ASSESSMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES STUDY – SUMMARY

APRIL 2021

THANK YOU

TO ALL THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO TOOK THE TIME TO SHARE WITH US THEIR THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES.

YOUR ENERGY, CREATIVITY AND RESILIENCE IS WHAT DRIVES THE YOUTH OFFER AND WE ARE HONOURED WE ARE ABLE TO SUPPORT YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY TO ADULTHOOD.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this research, commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council in November 2020, is to better understand the needs and wants of young people in Oxfordshire, how well these are currently being met, and potential implications for the future.

In this report we define the youth offer as a mix of local authority-led and voluntary sector support for young people aged 11-25 that provides positive activities to help children and young people thrive in life. This includes universal, targeted, and specialist services; for the purpose of this study, it does not include sports clubs, uniformed organisations, public and private health services, or educational establishments.

The context of this research is the ongoing duty that local authorities have to provide access to developmental opportunities and spaces for young people 'as far as is reasonably practicable'. In light of recent national developments, including the National Youth Agency Youth Work Strategy and the Youth Investment Fund, it is essential that local authorities gain a good understanding of the youth offer delivery model in their area and the needs of the young people who are eligible to access those opportunities.

The research involved a literature review of existing publications, interviews with 35 young people and 23 professionals from the youth sector, a survey for young people (140 responses); a survey for adults (65 responses); and Instagram polls (22 responses).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The quality of youth services in Oxfordshire is generally very good or excellent but they are reaching insufficient numbers of young people.

- There is more emphasis on provision of specialist/targeted services than on open access opportunities.

- Despite a number of different delivery models, some common values have been identified as enablers to effective youth offer delivery

- There are some skills gaps in the areas of mental health, business/enterprise, and leadership.

- It is essential that the youth offer and its delivery model are informed by the voices of young people

- There is potential to improve the profile of youth work as a career; provide better career pathways for youth workers; and increase opportunities to obtain accredited youth work training

- Oxfordshire has access to some dependable youth-focused expertise and this has improved over recent years, however some of the delivery feels disjointed

- The number of open access youth services in Oxfordshire had declined considerably in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic has caused further closures. This needs to be addressed:
  - to ensure the majority of young people have somewhere safe to meet outside of school where they can develop their skills
  - to enhance wellbeing and safeguarding of young people through trusting relationships with suitably trained youth workers

- Provision is geographically patchy - the larger urban areas of the county are seen to be better served than some of the smaller towns and villages/more rural areas.

- While it is commonly recognised that the youth offer needs to be youth led, in practice this approach is not always sufficiently adopted.

- Access to long-term, flexible funding is one of the biggest challenges for local youth organisations.

- There is a strong belief that more resources should be committed to early intervention activities.

- More and better quality youth-friendly spaces are needed to allow young people to meet in a safe, comfortable environment where they feel valued.

- Key factors that motivate young people to engage in opportunities and activities include access to youth workers they can trust and relate to; the opportunity to meet and make friends; activities that interest them that are fun and/or developmental; and close by/easily accessible, safe, comfortable, good quality spaces/facilities

- One of the main areas identified by young people as lacking support is transition into adulthood.

- One of the main barriers to accessing the youth offer is lack of awareness of the opportunities available.

- Some young people miss out because they cannot access opportunities due to limited/no public transport and/or living too far away.

- Youth clubs/groups need to have a greater variety of high quality, well maintained facilities and equipment.

- Young people see the key benefits of engaging with the youth offer as an increase in confidence and self-esteem and improved social skills and friendships.

- The most common needs identified by young people are safe, inclusive spaces; a wide range of opportunities; and better relationships with adults.

- The current delivery model, which focuses on non-statutory (i.e. charity/voluntary) provision, has resulted in greater creativity, willingness to engage in partnerships and collaborative working, and a nimble and flexible approach to working with young people. However, there is room for better overall coordination of the youth offer and clearer, more defined pathways to relevant support.

- The pandemic has had significant effects on both young people and organisations delivering youth opportunities. It is essential that more centralised support is put in place to enable positive transition and reintegration with communities.

- One of the most significant effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for young people has been its impact on their mental health.

CONCLUSIONS

Oxfordshire as a county has a vibrant and creative youth offer, which benefits from the expertise and local knowledge of skilled and passionate staff. The quality of delivery of the current youth offer is high, with many organisations boasting creative interventions. However, constraints such as funding that is short term and offers little support for core costs, low levels of collaboration, and limited geographical reach mean that there are still many young people who are unable to access the offer.

Young people who do engage with youth activities report feeling supported and recognise the importance of having their own space, with access to trusted adults. The main needs that are not addressed as well as they should be, revolve around the transition from adolescence to adulthood, including the development of skills that are not taught within the education system or where the depth of teaching is insufficient. The value of the youth voice is high across the sector, however there is more to be done for the youth offer to be truly youth led.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the youth opportunities offered, on the staff delivering them, and on the young people accessing them. A centralised and coordinated response might support young people and families in re-engaging with their communities, rebuilding their support networks, and ensuring that young people are able to feel hopeful about the future.

INTRODUCTION

1 BACKGROUND

In November 2020, Oxfordshire Youth, in partnership with Research Oxford, was commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council to produce a report giving an up-to-date assessment of the support that young people living in Oxfordshire need and want. The project also looked at the historical landscape, what is currently available to young people, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and examples of best practice in providing support that is missing in the current offer in Oxfordshire.

2 RESEARCH AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS EXPLORED

The research aims and objectives were outlined as part of the tender provided by the commissioning body and were then confirmed and specified further, in collaboration with Oxfordshire Youth and Research Oxford.

Aims

- ► To produce an up-to-date assessment of the offer for young people in Oxfordshire
- ► To understand the support young people in Oxfordshire need and want
- ► To identify whether specified support is currently being provided
- ► To investigate future youth offer delivery options to meet the needs of young people

Objectives

- ► To explain the historical context of youth services in Oxfordshire
- ► To map out current provision of the youth offer in the county
- ► To review good practice examples from other geographical areas
- ► To train community partners in selected research methods (i.e. one-to-one interviewing)
- ► To engage with young people through one-to-one interviews and a targeted survey
- ► To carry out a survey engaging professionals, volunteers and other adults working in, with, or being supported by the youth sector
- ► To engage with key stakeholders through one-to-one interviews and focus groups

Specific questions explored

- What support is currently available to young people?
- How has this changed over the recent years and months?
- What are the needs and wants of young people living in Oxfordshire?
- How well does the current offer cater for these needs and wants?
- What are the main challenges that young people face?
- Is the support that young people want and need available in their local areas? If not, what are the gaps?
- If support is not available, how are young people coping with their needs?
- What is the role of youth work in supporting young people? *(asked only in stakeholder interviews and focus groups)*
- What are the training needs of the youth sector? *(asked only in stakeholder interviews and focus groups)*

3   DEFINING THE 'YOUTH OFFER'

When agreeing the parameters for the study, it was recognised that support and opportunities for young people are provided by a wealth of sources, including statutory and voluntary organisations, commercial providers, and private funders. Due to the very broad range of providers, there are many definitions of what the 'youth offer' means. For the purpose of this study, the following definition of the 'youth offer' was agreed with the commissioning body:

The 'youth offer' is a mix of local authority-led and voluntary sector support for young people aged 11-25 that provides positive activities to help children and young people thrive in life. These include universal, targeted, and specialist services. For the purpose of this study, this does not include sports clubs, uniformed organisations, public and private health services, or educational establishments.

> The 'youth offer' is a mix of local authority-led and voluntary sector support for young people aged 11-25 that provides positive activities to help children and young people thrive in life.

4   RESEARCH METHODS

The research comprised the following research activities:

1. **Desk research:** a review of literature related to the questions listed above. This included national and local reports, published by the National Youth Agency, UK Youth and other organisations. Desk research was informed by, and refined using, insights gathered via the other research activities undertaken as part of the study.

2. **Thirty-five interviews with young people:** carried out as one-to-one, paired, or group interviews by individuals trained in qualitative data collection. The individuals were recruited from voluntary sector organisations and trained specifically to assist with the data collection for this project. This not only increased the reach of the interviews but also contributed to upskilling of staff and volunteers currently working with young people.

3. **Survey for young people:** this comprised seven questions relating to the research and four profiling questions. The questions were a mix of open-ended and multiple choice, with most being marked as mandatory. A total of 140 responses were collected between 06/03/2021 and 20/03/2021. A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix 1 and the profile of respondents is provided in Appendix 2.

   To further increase the reach of the study, social media was used to target 16 to 25-year-olds living in Oxfordshire. Through Instagram Stories, two questions were put to young people for completion on 15/03/2021 (the stories last 24 hours). The questions were: *'Is there enough support for young people?'* (yes/no) and *'How happy are you with the opportunities available to you?'* (sliding scale from 'not at all' to 'completely' – using emojis as indicators). The number of responses generated was very low: 22 and 14 responses respectively.

4. **Survey for adults including professionals/parents/carers/teachers and other adults working with young people:** this comprised six questions relating to the research and three profiling questions. The questions were a mix of open-ended and multiple choice, with most being marked as mandatory. A total of 65 responses were collected between 23/02/2021 and 19/03/2021. A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix 1 and the profile of respondents is provided in Appendix 2.

5. **Twenty-six interviews with professionals and volunteers working with young people:** carried out as one-to-one interviews and as focus groups. All were facilitated either by individuals trained in qualitative data collection or the consulting researcher from Research Oxford. The individuals were recruited from voluntary sector organisations and trained specifically to assist with the data collection for this project. This not only increased the reach of the interviews but also contributed to the upskilling of staff and volunteers currently working with young people.

6. **Mapping of the current youth offer:** based on the '*Youth in Mind 2020 Guide'* (produced by Oxfordshire Youth and Oxfordshire Mind), the map of Oxfordshire Youth members, various websites providing information on activities available to young people, and some ad hoc feedback from key stakeholders.

5 TARGET DEMOGRAPHIC

The target demographic for this research study was young people aged 11-25 living in Oxfordshire.

Limitations of this research

Due to various methodological and logistical constraints some of the sample sizes on which this research is based are limited. For this reason, it is recommended that the findings be viewed as indicative rather than conclusive. Nevertheless, they shine a clear light on the experiences and perceptions of a range of young people and adult stakeholders regarding the youth offer in Oxfordshire. This report therefore represents an important body of evidence to help inform future strategic decision making.

DETAILED FINDINGS

1 YOUTH PROVISION

1a. Historical context

The offer of support and services for young people in the United Kingdom dates back to the mid to late 1800s. The provision has evolved into what we now identify as youth support across the nations, with a wide variety of opportunities and levels of accessibility of the offer. From its beginnings, attempts have been made to clarify the purpose of youth work, focussing on its educational as well as recreational aspects. In particular, it has been highlighted that youth provision has an important role in supporting young people in their personal and social development, enabling them to play a full role in their local community. The timeline below highlights the main developments from a national perspective:

1844 ..... YMCA (Young Men Christian Association) founded by Sir George Williams

1855 ..... YWCA (Young Women Christian Association) founded by Emma Robarts and Mary Jane Kinnaird

1907 ..... Boys' Brigade Association founded by Sir William Alexander Smith

1910 ..... Girl Guides Association founded by Robert and Agnes Baden-Powell

1911 ...... National Organisation of Girls Clubs (NOGC) founded

1918 ..... Government passed an Education Act empowering local authorities to make grants to clubs and youth groups

1925 ..... National Association of Boys' Clubs (NABC) founded

1936 ..... Standing Conference of National Voluntary Youth Organisations (SCVNO) created

1942 ..... Set up of the Education Youth Advisory Board

1947 ..... Oxfordshire Association of Boys Clubs founded

1948 ..... British Youth Council founded

1956 ..... Launch of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award

1976 ..... Prince's Trust established

1977 ..... Youth Charter 2000 conference

1985 ..... National Advisory Council for Youth Services established

1989 ..... First ministerial conference on a core curriculum for the Youth Service

1991 ..... Set up of the National Youth Agency

1996 ..... First National Lottery grants for youth work

2000 .. UK Youth Parliament formed

2001 ..... 90th Anniversary of Youth Clubs UK, marked by rebranding as UK Youth

2002 ... £52 million Transforming Youth Work Development Fund launched

2010 ..... National Citizenship Scheme announced in the Positive for Youth Strategy

2013 ..... Launch of the Institute of Youth Work by NYA (National Youth Agency)

2016 ..... Responsibility for Youth Service moved from the Cabinet Office to DCMS
#iwill fund announced

2019 ..... Launch of £200 million Youth Endowment Fund
Youth Futures Foundation launched
£90 million released from dormant assets
£500 million Youth Investment Fund announced

2020 ... Creation of NYA Youth Work Curriculum

2021 ..... NYA Strategy for Youth Work

The principles that were relevant from the beginning are still relevant today: for example, basing youth work on a meaningful partnership with young people. There have been many changes in legislation over the years, reflecting the changing needs of society, and there has been a trend to recognise the importance of development opportunities for young people outside official educational settings.

