

YOUTH WORK IN ISLINGTON

IMPACT REPORT

2024/25

QUALITY LEADERSHIP IMPACT PARTNERSHIP

London Youth

MARY'S YOUTH WORK

ISLINGTON
For a more equal future

INTRODUCTION

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Pictures:
Top: Mary's residential
Middle: Freightliners City Farm
Bottom: Global Generation - Young makers fair

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Welcome to the third annual Youth Work in Islington Impact Report.
This report offers a snapshot of how the Young Islington universal youth offer is supporting young people across the borough - helping them feel safe, thrive within their communities, and take an active role in shaping the future. Our work aligns closely with both the Youth Safety Strategy 2020–2025 and the Islington Together Strategy 2030.

Through the voices and journeys of young people, we explore the role youth services have played in their lives, the experiences they valued most and the impact of meaningful relationships developed through youth work.
Each service contributing to this report looks different, from open access centre based and detached youth work through to targeted 121 support including mentoring and clinical therapeutic sessions. Despite their diversity, all provisions support young people across the four key life outcomes featured in this report.

Now in its third year, this edition highlights youth leadership, detailing how young people develop the values, attitudes, and skills needed to become leaders within their communities. Young people themselves share reflections on their experiences, aspirations, and how their involvement in youth activities is helping shape a better future for everyone.

Youth Voice has been central to this report. Young People from across Islington shared their experiences and opinions through a range of activities facilitated by youth workers, volunteers, and other young people.

Quotes and stories from young people are highlighted in blue throughout this report.

Where you see the orange loudspeaker symbol, you can click through to hear young people's voices directly.



This year, our theme is “Championing Young Leaders.” We want to highlight how youth work helps young people develop leadership skills–not just in formal roles, but in all aspects of their lives.

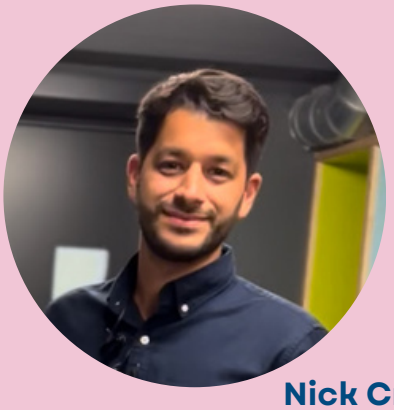
Leadership comes in many forms. It’s not just about titles or positions; it’s about the everyday moments where young people step up, take initiative, and make a difference. Whether it’s supporting a friend, speaking up for change, or inspiring others to try something new, we're focussing on the stories that bring these moments to life.

We’re thinking of young leaders in a few different ways:

- Leading in their own lives, taking ownership of their health and goals etc.
- Supporting others, such as friends and other members of the youth provision
- Leading youth services
- Making changes in their community/local area

In response to this year’s theme the team at **Soapbox** conducted research with the young people attending to explore what youth leadership looked like, with the following definition:
“an ongoing formal and informal process of service; which through demonstration of a professional, personal and work ethic, honed interpersonal skills, positive character traits, awareness of both situation and people, and authority that is earned, enables young people to guide peers, staff and others, in a shared, inclusive and fair manner, towards a goal of addressing real-world challenges and opportunities.”

Whilst we can’t (and don’t try to) provide children, young people and young adults with a voice, because they already have one, we do work to ensure that they have the skills to use their voice effectively, understand that their voice is valuable & valued and have a platform through which they can use that voice and develop it further.



Nick Crivello
Centre Manager / Youth co-ordinator @ Soapbox

Insight from Nick and other Islington based youth workers, is featured throughout this report alongside the voices of the young people they support.

A DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIVE OFFER

At Young Islington, we are committed to creating a youth offer that reflects the rich diversity of our borough and meets the needs of all young people. We continue to work closely with young people, families, and communities to shape services that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and adaptable to emerging needs. From targeted programmes for underrepresented groups to youth-led initiatives that amplify young voices, our approach ensures that every young person can access opportunities, feel a sense of belonging, and thrive.

This report highlights services commissioned by Islington Council alongside the wider Young Islington offer, which includes:

- Universal youth provision at Lift, SoapBox, Rose Bowl, and the Zone, as well as year-round community-based programmes.
- The Young Islington Locality Network.
- The Quality, Leadership and Impact Partnership (QLIP).
- Enhanced detached youth work across the borough.
- A 'transitions' offer for 11–14-year-olds on the Andover estate.
- Elthorne Youth Club, supporting local young people needing extra support to access wider opportunities.
- Summerversity holiday activities.

In 2024–25, we remained focused on reaching young people historically underrepresented in youth services or at greater risk of poorer outcomes, including young people with SEND, girls and young women, young people from Turkish, Somali, and Bangladeshi backgrounds, those at key transition points, and young people living in Islington's most disadvantaged areas.



Fun at Mary's Residential

The Enhanced Detached Offer

The enhanced detached youth offer was launched in 2023 to engage and support young people less likely to access the centre based provision such as youth clubs and adventure playgrounds, and who therefore may be more vulnerable to poorer outcomes. The detached team, led by **Prospex**, has been engaging and supporting young people across the wards of Bunhill, Clerkenwell, Mildmay, Tufnell Park, Finsbury Park and Elthorne, areas where serious incidents can be more prevalent.



Trip to Thorpe Park - Prospex Detached

Over the past year, the enhanced detached youth team has engaged **just under 3,000 young people** across six priority areas, building trust through consistent, street-based outreach. Of these, **142** young people are engaging regularly and have been connected to the wider universal service offer including youth hub sessions, Duke of Edinburgh's Award, outdoor adventures and therapeutic counselling. Key highlights include the development of strong relationships in Tufnell Park and Finsbury Park, leading to two residential weekends involving **22** young people, deepening connections with both participants and their families. In Finsbury Park, targeted efforts have increased engagement with the **Andover Youth Hub**, with plans to expand this collaboration.

