



# **‘Running on Reserves’**

## **The impact of COVID-19 on London's youth sector.**

June 2020

## | About London Youth

London Youth is the largest membership body for youth work in London. We are a youth charity on a mission to improve the lives of young people in London, challenging them to become the best they can.

We directly develop the confidence, resilience and relationship skills of over 27,000 children and young people each year through our arts and culture, employability, outdoor education, sports, and youth social action programmes. In every borough of London, through programmes run every day and most evenings and services open to all, our members reach tens of thousands more.

To keep our diverse network of over 550 community youth organisations in London strong, we provide funded opportunities, training and professional development, specialist member networks on issues affecting young people, Quality Mark accreditation, a policy and influencing voice, and research that evidences the needs of the young people and the youth sector.

London Youth is here to support our members and the London youth sector during COVID-19. We will continue to adapt and find new ways to back the amazing work that youth organisations are doing to challenge and support young people in this difficult period. Find out more here: <https://londonyouth.org/news-and-updates/covid-19/>.

## Foreword from our Chief Executive



London Youth has been around for 133 years and during that time has served and supported its members through an array of challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic, when taken together with the decade of painful austerity that preceded it and the unprecedented recession that will likely follow it, may prove to be one of the largest challenges that London's youth sector has ever faced.

Like most other charities, we've had to make significant changes to how we operate. I'm very proud, for example, that in the months since lockdown began we've been able to replace our entire face-to-face training calendar and provide virtual training to 499 youth professionals, which is double the number we trained in the previous quarter. Listening to our members has been vital; through our usual channels, through this survey and the one that preceded it, and through regular forums that allow youth professionals from different organisations to share and solve problems together. Listening has allowed us to shift our support for our members towards managing change and meeting these new challenges.

We're moving into a new phase of the response to COVID-19, which will bring whole new ways of operating for many community youth organisations. I am determined that London Youth will continue to listen, and that we will do everything we can to serve our members as they do their work, which is needed now more than ever.

We haven't forgotten about the systemic issues that affected the lives of young Londoners long before this current crisis. We can't let issues like serious violence, youth unemployment, racial injustice, and cold spots in youth provision around London slip down the priority list.

These challenges are daunting, but I am comforted and inspired by the dedication and determination of London's youth professionals to improve the lives of young people in any way that they can, no matter the challenges. Our sector's real resilience lies in its people.

**Rosemary Watt-Wyness**

Chief Executive

## Recommendations

- 1) Community youth organisations need funding certainty over the next 6-12 months:**

We support the response by funders in London, which has rapidly and effectively distributed emergency funding for services to support young people and local communities. We have concerns about the financial sustainability of our members over the next 6-12 months, which aligns with IVAR's warning of a 'funding cliff edge' for charities as they reach the end of emergency funding.<sup>1</sup> We recommend that funders publish their mid-term funding plans to give charities some certainty.
- 2) Community youth organisations need unrestricted funds:**

We encourage funders to increase the number of unrestricted grants they make during this period, allowing community youth organisations the flexibility to cover core running costs and to adapt services to changing public health needs over the next year, as we move between COVID-19 alert levels.
- 3) Prioritise young people's mental health:**

The mental health of young people must be a priority in the response to the pandemic. Both young people's mental health and their access to specialist services were major concerns for youth organisations before this crisis and have only been exacerbated by it. Young people must be supported in the return to 'normal', particularly with the return of formal education, and to find help and appropriate socially distanced services.
- 4) Guidance for changing circumstances:**

There is an extremely clear case for Government guidance, both for young people and for the youth sector. As we move into different phases of the pandemic response, it is vital that youth organisations know what services they are able to deliver and how they can do so safely. Many community youth organisations, with limited resources and expertise in this area, will be significantly adapting their physical spaces and their operations in the coming months. We are concerned about the burden of doing so without specific guidance to call upon.

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<sup>1</sup> IVAR (2020) [A Funding Cliff Edge? Briefing 4 on the challenges faced by VCSE leaders during the COVID-19 crisis](#)



**Our concern is that whilst we are able to make [mental health] referrals, there is a complete lack of specialist services available to our young people.**

**We have seen an increased need for support for the young people we are supporting along with their family members around mental health.**

**Mental health, drugs and violent crime, education - then impacting employment. This is an emergency for young people, it will have a massive impact on their futures, we need to act now to support them in the best way we can.**

**We are trying hard to keep in touch with our young people - but it is difficult.**

**We have 3 months of reserves, which took us 8 years to build up.**

**We have fixed costs that are not currently funded.**

**The biggest challenges for young people to face are access to services and support, some of which will no longer exist after the lockdown period. With so many people being made redundant some of our young people fear that they will never gain employment with the increased competition in the labour market.**

**They don't really want to engage online because that is what they have been doing with their school. They are bored and agitated and want to be outside in the good weather. Many are frustrated as they don't have access to laptops/tablets to amuse themselves with.**

**Social Isolation is a major issue for young trans people that we work with in normal times... because of the lockdown, some of our young people are now more isolated than ever and some in unsafe homes, so their mental health is really suffering.**



**Employment, access to services and support, mental health - the lockdown has caused havoc with so many services and has amplified stresses that were already present pre-lockdown, so when many young people needing support post-lockdown we can envision that being a struggle.**

**Our organisation is fortunate in having the support of funders which have been very flexible and understanding of the effects of the crisis. This is helping in this emergency phase... We are concerned about the picture this time next year.**

**We're seeing high levels of anxiety and increased level of safeguarding issues related to emotional wellbeing.**

**We are based in the epicentre of Covid-19. All members have family or neighbours who have died. Most working parents are bus drivers, nurses or frontline staff.**

**Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be hardest hit, setting them further apart from peers. Ideally government will step in and create opportunities for young people to engage in something positive and build their skills rather than seeing large numbers of young people unemployed.**

**Haven't been satisfied with Government COVID-19 guidance. In order to resume our service, we need reliable information and recommendations on adequate personal protective equipment (except for social distance and hand washing), which will minimize the spread of the virus.**

**Not satisfied [with Government guidance], there hasn't been a clear direction and other sectors that make money for the economy have been prioritised.**



## | Key findings

The immediate response to the crisis by funders in London has been rapid and effective.

