

# UK YOUTH

A group of young people, diverse in age and ethnicity, are shown in profile, looking towards the right. They appear to be at a concert or event, with some wearing headphones. The lighting is dim and colorful, suggesting a night-time setting. The overall mood is positive and engaged.

**The impact of COVID-19  
on young people & the  
youth sector**



## Foreword

UK Youth is a leading national charity committed to improving young lives. It is our vision that all young people are equipped to thrive and empowered to contribute at every stage of their lives. We do this by working as a nationwide Movement of over 5,500 youth clubs and organisations. Together we deliver innovative youth services, grow effective practice and campaign to increase support for youth work.

Over the past decade the youth sector has been placed under immense pressure as it responds to increasingly pervasive issues that have threatened the social and personal development of the UK's young people. Increasing social demands, coupled with severe reductions in funding, have put the youth sector in an extremely precarious state.



There are 11.6 million young people aged 10-24 in the UK - one in five of the population.

(ONS, 2018)



Funding available per child and young person for all children's services except schools and early education fell from £813 in 2010-11 to £553 in 2017-18

(Action for Children et al, 2019)



More than 1,000 children's centres have closed since 2009 and 760 youth centres have shut since 2012

(Unison, 2018)



The average local authority spending cut on youth services is 40% over the past three years

(APPG on Knife Crime, 2019)

It is against this backdrop that the risks from the COVID-19 pandemic are emerging. COVID-19 (coronavirus) has caused a global pandemic and the biggest public health crisis that we have experienced since WW2. It will have a long-lasting impact on society at large, from the economy to employment, to the way we interact. Organisations supporting the most vulnerable young people and communities are determined to do everything it takes to maintain high quality services in local communities. This report outlines the impact that COVID-19 is likely to have on young people and the youth sector during and after the pandemic.

We know that the pandemic is having a big impact on young people and those that support them. Our report highlights that whilst every effort is already being made to continue vital support services by moving them online, for some young people there are huge barriers to digital engagement. Youth organisations have been quick to adapt their services and have been at the forefront of supporting the wider emergency response, often redeploying their staff to distribute emergency care packages, support emergency services and transform their buildings into foodbanks. This report also shows an urgent need for emergency funding to be able to keep the doors open of their services in the long term.

We need to keep the youth sector connected, engaged and mobilised in order to support young people now and after the crisis. We must act now to ensure that the voice of young people and those that support them does not get forgotten during this crisis, and that the most vulnerable young people get the urgent support that they need now and in the future.

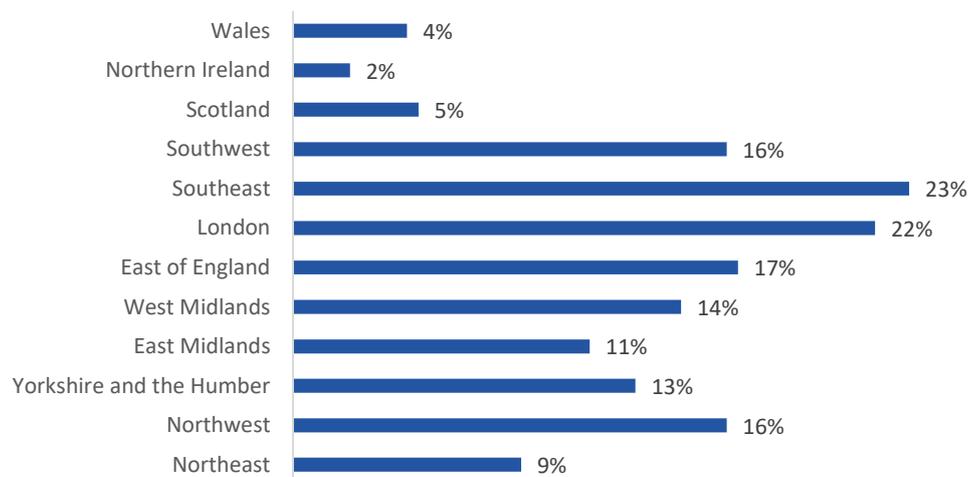
**Ndidi Okezie, CEO, UK Youth**



## Introduction

Between 20-27 March 2020, UK Youth surveyed the needs of the youth sector and young people in the wake of COVID-19, and potential long-term impact. To ensure a diversity of perspectives from youth and community organisations that work with young people across the UK, we reached out to the UK Youth Movement and asked them to also share with their networks. The respondents of the survey represent the breadth and diversity of the youth sector. **252 respondents, representing 235 organisations**, including network, membership and infrastructure organisations **that further represent another 1,848 organisations** completed the survey. The respondents represent organisations that engage young people across all English regions and the four nations (Figure 1). The organisations who responded reported engaging at least **608,700 young people** in the last year.