The team facilitated targeted support for vulnerable young people with **14** accessing therapeutic counselling and **8** young people referred to boxing sessions with weekly 121 mentoring.

Looking ahead, we aim to expand outreach sessions into Caledonian Road and Barnsbury Park in response to the emerging need. Additionally, we aim to expand youth-led projects, enhance therapeutic interventions, and deepen partnerships across the borough. We will continue to collaborate closely with **Targeted Youth Support** and maintain strong links with local services including **The Zone**, **Lift**, **Andover Youth Hub**, **Finsbury Fusion**, **Mildmay Community Centre**, **Mary's Youth Club**, **Soapbox**, **Islington Boxing Club**, and **Arsenal in the Community**, helping young people access safe spaces, trusted adults and a wide range of support and opportunities.

Focus on the North

Building trust, strengthening wellbeing, and creating opportunities for young people in North Islington.

The launch of **Finsbury Fusion** and **Elthorne Youth clubs**, now in their second year of delivery, continues to mark a major step in strengthening youth provision in north Islington. With weekly sessions at **Collective Acting Studios** (Hornsey Road Baths), **Andover Community Centre**, **Elthorne Youth Club** and **Whittington Park Community Centre**, alongside additional support through **Highbury Roundhouse** and **TYS**, young people now have greater access to safe spaces, trusted adults, and positive opportunities close to home.

"Leadership can happen in everyday moments when you empathize with others and step up to take initiative. It's about recognising opportunities to lead, no matter the situation, and supporting those around you. So, yes, I believe leadership is something anyone can demonstrate at any time!"
Young Person, Andover

Elthorne Youth Club

Launched in 2023, the Elthorne Youth Club is a partnership between **Elthorne Pride**, **Prospex**, and **Islington Council**, providing a safe, welcoming and supportive space for young people on the Elthorne estate, many affected by youth violence and anti-social behaviour.
Now in its second year, the Youth Club has engaged **93** young people who have participated in a diverse, co-designed programme.

Activities have included:

- DJ workshops
- boxing
- First Aid
- educational visits and offsite adventures
- personal development sessions

Responding to young people's requests for skills that support education and employment goals, the club introduced the **Duke of Edinburgh's Award**. Following parent feedback, a junior club for younger children now runs weekly on Tuesdays.



Islington's Deputy Young Mayor 2025

The hub has also extended its reach by welcoming newly arrived young Syrian refugees. Notably, one of Elthorne youth club's founding members was elected as a youth councillor and now serves as **Islington's Deputy Young Mayor**, campaigning to improve youth safety and local sports facilities.

Finsbury Fusion and Andover Youth Club

A safe, inclusive space where young people thrive.

Over the past year, **Manor Gardens North Area Youth Offer** has grown into a dynamic blend of vibrant youth club activity and estate-based outreach. **Finsbury Fusion**, a youth night based at the Hornsey Road Baths, and the **Andover Youth Club**, now deliver open access youth sessions 5-evenings a week, alongside a co-designed programme that includes a Girls' Night, Homework & Mentoring Club, voucher rewards scheme, and the popular Food & Feelings cooking sessions.

Attendance has steadily increased, with **54%** of participants coming from priority communities, including Somali, Turkish, Bangladeshi, Caribbean, and SEND, reflecting the impact of targeted outreach and growing trust within the communities.



Boxing at Kickback project

Kickback programme

The Kickback project is a community-powered violence reduction initiative funded by the 'My Ends' Violence Reduction Unit programme, that brings together grassroots organisations dedicated to making Finsbury Park a safer and happier place to live, work and thrive.

This year, the Kickback programme has delivered an inclusive, community-rooted offer in Finsbury Park, reaching **508** children and young people and **130** parents, carers, and professionals. The programme provided a mix of interventions, including 1:1 mentoring to boost emotional wellbeing, confidence, and goal setting; therapeutic support addressing trauma and anxiety; and group sessions exploring relationships, identity, and conflict resolution.

By building trusted relationships that support young people in the community, detached youth workers engaged **166** young people, many had never accessed a youth service before.

Transitions from play to youth services

In the past year, we've also continued to strengthen and build on some of the great partnership work between adventure playgrounds and the local youth clubs to support young people who age out of the play offer to transition smoothly to the local youth spaces.

Thanks to these effective collaborations we are seeing a consistent increase in the number of young people who are transitioning from the play offer to youth. In 2024 – 25 over a quarter (**26%**) of young people who were adventure playgrounds users in the previous year have transitioned to a youth club. This is a 4% increase compared to 2023-24, and 10% compared to 2022-23 demonstrating an upward trend in sustained engagement in safe spaces and supportive relationships for young people at this pivotal stage in their lives.

NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Young Islington Network

The Young Islington Network brings together universal youth organisations committed to child-centred, trauma-informed practice. Their shared goal is building a youth sector shaped and led by young people.

Youth Voice & Leadership

In May 2024, 11 youth organisations co-hosted a Youth Leadership Event at the Arsenal Hub, bringing together **40** young people to explore how they can influence change locally.

Young Islington Network Grants

Launched in response to youth feedback, the grant empowers young people to design and assess youth-led projects, aimed at addressing the issues raised by young people at the leadership event. In its first round **10** applications were submitted with **17** young people and **3** steering group members leading the grant assessment process.
Youth outcomes include increased youth voice in funding decisions, hands-on experience in project design, grant writing and budget planning alongside skills development in assessing and delivering impactful youth initiatives.

Funded Projects Snapshot

- **Ambitious Academy and Lift** – Media skills and video production
- **Fourth Monkey and Copenhagen Youth Project** – Acting and casting workshops for BAME youth
- **Mary's Youth Club and Gain Ctrl** – Music production and editing
- **Elthorne Pride and Prospex** – Employment mentoring and interview skills
- **Angel Shed and Galbur Foundation** – Theatre access for young people with a Northeast African background
- **Copenhagen Youth Project and Arsenal in the Community** – Accessible football tournaments
- **Prospex and Highbury Roundhouse** – Girls designing mental health awareness workshops for boys

This innovative programme highlights the power of youth-led design and decision-making, reinforcing the council's commitment to inclusive, participatory approaches to youth provision.

