



'Feels like home'

Young people's experience
of Relational Hubs

THE
YOUTHSCAPE
CENTRE FOR
RESEARCH



Relational
Hub

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“...wherever the Bell Tower goes, it still feels like home. Like, we had to relocate, but it still feels like a home.”

16-year-old male

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Terms

Young people: those aged 11-17 who took part in the research.

Young adults: those aged 18-28 who took part in the research.

Hub/project/drop-in: These terms are used interchangeably to refer to the youth work projects participating in the study. Young people would probably recognise the term 'drop-in' more than 'hub' which is a term used by the Relational Hub team to describe these open-access, community youth-work spaces.

Acknowledgements

We are incredibly grateful to all the young people, staff and volunteers from Leatherhead Youth Project, Thirst Youth Cafe and Bell Tower Youth Drop-In who took part in the surveys or interviews. We learned so much from you, thank you!



Summary

Relational Hubs are open-access community youth projects, and at the heart of each hub is an after-school 'drop-in'. The Youthscape Centre for Research was commissioned to learn more about the work of three of these hubs, and the impact they have. Over the summer of 2021 we engaged with 113 people, half of whom (62) were connected to Leatherhead Youth Project (LYP). This is the most established of the three projects and runs the BFree Café. The rest of the participants were part of Bell Tower drop-in (25) and Thirst Youth Café (26). You can read more about the methodology of the research at Appendix 1.

Who took part in the research?

41 young people who currently attend a drop-in (25 surveyed and 16 interviewed)

31 young adults who attended a drop-in as teenagers (17 surveyed and 14 interviewed)

41 staff and volunteers (all surveyed).

01

A safe and positive place

Across all three locations, the youth hubs were described as places with a warm and positive atmosphere that made young people feel welcome. They are fun places to socialise and meet new people; well-equipped with things to do and attractive environments that feel homely. We were told that each drop-in was a 'safe place', where youth workers maintained boundaries that protected this positive atmosphere. Young people valued the freedom to engage as much or as little as they wanted in the drop-in and contrasted this with the structure of school life. They appreciated youth workers being accessible every day after school, which meant they could chat to them as and when they wanted.

02

Supportive relationships

Across the survey and interviews, young people consistently told us they were attracted by a comfortable space where they could hang out with friends, play games, and relax. But it was the youth workers in those spaces who created a safe atmosphere, made them feel

welcome and gave them a range of support - from a listening ear to transformative opportunities. When describing their relationships with youth workers, young people said they were easy to talk to, friendly and non-judgemental, available, supportive and someone to look up to.

03 **Change in me**

There were a range of ways that young people felt they had been impacted by being part of a youth hub. The two outcomes that we heard about most often were greater confidence and stronger social skills, developed through spending time with peers and youth workers. The drop-in spaces also provided the opportunity to learn how to process and manage their emotions, and some young people described developing a sense of personal responsibility, respect for others and a broadened perspective on life. In some cases, the positive impact of the drop-in was that it re-directed young people away from peers who might have drawn them into unsafe contexts or behaviours. There was also a group of young people who told us they had learned new skills.

04 **From everyday fun to transforming opportunities**

At the heart of each of the hubs is a drop-in that is open after school and provides a relaxed space for young people to hang out with friends, play games and get to know a group of youth workers. But these drop-in spaces are run by youth charities or organisations that also provide other opportunities to those who attend the hubs. These ranged from weekly groups to one-off projects and trips out, and from annual residentials to visiting other countries. Such opportunities provide a pathway for development and ongoing engagement beyond the drop-in context.

05 **Sustainability and long-term impact**

Team members of the three hubs identified a range of factors that needed to be in place to successfully establish a community youth drop-in. First, a dedicated team that is committed to, and cares, for young people. Then, a well-equipped and conveniently located space is needed, which

will have a range of fun activities for young people to engage in. Engagement with the wider community was seen as very important, both in terms of local agencies but also the informal presence that helps sensitise a team to the needs of local young people. Finally, projects benefit from the support of churches in all sorts of ways, whether that is financial, prayer and practical resources, volunteering or various other kinds of expertise.

Welcome

As I entered my teenage years, my parents' mental health began to deteriorate to the point where they struggled with day-to-day life. I found myself needing somewhere, away from my own home, where I would be supported at a key moment in my life.



Andy Gill
CEO, Relational Hub

It was around this time that I joined my local church youth group, run by a group of young adults, some of whom were paid and some voluntary. They offered genuine care, support, and friendship to so many young people, including me. We were welcomed into their homes, given support when needed and opportunities to gain new skills and experiences. Whether it was church on Sunday, various mid-week groups, or the Friday night youth club, there was often something to do - an activity to help lead, or someone to drop-in on. Over the next few years, I spent most of my free time as part of this extended family, feeling like I was at home.

It was this experience as a young person that provided me with the blueprint and inspiration to help establish the work of Leatherhead Youth Project (LYP) 16 years ago, and now Relational Hub. The Relational Hub model

is based on the Key Principles (see Appendix Three) learned from my experience as a young person and over a decade of delivering drop-in sessions, five days a week. Since then, I've also seen hundreds of young people given life changing support and opportunities through our partner hubs across the country.

Today, I'm a husband, dad, and foster carer and I have no doubt that I wouldn't be where I am today without the relational support that I experienced as a young person. I certainly wouldn't be running a charity that supports others to do the same!

My hope is that, as you read this report, you will be inspired to think about how you can help create a 'home away from home' for the young people who need one most in your local community.

01

A safe and positive place

Welcoming and positive culture

Fun place to socialise

Comfortable, and homely space

Safe and boundaried

Relaxed and free

Accessible across the week

A safe and positive place

Across all three locations, the youth hubs were described as places with a warm and positive atmosphere that made young people feel welcome. They are fun places to socialise and meet new people; well-equipped with things to do and attractive environments that feel homely. We were told that each drop-in was a 'safe place', where youth workers maintained boundaries that protected this positive atmosphere. Young people valued the freedom to engage as much or as little as they wanted in the drop-in and contrasted this with the structure of school life. They appreciated youth workers being accessible every day after school, which meant they could chat to them as and when they wanted.

Welcoming and positive culture

We asked what it was like to arrive at one of the drop-ins, and young people told us that they were welcomed at the door when they first arrived, that youth workers were making conversation and including young people in games, and that there was always lots of different things going on. One young person described the atmosphere as *"...very sort of like bubbly, busy, I guess loud, but in a good way"* while another said *"...there's always some sort of buzz, that being talking, music, or people just sitting on their phone."* A few young people told us that these positive spaces helped them feel able to be themselves, because they knew there were lots of different types of people and they wouldn't be judged. For some, this culture meant you could feel part of things quite quickly - *"It's like an instant sense of belonging"*.

"It's always just so welcoming. The atmosphere...Like, even with, like, the youth workers there, who'd be like obviously much older than you, they'd still want to include you in card games at the table. You always feel wanted there."

16-year-old male, Thirst

Knowing the people who were going to be there created a sense of ongoing community or, for some, even the feeling of another family.

"It's just been great! Yeah, I feel like I've got like another little family where I can just pop in and say 'Hi'."

17-year-old female, Thirst

Fun place to socialise

As well as being a context for hanging out with existing friends, many of those we interviewed had valued meeting new people, and specifically mentioned the way the space brought together those from different backgrounds, from different schools, different ages and with different interests. You might arrive with one group of friends, but over time develop a whole new set of relationships.

Interviewer:

"How would you sum up what it's been like coming to the Bell Tower for you?"

Young person:

"Life changing."

Interviewer:

"Because?"

Young person:

"I got to meet these wonderful people, I got to meet new friends, I've got friends that I never would have met if I never went to the Bell Tower."

16-year-old male, Belltower

Gatherings of young people in public places are not always welcomed, so a place to gather with friends and feel accepted, was important.

"You don't sort of feel like you're

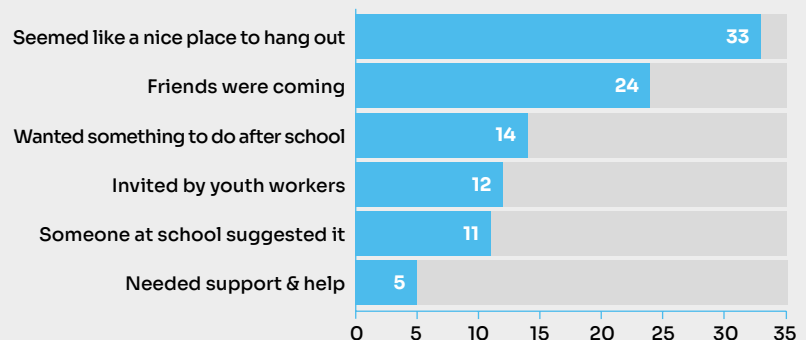
imposing or being judged for being somewhere where you shouldn't be, or people would rather that you weren't, as sort of a younger person."

