YMCA RIGHT HERE

Young people promoting health and wellbeing through education, campaigning and influencing

YMCA DOWNSLINK GROUP: HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE

EXPERIENCE OUR VALUES & CULTURE?

2018 REPORT



"At YMCA DownsLink Group we believe every person, whatever their circumstances, is unique, special and to be valued.

We are committed to providing an environment where all young people, staff and volunteers can belong, contribute and thrive.

This affects not only what we do but also how we do it. I am passionate therefore about our being an organisation which involves every one of us living out each day, values which welcome, support and inspire.

On behalf of the Board I highly commend this creative and important report produced following consultation with young people across the organisation.

It will act as a valuable launchpad for an implementation programme to embed those key values - WE WELCOME ALL, WE SUPPORT, WE INSPIRE which we hold dear."

John Slater Chair of Trustees

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ETHOS, VALUES & CULTURE

BECOMING A VALUES LED ORGANISATION: A SNAPSHOT

The Big Idea

In 2017, YMCA DownsLink Group (DLG) defined three core values for the organisation to work toward; We welcome all, We support, We inspire.

YMCA RIGHT HERE

A year on, we wanted to know whether young people felt they were being achieved. Right Here was asked to engage with young people from across the organisation and find out what they thought.

Our key questions were:

How well are we doing in upholding, promoting and driving forward with our values/culture?

How do we know this from what young people say, see, hear and do?

What Did We Do?

We heard from over 100 young people through YAC, Dialogue, Right Here, Housing, Safe Space, Chaplaincy, and Positive Placements. A 'culture and values team' of young people led the work. We agreed that values were felt, so we took a gualitative visual and sensory approach to exploring these, allowing young people to express often intangible feelings like 'belonging'. We designed a mixed methodology that was responsive to the diverse range of young people, environments and services within YMCA DLG. We used graffiti walls, postboxes, voting stations, art, polaroid photography, film and conversation to draw out the answers to our key questions.

Key Data



ETHOS, VALUES & CULTURE: A SNAPSHOT



What Did We Find?

Through our discussions with young people, some clear themes emerged that were often spoken about in the context of more than one of our values. We've summarised these themes below alongside the values that young people were speaking to most strongly.

Relationships: Many young people felt they had positive relationships with staff (especially mentors, night workers and key workers) and felt that these were central to how and whether our values were felt. (Welcome, Support, Inspire)

Environment: The space where young people spent time was important, particularly across the housing projects. Central to the idea of our values, was the idea of homeliness, and what this means to young people in different settings. This could be the appearance of our rooms and buildings, the provision of a daily structure, or the opportunity to share meals and participate in group activities. (Welcome, Support)

Inclusion: In some places, or in some conversations there appeared to be a lack of understanding around diversity and respect for each other. Racist and homophobic language among young people in several housing projects was picked up by our facilitators. (Welcome)

Independence and Moving On: Young people felt more could be done, in terms of both practical and emotional provision, to help them become independent, and build aspirations for their future - meeting a lack of motivation with encouragement and support. (Support, Inspire)

Engagement: Many of the young people we spoke to queried the value of sharing their views with us. From previous experience, sharing their views (both within YMCA and elsewhere) had not led to change. (Inspire)

YMCA and Beyond: Young people, particularly residents, raised frustrations and concerns around their relationships with the wider residential community, and the impact this had on experiencing the values of the YMCA. (Welcome)

Reflections

How do we gain the trust of young people as an organisation that listens?

Prioritising participation, and working alongside young people to bring young people on board with our vision, and make them feel part of the wider YMCA DLG community.

Can our housing projects be more like homes?

Making housing projects part of the community, and meeting the emotional needs of young people as well as their physical needs while they are living with us.

Inspiring young people

Most young people we heard from felt supported by the YMCA, our conversations revealed that fewer felt inspired by us. How can we create opportunities for young people to further showcase and celebrate the young people within our organisation who are thriving in order to inspire others?

