

# YiS Feedback Forum

Are you concerned about your mental health?

What kind of projects would you like to see developed?

What does mental health mean to you?



**We Heard What You Have to Say**



**YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH**  
Counselling, Education & Training



HM Government

In partnership with

**THE NATIONAL LOTTERY  
COMMUNITY FUND**

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# Acknowledgements

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Healthwatch Milton Keynes would like to acknowledge and thank the many young people who spoke to YiS and shared their experiences and their thoughts in order to improve the experiences of others.

We would also like to thank the hardworking team at YiS for their time and support, as well as their commitment and effort to ensure that young people have a voice.

A selection of the comments and observations made by people taking part in the feedback forum have been included, verbatim, to provide insight into the thoughts and views of young people.

We hope that the thoughtful responses and insight will encourage more involvement of young people in the design and delivery of services provided for them.

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**Like physical health, my mental health needs looking after and care. - YiS Survey response**

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# 1 Introduction

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YiS Young People's Mental Health is a long running independent mental health charity that works in Milton Keynes to help young people as well as the people that support them. They provide counselling, education, training, coaching, support and more to improve mental health and wellbeing in the local area. They are led by young people's needs and concerns, amplifying and advocating for young voices to ensure they are involved in the decisions that affect them.

YiS has been a key part of Milton Keynes' infrastructure support for young people since 1981. Originally part of the council's service, in 2007 YiS was spun off as an independent charity operating a completely separate service. They currently have 6 part-time members of staff and over 25 volunteers who are dedicated to helping young people improve their lives.

YiS belongs to several local and national boards, partnerships as well as formal and informal networks where they work alongside people and organisations dedicated to improving young lives in Milton Keynes. They are members of NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisation), the Association of Mental Health Providers, BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy), BAATN (the Black, African and Asian Therapy Network) and other organisations that link us to the latest research, good practice and community information. YiS runs the only BACP Accredited Counselling Service in Milton Keynes and belong to several professional mental health bodies who provide oversight and guidance to their work.

YiS wanted to make sure that the services being offered to young people were aligned with what young people need and delivered in the way young people want. Thanks to funding from the Coronavirus Community Support Fund, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, YiS were able to create the Feedback Forum.

The aim of the YiS Feedback Forum is to work proactively with young people in developing youth led initiatives, awareness campaigns, evidence-based activities or events that improve young people's mental health in Milton Keynes.

**10% of children and young people (aged 5-16 years) will have a diagnosable mental health problem, yet 70% who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age - *Mental Health Foundation.***

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## 2 Methodology

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Starting in November 2020 YiS have conducted two surveys and six focus groups. Approximately 150 young people have provided their thoughts, insight and fed into the Feedback Forum.

YiS reached out to all primary and secondary schools, and all local/ town / parish councils in Milton Keynes. They also communicated the information to other local charities that work with young people and posted updates across their social media platforms.

This survey was developed to be vague and open ended so that young people could freely express thoughts, feelings, and ideas about Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Mental Health services.

The second survey was developed using the ideas given by young people in the initial survey, focus groups, and steering groups.

To ensure that the report was independent and not influenced by prior knowledge of the participants, Healthwatch Milton Keynes agreed to analyse and compile the data. YiS provided Healthwatch Milton Keynes with the following anonymised information:

Young Person Focus Group Summaries.

Summaries of Steering Groups for Professional Working with Young People

Summaries of Steering Groups for Young People

2nd Survey Response Spreadsheet, developed using the ideas from young people from the initial survey, focus groups, and steering groups.

The Feedback Forum Summary which included ideas for how the funding could potentially be spent.