20-year-old female, Thirst

And although young people saw their friends at school, the atmosphere, facilities, and space made youth hubs particularly good places for socialising. During our interviews, young people would describe the physical space to us, highlighting the wide range of different activities available at the various hubs, including board games and card games, arts and crafts, pool tables, table tennis, sofas to relax on and spaces where they could do homework. There were areas to make milkshakes, games consoles, and screens for watching films.

Chart 1: Young people's reasons for coming to the drop-in

"Why did you start coming to the project?"



A safe and positive place

“Had consoles that I didn’t necessarily have at home, and a computer that I could use. And alongside all of that, I can do it with my friends. And so definitely, I didn’t necessarily have - grew up in a household where I can have all my mates around or you know. And so it quickly became our space.”

26-year-old male, LYP

Comfortable and homely space

It wasn’t just the atmosphere and facilities that they valued; young people told us that the way the drop-in spaces were laid out and decorated was part of what made them good places to be. Comments included that the hubs were “nice-looking”, “clean”, “tidy” or have “a nice aesthetic”. One young woman’s description of the Thirst café provides a sense of the high quality of the environment.

“I really like how Thirst is laid out inside, and sort of like the décor. It’s very open, lots of bright natural light. It just feels very comforting. Lots of nice colours. There’s metal chairs and stools, sort of like all different colours, which are really nice. And yeah, comfy sofas if you needed somewhere a bit more comfortable to sit. Yeah, I just really like the

aesthetic of like the exposed brick and sort of the rustic wooden counters. Yeah, walking past it on the outside before I even went to Thirst for the first time, I was like, “That looks nice in there.”

20-year-old female, Thirst

One young person contrasted the drop-in with another youth club in the area that was more run-down, remarking that she liked the way the drop in “...was looked after as well, I think that that made a big difference...I think if anything was ever broken, it was replaced.” But the homeliness of the physical environment was more than comfortable sofas and exposed brick: it mirrored the atmosphere described by the young people we engaged with. The warmth of the space and the welcoming culture, created the sense for some young people that this was like a home.

“It was decorated really nice, so it felt like a second home really.”

15-year-old male, Bell Tower

“I think just having people that I felt comfortable with, that I could talk to. That place where it was just sort of like “home away from home” once a week, where it was just comforting and yeah, people to chat to who would

listen to whatever was happening.”

20-year-old female, Thirst

And for one young man, this sense of ‘home’ survived the pandemic and a re-location.

“The space doesn’t really matter, because wherever the Bell Tower goes, it still feels like home. Like we had to relocate, and it still feels like a home.”

16-year-old male, Bell Tower

Safe and boundaried

About half of those we interviewed described the youth hub they attended as a ‘safe place’ or somewhere they ‘felt safe’ – a security that had physical, relational and emotional dimensions.

First, the drop-ins were described as places of physical safety, often in contrast to the streets or parks; a place to see friends when you couldn’t be in someone’s home, or if it was raining – “We have somewhere to go rather than dodgily sitting somewhere, like in a park or something.” (15-year-old female, LYP). A few young people told us that their parents were happy for them to be at the drop-in because they knew their children would be safe.

Safety was also relational. Young people described feeling safe because of the boundaries youth workers created and held around who was able to come into the drop-in. The positive relationships in the drop-in were contrasted with spending time with peers who might encourage young people to get involved in activities that might be harmful or unhelpful.

"It being open every day after school, it meant that nine times out of 10 I'd go there rather than getting involved in other things that maybe I shouldn't of when I was younger, and I was in a safe space, so it was all good."

22-year-old female, LYP

Finally, there was an emotional quality to this safety. One young person who experienced school as socially overwhelming and had been a victim of bullying described the Bell Tower drop-in as "a comfortable place" and "...a gateway to get away from all of that." When asked to sum up how they felt when at the Bell Tower, another 15 year old young man said "I'd definitely say that I feel very safe and that I'm accepted." A lack of judgement, being noticed and being cared for were all associated with feeling safe, in these accounts of the drop-in.



Of course, achieving a sense of safety for everyone is not always easy. A few young people particularly valued the way that youth workers could make the drop-in a safe space without being "controlling and strict".

"You were helping the people who were getting bullied but were also helping the people that were troubled enough to want to hurt other people. So, you'd always give them that fair warning like, 'If this happens again, you're off for a week, you're out.' That was really good, because it shows the sense of commitment and care towards everyone."

22-year-old male, LYP

One young person told us he would shout and swear at home, but "I couldn't get away with that here because I always know I'd get thrown out and I'd lose that safe space that I always had at the end of every day." For him, these boundaries had a long-term impact: "I would not be myself if I didn't have the discipline from the youth workers." (16-year-old male, LYP).

Relaxed and free

For many of those we interviewed, the drop-in was a place they could relax and unwind from the pressures of school. These were places to

01

A safe and positive place



“catch your breath”, “hide away”, “switch off”, have “a breath of fresh air”, “get away from normal life” and have “a little break from life” – all phrases we heard that captured the importance of having somewhere where they could slow down. Across all three hubs young people told us that school could be overwhelming, whether because of impending exams, general workload, or challenges with friendships: “After school you’d usually feel quite maybe deflated or stressed” (15 year-old male, LYP).

“You might not know that you’ve been stressed before, coming in here, chilling out, talking to

people that are great, really helps”

16-year-old male, Thirst

“The fun stuff was really important to me because when I played one game on that Xbox it used to help me calm down a lot, because I was concentrating on something that I really wanted to do, and not concentrating on something at school that I absolutely hated.”

18-year-old male, LYP

For some young people we interviewed, this space to relax was particularly significant. This included a young carer, someone who experienced domestic violence at home, young people with poor mental health and an individual whose parents were always arguing and told us “I didn’t like being at home, and just being here I was able to escape all that.” (16-year-old Female, Thirst)

“That was really important - to be able to have a place that was separate from all of the bad things that were going on around me and being able to actually have fun or actually get support that I needed.”

19 year old, female, LYP

One of the reasons the space felt relaxing, according to some of those we interviewed, was that you were free to engage with them on your own terms. This was often contrasted with school, and young people valued “...a space where you can choose what you want to do, and you don’t have to do anything...you’re not forced to socialise with anyone” (19-year-old LYP). This informality and freedom were appreciated and helped to make these places that young people felt relaxed.

“You could come in for like two minutes, say ‘Hi’, leave again. I do that plenty of times. Or you could come here for however long the whole session is then go home.”

16-year-old male, Thirst

Accessible across the week

By being open throughout the week, these drop-in spaces were sometimes described as different from other services or youth provision that had fewer ‘set times’ for activities, or that restricted these to particular age groups. Young people understood why that was necessary but valued having a space that was so accessible. They didn’t need to schedule a session, which added to the

experience being relaxed and home-like, but it also meant they could come and ‘check in’ or ‘touch base’ with youth workers after a rough day at school or when they wanted a chat. This consistent access made it possible to build strong relationships with youth workers, according to one young person who said that *“...over the past year I’ve got to see them so much that I can like bond with them a lot better than like if I was only seeing them like once or twice a week.”*

“I knew that I could always speak to a youth worker there whenever I was feeling troubled, which was quite a lot. They were there five days a week, so it meant I always had access to that.”

19-year-old female, LYP

“Even if I haven’t said in my head that I’m coming this specific day, I know that if I’ve had a really rough day I can just come down, I don’t have to book in advance, I can just come down and talk to people and get my mind off things. So, it really does help knowing that you’re open all the time.”

16-year-old female, Thirst



01

A safe and positive place

Survey results: safety, comfort and trust

We found that our survey results largely confirmed what young people told us in their interviews. For example, when asked the open question “What do you like most about the project?” the most popular answer among the 36 respondents was that the drop-in was a safe place to be (21 mentions), with a further 18 references to supportive youth workers. The opportunity to see friends and meet new people (17) was closely followed by references to the fun activities (10). Other mentions included: support for mental health (8); practical help (7); feeling able to ‘be myself’ (5); the chance to escape from my life (5); ‘everything’ (3), and the consistency of access/support (2).

We also asked young people to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements about their youth hub, on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 10 (Strongly Agree) and calculated the average score for each statement. This was an opportunity to explore how far young people perceived their drop-in to reflect the key principles of the Relational Hub model (see Appendix Three). Of the 42 respondents,

Chart 2: Young people’s level of agreement with Key Principles of the Relational Hub model

“To what extent do you agree with the following statements?”²



17 were young adults who had previously attended LYP, and were therefore reflecting on their historical, rather than current, experience.

There were high levels of agreement with nearly all the statements. The 42 respondents strongly agreed that there was a culture of mutual respect at each drop-in, that they trusted youth workers and that the spaces felt safe and positive. The lowest overall score was for “getting to understand more about faith and God”. Although heavily supported by Christian communities, spiritual

development is not a core aim of the hubs, which would make sense of this lower score.¹

¹ Each of the drop-in spaces are led and heavily supported by Christian communities and churches. They are open to young people of all faiths and none.