Valuing Diversity

How can YMCA DLG work together as a community to recognise and value the diversity we have, and cultivate a safe environment for all young people?

'I wish we could have takeaway nights and eat together like a family, but it's always 'there's no funding for that."

"A pet would make it feel more like a home. A dog would provide emotional support."

'I would feel more at home if I could use the lounge and kitchen whenever I want. Sometimes you just want a cup of teal

Keyworkers have helped me stay alive and given me the ability to talk. Through my problems."

"I used Safe Space. It was really good the guys there made me feel safe and sorted my injury out."

ABOUT

YMCA Right Here is a young people's health and wellbeing project based in Brighton & Hove, and is managed by YMCA DownsLink Group (DLG). Right Here's Youth Ambassadors are a diverse group of 16 – 25 year old volunteers who co-develop and co-deliver a number of health and wellbeing projects, campaigns, and participation activities across Brighton & Hove.

This report is the result of an engagement and involvement task that Right Here were asked to deliver by YMCA DLG in order to explore how young people from across the organisation experienced the culture and the three core values: We welcome all, We support, We inspire.

YMCA Right Here would like to extend our special thanks to all of the young people who took part, especially our project team who helped to plan and deliver this exciting and creative project:

Danielle Garratt	Isha E
Emily Kemp	Louise
Hobie Webb	Zack

sha Bailhache Louise Brennan Zack Parsons



BACKGROUND

In 2017, YMCA DownsLink Group (DLG) defined the three core values for the organisation to work toward:

We welcome all, We support, We inspire.

A year on, we wanted to know whether young people felt they were being achieved.

Right Here was asked to engage and involve young people from across the organisation, and find out how they felt.



Our key questions were:

How well are we doing in upholding, promoting and driving forward with our values and culture?

How do we know this from what young people say, see, hear and do?

METHODOLOGY

Right Here decided to reach out to young people across YMCA DLG, with an invitation to be involved in working with us on this project. After **assembling a 'culture and values team'** of 6 young people to lead the work, we organised a planning day to begin sharing ideas, skills, and methods.

It was strongly felt by all attending that in order to engage meaningfully with the diverse range of young people who interact in different ways with YMCA DLG, a **flexible and responsive mixed methods approach** was needed.

For this reason the team shortlisted from a wide range of methods, choosing specific tools, like anonymous postboxes, graffiti walls, or photography, for specific groups of young people (such as residents or counselling clients).

Additionally, the team chose methods they felt would allow a universal response, such as a survey and art competition.



Following the shortlisting, the proposed methods were taken to YMCA DLG managers forum, in order to explore whether service managers felt these approaches would be practical and effective with their service in mind.

The second Culture & Values team meeting consisted of **finalising the strongest methods, ensuring that each service or project had been considered** and had at least one avenue for young people to contribute.

Young people designed all of the posters and other engagement props, aimed both at staff and young people, and began to promote the engagement activities across our services.

Service managers and project teams were then contacted with an offer of **bespoke support** around engaging with the young people in their service around this consultation.



WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH THE CULTURE & VALUES CONSULTATION



TELL THEM ABOUT THE TEAM

We are still seeking young people from across DLG to join our Culture & Values consultation team; helping to deliver our engagement activities and bring together our findings in interesting ways.



USE OUR TOOLKIT

Deliver your own 30 - 60 minute engagement session with our handy plan for small groups. Send us a recording, brainstorm, notes, or artwork that answers our key questions.



FIND THE POSTBOX

We have installed Right Here postboxes in Horsham Dialogue, Hove Dialogue, and Brighton YAC. Please direct young people to the accompanying postcards, & remind them it's anonymous.



PROMOTE OUR QUIZ

Our 3 minute online quiz asks a few quick questions to gauge how young people using the YMCA feel about our culture & values.

Visit surveymonkey.co.uk/r/YMCADLG-Values



BRING OUT THE TALENT

We have decided to open a competition for young people using YMCA DLG services to submit an image, poem, short video (under 1 minute), or piece of music to express how you feel you 'Belong' 'Contribute' or 'Thrive' at the YMCA.

