



Supporting Young People to Take Charge of Their Mental Health

'Restart Youth!' Report



A collective and collaborative approach to the future of
local mental health services for young people

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No5

As designed by the young people of Reading

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Acknowledgements and Foreword

Firstly, our thanks go to the 64 young people who have made this report possible. For your honesty, openness, and articulate approach to voicing your experiences and your needs. For trusting us with your voices and allowing us to learn from them, take them forward to shape future services, and make a difference in our community.

Thank you to our Young Ambassadors who have shaped and been a part of every stage of this project, truly making it a piece of work by young people, for young people.

To the organisations who supported young people to engage with this project, especially Reading Football Club Community Trust and Reading Museum.

And lastly to the Blagrave Trust, for funding and supporting this project and trusting us to seek the voices of local young people and act on what they tell us.

As outlined by many national research studies¹, and our own Young Ambassadors' *'Impact of COVID-19'* report², young people have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and lockdown, and there is much to do regarding service recovery post-covid. This project put the voices of young people central to shaping and influencing No5's strategy, helping us to ensure we can be highly responsive to their ever-evolving needs as the landscape changes.

At No5, the voices of local young people are always at the centre of our service development, delivery and training. This project has allowed us to reach young people from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences, and we feel positive that the commitments and next steps outlined in this report are reflective of the wide-ranging needs of young people in Greater Reading.

Our focus remains co-designing and delivering the support that helps young people to take charge of their mental health, and we will continue to strive for this, alongside young people, in everything we do.

The young people we have worked with through compiling this report, and all our other projects, are a testament to the power of young people's voices. We hope this report will inspire and drive us all to have them alongside us in all decisions made about the services we offer to support them.

Carly

Carly Newman
Operations and Relationships Manager, No5 Young People

¹ The edge Foundation (2020) *The Impact of Covid-19 on Education A summary of evidence on the early impacts of lockdown*

Youth Access. (2021). *'Generation COVID'? Socio-economic factors impacting young people's mental health in the wake of the pandemic*

² No5 Young People (2020) *The Impact of COVID-19: The Voice of Young People*

About the Report

This report details the key themes and findings from our in-depth conversations with young people. By holding multiple focus group sessions with each group and meeting them in the places they were, we could listen to them for longer, establish a sense of trust and therefore hear a deeper insight into what local young people really need. This structure reflected the features of services they told us are essential to them – confidentiality, accessibility, trust and longevity.

Our sessions focussed on the elements of their identity they felt were important to them and which ones had the biggest impact, both positively and negatively, on their mental health. From this, young people designed, in detail, what services they need into the future. This report details those services and the essential features clearly identified by young people as crucial to them being able to get the support they need.

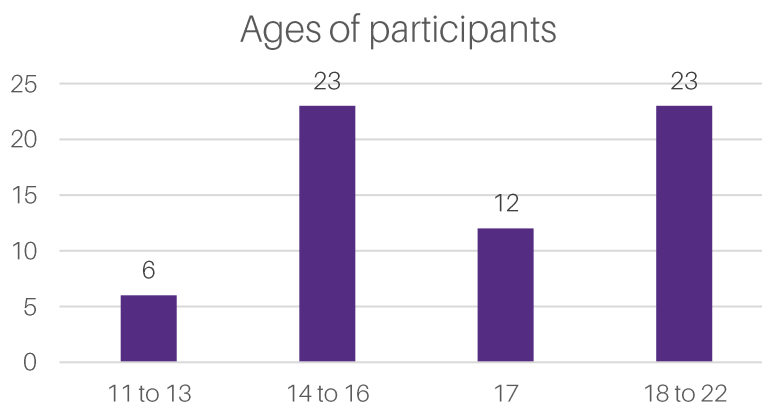
The feeling of safety and trust, along with clear boundaries and confidentiality, created in the sessions welcomed the diversity of experiences and created a space where young people felt they could disagree with each other – respecting each other’s perspectives and designing services that met many, conflicting needs. This was reported extremely positively directly by the young people involved who said they welcomed both the conversations and the opportunity to share their own experiences, and to disagree. This meant young people did not have to be representative of the whole cohort of their peers and were seen as individuals rather than a one-voice collective.

In the early stages of this project, our Young Ambassadors decided that the first crucial step to getting young people to engage with the project, was for the invitation to take part to come from young people, to be clear about what we were going to ask, why we were asking it, and what we were going to do with what young people told us. Transparency is key for young people who are all-too-often asked to give their feedback and opinions to ‘professionals’ who they believe do not follow through on what they have told them.

Our Young Ambassadors wrote, and sent, all communications to young people and devised the survey that we asked young people to complete. This survey gave us a snapshot of what was important to young people, and their feedback allowed us to shape and personalise our focus group sessions based on what we had learnt.

The survey also provided a vital, anonymous way for young people to have their voices heard – being able to share their feedback, and shape this project and future services, without having to attend a focus group session in-person or online where they did not feel able to. This anonymous offer meant that we heard from an additional 36 young people to the 28 we learnt from in focus group sessions.