1b. Current landscape

Youth provision is based on supporting the holistic development of young people, including life skills and personal, and social learning. The most recent review by The Health Foundation (2018)[3] recognised that youth organisations help young people to develop some of the key capabilities to enable them to feel in control over their lives and to reach their full potential. Those are provided through emotional, financial, and practical support, and access to skills, qualifications and personal connections.

The '*Outcomes Framework Report*'[1] identified that one of the main challenges faced by organisations delivering youth activities is the fact that they are not designed to address any one specific issue. The support offer targets "a complex matrix of factors" which, if unsupported, could potentially lead to young people becoming disengaged from the local community or education, having low aspirations, lacking positive role models, or experiencing crime, mental health problems or inequality of access. Organisations working with young people also have a significant role to play in the delivery of preventative work, making the evaluation and reporting of impact difficult.

Despite renewed interest in funding to support the opportunities available to young people, the last 10 years saw significant cuts to funding available for delivery of the youth offer, resulting in a reduction in youth support across the whole of the United Kingdom. As reported by the '*How Youth Provision Supports Young People in Building Assets for Healthy Life*' report,[9] despite specific local contexts differing significantly, there are some common themes emerging from all four nations: closure of youth centres, loss of professional youth work jobs, reduction in the spending power of local authorities, greater reliance on volunteers, and increased reliance on short-term funding.

A multitude of reports published over the last few years provide a good overview of the development of the situation in England. The main messages are:

- Top tier local authorities spent £332m on services for young people in 2018/19, a drop from £788m spent in 2011/12 (NYA, 2019)[24]

- Since 2011/12, the spend per year per individual young person for 11 to 19 year-olds dropped from £136 to £65 (NYA, 2019)[24]

- The decline in spending on universal services by local authorities in rural areas has dropped from 48.2% of total net spend (2011/12) to 34.5% (2017-18) – rural areas are known to have fewer alternative private and independent opportunities for young people. This, in addition to sparser transport links when compared to urban areas, means that young people living in rural areas are likely to be especially adversely affected by the cuts (NYA, 2019)[24]

- Research suggests that due to severe job losses (an estimated 3660 youth work jobs were lost between 2012 and 2016 (Unison, 2016)),[2] there are now two volunteers to full-time member of staff in the youth sector (UK Youth State of Membership, 2018)[18]

- There is a statutory duty for local authorities to provide equitable access to development activities and spaces for young people

- A review of the youth services statutory guidance has been commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in 2019

- A £500m Youth Investment Fund was announced by the Government in 2019 for investment in youth-related schemes

In 2019, National Occupational Standards published its version of the values and principles that are seen to underpin youth work in the UK: [25]

1. Participation and active involvement

2. Equity, diversity and inclusion

3. Partnership with young people and others

4. Personal, social and political development

Further research, reported in *'How Youth Provision Supports Young People in Building Assets for a Healthy Life'*,[9] has also attempted to provide some universal guidance for the sector, suggesting the following features as 'enablers' and 'barriers' to effective youth work provision:

ENABLERS	BARRIERS
Young people centred	Lack of local and national leadership
Support in development of healthy relationships	Inconsistency in defining the 'youth offer'
Providing access to trusted adults	Impact of reduced funding
Facilitating co-production with young people	Workforce challenges
Focus on young people's personal and social development needs and outcomes	Changing demands (irrelevant, lack of investment)
Providing a safe environment	Fragmentation
Community based	
Encouraging partnership, collaboration and collective support	
Providing a good balance of universal and targeted support	
Based on good evaluation and learning	

The report also suggests that one of the recognised issues currently facing youth provision across the country is the fragmentation of the sector, resulting from a significant decrease in funding for organisations offering infrastructure support and a lack of joined-up work between local authorities and the voluntary sector. The most recent *'Youth Work Inquiry'* report[24] highlights the impact that fragmentation may have on young people. The report argues that supporting young people to build the assets needed to support health and wellbeing calls for support and services to be joined up across localities and sectors, and for provision to take a long-term, consistent approach. An isolated workforce and disconnect between organisations create discrepancies in governance, policies, quality standards for delivery, and monitoring and evaluation of impact. It is also suggested that it may cause a lack of opportunities for grass-roots organisations to feed into local developments.

Over the last decade, through austerity, the landscape of youth support in England (and more locally) remains varied. The focus of the youth sector has been on targeted interventions and statutory duty. With the rise in referrals to social care and mental health services, the conversation about preventative provision is quickly moving into the spotlight. National and local statutory, voluntary, and business sectors are recognising the need for more support for young people through a robust and relevant youth offer (this has been further exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic).

In addition to those, recent years have seen a shift in the ways in which young people are engaged and the language that is being used. One of the main areas of work included in the provision of youth opportunities is safeguarding. With it being 'everyone's responsibility', professionals and volunteers working with young people have played a crucial part in Operation Reportage (concluded in 2015). The conclusions from the review showed a positive culture change event, where young people were recognised as being children at risk, who needed empathetic staff, prompt actions, quick access to relevant support, and to be believed.

2 PROFILE OF YOUTH OFFER IN OXFORDSHIRE

2a. Historical context

Oxfordshire has a mix of rural and urban communities, which creates complexities within each district. Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for the most strategic local government functions, including schools, county roads, and social services, whilst district councils deal with matters such as town and country planning, waste collection, and housing.

Like other areas of England, Oxfordshire has significantly changed the way in which the youth offer has been provided and delivered over the last decade. The county moved from a fully local authority-led service to a combined delivery model in Oxford City and a commissioned delivery model in the rest of the county. Before 2008, Oxfordshire County Council employed a team of staff who were responsible for the overall provision of the youth offer, from running multi-purpose youth clubs to delivering detached youth work across all areas. In addition, numerous external organisations and charities were commissioned to provide further services to young people and the third sector, including infrastructure support for voluntary youth clubs. Following the first wave of cuts to local authorities in the late 2000s, the focus of youth provision changed from an open access delivery to a more targeted offer of support. Following a period of consultation, delivery of the youth offer moved to a number of multi-agency hubs, located across Oxfordshire, where various professionals worked together to deliver targeted youth work. The move to a more centralised offer caused a significant number of professionals working in the youth sector to be redeployed to new roles or to leave the sector completely. It also led to a rise in the threshold of need, that young people had to meet to engage with the statutory offer.

The quality of support provided by the hubs differed between areas, with some having good links to their local communities and young people, while others lacked local links and collaboration with the wider offer, including educational establishments and health care. With the second wave of cuts in the mid-2010s, many hubs were closed.

In addition to the changes in the delivery of the youth offer, there was also a reduction in the ways that young people could influence some of the opportunities available to them, for example, involvement in securing additional funding sources, such as the Positive Activities Fund.

The loss of open-access youth provision prompted a response from the third sector to identify local gaps in the youth offer and set up community organisations to fill those. As more needs were identified, a more diverse range of charities started to operate, which led to a more targeted approach and development of specialised support.

2b. Current youth offer in Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire has a large charity sector, with organisations ranging from small volunteer-led youth clubs offering open access support to larger charities providing specialist and targeted services and interventions. Oxfordshire County Council has a small team focusing on supporting young people into education, employment and training, and covers all statutory duties around social care for children and young people. Each district has a small offering of youth work support and Oxford City Council has maintained a small youth service offer known as Youth Ambition. According to the *'Increasing Impact in the Oxfordshire Youth Sector'* report, an estimated £14m is spent through youth providers in activities outside of school, with more than 50,000 opportunities for engagement on offer across the county.

There is a wide range of organisations that make up the current youth offer in Oxfordshire. These have been mapped out using a mix of consultation and desk research. While the aim has been to make this as comprehensive as possible, it is acknowledged that there may be some unintentional omissions.

Appendix 3 provides a list of all the organisations/projects that were identified in the mapping exercise. The definition of 'youth offer' provided in Section 3 of the introduction to this report was used to decide what to include.

The chart below provides a breakdown of the current youth offer by area of focus (category). Where an organisation/project covers more than one aspect of youth work, it has been categorised based on what appears to be its main emphasis, or if there is more than one it has been categorised as 'general'.

A total of 158 organisations/projects were identified, the largest proportion of which (44%) primarily provide recreational opportunities for young people (mainly sports and other physical activities). Of the rest, there is a relatively even spread across those that focus on arts, health and wellbeing, specialist, and general youth work. A very small proportion (2%) focus specifically on homelessness/housing support.

Oxfordshire's youth offer by category
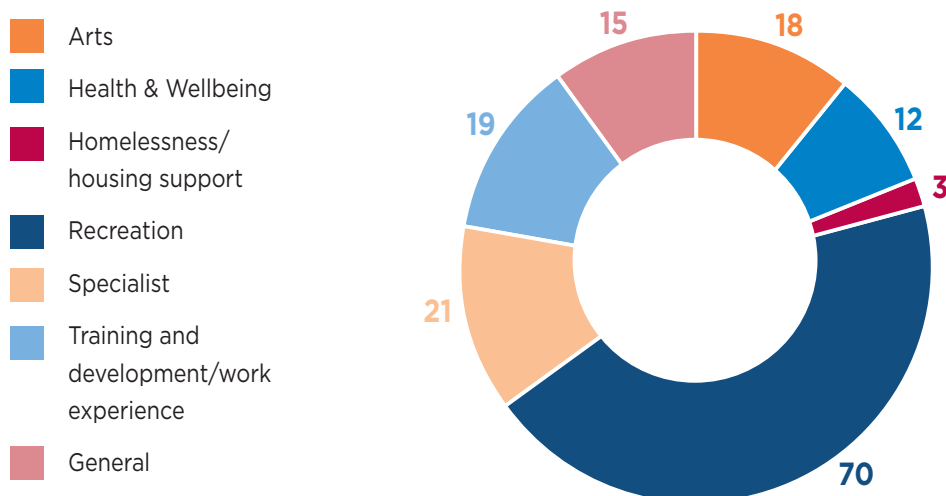
Arts
Health & Wellbeing
Homelessness/
housing support
Recreation
Specialist
Training and
development/work
experience
General

15
18
12
3
19
21
70

The chart below provides a breakdown of the current youth offer by area of focus (category). Where an organisation/project covers more than one aspect of youth work, it has been categorised based on what appears to be its main emphasis, or if there is more than one it has been categorised as 'general'.

Oxfordshire's youth offer by location

- Oxford City
- Cherwell
- West Oxfordshire
- South Oxfordshire
- Vale of White Horse
- Oxfordshire
- UK

17
37
20
34
20
13
17
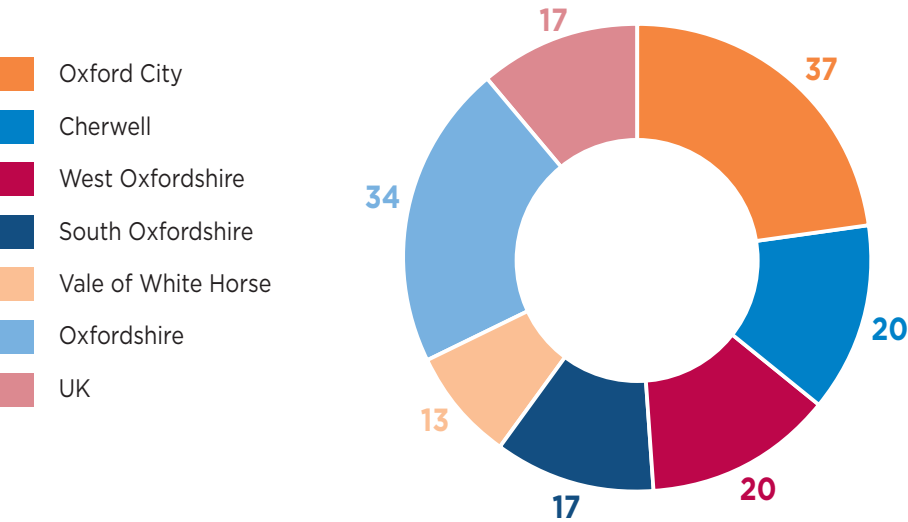
Sub-categories were added for some organisations/projects (where relevant), to aid further analysis. This showed that 10% are specifically focused on mental health support, 9% are for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, and 6% are faith-based. A smaller proportion of organisations/projects fell into various other sub-categories as can be seen in the table below:

SUB-CATEGORY	%	COUNT
Mental health	10%	16
Disabilities/learning difficulties	9%	15
Faith	6%	9
Abuse/trauma	4%	7
Ethnic minorities/migrants	3%	4
Bereavement	2%	3
LGBTQ+	1%	2
Safeguarding	1%	2
Young carers	1%	1
Parental imprisonment	1%	1
Not applicable (no sub-category)	62%	98
	100%	158

Oxfordshire has a large charity sector, with organisations ranging from small volunteer-led youth clubs offering open access support to larger charities providing specialist and targeted services and interventions.

