



YMCA
DOWNSLINK GROUP

Our Impact

2021

YMCA

Our 2021 Impact

For us, along with most other organisations, 2021 has been defined by the Covid 19 pandemic. Continuing to provide our essential services, whilst keeping our young people and staff safe has remained our top priority. Building on our Covid crisis plan, we were able to keep our housing services open throughout the lockdowns, testimony to the commitment of our staff. Throughout 2021 we continued to see an increase in the need for our supported housing services, so we are excited to finish the year with the opening of a new supported housing project in Hastings.

Many of our mental health and targeted youth work services transitioned to being digital so that support could continue despite Covid restrictions. Our experience on the ground has reflected the national picture of increasing mental health problems, rising levels of vulnerability, and, child poverty in our society. Through the lockdowns we were still able to provide services to over 6,000 children, young people & residents, only a 30% reduction on our normal annual reach.



Provided services to over **6000** children, young people & residents



Provided **763** homeless young people with accommodation every night



2,896 children, young people & families were supported by our counselling

We have been moved by the generosity of our local communities with people coming together to support our work despite the hardships of the pandemic. From local bakers creating amazing bakes for our young residents to people taking on the Brighton and London marathons to raise money. Back in July we held our first ever DownsLink Challenge fundraising event with over 100 people taking part walking the length of the Downs Link Path from where we get our name.



Fran Beckett
Chair of Board of Trustees



Chas Walker
CEO

Helping young people, belong contribute and thrive.

Where we work



Our projects



YMCA ACCOMMODATION



YMCA DIALOGUE
Counselling and therapeutic support for children, young people and families



YMCA POSITIVE PLACEMENTS
Supporting young people in their journey towards education, employment or training



YMCA YAC
Advice and support for young people aged 13-25



YMCA WISE PROJECT
Supporting children and young people to stay safe in their relationships



YMCA CHAPLAINCY
Providing a non-judgemental space to discuss, explore, listen and support



YMCA MORE THAN A ROOM
Housing, support and groupwork, enabling young people to live independently and achieve their work and learning goals





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

Supported housing

In total, throughout last year, **1181** young people were given a safe place to say in our accommodation

One of our missional priorities is to help young people belong in their local communities. We do this by developing and running supported accommodation for vulnerable and homeless young people throughout Sussex and Guildford. The pandemic has exacerbated the issue of youth homelessness with **1 in 5 homeless people now being under the age of 25**. Job losses, strains in family relationships, and worsening mental health means more young people are presenting as homelessness than in previous years.

Kicked out when he came out as gay | Jack's* story

"When I told my family I was gay it was probably the worst day of my life. My dad just couldn't look at me and my mum wouldn't stop crying. It made me feel terrible about myself – I got so depressed and low.

Things got worse when I was 16 and started going out – because I just hated being at home. My dad would get really angry, wanting to know where I'd been. After one terrible argument he just screamed at me to leave. I stayed on different friend's sofas or floors for a while, but I just sort of ran out of places to stay. That's when I ended up sleeping on a park bench – it was so scary – that was the worst time.

I was in a really bad place mentally – I think I just hated myself back then. The support workers were amazing and they just seemed to 'get me' and know what I needed. They encouraged me to join a local LBGTQ group and that was the start of me accepting myself for who I am. I feel so different now, I've mostly stopped self-harming and if I'm feeling low I know I've got people to talk to. I'm starting an apprenticeship soon and I feel so much more positive about the future."

"Being given a home at YMCA was the best thing that could have happened to me. It was such a relief to have a roof over my head and feel like I had a place to belong."

Around six in ten young people seeking support from our YMCA YAC Housing Advice service had to leave home after a breakdown in their family relationship. Young people like Jack, whose story you can read on the opposite page, are suddenly facing the frightening reality of having nowhere to call home.

More Than a Room

Through our 'More Than a Room' programme we recognise that every young person in our supported housing is different. We develop unique solutions, tailored to the needs of individuals, ensuring the support provided is exactly what they need. We help young people develop the skills they need and **last year 90% of residents leaving YMCA DLG, moved on in a positive, planned way.**

We provided safe housing to to **23** young asylum seekers at our Guildford Foyer



Getting the right support at a difficult time | Kian's* story

Kian arrived in the UK to seek asylum in October 2020 and was required, under Covid rules, to quarantine for 14 days at the Guildford Foyer, whilst Social Services looked for a more permanent placement.