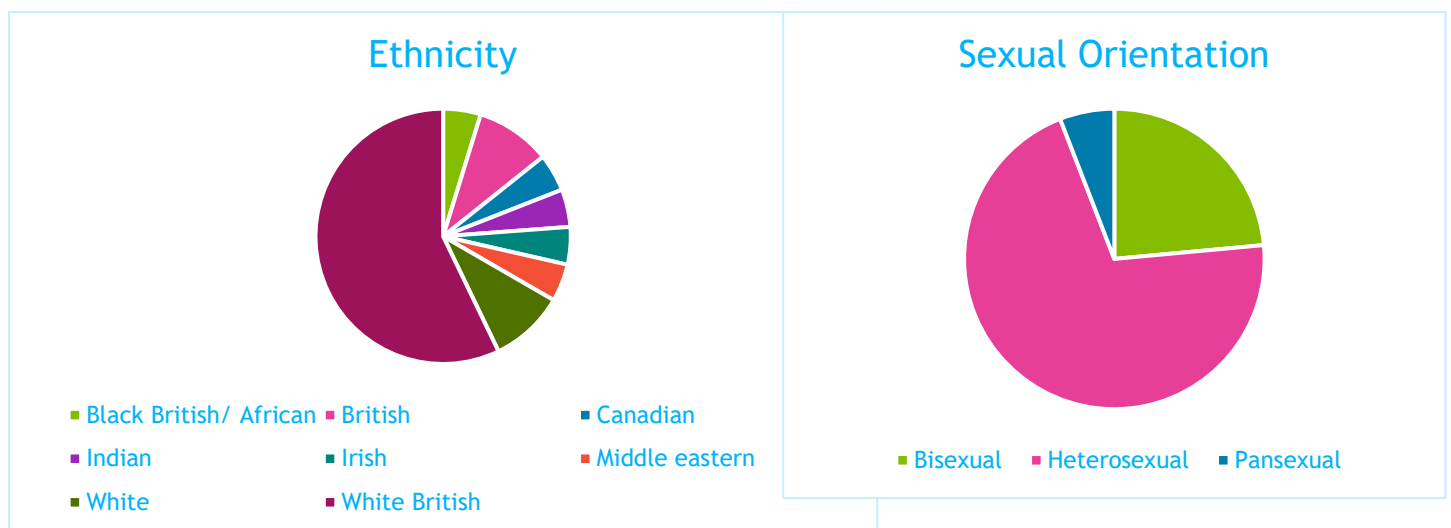
## 3 Survey One

The first survey designed for use as part of the YiS Feedback Forum project was specifically designed for Young People (under 25) to share their thoughts and feelings around the subject of mental health and well-being. All questions were optional and stated that if a respondent did not feel comfortable answering certain questions, they should not panic and simply move on to the next one.

Because the survey allowed people to skip questions that they were not comfortable answering, or provide multiple answers where applicable, the results do not always equal the number of respondents to the survey.

### Demographics

The demographic questions were all posed in a free text form to allow people to self-identify rather than giving prepopulated categories or labels. Out of the 28 discrete respondents, four identified themselves as male, 20 as woman or female, with four people skipping the question. Of those who chose to answer the question 'Are you religious? (if yes, which religion?)' 10 people said they were not religious, one person was Agnostic, two people said Christianity, one said Islam and one said Catholic. One person wrote that they were a spiritual Muslim and one said that they were atheist but curious.



While the ages of respondents ranged from 8 years to 25 years old, fifteen of the respondents who chose to give their age were aged between 18 and 25.

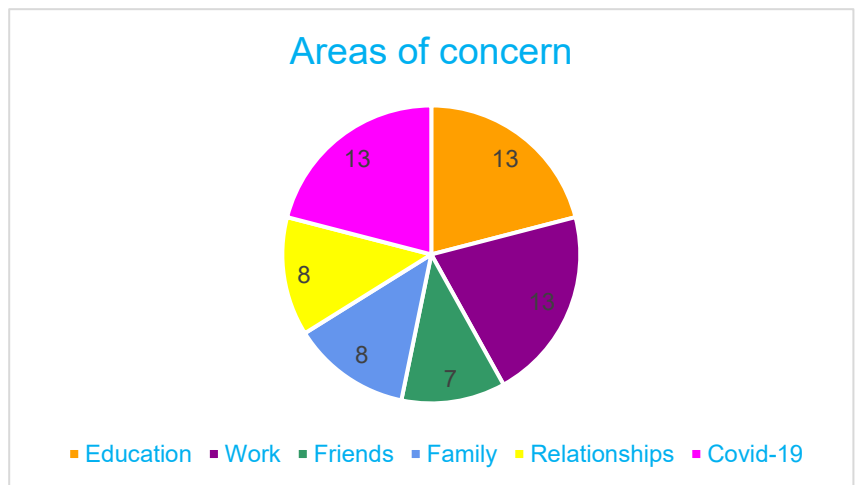
## 4 Areas of Concern

The initial survey began by asking people to select all that applied from a list of those areas of their lives they might have concerns about. So that this list could act as a prompt rather than a restricted or directive checklist, there was also a free text box where people were invited to add any others that were not listed.

