

Submission

House of Lords COVID-19 Committee
Life Beyond COVID Inquiry

31st August 2020

| About London Youth

London Youth is the representative 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.

We can facilitate for policymakers:

- Visits to community youth organisations;
- Consultation on specific issues or programmes with young people and youth professionals;
- Dissemination of opportunities or information to community youth organisations; and
- Young people and youth professionals attending and speaking at events.

| About this response

This is a response to the House of Lords COVID-19 Committee's inquiry, Life Beyond COVID, which closes on the 31st of August 2020.

This response is on behalf of London Youth's 550+ members and associate members.

| Our response

| Key messages

Now is a critical time for young people in London and for the dedicated professionals and outstanding organisations that support them. This current crisis comes after a decade of funding cuts that has been particularly challenging for youth services in London and it is imperative that the Government takes the necessary steps to ensure that the youth sector survives to continue delivering outstanding youth work that transforms young lives. The following are the priority areas to deliver for young Londoners now and beyond COVID:

- ❖ London Youth notes how vital youth work is in the lives of many young people, including some of the most vulnerable in London. Community youth organisations have made huge efforts to adapt their services to changing public health needs and have continued throughout the pandemic to deliver this vital support to the young people and the wider communities that they work with. As COVID-19 and its consequences continue, these services will only increase in importance for young Londoners.

- ❖ London Youth has serious concerns about the financial sustainability of the youth sector. It is particularly important for charities to be funded in the mid-term of the next 6-12 months, as emergency funding and Government supports comes to an end. It should be a priority to provide community youth organisations unrestricted funding to meet core running costs and to respond to changing public health needs.
- ❖ London Youth has welcomed the response by funders in London to the pandemic, as well as increased cooperation and partnership in the youth sector and with statutory partners. We would like to see this collaborative method of working for the benefit of young Londoners and the organisations that support them to continue beyond COVID and, wherever reasonable, to be formalised.
- ❖ London Youth considers that it is vital to address the long-running crisis of funding in the youth sector, which has only been exacerbated by this pandemic. We are repeating our call for youth services to be given strong and clear protection in legislation and for the commitment of long-term and ringfenced funding based on local youth populations to be allocated to each local authority. We support the recent recommendations for strengthening the youth sector made by the cross-party Youth Violence Commission.¹
- ❖ London Youth has serious concerns about the significant and disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on youth employment and young people's futures. We are particularly concerned about the likelihood of further entrenching pre-existing inequality and racial disparity in the employment market. We support a greater role for community youth organisations in supporting young people into good and sustained employment.
- ❖ The mental health and wellbeing of young people should be a priority in the response to COVID-19. Before the pandemic, youth workers had long reported that they are acting as frontline mental health support for young people unable to access mental health support through statutory services, such as CAMHS. Youth organisations have played a critical role in supporting young people's wellbeing, preventing social isolation, providing positive activities, and supporting young people during the pandemic.

| Consultation questions

Are there any positives you would take from this pandemic?

| Response by London's funders

London Youth supports the well-coordinated regional response by funders in London to COVID-19, which has rapidly and effectively distributed emergency funding for services to support young people and local communities. The best example of this is the London Community Response Fund partnership led by London Funders. Together with the latter organisation's widely-circulated pledge for funders to commit to flexibility with their grant-holders in the face of changing circumstances, the response fund has distributed emergency funding to many community youth organisations in London.

¹ Youth Violence Commission (2020) [Final Report](#).

We continue to have concerns about the financial sustainability of the sector, particularly over the ability of youth organisations to access unrestricted funding and funding over the next 6-12 months. This is explored in greater detail below.

| Partnership

London Youth supports an increase in new partnerships and collaboration between civil society groups and statutory bodies to address the unique challenges of COVID-19.

London Youth has led on building a new partnership of strategic organisations in the London youth sector. We have also collaborated with the Impetus-led Youth Employment Group and supported the work of the London Recovery Board and the London Violence Reduction Unit in responding to the pandemic.

As is often the case in crises, the community and voluntary sector has responded rapidly to adapt to this crisis and adapt delivery to meet the changing needs in their local communities. Among our own membership in the first stages of lockdown, at least 63% of youth organisations adapted their provision to deliver to young people virtually and many have continued to deliver face-to-face essential services to young people throughout the pandemic.

