

YMCA  
GEORGE WILLIAMS  
COLLEGE

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# OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2028



We are transforming: transforming **YMCA George Williams College** following the merger with the Centre for Youth Impact; transforming our support to the sector to be broader, deeper and more accessible; and transforming the quality and impact of the youth sector in its work with and for young people.

This is the first strategy for the new YMCA George Williams College, bringing together the expertise of the Centre for Youth Impact with the rich history of the College. We have a unique role and position: we are the only organisation to focus exclusively on evidence, quality, learning and improvement in the youth sector. We know that young people thrive through engagement with high quality youth work and informal learning. **We believe all young people should have access to high-quality spaces and opportunities to learn, grow and explore their relationships with the world around them.**

This vision drives our mission: to provide transformational support to all those working with and for young people through building reflective practitioners and quality relational practice, grounded in a shared evidence base.

*Working with our partners, practitioners and young people, we will:*

- transform our collective understanding of how and why youth work and informal learning changes lives;
- transform how we collectively measure and advocate for the change that youth work and informal learning creates;
- transform perceptions of the sector's commitment to evaluation, to influence both policy and investment; and
- transform support for the sector, so that everyone working with and for young people can actively improve the quality of their practice and therefore the outcomes for the young people and communities they engage.

We believe there are four powerful drivers of the transformational change we want to see, and which will create the conditions for lasting impact on practice.

**These drivers will shape our focus between now and 2028:**

- **partnerships:** the strong, trusting and purposeful relationships that enable us to progress system-level change for young people and the youth sector
- **agency:** the sector's capacity and capability to improve the design, delivery and evaluation of its practice, which in turn enables practitioners and young people to thrive
- **methods:** the validated, shared approaches to research and evaluation that evidence both the impact of practice and the power of practice-aligned tools
- **insight and evidence:** the robust, shared evidence base that demonstrates how quality provision improves outcomes for young people

Underpinning all of this, we will ensure that we, YMCA George Williams College, have the capacity and capability to deliver our mission sustainably, equitably and with quality, across our strategy.

- **In 2023, we will:** re-launch the College, consolidate our field building offer through our new impact and improvement curriculum and data portal, and work closely with Government and the sector to define a 'common core' in measuring the impact of youth provision.
- **In 2024-2026, we will:** re-establish the College's academic learning programme, exploring fit-for-purpose approaches to supporting and evaluating equitable and quality relational practice, whilst strengthening the youth sector workforce. We will also continue to expand the breadth, depth and accessibility of our support offer, and focus on developing leadership for impact within the YMCA Federation.
- **In 2026-28, we will:** re-invigorate the College's international partnerships, directly contributing to gaps in the evidence base for the impact of youth work in the UK and further afield.
- **By 2028, we will:**
  - build a shared and open evidence base that clearly shows how youth work and informal learning contributes to better outcomes for young people, across the life course;
  - create a common, practical framework that defines the observable markers of quality practice that lead to better, more equitable outcomes for young people;
  - enable everyone working with and for young people to access, at no cost, dedicated spaces for learning and reflection about their practice; and
  - provide dedicated and evidence-informed support for practice improvement, accessible to everyone working with and for young people.

# WHO WE ARE

We are YMCA George Williams College, an independent registered charity within the YMCA Federation. For over fifty years, George Williams College devoted itself to the training and education of youth workers from pre to post graduate levels. Latterly, the College broadened its offer to draw on the principles of relational practice to support and develop all practitioners working with and for children, young people and families.

The College's aim, which we are committed to maintaining, was to ensure that practitioners and volunteers working with children, young people and families develop the skills, knowledge and expertise to deliver outstanding relational and systemic practice, through a focus on wellbeing, learning, care and communities. The College was the only independent specialist youth work education provider in the UK, and retains its distinctiveness through its membership of and support for the YMCA as a national and international movement. The College has over **8,000** active alumni, working to serve children, young people and families all over the world. The significant cuts to the sector ultimately contributed to a decline in student numbers from 2010 onwards resulting in exploratory discussions around the potential for collaboration. The resultant merger in April 2022 brought together the Centre for Youth Impact with YMCA George Williams College, combining expertise in understanding and improving quality and impact with the training and development of practitioners.

