young person getting out of bed to come to a session, or even to smoke less weed and to engage in a conversation with you about their week, can be really important steps given the challenges they are facing in their life or the mental health situations they are up against*".

Romsey Mill recognises that meaningful change in young people's lives "*fundamentally takes a really long time*" and will continue long after their first few years of engaging in their programmes. Longevity is a key component in Romsey Mill's work, as it helps to develop trusting relationships between young people and youth workers, where support can be offered on a regular basis. As one youth worker described, being there "*week in and week out, throughout the highs and the lows*" can steer young people on an overall upwards trajectory towards positive change.

Romsey Mill also encourage young people to invest back in their communities through offering a young leaders programme and youth work training, which helps to develop a future commitment to giving back and support future generations of young people. This is important not only for supporting skill development and building young people's future career ambitions but also in developing a sense of responsibility to contributing to the local community in the future.

What aspects of the programme contributed to making this difference?

Building relationships: The core features that unify all of Romsey Mill's work includes building relationships, community and a sense of family. They believe their role is not to tell young people what to do, but to provide the information, guidance and care to enable them to make informed decisions. As described by one youth worker, "*while providing young people with information is important, such as on the dangers of carrying weapons, what is equally key is to provide them with a sense of purpose, hope and love, because there is an absence of that in many of their lives*".

Person centred approach: A person-centred approach underpins all of the youth development work, meaning that staff value everyone as an individual and are prepared to respond uniquely to their needs and experiences. Young people are put at the centre of all planning and decisions that affect them, given opportunities to express their views and to have meaningful involvement.

Professional and personal development for staff: Romsey Mill also place a strong emphasis on the professional and personal development of the team. As described by one youth worker, "*it's important to laugh with each other and share successes and mistakes, to support each other even in the stuff that goes wrong*". Not only is this an enabler for staff, but it is also part of the positive role modelling for young people, by demonstrating a sense of community and family within the Romsey Mill team.

The Access to Sports Project

Organisational aims and mission

The Access to Sports Project are a sports development charity based in East London, who operate across the London boroughs of Hackney, Islington and Haringey. They are a community-led organisation who work in partnership with other local services including youth services, housing associations, and council housing estates. The organisation aims to:

- provide training, support and volunteer opportunities for local people, enabling them to become involved in sports coaching
- organise a range of accessible and progressive sports activities for young people
- provide support and assistance to local organisations interested in delivering sports
- improve children and young people's health, reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, increase social inclusion, encourage skills development, build a sense of community, and increase employment opportunities.

Summary of YIF Funded Project

The Access to Sports Project received a grant of £226,737 through the Youth Investment Fund for the continuation and expansion of its provision to six days a week across the London boroughs of Hackney, Haringey and Islington, to increase its school holiday provision, and to extend the reach to girls and young people with complex needs aged 10-25 years.

The staff team at The Access to Sports Project agreed that YIF funding (YIF) provided them with an opportunity to test and develop approaches, reflect and better understand what works and why, and to be more directive in developing their service offering, through investing in staff training and receiving YIF-led evaluation training. YIF also helped the organisation to form local partnerships with other organisations, which they are now seeking to uphold and expand past the end of the project.

The staff team consist of part-time youth workers and sessional sports coaches, many of whom themselves had attended open access youth provision in the past.

Key activities for young people

The Access to Sports Project provide a range of sport based activities and programmes that are delivered in a range of different settings, such as sports centres, on housing estate grounds, in parks and in school based settings. Their flexible and collaborative model of delivery is based on bringing opportunities for young people to engage in an environment that they are comfortable and feel safe in. Sports provide an entry point for the majority of young people, a mechanism to engage and provide positive pathways for young people whilst being embedded in the local community.

Types of activities offered include, a range of sports coaching programmes such as roller-skating, football, basketball and karate. They also deliver nationally recognised training qualifications to young people, including a one-week Level 1 coaching course. Additionally, they run holiday programmes, which not only aim to teach young people skills in sports but also to educate them on topics such as food and nutrition, anti-drugs and knife crime.

Young people reached

The charity targets young people in East London who live in some of the most deprived areas of London, where there are high numbers of families on low incomes or universal credit, and where there is lower school attainment. They seek to deliver estate-based sessions in areas of Hackney, Islington and Haringey boroughs where there are high levels of reported anti-social behaviour among young people, where there is high levels of crime and fear of crime among young people and the local community, and where young people may be susceptible to being recruited to gangs. Often these young people *"feel left behind and need something to focus on"* (Quote, Youth worker).

"Hackney still has some of the most deprived wards in London, there's a lack of housing and a big problem with youth violence, but the council has no budget to tackle the problems...and a lot of local youth clubs have now closed, so what do young people do? They have no-where to go… So having ATSP working with local Housing Associations and gaining access to estates, is a really important way to be able to offer these young people something positive, and offering them opportunities. Access to Sports is at the heart of local community. They run sports days bringing the local community together, and in this way parents trust had been built up…Young people in Hackney deserve these opportunities."

Local Councillor, Hackney

In recent years, ATSP have provided an important role in tackling the growing number of families using foodbanks and who face holiday poverty.

"There's a growing concern in the borough of the increase in number of families using foodbanks...and also families have been affected by the introduction of universal credit. So ATSP being able to run a summer programme for children, supplying food for kids during the holidays, is so vital."

Local Councillor, Hackney

There have also been concerted efforts in recent years to develop links with some more marginalised groups of young people, by working with groups supporting the Somali community and Orthodox Jewish community, and recruiting and training sports coaches from these communities to work directly with them.