² This chart also displays the Standard Deviation score for each statement, which is a measure of the amount of variation within a set of values. A low standard deviation indicates that the values tend to be close to the mean while a high standard deviation indicates that the values are spread out over a wider range. The short lines within the bars for statements at the top of this chart show that nearly all the answers were clustered around the highest scores, while there was much larger variation in responses to statements at the bottom of the chart.

The young people were then asked which of these statements were most important to them, by choosing their top three. The chart to the right shows how many young people included each statement in their top three overall, regardless of ranking.³ Those taking part felt most strongly that their drop-in felt safe and positive and that it was a comfortable space, again reflecting some of the key themes of the interviews.

Finally, team members of the three hubs were asked to rate a similar, though not identical, series of statements. Again, there were high levels of agreement with all the statements, particularly that the drop-in spaces are welcoming, have a positive respectful culture and are safe. This strongly reflects young people’s responses, and the themes of the interviews with young people and young adults.

³“It feels safe and positive” ranked 1st 7 times, 2nd 8 times and 3rd 8 times. “It’s a comfortable and nice place to be” ranked 1st 8 times, 2nd 7 times and 3rd 7 times. “I trust the youth workers” ranked 1st 7 times, 2nd 6 times and 3rd 5 times.

Chart 3: No. of young people ranking statements in their ‘top three’

“Which three things were the most important to you about the project?”

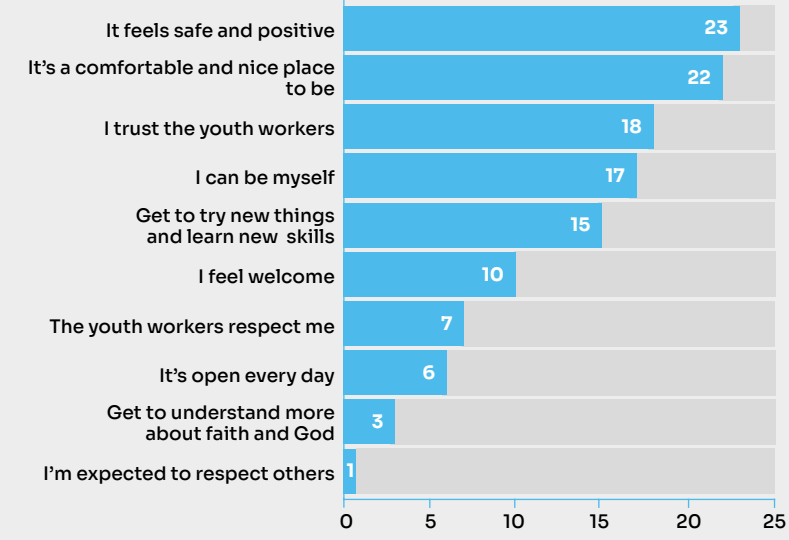
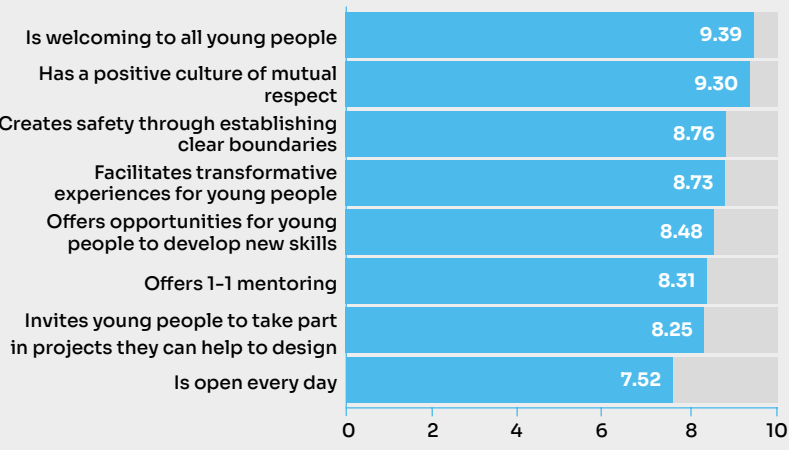
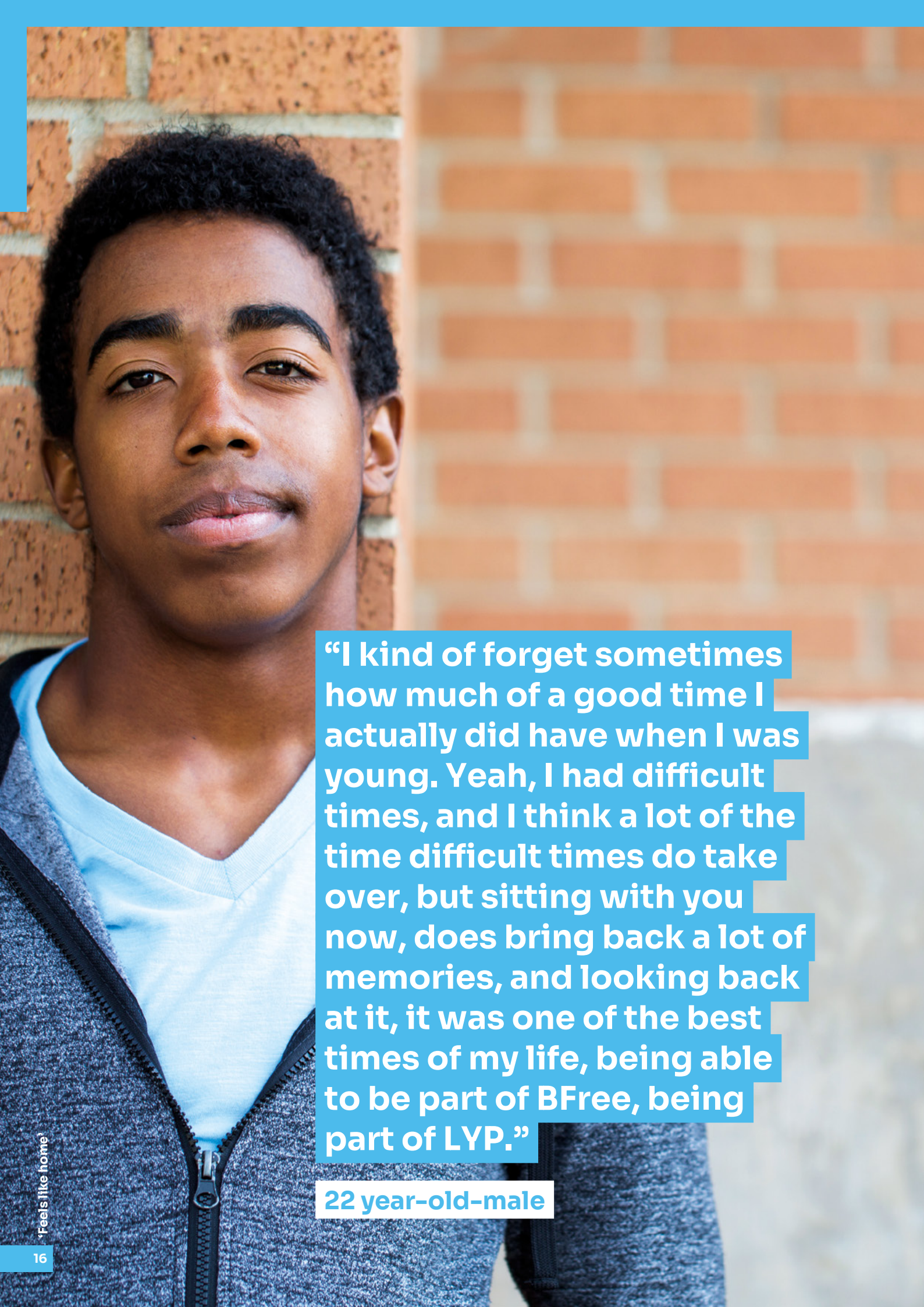


Chart 4: Team members’ level of agreement with Key Principles of the Relational Hub model

“To what extent do you agree with the following statements?”





“I kind of forget sometimes how much of a good time I actually did have when I was young. Yeah, I had difficult times, and I think a lot of the time difficult times do take over, but sitting with you now, does bring back a lot of memories, and looking back at it, it was one of the best times of my life, being able to be part of BFree, being part of LYP.”

22 year-old-male

02

Supportive relationships

Someone I feel I can talk to

Friendly, caring, and they
don't judge

There when you need them

Support for the everyday things
and the big life decisions

Role models

02

Supportive relationships

Across the survey and interviews, young people consistently told us they were attracted by a comfortable space where they could hang out with friends, play games, and relax. But it was the youth workers in those spaces who created a safe atmosphere, made them feel welcome and gave them a range of support – from a listening ear to transformative opportunities. When describing their relationships with youth workers, young people said they were easy to talk to, friendly and non-judgemental, available, supportive and someone to look up to.