Despite not falling under one of the categories identified above, many organisations providing the youth offer opportunities in Oxfordshire deliver on a number of specialist/targeted projects. Those include but are not exclusive to mental health issues, parental support, LGBTQ+ young people, young people excluded from schools, employment support, exploitation, SEND, or young carers.

There are still some organisations/groups that provide open-access provision but the number of those are in decline, further exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19.

Decline in open-access delivery has had a negative effect on a holistic approach to safeguarding. Open-access delivery organisations offered a valued source of information about the local community and were able to provide an important 'grass-roots' layer of safeguarding for young people.

Overall, provision of the youth offer in Oxfordshire is 'patchy' with some areas being able to offer much more (e.g. Oxford City) than others (e.g. Witney, Banbury). The reach of the offer is seen as limited, especially in the rural communities.

> *"What we have at the moment is that whilst those opportunities can be really transformational, they are very geographically specific. Something that's working really well in Banbury would actually be amazing if it was rolled out across the county, but actually it's only serving Banbury. And they don't have the capacity to go any further than that."* (STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW)

There is still also a perception of a gap in provision for different, underrepresented groups.

However, there is general agreement that the quality of the provision that is available to young people in Oxfordshire is of good or excellent quality. The offer provided is engaging, and the adults who support the young people in accessing it are skilled, passionate and committed. The move from a fully authority-led to a combined/commissioned model has led to many youth sector organisations developing expertise and specialist knowhow, which has improved over time and enabled the sector to provide high-quality support.

> *"We have real experts in this county. We have international leading charities, we have organisations setting agendas and lobbying the government. Real forefront of their work. And I don't think it's something that the general public would recognise."* (STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW)

The sector is seeing a shift in the support provided by organisations, which is now more likely to include an offer for parents and families and early intervention work. This development is in line with the national trends of holistic approaches to youth work and prevention.

It has also meant a less restricted space for organisations to be creative and to set up partnerships and collaborations.

> *"It took many years for the youth sector to really flourish in the way it has done over the last few years. [Due to the majority of responsibility for the delivery of the youth offer now being with the third sector] the youth sector started working much more collaboratively. Oxfordshire now has a thriving Children and Young People's Forum that is a space for voluntary sector organisations, who form the existing youth offer. In fact, it is a forum that captures organisations working with 0-25."* (STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW)

2c. Barriers for the current youth offer

Despite the quality of provision being generally good or excellent, many believe that the reach of the offer is too low – there is not enough available for the majority of young people to be fully supported to thrive and reach their full potential.

Following the changes to the youth offer over the last 15 years, it is also felt that provision offered to young people is undervalued and youth work is no longer seen as a 'career path'.

> *"It's becoming increasingly evident that so many of the services that we deliver are now considered 'added value', whereas before they would have been considered essential."* (FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT)

Organisations are also seeing an increase in demand for their services without additional resources to meet those needs.

Funding is one of the main barriers faced by the organisations delivering the current youth offer. Competition for the same pots of money, lack of support for core costs, and the prevalence of short-term funding have been identified as main factors stopping organisations from being able to improve/increase their work or make the support long lasting, sustainable, and effective. It has also been noted that, through the nature of youth work, it is often the case that opportunities offered have very high impact but the numbers of beneficiaries are low, which can be a barrier to successful funding bids.

In addition, overly restrictive spending guidance from funders has been identified as a primary reason for organisations to deliver an offer guided by the funder's priorities rather than by young people and their needs.

> *"You've just got to get funding where you can get it from and then whose agenda are you really trying to set? It's not the young people. Sometimes you just feel like you're doing something for the funders."* (FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT)

Access to funding might also influence the way in which organisations price their offer. For some, the price that they have put on their activities makes them unable to compete with other, cheaper services.

> *"It is always really good for the young people, always really good. It's very expensive. Sometimes kind of outpriced for anyone to take it."* (STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW)

In line with the national trends in youth offer provision, the fragmentation of the sector has also been noted by organisations as a significant barrier. Lack of joined-up approaches and limited communication between the deliverers are likely to negatively impact the quality of the support provided to young people. There are some organisations that are leading in supporting collaborative work, but this way of working is still not very common within the sector.

Further barriers identified were around relevance, access, and inclusivity, availability of resources, lack of early intervention causing build-up of pressure on current offer and lack of awareness of what is available.

The survey of adults asked what opportunities were available in their local area for young people. The most common answers were 'Scouts/Guides/Army Cadet Force/St John Ambulance/Brigades' (83.1%), 'local sports team' (75.4%) and 'local youth group' (61.5%). Less than half selected any of the other opportunities listed, indicating that these were either not available or there was a lack of awareness about them.

ADULTS: What opportunities are available in your local area for young people

65 responses (ticked all that apply)

Category	Percentage
Scouts/Guides/Army Cadet Force/St John Ambulance/Brigades	83.1%
Local sports team	75.4%
Local youth group	61.5%
Performing arts group (eg. theatre, drams, dance)	46.2%
Faith groups	43.1%
Private tutoring/additional classes	38.5%
Music group or orchestra	36.9%
Mental health and wellbeing support	29.2%
Social Action project (eg. environment, anti-gender violence, foodbanks)	24.6%
Homework clubs	23.1%
Online gaming	13.8%
Leadership/employability programmes	12.3%
Visual arts group (eg. painting, film making, sculpture, photography)	10.8%
Special interest (eg. reading gruops, local history groups)	6.2%
Political organisations (eg. political party youth groups, campaign groups)	3.1%

2d. Impact of COVID-19 on current youth offer

With the study commissioned during a pandemic, it was inevitable that the current, unusual situation would influence research findings. Some of the changes highlighted in the research are directly related to the impact of COVID-19, and it was deemed appropriate to discuss them separately.

'The impact of COVID-19 on young people & the youth sector' report[16] shows that it is likely that the pandemic will have or has already had a significant impact on the youth sector in England:

- 88% of respondents indicated that they are likely or very likely to reduce service provision to young people

- 31% of respondents said that staff redundancies were likely, while 17% said that permanent closure was likely

- Permanent closures are likely to hit small and micro organisations hardest

- 64% of respondents said that they were likely to lose sources of funding

- 71% of respondents said they were likely to reduce staff hours

As the youth sector in Oxfordshire is battling the odds to stay relevant and continue providing support to young people and their families, it has become clear that organisations delivering local youth opportunities are facing additional challenges around staff support and training.

Due to the impact that the pandemic and associated mandatory restrictions are having on young people, organisations delivering the youth offer are seeing increased demand at the same time as a decrease in resources and in the quality and quantity of provision.

There is a lot of uncertainty about the current offer due to changes that are taking place in existing organisations, new opportunities being set up, and a significant number of small groups unlikely to reopen their doors.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large part of the youth offer was converted to digital and is now being delivered online. Organisations are recognising both the shortcomings and the benefits of the move. The inequality of access to digital devices and broadband, known as 'digital divide', has emerged as a limitation of this type of delivery. Conversely some have identified that it facilitates wider reach and the ability to engage with audiences that had not engaged previously.

In addition to the online offer for young people, some organisations started to provide support for parents, carers and guardians, which was not available before.

The move to online delivery has prompted a review of training that is available to staff and revealed elements that are missing. Organisations have not only had to adapt to new ways of delivering services but have also had to ensure appropriate access to resources for their staff, implement any adjustments needed for them to work from home and provide relevant training to support effective online delivery.

> *"Our staff are doing the best they can, but we haven't trained them in actually coping with this new situation. I've got staff working who are finding it incredibly difficult to break into this new way of working. And I haven't started to really share how we could do this. You know, for some people it's easy. But for others, it's a new way of working that they haven't thought through before."*
> (FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT)

2e. Training needs

Some of the training needs identified by the study directly link to the changes necessitated by the impact of the pandemic. Organisations providing youth activities are looking to train their staff in online delivery and facilitation of youth work with limited face-to-face contact. Leaders from the youth sector identified leadership training and support in leading their organisations through and out of the pandemic, as something that would be beneficial to their provision.

In addition, there were three main groups of training needs that organisations delivering the youth offer thought would improve their provision:

1. **Training to improve outcomes for young people** – information for staff to be more aware and better prepared (e.g. exploitation, gang culture, safeguarding, trauma-informed delivery, SEND and integration, race, personal identity and racism)

2. **Training to support staff in their day-to-day roles** – resources to provide additional mechanisms for staff to be able to cope well with their workload (e.g. resilience, dealing with complex issues, career development in youth work)

3. Training to support the sector in providing better quality support to young people – ways and opportunities for the organisations to work better together (e.g. collaborative working, adapting to changing needs of young people)

2f. Perceived role of the youth offer

The *'How Youth Provision Supports Young People in Building Assets for a Healthy Life'* report[9] suggests that engaging with the youth offer has positive outcomes, which are related to developing skills and competencies (e.g. social, emotional and intellectual capabilities). Developing those skills enables young people to strengthen their networks and increase their social capital, while exploring barriers in a safe and supported environment. It also supports them in their transition to adulthood and is linked to the social building blocks of health (including good education, employment and housing).

Despite a wide range of organisations delivering youth opportunities in Oxfordshire, there is a general sense of agreement about the perceived role of the youth offer in young people's lives.

Most commonly, youth work is seen to play an important role in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, providing informal education, positive role models and support from trusted adults.

The main role of youth work is to provide consistency in young people's lives and to empower them to make positive choices, through promoting positive self-image and, providing role models and an opportunity to have their voices heard.

> *"If we want to work with young people, there is a bit about how do we empower and enable some of those young people, who've probably got a significant amount of lived experience. One, listen to them and to what they think was going to work. But then actually enable and empower them to give them skills to be part of the solution."* (STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW)

Organisations providing youth work opportunities are also seen as important in providing community support, early intervention services (provision of information and management of risk), and a respite from chaotic home lives.

It has been noted that since the move to a more targeted approach, the traditional understanding of youth work as support that runs alongside young people's lives and their communities has changed, and is now more concerned with support for individual wellbeing. This could potentially lead to fewer young people being able to benefit from its impact and opportunities.

In light of the current situation, national organisations, including National Youth Agency and UK Youth, are now looking at the role that youth work could potentially play in supporting young people in their recovery from the pandemic and reintroducing them into different environments and social interactions.

2g. What's missing?

When asked about the gaps in the current youth offer, both adults and young people provided a wide array of answers, in line with their experiences and focus. However, some responses were much more common than others. The following list of gaps is ordered from most commonly mentioned to least mentioned:

- **Lack of open access groups** – in line with the offer changing from a general youth work offer to more targeted support in recent years, the number of and access to safe spaces available to young people is limited. The main drawbacks are loss of access to trusted adults, links to the community and an opportunity to develop a sense of belonging. There is a perception that young people who are highly engaged and young people who have complex needs have better access to services, while young people who are in the middle of the spectrum are missing out on the offer.

- **Need for better communication/collaboration between organisations** – there is a shared perception that not many organisations have the space or resources to engage more in working with others to form partnerships or collaborative projects. It has been suggested that fundraising is a large factor contributing to this issue.

- **Lack of provision for younger and older age groups** – feedback from research participants suggests that certain age ranges are better catered for than others. Young people under 13 and over 17 are less likely to be able to access opportunities than those who are in their teenage years.

- **Lack of inclusive spaces** – one of the most common motivations for young people to engage with an offer is an ability to access a safe and inclusive space. Those need to be relevant and youth-friendly, so that young people are able to interact with their peers. The cost of accessing these spaces needs to be taken into account as most young people will not have much/any disposable income.

"I want somewhere that's safe, clean, fun to meet friends in all weathers. Not a cold wet park in the dark." (YOUNG PERSON, SURVEY)

- **Lack of detached youth work** – detached youth work is seen as one of the most effective ways of engaging with young people who might not engage with an organisation otherwise. Skilled staff with street-level knowledge that go into young people's spaces to do youth work are highly valued by both adults and young people.

- **Limited opportunities** – there is a limited choice of opportunities for young people to access, especially in rural communities.

- **Little focus on early intervention** – lack of early intervention partially stems from lack of open access groups, where early warning signs e.g. in relation to safeguarding) were more likely to be picked up on and supported. A lot of the organisations delivering a targeted youth offer are overstretched due to the demand on their services. Some of that pressure could be alleviated if there was more early intervention capacity available to support those young people.