We will select first, second and third place, and winners will receive a voucher of their choice as well as a personalised goodie bundle from Right Here. Your piece will also be exhibited for a week at YMCA DLG HQ!

Our Methods:

Counter & Jar Voting Stations

Creative Competition

Online Quiz

Graffiti Walls

Informal Conversation

Tea & Cake

Postboxes & Postcards

Video Interviews

Sharing Meals/ BBQ's

Service Walkthroughs

Polaroid Cameras

Interactive Thermometers



We will select first, second and third place, and winners will receive a voucher of their choice as well as a personalised goodie bundle from Right Here. Your piece will also be exhibited at YMCA DLG HQ!

Send your submissions to Jacob.Bayliss@ymcadlg.org by May 31st.





After placing our interactive stations in services such as YAC and Dialogue, launching our online quiz, and sending out posters and promotion packs to all staff, we began scheduling visits for 'indepth' methods such as focus groups at several residential projects.

Each visit or interaction was followed by a team debrief to address issues, share reflections, and include learning in further engagement. The team continued to promote and support these methods over a period of three months, carrying out **check-ins and visits with each project** in order to address any barriers to engagement and find solutions. As a result of this, several methods found to be less effective were changed or re-invented during the consultation.

Our **most effective methods were the most unstructured and informal**. During our interactions at housing projects, we would begin with structured activities such as a thermometer exercise and themed graffiti, but most young people were hesitant to fully engage with these. After structured activities, we prepared and shared a meal with residents and had relaxed conversations about the values – this is where we engaged best. (See appendix one for question set.)

Due to having so many unstructured discussions, it was **difficult to group our findings by value** without inferring from what young people told us about how the YMCA made them feel. For this reason we have chosen **other key themes** under which to group the information we gathered.

Some methods were certainly more successful than others, and we have included our learning around the process in our 'Findings' section.

FINDINGS

Our engagement and involvement project heard from **over 100** young people from across YMCA DownsLink Group.

Young people spoke to us in different ways about different issues.





OUANTITATIVE SUMMARY



Sample size: 40 (a mixture from our online survey and from other engagement activities.)

What three words would you use to describe how YMCA DLG makes you feel?



- Welcome, happy, and safe were the three most common words used by young people to describe how our services made them feel.
- This is from the same quantitative sample of 40 as on the previous page.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Most young people using YMCA DLG services felt we were welcoming and supportive, while fewer felt inspired.
- Overall a positive and friendly relationship with staff and service users was felt by most young people to be the most significant contributor to whether our values were felt in a service.
- Participation and engagement is a process that is new to a number of areas in the organisation, and there is room for developing confidence around how to deliver this in a meaningful way.
- Conversations reflected that young people were interested in how differences were understood and met for individuals and groups across our services but also in some situations such as the make up of the Right Here ambassadors how representative the groups were of our diverse and multi-ethnic society.
- Many of our findings tied in to current work within YMCA DLG, such as 'More Than a Room' and the Involvement and Influencing Strategy.

KEY THEMES

Our key findings fell under 6 broad categories:

Relationships: The formal and informal relationships built between staff and young people are central to how values are felt by young people.

Environment: The environments in which our services are accessed make young people feel, and convey our values.

Inclusion: How we ensure a diverse community of young people feel safe and welcome in our services.

Independence and Moving on: How we inspire and empower young people to gain independence and move on from our services.

Engagement: How engagement and participation is valued and delivered meaningfully across our services and projects.

YMCA & Beyond: How YMCA DLG and the young people using our services are part of, and percieved by the wider community.

We have explored these themes over the following pages.

Relationships

- Many residents spoke about their key workers when exploring how they experience our values. The vast majority of residents we spoke to felt they had **positive relationships** with their key workers and this went a long way to making them feel **supported** and **inspired**. Many residents also mentioned that they would like to be able to choose their key worker. We heard many examples of key work enabling young people to seize opportunities and take steps forward with finding support or employment.
- Some residents commented that the structures within which they were supported felt quite rigid, for example, they weren't able to choose their keyworkers, nor were they able to get **specific support with specific tasks** or life skills that they struggled with such as budgeting, shopping, or understanding bills (for the future). It was felt by some that **key work meetings were formulaic** and comprised of a tick list of necessary paperwork and tasks.