Someone I feel I can talk to

Relationships with youth workers were consistently described as being different from those with teachers or parents. They were seen as more approachable, someone young people could talk to about problems with friends, home, or school. Young people found themselves able to “open up” and talk about what they were feeling.

“I’m comfortable saying things around you that I wouldn’t to other, like I wouldn’t say it to teachers, I wouldn’t say it to my parents.”

15-year-old female, LYP

We heard that “...having people that you’re comfortable with, familiar with, is really nice” (20-year-old female, Thirst) and that this consistency helped young people feel safe. For some young people, these relationships provided important adult support, when relationships with parents were strained.

“I feel I’m more closer to you guys than I am with my dad at the moment, so you’re basically like a second family.”

16-year-old male, Bell Tower

Friendly, caring, and they don't judge

Our interviewees told us that youth workers in the hubs were friendly and welcoming: taking time to ask how young people were, noticing if they seemed to be struggling and drawing them aside to offer a listening ear. This visible care and lack of judgement meant young people felt they could trust and talk to the youth workers about their lives. They would sometimes share their own experiences with young people, “...which just made it sound much more real. They weren't dismissive about it”, according to one young man.

“It was really nice, because they're [youth workers] all so friendly and they ask how you are, and they care about you really.”

15-year-old male, Bell Tower

“It definitely helped knowing that I could speak to the youth workers and trust them with what I was going to say. Yeah, and know that it wouldn't get spoken about anywhere else other than them.”

18-year-old female, LYP

The informality of the drop-in context and the approachability of the youth workers led this



young woman to describe the youth workers she knew as somewhere between ‘adults’ (who give ‘proper advice’) and ‘friends’ (someone you get on with and can talk to).

“Although you're an adult and you give obviously proper advice, it doesn't feel like I'm talking to an adult... It's just we get along with you lot really well, and like we'll just have a conversation, you won't judge us or anything. You'll be like a friend in an older form.”

15-year-old female, LYP

“You form such good relationships with the youth workers, where you can trust each other and well I personally really respected and listened to what they had to say because all the advice they gave me led on to good things.”

18-year-old female, LYP

02

Supportive relationships

There when you need them

The regular and informal setting of a drop-in being open after school meant youth workers were available when you needed them, rather than being relegated to a once-a-week slot. And if there was nothing serious to talk about, youth workers would be playing pool, cards or FIFA with young people, further strengthening relationships, and making it more possible for them to 'open up' when they wanted to.

"At school I speak to my counsellor Tuesday break times, once a week Tuesday break times and it's just very you know scheduled, it's not like I can just go to them when I feel like I need to vent or talk about it. It's a lot more flexible here, which makes it more realistic and real to you, you know when you need to talk about things."

17-year-old female, Thirst

In a few cases, this openness, informality and availability was compared with spaces and relationships that were more clearly oriented to a goal for the young person. One young adult described his sense that youth workers from a different club had an agenda for him of some kind.



"I could kind of feel that going to other youth organizations I could feel like this is, they've got set goals here. And that felt kind of rushed, maybe felt like they were - they just wanted to have a relationship with us to get the end product and that wasn't, that wasn't the case at BFree with the youth workers there."

27-year-old male, LYP

Some of the young adults we spoke to had stayed in contact with youth workers, finding that the door was still open to drop by and say hello. Others had become volunteers or staff themselves, returning to invest in the project that had supported them.

"It was just really nice to know that even after X amount of time, I could still go in there and have a safe place and be able to talk to someone about things."

22-year-old male, LYP

Support for the everyday things and the big life decisions

Youth workers were seen as being generally supportive, offering help that ranged from a listening ear for everyday struggles, to guidance for the future, or counselling young people through particularly difficult challenges or emotions. One young man explained that the youth workers were "... just encouraging me to do the right thing at school" and that there "...was always space for support with any coursework or homework and that stuff. So I think that might have made a massive impact on my life."

One of the team members at LYP noted in their survey response that being open every day enabled a "relational approach" that meant "We get to know the young people that we work with and this means that we are able to give them more bespoke help." Some of the bespoke support we heard about included helping young people to access educational and work opportunities. In one case, the youth work team supported a young woman to access a bursary to attend a private school for sixth form.

"If they hadn't have done that, I wouldn't have done it myself, because I didn't believe that I could get it, and I didn't really know that was an option. They helped me with the application, and they helped me every step of the way, and that got me into a good sixth form which I had the best two years of my life. Coming out of it with three A-Levels and going to a good university"

19-year-old female, LYP

The same young woman had struggled toward the end of secondary school, when she was caring for her dad who had cancer and was also being bullied by some peers. She felt that her school had not provided good pastoral support.

"Whereas at BFree they were kind of the main factor in where I got my pastoral support from and helping me through that hard time. Without them I wouldn't have been able to cope with that time of my life."

Role models

For some of the young people interviewed, youth workers modelled what healthy relationships looked like, and acted as mentors. One young

man particularly valued the "key role models" he had found in the male youth workers, whom he wanted to replicate."

26-year-old male, LYP

"It's kind of like a mentor, like throughout my whole teen years."

19-year-old female, LYP

Another young man described looking to his father as a boy and *"...thinking, yeah, I'm gonna be like him, you know, gonna have people respecting me and stuff and get into what he does and all of that."* But as he got older, he watched what was happening to his dad's friends, some of whom went to prison,

lost their families, died of drug overdoses and were alcoholics.

"When I got to about 14/15 I noticed what was going on at BFree and how positive everyone was. You don't hear about them, you know, really getting into bad stuff. There's kind of like this path, two pathways of what kind of road to go down. And luckily, I'm pretty sure I'd say I chose the BFree and the youth work way and then getting to 18, getting baptised."

27-year-old male, LYP

And our survey said...

We asked the staff and volunteers of the three hubs what it was about each project that made a difference to young people. Of the 32 responses, it was various dimensions of a relationship with youth workers that was most frequently mentioned, with many of the answers reflecting what young people themselves had told us. First, hubs offered some form of "support or listening ear" (19 mentions) and the chance to "build relationships with youth workers" (16), providing them with "consistency" (8), a feeling of "being loved or accepted" (7), in a "safe space" (7) where they have a sense of "community" (5) and access to "role models" (4).



“I think if I could sum this place up, this place is very safe. You feel protected, you can get away from the daily life. You can come here, even if it’s for an hour or 30 minutes or something, just to have a little sit down, just pop by and say ‘Hi’. It would still feel like you would come out as a different person.”

20-year-old male, Bell Tower

03

Change in me

Confidence and social skills

Ability to process and manage emotions

Responsibility and respect

Improved relationships with friends and family

New skills

03

Change in me

There were a range of ways that young people felt they had been impacted by being part of a youth hub. The two outcomes that we heard about most often were greater confidence and stronger social skills, developed through spending time with peers and youth workers. The drop-in spaces also provided the opportunity to learn how to process and manage their emotions, and some young people described developing a sense of personal responsibility, respect for others and a broadened perspective on life. In some cases, the positive impact of the drop-in was that it re-directed young people away from peers who might have drawn them into unsafe contexts or behaviours. There was also a group of young people who told us they had learned new skills.

Confidence and social skills

Two thirds of the young people we interviewed told us that being part of the drop-in had, in some way, increased their confidence. In general, this was not through any program or intervention, but was just the result of spending extended time with other young people of different ages, and with the youth workers. The informality and openness of a drop-in requires young people to learn to engage with adults and young people they might not know.

“Because you’re standing around a pool table, no one’s in silence, you’ve got to find things to talk about, or it pushes you to play games with people that you don’t know, and it pushes you to talk to people you wouldn’t normally talk to.”

16-year-old male, LYP

“My confidence is definitely boosted, because of course my confidence before I came in was very low, because I could barely talk to anyone without stuttering or panicking.”

16-year-old female, Thirst

Many of them described overcoming shyness or insecurity, while one or two

described learning specific social skills like listening or compromise. One young adult who self-identified as having Asperger's explained that he "...just did not know how to socialise" and while he was having speech therapy at school, "...I suppose BFree was a safe space for me to practise the skills that I had learned at school."

The need to learn to talk to others had also helped young people develop social skills that had served them well as they transitioned to colleges, workplaces or other contexts.

"I feel like the transition from going to high school to college was a lot more smooth because I'd built up that confidence with working with younger people as well."

20-year-old female, Bell Tower

In some cases, young people referred to specific projects or experiences that had grown their confidence. These included Young Leaders programmes, residential trips where they tried new activities, volunteering opportunities, or working at one of the drop-in cafés where they had to engage with customers.



"BFree led me on to do many other opportunities that I didn't get from home or school, for example like Duke of Edinburgh, Girls Group, loads of different other groups that I got involved with, which boosted my confidence and my self-esteem."

