

YMCA
DOWNSLINK GROUP

Our Impact

2024/25

YMCA

Here for young people
Here for communities
Here for you

Introduction from **our CEO**

We're proud of what we've achieved in 2024-25, especially given the challenging environment for both our charity and the children and young people we support.

In this Impact Report, we celebrate how we've helped children and young people feel safer, be more independent, advocate for themselves, develop life skills and confidence and improve their emotional wellbeing and mental health.

At the same time, we're also proud of the advances we've made to become a more resilient organisation including:

- ▶ reaching a major milestone by securing Ofsted registration, which means we can continue housing 16 and 17-year-olds with care experience
- ▶ investing in key properties in Brighton and Crawley through our Homes England Recycled Capital Grant, securing vital supported housing for young people
- ▶ launching a new Youth Voice and Influence Strategy to ensure young people's voices are at the heart of everything we do
- ▶ introducing a new set of organisational values – shaped by staff, volunteers, trustees and young people – to reflect who we are and connect us to our community
- ▶ investing in our infrastructure, including improvements to our buildings and digital systems.



Emily and Trustee Simone Button (right) help prepare a Christmas meal with colleagues at our Hastings foyer

Cover image: one of our supported housing residents.



Emily with visitors from India YMCA

This report outlines the impact we've made in our three service areas:

- ▶ supported housing
- ▶ emotional wellbeing and mental health
- ▶ support and advice.

We are pleased to have supported **5,952** children and young people across Sussex and Surrey this year. A huge thank you to all our staff, volunteers, partners and supporters – your dedication makes this important work possible.

Emily Brock
Chief Executive Officer



Emily with MP John Milne during his visit

Soph at our Brighton Youth Advice Centre

Welcome from one of our **Youth Ambassadors**

I believe that young people deserve to be heard so I was pleased to be asked to do the introduction to this Impact Report. As a 21-year-old Youth Ambassador for YMCA DownsLink Group (see page 12), I have seen first-hand the difference it makes when young people are genuinely listened to and our views respected.

I've helped come up with ideas to include in the charity's e-wellbeing website content for children and young people and for their social media posts. Our group suggested covering myth-busting posts around different mental health topics and I was keen to see posts on neurodivergence. I have autism and ADHD and I'm passionate about spreading awareness of how that impacts someone.

As a former Patcham High School and Varndean College student in Brighton, it was great to go back to both with other youth ambassadors to speak about mental health – something I have struggled with myself. It was clear to me that the students were happy to talk with other

young people rather than older adults. The teachers also came up to me and told me how proud they were of me which was lovely!

Twice now I have attended the schools Mental Health Champions celebration events (see page 9) and it was great to see how the students' new ideas on improving wellbeing at school have taken off.

Looking to the future, I could see myself working in mental health.

After everything I've been through and what I've learnt, I'd like to help others. I've always had lots of pets and my dream job would be to help people with a support animal.

Soph, 21

Our impact

- 5,952** children, young people and families used our services
- 896** young people given a safe home
- 91%** of residents ready to move on to more independent living did so successfully
- 4,186** children and young people provided with counselling support
- 870** received other advice and support

Our mission

To help children and young people have a fair chance to be who they want to be. We do this by providing a safe home, increasing life skills and self-confidence, and improving emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Our values

- ▶ We do what's right
- ▶ We work with heart
- ▶ We build real connection

YMCA DownsLink Group is proud to be a member of the federation of YMCA England and Wales. We contribute to their vision and purpose: An inclusive Christian movement transforming communities so that all young people can belong, contribute and thrive.

Supported housing

Our impact on youth homelessness

A safe place to call home

In 2024-2025 we provided safe, high quality supported accommodation for **896** young people aged 16-25.

The young people who live with us have often experienced chronically overcrowded homes, emergency accommodation, street homelessness, unsafe home environments, family breakdown or domestic violence.

Of the young people we supported:

- ▶ **239** had lived in care, 36 of whom were aged 16 or 17
- ▶ **54** had been sleeping rough
- ▶ **84** were asylum seekers
- ▶ **472** had recorded mental health needs
- ▶ **145** had recorded health needs including around hearing or visual impairment, autism, learning difficulty, mobility issues and chronic illness.