To learn more contact : sharareh.avazzadeh2@islington.gov.uk

Quality, Leadership and Impact Partnership (QLIP)

The QLIP initiative, established in 2021 and commissioned by Islington Council is a partnership led by **London Youth** with **Mary's Youth Club** that supports practitioners in Islington with a range of professional development activities.

The QLIP professional support offer includes:

- Access to monthly supervision with experienced local practitioners
- Training
- 121 support tailored to the organisations needs
- Impact measurement support and resources
- Networking including "Coffee with QLIP" a quarterly practice sharing workshop focusing on a theme.

During the last 12 months the QLIP team have liaised with **41** organisations across the borough. Youth workers consistently highlight the value of the offer, for example; a supervision participant shared that they had been able to reflect on strengths based approaches to improve their youth work practice:

"Adapting the language to focus on the strengths of young people has better informed how I promote various aspects of my work and also how myself and my team structure our activities." - Youth Practitioner

In May 2025, ahead of UK Pride month, Coffee with QLIP was themed around best practice for supporting LGBTQ+ young people. The team from **Outcome at Mind Islington** shared their vital expertise supporting the emotional wellbeing of this group.

One of the valuable resources shared is the **"Challenging Inequalities Self-Assessment Toolkit for LGBTQI+"** Aimed at improving access to mental health services, the toolkit provides valuable reflections and suggestions to ensure all settings are welcoming of LGBTQ+ young people, whether they have chosen to share their orientation publicly or not.



Young people making art for Pride - Mary's

Learn more about QLIP

HOW WE'RE DEFINING IMPACT

Since the publication of the 2023/24 Impact Report in June 2024, QLIP has been working with youth practitioners to support impact measurement in different youth provisions. Utilising the impact framework to identify shared outcomes, and then tailoring data collection tools appropriate to the activities available at each service. By embedding one framework across multiple parts of the offer we aim to continuously build a picture of how providers are collectively creating impact for young people in Islington.

The framework focuses on four key areas and proposes a set of indicators and measurement methods that youth workers can use with young people. This report focuses on **four identified outcome areas** and shares a range of data generated by providers through their use of various tools and methods, including case studies, interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, and creative activities such as community mapping.

Physical and emotional well-being

- Improved physical health
- Improved emotional well-being
- Improved safety and perceptions of safety
- Improved resilience

Social, emotional and life skills and knowledge

- Improved practical and life skills
- Improved social skills
- Improved self-awareness
- Increased learning

Sense of agency and motivation

- Increased sense of ownership
- Increased confidence
- Improved aspirations and motivations to do well in education, training and employment

Connections with networks of support and communities

- Improved connections with others
- Improved connections with communities
- Improved access to services

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

Figures below relate to activities and providers commissioned by Islington Council between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025.

5602
young people took part in youth activities*

637
under 13s engaged in the youth offer

41%
engaging in the youth offer for the first time

50.3%
regular participants (attended 5+ times)

84%
live in the most deprived areas in the borough**

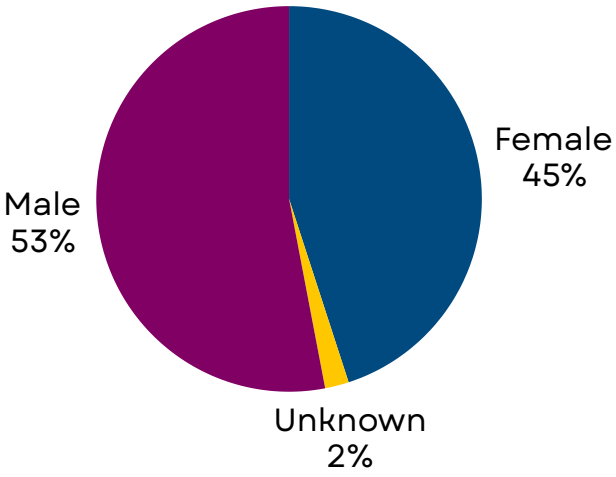
24%
13-19 year olds in the borough attending provision

Largest youth spaces at a glance

Youth Provision	Users	Participants
Lift	2211	1105
Soapbox	830	525
Rose Bowl***	425	213
Andover Youth Club	105	73
The Zone	50	30
Finsbury Fusion	55	36