Of the total group of 64 young people involved, 43% self-identified as coming from a non-White ethnic background. This is proportionality higher than the overall population of Reading, where Asian, Black British, Black African, Black Caribbean, mixed and multiple ethnic groups make up 25.2% of the population.



25% self-identified as not male or female, with 5 young people identifying as transgender, and 8% as non-binary.

The survey asked young people to identify which of the elements that made up their identity were particularly important to them, and whether these impacted their mental health. Answers included Work, Ethnicity, Religion, Sexuality, Socioeconomic background, School, Gender and Hobbies with 56% of young people selecting Gender and 72% stating that their hobbies were most important to their personal identity.

Surprisingly to us, only 25% of respondents felt that their ethnicity was an important element of their personal identity. Where it was important to them, this was the case for young people across the whole range of ethnicities, not exclusively young people from minority and marginalised ethnic groups. From this we learnt that we are mistaken to assume that the more prominent, and more often cited, categories of personal identity such as ethnicity, religion and sexuality are the elements that young people feel are the most important to them with their age, education, gender and hobbies actually being the most important to them.

Significantly, gender was the second highest category of importance reported by young people, but sexuality was only reported, as important, by 36% of the young people we spoke to. This also correlated with the feedback from young people when asked if they thought that pre-existing connotations and stigmas of these groups impacted their mental health, with stigmas and expectations about gender presentations featuring most often.

From this feedback, we shifted our understanding about what diversity looks like according to young people - moving away from the pressure to have a representative group of young people that just reflect the ethnic diversity of our area, to a diverse group of young people who also reflected the important features of their own personal identity.

With this in mind, we held focus groups in a variety of locations, both online and in-person, and with a diverse mix of young people that each brought their individual experiences and opinions. It was an important feature of this project to hear from young people who would usually self-exclude from this type of work, often thinking that their voice and opinion is not valid. The clear invitation coming from our Young Ambassadors, and transparency about how their feedback was going to be used, made a notable difference to the young people who engaged with the project meaning that we heard from underrepresented and marginalised young people.

We hope this report will both highlight the diverse needs of local young people, and take seriously the elements that they have identified as the essential features of the services they want and need – long-term, relational, trusted, safe and open access.

This report also details the commitments No5 has made to act on what we have learnt from the young people involved in this project, along with our proposed next steps to working towards delivering the range of services designed throughout this project, most notably an open-access hub in line with the model being championed by The Centre for Mental Health, Youth Access and The Children's Society³.

³ Centre for Mental Health and Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition (2021) *Time for action: Investing in comprehensive mental health support for children and young people*
 Youth Access (2021) *The case beyond Covid*
 The Children's Society (2020) *The case for open access emotional health and wellbeing services*

Key Themes and Findings

Support in the Community

- **Spaces and places.** Young people feel as though the limited spaces currently in the community are not accessible to them, do not provide them with the services they need, and they feel unsafe to access them in the areas they are currently located.
- **Skills and activities.** Spaces, outside of school, need to provide activities that are relevant to them, allow them to socialise and develop long-term trusted relationships, and provide opportunities to learn relevant life skills that they feel are lacking within the current education system.
- **Safety and accessibility.** Safety was a key concern for all the young people we heard from. Better community relationships, including with local Police Community Support Officers, felt to them like a way for them to feel safer and better able to access community spaces.

Support in School

- **Whole-school approach to mental health.** The need for a whole-school approach to mental health was voiced by all the young people we heard from. Crucially for them, this must include teachers and parents, and enable anonymous access to support and information.
- **Trust and relationships.** Young people feel a real lack of trust, and discontinued relationships, especially in the transition to Secondary school. They are keenly aware of the school confidentiality system and voiced their concerns about how this can be prohibitive to accessing support if there is a lack of trust, and a poor relationship, with the Pastoral staff within school.
- **Types of support.** Young people told us that for them, mental health support in school must come in the following forms: 1:1, group and drop-in, including a regular offer to all students to speak to someone, confidentially, without it meaning they have to attend regular counselling.

Support Online

- **Information.** Young people feel a real lack of accessible and understandable information regarding mental health, common issues and experiences, what is normal in terms of adolescence, thoughts and feelings, and often, where to go to access help.
- **Advice.** Young people want to be able to speak to someone for advice regarding their and their peers' mental health, without the fear of anyone finding out, being judged or labelled.
- **Counselling.** The continuing of an offer of online counselling was raised by young people who recognised that this form of support is essential for some young people and they did not want it to stop and everything go back to in-person. A balance of online and in-person was essential to them, and online support included groups and 1:1.

Signposting

- **In school.** Young people felt as though they could not easily access information about what support and services were available to them within school without having to directly ask, and therefore 'out themselves'.
- **Online.** Being able to go online for information about local support and services was essential for young people, including via social media.
- **Co-production.** Young people believe that information and advice should be 'collective, collaborative and co-produced'.