A resident and their support worker in our supported housing

Thank you so much for all your help at YMCA DownsLink Group. You have helped me change my life around. It's been a great journey with all of you guys.

Resident

Our support goes further

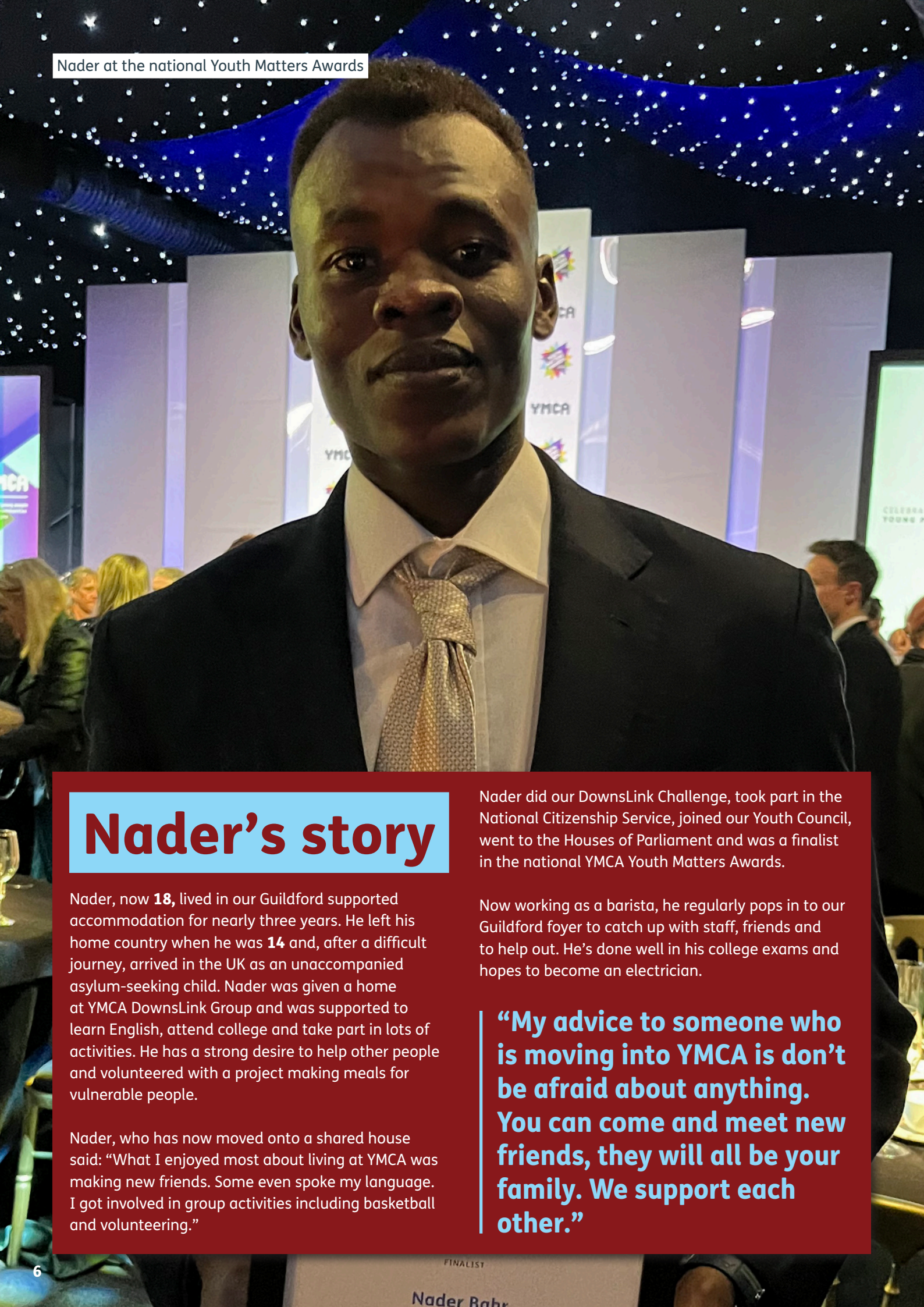
While living with us, the young people have support planning sessions. Key topics that young people had help and advice with included:

- ▶ **473** housing situation
- ▶ **405** money management
- ▶ **390** planning for the future
- ▶ **251** confidence and motivation
- ▶ **1,351** sessions on help around training or employment.