**66%** have received emergency funding

**34%** have received unrestricted funding

However, there are ongoing and significant financial impacts on youth organisations. A significant number of community youth organisations are facing a difficult financial future.

- Youth workers have serious concerns about their ongoing ability to raise the income required to meet their running costs in the medium term, particularly over the next 6 - 12 months. Organisations are concerned both about the financial knock on impact of all funding being adapted to the COVID-19 funding response and about the impact of cancelled fundraising activities and events.
- There has been a particular impact from the loss of income generating activities, such as venue hire and delivery-based income. For many smaller organisations, this sort of income has been a reliable supplement to other forms of funding.

**31%** could struggle to operate within 6 months

**27%** have struggled with running costs

Young people have struggled during lockdown, with mental health and safety at home a particular cause for concern. Many of the most vulnerable have struggled to access support during lockdown, due to the 'digital divide' and difficulty accessing statutory services.

**47%** said less than half of their young people had everything they needed to engage, particularly computers, appropriate spaces, and sufficient data or Wi-Fi

**73%** said that mental health of their young people has been affected

**54%** were not confident that their young people had received the necessary mental health support

**54%** are concerned their young people aren't in a safe environment during lockdown

There has been a large decrease in the number of youth workers and types of support available to young people, and challenges keeping young people engaged with virtual provision. Re-establishing services and rebuilding relationships will be a challenge for the sector for some time.

**47%** have furloughed staff

**78%** are regularly engaging with fewer young people than they were before lockdown

**2%** have made redundancies

There are significant challenges expected in the loosening of lockdown. Youth professionals expressed concern about the transition back to 'normal' and the return to formal education, young people's access to services affected by the pandemic, and difficulty in reengaging with youth services. There is particular concern about young people's physical health and mental health, their employment and financial situations, and young people experiencing serious violence as lockdown eases.

There are serious concerns about inequality and the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 on communities, particularly in disadvantaged areas, among families of key workers, and people from black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds. Young people from BAME backgrounds were disadvantaged in the labour market before this crisis, which has disproportionately affected their communities, and are likely to suffer the worst effects of the recession that follows it.

There is dissatisfaction with the guidance that has been available to the youth sector, both for young people and for youth organisations.

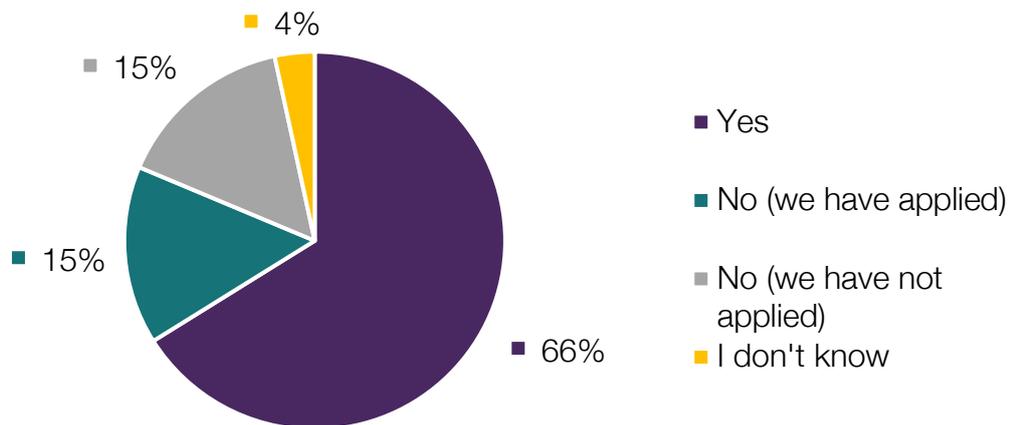
- Youth workers have largely been dissatisfied with the specificity and clarity of Government guidance available to young people and to the youth sector. Many responses express frustration over the lack of specific youth sector guidance that acknowledges the unique challenges of delivering safe and socially distanced youth work during lockdown and as it loosens.