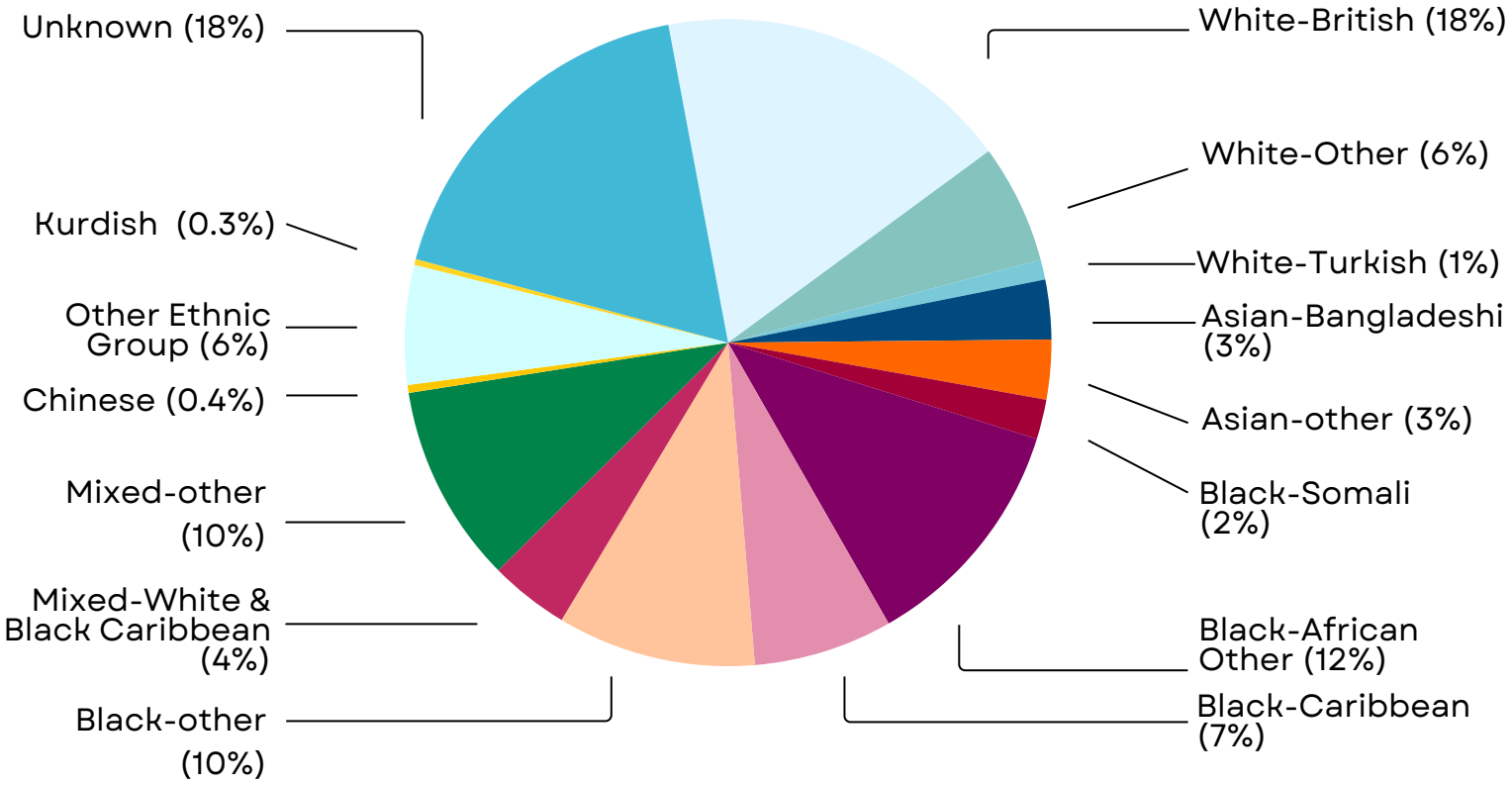
Users are individuals who attended each youth provider.
Participants are users who attended 5 or more times.

Gender breakdown, age 13-25



*Individual users can access more than one provision
**83.7% of attendees lived in the top 40% most deprived wards in the borough, as defined by IMD data.
***Includes 8-12 years age range

Ethnicity breakdown Youth and Play age 13-25*



SUMMERVERSITY & LAUNCHPAD 2024

939
young people participated

116
courses and activities offered

780
young people offered a free meal as part of their course

212
referrals made by social workers and other services**

*Membership of ethnic categories is self-defined and subjectively meaningful to the person concerned. Young people may self-report under more than one ethnic category. Providing this information is optional, which accounts for the proportion of young people with an unknown ethnicity.
**Referrals into Summerversity came from social workers, Targeted Youth Support, the Wellbeing Team, and Bright Futures.

PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Improved physical health
Improved emotional well-being
Improved safety and perceptions of safety
Improved resilience

One of the most visible forms of leadership in the community is leadership in sports contexts. Coaches and team captains are clear role models for many young people from an early age. Whilst improved physical health may not spring immediately to mind when we think of 'leadership', focusing on a healthy lifestyle does showcase multiple environments where young people take responsibility for themselves and others. Taking part in physical activities as part of youth work provisions can lead to young people acting as leaders.

Encouraging young people to take care of their physical health through introducing them to new activities such as hiking and encouraging them to get involved in sports provides multiple opportunities for young people to boost their own confidence, increase their personal health, and encourage their peers to try new things.

"I went there and they did like shock everyone and they take us to do a hike. When I was younger I would not want to do a hike and now I'm seeing all these pictures and I'm like guys we're doing a hike this year, I'm like get me there right now, I love everyone just walking up a mountain."

Young Person, Copenhagen Youth Project (CYP)

"A significant turning point in his journey was his involvement in boxing sessions at Rivals Gym on Caledonian Road, facilitated by **Prospex**. Through these sessions, Jamal developed greater discipline, physical fitness, and emotional regulation. His growth was evident not only in his personal progress but also in his interactions with others. He naturally took on a supportive role, encouraging his peers–especially the younger cohort–to stay focused and give their best effort. His ability to positively influence others within the sessions demonstrated the early signs of leadership."
Jamal's story (name changed)
Prospex Enhanced Detached Offer



Boxing sessions at Prospex

Being physically active is not the only consideration when encouraging young people to take agency over their health; emotional wellbeing, building resilience and feeling safe are also key.

Stories shared from **Global Generation** indicate how their work supporting young people to connect to the natural world strengthened well-being through conquering fears, overcoming challenges and simply being calm in nature.



Gardening at Global Generation

My favourite experience here is seeing the amount of beautiful stars in the sky with my friends. We even saw a shooting star, my first shooting star."
Young Person, Global Generation

A **QLIP** survey featuring responses from 75 young people across multiple provisions found that young people reported they had learnt about stress management and well-being at their youth club.
Young people who develop their ability to manage stress and care for their well-being increase not only their ability to support themselves as individuals, but also their capacity to support others with wellbeing.

Of the 75 young people surveyed; 44% rated their feelings of safety at youth club as 10 out of 10, 17% as 9 out of 10, and 22% as 8 out of 10.