Young residents' aspirations

- ▶ **424** wanted to be in training or education
- ▶ **204** would like to work
- ▶ **2** would like to have a voluntary position
- ▶ **20** wanted to develop leisure interests.

During the year, **91%** of young residents ready to move on to more independent living did so successfully.



Nader's story

Nader, now **18**, lived in our Guildford supported accommodation for nearly three years. He left his home country when he was **14** and, after a difficult journey, arrived in the UK as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child. Nader was given a home at YMCA DownsLink Group and was supported to learn English, attend college and take part in lots of activities. He has a strong desire to help other people and volunteered with a project making meals for vulnerable people.

Nader, who has now moved onto a shared house said: "What I enjoyed most about living at YMCA was making new friends. Some even spoke my language. I got involved in group activities including basketball and volunteering."

Nader did our DownsLink Challenge, took part in the National Citizenship Service, joined our Youth Council, went to the Houses of Parliament and was a finalist in the national YMCA Youth Matters Awards.

Now working as a barista, he regularly pops in to our Guildford foyer to catch up with staff, friends and to help out. He's done well in his college exams and hopes to become an electrician.

"My advice to someone who is moving into YMCA is don't be afraid about anything. You can come and meet new friends, they will all be your family. We support each other."

Chaplaincy

Our multi-faith chaplains provide a sense of family and non-judgemental support. The chaplaincy sessions give young people a space to be heard, the chance to discuss deeper issues – but also to share a home-cooked meal together and have fun.

A total of **1,645** meals were served in chaplaincy over **333** sessions, with **224** of our young residents attending.



Residents and a chaplain at our supported housing

Some of the topics discussed during 2024-2025 included:

- ▶ **Mental health** – depression, loneliness, requests for counselling
- ▶ **Physical health** – cancer, pain management, operations, doctor appointments, rehabilitation
- ▶ **Abusive behaviour** – safety concerns, domestic violence, aggression
- ▶ **Addiction** – alcohol misuse, drug and gambling abuse
- ▶ **Family issues** – divorce, bereavement, family in conflict zones, pregnancy, relationship issues with children
- ▶ **Faith issues** – discussions about faith, life, future, prayer, death, dying, feelings of worthlessness
- ▶ **Practical help** – redundancy, workload.

Supporting young families

We supported **35** parents and **15** children over the year, **12** families at our supported housing in Brighton and four at our next-step project in West Sussex. Young parents often come to us with their babies and children seeking a safe, supportive environment where they can thrive.

While living with us, they receive help to build a strong foundation as parents which also positively impacts their children's futures.

In addition to our accommodation, we also provided counselling for **14** other parents through our therapeutic service.



One of our youngest residents plays with a toy donated by a corporate supporter

Emotional wellbeing and mental health

Our support in the community

We are the partner of choice for Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SPFT) and lead partner for NHS counselling services in Brighton and Hove and West Sussex. During the year, we provided therapeutic support to **4,186** young people across Sussex through our community counselling and schools services.

In Brighton and Hove, we are the leading mental health provider for those aged four to 25 with mild to moderate needs and last year we supported **1,476** children and young people. We did this through counselling, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), low-intensity psychological therapy, play and drama therapy and family therapy. We also offered:

- ▶ LGBTQ+ support to young people where sexual identity was linked to mental health difficulties
- ▶ culturally-sensitive global majority counselling
- ▶ specialist neurodiversity counselling.

Average waiting times fell by almost half – from **88** to **46** days over the year.

I felt listened to and understood. I've been through a lot of rejection and this has helped me understand myself more and that my feelings are valid and ok.