What are the things that you are most worried about?

| The impact of COVID-19 on our membership

Since the beginning of lockdown, London Youth has commissioned two surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on our members in the London youth sector; the first survey surveyed 290 youth professionals from 149 youth organisations in April and the second heard from 59 youth professionals in May. We have summarised these surveys in our report, [*Running on Reserves: The impact of COVID-19 on London's youth sector*](#).²

We have included some key responses from our members, show the situations that many community youth organisations find themselves in:

“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.”

“We are based in the epicentre of COVID-19. All members have family or neighbours who have died. Most working parents are bus drivers, nursing or frontline staff.”

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

“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

² London Youth (2020) [*Running on Reserves: The impact of COVID-19 on London's youth sector*](#).

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 need to resume our service, we need reliable information and recommendations on adequate personnel protective equipment (except for social distance and hand washing), which will minimize the spread of the virus.”

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 devices, appropriate spaces, and sufficient data or Wi-Fi
- 73% said that mental health of their young people has been affected
- 54% are concerned their young people aren’t in a safe environment during lockdown
- 54% were not confident that their young people had received the necessary mental health support

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 were 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.

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% were not confident about their young people being able to access and engage with Government guidance

| Financial sustainability of London's youth sector

London Youth has serious concerns about the mid-term financial sustainability of the youth sector, with up to a third of our members saying that they may face closure within six months without additional support. This poses a particular threat to small, grassroots community youth organisations with limited resources including financial reserves, to respond to the crisis. Around a third of London Youth's members have an annual income of £100,000 or less.

While many community youth organisations have diverse sources of income, COVID-19 has interrupted not only delivery-based funding but also the key summer fundraising period and income generating activities, such as venue and facilities hire. Many organisations rely on this revenue to meet their core running costs, such as staff and premises costs, and face a struggle to replace this income through grant funding and as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is phased out.

We consider that it is vital for community youth organisations to have funding certainty over the next 6-12 months. We support the well-coordinated regional 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.³ We recommend that funders, including the Government, publish their mid-term funding plans to give charities some certainty.

We argue that community youth organisations have a particular need for unrestricted funds. We encourage funders, including the Government, 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 IVAR (2020) [A funding cliff edge?](#)

| Youth employment

As an organisation with deep experience in youth work-based unemployment support, we have serious concerns about existing racial disparity in employment for young people in London, particularly for young men of Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi backgrounds, and how these could be exacerbated by COVID-19 and its aftermath.

We welcomed the announcement earlier this month by the Chancellor to deliver employability support to young people through the £2 billion Kickstart Scheme and other initiatives. We encourage the Government to further look at the role of community youth organisations to support young people into good and sustained employment. The Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit has recently pointed to the effectiveness of support-based unemployment support in reducing violence affecting young people.⁴

| The mental health and wellbeing of young people

As detailed above, our members have reported that young people are struggling have struggled with their mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic.

We consider that young people's mental health should be a cross-Government 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.⁵ 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.

| Community youth organisations and social infrastructure

Community youth organisations are a key part of social infrastructure in the capital.⁶ Among our own membership, we know that half of these organisations work with other parts of the community than just young people and we know that during lockdown 5% of our members were still delivering essential services within their communities, including supporting food banks.

Now more than ever youth organisations are needed in their communities and we consider that Government support for civil society should recognise the vital role that community youth organisations play in local responses to crises like COVID-19 for young people and wider communities.

⁴ Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit (2020) *Violence in London: What we know and how to respond*.

⁵ Care Quality Commission (2018) *Are we listening? A review of children and young people's mental health services*.

⁶ London Youth (2017) *Young People's Capital of the World? Understanding and responding to young Londoners' changing needs*

| Guidance

There is an extremely clear need 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.

The National Youth Agency (NYA) has issued excellent guidance, which is supported by the Health and Safety Executive and Public Health England, but not the Government. Members report confusion at which guidance to follow (eg, local authority, NYA, or that issued by sporting governing bodies) when there is inconsistency on basic questions such as the maximum group size they can host. Many community youth organisations, with limited resources and expertise in this area, have significantly adapted their physical spaces and their operations and will continue to do so to adapt to changing public health needs. We are concerned about the ongoing burden of doing so without specific and official guidance to call upon.

Get In touch

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