Key Features

The key, essential features of all support and services, according to young people, are;

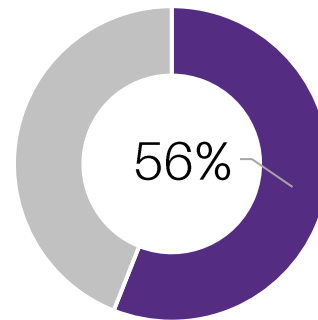
- Trust
- Confidentiality
- Accessibility
- Open-access - for both drop-in and regular services
- Relational
- Early intervention
- Listening and being heard
- Collaborative and young person-led

Support in the Community

A central theme in both the survey and focus group findings was the need for support to be available and accessible to young people in the community, outside of the school setting.

For some, they highlighted the need for this to be the case for young people who were not within the school-system, for those aged over 18 and those in training. For others, support outside of school was crucial because it provided young people with privacy and anonymity.

For many young people, especially those from communities where there is still significant stigma surrounding mental health, accessing support is taboo. Some young people told us that, because of this, they would not access support within school because 'everyone would find out' and being able to access support with the confidence that their parents, and wider community, would not find out was the only way in which they would ask for help.



- 56% wanted support out of schools but in the community
- 44% wanted support in school

This privacy also speaks to the way in which young people need services to be delivered. Confidentiality is key to young people who exist in a world where so much of what they do is decided for them and known about by those around them. For the young people we spoke to, confidentiality is crucial, not just regarding the content of what they may say to a professional, but also in them even accessing support.

For some young people who had experience of disclosing information about past events to statutory bodies, a feeling of not being heard and having decisions made for them would prevent them from accessing support in the future. They told us that they should be involved in discussions about what happens next, with decisions being made alongside them, allowing them to keep their stories as they own, rather than them being lost to 'the system' and no longer feeling in control of what happens.

The crucial factor of confidentiality, ties closely with accessibility for the young people we spoke to about support in the community. For many, they need to be able to access support without those around them knowing and this, therefore, speaks to services being delivered in places that young people can safely get to, and in the spaces where they already are.

Accessibility, for young people, has multiple factors. They told us that in order for services to be truly accessible, they specifically needed a choice in the gender and age of the counsellor or other professionals they would work with, multiple languages spoken, a range in the times and days that support and services are offered, and a presence within these spaces of trusted community leaders from marginalised communities where support is still not widely acceptable. These are the factors that young people told us would allow them to access support in the community.

Young people told us that another crucial element of services being accessible was that they are all free at the point of delivery. This is crucial for two key reasons;

1. Young people, who want to be able to access services confidentially, cannot do so if they need to ask their parents and carers for money to attend.
2. Services must be available to all young people, regardless of economic background and family income, therefore must be free for all.

Free services encourage access by all and young people told us they want community spaces that allowed them to meet young people that they otherwise wouldn't get the opportunity to – broadening their horizons and experiences. This can only be achieved by accessible services that offer equity to all young people.

To all the young people we heard from, safety was the most important factor to them feeling able to access services. For many, they feel the current spaces that are being used to offer community-based activities such as some Community Centres are located in areas

where they do not feel safe. This is made worse by these spaces not being used often, and so are perceived as being old, run-down and out of date. These factors combine to create places where young people do not feel they can be – they worry about feeling unsafe and judged.

Feeling safe is crucial to young people being able to access help, engage in activities, and be a part of the community – something they told us they really wanted. By contrast, feeling unsafe is paralysing – it activates the fight, flight or freeze response mechanism and puts young people into a sense of hyper-awareness which is not conducive to being able to access support or engage with their peers and the wider community.

Young people specifically told us that they wanted there to be a wider presence of Police Community Support Officers in their areas, and for those individuals to truly be a part of their community. Young people want to be able to get to know these Officers, to develop long-term relationships with them, and to be able to trust them in order to be able to feel safe and know where they can go for help should they need it. Young people have experienced a real sense of disconnect and fear, between their communities and the Police, especially given the significant increase in knife crime in the Reading area in the last few years – something that young people are acutely aware of, and this was raised multiple times throughout our sessions as a key concern.

Additionally important to safety, young people said that a space to develop long-term relationships with trusted adults was crucial to their development, and progression into adulthood and the world of work. Many young people that we spoke to keenly felt a lack of positive and relatable role models, especially male role models, in their lives and said that support in the community would be where they would go, if this was available to them.

Role models, to the young people we heard from, have to have had a similar lived experience to them, and provide a non-judgemental, safe space for them to explore their anxieties about going out into the world. These role models must be willing to share elements of their own lived experience in order to help young people feel less alone, to show that the thoughts and feelings they may be experiencing do not last forever and do not prevent them from achieving what they want to.

Reliability and consistency were raised by many young people, especially those who identified as male, as elements that would make the most difference to them being able to build trusted relationships with the professionals who supported them in community spaces.

'Safe community spaces to be with other people are essential to building a sense of self and community'

The benefits of peer support were also closely linked to the presence of positive role models, for the young people we heard from. They have experienced a real lack of opportunity to hear from, and learn from, each other, especially during the pandemic. They expressed a need for young people to share their lived experience with each other and offer advice.