- It seemed to us that the idea of **contact and spending time together was an important part** of having a key worker for young people. We observed recently that there was some anxiety among residents about the idea of using ipads in keywork sessions, as this may speed up those necessary tasks and reduce contact time.
- Night workers were also mentioned a lot this is possibly linked to their presence at quieter times when residents may be feeling more vulnerable or more open, and their availability to chat in an informal and familiar way. Many residents used familial terms to describe the role of night workers in juxtaposition with the professional terms used for other workers.
- Incidental and informal relationships built in our services (as oppose to direct support relationships such as key worker or coordinator) were central to how our services felt for young people. Familiar faces were important, and caring questions like 'how are you?' and 'how has your week been?' were highly valued.
- When asked, young people involved in Right Here often reference the importance of the **relationships they build with their peers** through the groups and meetings they attend. This is a significant factor in their reporting of **improved confidence and wellbeing** through their involvement with the project.
- Overall a positive and friendly relationship with significant staff members and other staff and services users was felt by most young people to be the most significant contributor to whether our values were felt in a service.
 Mentors, key workers, Safe Space workers, and volunteer coordinators were all mentioned in this context.



Environment

- The **physical environment** in which young people were accessing our services made a difference to how those services felt, and how our values came across.
- Nowhere was this more pertinent than in our housing projects. Many
 residents referenced the idea of 'homeliness' and how the feel of a
 space or building contributes to that. The appearence of rooms and
 buildings in housing projects was important, and we had a range of
 responses about how homely projects currently felt.
- Homeliness was also felt by many residents to stem from things like the provision of a daily structure, or the opportunity to share meals together, and to participate in group activities.
- Residents were particularly affected by their environment and felt that more participation could take place around shaping the look and feel of projects. Our team was excited to hear about the 'More Than a Room' initiative and felt it touched on some of the aspirations residents had for the housing projects.
- Young people we spoke to who access Reed House commented that it does not feel 'young person friendly' and that meeting in professional office environments can feel intimidating. We heard several times that the presence of colour and artwork made a significant impact on how welcoming the space felt for young people using our reception area and meeting rooms.



I feel inspired when... you enter the building and you are welcomed with bright posters and information, describing positive stories of young people who through the YMCA have really achieved their goals.

> You can see that YMCA give lots of opportunity for young people to get involved with projects, like showcasing their work at art shows.

Inclusion

- Inclusion and cohesion was felt by many to be an important consideration for YMCA DLG to make when thinking about embedding our values across our services.
- Residents spoke about housemates, and how relationships between housemates varied. We heard lots of positive stories about finding new friends and sharing difficult experiences with other young people in the housing projects, however many young people were keen for there to be more 'team building' sessions among the housemates.
- We heard about activities such as go-karting, fishing, and even lifeskills lessons that residents valued partly for their opportunity to spend time with each other and **strengthen the feeling of community** in their projects.
- During our visits to housing projects we observed **racist and homophobic language** being used in conversation between residents. Our graffiti wall also contained some similar language, as well as comments from young people about their experiences of being called words that could be identified as xenophobic or racially charged. In our visit to a project housing a number of unaccompanied asylum seekers, we noted animosity from some of the residents they were sharing the building with, and their guests. It appeared to us that there was a **lack of understanding around diversity and respect for each other between residents**.
- Outside of the housing projects, a number of young people we spoke to (particularly from Right Here) commented on diversity, and felt that YMCA DLG should be reaching out to underrepresented groups of young people (such as BME young people) and ensuring our services meet their needs.