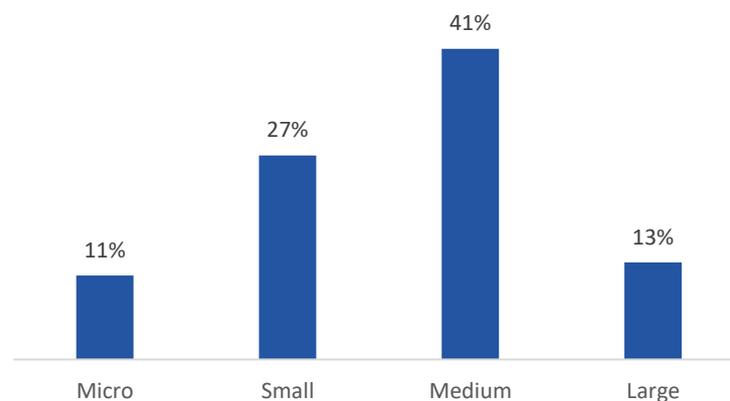
Figure 1. Regional breakdown of respondents' organisations



Note: Based on 235 organisations represented by 252 respondents. Figures do not add up to 100% because some organisations operate in multiple regions.  
Source: UK Youth.

We can also see that the respondents represent a spectrum of organisations by size, with more than half falling in the medium and small categories (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Size of respondents' organisations



Note: Based on 235 organisations represented by 252 respondents. Organisation size based on reported annual turnover for 2019-2020 financial year. Organisation size based on Small Charities Commission definitions, including the following turnover amounts: Micro: less than £10,000; Small: £10,000-100,000; Medium £100,000-1 million; Large £1 – 10 million. Source: UK Youth

## The impact for young people

**“We are so worried for our young people. They are already a very marginalised and isolated group and now that has intensified greatly. Many exist in unhappy homes with little chance for escape or support. With the whole nation now being told to stay at home these young people are left trapped with the people they are desperate to escape from and even less able to be who they are.”**

*-Mermaids charity*

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect the most vulnerable, the Government has put in place the biggest public health measures during peacetime. Without a doubt, whilst this has to be the priority, the impact this will have on young people is likely to be intense and long lasting, especially for the most vulnerable. Feedback from the UK Youth Movement predicts that the impact on young people will include the following, ranked by order of importance (based on number of responses).

- 1. Increased mental health or wellbeing concerns**
- 2. Increased loneliness and isolation**
- 3. Lack of safe space – including not being able to access their youth club/ service and lack of safe spaces at home**
- 4. Challenging family relationships**
- 5. Lack of trusted relationships or someone to turn to**
- 6. Increased social media or online pressure**
- 7. Higher risk for engaging in gangs, substance misuse, carrying weapons or other harmful practices**
- 8. Higher risk for sexual exploitation or grooming**

Members of UK Youth Voice, our national youth advisory group, corroborated our survey results. They reflected on and highlighted some of the concerns young people have for the future, such as the long-term effects of isolation on wellbeing and mental health, and uncertainty about employment.

**“So many people are reading the news all day as we are just at home, some of it is fake news and we’re getting so scared, some people I know are having panic attacks. We’re trying to figure out how to stay safe while still staying mentally healthy, Depression is going to go up during this outbreak you don’t realise it’s here until it’s too late.”**

**“Not everyone has a family to support them through this. Lots of people’s friends are their family and now they can’t see them at all, only online. People will be feeling so isolated more than they have ever done before.”**

**“Young people are facing many worries and challenges at this time. Some of us are on zero hours contracts and are losing jobs or their work has closed so they have zero income, and no-one is around to tell you what’s happening and help you understand it at all. Many people rely on jobs as an escape from my home life, especially me, and I have been so eager to go to work. Me myself, I have zero knowledge if my work will ever open again, it could be back to square one in the job hunt, which will be soul destroying for me.”**

## The impact on youth organisations

There has never been a more important time for the organisations that support young people and transform their lives. However, the results of our rapid assessment and survey highlight the devastating impact that the youth sector is facing.