The impact on young people's lives

The Access to Sports Project staff team reported a number of different ways their work and activities help young people to develop life skills, alongside promoting young people's physical skills and fitness levels. These include:

- Teamwork
- Coping strategies and resilience
- Expectation management
- Communication skills
- Creativity
- Dealing with conflict
- Time management
- Problem solving
- Taking initiative
- Goal setting
- Improved physical fitness
- Improved mental health – (from physical activity and development of personal and social skills)
- Opportunities for vocational training in sports coaching or refereeing.

The Access to Sports Project emphasise that each and every young person they engage with will progress in different ways for one or more of these outcomes, depending on their age and starting point.

For some of the older young people they work with, who have engaged with the organisation for a number of years, they described a very positive experience of their engagement with The Access to Sports Project (Figure 1) on their education and choices to attend further education. Two young people described how they had been offered a scholarship pathway into sports training and coaching opportunities, which they can take forward to develop careers in sports, should they wish. Both youths believed that without being able to develop as a young person through attending The Access to Sports Project over many years, they would have not otherwise be able to access this training. Having endorsement from the organisation to attend this training, was for one young person really important in demonstrating the faith and value his coaches had in him which made him very proud.

Staff commented that whilst this programme can help some young people consider their future aspirations and build towards their longer term goals, for many these opportunities can build confidence and help the development of leadership skills which they can then share when return to their activities at Access to Sports Project.

The Access to Sports Project also report that their work helps to promote social cohesion within the local areas, as they specifically try to breakdown the stigma faced by many young people mixing with other young people who live on other estates or in neighbouring areas through encouraging young people to build relationships with other groups of young people they meet at the different sporting activities provided. By meeting and training with young people from different boroughs and schools, young people feel they have been given a chance to socialise and develop new friendships.

"The bonds that we've made here, I don't think they'll ever be broken, we'll always have a connection here….It brings the community together. A lot of our friends and teammates are from different parts of London…so if it wasn't for (ATSP) basketball we wouldn't have me….You're able to build strong bonds with each other… it's like a bigger network"

<div align="right">**Young person**</div>

The Access to Sports Project additionally provides a service that can fill some of the gaps left locally from loss of youth provision, and often find themselves delivering early interventions in places where other services may be absent. Their sessions offer young people a space to talk about things if they need it, give them a reason to get outside, and in some cases may be the only reason they feel comfortable leaving their estates. For one young person, attending sessions provided them with a distraction from their worries and responsibilities (at home), a chance to focus on themselves and hope and determination for the future:

"Sometimes basketball just lets me forget about all the worries and just go through the motion. It just makes you forget about anything outside, so you just focus on yourself…Looking at the bigger picture (goal of become a professional sports coach) sometimes helps you get past what you're going through in that moment."

<div align="right">**Young person**</div>

The importance of developing and maintaining relationships between staff and young people was identified by both staff and young people. For many, their sports coaches represented important role models for them and an adult they trusted and can open to. For example, one young person stated,

"If you just saw a coach that's on a short contract for a minimum time you don't really build a connection, and you just see them as a coach, and they see you just as a participant, as a child… you don't get as much, whereas if you get to know who your teacher is, who's teaching you, then you get to learn more of their ways (reference to coaches as important role models)."

'It gets you ready for life'…Our coach always tells us that things you do on the basketball court may reflect things you do in the workplace, It's also that thing of commitment and discipline… you're not always going to enjoy work are you, but that's the commitment you've made so you've got to stick to it… That's what you learn here, to keep on going".

<div align="right">**Young person**</div>

A senior staff member also reflected how important their female coaches had been in engaging with girls and young people they meet on estates or in school settings, and with the increasing awareness and diversity of young women, from all different ethnic and social backgrounds doing well in sports, girls and young women had more role models.

However, it was also recognised that young women would be more likely to attend activities that were specifically targeted at them and that these activities would have to be held at certain times of the day or in building based provision for safety reasons. The organisation felt they had learnt lots through from trying different approaches to engaging girls.

What aspects of the programme contributed to making this difference?

Being accessible: The free open access nature of provision offered by Access to Sports is important, as it attracts young people whose parents might otherwise not be able to afford similar sessions elsewhere. Some young people in these areas are often living with expensive sports facilities on their doorstep, but cannot always afford them, and so Access to Sports is helping to change their perception that these activities are "not for them". Sports often provide an easy entry-point for getting young people involved in sessions, especially when combined with other incentives such as social activities and training opportunities.

'Some families are financially unstable, so the fact that ATSP provides sports that are free of charge is something that you wouldn't really find any other place… it puts less burden on families and allows parents to send their kids out and not worry about paying an expensive fee."

<div align="right">

Young person

</div>

The wide range of activities available also makes sure the offer is as attractive as possible to the largest number of young people in the area. Similarly, the fact that Access to Sports operate in a variety of locations, venues and offer some detached work (e.g estate based provision) increases accessibility, particularly when young people (or their parents) may not feel safe going into certain areas. This flexibility allows them to go to where young people are most comfortable and helps to establish a sense of community near their homes.

Building ongoing trusted relationships: The Access to Sport Project ensures that it's activities are delivered by regular coaches who are able to build a rapport with young people over time, and who are often from the local area themselves, making it easier for young people to relate to them and build a strong connection. Young people reported that their coaches were understanding and easy to talk to about personal issues, and that they pushed them to do their best and made them feel appreciated.

"They push you to do your best'; 'They get to know you, and they really want to know who you actually are as a person… they don't just see you as a bunch (of kids), they take time to get to know you as individuals".

<div align="right">

Young person

</div>

The organisation also ensures activities are youth-led and that there is an open and welcoming atmosphere for all. Sessions are targeted to the needs of both individuals and the group as a whole, using sports as a tool to address underlying worries, issues or concerns that young people may be experiencing.

"Young people are respected and afforded a voice in what they do...In this way they (young people) have respect for them (staff) … and develop a connection with the community."