22-year-old female, LYP

Ability to process and manage emotions

The second area where young people identified positive change was in their ability to process and manage their emotions. Many of them attributed this to the support of youth workers, who asked them how they were and helped them

03

Change in me

learn how to express themselves in a safe space.

“When you let all your emotions out and you talk about it, it does help you mentally.”

17-year-old female, Thirst

We were told that the drop-in space provided respite and “stress relief” from the strains and pressures of school or home life, enabling young people to “decompress and have a little break” (20-year-old female, Thirst).

“Yeah, it’s helped me with like troubles at school and troubles at home, because I can talk about them with both leaders and like friends, just rant about it, get it out there. It helps like calm me down.”

15-year-old female, LYP

One young adult explained that it was easy to move on quickly from the school day, but that when he arrived at LYP those experiences are “...at the forefront of your mind, and you focus and he’s [youth worker] asking you about it and asking how your day is, and it really helps that process” (26-year-old male, LYP). Another young man described attending the drop-in as “...the chance to refresh my mind, I got to hit that reset

button and always go back in tomorrow feeling completely a new person.” (16-year-old male, LYP)

Then there was a smaller group of young people who had been struggling with anger or anxiety and were helped to learn how to manage overwhelming emotions.

“Once a week when I’d come into BFree we’d have one set day when I’d come and sit for half an hour and we’d have a chat and then you guys would help me sort of how to control my anger, how to ignore the bad stuff that happens in school and how not to react to things.”

22-year-old male, LYP

“Having those sessions helped me to deal with my emotions and work through my anxieties. Without having that support I would have been, I’d still be really withdrawn like I used to be.”

19-year-old female, LYP



Responsibility and respect

The drop-in context also provided opportunities for young people to develop their character by taking on new responsibilities and being exposed to new situations and ideas. One young woman told us how she had been affected by being given a leadership role at the All Saints Café, which is run by LYP.

“The fact that they put trust in me at 16 to be in charge and be responsible for all of those things showed me that, actually, I am trusted and capable of doing things that I wouldn’t have believed I was.”

19-year-old female, LYP

Another young adult we interviewed could recall a seemingly insignificant moment when he was told he could use the kitchen to microwave his food if he cleaned up after himself. For him this “...little bit of extra responsibility and respect” in the context of everyday life helped him to develop new capacities. He went on to lead projects and was part of the Youth Council

for LYP “...where we decided what trips we do and what projects we should kind of start and stuff like that”.

Youth drop-ins can be places where young people encounter a range of beliefs and backgrounds, and are invited to treat others with consideration, compassion, and respect.

“I was forced to change the way I treated other people at least in this building, which caused me to then change the way I treated people outside, because it’s just respect. I was taught respect simply put.”

16-year-old male, LYP

“I think it broadened my perspectives and sort of appreciation of different young people’s opinions, depending on where they went to school and what their upbringing and home life and stuff was like...It’s just always really interesting, and definitely something that changed me and has impacted me as a person, being more aware and more compassionate, I guess.”

20-year-old female, Thirst

Improved relationships with friends and family

Many of those we interviewed told us that they had made new friends as a result of coming to one of the after-school drop-ins. Often these connections were with young people of different ages and from different schools, which contrasted with school where it was easier to find yourself “sticking” with the same group you had always been friends with.

“I just met loads of different people who were so cool and like friendly and it helped me have the skills or build up the skills to make friends easier.”

20-year-old male, Bell Tower

“I’m not the best person to make friendships and that, so coming here helped because people were willing to talk to you and be friendly. They accept you, and sometimes school you can be picked on for something silly then it really does push you down.”

16-year-old male, Thirst

Youth workers also played a role in helping young people learn how to communicate, or to navigate difficult issues in their relationships; and in some cases, these new skills were

03

Change in me

then used at home, where family relationships were strengthened as a result.

"I would have like a problem with my friendships sometimes, and I'd come to Thirst and they would help me talk about it, and how I could like fix it, or how I could cope with anything that's problematic."

16-year-old female, Thirst

"I've always had issues with communication and expressing my thoughts and feelings and being at Bell Tower and being able to express my thoughts and feelings with different young people who might feel the same way or give me different advice and help me, allowed me to utilise the same thing at home and actually be able to communicate with home and family and that really helped me with like various issues at home and helping my family."

20-year-old female, Bell Tower

Finally, there were four young people who felt that if they hadn't been spending time at the drop-in, they would have been with "the wrong crowd" – peers who might have drawn them into unsafe contexts or behaviours.



"Before, I was always getting in trouble, hanging around with people I shouldn't have been. Ever since I went to the Bell Tower, I stopped hanging out with them."

16-year-old male, Bell Tower

New skills

Finally, there were some references to the new skills young people had developed because of coming to one of the youth hubs. Social skills aside, the drop-ins provide

opportunities for young people to get involved in a range of projects that developed new capacities or interests. A couple of the young adults we interviewed looked back on specific gardening or cooking projects they had been involved with through LYP, and how useful they had been.

"I like actually really enjoyed that stuff. And it was like an opportunity to be really, like practical, very physical, I didn't really do much gardening before that, and never knew anything about it - something in my life that I think is a key skill."

26-year-old male, LYP

"It was quite helpful, because I suppose at that sort of age I didn't really know how to cook or anything. So, it was learning new skills. Then yeah, I think there was always something, there was always something involved about diet, because it was like 5-a-day and stuff, so it was always beneficial."

24-year-old female, LYP

And our survey said...

We also asked the young people completing our survey whether attending the drop-in had made a positive difference for them. Of the 30 who responded, 28 chose 'yes' and two chose 'sort of'. Their reasons mirror many of the themes expressed in our interviews.

"Improved social life" was mentioned most often (11 times), followed by references to the drop-in being a *"safe, fun and welcoming"* space (9) that kept young people out of trouble and allowed them to be themselves. Closely related to that was the feeling of being able to *"be more open"* (4) to express themselves and their feelings more easily. For some young people, coming to the project had *"improved my mental health"* (7), including feeling happier, less anxious and stressed, and increased confidence. Some even mentioned having a *"changed outlook"* and making better decisions (5). Finally, some young people mentioned getting to develop *"new skills and have new experiences"*, such as being able to volunteer with the project, or even go to a different country (7).



“I don’t think there are many places like Thirst in other towns, so we’re very lucky to have somewhere here. Yeah, it’s great.”

16-year-old female

04

From everyday fun to transforming opportunities

Projects and groups

Volunteering

Trips, residentials and
international travel

Opportunities that opened
up the future

04

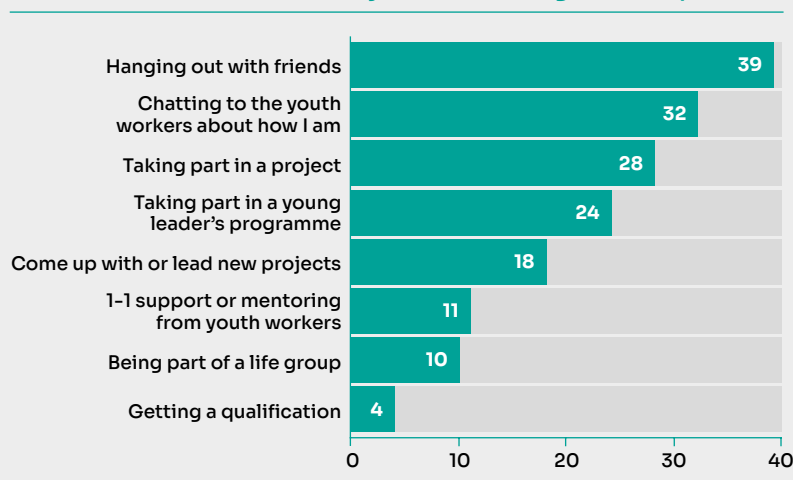
From everyday fun to transforming opportunities

At the heart of each of the hubs is a drop-in that is open after school and provides a relaxed space for young people to hang out with friends, play games and get to know a group of youth workers. But these drop-in spaces are run by youth charities or organisations that also provide other opportunities to those who attend the hubs. These ranged from weekly groups to one-off projects and trips out, and from annual residentials to visiting other countries. Such opportunities provide a pathway for development and ongoing engagement beyond the drop-in context.

Young people completing the survey were asked how many of a list of eight activities they had done through the hub.⁴ Nearly all those who took part (93%; n=39) said they had hung out with friends, while three quarters (76%, n=32) said they had chatted to youth workers about how they were. Nevertheless, more than half also said they had taken part in a project (67%; n=28) or had taken part in a young leader's programme (57%; n=24). One young man who had become a volunteer at the drop-in café said, "It all really starts in Year 7, and it expands as you move up through school years." (16-year-old male, Thirst), capturing the sense of widening opportunities for development and new experiences.