Feeling safe is a key part of wellbeing, young people attending youth clubs report their sense of safety increases, with many identifying youth club as a safe space. When young people feel safe they are able to try new things that are outside their normal comfort zone, encouraging themselves and their peers to take on new challenges.

"I like this space because it's very nice to me and I can feel safe."
Young Person, QLIP Survey

"I felt like I was in a safe space I could collaborate in and a nice place to express creativity and learn together."
Young Person, Gain Ctrl

Giving back through actions such as volunteering is one of the NHS 5 steps to mental well-being, along with connecting with others, being physically active, learning new skills, and being present in the current moment.
For LGBTQ+ young people finding safe spaces that boost their wellbeing and resilience can be transformative to their lives.

Resilience is not always an easy term to define, rarely referenced explicitly by young people. To reflect on what resilience looks like day to day, and whether someone has developed this quality in themselves demonstrates the kind of self-aware leadership that youth workers consistently encourage in the young people attending their services.

Parent testimony

My son, is a transgender teenager, who is now 13, has been regularly volunteering. After personally observing my son and other young people, who volunteer at **Freightliners City Farm** and whose parents I know, we are all seeing the tremendous positive impact this city farm has made.
For my son, this place is a precious, safe and encouraging sanctuary. The organisation provides a nurturing environment, where young people can meet and undertake activities in a supportive and inclusive space.



Feeding the goat at Freightliners City Farm

"I see resilience in the young people who keep showing up. It's in how they don't let a 'no' shut them down, especially when they realise someone believes in them. That's where real resilience takes root, you can literally see their resilience grow. It's in their voice, their posture, their willingness to not give up and try again."
Sombo, Copenhagen Youth Project

"It's happening when you don't know, it's the trips that you take, which is like, all right, this is cool, but you're actually learning resilience in a good situation and you're learning how far your boundaries can go with people."

Young Person, CYP

FOCUS ON GIRLS WORK

She is Supported (SIS)

Building confidence, connection, and leadership for girls across Islington.

The SIS Project, funded by the Mayor of London, is a partnership between the **Brandon Centre**, **Highbury Roundhouse**, **Prospex**, and **Mary's Youth Services**. Together, they deliver a holistic programme supporting girls and young women aged 10–24 across Islington.

The SIS offer includes:

- Weekly group activities
- One-to-one mentoring
- 12–16 weeks of therapeutic support
- Annual residential retreats
- Staff training and development
- Peer mentoring and Wellbeing Ambassador training

> "The three things that I have learnt from stepping up with SIS is be yourself, always be brave and have fun."
> **Young Person, The SIS Project, Highbury Roundhouse**

A key feature is the Islington Girls Super Group, which brings girls from all youth hubs together for collective sessions focused on themes identified by participants. These sessions foster meaningful connections, shared understanding, and a strong sense of sisterhood across the borough.

Since January 2024, the SIS Project has supported **253** girls, with **232** receiving 1:1 mentoring, **21** accessing therapeutic support from embedded psychotherapists at **Highbury Roundhouse** and **Prospex,** and **70** taking part in 2 residential trips. Notably, nearly **60%** of participants are from the Global Majority, reflecting the programme's inclusive approach.

At its core, the SIS Project focuses on connection, confidence, and wellbeing. It empowers younger girls through peer-to-peer support and offers older participants the chance to develop leadership skills.



A SIS project social

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND LIFE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE


Warming up at Access to Sports

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Young people gain practical and life skills
Improved self-awareness
Improved social skills
Increased learning

"I've learnt to be a leader by being an older sister, experiences at school and qualifications I've completed with Access to sports. I used to think a leader is a high position but I learnt anyone can be a leader simply by helping those around you. Therefore you don't have to have a title to be a leader, but be prepared to help others around you."
Young Person, Access to Sports

Youth work supports the development of social skills by offering a wide range of inclusive, engaging activities that bring young people together. Whether it's team sports, creative arts, group projects, or open discussions, these experiences help young people learn to communicate, cooperate, and navigate different social situations. In youth spaces, they build confidence by working with others, managing conflict, and understanding different perspectives. Because youth work is voluntary and built on mutual respect, young people feel safe to be themselves, take risks, and grow, developing the social skills they need for everyday life and future opportunities.

What makes youth work special is how we meet young people where they are. Youth workers take time to build trust, learn stories, notice strengths, and support young people through their challenges. As a profession, youth work focuses on encouraging good choices, young people learn to see the good in themselves too. They begin to name their strengths, set goals, and take responsibility for their growth.
Sally, Mary's Youth Club

Summerversity Overview

- **4705 attendances**
- **32 local organisations delivering**
- **Over 197 accreditations gained**

Youth work is a great space for young people to build real-life skills in a way that feels natural and relevant to them. Because youth work is informal and flexible, practitioners can shape activities to meet each young person's needs and interests. Activities aren't just for fun, they're where the learning happens.

Every year at Summerversity, young people from across Islington are introduced to new activities facilitated by a range of provisions across the borough.
Young people increase their social skills by making new friends on each course. By trying new things they role model to others what it means to be brave and take leadership in your life.

Many courses provide nationally recognised accreditations and qualifications, with young people stating that they felt more confident about their future as a result of attending.



Introduction to the nail industry

"this guarantees you a job, at whichever centre you'd like to lifeguard at in Islington."

Young Person, Summerversity



Woodwork and contruction at The Triangle

"The best part of Summerversity is that you get to look around and try new things, and see what you want to do further in life."

Young Person, Summerversity

Learn more about Summerversity

The majority of young people who spoke about further skills development did so within the context of preparing for future careers. Young people from multiple provisions including **Angel Shed, Rosebowl, Mary's Youth Club,** and **Elizabeth House** valued the opportunity to develop their skills through volunteering. Several young people directly referenced skills they had developed through workplace opportunities that would support them in the future, with others highlighting the importance of developing their emotional, social and life skills through volunteering.