The prepopulated options were: Education, Work, Friends, Family, Relationships, Covid-19, and Other. Covid-19, Work and Friends were selected most often from the supplied list of concerns.

Other areas of concern mentioned in the free text area of the survey included the lack of youth clubs, health, sleep and the state of the world.

The following are a selection of the responses given when asked to provide additional details about the concerns they chose or expressed:



*“I’m worried about education as I don’t know where I’m going in life and unsure what I want to do! It’s the fear of the unknown “*

*“Older and vulnerable family members becoming ill”*

*“Friends feeling alone or going through things because they’re on their own with their own thoughts”*

*“Relationship breaking down”*

*“Worried about major exams that are coming up”*

*“Time management/pressure, maintaining work ethic”*

*“Get anxious about sleeping or stopping breathing”*

*“Too much screen time”*

*“The youths in the area are looking for something to do without costing an absolute bomb to do it”*

*“There’s lots of work to do home-schooling and it’s hard to focus”*

## 5 Mental Health

### What does mental health mean to you?

The second section of the survey began by asking respondents what mental health meant to them. The answers (a selection listed below) provided to this are compelling as they were articulated in such a way that they capture the intensely personal views but also reflect the universality of what mental health mean to us all.

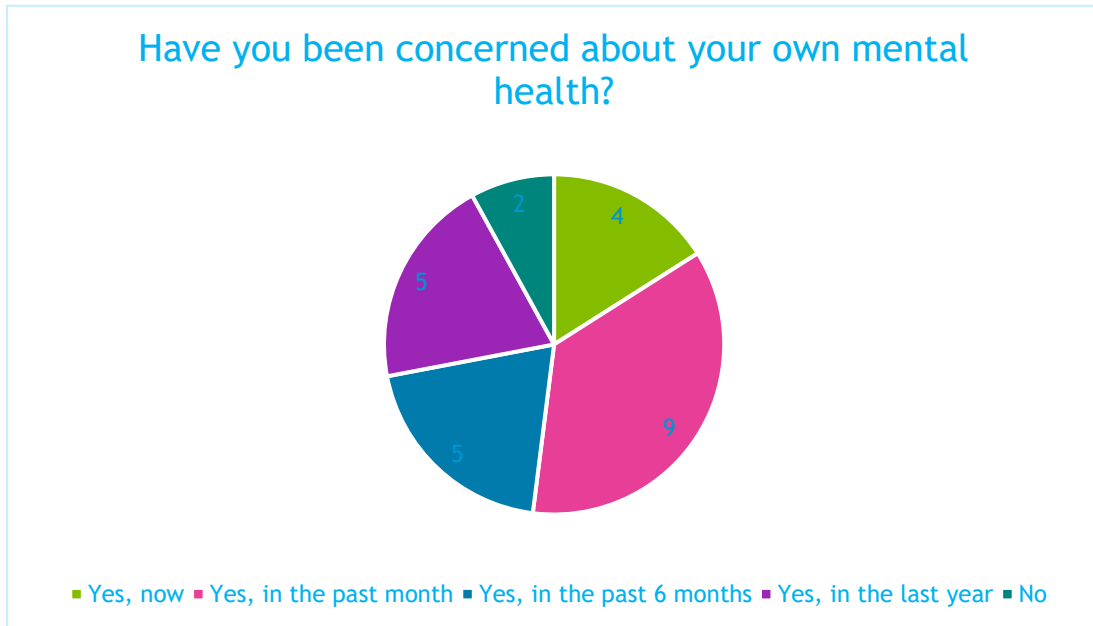
- Your willingness to carry out regular activities
- **To me, mental health is your emotional well-being and thoughts.**
- Feeling happy within myself and where I'm going. Also to feel motivated each day to live each day to its fullest
- **Everything - it influences everything else!**
- Like physical health, my mental health needs looking after and care
- **Getting up in the morning and feeling positive about the day ahead**
- It's crucial for the next generation to be strong appreciated and understood
- **Your state of mind, how you feel.**
- Having your mind be healthy enough that you want to leave your bed instead of sleeping forever.
- **How I feel inside**
- It means a lot as it controls a lot of my world, especially how I view myself.
- **How someone's mind works and how they perceive things**
- Tuning in to your mind and looking after your mind
- **Everyone has it, it needs to be looked after just like physical health.**
- No matter what challenges, you can complete anything you set your mind too.
- **Feeling stable, content and able to make clear decisions**