- Most respondents (88%) indicated they are likely or very likely to reduce service provision to young people.
- **31% said that staff redundancies were likely, while 17% said permanent closure was likely.**
  - **36% of those from medium organisations noted that staff redundancies were likely**, followed by small (32%), large (29%), and micro (14%) organisations. The smaller likelihood for staff redundancies from micro organisations could be due in part to these organisations being more likely to hire volunteers rather than paid staff.
  - **Permanent closures will hit small and micro organisations hardest. 22% of respondents from small and 21% from micro organisations said that permanent closures were likely**, followed by 17% from medium organisations and 11% from large organisations.
- **64% of respondents said that they were likely to lose sources of funding.** About 69% of respondents from small organisations reported this, followed by medium (68%), large (63%), and micro (46%). *This percentage is likely to be higher following lockdown measures announced 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020.*
- **71% of respondents said that they were likely to reduce staff hours.** *This percentage could be higher following lockdown measures announced 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020.*

**“This is a critical time for the youth sector and particularly those who receive no core funding. If organisations close, it will be incredibly hard to pick up the pieces and vulnerable young people will not get the support they need and deserve. For those who have suffered trauma in their lives this could cause further trauma and lead them further into mental ill health, physical ill health and reduced life outcomes. The repercussions of this crisis are unthinkable. Supporting charities and the youth sector to stay afloat means that skilled workers, with existing trusted relationships, can support them to gain a level of understanding of the situation and mitigate some of the likely outcomes.”**

*- UK Youth Movement member*

## Adapting and innovating in the face of COVID-19

The youth sector is adaptable and is constantly changing to meet the needs of young people. The diversity and flexibility of organisations supporting young people means that we are already seeing how the sector is quickly responding to change the way they deliver in order to try and continue to support young people.

**“As a group training organisation, we are looking at how to achieve our aims through reaching out to young people in a different, digital, way. This is difficult due to the types of young people we work with - in terms of access to internet/resources and attention. Still, we are developing engaging relationship building and interactive sessions using technology to continue to reach young people. We are reaching out to those we already have worked with, sharing tips, seeking to understand their needs at this time and finding ways to support them.”**

- UK Youth Movement member

Our survey has highlighted that;

- **Most respondents (86%) indicated that they were engaging young people virtually** or were in the planning stages to do so, where possible. For example, respondents described taking steps to move service provision such as activities online, engage with young people using social media platforms, and/or engage with young people by phone.
- **Of those who answered, almost half of respondents (48%) said that between 75% and 100% of their young people would be able to engage in youth services digitally**, based on current knowledge.

**“We are proud to have transferred our services to operate remotely, e.g. online/ telephone therapy - however this is not suitable for all of our service users, and completely inappropriate for adoption cases, children living in one bedroom flats with no safe space to engage in therapy, those living with family conflict and those who do not have access to the internet/ a laptop or smart phone. We are devising online support for teaching staff and careers during this period and hope to deliver workshops in schools when they re-open to help young people to process the trauma of the crisis.”**

- UK Youth Movement member

The survey highlighted what is needed for youth organisations to survive this crisis, to adapt their services in the short term and be able to mobilise and respond when the pandemic is over. Many of the organisations we represent conduct large-scale income-generating activities to support their work, both commercial in nature (such as trading, training and events) and reliant on fundraising activities (such as community fundraising activities, sponsored activities and events). Heavily reduced footfall on high streets will lead to a large decrease in income from charity shops. Restrictions (both mandated and voluntary) will lead to training and events being cancelled, and community fundraising initiatives will either be cancelled or scaled back.

- **72% of respondents said their organisation needs access to emergency funds** to support organisational needs in order to continue to support young people during and after the pandemic.
- There is a need to drive digital innovation as 81% of respondents said that unreliable or no access to IT infrastructure (such as phones, Wi-Fi, or mobile data) could pose a barrier to young people engaging in youth services digitally. **69% also indicated that unreliable or no access to a private space could also be a challenge to engaging in digital services.**
- In order to provide virtual services, we need to increase the digital capacity of youth organisations. **65% of respondents identified an urgent need for digital infrastructure and support. 31%** of respondents said that they **do not have the infrastructure** to provide youth services digitally.
- **68% need access to information and resources** for young people in order to continue to support them during this time and provide safe, high quality services.

- **35% need access to safeguarding guidance** to support new ways of working, specifically around supporting young people virtually.

We must also continue to put young people's voices at the heart of decision making and enable them to be part of the solution to reuniting communities in the aftermath of the crisis. The most common way that youth workers (37%) envisaged young people leading or having a voice in their community's response to COVID-19 was online, whether through campaigning, sharing information and connecting with others or generating creative online content.

One in five youth workers felt that in order for young people to lead or have a voice, they needed to be given meaningful opportunities to express themselves and share their opinions (through dialogue, surveys, youth boards and forums). It is vital that decision makers create meaningful opportunities for young people to have their voices heard.



# UK YOUTH

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