"Volunteering at Angel Shed has given me the experience of working with young children. The experience has extremely boosted my confidence. It has also helped me to expand my knowledge about safeguarding and supporting children with different needs."
Young Person, Angel Shed

"My friends and I cook once a month at Rose Bowl for the other young people during youth sessions. We explore different dishes and teach each other how to cook. It's crazy how some young people don't have a clue on how to cook. So, it's good to share skills."
Young person, Rosebowl


Cooking at Elizabeth House

Young people also shared examples of developing their self-awareness at youth club, whether through regular attendance, or by taking a more active role such as participating in youth boards and forums like the one at **Angel Shed**:

"I used to be a lot more self-centred, used to think I'm right, my way of doing things. Have learned to listen to others, compromise."
Young Person, Angel Shed

"[Something I've learned]... communication and leadership skills. I'm better at time management than I thought."
Young Person, Mary's Youth Club

"Yes, I feel communication has improved and an example of this is I feel more calmer when I talk to people, more confident. I also feel able to speak up and give advice."
Young Person, The Zone Youth Club

FOCUS ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

Working Worlds: Building Skills, Confidence & Community

The Working Worlds programme, delivered by **Hayward Adventure Playground**, supports young people with special education needs and disabilities to gain real-world work experience, develop independence, and build confidence as they move toward adulthood. The programme connects isolated and vulnerable young people with their local community through enriching activities and life-skill development.

Key Highlights:

- **Real-World Experiences**: Trips to Kew Gardens, city farms, the local fire station, plus creative workshops (music, circus, dance) and active sessions including football, swimming, and parkour.
- **Residential Adventures**: First-time overnight trips including 3 canal boat residentials in partnership with **Angel Community Canal Boat Trust** and 2 on-site camping weekends.
- **Work Experience**: Placements at a local nursery and theatre offer valuable professional insight.
- **Community Restaurant**: A standout success–young people run a monthly eatery in partnership with **The Dusty Knuckle Bakery**, learning catering and customer service skills while hosting inclusive, free meals for local families.



The Angel boat, Angel Community Canal Boat Trust

"At school I always feel tired, but that was so fun. I feel so happy and energetic. Thank you!"
Young Person, Hayward Adventure Playground

"(He) was so excited to tell us everything about the residential, it was an amazing experience and made him more confident and independent."
Parent, Hayward Adventure Playground

Working Worlds is helping Islington's SEND young people to thrive - one experience at a time!

SENSE OF AGENCY AND MOTIVATION

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Sense of ownership within youth work
Increased confidence
Improved aspirations and motivation to do well in education, training and employment (ETE)

Youth work helps young people find and use their voice in ways that many other spaces don't. It gives them real opportunities to shape their lives, their youth offer, and even their wider community. By involving young people in planning, decision-making, and shaping activities, youth work shows them their opinions matter.
It's about creating safe, supportive spaces where young people feel heard and respected. Whether it's through conversations, group work, or creative projects, youth workers encourage young people to think about what's important to them and make confident choices. When young people feel trusted, they start leading their own path - that's agency!

"Lift impacted me on a very positive level, allowing young me to find something I'm truly passionate about and guiding me into following that passion free of judgement, gaining my confidence, learning and pushing me in the right direction. If it weren't for this place, I don't know where I would be now. It's the active encouragement, positive energy and immense help they give that have both helped me grow my skills musically and as a person. It's these things that are extremely important that really cement the positive impact this place has had on my life."
Young Person, Lift



In the studio at Lift Youth Hub

STEPPING UP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth councillors are responsible for making sure the opinions of young people in Islington are heard, campaigning for their needs and interests. They work with council officers and councillors to ensure young people have a key role in planning, designing, delivering and reviewing services.

Being on the Youth Council is a fantastic opportunity to do so many things: influence how money is spent on services for young people; act as a voice for young people to make sure their ideas and concerns are heard; help to change society's views about young people; gain good skills and experience that will enhance their CV and college applications – and, importantly, give young people a sense of pride that they have influenced positive changes in Islington.

"I'm proud of myself as I hold myself accountable to better improve my school and the experience of youths in it (and Islington as a whole). It is a lot of responsibility, but it's for a good cause."

Islington Youth Council member

"It was one of the youth workers at Elthorne Youth Club. He told us about the Youth Council, what it was about and how we could have a say about issues affecting young people in Islington. He said he thought I should put myself forward and that I would be good at it. I was a bit sceptical at first and nervous about what it might involve. Back then I wasn't confident about speaking in public. After I thought about it for a bit I thought if I want to see a change in the borough then I needed to put myself forward."

Young Person, Elthorne Youth Club



Islington's Youth Council 2025

Learn more about the Youth Council

Youth work intentionally shares power with young people. In many other settings, young people are told what's happening and expected to take part, in youth work, they're invited to shape what's happening.

When young people help design activities, support funding bids, or join youth councils, they're not just participating, they're practising leadership, learning how systems work, and making real decisions that have visible impact. Youth work creates the space, time, and trust for this to happen. Because our practice is voluntary, relational, and based on equality, young people aren't just included they're valued partners. That's not something they often get in school or other services.

Young people discussed supporting activities, working on bids and joining youth councils. Out of the 75 young people attending youth clubs across Islington that were surveyed by QLIP: 21% rated how involved they felt in shaping or changing the activities at the youth club as 10 out of 10, 24% as 9 out of 10, 13% as 8 out of 10 and 21% as 5 out of 10.



Photography at XLP

Since the residential, Yasmin has continued to engage with the detached team consistently. Her confidence has flourished, and she now plays an active role in planning activities. She willingly shares her ideas and contributes to decision-making processes, demonstrating an increased sense of responsibility and initiative.