Young people told us that they would want to be equipped with listening skills and training to better be able to support their friends if they were struggling, and this is the type of training they would look to be delivered in a community space. Young people expressed concerns about their own mental health and wellbeing when they are encouraged to take on the issues of their peers. They told us they want listening skills training, not to take on the responsibility for dealing with the issues of their friends, but to be able to better support them without being impacted themselves. Young people keenly want to help each other whilst also protect their own mental health and wellbeing.

Community spaces for young people must provide a holistic range of activities and support. For the young people we spoke to, this crucially included;

- Sports and creative activities that helped them develop passions and the most important elements of their personal identities
- Activities and work experience that 'prepare young people for life' such as CV writing, interview skills, money-management, conflict resolution, listening skills, and awareness about consent and healthy relationships
- Drop-in and ad hoc mental health support such as one-off counselling sessions to offload their worries and stresses
- Themed group support work for various mental health issues
- Social and recreational opportunities and activities
- Mentoring – both the opportunity to have a mentor, and also develop into mentoring other young people
- Opportunities for other members of the community and local businesses to collaborate with them, to work alongside them on activities and deliver training and life skills.

Young people recognised that a hub providing a range of activities and support also provides them with the privacy that they require from services. They said they felt comforted in the idea that they could attend for a whole range of different activities, or even for a safe place to socialise, rather than it being a space that only offered 'formal' mental health support.

In conclusion, young people told us that in order to thrive, they wanted to be connected to their communities, for 'everyone to be a part of it and feel like they belong' and said that hub spaces would provide them with this connection to each other and their wider communities. For the young people we spoke to, community, and a sense of belonging, would positively impact their mental health and wellbeing.

'Community... seeking out others who identify similarly to me. This offers validation and support.'

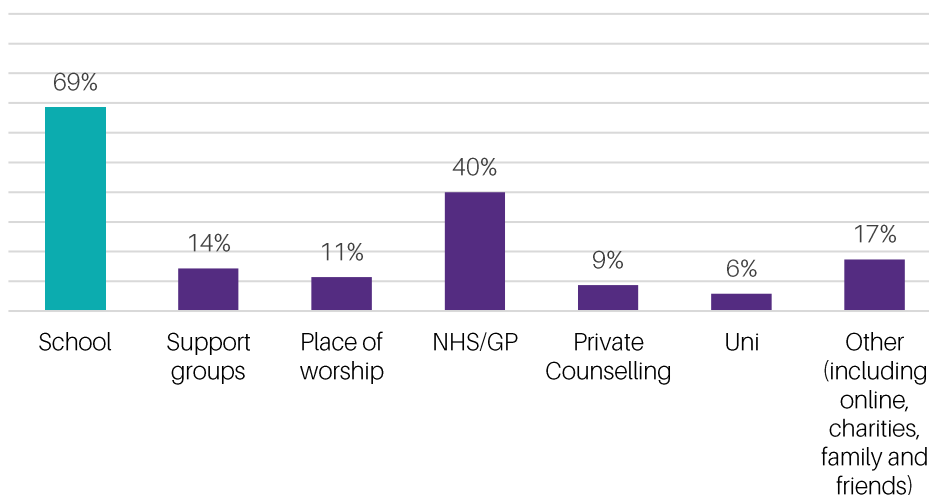
Support in School

Whilst support in the community was deemed crucial by young people, they also recognised that this must be paired with support in school, as for many young people it is where they had previously accessed mental health support.

For some, this was due to school being the only place they could go to access support as they wouldn't be able to travel anywhere else without other people knowing. They said that as they were already in school every day, accessing support confidentially was only possible within the school setting.

For others, support in school represented an opportunity for prevention and early intervention to take place, where a whole-school approach to mental health would promote education and access to information would be available before issues even arose.

Where young people have accessed support before



Young people want mental health to be embedded within the school system; to be included in PSHE lessons and tutor time, but also to include support, information and training for teachers and parents.

School, for many young people and their parents, represents a trusted institution and this trust is important to them in regard to the information they receive, and the support they may ask for. Some young people told us they would feel more comfortable with receiving information about mental health and common issues within school, when compared to online sources, as they could better trust the information given in school.

However, trust and relationships are also important to young people in other ways. Young people are acutely aware of feeling as though nothing they say within school is confidential, and they live under a constant feeling of threat that anything they say will be reported. This, along with a feeling of a lack of relationships with trusted professionals within school, makes it prohibitively difficult for young people to ask for help when they need it.

Many young people told us that in the transition to Secondary school, they lost the feeling of trust within school and did not manage to establish trusted relationships with members of staff. This, along with there usually being only one 'Designated Safeguarding Lead', stopped young people feeling able to talk to someone within school.

Young people wanted to be able to speak to any member of the school team about how they were feeling, as they felt that if they did not have a relationship with the designated individual, they couldn't talk to them – leaving them alone and unable to ask for help.

Mental health education was identified by all the young people we heard from as the first step to early intervention and prevention, and all of them said that the school setting was a key place for this to take place.