⁴ All three hubs share a similar model of open access, after-school drop ins, accompanied by optional projects and wider opportunities for personal development. The main project offered by the Bell Tower is life groups, which is why this option was presented separately to young people in that context.

Chart 5: Which of these have you done through the drop-in?



Projects and groups

As previously discussed, there could be a range of projects young people might participate in through a youth hub. We heard about cooking, sports, and arts and crafts activities as well as lads' nights, girls' groups and life groups. At LYP, young people told us about the 'Making Good' project, which took a group down to some local allotments on a Saturday where they would work in the gardens and learn about how to grow food, before closing with a fun activity. At LYP, both young people and youth workers articulated a connection between the time spent getting to know young people informally at the drop-in, and the development of

bespoke projects that reflected their needs and interests.

"The youth workers at BFree would get to know us so well, that they'd identify what other projects to start would do good for us. So, we started a football team, which none of us could afford to play."

27-year-old male, LYP

"I think chatting to different youth workers about interests and something that they like, I think it's a very powerful thing that you can do, can really help draw stuff out of the only person that they don't necessarily know their selves."

26-year-old male, LYP

While the openness of a drop-

in is clearly valuable to young people, some structured conversations and activities made specific types of support and development possible. As one 14-year-old woman reflected, *"...it gives you other atmospheres to then immerse yourself in and you get to know even more people."* (14-year-old female, LYP)

"The drop-in afternoon sessions are just chaotic, everyone's doing their own thing, but with Life Group we're all engaging in one main activity, and then talking about how everyone's week has been."

16-year-old male, Bell Tower

Volunteering

Across all three youth hubs there were young people who told us that they had engaged in volunteering. Some of the 'social action' opportunities we heard about included litter picking, distributing hot chocolate in town for Christmas, gardening, and cleaning. In quite a few cases young people graduated from being attendees to young leaders or volunteers at the drop-in or café.

"We do an actual project like down at the homeless shelter down the road. Then we go out after that and do a kind of

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From everyday fun to transforming opportunities

activity as fun. To be honest, the activity after somehow is still part of the thing, because laser tag was kind of team building... It's not always going to be your friends, so you learn to bridge the gap and get on with people and help them where they needed the help."

16-year-old male, Thirst

"I definitely learned some leadership skills from shadowing the other youth workers and seeing how they were doing it. I actually use a lot of the skills that I gained from LYP related projects in my job today."

25-year-old male, LYP

Trips, residentials and international travel

Beyond the weekly projects, the youth hubs also provided opportunities for young people to go on day trips, weekends away and in some cases even travel to other countries. A young woman who had been part of these trips through the Thirst Café told us that it was...

"...really good, just to change the environment up a bit and it really just shows how much they're willing or they're wanting to get young people involved and happy and do

things different that otherwise they might not be able to do with their family."

17-year-old female, Thirst

Young people talked enthusiastically about longer overnight trips or annual residentials, which held fun memories and were particularly valued by those who would not usually go on any kind of holiday.

"Although it wasn't necessarily physically far from where I lived, it felt like a million miles away... And you just learned a lot from that, it felt like holiday. And it was a great experience."

26-year-old male, LYP

"I've done things I didn't think I was ever going to do, like climbing that mountain. It was very tiring, but it was such a laugh."

15-year-old female, LYP

The team at LYP were also able to provide the opportunity for some young people to travel to Romania, in partnership with a local charity re-building homes in a village, and providing fun activities for children and young people over the summer. For young people who had not really travelled far beyond their own hometown, this was

described as something of a transformative experience.

"The Romania trip they did, that definitely changed me massively. It got me out of Leatherhead, which was all I knew at the time, and I didn't know anything else. Seeing people less advantaged, and in worse conditions showed me that – it just made me want to help people – and it actually dictated what I applied for, for Uni, because I wanted to go into humanitarian aid."

19-year-old female, LYP

Opportunities that opened up the future

Some of the young adults we interviewed had discovered talents, passions and even a sense of vocation, through the support and opportunities provided by the youth workers. One young man was looking back at his time at LYP, and remembered being given the chance to prepare food for the 'Lads' group happening every Friday night at the drop-in.

"Obviously you could have easily just done it yourself, easily just cooked up the food, served it to the boys, but you allowed me, for someone who enjoys cooking, I was able to

have basically a kitchen space of my own... I was able to feel comfort in a kitchen. That worked really well for me because obviously I work in pubs myself, and I do pub bar and kitchen work. So, it gave me that level of confidence because when I was younger, I was able to have that experience.”

22-year-old male, LYP

Another young adult told us he was ‘average at school’ but after helping to start a football project as a teenager at LYP, one of the youth workers helped him try out for the local club. For two years he was part of a Football Academy, working toward a B-Tech in Sport and playing every day. When he couldn’t progress further, he went back to chat to another of the youth workers.

“...saying ‘Yeah, not sure what I’m going to do now’ then and Andy said ‘Well, I think you’d be a great youth worker. We know this college where you could do placements with us and we’ll subsidise your fees.”

27-year-old male, LYP


No-one in his family had gone to university before, but he completed a three-year degree, and then worked full-time at LYP



before becoming manager of BFree and then the Lead Youth Worker for the local area. This was a “...big thing for me just kind of like full circle coming around to managing BFree, from being a kid to managing it.” He was working abroad with young people in care at the time of our interview, but was planning to return to Leatherhead, not least because of the community he had become part of through meeting people at LYP.

“I think I really learned that at BFree even though you come from a bit of a difficult upbringing or live in a difficult area, there is still a lot of hope for what you want to do and all that.”

27-year-old male, LYP



“The Bell Tower is life-changing. I think that’s what I would say. The Bell Tower is life-changing for me, and I feel like it can be life-changing for a lot of people if they decide to come here.”

20-year-old male

05

Sustainability and long-term impact

Dedicated team

A well-equipped and located space

Community engagement

Church engagement

Governance and marketing

05

Sustainability and long-term impact

Team members of the three hubs identified a range of factors that needed to be in place to successfully establish a community youth drop-in. First, a dedicated team that is committed to, and cares, for young people. Then, a well-equipped and conveniently located space is needed, which will have a range of fun activities for young people to engage in. Engagement with the wider community was seen as very important, both in terms of local agencies but also the informal presence that helps sensitise a team to the needs of local young people. Finally, projects benefit from the support of churches in all sorts of ways, whether that is financial, prayer and practical resources, volunteering or various other kinds of expertise.

A survey was sent to current and former staff, volunteers, and trustees of each of the three hubs, who we describe as ‘team’ in the rest of this section. A total of 33 people responded: seven from Bell Tower, ten from Thirst, and 16 from LYP. Most (26/33) had only held one role while the rest had been involved in multiple ways. Overall, 15 respondents had experience being involved in the project as staff, 11 as volunteers, 11 as trustees, and three in some other ways. Most (24/33) were currently involved and nine had formerly been involved. One person had been involved less than a year, nine had been involved 1–3 years, and 23 had been involved for four or more years. The responses were all anonymous.

The Relational Hub model identifies a series of ‘Foundations’ that are needed for any hub (see Appendix 3). We asked team members from each hub to rate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about the project that were based on these foundations, from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4) and an average score was calculated for each statement.



Across all three hubs, there were high levels of agreement that nearly all of the foundations were in place, with average scores of between 3.53 and 3.81 out of 4 for eight of the nine areas. Agreement was strongest that the hubs each had a

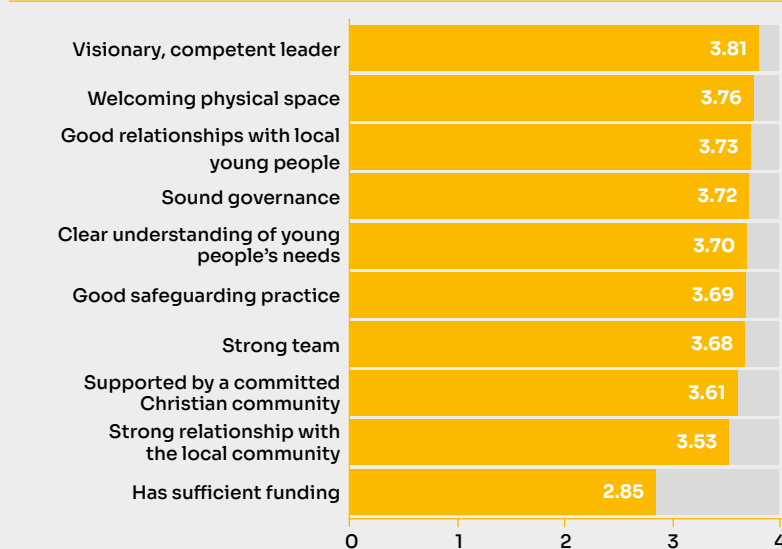
visionary, competent leader, but scores were high in nearly all areas. The only area where average scores dipped below 3 was that the hubs had sufficient funding, with an average score of 2.85.

