LY London Youth

WORKING WITH MINORITISED YOUNG PEOPLE

A RESOURCE FOR YOUTH PROFESSIONALS

YMCA GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

HIGHBURY ROUNDHOUSE
Putting the heart back into the community

Partnership for Young London

QUALITY LEADERSHIP IMPACT PARTNERSHIP

Voluntary Action Islington

WORKING WITH MINORITISED YOUNG PEOPLE

'At Chickenshed Theatre you can be who you want… (without judgement).'
Research Participant,
Authoring Our Own Stories

This guide supports youth professionals to build more inclusive opportunities and services. It helps you to think about what you're offering young people, work out how best to support them and engage them in what you're doing. It's about listening to them and their needs, meeting them where they are, and enabling them to participate and attend.

While this is all fairly standard practice within youth work, we hope this will help you to reflect on your specific offer to young people from minoritised groups and ask questions about how you can improve what you're doing with them.

What is a 'minoritised group'?

This is a group of people who are seen as a minority by a larger, more dominant group. Often the inclusion of minority groups and recognition of their needs is treated as secondary to the dominant group. The term can be applied, but is not limited to, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, disability and religion. You can find out more about the term on Action for Race Equality's website.

How to use this guide

Our guide covers the key points to consider at each stage of your interaction with young people. We've included tips, insights and examples from our conversations with youth professionals. By combining these ideas and approaches, you can create a more inclusive space in which young people can thrive.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU START

What are the needs of the communities you are serving? What opportunities are there to work with them?

What's your approach to identifying their needs and developing responses?

What are the core values of your organisation?

How does this work connect to your values?

STAGE 1
INITIAL ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

"[We have] diverse backgrounds and experiences but shared experience of mental health struggles."
Youth professional, Islington

What to aim for

» Your service or offer **responds to the active needs** of minoritised young people and has been designed in collaboration with young people from a similar background.

» Young people feel **seen and understood** when they arrive. They don't have to hide their identity or explain themselves, and they meet people they can connect with who have shared experiences and identities.

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How to get there

"People give us feedback that our working is having a positive impact and more in needed. If we felt something is not working, we regroup and understand what is needed for a change, and then adapt to how it will work."

Bablu Miah, Head and Founder,
Trapped in Zone One, Tower Hamlets

Through word-of-mouth, build a **presence and awareness** of your work in the community to help you reach others. Encourage the young people you work with to be your **champions**, along with others in the community who recognise the value of what you do. They could be people from the community who volunteer in other services, or those who are well-connected to schools or parents.

Recruit staff from the community you serve and **support** your team to **build knowledge** of the community's lived experience. This could include hiring some of the older young people you work with or setting up programmes to support young people into youth work careers. This can start as something simple, like asking young people to **facilitate** some sessions, take on **leadership** roles or attend training.

Youth professionals don't need to have exactly the same background as the young people they work with, but it helps to have some **common understanding** of their culture and the issues they're facing.

Appreciate that staff who are not from within the community may need the "stamp of approval" from colleagues within the community, the young people themselves, or a respected community member.

Design or adapt your offer by mapping what you already have in place and then putting it alongside the needs of young people. Use the young people's **insights and experiences** to inform this, and consult others within the community.

Regularly collect **feedback and data** on what works and what doesn't and use this to adapt and improve your approach.

STAGE 2
BUILDING TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS

"Identity is also at the core of what we do. Understanding what they identify with and what is important to them."
Varsha Chauhan Gawde, Brent Young Adult Pathway Lead, CNWL NHS Foundation Trust

What to aim for

» Young people are **heard, understood and represented**, and can voice this.

» Young people build an understanding of their **identity and culture**, while finding commonalities with others. They feel more **confident** and comfortable talking about themselves, their identities and the **issues that affect them.**

» Young people have **someone they can talk to** about these issues, who understands their situation (e.g. county lines), when they feel they **can't speak to anyone else**.

» Young people feel they have someone available to **facilitate conversations** with external agencies or their families with them or on their behalf.

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How to get there

Have **open conversations** about identity. Think about how identity is perceived by an individual and those around them. Consider intergenerational and intercultural **identity challenges**, different interpretations and fluidity of identity, and the different parts of people's identity.

Provide space for the young people to feel **understood**, safe enough to **express themselves** freely and make decisions. This could include **letting them decide** on timings, opportunities, choices and activities.