<div align="right">

Board of Trustee member

</div>

"It's not about coming in with a new unique solution... but that we're there consistently….We're not parachuting into an area or offering a 6 week programme that will magically solve problems... I think the young people recognise that we're there for the long term, to support them."

<div align="right">

Youth Worker

</div>

Professional and personal development for staff: Organisationally, Access to Sports promotes professional learning and development among the staff team and there is a strong team working approach across the sport coaching staff to learn from each other and co-ordinate and link up various programmes, and to problem-solve.

Collaboration and partnerships: The Access to Sports Project depend on working closely with other local partner organisations, for example by offering taster sessions in schools, working closely with Tenants

Associations on various housing estates, and working closely with the local police force and local youth service providers. This not only enables effective signposting and referrals of young people to/from these partner organisations, but also offers them the ability to access some of the limited green and open spaces and local venues they can use to offer sports activities for young people.

Figure 1: Words young people used to describe their experience of attending

OneWalsall: Walsall Youth in Unity

Organisational aims and mission

Walsall Youth in Unity is a collaboration between three Walsall-based youth service providers who provide open access youth activities for young people aged 10-18. The collaboration is facilitated by One Walsall, a charity which supports the development of the community groups and the voluntary sector in Walsall providing information and support, networking opportunities, funding advice and access to volunteering.

The three youth providers that make up Walsall Youth in Unity project include: Bloxwich Community Partnership (BCP) Youth Connect and Kids in Communication (KIC).

Summary of YIF Funded Project

One Walsall - Walsall Youth in Unity partnership received a grant of £463,237 through the Youth Investment Fund for the continuation and expansion of open access Youth activities in Walsall Borough. It is a unique consortium of three small youth providers – two of whom have been embedded in their local communities for over a decade and one which is relatively new to the Walsall area together with the local VCS infrastructure provider One Walsall.

One of the unique features of the partnership is that One Walsall provides the infrastructure support and strategic overview of monitoring, evaluation and reporting, which has been valuable for these smaller organisations who have limited infrastructure support (i.e. admin, system support). All three organisations deliver support to youths in communities that are fairly insular, and where, as a result of ingrained poverty in their family and community,

many young people have a lack of positive adult role models and have a perceived lack of control over their future. The organisations have survived despite widespread cuts to youth provision in Walsall over the previous decade, and all aim to increase young people's aspirations and broaden their opportunities.

Key activities for young people

Youth Connect is the delivery arm of British Muslim Youth Group (BMYG) CIC and works with young people and their families to offer positive activities and support in various areas. Youth Connect aims to empower young people in our communities to reach their fullest potential through providing a wide range of enrichment programs to help shape their identity. They provide a range of building-based activities in different parts of south and East Walsall, that are delivered all year round and include a range of different activities. In addition, Youth Connect deliver regular detached and outreach sessions among the local south Asian communities, offering weekly sports sessions (such as Football, Cricket, Basketball, Badminton) in local parks and recreation centres. Youth connect work with key local sports organisations such as Staffordshire County Cricket and Walsall Football Club in the development of their sports programmes. Youth Connect also offer mentoring programmes for young people and seek to run residential and outdoor pursuit trips for young people.

Bloxwich Community Partnership (BCP) offers both dedicated building-based youth provision to young people from Bloxwich, Blakenall and surrounding areas, and street based (detached) youth provision aimed at anti-social behaviour hot spots and places where young people gather. The centre also offers an alternative education provision for young people excluded from school, providing them with a foundational skills training programme, and a highly successful summer programme for young people. A range of fun activities are offered, including cooking, table tennis, pool, games consoles, arts & crafts, which are the tools used by skilled youth workers to be able to reflect the issues that young people are currently facing and look to inform and support them to make better life choices in the future.

Kids In Communication (KIC) are a quality endorsed centre with Open College Network providing accredited awards for digital and creative skills learnt by young people. Accredited awards can be achieved in photography, radio & podcasting, community reporting, community impact, online safet, digital citizenship and more. These accredited awards provide alternative learning opportunities for young people who may not necessarily be able to achieve academically and can support their applications for jobs and careers in the future. Accredited awards achieved by young people are celebrated in the presence of parents, local community and local councillors at our annual awards nights.

Young people reached

BCP is based in an area of high social deprivation and therefore the young people reached do not have much resource or support at home and they vary in age and profile. Those attending building-based provision tend to be those nearing end of primary school (10-12 years) and those in their early secondary school years (11-15 years). Through YIF funding BCP have been able to deliver more detached/ outreach sessions in places where (mostly older) young people convene in the local area (e.g. parks or local shopping arcade)– who would not otherwise engage with provision. The centre is a hub for the whole community and is known by all the community for its work with young people

KIC deliver their Kicsters project. This is a digital pop-up youth club operating from Darlaston and Mossley for young people aged 10 - 18 living in Walsall. Their mission is to deliver local community programmes that meet the needs of young people and empower them to learn new skills, gain knowledge lead positive social action

projects and improve emotional and social capabilities. Kicsters also provide a virtual youth club at www.kicsters.co.uk increasing the reach of the project across Walsall. Their services and projects have been co-designed by young people for young people.

Youth Connect predominately reach young people from the south Asian Muslim community based in south and east Walsall, which represent some of the poorest areas of Walsall. A lot of work is focussed on building trust with families and the local community to allow young people to attend services, particularly among girls who can be overprotected by their families.

"Here it's a large Muslim community. Strong South Asian, new Eastern European community, but that's it... In our [area] young people are different. They have less opportunities available to them… Here, there may be more single income families, low income families, or families on benefits, and complex relationship issues at home. There's a lot more poverty, a lot more around drugs. Around here, it's known to be a red light district area as well, and you've got drugs, more youth violence in this area…Some young people are scared to go out, or their parents are scared…in this community sometimes it's hard for girls to be given the freedom to go out, some parents can be very protective. We do have female workers as well and try to engage parents with the workers and develop that level of trust."