**54%** weren't confident about their young people being able to access and engage with Government guidance

## What our members told us

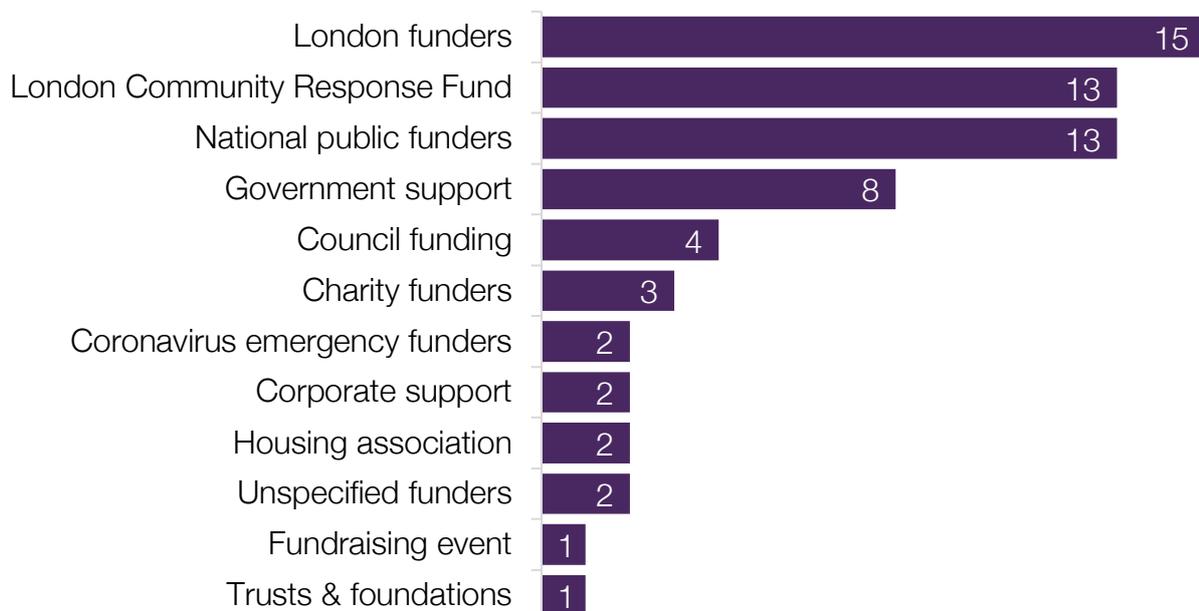
### Financial impact

#### 1) Has your organisation received any emergency funding or other financial support?



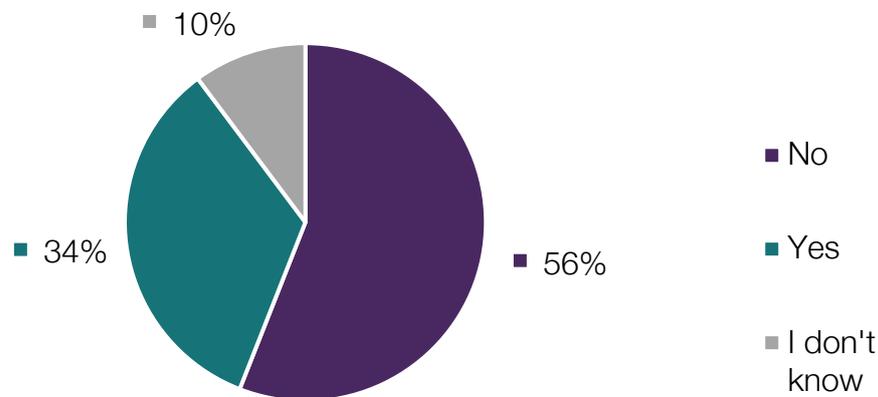
- Two thirds of youth workers (66%) said their organisation had received some form of emergency funding, and only 15% who had applied had not received any emergency funding.

#### 1a) If so, who was the funder and what was the nature of the funding?



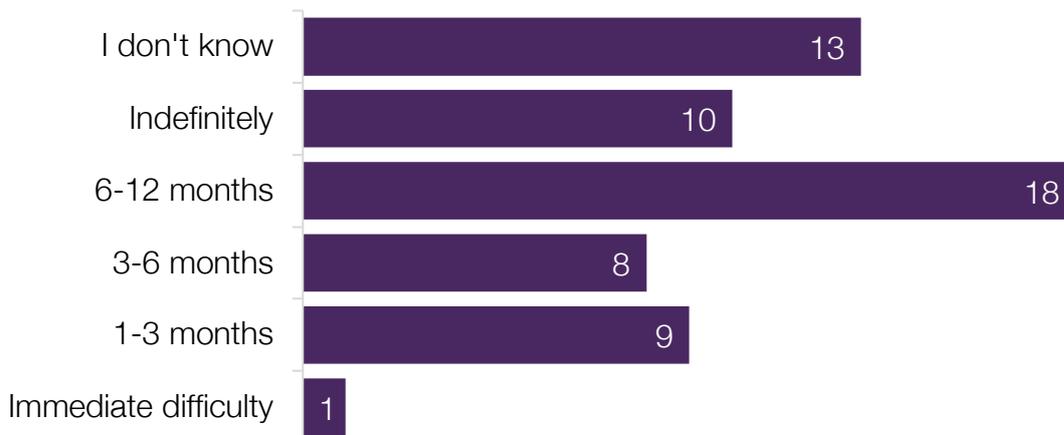
The above information should be treated as indicative due to how respondents have interpreted the question. For example, only four respondents explicitly named the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme as a form of financial support in this question, but 47% of respondents to *Question 3a* said that their organisations had furloughed staff.

**| 1b) Has your organisation received any unrestricted or core cost funding?**



- A third of youth workers (34%) said that their organisation had received some form of unrestricted or core costs funding.

**| 2) Without emergency funding or other financial support, how long could your organisation continue to operate?**



- Almost a third of youth workers (31%) said that their organisation could struggle to operate within the next six months without emergency funding or other financial support.

***Further detail on organisations struggling to operate within six months***

Of the 18 organisations who could struggle to operate within the next six months:

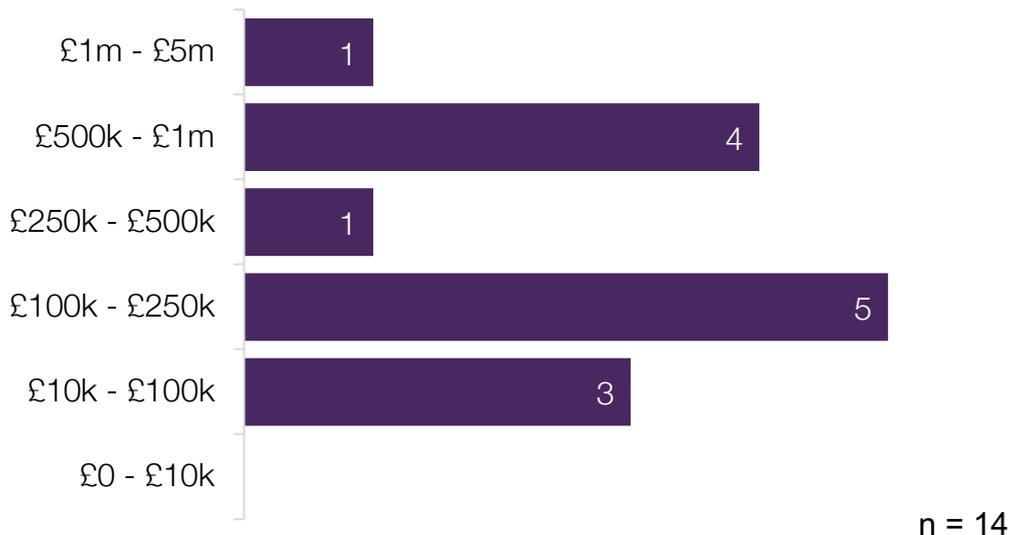
- 15 have received some form of emergency funding.
- Six have received some form of unrestricted or core cost funding.
- Seven have received funding from the London Community Response Fund, six identify some form of Government support, and three have received funding from Sport England.

These members' responses in Question 2a reference struggling to survive on hard-won and quickly depleting financial reserves; struggling to pay expenses, particularly rent; and the impact of the loss of income generating activities, such as room hire.

“ We have 3 months of reserves, which took us 8 years to build up.”

“ Only part of our provision is funded through grant making trusts. Nearly 50% of staff are funded through income generation on site.”

As the graph below shows, these organisations are some of the smallest by income – with at least 8 of the 18 having an annual income of £250,000 or less.



## | 2a) Please provide any more detail

- Many organisations are already surviving on financial reserves or are planning to use them in the near future.