## Have you been concerned about your mental health?

After people had expressed what mental health meant to them, they were asked if they had been concerned about their own mental health in the past year, past six months, the past month, or if they were concerned for their mental health right now. Of the 25 people who answered this question 23 people said they had been concerned about their mental health with 11 people being concerned either right now or within the past month.

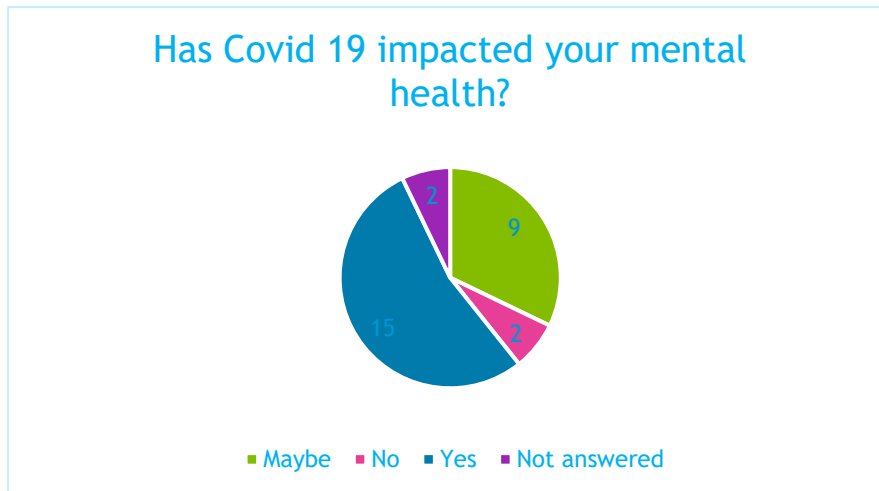


The survey also asked people to rate the level of their worry on a scale from One (Low level of concern) to Ten (extremely concerned). Of the 20 people who responded to this question, only six people rated their level of worry at 5 or lower. The majority (10 people) rated their level of concern at a 7 or 8.

While the survey didn't specifically ask these respondents whether they had sought support for their mental health during this time, or where had they sought help from, the next section (mental health services) suggests that most people had reached out to a variety of sources of support.



## Has Covid-19 impacted your mental health?



People who answered this question were asked to expand on their answer. The reasons given ranged from the Covid related things that had caused the impact to the feelings or manifestations of the impact on their mental health:

*“Isolation and sudden change.”*

*“Not being able to see my friends and everyday being the same has affected my mental state. It’s been difficult not having things to look forward too. It’s also been mental draining as it is a disease that we are having to stay away from, so I have been worried about my friends and family becoming unwell :(”*

*“Taken me out of social situations which has increased my anxiety about returning to these situations, made me feel quite alone.”*

*“Isolation and lockdown had had a very negative impact, am a social person who likes to get out and this has not been possible.”*

*“I worry a lot and feel like I am missing out a lot at school and not being prepared enough for exams.”*

*“Mainly impacted my mental health as it has impacted my work opportunities, I feel my life has been put on pause and I have no purpose....”*

*“More anxious about going out and being near people in public spaces e.g., supermarkets.”*