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Independence and Moving On

- When thinking about how YMCA DLG might inspire young people going forward, the focus for our residents was very much on the possibilities of moving on from our projects and becoming independent. For young people this most often meant being employed and financially independent, while for some this meant being more emotionally resilient and no longer needing the kind of support we provided.
- Residents felt that rent prices were inhibitive to being able to afford to move on, while the kinds of support on offer did not fully prepare them to be independent. It was commonly suggested that residents would feel more inspired if support included more opportunities to practice lifeskills.
- Residents we spoke to who identified themselves as taking positive action felt that more could be done to challenge less motivated peers and that staff could look for new ways to do this.
- Residents also voiced that a focus on moving on and being independent was important, but stressed this should not be at the expense of allowing young people to feel secure and 'at home' in the project while they were there. Some young people felt 'gotten rid of' when they were moved on.
- Elsewhere in the organisation, young people were focussed on finding work. Those engaged with Positive Placements and Right Here felt most **inspired**, and this was often due to being listened to, but also **seeing opportunities to grow and develop professionally.**
- Many young people talked about seeing 'success' stories from other service users being really powerful. Many of them had noticed this during our Open House and wanted to see more.

"I used to feel a sense of belonging, but now I don't feel I belong because I don't want support. I felt I could cope on my own but it took so long to get a move on project. Now [in Move On] I'm much happier, I have much more independence." YMCA inspires me by giving me opportunities that prove I can achieve more than I thought, and my plans for what i'll do in the future have changed.



Engagement

- The process of carrying out this Culture & Values consultation allowed the team to experiement with a variety of engagement tools and methods. There were interesting lessons learned about what made engagement and participation meaningful and effective in the context of our own organisation and the diversity of services and environments within.
- Our online quiz had a high response rate from the young people who attend Right Here, but a significantly lower response rate from other areas of the YMCA. From past experience, Right Here feel that barriers to online engagement, literacy, time, and confidence all impact on a young person's ability to engage in this way. We also feel that this kind of independent action requires a sense of assurance that the feedback is impactful. The Right Here volunteers have a clear awareness of how feedback is gathered, analysed, and used to improve services – they are therefore more willing to engage in this way.



- The most powerful and effective method we used across the consultation, was with the housing projects. Over the duration of the work we visited Worthing, Guildford, Horsham, and Lansworth House, as well as hosting a separate coffee & cake event for Band 3 residents. Our visits involved the sharing of a meal, informal 1 to 1 conversations between peer facilitators and residents, and additional activities such as a graffiti wall and polaroid camera walkthroughs. This combination uniquely allowed us **to come alongside residents** in their home setting and work with individuals on a personal level – **addressing anxieties or questions around contributing, and removing barriers** (what's the point, what's going to change, who's listening), **and communicating in a way that suited them.**
- Our creative competition had a limited number of responses, however we would like to mention the resounding success of the 'Identity' photo competition earlier this year. Whether Identity was a theme that struck a chord with young people, the exceptional prize of a camera, or another factor that motivated so many to respond we aren't sure. We do know however that this provided a powerful means for young people to express themselves creatively – a means we hoped to use to similar effect as part of this consultation. Photography was still a central pillar of our consultation (via our polaroid walkthroughs), and the team are in agreement that this produced some of our most powerful findings, and created space for young people to capture things that were difficult to summarise verbally. We would encourage further **exploration of photography and creative media as a way for young people to communicate with the YMCA**.
- We particularly struggled to engage with young people who were using our counselling services, and we heard from only two. The culture and values team were keen to hear from this group as it was felt that the conversations about environment and feelings were particularly important, relevant, and timely. We tried several approaches to making this process work from anonymous post boxes, to a number of specific ideas and suggestions for counsellors to implement. As mentioned above, the success of these tools relies on the ability of staff present to encourage participation, and on reflection we felt that when children and young people are engaged in accessing support, staff focus is on support needs and additional participation is not at the front of their minds.