The impact on young people's lives

Staff from the three partner organisations reported a number of different ways their work and activities help young people to develop personal, social, emotional and general life skills, alongside promoting young people's physical health. These include:

- Self-confidence
- Friendships
- Communication and social skills
- Teamwork
- Coping strategies and resilience
- Self -awareness and decision making
- Digital skills – radio, web development, photography, graphic design
- Creativity skills – art, drama, music
- Dealing with conflict, and managing emotions
- Time management
- Problem solving
- Taking initiative
- Goal setting and increased aspirations
- Increased engagement in physical activity
- Improved mental health

Some additional specific outcomes were also identified by these projects:

Accreditation: Kics invest in accrediting young people for their digital and creative skills development. This accreditation scheme offers some young people an alternative to traditional learning and qualification routes and is an important way to celebrate their success with parents, local community and local councillors at awards celebrations.

Leadership skills: Kics are committed to developing a Young Leaders Programme which they have pilot tested during the period of YIF. This offers young people significant opportunities to development skills for employment (e.g. team working, communication skills) whilst also enabling them to engage with a range of different external stakeholders.

Mentoring skills: Kics and Youth Connect offer opportunities for older young people to mentor and support other young people with particular skill development or with developing social and communication skills.

Promoting community cohesion: BCP have been working across their youth and family-based provision to engage with the travelling community and with more recent eastern European communities who have settled in the area. Over the past 12 months they have run a series of cultural celebration events that young people have organised which has helped to increase young people's awareness and understanding of different religions and communities. Through increased engagement of young members of the travelling community with the centre, there are now better relationships between local youths. All three Youth in Unity organisations described the huge benefits that the partnership has had on bringing young people from different communities together to learn more about each other, helping to breakdown stereotypes and misconceptions.

"I think the partnership work and bringing young people from a predominately Asian Muslim area to young people from a predominately white working-class area, has a profound impact on those young people. At first there was a little apprehension, but … they really enjoyed it… We did some group discussions, and some activities, and went to the bowling alley, and they were relaxed and comfortable with each other. It was still really powerful, and the parents fed back (positively). They were was no bad words between the groups, they set aside their differences and looked at what they had in common… like the housing and the shops in the area or like the video games."

Youth work manager, Youth Connect

Detached/outreach work has helped to reduce youth anti-social behaviour - Staff at BCP feel that the levels of youth anti-social behaviour have reduced in local parks due to their increased provision of detached/ outreach in their local area, and enabled the organisation to work effectively to support groups of young people on an ongoing basis, who would otherwise not engage in youth provision.

What aspects of the programme contributed to making this difference?

Partnership has facilitated collective service improvement and opened new opportunities: The three partner organisations all felt they had benefited from the partnership with One Walsall through sharing of ideas, staff visits and opportunities for staff training, and collaborating with one-another. All felt it had also opened up new opportunities for ways of working and for future funding.

"YIF has allowed them (the three Youth in Unity Partnership) to test approaches, reflect more, develop their approaches, better understand what works and why, be more directed in developing and offering their service with the added capacity and expertise they have, being able to resource programmes more easily. Partnerships formed locally have been good, and we're looking at sustainability of continuing these projects (e.g. working with housing partners, other support groups etc)."

Manager, OneWalsall

"I think it's important for them (One Walsall) to co-ordinate what's going on (activities, evaluation & reporting) and bring us to together at times and help promote us. I think the balance is right. It's helped open doors, we're now putting in a bid for other projects, around youth ambassadors, youth leaders – which is a borough wide opportunity. Working as a partnership already puts us in a better position, we can apply for some of the larger

projects (grants) by working together. Together we cover the whole borough… It's been a really good positive experience."

Other Informal and formal partnerships and relationships with schools, community groups, families, the police, other children and young people's services, social services, charities, housing associations, and local authorities were the features of all three organisations. BCP offers a family-centred approach to some of their service model delivery, providing a range of interventions for families (i.e. mother and toddler sessions; mums coffee mornings). This approach affords the organisations a deeper insight into the young people's backgrounds, enabling youth workers to work closely with parents and families to address issues that their child might be experiencing. Kics also found that by starting provision in a new area a lot of effort in their first year was focussed on building trusted relationships with families – to encourage them to promote the service to their children.

Trusted sustained relationships with staff were facilitated by:

- **Representation of community among youth work staff**

  This was identified as being core to the identity, values and culture of each of the three Walsall youth providers. For Youth Connect in particular, having staff who were from the Muslim community and/or were familiar with south Walsall areas was important as staff then had cultural awareness of the needs and challenges faced by young people from predominately Muslim south Asian backgrounds, which enabled them to build trust with young people their parents and the youth provider. Similarly, BCP have recruited staff and volunteers from the local eastern European and traveller community, in order to support engagement with young people from these communities.

- **Diverse professional experience and backgrounds of staff**

  Youth Connect feel that core to its success in tackling some of the more challenging problems faced by their young people, such as radicalisation, drug usage and gang related activity, is having a team of sessional youth workers who have professional backgrounds in social work, education or youth offending/ probation services.

- **Safe and secure environment**

  All three partner organisations described the importance of having clear boundaries and rules of conduct for young people engaging in their provision, as many young people live chaotic lives and have had difficult educational journeys at school. Through role modelling respectful and inclusive behaviours and attitudes, youth workers are able to positively influence young people's relationships and social interaction between young people, their peers and staff/volunteers at the youth organisation.

Youth-led/Youth voice: The Youth in Unity partners emphasised their commitment to promoting and encouraging more opportunities for young people they work with to have their voices heard.

"We plan sessions in advance, but always allow some flexibility so that can respond quickly to current issues and areas where we identify they are less well informed about."