*“It has made me rather isolated. I would normally have gone out and met up with friends whenever I had concerns in life and if I were feeling down. Now I can only do so through messages from home and it just isn't the same. It isn't enough.”*

*“Being stuck in with my two children has been hard and my husband lost his job due to covid.”*

*“Making me feel deflated.”*

Social isolation, a loss of purpose, and being cut off from natural supports were the most cited impact. However, one person reported feeling that that Covid-19 was the reason their anxiety and depression had been addressed:

*“COVID-19 has improved my mental health so much as I have been prescribed anti-depressants to help manage anxiety and depression.”*



## 6 Mental Health Services

In this section, the survey explored which services respondents had experience of. While the responses don't specify how recent this experience may have been, many of the comments use the present tense or give a specific timeframe.

There were 12 respondents who reported that they had experience of mental health services. Two people reported having had Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), one person said their husband was under Adult Mental Health Services and their children were under CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and one other person said they had been referred to CAMHS by their GP.

Five people reported having received counselling, either paying privately, accessing through MIND, through YiS.

One person told of their difficulty in accessing continuity in their counselling:



*“I had counselling at [a local church] 8 years ago that got cut short. I also had counselling at college last year that got initially cut short, then my counsellor was suddenly changed to one I didn't get on with and whilst I was assured when my original counsellor came back, I would resume sessions with [them]. That was not the case. Instead, I was not informed of [their] return and hadn't even been put on a waiting list for [them]. I would only have been able to see [them] again if I reapplied and went to the back of the waiting list. “*

Twenty-six people responded to the survey question asking if they had had experience with education or training around mental health and/ or wellbeing. Fifteen respondents said yes, with this experience ranging from holding a safeguarding certificate to being a university undergraduate in a psychology degree.

Four people said that they were currently undertaking a mental health awareness course or workshop and another four mentioned that they received this experience through school - either through a power point at a yearly assembly or as part of the compulsory curriculum.

## 7 Focus Group Findings

The focus groups for young people posed a number of open-ended statements that the attendees could complete:

Everyone in Milton Keynes needs to support young people's mental health because...

- One of the toughest times we've had- COVID, Workload, expectations
- The future is in their hands
- we are expected to do a lot/ have a lot of pressures because of our age and society
- because of pressure from the society & our age

The biggest difference YiS could make to support my mental health is...

- Consistent group activities
- Camping- bonding experience, pushing limits, building confidence
- watching influencers or talking to inspiring people and their accomplishments
- Training around our mental health and wellbeing

Activities that make you feel happy and healthy are...

- Theme Parks
- Gyms
- Animals - zoos/ farms
- Adult colouring book
- Walking, Tennis, Rounders
- Music, Dancing, Cleaning
- Bike riding,
- Reading
- Writing
- Cooking, Baking
- Cleaning



Which services do you feel are a priority for your mental health/ wellbeing?

- Some kind of helpline
- Young people's services made older e.g., CAMHS
- 1:1 Sessions
- Better known services, More services
- Better school services
- Training

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## 8 Steering Group Recommendations

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YiS collated the findings from the initial survey and the focus groups into statements outlining the themes. They then facilitated two steering groups for young people and one for professionals, tasking the groups with discussing these themes and proposing recommendations or actions in response.

### Young people felt that YiS was either unknown or under promoted:

Young people felt strongly that a ‘tailored’ wellbeing or self-care pack should be available, although they added the caveat that it needed to be inclusive rather than a general (e.g.; not stereotyped for gender) pack. They also suggested ways to ‘keep the buzz alive’ on social media including ‘Takeover Tuesdays’ and creating YouTube specific content such as wellbeing tips, Q&As and educational videos.

Young people also suggested having branded merchandise available with hoodies and stress balls being the most popular suggestion as long as a wider range was available to allow for choice.

The professionals felt that working with school careers advisors to devise an approach to promoting YiS and its services could be useful. Professionals also felt that creating a ‘sharing’ group with a variety of charities to promote each other’s services would be a good idea.

Interestingly, the professionals felt that certain words could be ‘Taboo’, for example, the use of the word ‘counselling’ might discourage young people from reaching out. However, when this was put to the young people’s steering group, their response was that removing the word counselling from posts adds to the stigma around needing it.

