



YMCA
DOWNSLINK GROUP

Our Impact 2020

*Helping young people to
belong, contribute and thrive*

Our 2020 Impact

This has been a tough year for us all but for young people who were already vulnerable, the impact of COVID-19 has been dramatic. As the largest youth homelessness charity in the South East, we saw a staggering 61% increase in the number of young people presenting as homeless at the start of the pandemic compared to the same period last year. This was linked to additional pressures on families due to the pandemic, with family breakdown being the number one cause of youth homelessness. Despite the challenges, we continue to deliver a wide range of vital housing services and support programmes that help young people to belong, contribute and thrive.

COVID-19 has also exacerbated emotional wellbeing and mental health problems for children and young people. As part of our YMCA Dialogue service we were pleased to launch e-wellbeing this year, a digital service to support young people to access important information and support around their emotional wellbeing and mental health.

10,800 young people accessed our services both online and offline

We provided safe housing and support to **1,652** young people

We saw a **20%** increase in the numbers of young people who were reaching out for support

3,142 children, young people & families were supported by our counselling

Our YMCA Youth Advice Centres supported **1,700** young people and their parents/carers who were looking for advice in a crisis situation


Helping young people, belong contribute and thrive.

Where we work



Our projects





"We all take for granted having constant support until it's no longer there."

**Name has been changed to protect the identity of the young person, and we have used a model.*

A safe home | Susie's story

"My family was split up due to a traumatic incident that saw my mother spiral into a deep depression. Unable to cope she moved abroad, leaving me to fend for myself. Unable to pay rent on my own and struggling, a social worker visited and helped me get support through my local council – securing me a place in YMCA DLG supported accommodation."

YMCA DLG have helped me tremendously – with food banks, rent management, social group clubs and one-to-one sessions to talk to a professional about my mental state. They have been there for everything I needed."

Susie, YMCA DLG resident

SUPPORTED HOUSING

Homelessness is a constant issue in our communities and **1 in 5 homeless people across the UK are aged 16-24**. We know that rough sleeping is a significant challenge but as well as the homeless people we see on the streets, there are also those we don't see – the hidden homeless.

Approximately 40% of 16-25 year olds in the UK have sofa-surfed at some point due to having nowhere to live. At YMCA DownsLink Group, we believe that every young person should have a safe place to stay. But we know that ending homelessness needs to be about more than providing accommodation. It's about providing people with the holistic support and advice they need to prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place or stop them returning to the streets.



Last year we provided **763** homeless young people with accommodation every night

Family Mediation

Family breakdown is one of the leading causes of youth homelessness and the pressures posed by COVID-19 only exacerbate the problem. Our family mediation service helps families repair relationships to prevent evictions which reduces youth homelessness.

Last year our family mediation service enabled 71% of the families they saw to stay together, therefore reducing homelessness.



We offer so much more than a room...

Developing life skills | Sherylee's story

When Sherylee came to live with YMCA DLG she was struggling to attend college where she had been studying Music Performance. With support from staff through the More than a Room programme, she was able to develop life skills such as paying rent and money management, as well as intensive budgeting work to prepare her for moving out.

Staff also supported her to attend meetings at college and gave lots of help with regards to her music – helping her share her music and website link to spread the word. Due to Sherylee's hard work, she was offered the opportunity to complete a two-year foundation degree in Music Performance at a college and has just released her first EP!

...we offer a passport to independence

Through our More Than a Room programme we aim to ensure that all young people move on to positive independence.

Through this programme we offer:

- ▶ Basic independence skills
- ▶ Wellbeing and personal safety support.
- ▶ Money management skills and advice
- ▶ Access to training & employment

Covid-19 had a massive impact on young people in supported accommodation. Nearly a third of whom come to us straight from the care system and virtually 50% are homeless immediately prior to living in YMCA accommodation. The young people in supported accommodation mostly survived the lockdown with no family support, facing job loss, a loss in education provision and isolation due to the closure of our common areas.

Our dedicated Key Workers, continued with More Than a Room Activities to ensure that young people were engaged and supported through a very difficult year.

Last year:

- ▶ Our Skills Advisors delivered **23** accredited learning programmes and **724** skills development sessions
- ▶ Our Volunteer Mentors worked with **72** young people through our YMCA Positive Placements programme
- ▶ In our annual client survey, **91%** of our residents reported feeling safe in our housing projects
- ▶ **24** of our residents in our supported housing projects were unaccompanied asylum seekers

Overcoming anxiety | Paula's story

Paula has struggled with anxiety and confidence issues since she was young. As she got older she was finding it hard to control her emotions and temper and felt very overwhelmed a lot of the time. She had become dependent on family members who encouraged her to seek support from CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)

"I was at a really low point, but it made me realise that I have to keep going and enjoy life, and that I have a lot to offer."

During Paula's CAMHS assessment, they realised she found it easier to talk to animals than humans and told her about Canine-assisted Counselling run by YMCA DownsLink Group as part of the Brighton and Hove Wellbeing Service. She was given a space and started a series of therapy sessions with Andrew and Pudz the dog.