- **Lack of investment and resources** – with limited budgets, organisations are struggling to replace broken equipment or make spaces more youth-friendly and to provide opportunities that are interesting to young people.
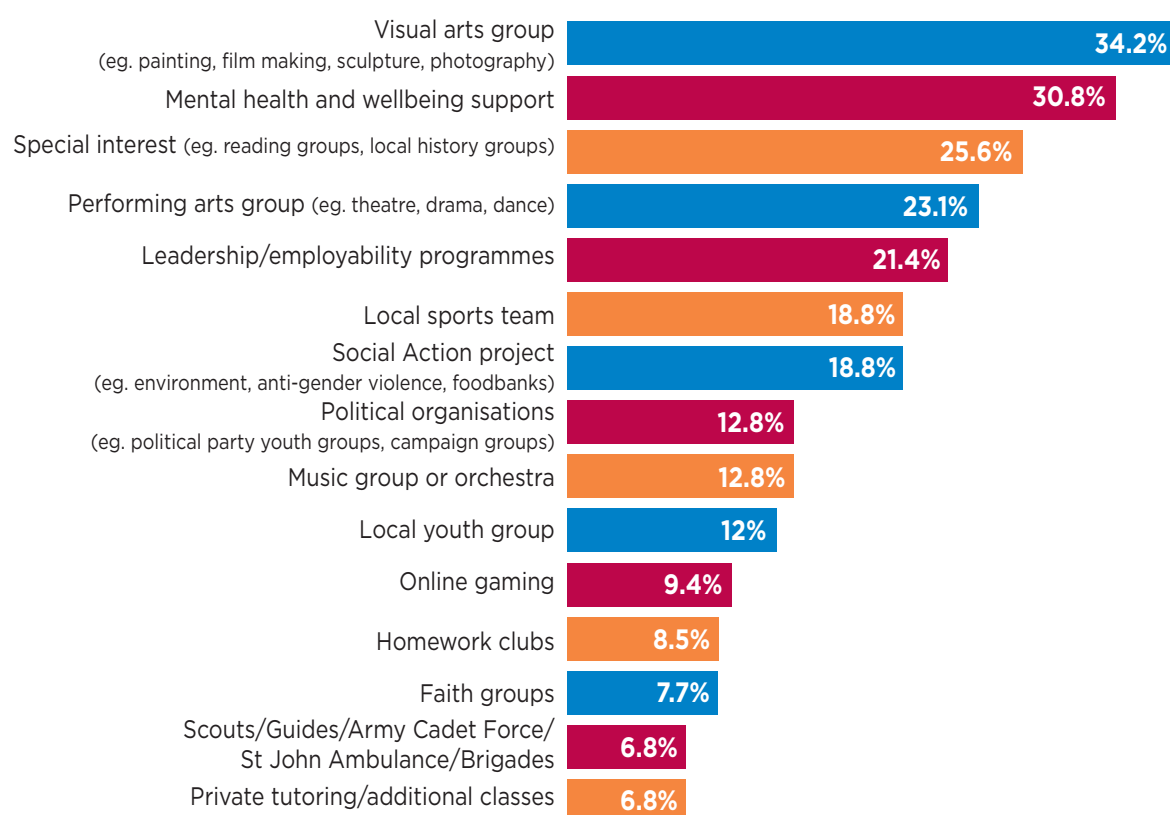
"Because everything gets destroyed and nothing gets replaced. Because what happens with other kids when they are naughty. So stupid. And then they don't replace stuff in the youth club because it's been smashed up before. The pool table at the youth club has been broken for years. Always has been [...] Makes you feel bad, cause there is nothing to do. It's all damaged. You go to play football and it's half pumped up. You can't play football with that, can you? Too frustrated that there's nothing to do in the youth club." (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

- **Inadequate advertising of the youth offer** – one of the most common statements heard by the researchers was that it is not clear what is available to young people in the local area. There seems to be a significant lack of communication, or else the ways in which organisations are communicating their offer is not appropriate for the target audience. In many areas, there is a disparity between the offer and the perception of what the offer is.

- **Lack of provision for certain groups** – there is limited opportunity for certain groups, such as young carers, LGBTQ+, young people experiencing NEET, and parents.

- **Lack of support when experiencing disengagement with statutory services or education** – due to long waiting lists or a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, some young people are at risk of becoming disengaged with the youth offer and are less likely to seek support in the future.

- **Lack of informal education or varying quality of informal education** – in connection with the significant reduction of open access youth work, it has been noted that there are gaps in provision of informal education (e.g. life skills, healthy relationships). Also that what is available is not governed by any form of curriculum, which leads to varying levels of quality amongst providers.

- **Lack of linking with local communities** – one of the qualities of a successful local youth offer is that it is linked to the community which promotes a feeling of ownership and belonging. With a more centralised and targeted offer, links with local communities are weaker and do not support young people to engage.

- **Youth work is not seen as a career** – due to the changes in the youth offer provision and limited training opportunities, the role of a youth worker is changing. There is a perception that it is no longer seen as a long-term career choice, linked with lack of clear future developments, changing values, and lack of investment and resources in the sector.

- **Lack of data-informed opportunities** – it was highlighted by some that more of the youth offer could be better data-informed. Opportunities and interventions should be based on existing needs and providers should be chosen on the basis of their ability to successfully support those needs.

- **Lack of opportunities for young people to have their say** – although better than some other counties, Oxfordshire is still perceived as lacking opportunities for young people to feed into local developments and truly inform how the youth offer should look and be delivered.

When surveyed, young people were asked what types of opportunities they would like to see that were currently missing. The top three most popular options were 'visual arts group' (34.2%), 'mental health and wellbeing support' (30.8%) and 'special interest, e.g. reading/local history groups' (25.6%). It is also worth noting that over a quarter (25.6%) answered 'none'.

YOUNG PEOPLE: What types of opportunities would you like to see that are currently missing? *117 responses (ticked all that apply)*

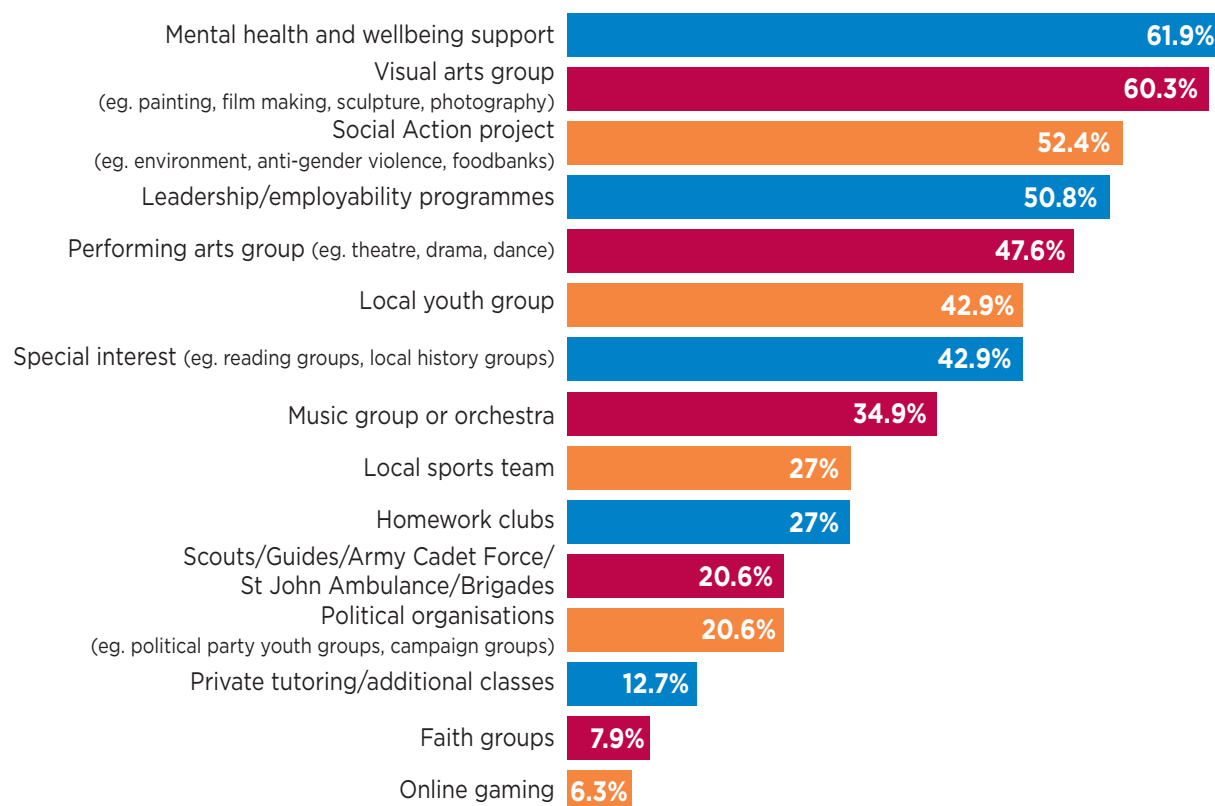| Category	%
Visual arts group (eg. painting, film making, sculpture, photography)	34.2%
Mental health and wellbeing support	30.8%
Special interest (eg. reading groups, local history groups)	25.6%
Performing arts group (eg. theatre, drama, dance)	23.1%
Leadership/employability programmes	21.4%
Local sports team	18.8%
Social Action project (eg. environment, anti-gender violence, foodbanks)	18.8%
Political organisations (eg. political party youth groups, campaign groups)	12.8%
Music group or orchestra	12.8%
Local youth group	12%
Online gaming	9.4%
Homework clubs	8.5%
Faith groups	7.7%
Scouts/Guides/Army Cadet Force/St John Ambulance/Brigades	6.8%
Private tutoring/additional classes	6.8%

When the survey asked adults what types of beneficial opportunities were missing from the current youth offer, those answering also put 'mental health and wellbeing support' (61.9%) in their top three, along with 'visual arts group' (60.3%) and 'social action project' (52.4%).

As shown on the graphs (see overleaf for the corresponding responses from adults) there is a degree of disparity between what young people said they would like to engage with and what adults perceived their interests to be. This further highlights the importance of ensuring that the youth offer opportunities are youth-led, in order to encourage engagement and maximise resources.

There is a degree of disparity between what young people said they would like to engage with and what adults perceived their interests to be…

ADULTS: What types of opportunities do you think would be beneficial to young people, that are currently missing? *63 responses (ticked all that apply)*

Opportunity	Percentage
Mental health and wellbeing support	61.9%
Visual arts group (eg. painting, film making, sculpture, photography)	60.3%
Social Action project (eg. environment, anti-gender violence, foodbanks)	52.4%
Leadership/employability programmes	50.8%
Performing arts group (eg. theatre, drama, dance)	47.6%
Local youth group	42.9%
Special interest (eg. reading groups, local history groups)	42.9%
Music group or orchestra	34.9%
Local sports team	27%
Homework clubs	27%
Scouts/Guides/Army Cadet Force/ St John Ambulance/Brigades	20.6%
Political organisations (eg. political party youth groups, campaign groups)	20.6%
Private tutoring/additional classes	12.7%
Faith groups	7.9%
Online gaming	6.3%

3   PROFILE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN OXFORDSHIRE

3a. Profiling information

General

According to the Office for National Statistics, there are over 97,000 young people in Oxfordshire. With the total population of 691,700, young people constitute 14% of all residents in the county. A breakdown by age group can be seen in Table 1.

Age	Cherwell	Oxford	South Oxfordshire	Vale of White Horse	West Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire
All ages (11-25)	22,095	43,830	20,569	20,249	15,573	97,041
Aged 11-14	7,454	6,840	7,058	6,477	5,100	32,929
Aged 15-19	7,892	11,715	7,448	7,444	5,637	40,136
Aged 20-24	6,749	25,275*	6,063	6,328	4,836	49,251

Most recent '*Oxfordshire Children and Young People Needs Assessment*'[13] reports that there has been an increase in ethnic diversity in the county, with 13% of children in primary schools having a first language other than English.

* Figure inflated by the high number of students attending universities based in the City of Oxford

It also shows that there are approximately 28,000 children living in poverty in Oxfordshire. Some city wards including Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill & Iffley, and Barton & Sandhills have child poverty rates of a third of their population by area. Further, according to the Needs Assessment, 14,000 children in Oxfordshire are affected by income deprivation: of these 81% live in urban areas.

There are 767 children in care for in Oxfordshire. The proportion of cared for children who were placed more than 20 miles from their home and outside Oxfordshire increased from 33% as at 31st March 2019 to 36% as at December 2020.

Excess weight in children has remained high in the county. The most recent '*Joint Strategic Needs Assessment'* (JSNA)[14] showed that 42% of children in Oxfordshire were not meeting the daily physical activity guidelines last year. Further data shows that, as of 2019/20, 18.6% of children aged 4 or 5, and 29% aged 10 or 11 were overweight or obese.

There has been a significant increase in the number of police recorded domestic abuse crimes involving children in 2019/20 in Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire services are now supporting 121 survivors of child sexual exploitation.

Impact of COVID-19

The *Children and Young People* report shows that increased levels of worry about the COVID-19, feeling a loss of control or losing support networks, may have been more common for some groups of children and young people, such as those in relative poverty, NEET young people and young carers.

Education

There are 305 educational establishments in Oxfordshire, including primary and secondary schools and nurseries (this excludes independent schools).

In line with the overall population demographic, over 70% of young people attending state-funded schools, special schools, and pupil referral units are White British. However, the percentage representation of various ethnicities varies between different types of educational establishments. This suggests potential inequalities in how young people from different ethnic backgrounds are supported in engaging with mainstream and alternative education.