“ We have just under two months of reserves before having to wind up.”

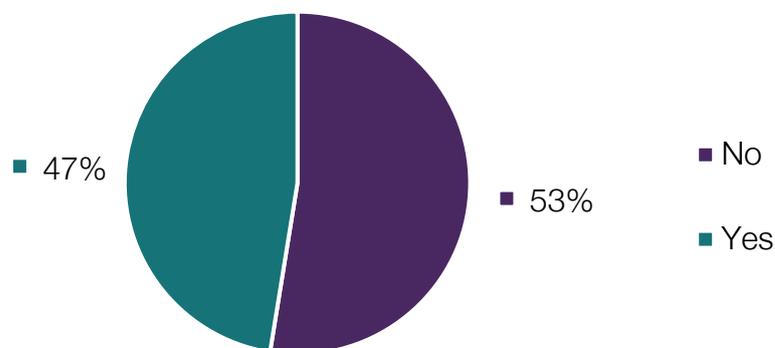
“ We have funding confirmed for the next 6 months, after this time we may have to start having to use reserves. Funders have put their normal funding rounds on hold during covid19 which has impacted our fundraising pipelines.”

- There is concern about the future of the fundraising pipeline and the impact on charities in the mid-term of the next 6 - 12 months. Organisations are concerned both about the financial knock on impact of all funding being adapted to the COVID-19 funding response and about the impact of cancelled fundraising activities and events.

“ Our organisation is fortunate in having the support of funders which have been very flexible and understanding of the effects of the crisis. This is helping in this emergency phase. At this time of the year we would normally be submitting applications for the next financial year 2021-22 as it takes often takes a year for funding applications to be processed. The concern is that some of this funding has been put on hold and our own efforts have been spent on the current situation. We are concerned about the picture this time next year.”

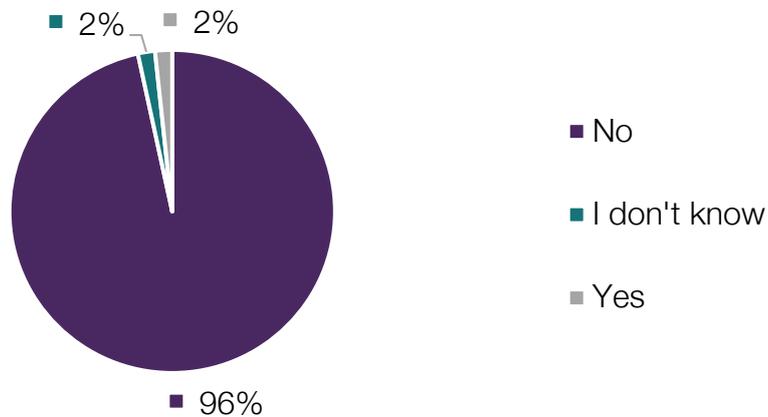
- There is concern about the loss of income generating activities, such as venue hire and delivery-based income. For many smaller organisations, this sort of income has been a reliable supplement to other forms of funding
  - “ We have lost significant income from room hire income which has now all stopped until mass gatherings are allowed again. That could be around £30k - £40k for 6 months.”
- Organisations without secure funding are concerned about fixed running costs.
  - “ Our core funds are low which means we'll be unable to pay rent and staff salaries once the funds run out.”
- Several responses reference flexible and supportive funders, who have adapted their funding to the new circumstances. Several respondents mention the security of having secured multi-year funding from funders such as John Lyon’s Charity, City Bridge Trust, or a housing association.
  - “ Funders have assured us that we can still use funds to operate as usual.”

### | 3a) Has your organisation furloughed staff?



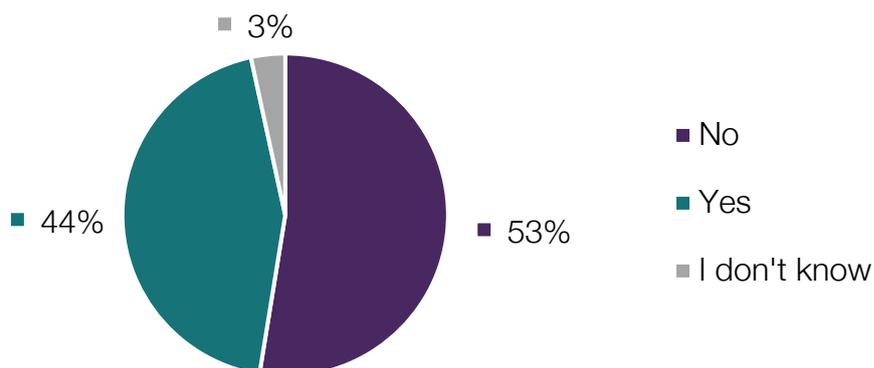
- Just under half of youth workers (47%) said that their organisation has furloughed staff.

### | 3b) Has your organisation made redundancies?



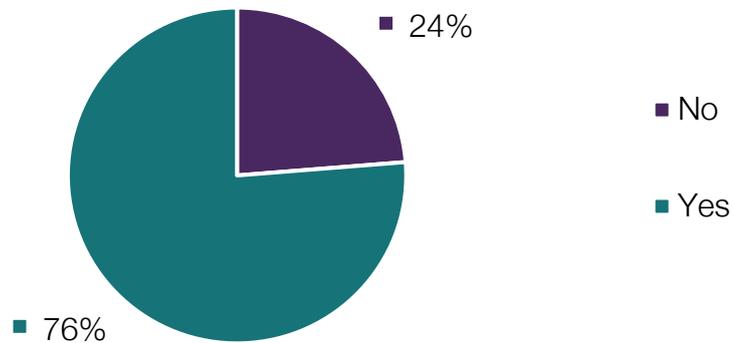
- Only 2% of youth workers said that their organisation had been forced to make staff redundancies.

### | 3c) Has your organisation reduced the number of volunteers?



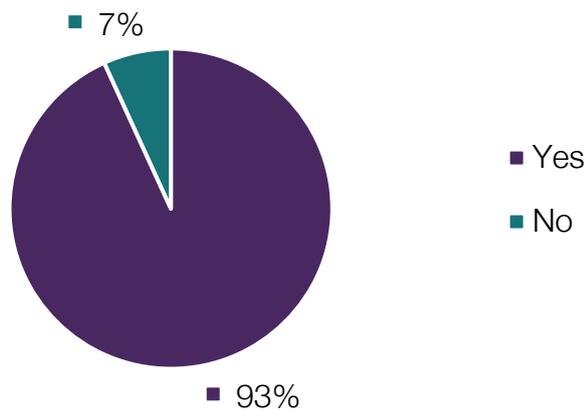
- Over half of youth workers (53%) said that their organisation has not reduced the number of volunteers.