This strategy sets out a new future for the College, bringing together its powerful legacy with the specialist role and profile of the Centre for Youth Impact. We also recognise that this strategy is nested within the largest and oldest youth movement in the world: the YMCA. Our strategy contributes to Vision 2030, the collective vision of the World YMCA movement to help build a just, sustainable, equitable and inclusive world. Our strategy also directly supports the Federation strategy for YMCA England and Wales, focused on four ambitious goals: leadership and influence, excellence and impact, growth and reach, and awareness and support.

The Centre for Youth Impact is now one of three centres of expertise housed within the College; each a shared space for leadership, research, support and training. Our three centres of expertise have different areas of focus: one supporting the design and delivery of high-quality informal and non-formal learning provision, one focused on evidencing the impact of such provision to enable it to be even more effective, and one advocating for a stronger role for youth voice in evaluation and continuous quality improvement.



**THE CENTRE  
FOR QUALITY  
PRACTICE**

Part of YMCA George Williams College

The Centre for Quality Practice works to develop thoughtful and skilled practitioners who can create high quality informal and non-formal learning environments. The Centre for Quality Practice will achieve this by providing resources and educational opportunities that have a focus on holistic development and relational support for young people.



**THE CENTRE  
FOR YOUTH  
IMPACT**

Part of YMCA George Williams College

The Centre for Youth Impact supports organisations to generate and act on evidence of the impact of their provision. The Centre for Youth Impact will do this through the design and testing of shared approaches to quality and impact that facilitate collective insight and learning, and by sharing open access resources and training.



**THE CENTRE  
FOR YOUTH  
VOICE**

Part of YMCA George Williams College

The Centre for Youth Voice advocates for and supports a stronger role for the voices of young people in evaluation and continuous quality improvement. The Centre for Youth Voice will do this by developing and sharing approaches to embedding the voices of young people, and directly supporting them to develop their research and evaluation skills.



**In time, on a journey of development, YMCA George Williams College may develop more centres of expertise as it continues to expand its support for the sector.**

# OUR CONTEXT

We are publishing this strategic plan at the start of 2023, as we continue to understand the 'new normal', post-pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic created a perfect storm for young people and the practitioners who support them, isolating many young people at a point in their lives when relationships and interaction matter most. It created and compounded disadvantage that will linger into adulthood and highlighted the stark inequities experienced by young people and communities.

We know that high-quality relational practice, with an equity lens at its centre, can have a powerful impact on young people and communities. We also know that the practitioners and organisations working with and for young people and communities need accessible, ongoing support to reflect on and strengthen their practice.

Through support from central government, we are developing our offer to the sector, and are working to ensure that this offer directly responds to the needs of practitioners and the organisations they represent. As we approached the merger between the College and the Centre for Youth Impact, we asked sector leaders, front line staff, partners and other infrastructure organisations what they would like from the new charity. We heard:

- Following more than a decade of austerity, youth work and informal/non-formal youth provision needs investment in order to be sustainable and accessible, and to meet growing need;
- Current investment is distributed unequally across the UK, with the most deprived communities often losing out;
- A widespread belief that the role and value of youth work and informal learning is not widely shared or understood;
- A recognition of the role of training, continuing professional development and communities of practice in supporting high quality, responsive provision for young people and communities;
- Strong understanding of the role of evaluation, impact measurement and data in both understanding and communicating value, alongside improving and growing provision; and
- A desire for more accessible, shared and consistent tools, resources and training to support evaluation and data use.

Our 2023 to 2028 strategy is grounded in those consultations and outlines how we will work with and through others to provide critical 'field building' support to help practitioners, organisations and practice to get even better.

# VALUES

In order to create change,  
**we are...**



## Considered

Open, thoughtful, curious, rigorous, credible - an independent voice with a wide field of vision.



## Challenging

Audacious and confident in our actionable insights, developing and innovating, and remaining open to different ideas.

These values complement and reflect the values of the YMCA England & Wales Federation: *we seek out, we welcome, we inspire, we speak out and we serve others.*



## Collaborative

Working with others to achieve change, developing collective insights and assets, sharing resources openly and seeking diverse relationships.