Alongside presenting these statements, we asked the open question *“What are the most important things needed to set up a community youth drop-in?”*

Dedicated team

Over two thirds of respondents highlighted the qualities needed in the team that would be leading and running the drop-in. The most frequently mentioned was that the team should be *“dedicated and friendly”* followed by a need for *“energy and motivation”* and being *“accepting and open”*. Some felt the team needed to be *“diverse in their skill and experience”*, and a third said they needed a *“shared vision”*.

Chart 6: Average scores for how far hub teams agreed that the foundations were in place



“Individuals dedicated to the development of young people with the required background and experience, an appropriate meeting place and sufficient funding to get started.”

LYP trustee

“It is a long journey that may take quite some time to see fruition but each moment is making a big difference to their lives so persevere! To see any change in the young people's lives you need to get to know them which is why the relational approach that LYP has makes all the difference.”

LYP volunteer

05

Sustainability and long-term impact

When responding to a question about any lessons they had learned about community youth work, the most common answers also highlighted the commitment and care needed for young people. There were repeated descriptions of the work being “relational”, with the clearest themes being that “it takes care for young people”, “it takes long-term investment”, “shared vision”, “commitment” followed by references to a “supportive team”, “skilled people” and “staff care” as well.

A well-equipped and located space

Secondly, there was a strong emphasis placed on the need for an “accessible and welcoming location” for the drop-in. The right place, that would be open “consistently” and offer “fun activities”.

“A well-placed space for the young people to meet – location is key, needs to be easily accessible. Ideally welcoming and fun space but this can be achieved with people, doesn’t need to be high tech, just needs people who are passionate about connecting with young people in a fun and non-judgemental way.”

Bell Tower, trustee

“I think the venue at Thirst, which has glass exterior walls which let in a lot of light, really helps. I also think the open floor plan where we have simply one large room enables and empowers everyone to be involved in something”

Thirst staff member and volunteer

Community engagement

The second clear theme was that a community youth drop-in required “community engagement” which included both partnering with different agencies and people in the community, and individuals being a part of the community in a way that helped the projects to understand and respond to the needs of local young people.

“Being a community youth worker doesn’t just mean delivering projects for young people. It means being rooted within that community. Build relationships with the local primary and secondary schools, the police, local authority, other 3rd sector organisations that are in the community.”

LYP staff

“It takes time to build the connections and trust of local authorities, schools, police etc but once it comes through our

consistent quality provision it makes a joined-up approach with young people so much better for all.”

Bell Tower trustee

“LYP acts as an institution within the local community and so therefore needs to and does take an approach that says we want to stand for, speak for the needs of the local community. There is a responsibility on LYP that goes beyond just standing with young people but stands with their families as well.”

LYP trustee

Church engagement

The third theme highlighted in our survey was the importance of support from local churches in sustaining the youth hubs. Support was needed in a variety of forms, from “financial contributions” to “prayer and emotional support” and “practical support” in the form of providing volunteers, advice and help with governance.

“Knowing that LYP has local churches supporting them provides a really valuable support network that strengthens LYP’s impact in the local community. Local churches can provide prayer, an opportunity for more people to

learn about LYP's projects, gives more people a chance to find out about becoming a volunteer and can provide financial support too."

LYP volunteer

Some respondents also felt that churches could help with publicity and networking, providing easy access to pre-existing local networks when the project needed resources or help. A similar number also expressed a desire for churches to be more involved in their hub than was currently the case, with some being unsure of how to do that.

Beyond the practical support offered by churches, there was a strong belief amongst our survey respondents in a "compatible ethos" between the Christian faith and the principles and practice of community-based youth work.⁵ Having this framework of faith enabled a team to have a set of "shared values", according to some team members, as well as providing a community that provided various kinds of support to youth workers themselves. Some team members saw Christians as having "extra commitment" or "increased depth" in their engagement with young people



because of their faith. Finally, some individuals suggested that having Christians as team members could "expose young people to faith" which might serve as a "source of hope and guidance" for them.

"Yes, Christians often seem to be good community workers, benefitting from having supportive networks of people in their lives, often find community work motivating due to their wider mission in life, and they are good at helping young people feel part of something. They don't need to be Christians, but I feel

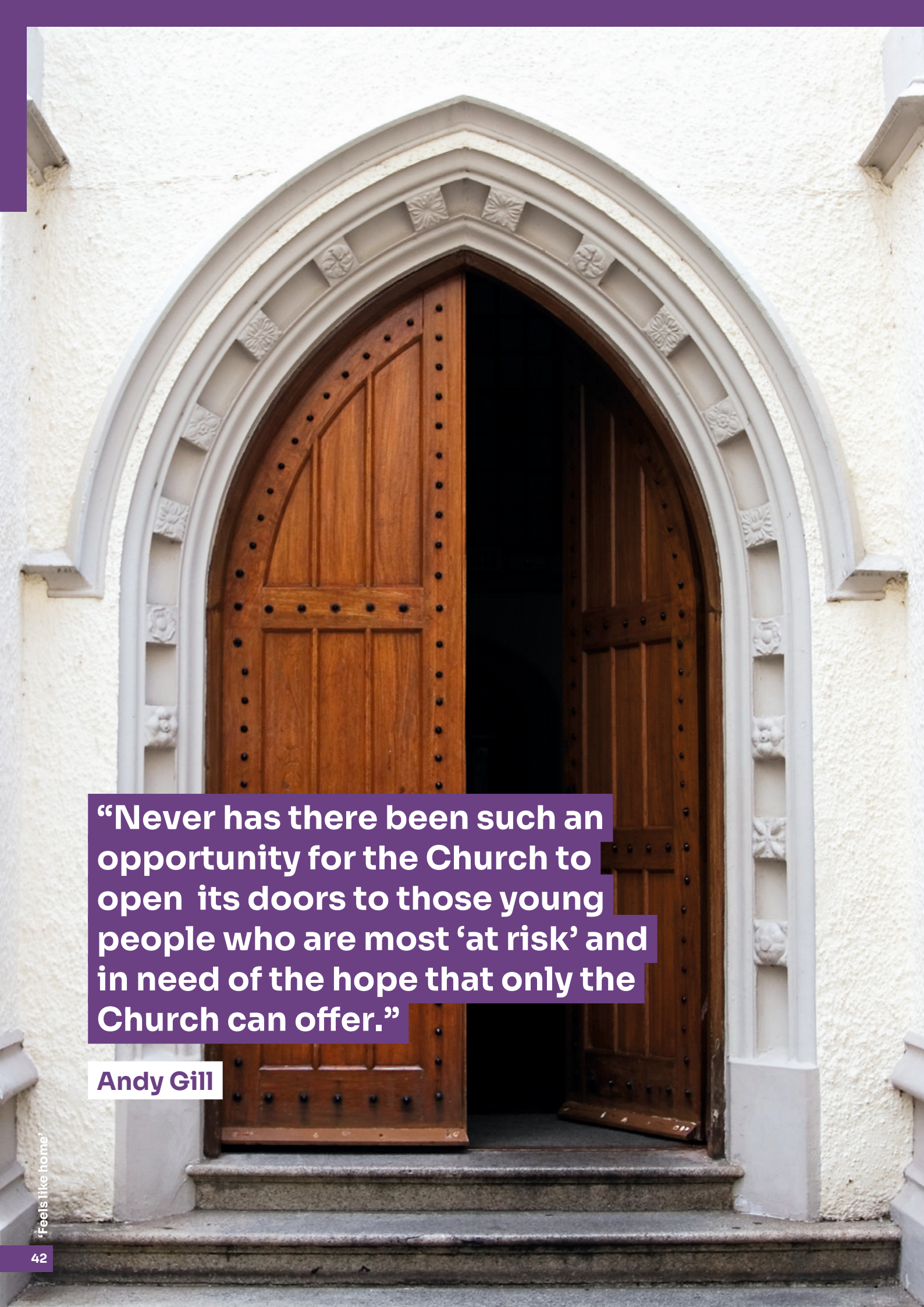
Christians often have these certain advantages."

LYP staff

Governance and marketing

Finally, some team members highlighted the importance of "good governance", including policies and procedures around safeguarding, and "good marketing" to help raise financial support and sustain community engagement.

⁵ There were two people who did not think that there was any additional value in having Christians directly providing community-based youth work.



“Never has there been such an opportunity for the Church to open its doors to those young people who are most ‘at risk’ and in need of the hope that only the Church can offer.”

Andy Gill

Comment

Comment

Andy Gill
CEO, Relational Hub

The findings of the ‘Feels like home’ research reflect and amplify two decades-worth of experience delivering open access youth drop-ins and supporting others to do the same. Hearing the voices of the young people impacted by our work has been a privilege and an inspiration. It has reinvigorated our passion to see more relational hubs created wherever there is a need, and wherever that need is matched by a local church or organisation with a vision to support young people.