As reported by the Oxfordshire JSNA:[14]

- **Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET):** between December 2019 and December 2020, there was an increase in the number of young people classified as NEET across all five districts in Oxfordshire. In the 16 – 18 age range, 334 young people were classified as NEET (2.7%), compared to 1.6% in 2019. The proportion of young people classified as NEET more than doubled in Cherwell, and Oxford City recorded the highest rate at 3.7%.

- **Special Educational Needs (SEND):** There are 6391 young people with learning difficulties in Oxfordshire. 2019-20 saw an increase in the number of pupils with SEND, at double the national rate.

- **Early Years Development:** the gap between pupils from lower income families and other pupils has increased for the second year in a row.

- **GCSE:** 52% of pupils in Oxfordshire attain good GCSEs (grades 9-5) in English and Maths. The average GCSE attainment in 2019/20 was below the regional average but similar to the national average.

- **Absence:** the persistent absence rate for pupils in Oxfordshire secondary schools was above the national average (2018/19).

- **Sex education and relationships:** there were 110 conceptions for girls aged under 18 in 2019/20.

Employment

Oxfordshire boasts high levels of employment (85.2%), well above the national (79%) and South East regional (82%) levels.

Despite high levels of employment, the most recent JSNA shows that the percentage of Oxfordshire's care leavers in employment, education or training was below the national average in 2019/20.

Amongst the economically inactive, the biggest groups are students (35.5%), people experiencing long-term sickness (24.4%), those looking after family/home (17%), and retired people (13.4%). As of September 2020, 17,400 out of 63,000 people in unemployment wanted to find a job.

Over 83.7% of people in Oxfordshire have a qualification level of NVQ2 and above (with over 50% having NQV4 or above), which is well above the national (75.6%) and regional (79.1%) levels.

In February 2021, there were 3,175 people between the ages of 16 and 21 who were claiming benefits.

Impact of COVID-19

The '*Lockdown 2020*' report,[23] published by The Prince's Trust, shows that young people are almost 2.5 times more likely to work in sectors that experienced significant shut down due to social distancing measures, than other employees, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

Despite Oxford showing high levels of resilience to the economic impact of the pandemic (as shown by the *'Good Growth for Cities Index'*[7]), the impact on youth unemployment rates has been marked, with a rise of 0.7% in the third quarter of 2020 – the highest quarterly increase in youth unemployment since 2011). Data shows that young people accounted for 46% of the increase in unemployment, despite them constituting only 11% of the working population.

Furthermore, findings indicate that nationally one in ten young people has had a job or training that they were about to start cancelled due to the outbreak.

The situation has further limited young people's access to employment. It is widely accepted that recessions have long-term effects on employment, lifetime earnings and occupation of young workers, especially for non-graduates. Young people are also likely to start on a lower pay band. Data from the Office of National Statistics[21] shows that, even before the pandemic, those under the age of 25 were four times less likely to be employed, when compared to the rest of the working age population. The most recent JSNA confirms that Covid-19 lockdowns have reduced advertised apprenticeship opportunities in Oxfordshire for young people.[14]

Statistics show that young people, who are already three times more likely to be in insecure employment than adults, were more heavily impacted than other age groups. Nationally, a third of all 18- to 24-year-olds have either lost their jobs or been furloughed since March 2020 (compared to one in six adults). Between February and June 2021, Oxfordshire saw a 150% increase in the number of benefit recipients. The district with the highest claimant rate for those aged 16-24 was Cherwell (785), followed by Oxford City (885). It has also been noted that neighbourhoods with the lowest ability for creation of employment opportunities were hit the hardest. Young workers are therefore entering the labour force in one of the toughest economic environments, which will exacerbate unemployment rates, make employment opportunities even more competitive and potentially undermine social mobility.

Mental health

The '*Are We Listening?*' report[4] which reviewed the quality and access across the system on mental health services for children and young people, published in 2018, found that, as a whole, the system is complex and fragmented and that the quality and accessibility of care is marked by variation. The system is made up of a wide range of different professionals, teams and services, including schools, nurses, teachers, GPs, health visitors, youth workers, paediatricians, voluntary and community organisations, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), therapists, social workers, counsellors, psychologists, SEND services, services for children in care and support for young people in the criminal justice system.

Findings from the '*Are we listening?*' report shows that around half of all people experience poor mental health at some point in their life will experience their first symptoms before they are 14 years old. It is also known that children and young people in some communities and some circumstances are more likely to experience mental health problems, due to services not responding well enough to their needs.

The impact of a complex system is visible in Oxfordshire. The most recent JSNA reports that the number of mental health referrals for young people has increased over the past 5 years,[14] especially for those aged 20-24. Rates of hospital admissions for self-harm in young people (aged 10-24 years) have also increased over time, with the rate in the county being similar to England. In total, there were 570 young people admitted to a hospital due to self-harm in 2019/20 in Oxfordshire. Additionally, there were a further 155 under 18s, who were hospitalised due to alcohol consumption.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on young people and their wellbeing. Data from the Royal Society for Public Health shows that 70% of 18 to 24-year-olds are experiencing more anxiety than usual, compared with 47% of over 75s. A '*Children and Young People'* update[5] published by the government in its COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance report, shows that in April 2020, almost half of 16 to 24 year-olds showed new symptoms of psychological distress (this age group was also most likely to report new symptoms in May 2020). The report also highlighted that in 2020, one in six children and young people aged 5 to 16 was identified as having a probable mental health disorder, increasing from one in nine in 2017.

A recent survey conducted by The Princes Trust ('*Lockdown 2020')*[23] reports that:

- 33% of young people in UK feel that everything that they have worked for is now 'going to waste'

- 69% of young people feel that their life is 'on hold'

- 29% of respondents say they have no one to help them with their stress and anxiety as everyone around them is struggling at the moment

- 47% of young people worry that missing out on time in education or the workplace now will put them at a disadvantage for 'years to come'

- 48% believe that the negative consequences of the pandemic will have 'long-term or permanent impact' on them

- 25% claim that there is 'no point' in planning ahead, with one in five believing that their life will amount to nothing, no matter how hard they try

- One in four 16- to 25-year-olds admits to feeling 'unable to cope with life', increasing to 40% in those who are NEET

- Since the pandemic began, one in five young people has experienced suicidal thoughts, rising to 28% for those who are NEET

- 10% of young people have self-harmed, increasing to 14% for those who are NEET

The '*Children and Young People'* report[5] claims that parents of children and young people with SEND felt that their children were negatively affected by the pandemic. Although measures of emotional and behavioural difficulties do not show a widening gap with their peers, there is evidence that SEND young people aged 16 to 24 have felt more anxious than their peers.

Research has also shown that young people who are not in education, employment or training are significantly more likely to feel down or depressed than their peers who are in work, education or training. The '*Youth Index 2021*'[17] highlights that 45% of NEET young people say that they always or often feel hopeless (compared to 29% of young people in general).

However, that is some evidence that young people are reporting positivity around resilience and a sense of empowerment in response to the pandemic. The Prince's Trust '*Lockdown 2020'* study[23] reports that 52% of the young people who responded to their study believe that the pandemic will make their generation stronger and more resilient.

The '*Youth Index 2021*'[17] reports that two-thirds of young people said that the political events of the year (including Black Lives Matter and the movement to tackle climate change) made them want to fight for a better future, with more than half agreeing that they are 'motivated more than ever'.

Homelessness

In 2017/18, there were 537,000 young people aged 16-25 living in the private rental sector in England, which accounts for 68% of all independent households in the age group. The Chartered Institute of Housing has highlighted that young people often face high rental costs and insecure finances.

Since the publication of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, all councils in England have a legal duty to ensure that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness has access to meaningful help, as long as they are eligible for assistance. In addition to this and the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (published in February 2018), the Department of Education and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published a joint statutory guidance on 16- and 17-year-olds who are homeless, which further clarified the duties of Children's Services and Housing Authorities. Young people should now have access to more intervention and support to prevent homelessness.

However, the recent '*Young and Homeless'* report[19] claims that young people in England are facing a homelessness crisis, sustained by structural and systemic disadvantages and discrimination. Young people are at a higher risk of poverty and they face more insecure employment and discrimination in the housing and labour markets, compared to other age groups. They are over-represented in housing services, with over a third (91,500) of people accessing supported accommodation in England in 2018-19 being aged 16-25. The report highlights that there is also a strong likelihood that these figures do not capture all of the young people who experience homelessness, as some are reluctant to approach their local council and stay 'hidden' by using temporary and informal living arrangements. Further factors such as a reduced level of Universal Credit, entitlement to only the lowest rate of Local Housing Allowance, and a greater risk of benefit sanctions affect young people's ability to access and maintain secure accommodation.

The most common cause of homelessness for young people is family breakdown. A range of factors such as age, sexism, racism, homophobia, violence, abuse, and experiences of institutional care can all put young people at a higher risk of homelessness. Statistics show that, for example, young LGBTQAI+ people face a disproportionate risk of homelessness, due to family rejection because of their sexual or gender identity.

Young people are at a higher risk of poverty and they face more insecure employment and discrimination in the housing and labour markets, compared to other age groups.

Impact of COVID-19

Recent studies have shown that the pandemic has further increased the risk of homelessness for young people. In 2020 Centrepoint reported that their usual number of enquiries from young people sleeping rough has doubled.[19] Further, it evidences that family breakdowns are increasing due to lockdowns exacerbating tensions in the family home, and this is combined with a lack of traditional community safeguards (like education or youth services) that would normally help to identify those at risk of homelessness. Young people's ability to access the welfare safety net has also worsened, due to the impact that Covid-19 has had on employment.

In addition, as the furlough scheme winds down, young renters will be more vulnerable to evictions, with a survey by the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA)[12] showing that 24% of private renters aged 16-25 are currently reliant on the furlough scheme.

3b. Issues facing young people

According to the young people surveyed for the purposes of this study, well over three quarters (79.1%) identified 'mental health difficulties' as the main issue currently faced by young people. This was followed by 'isolation and loneliness' (64.3%), 'body image anxieties' (63.5%) and 'pressure at school, college, university' (60%) – each of which also contribute to, or are symptoms of, mental health difficulties.

YOUNG PEOPLE: What do you think are the main issues faced by young people at the moment? *115 responses (top four issues identified)*

Mental health difficulties	79.1%
Isolation and loneliness	64.3%
Body image anxieties	63.5%
Pressure at school/college/university	60%

Please see page 43 for list of references.
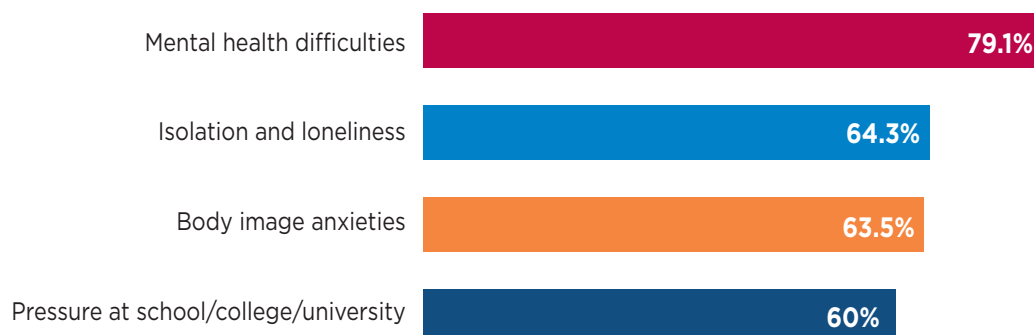
When asked the same question, the vast majority of adults surveyed also identified 'mental health difficulties' (90.2%) and 'isolation and loneliness' (85.2%) as the top two main issues, followed by 'lack of spaces to spend time with friends' (78.7%) and 'lack of opportunities' (65.6%).

ADULTS: What do you think are the main issues faced by young people at the moment?
61 responses (top four issues identified)

Mental health difficulties	**90.2%**
Isolation and loneliness	**85.2%**
Lack of spaces to spend times with friends	**78.7%**
Lack of opportunities	**65.6%**
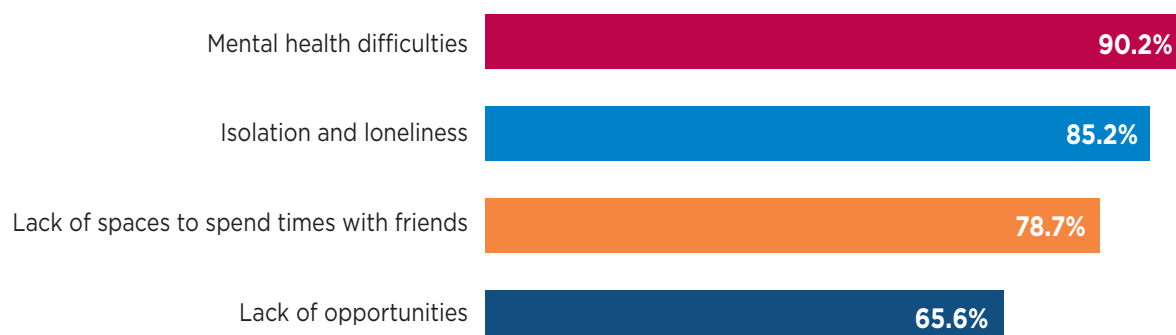
The prominence of mental health difficulties was further crystallised when young people and adults were asked to identify the one most important issue for young people, with the largest proportion of young people (54.4%) and adults (35%) answering 'mental health difficulties'.