### Young people asked for more education around mental health and wellbeing:

The professionals Steering group attendees were strongly positive about the development and delivery of a Wellbeing Champions Programme and thought that an adaptation for use in primary schools was a fantastic idea.

The young people all loved the idea of the Champions programme and expressed an interest in having that training included in the Young Adults group they are developing. They all thought the offer for primary aged young people would be of benefit as long as any workshop developed was age appropriate, perhaps diluted, to include more basic understandings of emotions and self-care. They also felt that this type of educational content could be uploaded to YouTube.

### Young people ask for more activities and events:

Young people felt there could be more low-key and low maintenance activities like 5km/ 10km walks around Milton Keynes or Campbell Park, or organising events similar to the Midnight Moo - or even entering teams into the Midnight Moo. They also suggested reaching out to organisations like the Parks Trust for help running nature/ explorer type groups.

The professionals said that any event or activity needed to be affordable for young people and suggested options such as outdoor activities, a community picnic, or a graffiti workshop.

### Young people asked for a 'place':

All of the professionals agreed this was a good idea but pointed out the difficulty in delivering such a huge project and suggested it would need to be a multi-agency project.

The young people's steering group attendees felt strongly that it needed to be a physical space - no one wanted an online or virtual space or drop in. They also said it needed to be a standard drop-in location, weekly, with no set agenda so that young people could come and go.

The Young people also suggested that monthly youth groups with photo of the week type projects could be held.



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## 9 Survey Two

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The second survey built on the responses to the first survey and the subsequent focus and steering groups. It began by asking respondents to rate the importance of the themes that had been raised in the previous work. These are listed in the order of priority given:

How important do you think it is that young people have a place they can go to when they are struggling with their mental health? - **93/95**

How important is mental health and wellbeing education for young people? **92/95**

How important do you think it is that young people have access to mental health-boosting activities? **91/95**

How important do you think it is that young people are provided with opportunities to meet other young people who are either struggling or passionate about mental health? **86/95**

How important do you think it is that young people have access to counselling? **85/95**

How important do you think it is that young people are aware of YiS and its services? **85/95**

By happy coincidence, each of these priorities could be met by addressing the number one priority - a place for young people to go. This is a finding echoed in engagement carried out by Healthwatch Milton Keynes<sup>1</sup>, and it was the third priority in the latest MK Youth Cabinet campaign ballot<sup>2</sup>.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.healthwatchmiltonkeynes.co.uk/report/2020-06-29/listen-us-young-people%E2%80%99s-experiences-health-and-social-care>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/schools-and-lifelong-learning/community-learning-mk-hub/youth-mk/youth-cabinet-mk/youth-cabinet-past-events-and-achievements>



## YiS Wellbeing Champions Programme

The wellbeing champions programme aims to give participants the skills and knowledge they need to safeguard their mental health and that of their peers. In this champions programme, educators will work through a mental health awareness workbook that covers the topics of mental health, stigma and discrimination, spotting the signs, including non-judgemental listening and the responsibilities of a mental health and wellbeing peer educator.

Champions can help young people build the skills and confidence to help change how people think and act about mental health problems. Survey respondents felt this programme was a great idea with one saying:

*“I think it provides young people with much needed autonomy and independence that they do not have access to or feel worthy of this, this teaches them a valuable level of resilience, as well as give them a clear sense of purpose/direction.”*

Another young person echoed this and added their feeling that it should be widely available and adaptable for different ages and warned that access for many young people would be severely limited if there was a fee attached to it.