### | 3d) Has your organisation reduced services?



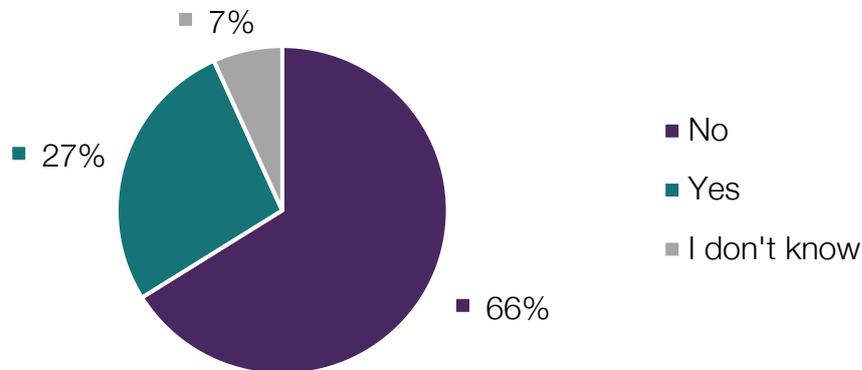
- Three quarters of youth workers (76%) said that their organisations had been forced to reduce services to young people due to the pandemic.

### | 3e) Has your organisation adapted services?



- The vast majority (93%) of youth workers said their organisation has adapted services in some way.

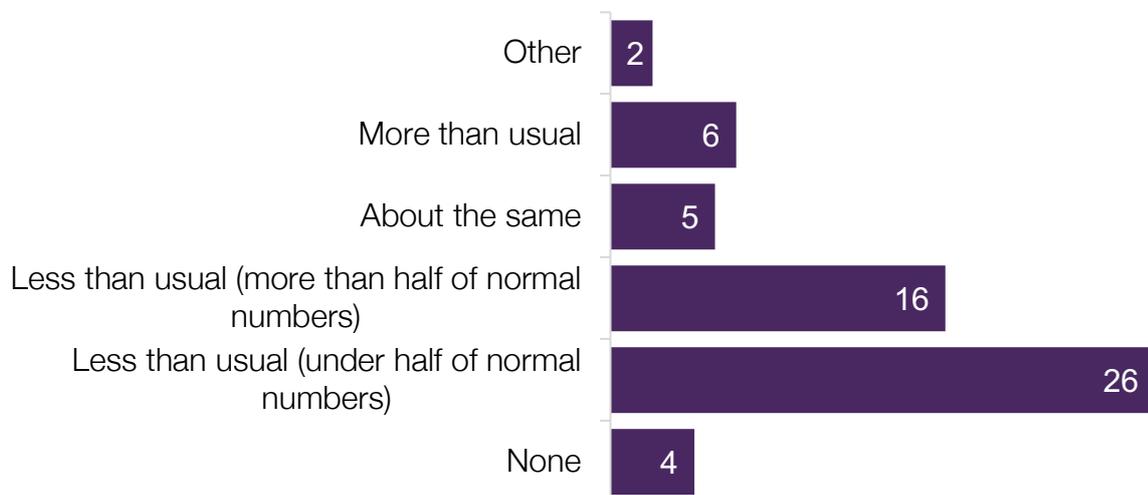
**| 3f) Has your organisation struggled to meet running costs (such as rent, utilities, facilities maintenance)?**



- Almost a third of youth workers (27%) said that their organisation has struggled to meet essential running costs, such as rent.