Mental health issues were also the most common theme raised during the interviews with young people and adults.

Another common issue that emerged was perceived lack of support from the current education system in preparing young people to enter adulthood (including transition between education and the labour market, healthy relationships, and unbiased advice), combined with the level of pressure put on them by their education providers, and the fact that more targeted support was only available to a limited number of students.

> *"I had a friend last year who was doing his exams and he would repeatedly whack his head against the wall because he would get so frustrated with everything."* (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

There is a common perception amongst young people of a lack of 'things to do' in their local areas, which might lead to them engaging in anti-social behaviour.

Young people also spoke about their relationships with adults. This included a negative view of young people by the public, lack of trusted adults, employment not being youth friendly, and stigma or lack of understanding from adults, where young people are treated as children but expected to act like adults.

> *"People say a lot that my age group were expected to act like adults, but we are treated like children. So it's very confusing. What do you expect us to do?"* (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

Other significant issues experienced by young people are poor parenting/chaotic households, risk of exploitation, and engaging in crime and anti-social behaviour, including substance misuse and territorial rivalries.

The report '*Hidden in Plain Sight: Gangs and Exploitation – A youth work response to Covid-19*',[8] which includes data from Thames Valley, highlights the scope of child criminal exploitation. According to the report there are 60,000 young people (aged 10-17) who identify as a gang member or have a relative who is a gang member in England. This number rises to 300,000 when including young people who know someone in a gang, and to 500,000 when also including young people in groups exposed to 'risky behaviours' associated with gangs.

There are also over one million young people who face risks from any of the so-called 'toxic trio' of living in households with problems of addiction, poor mental health and domestic abuse. While there is no consistent data on the number of young people experiencing or at risk of criminal exploitation, some groups of young people are more vulnerable, namely looked-after children and young people with SEND and learning difficulties.

> *"It's usually around just silly, silly behaviours. But then it does escalate. So the higher the pecking order they go in the gang, the worse the anti-social behaviour becomes. And a lot of that is because they don't want to really be at home. And a lot of them are vulnerable young people. They've got really fractured home lives."* (STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW)

Young people and adults also spoke about facing issues surrounding their identity, lack of self-belief, confidence, and resilience. Some groups, including BAME and LGBTQ+ young people, are experiencing marginalisation and feel uncertain about the future. It has been also noted that social media, especially influencers, might move young people away from making positive choices.

> *"Statistically young people from BAME culture or with a BAME name even take two years longer to get graduate jobs than if you're white or have a white British name, which is remarkably poor."*
> (STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW)

Other issues facing young people revolved around their day-to-day lives and transition to adulthood, including affordable housing, good transport and support for young parents.

> *"I think it's hard for young people with childcare. But when you are on benefits, you can still go to college. But there is not enough for young people to put their child in day care."*
> (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

Impact of COVID-19

One of the most common issues mentioned by both young people and adults was worsening mental health and poor access to support.

> *"I've noticed there's a lot of toxic things on TicTok, like promoting really bad habits and it has really affected people's mental health. I think they just pick up ideas from people and start comparing to be equal. And that's the only thing they are seeing. They are not going out and seeing reality. They only see what people want them to see for every decision."* (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

Lockdown has also significantly impacted the issues that young people are facing at the moment, either deepening the existing ones or creating new ones. One of the most visible impacts was on young people's wider relationships, with recent ONS data[21] showing that, nationally, 60% of young people aged 16-29 felt concerned about the impact of lockdown on their friendships, compared to just 34% of 30- to 59-year-olds. Technology has played an important role in keeping in touch with friends, with young people aged 18-29 speaking to others by telephone or video calls and messages more than any other age group. However, 40% of 18- to 24-year-olds reported speaking less to family and friends outside their own home than they did before lockdown, according to YouGov data.[20] Many young people explained that technology could not replace face-to-face interactions with friends.

More digital contact and worsening mental health has also raised concerns about being able to respond well to other people's disclosures relating to the issues they may be experiencing.

Less contact with other people and an increase in using digital spaces has created a growing concern about the social skills that young people might not develop or might lose during lockdown.

Despite much of the youth offer being moved online and therefore being more widely available, there are some drawbacks for young people. Online delivery in schools and outside of education has highlighted the digital divide between local communities and is contributing to the widening of the attainment gap. Loss of face-to-face activities is also creating a feeling of boredom and lack of respite from the home environment, and this has also removed a layer of safeguarding that some young people relied on.

Both young people and adults agree that there are positive and negative sides to online delivery of the youth offer. The positive is that it is now more widely available and some young people who were not willing to engage with face-to-face delivery, are now able to take part. The negatives are limited access due to technology and certain forms of delivery, e.g. those that involve large numbers of participants at the same time.

One of the more challenging issues emerging from the pandemic and lockdowns is the risk of exploitation. '*Hidden in Plain Sight. Gangs and Exploitation – A youth work response to COVID-19*'[8] reports states that there has been a change in gang activity and exploitation, with behaviour being altered to still enable the individuals and gangs to carry out their activities, but without drawing attention to themselves by breaking the local restriction guidance (e.g. young people involved in county lines are still staying away from home but they may have changed their known locations to other, less frequented places). There is also a rising concern that gang activities have switched to a new, 'unknown by services' location and that lockdown periods have been used as a 'recruitment phase'.

Feedback from the interviews with young people indicated that one of the main drivers behind engaging with activities that might put them at risk of exploitation is lack of employment or limited access to money.

"I think obviously during lockdown young people can't even get jobs. So there being a drug exploitation, whatever it is, they are like: Okay, well, how much money you're gonna give me and I'll do it. And they don't see the big side effects of this. They don't see what's gonna happen If you don't do what you've got to do. And then that's when the knife crime comes in. And where drugs are so big around here." (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

"Since COVID, I've actually seen more knife crime than I ever have. And, if I'm honest, I've probably seen more drug deals and stuff going on than I ever have as well. And I think that's generally because of money. And, even as a young person, I've heard of this page Only Fans. You put up pictures of your body and you get money. So this is what people are doing in lockdown and not actually going out, trying to get a job. Like what's going on? You're 21 and you're doing that. That's too much. The lack of jobs and the lack of support. Quite a lot of my year are now mums and to get money, they're wanting to do that. It's quite sad that there aren't jobs out there for them to go and do other stuff." (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

Lack of opportunities for employment was an issue that was highlighted by both young people and adults.

Young people also spoke about the uncertainty they feel about the future, being supported by adults who are probably also struggling. Additionally they were finding it hard to have their opinions heard.

"Young people want to be listened to when it comes to their thoughts, feelings, opinions on the whole situation, because obviously they're the ones going through this, like this sort of struggle with education and the pandemic. So it'd be good for people to take this on board. What they really think about this, rather than the parents, rather than adults, for it to come from young people directly." (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)
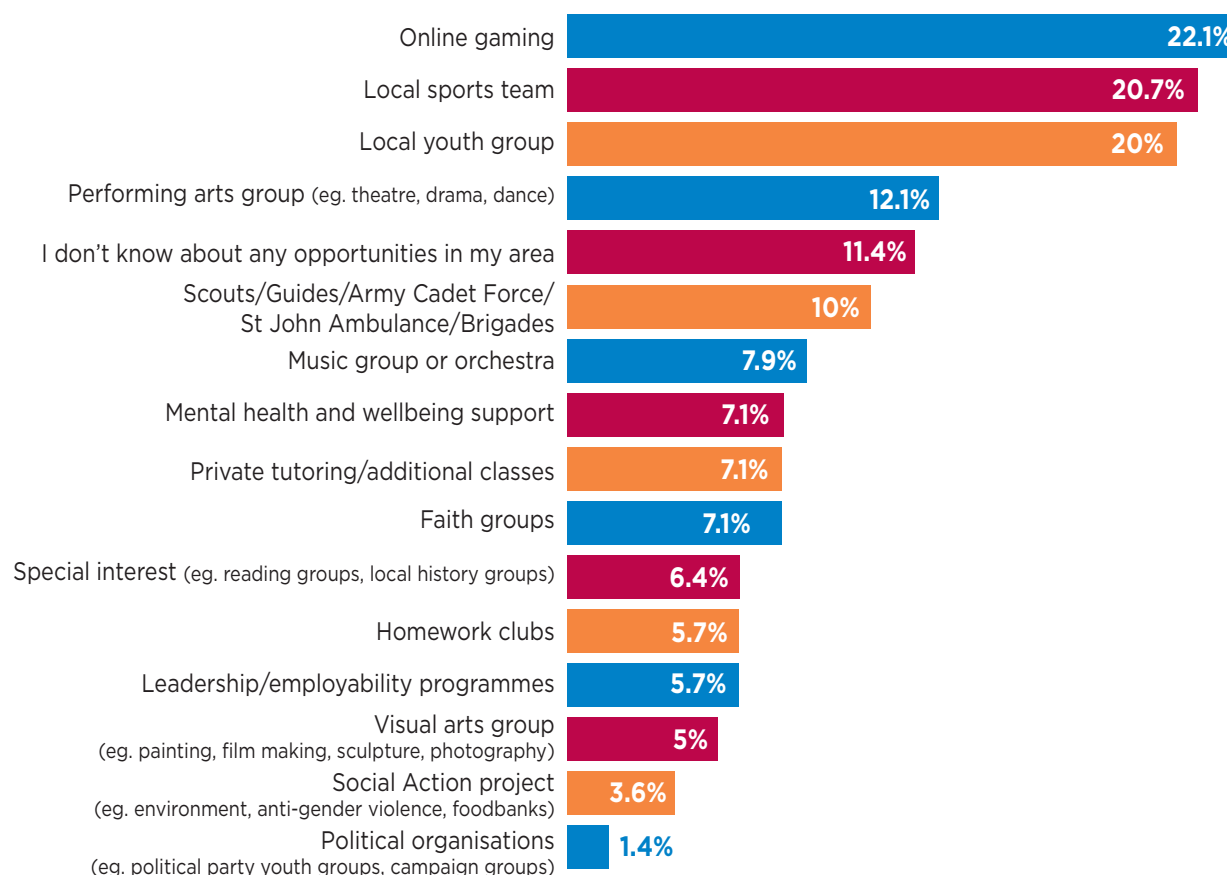
3c. Current/past activities and their impact on young people

Feedback from the surveys and interviews showed that young people take part in a wide range of activities and opportunities.

The activity most commonly engaged in was online gaming (22.1%) followed by local sports teams (20.7%) and local youth groups (20%). Far fewer young people said they engaged in other activities with visual arts groups (5%), social action projects (3.6%) and political organisations ranking the lowest for engagement. Activities highlighted in the interviews included dancing, football, boxing, gym, swimming, snooker, gardening, drama, working with animals, music and art.

YOUNG PEOPLE: Do you take part in any of the following aside from what you do through an educational setting, like school, college or university?
140 responses (ticked all that apply)

Activity	Percentage
Online gaming	22.1%
Local sports team	20.7%
Local youth group	20%
Performing arts group (eg. theatre, drama, dance)	12.1%
I don't know about any opportunities in my area	11.4%
Scouts/Guides/Army Cadet Force/St John Ambulance/Brigades	10%
Music group or orchestra	7.9%
Mental health and wellbeing support	7.1%
Private tutoring/additional classes	7.1%
Faith groups	7.1%
Special interest (eg. reading groups, local history groups)	6.4%
Homework clubs	5.7%
Leadership/employability programmes	5.7%
Visual arts group (eg. painting, film making, sculpture, photography)	5%
Social Action project (eg. environment, anti-gender violence, foodbanks)	3.6%
Political organisations (eg. political party youth groups, campaign groups)	1.4%

Over one in five of the young people surveyed, (22.9%) said they did not take part in any activities and over one in ten (11.4%) said they did not know of any such opportunities available in their local area.

Young people agreed with previous comments about the 'patchy' nature of the delivery of youth opportunities in Oxfordshire and about local opportunities shutting down (pre-COVID).

In addition, young people also identified targeted groups (e.g. young carers, LGBTQ+), engaging in fundraising for national charities, local 'youth voice' organisations, and setting up their own groups in line with their interests, as most popular options for activities outside of formal education.