Yasmin's story (name changed)
Prospex Enhanced Detached Offer

Jim's Story, XLP

"Jim (name changed) was a regular attendee at one of XLP's mobile youth centres, and over time he made a significant transition from being a young person on the project to launching a successful start to his working career. With support from the team, Jim was guided through the process of job applications, CV writing, and interview preparation. He approached this next chapter with a positive attitude and a drive to succeed. Even after moving on, he remained in touch with his youth workers and expressed a genuine desire to give back to the projects that he had been a part off. One youth worker, who worked in the photography world, recognised Jim's interest and began teaching him the basics of photography and editing. When the opportunity arose to support XLP events with a photographer, Jim was the perfect person for the job.

Read more stories

FOCUS ON MARGINALISED GROUPS

The **Somali Youth Ambassadors** internship programme offered by Islington Council to better support the community following some serious incidents, worked to upskill four youth peer engagement advocates (or ambassadors) to conduct research with young Somali residents to understand their views of Islington Council's employment and educational services.
The ambassadors developed a range of youth engagement tools including a survey on 'Lets Talk Islington', focus groups and they also facilitated a careers day event (pictured) where young people could meet with employers, explore employment opportunities and attend a panel talk. Responses in the survey revealed that only 29% of participants had previously accessed council services, highlighting areas for the Council to improve.

In a survey following the careers day, 93% of attendees stated that the event left an impact in terms of their next steps within their careers:

"I feel more inspired to achieve my goal" "Yes it helped me look further in the future"
Careers Day Attendees



The organization also surveyed four intern programme participants with **75% rating their internship 'excellent' and 25% rating it 'good'.** Participants shared what they had learnt:

"I have enjoyed being able to learn more about my community and being able to help them."
"The most important thing I've learnt was confidence in front of a crowd and and what I found useful was finding out what my community needs help in."
"Being able to develop my research skills."

The Young Ambassadors are not only developing their own skills, but also advocating for their peers to make sure youth services are accessible and tailored to young people from the Somali community in Islington.

CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITIES & SUPPORT

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Improved connections with others
Improved connections with communities
Improved access to services

As we have seen in earlier sections of this report, young people build confidence in their abilities to succeed when they are surrounded by encouraging voices. Whether these are their friends, parents and carers, teachers, youth workers, or other important people in their lives. Young people who courageously take on public leadership roles demonstrate to others that they can do it too. This representation highlights the strength of celebrating different heritages and life experiences.
Young people from multiple projects highlighted the importance of being connected to the wider community, taking opportunities, and having safe spaces within the community to connect with others positively. Young people taking part in acting workshops at **Whittington Park Community Association** spoke about the valuable links to drama schools they had made, and how by being part of a supportive community space they had developed their confidence to enter new environments, both personal and professional.



Photography at Whittington Park Youth Club

"I will continue to develop my leadership skills by supporting those around me in my community. I would like to see more sports and opportunities for the next generation of young leaders!"
Young Person, Access to Sports

"Just having that sort of community base, inside of the youth club, that's the heart of it, that's what you need at the end of the day."

Young Person, Whittington Park

Young people in Islington are passionate about the importance of community. Youth clubs create safe spaces where young people can be themselves, and make friends with different types of people they may not otherwise have spoken to. Young people consistently talk about making new friends and working as part of a team as a positive aspect of attending youth services. For many young people this extends beyond youth club, to helping people in their wider community.

Young people across Islington were asked about what they had done for their local communities as part of the QLIP survey. Of the 75 respondents, these quotes are a small snapshot of the different ways young people support others in their communities:

"(As Deputy Young Mayor) I will be campaigning for better sports facilities for young people. I also want to help make the area feel safer to live in. I will support your ideas and be a real voice for the young people in Islington."

"Volunteering at food shelters."

"Pick up rubbish"

"Helping my neighbours with day-to-day chores."



Crafts at Highbury Roundhouse

Alfie's story (name changed), **XLP**

"Through the school mentoring programme and leadership opportunities he (Alfie) has been empowered to express himself in a safe and contained environment. He regularly supports the project by helping with practical tasks such as preparing food and snacks for others, and he plays an important role in upholding the group's rules and values. His natural authority and presence, when guided and supported by staff, have become a positive force. He uses these strengths to encourage accountability among his peers while also holding himself to the same standard. As a team, we've witnessed Alfie's journey of personal growth, marked by increased confidence, stronger self-awareness, and a genuine commitment to supporting others. He remains a valuable member of this project and an encouraging example of the difference a supportive and structured environment can make."

When considering leadership young people across Islington referenced how their connections with others were an important aspect of leadership. Some highlighted people they considered to be a role model, such as their parents, teachers, and youth workers. Others spoke about the people they had supported, or their role as a volunteer at the youth centre. Youth workers reflect back the growth they've seen to the young people, helping them to consider themselves from a different perspective. This might look like sharing decision making power, supporting young people to use their voice or celebrating achievements. Just one trusted relationship can support a young person to access other supportive services!

When Anna (name changed) from **SoapBox** was asked to consider what leadership meant to her, she drew on her experience of two SoapBox youth workers.
The first word she used to detail their approach to giving instructions or guidance was "gentle", to which she then added "nice" and "kind".
Anna felt that she had agency and could try to do things in her own way at SoapBox, she saw the youth workers as open: leading by example and guiding people. Anna felt that these were some of the key characteristics of a good leader.

Targeted Youth Support (TYS) works with some of Islington's most vulnerable young people, with caseworkers typically supporting 14–15 young people each.
In 2024 TYS caseworkers in partnership with **Highbury Roundhouse Youth Club** launched a new bi-weekly group, primarily for young males on their caseloads, offering a safe space for informal learning, peer connection, and life skills development.
The group brings together 4–6 participants per session helping to build confidence, self-esteem, and positive peer relationships. All participants have access to the wider youth offer once they have completed their targeted group session with their caseworkers.
Running these targeted sessions alongside the open-access youth club means that young people become familiar with the **Highbury Roundhouse** setting, staff team and programme offer, allowing them a safe and supportive space when they are ready to transition out of targeted support into the universal youth offer.