Young people want education about what mental health is, what experiences of struggling with mental health issues may be like, and to hear from other young people who have gone through it about what they did to feel better. Young people also want an open dialogue between them and school-staff about struggling with mental health, wanting their teachers to be 'more human' and share their own experiences.

Young people explored what this might look like within school, and told us they would want PSHE and Tutor time to equip them with a language to talk about their own mental health, to explore what is 'normal' when it comes to thoughts and feelings (especially during adolescence), to learn about where they can go to access help, and different mechanisms and coping strategies to help them take charge of their own mental health. Young people want mental health education in school to help them to feel less alone and to enable them to feel safe and secure in talking about mental health.

When exploring what this might look like, young people said they wanted this to be more than a one-lesson, tick box exercise and for them to have multiple opportunities throughout their school careers to explore and understand mental health and wellbeing.

They suggested that lessons on mental health should be tailored to their needs by the group completing a survey ahead of a lesson, and a teacher being able to adapt the content based on what the group felt they needed the most rather than a 'one-size fits all', curriculum-based approach. Young people felt this was essential to them being able to engage and relate to the topic of mental health which can often feel alien and in some cases, quite scary.

Young people also recognised that mental health comes up in various forms throughout education but is not talked about. They voiced that they didn't want mental health to be in isolation but to be a part of their everyday school experience, where it arose. For example, they noted that the topic of suicide is present in *Romeo and Juliet*, but that this element of the text is never really explored or discussed. These conversations, young people felt, would normalise, and destigmatise mental health.

It was also acknowledged that conversations about mental health need to start early, with young people suggesting that it would have been beneficial to them, when they were in primary school, if Secondary school-aged young people came in to talk to them about thoughts and feelings. The young people we heard from were also extremely keen to do this themselves, recognising that they would be benefiting the younger generation whilst also developing their confidence.

We feel it is important to highlight that, where young people felt that they had received a good level of mental health education in school, they felt able to self-manage and support their peers. They told us they felt they should, and were able to, take charge of their own mental health and be responsible for accessing information and help if they were to need it. Crucially, this represents education as prevention.

However, young people feeling as though they received mental health education in school was rare amongst the young people we heard from. Most said they didn't have conversations like our focus groups at school, especially about mental health and that the process of taking part in these sessions highlighted to them how much was lacking from their school experience.

Exploration around what mental health support within school should look like was also prominent in the sessions. They expressed they wanted 1:1, group support and drop-in all to be available within the school setting. They said it was crucial that professionals such as counsellors, working within schools, must be independent and not a member of staff that they would come into contact within different contexts, such as a member of teaching or pastoral staff.

As with the community setting, drop-in support featured heavily when talking about in-school support services, with young people suggesting that they would want all students to be offered a regular one-off session with a counsellor within school without it meaning they would have to commit to attending weekly. An opportunity to off-load their worries and stresses without the stigma of 'having counselling' was really important to many of the young people we spoke to.

Shockingly, some of the in-school services that were on offer to the young people we spoke to were paid-for services with young people telling us they and their parents would have to pay for counselling within school. As stated above, this makes services inaccessible to young people whose families cannot afford support and those who want their support to be confidential. Young people re-iterated the need for all support and services to be free for all.

In summary, in-school support must work alongside a full community support offer in order to promote mental health education, and therefore prevention and early intervention whilst also providing young people with the choice of service they need in order to act, with agency, to take charge of their own mental health.

Support Online

There were three distinct types of support that young people raised in regard to online services; information, advice, and counselling.

The features that young people told us were important to them regarding these three areas differed widely and this made it clear that for young people, it is important for these offers to be boundaried and separate.

A lack of reliable, trusted information written in a young person-friendly way, without feeling patronising, was keenly expressed by the young people we heard from. They said they want information about mental health, common issues and experiences, what 'normal' mental health looks like in adolescence, and easy-to-find information about where to go for help.

Alongside this, young people want to be able to access resources that help them to self-manage their thoughts and feelings such as coping mechanisms, with it being crucial to them that these were in the words of other young people with lived experience, rather than being written by professionals. They said the voice of their peers sharing experiences would help them to feel reassured. They did, however, want this information to be hosted by a reputable organisation that was trusted in the community – young people's voices backed by a professional service.

Accessing information, for young people, sits alongside getting advice. They want to be able to get information and then be able to share and receive advice from their peers, and professionals. For the young people we spoke to, the ability to seek professional advice, confidentially, without needing to commit to regular support was crucial as many wanted to just be able to 'check out' that how they were feeling was normal. Being able to do this without anyone else knowing was important to the young people we spoke to, and they said it was essential that they were not judged or labelled in the process of seeking advice.

Some young people expressed that discussion boards, where young people and professionals with lived experience, could post questions and share advice would be how they would want to access support, with a two-way giving and receiving of support feeling important to them.

Some also said that they would feel comfortable using an online chat function to seek advice, as this mode of access would give them both the drop-in capacity, and anonymity, that they want when asking for guidance.