YMCA DLG and Beyond

- Many young people we spoke to struggled to place their projects within the wider organisation and YMCA community.
 Few were aware of the other areas of work delivered by YMCA DLG, and the potential opportunities therein.
- Young people, chiefly from Right Here, made a number of comments about the place of the YMCA within the wider community, and felt that YMCA should be influencing national policy and representing their interests locally and nationally wherever possible. Issues like the PSHE curriculum, Brexit, and workplace discrimination were popular examples of where young peoples voices needed to be pushed forward.
- More locally, residents were concerned about the perceptions they faced as a result of living in a supported housing project, and felt that neighbours had a negative attitude toward them and the project. Residents told us they felt unwelcome in the area near their homes, and it was felt the organisation could do more to enable them to cultivate positive relationships with neighbours and the local community.





CONCLUSION

The Right Here Team have been very pleased to utilise and extend their experience and skills to support this engagement process around the values and culture of YMCA DLG.

As we explored each value, we discovered that for many young people in our organisation, they are intrinsically linked and build upon each other to create a culture that is experienced as a whole.

Within this, key themes emerged that were central pillars to young peoples experience of us, and how our organisation made them feel.

The work has highlighted the success of YMCA DLG in making young people feel welcome and supported. It has also identified that it can be hard to recognise and agree what making young people feel inspired means. It has provided a good basis for examining how well we are doing and what more we can do in order to fully achieve and live our values. It's reassuring to recognise that a number of the ideas for improvements are reflected in our 'More Than A Room' initiative and our emerging Involvement and Influencing Strategy.

Going forward, we hope that these findings will provide a foundation on which to build recommendations, and make changes that reflect the priorities of the young people in our services.

The Culture and Values team will share a version of the 'Snap Shot' with the young people who participated in this work and more widely across YMCA DLG. This will help promote the value of participation and disseminate the learning.

We very much hope the conversation between our staff, leadership, and young people continues, and we look forward to seeing the influence young people's views and experiences have on our journey to becoming a values led organisation.

REFLECTIONS, OBSTACLES & LIMITATIONS

- Our **mixed methods approach enabled us to gather rich responses** from almost 50 YMCA DLG residents, and so their voices are represented the most vividly within this work.
- We also became aware that there was **no working definition** for the values of the YMCA, and these words had different connotations for different people. It would be useful to have a more concrete idea of what we mean by inspire in order to know whether we are succeeding.
- Key obstacles for us in delivering this work have been around the **capacity of other YMCA projects to consider and prioritise engagement** and participation in their settings. Very few projects have been able to offer us support in this area which has made effective and meaningful engagement challenging. Without the support of the wider organisation, and professionals who have existing relationships and communication with young people, we are unable to provide further context and frame our efforts in a way that motivates young people to show up, or share with us. This perhaps demonstrates **a need for a culture change around the importance of centering young people's views and influence.**
- We still feel that engaging with the groups of service users we didn't hear from is an important step for developing our services in the future, and are aware that this piece of work focused solely on young people already within the organisation. Particularly when we ask ourselves how we can welcome all, it might be valuable to **hear from young people not yet engaged in our services**.
- Engaging with young people in a meaningful way meant that our methods were **highly qualitative**. This meant that it took additional **time and resource** to take what we had heard and pull out thematic issues. We had to balance what we heard from the most outspoken young people with the larger body of evidence we had gathered. We had to **ensure that we committed the appropriate amount of resource to really understanding and analysing what young people were telling us in order to fairly and accurately represent their thoughts.**
- The idea of displaying uncensored material written by young people such as graffiti walls was met with **anxiety by some colleagues.** This indicates a need for clear communication around the purposes of participation and engagement, and a nuanced **understanding of** how critical feedback is regarded and used.

APPENDIX 1

- Explain your photo/ show us your photo/ show us what you photographed.
 What value does this represent to you? Why?
- What do you think YMCA does that helps young people to feel WELCOME?SUPPORTED/INSPIRED?
- What needs to change at the YMCA for young people to WELCOME/SUPPORTED/INSPIRED?
- Can you think of a time you felt WELCOME/SUPPORTED/INSPIRED? What was that like? What made the difference?
- Is there a time you feel we haven't lived our values? What would have made the difference?