"(We) try to move with young people, give them a voice to say what they need help with"

Inclusive practices and responsive to needs – was a feature for all three partner organisations, in respect of working with young people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and being inclusive of young people with learning and physical impairments.

"(some) young people feel badged with a label…it's about this is what they say they have, but how can we treat them like the rest of the group. That's all they want, they want to be treated like everyone else. So if you've got autism or ADHD or something else, we just cater for their needs…That's no different to asking them about their concerns or issues, you're still reacting to what they need, it's just on a medical term. We are still able to integrate them with the rest of the group, and basically treat them the same."

<div align="right">

Manager, Kics

</div>

"We have regular discussions about relevant issues to young people. For example, knife crime - as there were incidents in *** area a couple of months ago which a couple of our YP got involved in, which caused feelings of being unsafe in the community and parents reluctant to let them walk to get to places. So we ran a four week project with parents and kids to give reassurance about safety and importance of safe places. We invited police to talk about what they're doing to keep people safe, and we ran a consultation with young people and parents about what makes them feel unsafe…Other topics we've had discussions on… like bullying, cyber safety, mental health."

<div align="right">

Manager, Kics

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Being accessible: The free open access nature of provision offered by all three Youth in Unity partner was regarded as fundamental to their organisations, as the communities they are serving have limited financial resources and have been severely affected by cuts in local authority spending.

"Youth service in Walsall cut 95% of staff and resources to young people. When we're talking about youth violence, we don't have that youth service no more, we're lucky to have local community service to offer here. If we're going to try and resolve these issues (knife crime, youth violence, drugs), we've got to develop a whole service…Our approach to developing the Youth In Unity (One Walsall) partnership across the borough, that will probably the model of youth service for the future… In next 5 years I hope we're still here, delivering more and I hope the partnership is stronger and the youth have a bigger voice."

<div align="right">

Manager, OneWalsall

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Words used by young people to describe attending Bloxwich Community Partnership

Young People's Advisory Project (YPAS)

Organisational aims and mission

Established in 1966, YPAS's mission is to support children, young people and families across the city of Liverpool to address their mental health and emotional well-being difficulties in a non-stigmatized environment. YPAS aims to:

- Deliver a wide range of support and therapeutic interventions for children aged 5 -15 years, young people aged 16-25 years and families in Liverpool.
- Reach children, young people and families as early as possible
- Consistently monitor progress and change
- Work jointly with professionals across health, education and social care
- Include children, young people and families in the design and delivery of services
- Ensure services and pathways are accessible

Services are delivered across the city through working in a number of different settings - primary schools, secondary schools and across three community hubs. Each hub tailors their offer to the needs of children, young people and families in the local area. YIF funding enabled YPAS to invest in both the north and south hubs.

Summary of YIF Funded Activities

YPAS received a grant of £461,450 through the Youth Investment Fund, for the continuation and expansion of its existing open access youth work. This has included extending provision of:

- **Thrive** sessions to five sessions per week across the central, north and south hubs. THRIVE is aimed at young people aged 13 -15 years. THRIVE offers informal education and structured youth work provision. It provides the opportunity to meet peers, share experiences, participate in decision making, and peer education activities, life skill sessions and positive role models.
- **SMARTYs (after school club) provision** aimed at children aged 10-12 years was extended to north and south hubs, each providing two sessions a week. SMARTY'S offers a range of activities including

creative play, arts, drama, dance and singing etc, and provides a secure, happy and stimulating environment enabling children to learn and develop attitudes, skills and abilities.

- **SKY provision** increased to running daily at YPAS's central hub and weekly in the north and south hub. SKY offers young people aged 16 -18 years, informal education, issues based group work, life skills, problem solving, advocacy, employability skills, positive role models, structured youth work provision and new experiences.

- **5WOW project** was extended to Saturday sessions delivered on a two monthly basis. 5WOW provision seeks to increase community cohesion by providing young people new experiences outside of their local community. It was focussed around 5 ways of wellbeing: "Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Give".

Young people reached

Over the course of the three year YIF funding, YPAS reached 2,567 young people YPAS have raised awareness of their work across the city and have developed referral pathways with local authority youth services, CAMHS service, hostels and schools. Working with local families and the local community in north and south hubs has been key to engaging young people. Young people tend to engage regularly with YPAS services and seek therapeutic based support when they feel they need it. What's important is the voluntary nature of young people engaging when they want to.

YPAS's north and south hubs are situated in areas of high deprivation, where there are high levels of youth unemployment, school exclusions and anti-social behaviour. Providing a safe place for young people to engage in positive activities and receive nurturing support is critically important for these local communities. What is unique about YPAS is that their open access youth provision is situated within a mental health support setting, and this enables them to identify and tackle issues earlier but also support young people with mental health needs for longer periods of time. In addition, it enables them to reach some of the most marginalised groups of young people – such as LGBTQ+ young people.

The impact on young people's lives

Through regular engagement with YPAS activities, staff report that they observe improvements in the short and intermediate term in young people's **self-confidence and self-esteem, well-being and mental health, and the development of social skills** through spending time with peers and youth workers in a supportive and structured environment. Key to being able to achieve this is by helping young people emotionally regulate and navigate decision making. YPAS emphasise that progress across all of these outcomes look different for each and every young person.

These findings were also supported by young people's accounts of attending YPAS. Young people described the incremental steps in developing a more positive sense of self over time - through the love and support they receive from YPAS. For some, YPAS has helped them with key transition moments in their life – such as from school to college/ work, helping them to 'see' that opportunities existed and broadening their horizons.

YPAS strongly believe that the open access nature of YIF groups enables early intervention, supporting young people to build relationship over time when they may not have previously been identified as needing one-on-one support. Group work can be invaluable for building life skills, peer support and boundaries. However, for young people who first engaged with YPAS through 1:1 counselling, group work can provide an extension to therapy and access to ongoing support. A key feature of YPAS provision is that it is not time-bound to age 18 like many other

youth services. Instead young people can attend up to the age of 25 years, which means they can carry on supporting young people with difficult transitions and learning how to be an adult.