3d. Motivations for engagement

There is a wide range of factors, which young people and adults identified as motivations to get involved with the youth opportunities. In order from most common to least, they were:

- **Access to trusted adults** – both young people and adults recognised the value of trusted relationships with positive role models. They valued adults who were not judgemental, who would give them unbiased advice and just having someone to talk to.

- **To have fun** – the activity needs to be relevant and fun for young people to engage with it.

- **Something to do** – one of the main motivations identified by research into engagement with youth work.

- **Somewhere to go/safe space** – youth friendly spaces have been identified as an important motivator for young people to engage with the youth offer. Such spaces are not always used by young people to access activities: sometimes, the only role of the space is to be a safe and warm

"[Talking about past activities] I felt safe there, in both of them. I did feel safe because there were so many people I could talk to if I've been having a bad day." (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

- **Having a sense of belonging/shared cause** – young people felt that through joining groups they were able to connect with others and with the space. Some described the feeling as a "second family", some as a "community".

- **Friend taking part/ activity being recommended by someone else** – knowing someone who engaged with the activity previously seems to be a strong motivator for young people. That ranges from other young people, through to parents and influencers.

- **Meeting up with friends/meeting new people** – connecting with other young people seems to be a strong motivator to engage. Seeing the activity as an opportunity to hang out with friends or getting to know new people is well-received by young people.

- **Meeting people who are similar or have been through the same experiences** – the opportunity to meet other young people who have similar lived experiences is seen as a strong motivator by both young people and adults. It's been suggested that knowing that others have similar experiences allows the young person to feel less isolated and support their self-image and confidence.

> Young people want to be heard and they see youth provision as a good way to achieve that

- **Learn new skills/ skills that are not taught by mainstream education** – both young people and adults recognised the value that the youth offer brings through providing opportunities to learn. Skills ranged from life and social skills, through leadership and relationships, to practical skills, like building a shelter or lighting a fire.
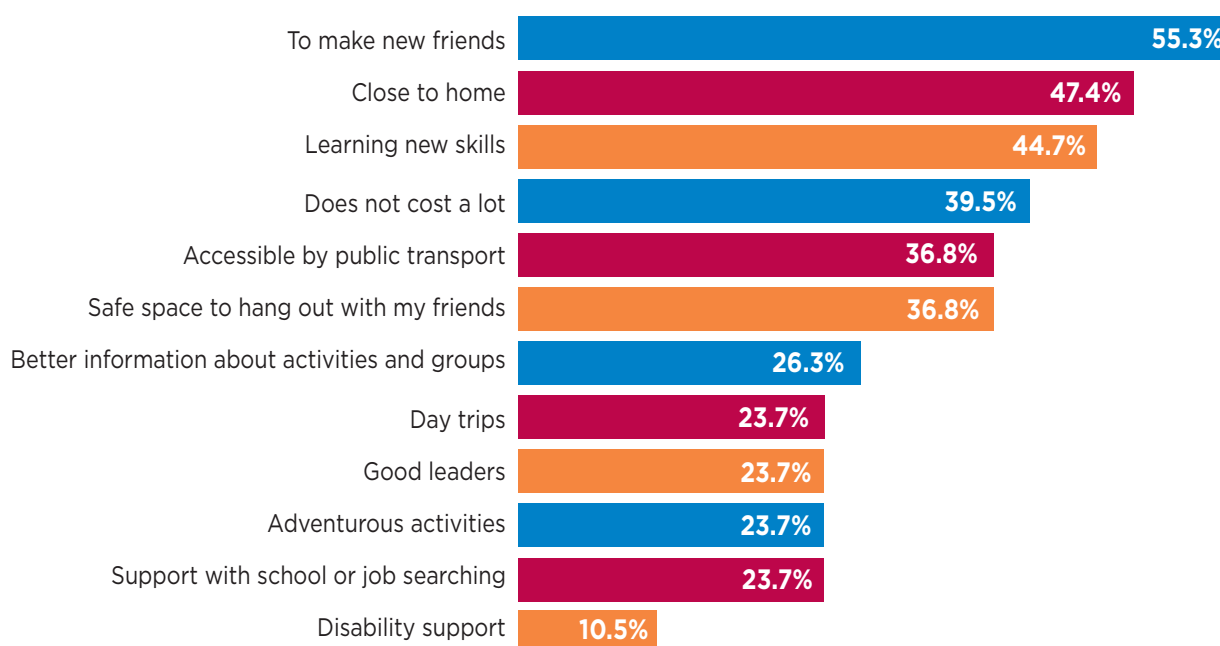
- **Inclusive environment/help with identity and self-awareness** – in addition to providing safe spaces and positive role models, young people identified youth support as a provider of inclusive spaces where they can make mistakes in a supported environment, explore different issues and feel that they are accepted.

- **Mental health help** – some young people use local youth provision as a space where they can access low-level mental health support or preventative coping mechanisms to support them.

- **Raising awareness/voice of young people** – young people want to be heard and they see youth provision as a good way to achieve that. Some groups focus on raising awareness of issues that young people might be facing (e.g. young carers) and some are a space where young people can explore current issues and discuss them with trusted adults.

- **Achieving something good** – engaging with youth opportunities is perceived as an opportunity to engage with local communities in a positive way. Young people feel a sense of achievement and view the results of their participation as good.

Other motivations that were highlighted were ease of access (for the offer to be in the same spaces as young people), availability of food, low cost, relevance to young people, and something to provide structure/focus.

When surveyed, those young people who said they did not currently take part in any activities were asked what would make them want to. They identified their top three motivators to engagement as 'make new friends' (55.3%), 'close to home' (47.4%) and 'learning new skills' (44.7%)
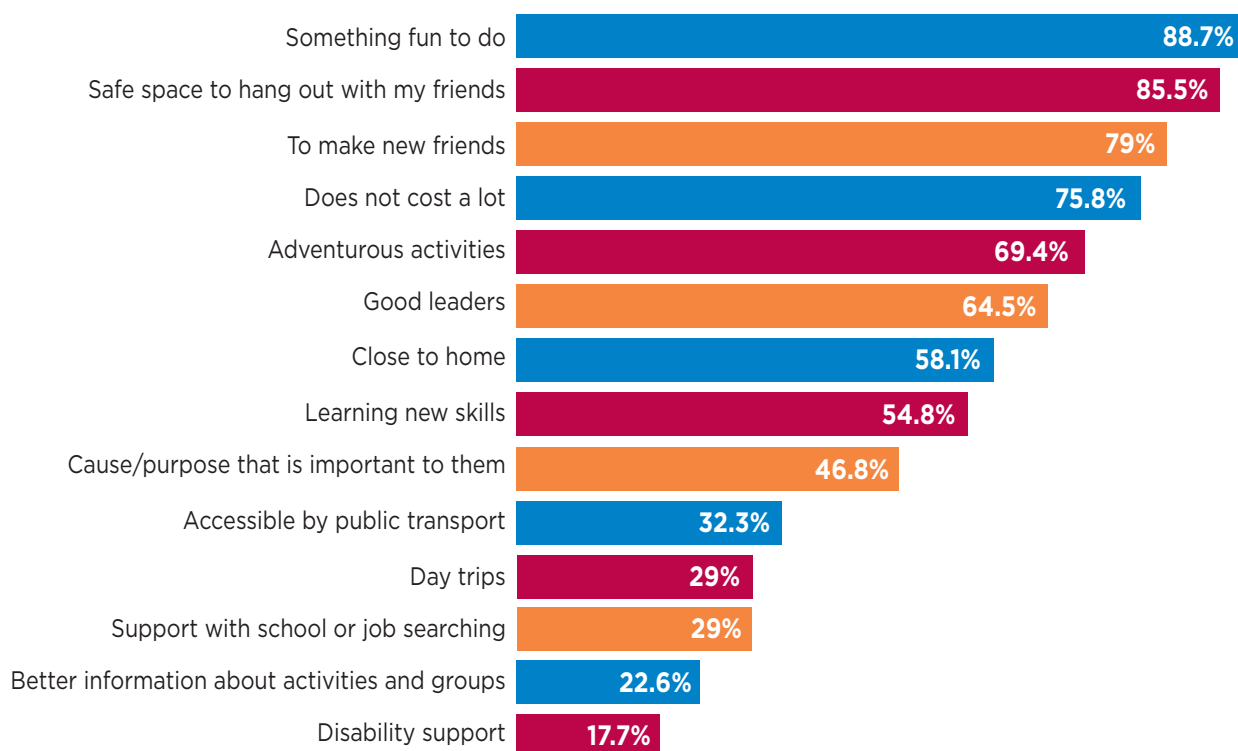
YOUNG PEOPLE: What would make you want to engage with an activity?
38 responses from those currently not taking part in any activities (ticked all that apply)

To make new friends	55.3%
Close to home	47.4%
Learning new skills	44.7%
Does not cost a lot	39.5%
Accessible by public transport	36.8%
Safe space to hang out with my friends	36.8%
Better information about activities and groups	26.3%
Day trips	23.7%
Good leaders	23.7%
Adventurous activities	23.7%
Support with school or job searching	23.7%
Disability support	10.5%

Adults' perceptions of the main motivators to engagement for young people, as indicated by their survey responses, also put 'to make new friends' (79%) in the top three, followed by 'something fun to do' (88.7%) and 'safe space to hang out with their friends' (85.5%).

ADULTS: What do you think are the main motivators for young people to want to engage with an activity? *62 responses (ticked all that apply)*

Motivator	Percentage
Something fun to do	88.7%
Safe space to hang out with my friends	85.5%
To make new friends	79%
Does not cost a lot	75.8%
Adventurous activities	69.4%
Good leaders	64.5%
Close to home	58.1%
Learning new skills	54.8%
Cause/purpose that is important to them	46.8%
Accessible by public transport	32.3%
Day trips	29%
Support with school or job searching	29%
Better information about activities and groups	22.6%
Disability support	17.7%

It has also been noted that some of the organisations and spaces are not as youth led as they could be, making them less appealing to young people to engage with and less relevant to provide support where it is needed.

3e. Benefits of youth work

The '*Benefits of youth work'* report[15] shows that the impact of youth work is significant, with two-thirds of young people feeling that youth work has made a considerable difference to their lives. Perceived benefits included increased confidence, learning new skills, making decisions for themselves, and feeling more confident about asking for help and information. They also felt that it helped them understand people who are different from themselves and improved their prospects of securing employment.

As mentioned in the report, '*Kids at the Door'*, a longitudinal study of the impact of youth work, showed that after 20 years, people report positive effects of their involvement in youth work, from moving away from crime and anti-social behaviour to sharing values and practice.

Both young people and adults identified increase in confidence and self-esteem as the biggest benefit of engaging in the youth offer.

> *"I just felt more mature, because I felt like I was putting myself out there. And it puts a lot less shame on you. When you go out more, you build your confidence in yourself. You get the ego, better self-esteem. You don't care about what people have to say about you. You know you are doing well. And why let someone else put you down?"* (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

The development of social, life and employability skills was also identified as one of the biggest perceived benefits of being involved with the youth offer.

Another perceived benefit of youth work is access to a supportive environment, where young people can make informed choices. It also encourages young people to stay open to new experiences, supports better health and wellbeing, and gives them a feeling of empowerment, ownership and independence.

> *"They help you understand more about what life's about. They also give us opportunities that we probably wouldn't be able to do and they just give us all the help and support that we need. And make us feel right because we can speak to them whenever we want to, without feeling like we are going to be judged."* (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

Other benefits identified by young people and adults were opportunities to gain new perspectives, ability to share experiences, links to local communities, and a sense of pride/achievement.

3f. Barriers to engagement

Similar to benefits and motivations, young people have also identified some barriers that might stop others from engaging in youth opportunities. All barriers are listed below in no particular order:

1. Inconsistency in service delivery from adults
2. Lack of feeling of safety
3. Perception that there is nothing to do in the local area/ Lack of awareness of the offer
4. Families not supporting engagement (e.g. not able to provide transport)
5. Costs of activities
6. Shortcomings of the education system (too much focus on academics)
7. Risk of exploitation
8. Access to opportunities/poor transport links
9. Fear of failure
10. Lack of motivation
11. Irrelevant method of communication with young people (opportunities advertised in a non-effective way)
12. Buildings/offer not youth-friendly
13. Offer not varied enough
14. Lack of trusted relationships
15. Territorial barriers (young people from other areas attending)
16. Short-term projects
17. Long waiting times
18. Mixed age groups – offer not relevant to some young people attending
19. Not wanting to be a part of an organised group (too much pressure making the activity not fun)
20. Disillusioned with support accessed in the past
21. Some projects and delivery being ill-informed

Impact of COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic has created additional barriers for young people to engage with the youth offer. Two main ones that were identified were the digital divide (some young people not having access to digital devices) and young people experiencing low motivation to engage with activities.
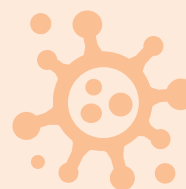
Others were around online delivery (young people being "zoomed out" or not having a space at home that they can use for video calls), difficulty in building relationships and communications without the face-to-face interaction, and not knowing what activities were going on and which ones had stopped.