Distinctly, however, online chat was not the way that young people said they wanted to access regular mental health support. Some said that it may be a helpful 'way in' to online counselling, but all of the young people we spoke to said they would want video call-based online support as they felt that they couldn't develop a relationship with a counsellor via web chat. They felt that seeing and hearing their counsellor was crucial to building a trusting relationship. Many said that webchat would help 'start them off' on their counselling journey, with typing what was going on for them feeling easier than having to say it for the first time, but all said they would want this to progress from webchat to video-based services where they needed longer-term support.

Young people also expressed a desire for services to continue online, post-pandemic, with many recognising that online support could be the only way that some young people could access help. They highlighted the need for a balance between online and in-person services and expressed the desire for an increase in online group support, as well as 1:1.

In summary, the online space is an important one for young people to be able to access reliable information, advice, and support. What was the most clear from the young people's feedback was the distinct difference in what they want from information and advice (anonymous, forum and chat-based services) in comparison to more formalised online support services (regular and consistent video call, relationship-based support with the same counsellor/mentor). We must honour these differences in the delivery of online services in order to best meet young people's needs.

Signposting

As highlighted by the different features that young people identified between what they needed from online information/advice and counselling, what was clear is that anonymous and confidential access to information is crucial to young people being able to take charge of their own mental health.

Young people also expressed that they wanted clear, accessible information to be available in the places and spaces that they already occupy, namely in-school and online.

The requirement for anonymous access to information within the school setting first felt like a challenge to the young people we heard from. However, they felt this could be achieved by the whole-school approach to mental health which would see up-to-date information being available around the school, included in school newsletters and printed in school materials, such as planners. This meant, for young people, that they would all have access to the same information, and they and their parents could look at it both in and out of school, without having to ask and 'out themselves' as needing it.

Online platforms also featured heavily in the discussions about signposting, with young people telling us they would want information to be available online, such as on social media. This is because it is where they already are and so would help to normalise and destigmatise mental health and getting support as it 'would seem normal as everyone has social media'.

It was clear from their feedback that signposting about support and services, in both these forms, must clearly communicate what services they offer, who they are available to, and what the process to accessing them is.

The most important feature of signposting, and information, according to the young people we spoke to was that it must be co-produced – a 'collective and collaborative effort'.

Key Features

In addition to the 'what' of service delivery, our sessions with young people focussed on the 'how' – with young people identifying the crucial features that they needed from services in order to meet their needs.

The key features, as told by the young people we spoke to, are as follows;

- **Trust** – Being able to trust the professionals around them, the young people said, was essential to them feeling able to engage with services, and to find, and speak their truth. Young people acutely felt a lack of trust both in the professionals, and the institutions and statutory services, around them. This was expressed the most in terms of statutory mental health support and school staff.

Young people told us that they needed a consistent, professional adult with whom they could build a trusting relationship to engage with services and have their needs met.

Essential elements of being able to build this trust was that they would consistently engage with the same professional, allowing them to know that that person would be there for them, week-in week-out. Young people said they would feel more comfortable if the professionals around them were 'humanised' and were willing to share their own stories and experiences.

Professionals being 'like them', that they could identify with, and who had similar lived experience to them would have the biggest impact on them being able to develop trusted relationships.

- **Confidentiality** – Knowing that spaces, activities and services were truly confidential was 'a deal breaker' for young people. They said they would need to know that no one would have to know they were attending or accessing support in order to feel able to engage. Confidentiality, for young people, also extended to the content of what they brought to sessions, with it being crucial that no one would have to find out, except for in cases of safeguarding concerns, what they had said.

Young people also expressed how they would want confidentiality to be handled in situations of safeguarding concerns when confidentiality may have to be broken and other bodies informed.

They told us that they want to be part of the process at every stage, where it was appropriate – for them to be involved in discussions and decisions made about what to do next, and to be supported in understanding the process and potential consequences.

For the young people we spoke to, who had previously been in similar situations, it was crucial that if they made a disclosure about another individual, for the support they were receiving to continue to support and focus on them, rather than to become about the other person. The young person themselves remaining at the centre of their care. This was especially important for young people who had been the witness to incidents that required police intervention, with them feeling that the attention was often being shifted towards the perpetrator and victim, and away from them – taking their voice away and invalidating their own feelings and experiences.

Confidential access to information, advice and support, where they would be believed and validated, was so important to what young people told us they needed.

- **Accessibility** – Services being truly accessible to all was a prominent feature in everything we heard from the young people we worked with.

To them, services are only accessible if they meet the differing needs of all groups and so working alongside them to co-design and deliver these services is essential to ensuring accessibility for all.