A number of the youth workers described the impact that their provision has had on young people's lives when they have consistent, sustained relationships over time or meet young people later on in their adult lives. During these encounters, individuals recall the fun times and transformative experience youth provision can have.

"I think it's good to take into perspective, like how far you've actually come…Like I've not changed much in the past two weeks, two months…but if you met me 5 or 7 years, if you met me like when I met (youth worker), then you'd see how far I've come, and so many things I've overcome."

<div align="right">**Young person**</div>

Benefits to families: YPAS offers a family-centred approach to delivering services in its north and south hubs, providing a range of interventions for families (i.e. mother and toddler sessions; parent advice sessions). This approach affords the organisation a deeper insight into the young people's backgrounds, enabling youth workers to work closely with parents and families to address issues that their child might be experiencing.

In the north hub, YPAS had recently began a partnership led provision between a volunteer community youth group called 'Smarty's' that had previously used the premises which had been given to YPAS as an asset transfer from Liverpool City Council. YIF funding enabled the Smarty's provision to be extended in the local community and partnership processes were formalised between the community group and YPAS with a focus on building trusted relationships with families and local community. This process has enabled YPAS to develop the provision collectively with volunteers and local families, helping YPAS to become embedded locally.

"The way they speak to the parents and deal with things [is good]… if you need to say something, like you're not happy with something, you don't feel intimidated like you can't go and say something… and when you do, it just gets sorted out, dealt with, forgotten about… if my kids were coming here and I couldn't speak to them, I wouldn't trust them."

<div align="right">**Parent**</div>

Benefits to wider community: Through its extended north hub provision, YPAS has had a positive impact on youth anti-social behaviour through working closely with the local Merseyside Police force.

"We've got a problem with ASB in the area (north Liverpool)… Going into places like YPAS gives us an opportunity to engage with them in a more positive manner."

What aspects of the programme contributed to making this difference?

Accessible safe place: Across all three hubs, YPAS had created an inviting, comfortable and accessible environment that is non-clinical and non-intimidating, and where young people want to come. By involving young people in designing and decorating the interior, young people feel YPAS is a safe place for them.

Having clear boundaries and rules of conduct for young people engaging in provision was considered to be very important for YPAS, as many young people they serve have had first-hand experience of mental health needs, and may have live chaotic lives and difficult educational journeys. Through role modelling respectful and inclusive behaviours and attitudes, youth workers are able to positively influence young people's relationships and social

interaction between young people, their peers and staff/volunteers at the youth organisation. One young person described how,

Building trusted relationships: The core features that unify all of YPAS's work includes building relationships, community and a sense of family. They believe their role is not to tell young people what to do, but to provide the information, guidance and care to enable them to develop life skills, manage their emotional responses, and make informed decisions.

Holistic and person-centred approach: Both youth workers and young people described how YPAS take both a person-centred and a holistic approach to supporting young people with their mental health and social support needs. Having a holistic approach means that do not have to refer young people to many different places to get the support they need, which avoids young people from having to repeatedly ask for help and support from many different agencies – which itself can be anxiety provoking.

Diverse professional experience and multi-disciplinary staff team: YPAS has a multi-disciplinary model to delivering open access youth provision, which they feel enriches the quality of their services. Having different perspectives, expertise and experience, also means that staff learn a lot from each other, which is also facilitated through strong teamwork. This differs to a large extension to other local authority and community based open access youth provision.

Professional and personal development for staff: YPAS pride themselves in providing a nurturing, supportive and learning environment for staff, student placements and volunteers; all of whom are equally respected and valued. Managers operate an "open door policy" and are committed to investing in staff because "*happy staff equals happy young people.*" One of the mangers described how:

"We're like a family… the voice of staff and young people are equally important… everyone looks after each other and we work together like a family."

Encompass values of respect and inclusivity in working with young people: Ensuring young people feel valued and respected, cared for and accepted were key attributes that staff felt YPAS tried to embody in how they communicate and support young people. Young people described how they could be themselves in a non-judgemental environment.

'It feels like a place where I can actually truly be myself… I feel like I'm censored a lot of the time… here it's more accepting and you can actually be yourself without getting judged all the time, and I don't think there's really very many places like it'

Youth-led/Youth voice: Children and young people play a vital role in shaping services at YPAS, and are a major driving force in influencing commissioning. Young people can have their say about any aspect of service and are given opportunities to be involved in the recruitment process for new staff; develop new resources; fundraise for events; and be representatives/ ambassadors for YPAS. Staff at YPAS are committed to youth voice and seek to provide timely feedback to young people involved on what the process will be in making decisions and implementing change through regular feedback and updates.

Partnership working and collaboration: YPAS staff emphasised the importance of establishing a local presence through informal as well as formal collaborations and partnership with local stakeholders (such as school, local police force, local authority youth services etc). This is both beneficial in developing trusted relationships with families and local communities, but also having effective referral pathways to support young people.

Words used by young people to describe attending the SKY project at YPAS

Appendix 4: Creative methods used to facilitate discussion in youth workshops

The river of life is a visual narrative method that helps people to reflect and tell stories of their life journeys (past, present and future). It helps people to identify and explain factors that take their life (river) off course or time-points when they were challenged, but also factors/events that supported them to get back on course or take a new course on their life journey.

In this exercise, one of the researchers presented their 'river of life' example to the young people to help explain the exercise and to role model the sharing of their life journey for the young people to replicate at the end of the exercise. Young people were asked to map their feelings at different points of their 'river of life' and to pinpoint where on the river they had first engaged with their open access youth provider and how the organisation had helped shape their life journey. For more information see Appendix 5: Data collection tools.