We believe every young person should be offered the support and opportunities they need, to thrive in all areas of life. We also believe that offering relational, open-access youth work on a consistent basis is one of the most effective ways of helping those most in need to positively transition to a healthy adult life. We have seen first-hand, the importance of creating safe spaces

that offer radical hospitality. Building everyday relationships between young people and youth workers grows the mutual trust and respect needed to offer effective support in crisis moments and provide life changing opportunities that wouldn't otherwise be available. We know from experience that this can be delivered in a sustainable way over the long-term, offering the very best outcomes



“We believe that offering relational, open-access youth work on a consistent basis is one of the most effective ways of helping those most in need.”

for young people and their local community.

We believe that the local church is best placed to offer a ‘home-away-from-home’ for the young people who need one most. And the need has never been greater. On one hand, young people are facing unprecedented challenges, with poor mental health on the rise and increased concerns about the impact of gangs, county

lines, exploitation, and exposure to various kinds of harm online. On the other hand, youth services are on the edge of a cliff, having been cut by 73% since 2010.⁶ Never has there been such an opportunity for the Church to open its doors to those young people who are most ‘at risk’ and in need of the hope that only the Church can offer.

⁶ See NYA and YMCA’s joint report ‘Time’s Running Out’.

Relational Hub supports churches and organisations to create thriving youth projects by offering ongoing support, expertise, and advice to our partners: taking them from vision to implementation to long term sustainability.

If you would like to learn more about how you could become a Relational Hub partner or join our Collective, please visit: www.relationalhub.org



Leatherhead Youth Project



Thirst Youth Cafe



'Feels like home'

Bell Tower Youth Drop-In

Appendix 1: Methodology

The aim of this research project was to collect information about the medium to long-term impact of the Relational Hub model by listening to the experiences of young people, staff, and volunteers. The three hubs participating in the research were Leatherhead Youth Project (BFree Café), Bishop Stortford Youth Project (Thirst Youth Café) and Chichester City Centre Drop-In (The Bell Tower). As the most established hub, we spoke to more young people at Leatherhead Youth Project than the other two locations.

We engaged with those who were participating in the hubs now (aged 14-17) as well as young adults (aged 18-28) who had accessed a hub between the ages of 11-18, enabling us to understand the value of this provision from two vantage points.

Surveys

Three different online surveys were created: for 14-17-year-olds, 18-28-year-olds and the staff/volunteers/trustees of each hub. The survey was advertised in each location and distributed to as many potential participants as possible via email, phone, and social media. Young people and young adults

completing the survey could enter their details to receive a prize of £100 worth of high street vouchers.

Of the 42 young people surveyed, 25 were current attendees of the three drop-in projects and 17 were young adults who had previously attended LYP specifically. There was a fairly even gender split in the survey sample, with 18 females, 20 males and 4 nonbinary participants. The majority were white (36), five were of mixed heritage and one young person was Asian British.

Interviews

An additional thirty young people agreed to be interviewed (sixteen 14-17-year-olds and fourteen 18-28-year-olds) to explore their experiences in greater depth. Some interviews were conducted in-person and others online using Zoom. Interview questions were shared with young people in advance, and the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Appendix 1: Methodology – continued

	Young people surveyed	Young adults surveyed	Team members surveyed	Young people interviewed	Young adults interviewed	Total involved
Bell Tower	11	0	9	2	3	25
Thirst	7	0	11	7	1	26
LYP	7	17	21	7	10	62
Total	25	17	41	16	14	113

Ethics

The research followed an ethical protocol designed in accordance with current guidance from the British Sociological Association, and from the International Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) project. All participants were given full information about the research before giving their consent to take part. Those aged 16 or over were deemed competent to make this decision themselves, while 14 and 15-year-olds needed parental consent to take part. To view the ethical protocol for this project please email research@youthscape.co.uk.

Limitations

Participation in the youth hubs is voluntary, as was participation in the research. As such it is very likely that our participants were mostly young people who find the provision valuable, and who were willing to take part in the study because of their

positive relationships with youth workers. We attempted to reduce this selection bias to some extent by advertising the survey widely and offering the incentive of entering a prize draw to win £100 of shopping vouchers to anyone who would share their opinions and experiences. Because of this, the findings of this report cannot be generalised to all young people who have engaged with LYP, Thirst Youth Café or Bell Tower; they are only the experiences of the young people who took part.

Given the relatively small sample size, we have not broken the findings down by location. Each hub is unique, but they share a common approach which is summarised in the Relational Hub model. There will therefore be differences between the projects that have not been captured in this project. Finally, each of the hubs had to close over the last eighteen months because of the pandemic, disrupting

the model of ‘everyday’ open-access youth provision that Relational Hub advocates. This will particularly have affected those young people currently attending a hub who took part in the research, and who will have had less experience of this model in action.

Analysis

The interviews were coded using the qualitative analysis software package NVivo and these codes were organised into themes and sub-themes. We have clustered the most significant themes by order of how frequently they were mentioned by different young people, and by the themes that were mentioned by young people across all three locations. The research questions and coding framework were informed by the Relational Hub model, to understand how far young people’s experiences reflected this model (see Appendix Three).

Appendix 2:

Project profiles



Leatherhead Youth Project

Leatherhead Youth Project (LYP) launched in 2005 to provide much needed services for socially and economically disadvantaged young people in Mole Valley. Their aim is to help young people be safe, happy, resilient, and able to make positive changes in their own lives and in their community. LYP takes a relational and positive approach which provides support and skills to young people, helping them to overcome barriers they are facing and build a brighter future. LYP's Drop-in, BFree Youth Café, now run by Mikey Dicken and the LYP team, has opened its doors to young people five days a week for the last 15+ years and offers a range of off-shoot projects including small groups, residentials, a boxing project and an additional drop-in in Bookham. LYP also run a counselling and emotional wellbeing support service, with a dedicated team of counsellors, working throughout their region.

leatherheadyouthproject.com



Bell Tower Youth Drop-In

The Bell Tower Youth Drop-In was founded in 2014 after existing government funded youth centres in the city had closed due to cutbacks to statutory youth services. It is a joint venture between local churches, The University of Chichester, and The Chichester Cathedral. Today, Sam Harding and his team run the drop-In five days a week after school, providing a home away from home for young people from Chichester and the surrounding villages. They also offer more targeted projects like their weekly Life Group, where young people cook and eat together, discuss relevant topics and have a mental health check-in. In 2019 the Bell Tower received The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The award recognised the work of volunteers in supporting local young people in Chichester and the wider district, in providing a daily after school drop-in, with mentoring support and their young leaders development programme.

belltowerchi.uk



Thirst Youth Café

Thirst Youth Café was formed in 2013 and provides a safe space after school for 11–18-year-olds, five days a week. Thirst is run by Bishops Stortford Youth Project (BSYP) and led by Jake Tucker and his team. The café is a place where young people come, eat, relax, play, be creative and enjoy each other's company, as well as receiving support and advice from experienced youth workers and positive role models. Young people also have the opportunity to take part in a young volunteering scheme where they can learn new skills and build confidence as a young leader. Alongside the Cafe, BSYP provides a number of off-shoot projects including a social action project and additional activities and trips during the school holidays. Over the last two years they have started a weekly wellbeing group for young people who are referred from local GP surgeries.

thirstcafe.com

Appendix 3: The Relational Hub model

Key Principles

Our Key Principles are a set of practices that we believe provide an effective basis for any organisation to run an impactful and sustainable, open-access youth drop-in.

RADICAL HOSPITALITY

- Welcoming and Generous
- Positive Culture
- Inspirational Team
- Excellent Homely Environment

EVERYDAY RELATIONSHIP

- Informal Drop-in Sessions
- Inclusive and Accessible
- Safe Space and Clear Boundaries
- Mutual Respect

SUPPORT & OPPORTUNITIES

- Co-Designed Projects
- 1 to 1 Mentoring
- Key Skills Development
- Life-Changing Experiences

SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

- Long Term Commitment
- Community Involvement
- Local Knowledge
- Fundraising Strategy

Foundations

Our foundations provide a framework for churches and organisations, with our support, to assess the viability of running an impactful and sustainable project.



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www.relationalhub.org

1. Safeguarding

A track record, policies, and procedures for keeping young people safe.

2. Charitable structure

A registered charity with an appropriate constitution, policies, and procedures.

3. Start-up funding ready

The ability to raise funds before the project begins.

4. Existing relationship with local young people

Established links with local young people.

5. Positive relationship with the local community

Strong links with schools, local authorities, and other groups.

6. Identified need

Knowledge of the needs of local young people and data to support it.

7. Visionary individual and team

A passionate and capable team leader, able to set culture and manage, develop, and inspire a supportive team.

8. Committed Christian community

A group of local people prayerfully and actively invested for the long term.

9. A purpose fit space

An environment, in a good location, which is adaptable to the needs of young people.

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