Andrew and Pudz helped Paula to feel calmer and manage her outbursts, teaching her some breathing and counting exercises. Paula says the best part of her sessions was Pudz – who acted as a distraction and gave her the confidence to talk to Andrew. Having heard about Emotional Support Animals (ESA's) and with Andrew's support, Paula and her family began to investigate this, eventually leading to Ralph the puppy!

Paula says, "I would just like to say thank you to Andrew, Pudz and my family. Who knows what the future holds, but it certainly looks a lot brighter than it did."

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Last year brought unexpected challenges for us all as we contended with the impact of a pandemic, not least for those who were already vulnerable and struggling. The implications on health issues and employment hugely impacted on the anxiety levels and mental health of our young people.

While it was a challenging year, we were able to adapt our mental health services to a remote provision, ensuring essential support could continue. Last year also saw the launch of a new digital service for young people in Sussex – e-wellbeing. The mental health support website provides advice, support and a clear pathway to local services for any young person in need and aims to reduce the pressure on frontline services, including GP's and A&E.

Giving advice to those in crisis

YMCA Youth Advice Centres (YMCA YAC)

YMCA YAC centres are a one-stop-shop for any child or young person aged 13-25, providing support on a range of issues including housing advice, family mediation, sexual health, relationships, substance misuse, employment, training and education.

Last year we extended our YMCA YAC centres, establishing 3 new services in Worthing, Crawley and Eastbourne.

Counselling and support

YMCA Dialogue

YMCA Dialogue provides counselling and therapy to children and young people, including community-based counselling, counselling services for schools and colleges and work with children in care, adopted and young people.



Over **1,500** people accessed e-wellbeing in the first week alone

We provided **3,142** children, young people and families with counselling and therapy last year

Building self-confidence | Shaun's story

Shaun has anxiety and has been bullied in the past, making him anxious about new people and situations. During lockdown he didn't leave his home at all due to fear and anxiety.

After speaking to staff and young people at his local YMCA DLG youth club, he tried out new sports, participated in team sports and helped set up equipment.

His anxiety decreased and self-confidence grew over time and he started to feel more comfortable meeting new people. In his own words, he said that the youth club has "really helped my mental wellbeing".

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YOUTH WORK

With a 71% reduction in public funding for youth services since 2010 (£1.36 billion to £398 million), YMCA DownsLink Group bucked the trend by extending our youth work programmes to fill the void left by funding cuts.

Supporting young people at risk of exploitation

YMCA WiSE

YMCA WiSE offers direct support to victims of criminal and sexual exploitation. The project also delivers awareness campaigns, research and offers training, guidance and advice to social workers and the police.

Giving young people a voice on issues that matter to them

YMCA Right Here

YMCA Right Here is our youth-led young people's health and wellbeing project. Last year 18 Youth Ambassadors developed digital projects and campaigns, including Shape my Future – research commissioned asking young people for their thoughts and concerns about their future prospects.

REBOOT

A partnership project commissioned by the Sussex & Surrey Police Commissioner, REBOOT is an early intervention programme aiming to reduce the risks of young people being either the victim or suspect of serious violence in the future, using a non-criminal pathway.

Last year, **4,598** children and young people were reached through our youth work programmes



Over the first year of the programme, REBOOT worked directly with **938** young people

Can you help support young people in your community?

Each year, we help over 10,000 young people, children and families to access services and build a better future. The work we do would not be possible without your support – thank you!

Here are 5 ways you can make a difference to a vulnerable young person:

Volunteer

Volunteers play a vital role in our services and projects. A brilliant way to share and learn new skills, you'll be making a real difference in the lives of vulnerable young people. It's also a great way to enhance your job and university prospects.

Over the past four years, volunteers gave 113,626 hours of support to our YMCA, equating to a massive £846,450 contribution to local communities.

Take on a challenge

Our events programme includes marathons, sleepouts and cycle rides – there's something for everyone! Why not challenge yourself, get fit and help raise much-needed funds for our work with young people.

Become a Youth Ambassador

If you're aged 16-25, join our youth movement for change. Our youth-led health and wellbeing project, YMCA Right Here, gives young people a voice in issues that matter to them and YMCA WiSE supports children and young people to stay safe in their relationships.

Keep in touch!

Sign up to our bi-monthly e-newsletter and hear from some of the young people we support, as well as being the first to know about new opportunities, events and updates.

Get your business involved

A corporate partnership with YMCA DLG not only makes a difference to local young people, but also brings lasting benefits to your company. Enhance your brand, position yourself in the heart of your community and boost engagement with staff and clients.

We'll work closely with you to develop a tailor-made programme that fits with your company culture and leads to a mutually beneficial partnership.

Interested?

Email fundraising@ymcadlg.org to take the first step





Want to give a gift that keeps giving?

You can make a difference from just 40p a day.

Every night we support 763 young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness throughout Sussex and Surrey, but we need your support to help them rebuild their lives and live independently.

By sponsoring a room, you help give a vulnerable young person a home, breaking the cycle of poverty, ill-health and exclusion that homelessness makes impossible to break.

Get involved at www.ymcadlg.org/room-sponsor

Keep in Touch



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