Identity means **different things to different people**, so it's not always easy to define. However, based on our research, the areas that minoritised young people often want to discuss, explore and test are about their cultural, ethnic, religious or national identities and how these intersect with other elements of their identities and lives. For those who are refugees or asylum seekers, this may also include different challenges relating to identity. Be open to **understanding** young people's lived experiences but **avoid making assumptions** about them. Make sure there's **space** for them to discuss all the issues that affect them. These may be struggles around identity - such as racism, negative stereotypes, anti-migration sentiments and homophobia - but they could also include poor mental health, housing challenges and financial problems, as these can often overlap.

Ensure young people can **build** stability, consistency and deeper **relationships** with their caseworkers.

Use **fun and creative** methods, including art and discussion-based activities, to support young people in their **self-expression** and identity development, and to build **trust**.

Where staff feel comfortable, encourage them to **share common experiences** that might help young people to **open up**. This could include a staff member sharing their own personal experiences of exploring their identity, challenges with their own mental health or other **experiences they have in common** with the young people.

STAGE 3

CREATING SAFE SPACES

What to aim for

» Young people have space to **explore**, test themselves and **learn** about their identity in a safe environment.

» Young people feel **ownership** over the space and have the **confidence** to co-create an environment where each group member can be themselves.

» Young people build the **skills** and **confidence** to design a service and space that's relevant to them.

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How to get there

Build spaces where young people's identities and needs are **understood, reflected and celebrated**. Some ways in which you might do this are listed below.

Find ways to **connect** and include the culture of the young people. This could include **celebrating** religious festivals **together**.

Make sure the space is **adaptable** based on the **needs** of the young people. This could include having a prayer room and changing session times during Ramadan.

Provide safe spaces in a way that feels **relevant** in the moment. This might mean having separate boys' and girls' sessions when necessary, or permanently.

Provide a range of **opportunities** for a diverse group of the young people to give feedback and **co-design** the offer. This could include having a representative youth advisory board or holding regular meetings with all the young people to discuss plans, activities and future offerings. You could assign organisation or leadership roles to different young people for these activities to build feelings of **ownership** and **autonomy**.

"An element of ownership also helps with retention – otherwise it's like a school mentality. We want young people to feel this is their own space – they can scream, shout if they want to express without judgement… Ownership also brings trust."
Bablu Miah, Head and Founder,
Trapped in Zone One, Tower Hamlets

Additional resources

1. Initial engagement

Youth professional training for employees and volunteers of London Youth members, including young people (free)
londonyouth.org/events/

Needs assessments tools and theory
youthimpact.uk/resource-hub/
why-do-we-do-what-we-do

Islington Council's commissioned youth services – a similar directory might exist for your local area
izzy-info.com

QLIP Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework and tools
qlip.org.uk/support/measuring-impact/

2. Building trusted relationships

Know your roots, a 'super, kinky, curly' exploration of black hair
partnershipforyounglondon org.
uk/knowyourroots

Authoring Our Own Stories is a peer research programme using creative thinking and tools, focus on young people's civic identity
partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/post/
authoring-our-own-stories-through-
the-power-of-creative-thinking

Diversity Toolkit: A Guide to Discussing Identity, Power and Privilege
msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/diversity-
workshop-guide-to-discussing-
identity-power-and-privilege/

Session plan: Exploring My Identity and What is Important to Me - Ealing Youth Justice Service
yjresourcehub.uk/working-with-children/
item/1086-identity-session-exploring-my-
identity-and-what-is-important-to-me-ealing-
youth-justice-service-february-2023.html

Transcending Resilience - explores resilience amongst young people with minoritised identities
partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/post/
transcending-resilience-youth-policy

Advice: Helping young people to understand their autistic identity
autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/
professional-practice/autistic-identity

3. Creating safe spaces for young people

UK Youth top tips on safe spaces
ukyouth.org/wp-content/
uploads/2021/09/02-Making-safe-spaces-
for-young-people-Top-Tips.pdf

Creating Safe Spaces for Young People, international perspective and guidance:
positivementalhealth.eu/2021/02/11/
creating-safe-spaces-for-young-people/

Lundy's participation model clearly and simply highlights what young people need in order to have agency and take leadership roles
participationpeople.com/wp-content/
uploads/2020/11/Compressed-PP-
_-Lundy-Model-Explained-2.pdf

The Essential Groupworker: Teaching and Learning Creative Groupwork by Mark Doel, Catherine Sawdon
books.google.co.uk/books/about/
The_Essential_Groupworker.html?id=-
yUQBQAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

Youth involvement toolkit
voiceopportunitypower.com/

Youth voice typology
ymcageorgewilliams.uk/sites/default/
files/2022-11/Typology%202.0_
FINAL%20VERSION_published.pdf

The Faith & Belief Forum offers resources about creating a safe space and talking about identity and controversial topics
https://faithbeliefforum.org/
resources/introduction/

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