Word association is a method in which participants are presented with a word and asked to quickly respond with the first word that comes to mind. It can be used to give feedback on the attributes of the subject under investigation and can be a helpful way to capture immediate reactions and attitudes; personal beliefs or connections, and understand the language used to describe the subject.

Sentence/Story completion is similar to word association but differs in that participants are presented with a sentence or story that contains a blank and then asked to add some immediate thoughts and description by completing the sentence. It too also asks participants to respond quickly to encourage creative thinking and can uncover thoughts and attitudes associated with the subject under investigation.

Appendix 5: Data collection Tools

Topic Guide for Young Person Workshop

Introduction

Introduce purpose of the research, my name, my role as researcher.

Go through the information sheet and ask to sign consent forms (key items: are they happy for session to be recorded, we can stop at any time, there are no right or wrong answers, information shared will be confidential, any quotes used will be anonymous).

YP Introduce themselves: first name and how long you've been coming to Youth Club and what your favourite things is about coming here?

Warm up would you rather game:

- Would you rather live at the North Pole or live in the desert?
- Would you rather never brush your teeth again or never brush your hair again?
- Would you rather count ever grain of sand on a beach or count every drop of water in a lake?
- Would you rather fail or never try?
- Would you rather be a movie star or a singer?
- Would you rather be at home watching TV/ on playstation or attend [Youth Club]?
- Why?

[Researcher(s) to decide appropriateness and feasibility of undertaking one or more of the following practical exercises]

Exercise 1: Create a picture of 'My Time at Youth Club' (individually or pairs depending on age)

Step 1: Draw picture / write down names of activities that you have done here

Step 2: Draw picture of some young people doing this activity and show me if they were enjoying it (happy faces) or disliked it/ found it challenging/ boring (sad faces)

Step 3: Draw some young people who you know who don't come here and what they might be doing after school/college – and give them expressions (happy, sad, neither)

Step 4: Draw some youth workers/ staff at youth club and give them expressions

Step 5: Now draw a representation of this youth club as a place, that holds all these activities, young people and youth workers together? (could be building, smiley face, heart)

Questions to ask:

- What motivates/ encourages you to come here (e.g. parents, friends, activities)? What's different compared to the young people who don't come?
- Ask about the young people's expressions
- What do they enjoy about coming to youth club?
- What do they get out of it?
- What do they learn?
- (NOTE: Also explore any examples given of young people who were bored/ find difficult etc)

Exercise 2: Words use to describe youth club

Instructions for young people: Using post-its, write down as many words that describe your youth club in 60 seconds

Researcher notes: Can do different rounds for different activities; Ask to feedback what they have written and why.

Exercise 3: River of Life

Researcher notes: Use if young people have been attending for 6 months and if 14 or over. Purpose is to build self awareness – may not be necessary if young people are very self-aware already.

Instructions for young people:

- In this activity the river represents your personal journey. It visually shows how you are growing over time, and also shows how we are shaped by other people and wider world. So, in your river, there will be twists and turns in the river when either good things happen or when bad things happen which impact on how you feel and how you're able to flow smoothly. When you've gone through challenging times or bad things have happened your river shrinks a bit and goes off a little, but then over time or with some inputs the river has started to grow again.
- Ask to draw your river of life that is made up of two halves. First half of the river being before you started coming to youth club and the second half of the river should reflect the time you've been coming up to today. (5 mins for each half)
- Show pre-prepared **example** of river and then add in emoji post-its to show what you were feeing (sad, angry, happy, calm). And what external influences were affecting you (e.g. peer pressure, school issues, family issues) as well as what the 'inputs were' that helped
- Thinking back to what we did in Exercise 1 or 2 (My Time at Youth Club) show how your river winds and bends and shrinks or grows bigger at different times.

Tips:

- Emphasise ups and downs in different stages of life
- Add in emoji's in the second part of your river to show how you felt

Researcher prompt questions:

- How did you feel at this time? Why?

- Who helped?

- What got the river moving again? (What were the inputs – draw these in)

- Who did you interact with?

- What did that mean/what did you gain?

- What would you tell other young people who don't come here?

Drawing out part 2 of the river:

- Has coming to youth club made your river grow wider and more steady?

- Add in words on your river about how youth club has helped you grow and develop as a person? What have you gained? (e.g confidence, friends etc.)

Closing session - Exercise 4: Word Association Game

- Example: Jumper > athlete > Javelin > Olympics > London 2012

- Words to use: teenager, youth worker

Topic Guide for Youth Workers/ Youth Club Manager

1. Introduction

Introduce purpose of the research, my name, my role as researcher.

Go through the information sheet and ask to sign consent forms (key items: are they happy for session to be recorded, we can stop at any time, there are no right or wrong answers, information shared will be confidential, any quotes used will be anonymous).

2. Background

- How long have you been youth workers/ youth club manager, and how long have you been working at this youth organisation?

- What do you like about the youth organisation compared with other places you've worked?

- Tell me about the ethos and approach of the youth organisation? Do you feel this is unique to the youth organisation? Does this effect how you as staff work with and support young people?

- How do young people benefit? How do you as staff benefit?

- Are these values achievable or over-ambitious?

- What do you feel it could do better at?

3. Activities and delivery

- Tell me about the activities/services provided. Were they developed to respond to need/evidence?

- Where/how have young people been involved in shaping the activities you do (and how you do it)?

4. Engagement and attendance

- What generally do you find first gets young people to engage/attend?

- Why do you think YP come here rather than other local youth providers? (What motivates them?)

- What are they key things that influence young people's attendance and engagement with activities/services you offer? (e.g peers, parents, school, siblings etc.)

- What are the common paths young people take when they come to the youth organisation? (E.g. Does the youth club act as a funnel to direct young people to more structured provision or vice versa?)