## Compassionate

Human, trusting and empathetic in our approach, starting where others are at and centring the practical, emotional and equitable foundations of our work

# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, 2023-2028



Over the next five years, we will focus our work in five strategy areas, aligning with the powerful drivers of the change we want to see. These drivers are interdependent, and together represent the transformational support we will offer, alongside creating the conditions for lasting impact on practice.

This framing of our strategy also highlights our unique role and position: we are the only organisation to focus uniquely on evidence, quality, learning and improvement in the informal and non-formal youth sector.

We believe that we play a critical role in the youth sector ecosystem.

The next five years will see us deepen and extend our support to young people, practitioners and the organisations they represent, alongside the funders, commissioners and policy makers who invest in and influence informal and non-formal youth and community provision.



## ► Building Partnerships

Establishing and nurturing strong, trusting and purposeful partnerships that enable us to progress system-level change for young people and the youth sector.

*We will:*

- Develop and deepen our existing partnerships, including with government, so that we can achieve even more together;
- Undertake an 'equity audit' of our partnerships and the reach of our support offer;
- Build intentional partnerships across the YMCA Federation and beyond, creating strong and supportive relationships between the College and the YMCA movement; and
- Broaden our reach with new mission-aligned local, national and international partners that enable us to bring our expertise into the agendas that matter for young people.

## ► Building Agency

Supporting a stronger sector with the capacity and capability to improve the design, delivery and evaluation of its practice, enabling practitioners and young people to thrive.

*We will:*

- Develop practical and accessible resources to enhance the quality of youth provision;
- Develop and offer high quality training and education accessible to everyone working with and for young people, particularly seeking to proactively address any gaps identified in our equity audit;
- Enable organisations in the youth sector to adopt and embed tried and tested methods and approaches to design, delivery, evaluation and learning;
- Convene networks and communities of practice to support sustainable peer to peer learning; and
- Expand our reach through the YMCA movement to build agency with key international partners.

## ► Building Methods

Embedding at scale validated, shared approaches to research and evaluation in youth provision, evidencing both the impact of practice and the strength of practice-aligned tools.

*We will:*

- Create spaces for consensus building, where we bring 'users' and 'generators' of data together;
- Develop and validate shared measures, methods and data standards that are practice-aligned, accessible and appropriate for the diversity of young people engaging in youth provision, and used at scale;
- Develop resources, tools and training to support all those working with and for young people to understand and use the tools;
- Develop and share powerful insights from the data collected; and
- Advance understanding of the role of youth voice within evaluation and continuous quality improvement.

## ► Building Insight and Evidence

Supporting the sector to co-produce a robust, shared evidence base that demonstrates how quality provision improves outcomes for young people, enabling shared insight, benchmarking and continuous quality improvement.

*We will:*

- Achieve a critical mass of youth organisations using our data portal;
- Use our measures equitably and in pursuit of equity in outcomes;
- Motivate youth organisations towards using common and standardised forms of data;
- Create a louder voice for the sector to share and advocate for collective impact;
- Communicate insights and evidence in a way that moves people, informing practice and investment into the youth sector;
- Partner with young people as researchers, evaluators and facilitators of learning; and
- Undertake research and conduct sophisticated generalisable analysis of the data on the portal that responds to the 'big questions' about youth work practice and contributes to socio-emotional learning debates.

## ► Building Ourselves

Ensuring we have the capacity and capability to deliver equitably, sustainably and with quality, across our strategy.

*We will:*

- Maintain a balanced income portfolio;
- Secure longer-term funding whilst remaining adaptable and responsive to emerging opportunities;
- Strengthen our relationships with core funders to stabilise our funding position;
- Build a Trustee Board that is fit for the needs of the future;
- Foster a skilled, confident and adaptable workforce, where we balance ambition with wellbeing;
- Develop and implement a robust EDI action plan that address the composition and understanding of the staff team, builds our workplace culture and ensures equity underpins all our practice; and
- Develop our research capacity to process our own data and undertake stand-alone research.



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