Accessibility, for the young people we spoke to, spanned a range of factors, such as;

- Physical building access for young people with visible and invisible disabilities
 - Locations of services – young people must be able to travel, safely, to services in a way that allows them to do so confidentially without fear of judgement
 - Free services – all activities and services must be free for young people, no matter their background
 - A range in the days and times that activities and services are offered
 - A range in the languages spoken by the professionals, and leaders, within the hub space and for these to be reflective of the languages spoken in their communities
 - A range in the ages and genders of the professionals working within the hub space, and a choice in who to speak to
 - Dedicated times for specific needs and identity-based groups to allow young people to feel safe and free from fear of judgement
 - A well-known about and advertised space that means young people know it is there and available even before they need it.
- **Open-access (drop in – non-commitment)** - Activities and services that promote young people to turn up when they feel they want and need to, without having to sign-up beforehand or commit to attending regularly. Young people told us this would encourage them to take charge of their own mental health, seeking additional help and support when they felt overwhelmed without it making them feel there was ‘something wrong with them’.
 - **Relational** – Young people told us it was crucial to them to be able to develop long-term relationships with the professionals working around them and for these professionals to be positive role models. Young people, especially those who had previously received support from the statutory sector, felt that the support was transactional and short-term. This meant they didn’t have time to build trust before they were ‘moved on’. Inconsistency in the professionals supporting them, especially within the social care setting, was clearly hugely damaging and fracturing for the young people we spoke to.
 - **Early intervention** – Information, advice and support being available at the earliest possible stage was essential to young people. They told us that having to wait for services, once they were already struggling with their mental health, was prohibitive to them even asking for help.

‘Waiting lists are so long before people can access help it puts young people off even seeking help in the first place’

Young people want access to information and advice before issues with their mental health even arise, helping to promote that struggling with your mental health is normal.

Counselling and mental health support being offered within a hub space where other activities are taking place would help to promote this, young people said. They told us

that it would show them that getting help for your mental health was just the same as taking part in a sports or creative activity.

- **Listening and being heard** – Young people said that spaces and services that truly listened to them, where they felt heard, were essential to them being able to take charge of their mental health.

Some of the young people we heard from, who had previously accessed statutory support, said they didn't want worksheet-based activities that taught them to 'cope better' or 'be more resilient', but wanted a space where they had time to truly be listened to and heard, and to work through their difficulties.

- **Collaborative and young person-led** – Ultimately, young people told us they want to be supported to take charge of their own mental health. This, to them, means that they want information, advice and support to be young person led, as they feel the most connected to their peers who share lived experience.

Young people feel that they collectively know best what they and their peers need, and so should be supported by professional organisations to co-design and deliver services – allowing them to be an active part of their support, and community, rather than having decisions made for them and support 'done to them'.

In order to deliver effective support to local young people, all services must honour these features and No5 is committed to continuing to promote these within all of its current and future work.

Next Steps

Commitments already implemented by No5

Given the extent to which young people have shown us that the important elements of their personal identity impact their mental health and wellbeing, No5 has committed to promoting intersectionality, and are working hard to have an intersectional lens across all elements of our support and outreach.

No5 is committed to continuing to learn from young people and ask them about potential friction-points that may create barriers to accessing our services.

To date, the training and changes that have been implemented are:

- The delivery of Active Bystander training across the whole organisation in response to advice from young people who told us that their ethnic background was important to their identity about ways in which No5 can promote, and demonstrate, our intersectional approach. Currently 61% of the organisation have completed the training delivered by the Active Bystander Company.
- Reflecting on what we ask young people about themselves, at the point of referral, and re-organising our online referral form to prioritise young people being able to ask for what they need from No5 rather than focussing on the 'data' we need to report for funders.

To better signpost young people to support and activities in the community, we have added a 'Support in the Community' section to our monthly newsletter, which is shared with all young people on our waiting list, and current and former clients. We are working with partner organisations, such as Sport in Mind and Digital Gum, to promote support, opportunities and activities that they are running. The activities of these organisations, along with job opportunities from community partners such as Connect Reading, are especially important given the extent to which young people highlighted sport and career opportunities as both being important to them maintaining and improving their mental health, but also as lacking in their community.

To support the need for better signposting, as a part of this Restart Youth project, No5 is also embarking on a sector-mapping project which seeks to hear from the organisations working with young people locally, and map what services they offer, who they are offered to, who they take referrals from, and who they refer on to. From this, we aim to create a comprehensive service map of the current offer for young people.

With this map, No5 will then scope the second stage of this project, which will see young people co-produce, along with a graphic design agency, this service information in a way that is accessible to them, such a new website hub for information and resources.

Young people also suggested a dedicated Instagram page for all local young people's services and groups, however told us that they would not download a specific app in order to access this information, due to stigma. This suggests that this information would have to be accessible via the apps and platforms that young people are already engaging with.

In order to address waiting times, No5 is currently in the first year of a four-year transition that will see the employment of 10 counsellors, each delivering 10 sessions per week (450 sessions each per year), to young people under 18. This transition will reduce the waiting times young people currently experience, properly recognise counsellors for their specialist skills and

professionalism, and allow for closer working between counsellors, Young Ambassadors, and the team to understand the current needs of young people and co-produce complimentary services. No5 has already secured funding to employ 3 counsellors for the first year of the transition from Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group, and raised the funds for an additional post through anniversary fundraising activity.