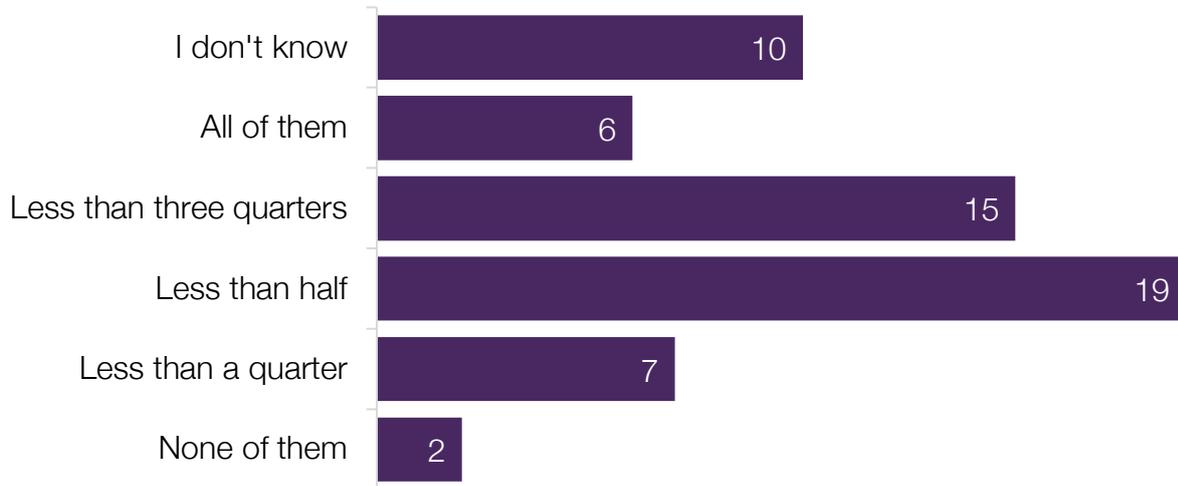
**| Youth work during lockdown**

**| 4) How many young people are you regularly engaging with, compared to pre-lockdown?**



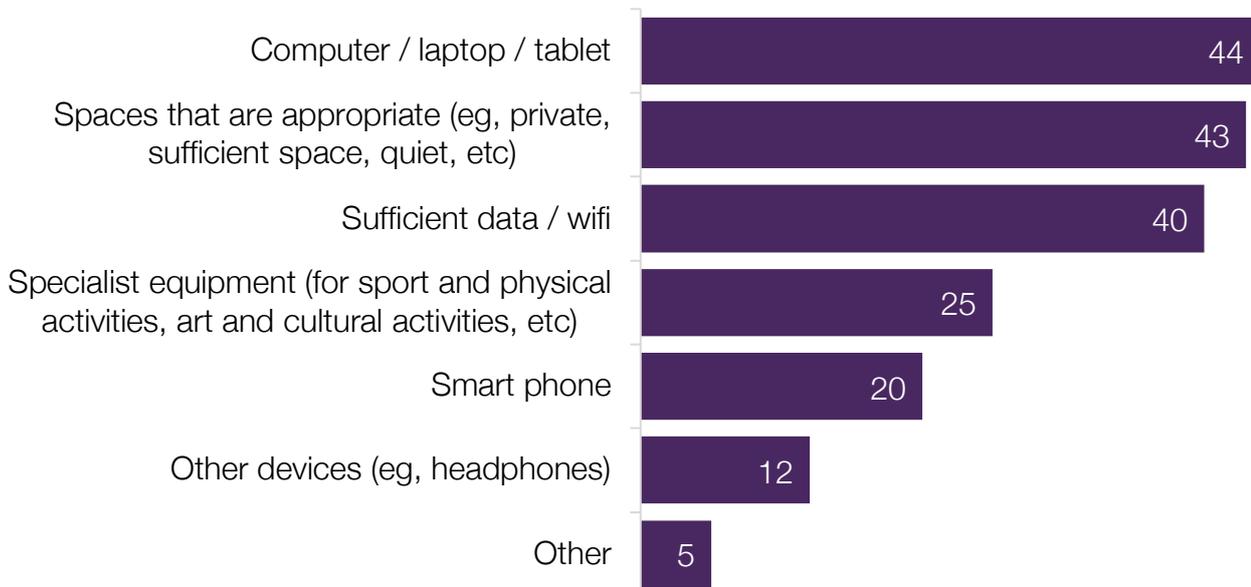
- Over three quarters of youth workers (78%) reported a drop in the numbers of young people they were regularly engaging with, compared to pre-lockdown. For 10%, there has been increased demand.

**| 5) How many of the young people you work with have everything they need to engage with your services and other forms of support? (ie, devices, data, appropriate space, etc)**



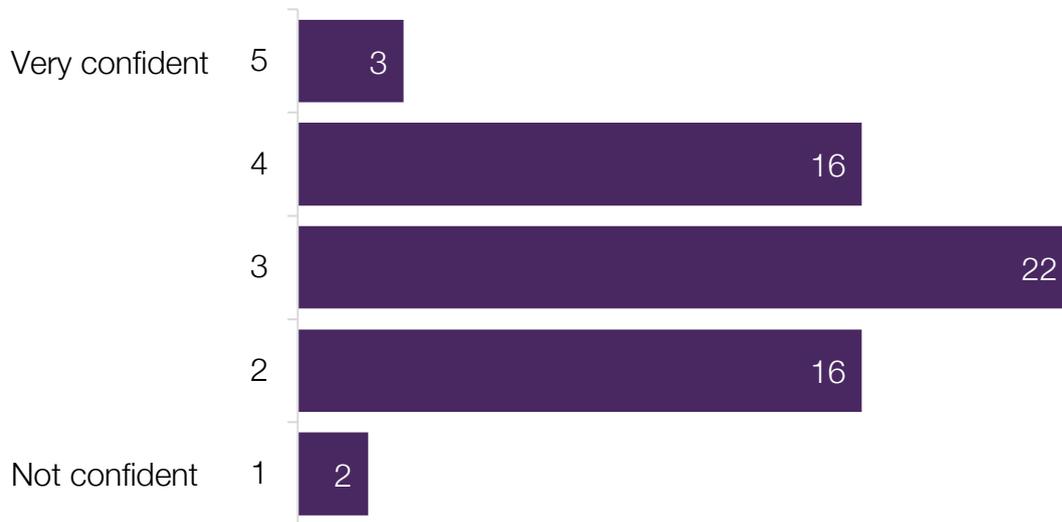
- Only a tenth of youth workers (10%) were confident that the young people they work with have everything they needed to engage with services. Almost half (47%) said that half or less of their young people had everything they needed to engage.

**| 5a) What are young people most likely not to have that is a barrier to engaging with your services and other forms of support? (Select all that apply)**



- Youth workers identified lack of access to a computer or similar device, appropriate spaces, and sufficient data or wifi as the largest barriers for young people to engage with support.

**| 6) How confident are you that the young people you work with are able to be referred on to specialist services if they are needed?**



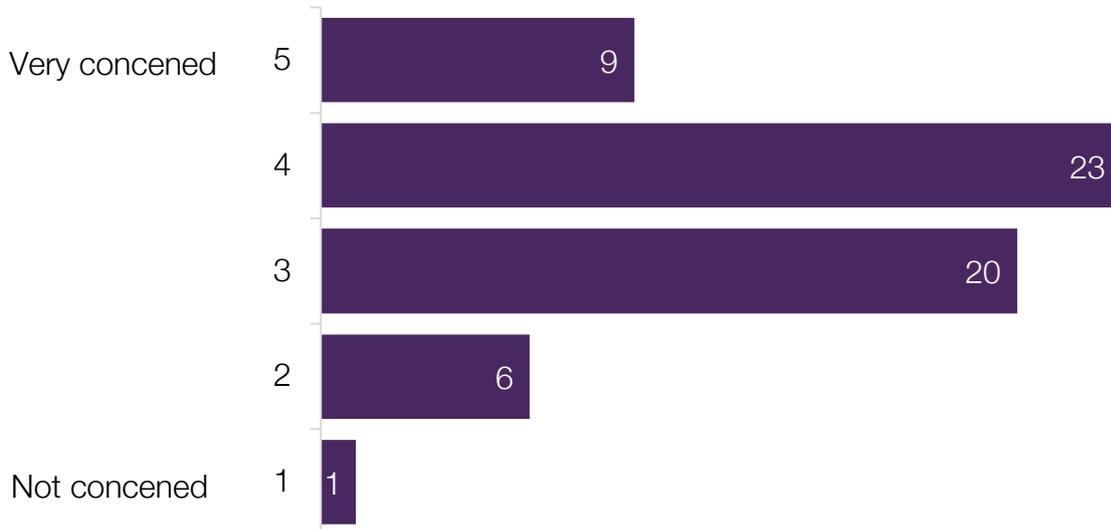
- Youth workers were almost equally split over their confidence that young people were able to be referred on to specialist services if they are needed.