Receiving certificates at Mildmay

"[Something I've learned]..to be nice to people
...that I can make friends"
Young People, Mildmay

FOCUS ON YOUNG PEOPLE AT SCHOOL TRANSITION AGE

The Transitions Project

Designed to support children with complex needs, including those with SEND or social, emotional or mental health challenges including those resulting in prolonged absences from school, the Transitions Project works closely with families to help young people make a confident start in secondary school. Through tailored workshops, therapeutic input, and family engagement, the programme helps build emotional readiness, coping strategies, and long-term resilience.
This year the programme has delivered 20 school-based workshops, reaching **647** children, supported **233** young people through personalised transition support and provided 121 support to **197** parents with **33** families receiving therapeutic input. As a result, there has been a reduction in school-based anxiety across cohorts.

Youth workers in Islington are committed to supporting young people to challenge themselves at every stage of their journey. Encouraging them not just to reflect on their own character, but to also look around them and support other young people, their parents and carers, their teachers, and others in the community.

Playworkers from **Awesome Adventure Play CIC** know that young people can develop their leadership skills at any age, and encourage young people to step up to support the young children as part of their young leaders programme. The programme was developed in line with play work principles and allows young people to take on a supportive, role-model position, where they guide and mentor younger children while still engaging in play themselves.

"It's great that we can offer our Young Leader Programme to those that have aged out of our play service but still want to be involved, supporting younger children just as they were once supported"
Playworker, Awesome Adventure Play CIC

"My favourite part of being a young leader is that I get the privilege of helping out with all the kids, playing games and having fun. I get to see them grow and have fun on our great playground, I feel more grown up and like helping kids that was once me here'"
Young Person, Awesome Adventure Play CIC



On the pitch with Awesome Adventure Play CIC

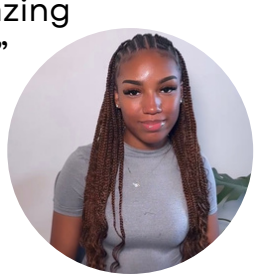
CONCLUSION

Throughout this report we've seen how effective youth work makes a difference to the lives of young people, improving their self-confidence, agency and motivation. It encourages young people to trust themselves, try new things and give back to their communities. Many youth workers can attest to the transformative power of youth work, because their own stories often started in a youth service much like the ones they now run.
As Elyse's story demonstrates, young people have leadership potential at any age, and youth spaces provide a vital space for them to step into exciting futures.

During 2025-26, Young Islington priority areas include:

- Continuing to improve the reach, quality and sustainability of our play and youth offers
- Continuing to make the offer more accessible and inclusive, increasing the diversity of young people attending universal provision and supporting practitioners to engage underserved communities effectively
- Strengthening youth voice in decision-making processes
- Supporting youth organisations to better measure the impact of their work, and continuing to engage young people as active participants in impact measurement

"Attending **Lift Youth Hub** as a young person truly shaped who I am today. What started as a space to catch up with friends after school has transformed my life in ways I never imagined. I've gained different skills, built confidence, and found a forever family. Fast forward five years, and I'm now a Duty Manager, Gym Instructor, and Project Assistant, roles I never imagined I'd be in when I first walked through the doors. Lift didn't just offer me a space to be myself, but it also gave me the tools to transform my life. Today, I'm proud to give back to the next generation of young people, just as I was supported when I needed it most. The journey from participant to staff member has been an amazing one, and I owe so much of my growth to the hub and the amazing community it has built."



Elyse, Lift

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the youth workers that have contributed to this report, by sharing stories of the impact achieved for young people, reflections on youth work practice, and your ongoing support for the next generation of community leaders here in Islington.
Your work is invaluable, and in many cases truly life changing.

LEARN MORE

LEARN ABOUT THE PROVIDERS FEATURED

Access to Sports
https://accesstosports.org.uk/

Andover Youth Centre
https://manorgardenscentre.org/

Angel Shed Theatre Company
https://www.angelshedtheatre.org.uk/

Awesome Adventure Play
https://awesomeadventureplay.org/

Copenhagen Youth Project
https://www.cyproject.org/

Elizabeth House
https://elizabeth-house.org.uk/

Elthorne Youth Club
https://elthornepride.co.uk/

Freightliners City Farm
https://www.freightlinersfarm.org.uk/

Gain Ctrl
https://www.gainctrl.co.uk

Global Generation
https://www.globalgeneration.org.uk/

Highbury Roundhouse
https://www.highbury-roundhouse.org.uk/

Islington Youth Council
youthcouncil@islington.gov.uk

Lift Youth Hub
https://www.liftislington.org.uk/

Mary's Youth Club
https://www.marys.org.uk/

Mildmay Youth Project
https://www.mildmaycommunitycentre.org/

Outcome (Mind)
https://www.islingtonmind.org.uk/our-services/outcome/

Prospex
https://www.prospex.org.uk/

Rosebowl
https://www.rosebowlislington.org.uk/

Soapbox
https://www.soapboxislington.org.uk/

Somali Youth Ambassadors
https://www.islington.gov.uk/

Targeted Youth Support
The Zone Youth Hub
https://www.islington.gov.uk/

XLP
https://www.xlp.org.uk/

Whittington Park Youth Club
https://www.whittingtonpca.org.uk/youth-club

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH PRACTITIONERS

Get involved with **QLIP**
www.qlip.org.uk

Join the **Young Islington Network**
Contact: sharareh.avazzadeh2@islington.gov.uk

TOGETHER
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

London Youth
www.londonyouth.org

Mary's
www.marys.org.uk

Islington Play and Youth
Young people | Islington Council
playandyouth@islington.gov.uk

QUALITY
LEADERSHIP
IMPACT
PARTNERSHIP