Quarantine was 'very difficult'. He was alone in a new country and was not allowed to come out of his room due to the protective restrictions. When he was allowed out of his room, Kian did not want to be at the Foyer or in Guildford and felt that no one was listening to him about being moved to London. He wanted to join a football academy and pursue his dreams to become a professional footballer. He says that playing football is the only time that he feels free from his troubles.

It was tough, he was very isolated in a new country and under lock down conditions. After some adjustment and a lot of 1:1 support, Kian settled at the Foyer and decided to stay until the right place in London became available. He engaged in English lessons and improved quickly. He began to trust staff and was a permanent feature at the front desk, always looking for opportunities to improve on his English. He enrolled in college and has joined in with the local football opportunities.

Kian will shortly be moving to London to join a football academy and enrolling in a new college in September. Kian found the asylum journey and restrictions of Covid very challenging for his mental health but looks forward to his future in London and is grateful for the support, care and understanding that he has received at the YMCA Guildford Foyer.

Mental Health Support

Covid 19 has been challenging for us all, but for young people who are already vulnerable, the pandemic presented an additional layer of disadvantage with deepening isolation due to the social restrictions, and an increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression. Our Children & Young People's emotional health and wellbeing service, YMCA Dialogue, saw the single biggest change in responding to Covid. Moving from face- to-face service to a digital service overnight. Despite this they were able to continue offering mental health and emotional wellbeing support to young people across Sussex through our community-based counselling and counselling in schools and colleges.

Schools and children and young people's education were massively disrupted this year by Covid. We were pleased to be able to work with over **50 schools** across Sussex to ensure children and young people were able to access counselling support through YMCA Dialogue

Around 68% of the young people living in our supported accommodation suffer from mental health difficulties. Many of our young people have never had an adult in their lives that they can trust. Building a positive relationship with their key worker can be the first step towards building resilience and independence. For young people like Kian, whose story you can read on the opposite page, having someone who will support them wholeheartedly can make all the difference.



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

Learning what a healthy relationship looks like | Tina's* story

At 17 Tina and a friend had been befriended by two much older men, invited to parties and given alcohol. Following an incident Tina was referred to the YMCA WiSE service for support. It was recognised that Tina was very vulnerable and had already been subjected to grooming at an earlier age.

The YMCA WiSE worker was able to give Tina a good deal of helpful information around healthy relationships, recognising grooming, growing self-esteem and assertiveness and the issue of consent. They met every week, and Tina appreciated being in a safe place where they could discuss anything that was on her mind.

They were able to address other issues too, such as Tina having had no money of her own. As the family income was low, the YMCA WiSE worker supported Tina and her mum to claim a Personal Independence Payment, which enabled Tina to buy herself some clothes and materials for her college course.

At the end of her time with YMCA WiSE Tina was very positive about the value of having someone she could talk to confidentially about private issues that she couldn't share with her family or friends. She started volunteering in a charity shop, completed a first year at college and plans to go on to a second year.

With support from her YMCA WiSE worker Tina grew significantly over the course of six months and is now well on the way to building a more positive future for herself.

Youth Work

A significant focus of our targeted youth work services is to keep children and young people safe. It is over 15 years since we first started campaigning on the issue of the exploitation of young people. This campaigning developed into our YMCA WiSE project (what is sexual exploitation). YMCA WiSE works across Brighton and Hove, Surrey and East Sussex to support children and young people to stay safe in their relationships. For young people like Tina, whose story you can read on the opposite page, having a safe place to discuss their concerns can help them grow in assertiveness and confidence.

YMCA WiSE project worked with **111** young people and **259** professionals to help prevent exploitation

"It has helped a lot, I never opened up to professionals, but my YMCA WiSE worker helped me to open up and has taken a lot of problems off my shoulders"

Y's Girls mentoring programme

We are proud that our work is focused on supporting the most marginalised young people in our local communities to achieve their potential. This year we joined YMCA England's Y's Girls mentoring programme, matching trained volunteer mentors with female-identifying young people to help develop their confidence, skills and engagement with their communities.

Can you support vulnerable young people in your community?

Every night we provide accommodation to more than 750 young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We reach thousands more every year through our youth advice centres, community and school counselling services, family mediation and other youth focussed services.

We could not do this vital work without your support – so here are four easy ways you can make a difference to a vulnerable young person:



Take on a challenge!