**| 7) How confident are you that the young people you work with have been able to access and engage with government guidance (eg, employability support, mental health and wellbeing, physical health and safety)?**



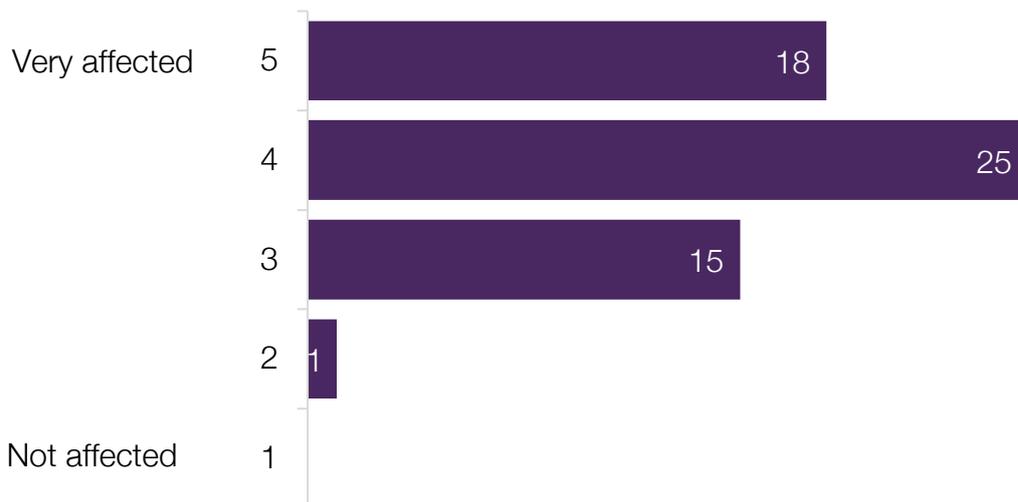
- More than half of youth workers (54%) said that they were not confident or fairly not confident about the young people they work with being able to access and engage with Government guidance.

**| 8) How concerned are you that the young people you work with are in lockdown in a safe environment?**



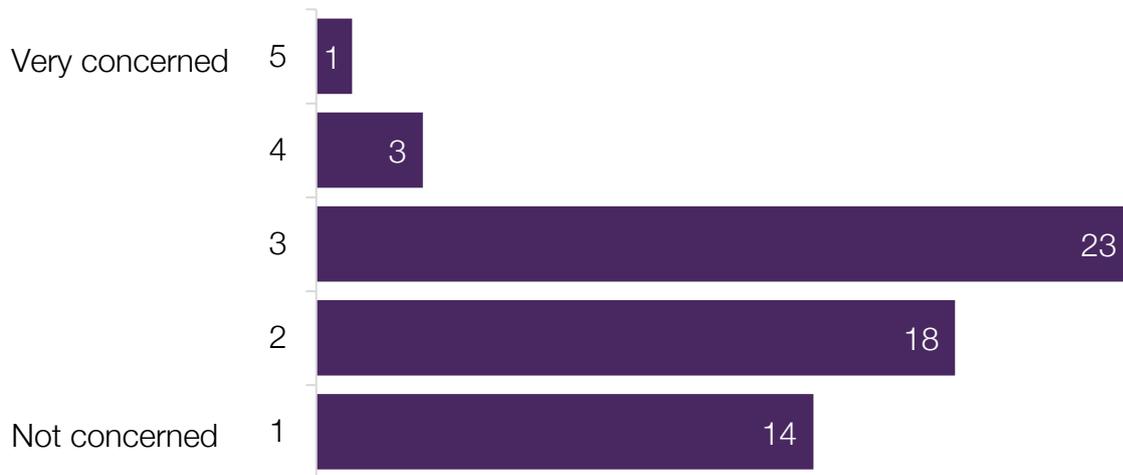
- More than half of youth workers (54%) said that they were fairly concerned or very concerned about the young people they working with being in a safe environment during lockdown. Very affected

**| 9) How has the wellbeing and mental health of the young people that you work with been affected by lockdown?**



- Almost three quarters of youth workers (73%) said that the wellbeing and mental health of the young people they work with has been fairly affected or very affected by lockdown.

**| 9a) How confident are you that the young people you work with have been able to receive the wellbeing and mental health support that they need (eg, CAMHS)?**



- Over half of youth workers (54%) were not confident that the young people they work with have been able to receive the wellbeing and mental health support that they need, while only 7% were confident.
- Several responses to *Question 9b* provide greater nuance around mental health support available to young people:

*“ We completed a questionnaire and a high number say their mental health has been affected and are worried about how friendships will be after lockdown. A number access CAMHS but can't during this week time. We've had to chase for appointments to continue.”*

**| 9b) Please provide any more detail about the mental health and wellbeing of the young people that you work with**

- Concern about the impact of the COVID-19 on communities, particularly the disproportionate impact on deprived areas, key workers and their families, and people from black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds.
- “ We are based in the epicentre of Covid-19. All members have family or neighbours who have died. Most working parents are bus drivers, nurses or frontline staff.”*
- Many youth workers said that they are struggling to keep in touch with young people and keep them engaged in services.

*“ We are trying hard to keep in touch with our young people - but it is difficult. They don't really want to engage online because that is what they have been doing with their school. They are bored and agitated and want to be outside in the good weather. Many are frustrated as they don't have access to laptops/tablets to amuse themselves with. We have applied for funds to try and fill the digital divide but we haven't heard anything yet.”*

- Concern about increases in anxiety stress, isolation, and depression, as well as underlying mental health issues.

*“ We have seen an increased need for support for the young people we are supporting along with their family members around mental health.”*

*“ We're seeing high levels of anxiety and increased level of safeguarding issues related to emotional wellbeing.”*

- Concern for young people with difficult home lives, such as LGBTQ+ young people and those who are not safe at home.

*“ As our young people are LGBTQ+ there are additional concerns as many are not 'out' at home and therefore cannot access the services they normally would in the community and / or via school (where we are usually based). Our trans members are particularly affected.”*

- Concern about difficulty accessing specialist mental health support through referrals.