3g. Needs and wants

'How the youth provision supports young people in building assets for a healthy life' report[9] highlights that, over many decades, local and national consultations with young people have shown ongoing demand for 'somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to'. However, it has been noted that exactly what that means and how it may meet young people's needs changes over time. The take-up of the offer will be influenced by access to the opportunities, including transport, inclusivity and price. Shifts in the socio-economic and political make-up of local areas also have a significant impact on the youth offer. The report mentions that two of the most common failures of the youth offer to keep up with such changes are poor digital opportunities (it's important to note that the report was published before the outbreak of Covid-19, which led to a significant development of the digital youth offer) and buildings used for the delivery of youth opportunities not being fit for purpose.

In line with national findings, the most common need expressed by young people in Oxfordshire is the need for a safe, well-equipped, and inclusive open-access space.

Due to the "patchiness" of the offer, young people would also like to see more opportunities available to them, especially in their local areas. It is however important to mention that the opportunities offered need to be relevant to the interests of young people living in the local area. Young people are looking to engage, but they want to take part in activities that are fun and enable them to do something that they want to do (e.g. creation of a local motorbike track).

In addition, there is a need for better access to trusted adults and resources.

It was also highlighted that young people, in general, do not have an awareness of what youth opportunities are available to them. There is a significant barrier in communication between the youth offer providers and young people.

The *How Youth Provision Supports Assets for a Healthy Life* report mentions that it is a common occurrence that young people do not know how to find youth provision in their area. The youth offer is rarely well advertised and it often takes place in venues which are not well-marked or youth friendly.

> *"I wouldn't have known about that if I didn't see it over social media and then my youth club telling me about it."* (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

In addition to the actual offer, young people spoke about the need to improve the understanding and perceptions that older people hold about young people. This does not only include better links with the adults living in their local communities but also staff and volunteers delivering youth activities – there is a significant need for more collaboration with young people.

> *"Young people are judged way too harshly by the older generation."*
> (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

With regards to the current youth offer, young people and adults suggested that there could be more support made available for the following issues:

- **Transition between schools and from school to employment**
- **Learning additional skills, including sex education, life and employability skills, or having a more robust curriculum**

The '*Youth Clubs and Schools: A partnership worth building'* report argues that schools' most acute and immediate needs are in areas where they face "confidence deficits", i.e. areas which they perceive as important, but lack confidence, such as: opportunities to learn about sex and relationships, support with transition to workplace and careers and opportunities to learn in a different setting.

- **Opportunities to voice their opinions/have more choice about provision**

The '*Youth Index 2021'* reports that despite two-thirds of young people feeling motivated to fight for a better future, some still feel that their voices are not being heard. Over a third of young people experience the feeling of powerlessness when thinking about their own future, and they think that their opinions on issues do not matter.

- **Employment/ apprenticeships/ studies**

> *"More help with careers advice as during pandemic schools could not run careers evenings. Need much more advice and support with choices when leaving schools, including local available apprenticeships and work experience opportunities"* (YOUNG PERSON, SURVEY)

- **Age-relevant activities and groups**

The '*How Youth Provision Supports Young People in Building Assets for a Heathy Life'* report[9] talks about the importance of ensuring that the youth offer available is relevant to the young people that it is trying to engage. Young people are going through experiences and transitions that are unique to their stage of development and need spaces and support that will cater for such their age group.

Other needs that were highlighted by both young people and adults were (in no particular order):

1. More support for different/minority groups, including LGBTQ+ young people
2. More flexibility in timings of opportunities to suit young people in education and apprenticeships
3. More low-level mental health support
4. Better training for support staff
5. More support for parents
6. Getting on the housing ladder
7. Some form of youth service
8. Befriending service
9. Shorter waiting lists for services
10. Support in getting back from the pandemic

It is clear that some of the needs and wants identified by the young people and adults in this study reflect the impacts predicted above.

In addition, it has been suggested that one of the main ways of supporting young people at the moment is encouraging them to stay hopeful.

> *"What young people need most, from my perspective, is something to do with understanding that there is hope. It is still worth you having aspirations."* (STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW)

3h. Addressing the needs

Longitudinal evidence reported by the '*Children and Young People*' governmental update[5] also showed that, due to COVID-19, young people became less likely to share their problems, more likely to try to deal with distress on their own and being less open to change.

When asked how young people are addressing their needs, when there is no apparent support available, most said they would turn to internet searches and social media.

> *"Young people will look for answers and they will find them. The problem is now they can google an answer and find it and it could be anything. I think that's quite dangerous."* (STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW)

In addition to these sources, young people are also likely to turn to family or friends, or to use national helpline services or relevant apps.

Adults taking part in the survey were asked to say, in their own words, what the top three priorities were in providing a high-quality, relevant and sustainable youth offer in Oxfordshire. The key themes that emerged were as follows:

1. **Workforce** – investment in training and development, and provision of sustainable career paths, valuing youth work as a profession and thereby ensuring young people have dependable, consistent, skilled support.

2. **Physical spaces** – provision of good quality premises/sites, equipment and facilities demonstrating that young people's needs are valued and ensuring they have a safe, youth-friendly space to go.

3. **Affordable** – opportunities and activities need to be free/low cost/affordable for all.

4. **Geographically accessible** – young people need to, easily and safely, get to the activities and opportunities meaning that they need to be available in all local communities and/or very easy to get to via affordable public transport.

5. **Inclusive** – opportunities/activities need to be available for all young people, both those who are in minority/vulnerable groups and those who are not.

## 3i. Perceptions of the youth offer

The survey data indicated a notable difference between how satisfied young people are with the youth offer and how satisfied adults think they are. When surveying young people, we found that over half (54.2%) were 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the activities/opportunities available to them.

YOUNG PEOPLE: Overall, how satisfied are you with the activities/support available to young people like you in your area? *140 responses*

Very   Quite   Not very   Not at all

| 6.4% | 39.3% | 42.1% | 12.1% |
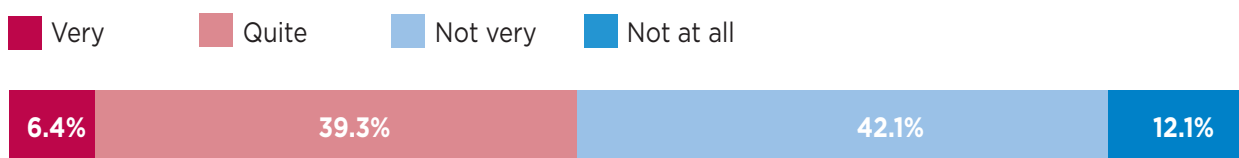
However, when adults were asked a similar question - how satisfied they thought young people were with activities/support available to them in Oxfordshire - they predicted notably lower levels of satisfaction, with just 29.2% saying 'quite satisfied' and none saying 'very satisfied'.

ADULTS: Overall, how satisfied do you think young people are with the activities/support available to them in Oxfordshire? *65 responses*

Very   Quite   Not very   Not at all

| 7.7% | 63.1% | 29.2% |
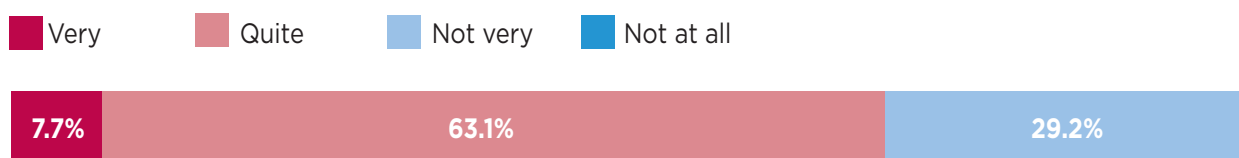
When asked about what they dislike about the current youth offer in Oxfordshire, young people spoke about some organisations creating additional pressure on their lives and working with staff that do not have relevant training.

Additionally, issues like lack of connection with the community, lack of encouragement to attend, lack of organisation, closure of services without a reason and timings of the opportunities were mentioned.

> *"I know that there are some youth groups here, but I feel like it's not really a big thing that's encouraged in young people to join a club or a youth group. Yeah, that's definitely something I feel that is missing here."* (YOUNG PERSON INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

Please see page 43 for list of references.

MODELS OF LOCAL YOUTH PROVISION

Examples of models of local youth provision

Most recent guidance published by Public Health England[10] suggests that taking a disjointed approach to health issues will not improve the overall wellbeing of young people. Six core principles were suggested for improving young people's health:

1. Relationships and a sense of belonging are central to young people's health and wellbeing
2. A positive focus on what makes young people feel well and able to cope
3. Reduce health inequalities for the most in need
4. Integrated services that meet young people's needs holistically and are centred on young people
5. Understanding young people's changing health needs as they develop
6. Accessing young-people-friendly services

In May 2019, the Local Government Association commissioned a study to identify factors that facilitate or hamper the development of an effective local youth offer. For the purpose of the study, authors defined the youth offer as the *'full range of provision in a local area to support youth related activity including both formal youth services as well as provision delivered by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and other partners'*.

The report[6] categorises a range of delivery models on a spectrum from local authority-led to commissioned models, with a combined approach in the middle. Within these, the research found variations in the role the local authority played, its interaction with the voluntary sector, and the diversity of provision and funding.

Local authority-led

Youth services are delivered primarily by LA, including provision of youth centres and/or workers.

Combined

Some of the youth offer is commissioned out to VCS, with some elements provided by the LA eg. specialist workforce, youth centres.

Commissioned

Youth Services are primarily delivered by the VCS being commissioned by the LA or through other partners.
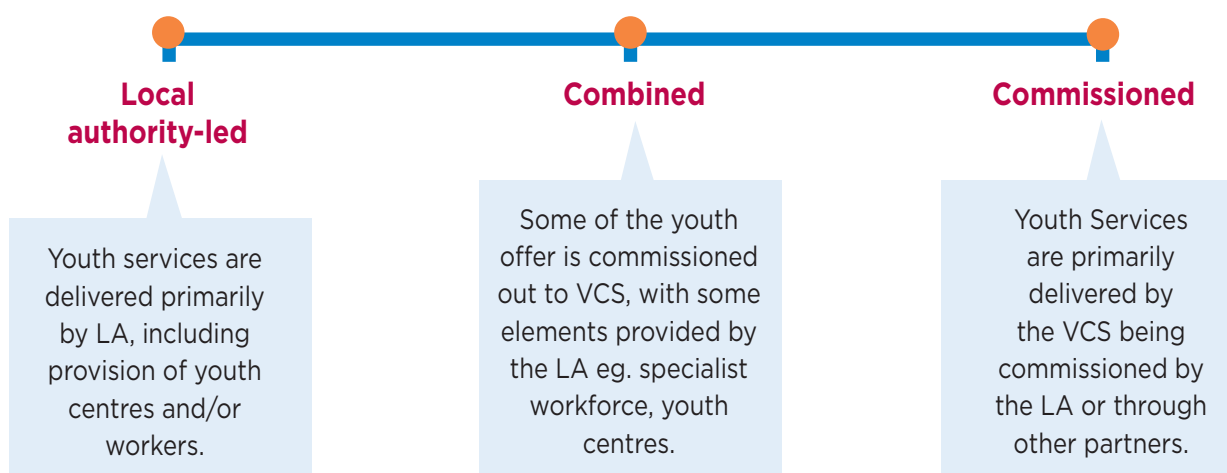
Figure from *Developing an effective youth offer* report, 2020

Through the analysis of different models, the report suggests a number of common enablers that contribute to the development of an effective local youth offer. Those are:

1. **Vision and leadership** – clear on purpose and how to achieve desired outcomes

2. **Commissioning** – rationale behind partners' involvement is well-articulated

3. **Provision and delivery** – provision practicable for young people and suitable for a set of evolving needs

4. **Partnership and capacity building** – partners are able to have a clear way of engaging with and shaping the local youth offer

5. **Workforce development** – long-term plan behind recruitment to ensure a broad representation of people supported into profession

6. **Demonstrating impact** – able to tell the story about what the youth offer is, why it matters and the impact it has

Recognising the importance of ensuring that the offer stays relevant and is engaging, it is also essential to build in the voice of young people into everything that is created to support them.

The '*Are We Listening?*' Care Quality Commission March 2018[4] – review of C&YP mental health services suggests that involving children, young people, their parents, families and carers in decisions about their care makes it easier to provide high-quality care. Having a single 'key worker' coordinate input from different teams and services enables a child or a young person to build trust and rapport with a single member of staff over time. It also facilitates regular contact, which improves their experience of care and helps to bridge a gap if they are waiting to access the opportunity.

Three case studies, which can be found in the full-text report, summarise information provided via interviews with one key stakeholder of the youth sector in each of Devon, Coventry and Essex. The aim is to provide an overview of the current model for youth provision in each area and to summarise relevant key insights, challenges and priorities for the future albeit limited to the views and perspectives of the individual stakeholders.

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