In the meantime, whilst we work to raise funds to employ counsellors and see the impact on reduced waiting times, No5 has also committed to delivering additional, co-produced forms of alternative support which is offered to young people whilst they are waiting for counselling. Given the desire for an increase in online group support, in September we delivered a pilot of 'Creative Expressive Wellbeing' workshops, designed and delivered by one of our Young Ambassadors, and supported by a counsellor. This 8-week programme supported 8 young people and was hugely successful in providing a safe environment for young people to express themselves and socialise, and led to increased wellbeing and decreased presenting symptoms.

The success of this pilot has led to a confirmation of funding for a second programme of this work, which began in November and will support another group of young people for 10 weeks.

No5 has committed to securing funding to continue to run this project and maintain it as an offer to young people on our waiting list. We are also in discussion with community partners to develop a co-produced pilot of transitional support for young people identified as 'vulnerable or at risk' by their school during the summer as they transition to Secondary school. This project would seek to develop confidence and self-esteem in these young people, whilst exploring consequences and choices as they transition into adolescence.

For the last 3 years, No5 has delivered Young Ambassador-designed mental health workshops in local Secondary schools. These workshops focus on key areas of mental health and adolescence that young people have told us they want more information about, and continue to be updated by young people. These workshops support a whole-school approach to mental health, and aim to equip young people with information, resources and mechanisms to support themselves before difficulties with their mental health arise. No5 will continue to seek funding for this project to ensure we can deliver these sessions on an ongoing basis.

Commitments No5 will be implementing

The young people we learnt from throughout these focus groups reminded us that online, webchat and forum-based support works well for some young people – providing an anonymous means of speaking to both a professional on a 1:1 basis, and also gaining support from other young people who have experienced similar mental health issues. As a result of the pandemic, Berkshire West CCG and Reading Borough Council have jointly commissioned the online service, Kooth, for young people in the area. No5 has committed to making sure young people know about this service, and other online support available to them, where appropriate.

With signposting coming up as such as crucial, and lacking, area for young people, No5 has taken on the feedback from young people who suggested that we share our newsletter along with additional resources and blog content regularly on our social media. This will facilitate young people who have not signed up to our newsletter to more easily access the information, advice and resources our Young Ambassadors and counsellors produce – allowing them to better take charge of their mental health.

To broaden the range of voices of young people sharing their experiences and advice, No5 is committed to recruiting a wider group of Young Ambassadors, with a focus on social media

content and activism. No5 is also committed to developing a broader range of resources, for parents and young people, co-developed by Young Ambassadors and counsellors.

Longer-Term Next Steps

What has become clear, through listening to local young people, is the lack of safe places for them to be where they also have access to activities, support and the opportunity to develop long-term, trusted relationships with adults that they can rely on and look up to.

‘Community spaces for young people must be better, more engaging and inspiring’

Young people have told us that they want spaces, unlike the current Community Centres, where they can access drop-in, ad hoc support, learn life skills, and be together in a safe environment. This speaks to the need

for an open-access hub in Reading that provides this space for young people.

The feedback we heard from young people regarding what this should look like, to best meet their needs, reflected the model currently being championed by the Centre for Mental Health, Youth Access and The Children’s Society. With this in mind, No5 is committed to working closely with local and national partners to listen and learn from them about how to make this possible.

No5 is committed to working alongside local and national funding bodies to scope and fund the development of an open-access hub for the young people of the Greater Reading area.

We are committed to ensuring that the future hub space provides support in the way that young people have told us it needs to be, honouring the key features that they identified; Trust, Confidentiality, Accessibility, Open-access, Relational, Early intervention, Listening and being heard, and Collaborative and young person-led.

Young people have told us, clearly, that they want a hub that offers a range of activities, training and support, that promotes community, skills development, and provides a safe place for them to socialise, build relationships and access mental health support.

This hub must encourage partnership working across all the services that provide support for local young people, and include a cross-sector offer of activities, training and support, including targeted support for specific identity-based groups, and skills and interest-groups. We must provide them with a space to grow, develop their hobbies, and promote them as important.

Finally, No5 is committed to ensuring that this provides the support that young people have told us they need. We are committed to making sure this space, and the support and services provided within it, are in the shape that young people have told us they need – facilitating a safe, accessible space that helps them to take charge of their mental health and wellbeing.

This hub, as all the young people we spoke to said, must be a **place for all**.

Conclusion

The areas identified as most important to the young people we spoke to throughout this project in survey responses and focus groups, were support in the community, support in school, support online, and access to clear, accessible information and advice.

The most prominent element of all their feedback, alongside a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing, was the need for an open-access hub space that provided them with a safe place to be with each other, engage in a range of activities, and where they could confidentially access mental health support on a one-off and regular basis.

Young people, no matter their background and across all of the minority and marginalised groups we heard from, keenly felt the lack of youth club-type spaces, and all were certain that this was what they needed most.

What was clear from speaking to young people throughout this project is that they know exactly the support and services that they want and need, and the key factors that make up how they want these delivered.

Now it is our job, as laid out in the commitments above, to work in partnership with cross-sector services, and funders, to make this much needed space a reality with the young people in our local area in order to support them to take charge of their own mental health.

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Supporting Young People to Take Charge of Their Mental Health

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