*“ Our concern is that whilst we are able to make referrals, there is a complete lack of specialist services available to our young people. CAMHS constantly reject our referrals as they say they don't cater for autism, but they fail to recognise the mental health needs arising from lack of autism support - they only intervene when it's too late and needs have escalated to crisis, e.g. suicide ideation.”*

## **| Youth work after lockdown**

### **| 10) What will be the three biggest challenges that young people face when lockdown ends (eg, employment, serious violence, access to services and support, education, physical and mental health)? What support will need to be in place?**

- Concern about inequality and the impact on those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

*“ Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be hardest hit, setting them further apart from peers. Ideally government will step in and create opportunities for young people to engage in something positive and build their skills rather than seeing large numbers of young people unemployed.”*

- Concern about young people's physical health and mental health, particularly anxiety.
  - “ *Physical and mental health, education, self-awareness of young people on how they are doing and what support they need.*”
- Concern about the transition back to 'normal', particularly regarding the return to formal education.
  - “ *Adapting to returning to 'normal', rebuilding face to faces relationships with peers, struggling with mental health. All the young people we work with are in full time education so schools will need to provide adequate support to catch up those who have not had access to quality remote learning opportunities during lockdown and appropriate pastoral support as well.*”
  - “ *We also foresee that the transition back into school will be difficult. Many young people have lost their routine and become nocturnal. For young people who struggled with attendance and engagement with education before, this will be a difficult transition period. Additional support to integrate young people back into the routines and rhythms of school will be needed.*”
  - “ *Schools, colleges and FE institutions will need to be aware of potential mental health challenges amongst students and have some kind of plan in place to offer structured help through counselling or referral to support services.*”
- Concern about access to services, which may have disappeared due to the impact of the pandemic, as well as difficulty in reengaging with youth services and other forms of support.
  - “ *The biggest challenges for young people to face are access to services and support, some of which will no longer exist after the lockdown period. With so many people being made redundant some of our young people fear that they will never gain employment with the increased competition in the labour market. Access to informal/alternative education. Many of our people have struggled to engage with mainstream provision before the COVID-19 crisis for a variety of reasons. More funding for youth services are going to be needed in order to preserve vital services for young people. They will be needed more than ever now and in the coming 12-18 months.*”
  - “ *There is likely to be a hesitancy about reengaging mainly due to parents' fear of infection and maybe lethargy after months of 'hibernating'. We will have to work hard to bring the young people back to the centre so they can have fun and become physically and mentally fit again.*”
  - “ *Youth services/provision are needed now more than ever to support all young people and we need to ensure we are staying connected and maintaining a connection to young people, so they know where to find the support they need and they have someone they can ask for help from.*”

- Concern about difficulties with youth employment and young people's financial situation.
  - “*Employment, access to services and support, mental health - the lockdown has caused havoc with so many services and has amplified stresses that were already present pre-lockdown, so when many young people needing support post-lockdown we can envision that being a struggle. The government need to provide more direct support for the youth sector and undo damage done due to austerity.*”
  - “*Mental health, drugs and violent crime, education - then impacting employment. This is an emergency for young people, it will have a massive impact on their futures, we need to act now to support them in the best way we can.*”
- Concern about the potential for young people experiencing serious violence as lockdown eases.
  - “*Risk of involvement in gangs and youth violence – needs detached services which adhere to social distancing to start soon (if not now!).*”

### **| 11) How satisfied have you been with Government COVID-19 guidance for the youth sector to date and what more information do you need to make a safe and informed decision about reopening over the coming months?**

- The responses largely reflect dissatisfaction with Government guidance for the youth sector. Even among responses that were satisfied, there was acknowledgement of the lack of youth sector-specific guidance and concern that this was urgently needed.
  - “*Not satisfied, there hasn't been a clear direction and other sectors that make money for the economy have been prioritised.*”
  - “*I am satisfied with the Government COVID-19 guidance so far. We will need more very clear advice before we can come to any decisions about reopening of our facilities as we are not clear how we would be able to manage and carry out social distancing due to the layout and nature of our building.*”
- Concern that guidance has been confusing for young people and have found it find it excluding.
  - “*Our young people have experienced a lot of misinformation and confusion.*”
  - “*The government guidance hasn't specifically mentioned young people and youth services, which doesn't make young people feel that they are important to the government.*”

- Many responses express frustration over the lack of specific youth sector guidance, while acknowledging the unique challenges of delivering safe and socially distanced youth work during lockdown and as we come out of it.
  - “*Guidance has been confusing, particularly as we work across the age groups from 5 to 25s. We have made assumptions that we would fall under the leisure / public open space area and have been following those guidelines. We need to understand how we differ from schools; which came out recently. We would consider ourselves to be informal educators (through play and youth work) but we have not been able to decipher this from the various guidance documents.*”
  - “*Unlike schools, youth centres can have any number of different young people attending, we don't have a lot of control over who attends when. Also young people tend to have large social circles so are likely to be mixing with lots of different people. If we choose to open services only for specific targeted young people, then it will feel unfair to those young people who this does not include. How do we get the balance right between delivering online services and IRL services, staff don't have time to do both, but going forward we need both.*”
- Desire for more clarity over how youth organisations should manage the risks of reopening.
  - “*No guidance still to be provided, very frustrating and impacts on our plans to know how best to proceed.*”
  - “*From an employer's perspective the guidance has been far from clear. Many key decisions have been left to us as an employer. We are conflicted between providing an in-person service to our young people (resuming our programmes to normal) and the duty of care we have to our staff. We would appreciate clear guidance, both around under what conditions it will be safe to return to work, how to resume work safely in schools and how to ensure the safety of office-based staff working out of a small office.*”

## | Key findings from our first survey

Between 26th March and 23rd April 2020, we surveyed 290 youth workers from 149 youth organisations in our network on the impact of COVID-19 on their youth organisation, how they were adapting, and what support they needed in the first weeks of lockdown.

**33%** were facing significant and immediate financial pressure

**26%** listed funding and income as their most immediate concern

**5%** were delivering face-to-face essential services to young people

**63%** were moving to some form of digital provision

**You can read the full results of the survey by visiting our website:**

<https://londonyouth.org/covid-19-financial-impact-on-our-members/>.

## Get In touch

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