**Having a wellbeing champion in my school would make things better because....**

The word cloud contains the following responses:

- Students will have someone to go to who will understand what their going through, because some teachers are not trained in mental health.
- Sometimes it's easier to talk to someone my own age
- It would give me someone to talk to about things I have no one to talk to about
- you would feel that your peers are more understanding of struggles you may have
- It would provide the young people with a peer who they feel safe with and can express themselves. However, this would need to be very carefully delivered and that close observation would need to be put in place to ensure the right information is being divulged.
- they have a set goal/purpose
- there will always be someone that I could reach out to
- there would be a specially trained, realistic person to go to for focused support.
- People may understand they are not alone and feeling the way they are feeling is not normal but it's not going to be judged if they ask for help
- it would offer somebody to help young people who want to talk about their mental health.
- the students would be better educated about how to handle mental health and broaden their views on it beyond just what they hear from others who may not fully understand it or have experience with dealing with mental health. It's a tricky subject but it's easily just as important as physical health, especially since both impact one another.
- It would empower them
- It will help me understand my problems and encourage me to heal my body from all of my hardest times and to improve my targets
- People could feel like they had a dedicated person to go to, instead of maybe a teacher or head of year, that may not be able to give the right support or show them the way.

## 10 Next Steps

The biggest priority for young people is to have a safe place to go. Young people said that it needed to be easily accessed within their community, unstructured - in that the young people have control over when they can come and what they can do, somewhere that they could truthfully express themselves without judgement. They said they would like it to be a comfortable space, not a sterile 'school hall' type environment - somewhere they could relax and take part in activities if they wanted, or where they could just 'be'.

Most people asked that this place would be in a consistent location although they felt it would be nice if this were available at various places across Milton Keynes. The preference would be for this to be available every day, which would prevent it evolving into a more structured group or club type environment.

*“I think it should be there as a proactive strategy that young people can use when they are struggling but equally just for them to go as a preventative measure. Have activities available but not forced to do anything, equally maybe have a discussion topic available each week”*

It appears that while having a Youth Drop In centre might be out of the reach of the YiS Feedback Forum at this stage, partnering with some of the Parish councils that YiS are already working with could provide consistent premises for a number of smaller groups to be developed.

### Promotion of YiS services:

- 27.8% felt that YiS services were promoted well.
- 72.2% unsure how to access CBT
- 61.1% unsure how to access Coaching
- 29.4% unsure how to access Counselling

YiS have agreed to explore ways they can improve and update the way they promote their services and how to access them. This will include more social media content focused on the different services they provide.

YiS will work with other voluntary groups and Parish councils to promote and share service information.

Holding outreach events and having stands at existing young people's and health and wellbeing events will promote awareness and understanding of YiS services.

### YiS Merchandise

Young people have said that having YiS merchandise would be a good way to promote the service and have suggested that T-shirts, keyrings, badges, tote bags, and mugs would be a good range to start with.

Almost all of the young people who took part in the Feedback Forum said they would like a YiS wellbeing postable pack.

### Wellbeing Champions Training:

Develop a full Wellbeing Champions Programme

Fund at least 3 Wellbeing Champions workshops

### Activities and events:

Until Covid-19 restrictions are lifted and/ or premises are secured, YiS are planning to meet the priorities of young people by organising a number of events. The specific events and activities will be decided by running a social media poll to find out what young people want to get involved with this year. Possibilities are:

**Headstart programme** - MK Arts for Health's 12-week programme (Art, Motor stance, Music, Art forms- theatre) - online 10-12 participants

**Trip to the Zoo** - Whipsnade or Woburn

**Caldecotte Xperience:** Abseiling, Archery, Bouldering, Bushcraft, Caving, Climbing, Fencing, High ropes, Low ropes, Orienteering, Paddle sports, Raft building, Sailing, etc.

**Walking Group:** Lead by a volunteer YiS Champion, Weekly, Fortnightly, or Monthly. Different groups could cover different areas.

**Group well-being sessions:** Small group wellbeing sessions

**Online drop-in session:** A virtual place to go and meet with people, breakout rooms for private chats, mindfulness activity, additional resources provided and available weekly.

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## 11 Further Reading Suggestions

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- Young Minds - Fund the Hubs - <https://youngminds.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/fund-the-hubs/>
- Fairer foundations: How has the pandemic affected young people's mental health - <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/fairer-foundations>
- British Youth Council Make Your Mark - <https://www.byc.org.uk/uk/uk-youth-parliament/make-your-mark>
- Council for Disabled Children's Lessons Learnt - <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/news-opinion/news/lessons-learnt-lockdown-highs-and-lows-pandemics-impact-disabled-children-and-young-people>