- Do you specifically target disadvantaged youth or youth with specific needs/backgrounds? Are there any groups that you are not currently able to reach but would like to? Who/why?

- Why does being 'open access' matter for young people? Why do you feel this is important?

- What's changed or developed in terms of young people's interest and engagement with activities?

- From your experience, what are the common pre-conceptions that new young people attending the youth organisation's activities have of staff/youth workers and how do their attitudes change?

5. The 'How'

I'm going to read out the start of a statement about the youth organisation. I'd like you to spend 1 minute thinking about and write on post-it or piece of paper how you would end it….

"It's been said to me recently by some youth workers that 'It's more than just the activities we do with the kids, the football, the days out, the youth club, it's really about…'"

Identify features of the delivery that are most important (i.e. relationships):

- From your point of view, why is this important?

- How does this influence young people's engagement and participation?

- How does this influence emotional and behavioural responses (i.e. relationships with staff, peers)

- How does this influence their skill and learning development?

- Do you feel schools, parents understand this?

- Do you feel funders understand this? What are the challenges you face with funders?

How much time do you spend proportionally on each of the following? (in % of time)

- Preparing / planning / delivering sessions / post session follow-up on issues, situations and needs of some individual young people / monitoring, evaluating, reporting

- Do you feel this time split is about right?

How do the attitudes and behaviours of others influence how the youth organisation works and what it is able to deliver and achieve for young people?

- Parents, schools, police, local councillors, other youth providers, local community centres, leisure centres (where positive examples are given ask: why is this important/beneficial?)

6. Professional development

- How often do you de-brief, hold staff meetings, peer catch-ups? How valuable are these and why?

- What are the things you find most challenging/difficult as a youth worker supporting young people? Do you have the opportunity to share/learn from others?

7. Outcomes

- "That was a good week. I feel I made a difference". Can you reflect on this quote and tell me from your point of view and your experience what that would mean for you?

- Reflecting back on one of your sessions over the past (week/month) where a situation or need emerged with a young person or group of young people, what would success look for you?

- From you point of view, what are the key skills young people learn and develop here? (Probes: personal, social, emotional)

- If not covered earlier…in what ways are these skills taught and learnt?

- What do you feel you provide for young people that they may not get from home or school?

- What are the most common positive outcomes you observe among young people?

- What are the measurable changes you would expect to see over a 6-12-month period?

8. Wider context and networks

- What do you feel are the benefits of the youth organisation's work on the wider community?

- Are there any negative impacts on local community?

- How is your work shaped by community?

- Do you feel the Youth Organisation has a voice locally? Any barriers? What you would like to achieve?

- How much do you link with other youth organisations locally/nationally? (If you identify a gap, explore what the gap is and whether a solution is needed)

9. Learning from the YIF Evaluation

These findings will be shared in insight paper 6.

The YIF evaluation:

- What have you gained from it? What has been some of the most important learning so far?

- What evaluation were you doing before the YIF?

What challenges have you experienced taking part in the evaluation?

- Do you have any feedback on any of the data collection strands? (e.g. User feedback, Quality – PQA, Outcomes)

Topic Guide for External Stakeholders

Background:

- Describe Youth Investment Fund – 3 years funding for c90 open access youth provision in 5 different regions of England with high levels of social disadvantage.
- Explain purpose of the process evaluation case study approach and why we're interested in speaking to stakeholders who have relationship with the youth club

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Notes for researcher:

Before beginning – run through the consent information again (and either collect in consent forms or ask stakeholder to complete)

Informed consent – have they read and understood the information provided. Do they have any questions?

Voluntary nature of participation, can stop at any time (without giving a reason)

Audio recording of interview – at the end of the evaluation recordings will be destroyed.

Confidentiality, anonymity and to whom and how findings will be reported. The findings will be reported to funders and more widely

Length of interview – 30-45 mins

Any questions participant has at this stage about the research?

Would you be able to sent through the signed consent form today?

Tell me about your relationship with [organisation]

- How did you get involved/ hear about it?
- What is your involvement currently?
- What do you feel [organisation] provides for young people that they may not get from home or school?
- From your perspective, what are the main things that characterise [organisation's] ethos and approach?
- What are the most common positive outcomes that you observe from young people engaging with [organisation]?
- How do you feel it has benefited children in the local area?
- What are your observations about how [organisation] interacts with others? Other local services for young people; Other national services for young people; Schools; Parents?
- What works? Why is this important?

Local community

- Do you feel [organisation] has a voice locally? Why is that important/worrying?
- What do you feel are the benefits of the youth organisations' work for the wider local community?
- Are there any negative impacts of the youth organisation's work on local community?

- What do you perceive as the main barriers or challenges that [organisation] face? (Explore why barriers might exist and how they could be overcome)
- Is there anything you would like to see change about [organisation]? [Prompts: delivery, access, funding, partnerships]
- What you would like [organisation] to achieve in the future?
- To finish off, what would you like to tell the funders of [organisation] about the work they do for young people?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 6: Research validation exercise with new groups of young people

The following questions were asked by a youth work manager at one of the case study organisations during the summer 2020.

1.a. Do the words that young people used to describe our youth club and/or other youth club (as shown in this word cloud) feel like words that you would use to describe our youth organisation?

1.b. WHY?

2. When young people from all 7 case study organisations were asked about what they gained from attending, they said:

- Friends
- Increased confidence to talk to others
- Sense of belonging/ part of the youth provider community
- Feel voice is heard
- Increased confidence in skills & abilities
- Able to share problems and worries with youth worker if want to
- Increased respect and acceptance of difference, equality, and inclusivity of others
- Learn from mistakes
- More aware have choices about decisions they make
- Try new things
- Learn to not give up when faced with a challenge or disappointment
- Learn more about how actions affect others