Mad for marathons? Raring to go for runs? Wild for walking? Our events programme involves these and much more – there is something for everyone! Get fit, take on a new challenge and help raise much-needed funds for young people.



Volunteer

Volunteers play a vital role in our services and projects and volunteering is a wonderful way to gain experience, learn new skills and make new friends. Whether supporting at an event, providing meals for residents in supported accommodation or mentoring a young person, there is a role for you.



Get your business involved

A corporate partnership with YMCA DownsLink Group enables you to make a dramatic difference to local young people.

We will work with you to develop a tailor-made programme that fits with your culture, enhances your brand and helps boost your engagement with staff and clients.



Keep in touch!

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

Interested? Simply email fundraising@ymcadlg.org to get started



Finance

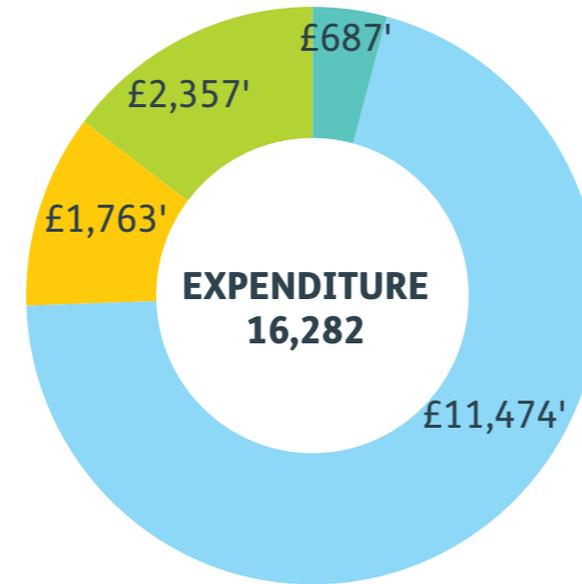
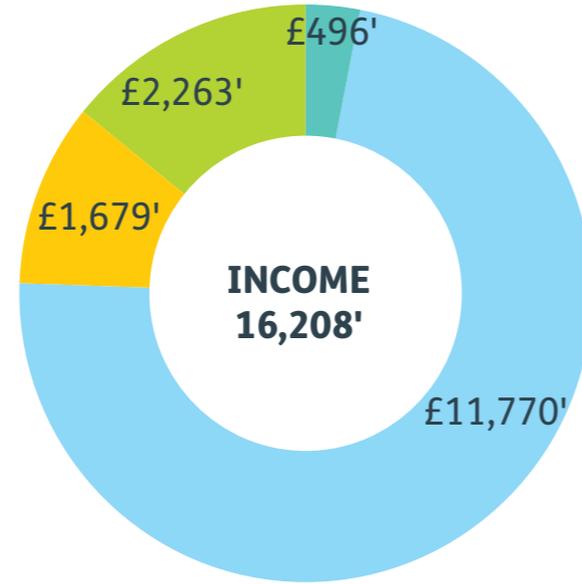
This year, the greatest driving force has been Covid-19 creating unprecedented economic uncertainty. The Job retention ('furlough') scheme enabled us to retain the staff who work within our face-to-face missional activities, although towards the end of the year we had to make the difficult decision to restructure some of these activities to ensure the ongoing viability of the organisation, resulting in some redundancies costing £94,000.

We want to thank all partner organisations who supported the delivery of our services this year and who have contributed to the development of our YMCA. Thank you for your continued commitment and support and for the generosity of your financial support for our work.

The summary financial information contains data from the management accounts of YMCA DownsLink Group for the year ended 31 March 2021.

The full financial statements have been audited by Haysmacintyre LLP and received an unqualified opinion. For further information, the full audited financial statements containing the Report of the Directors and the Auditors' reports should be consulted.

Read the full Annual Report, including the Auditors Report and Financial Accounts, [here](#).



2010 - 2021
£'000

- Accommodation
- Support & Advice
- Health & Wellbeing
- Training & Education

Our Partners



Our supporters

- | | | |
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| New Life Baptist Church | Griffiths Smith Farrington and Webb | Fonthill Foundation |
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| St John the Baptist, Hove | Lancing Prep School | |
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| Active Sussex | Community Foundation for Surrey | |
| The Heathrow Community Trust | The Groundwork South Trust Ltd | |



No young person chooses to be homeless

You can change the life of a local young person facing homelessness for just 40p a day

When you become a Room Sponsor not only are you giving a vulnerable young person a home, you are giving them a second chance.

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

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