Taylor

Hannah Warwick from our SPFT partners said:

“Through our successful partnership with YMCA DownsLink Group, waiting times have been reduced. This means children and young people in Brighton and Hove can be seen sooner, at the time they most want support.”

During the year we worked with **1,091** children in **43** schools across East and West Sussex, Brighton and Hove. Based on recorded data, **80%** of children showed a clinically significant improvement in their mental health.

In West Sussex, we partner with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Youth Emotional Support (YES) to have a single point of access for mental health support in the county. We supported **1,181** children, young people and parents through individual counselling, therapy and group work.

Our support in schools

Our specialist mental health counsellors continued to support children to cope with stressful and distressing experiences, anxiety, bereavement, loss of self-confidence and emotional difficulties.

As part of our work in schools, we supported **18** fostered and adopted children. We worked closely with social workers, foster carers, families and schools to provide them with specialist, trauma-informed support including when they move foster placements or change schools.



Students taking part in a Mental Health Champions event

Our Mental Health Champions programme in schools, run in partnership with Brighton & Hove City Council, engaged **220** students across **11** schools. The programme empowers young people to take action to improve the mental wellbeing of both students and staff and to challenge mental health stigma.

Sally Rodgers, English Teacher and Mental Health Lead at Portslade Aldridge Community Academy (PACA) which joined our Mental Health Champions programme in 2021, said:

“It’s entirely youth-led, making it great training for leadership – many of our Mental Health Champions go on to become prefects. It also helps the students with their public speaking and general confidence, preparing them for other roles in life.

“The young people are proud of the programme and their role as mental health champions, as recorded by the most recent OFSTED report.”

Practical hands-on time helped Milo gain confidence and he felt empowered to complete brave activities.

Parent

Youth advice and support

We believe every young person should be able to speak with someone they can trust. Our support and advice services provide emotional and practical help to children and young people.

Our work preventing and responding to sexual exploitation

Our specialist work across Sussex and Surrey provides targeted support to children and young people who are affected by sexual exploitation. Our What is Sexual Exploitation (WiSE) service combines direct intervention, professional training and consultation to address and prevent exploitation in all its forms.

During 2024-25 we:

- ▶ supported a total of **355** children and young people who were experiencing or at risk of sexual exploitation. The average age was **14**.
- ▶ provided specialist training to **663** professionals including teachers, health workers, police and social care staff.

Our early intervention group work in mainstream schools, pupil referral units and special schools provided a safe space for education and open discussions to promote healthy relationships, raise awareness of exploitation and challenge harmful gender stereotypes.

The sessions for families of children affected included guidance and information to update their knowledge on online safety.

Our work guiding young people

Our two youth advice centres, in Brighton and Crawley, supported **550** children and young people over the year, **460** in Brighton and **90** in Crawley.

The centres are safe and inclusive spaces where children and young people can ask for support and advice on a range of challenges. Many who come to us face complex and interconnected issues which impede their life chances such as homelessness, poor mental health, poverty, domestic violence, seeking asylum, exclusion from education and family breakdown.

A total of **100%** of children and young people said they would recommend this service to their friend and 100% said they would return if they needed help in the future.

Of the people who took part in family mediation sessions, **92%** stayed safely in their homes rather than becoming homeless.

In 2025, we completed an innovative two-year young men's youth support pilot programme for **20** vulnerable and at-risk young men aged 17 to 24 in Brighton and Hove. Positive outcomes were recorded for **16** of them and included securing supported accommodation, engaging with services, attending anger management sessions and securing work.

It has helped so much. I never felt comfortable talking to professionals but my worker helped me open up and has taken a lot of problems off my shoulders.

Young person, 16

Housing advice worker Taya outside our Brighton Youth Advice Centre



Sam's story

Sam* received support through our boys and young men's programme at our Brighton Youth Advice Centre. Sam had a history of struggling to engage with NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and had undiagnosed mental illnesses. He was not registered with a GP or dentist.

He struggled to regulate his emotions and was known to the police, having been arrested and bailed with conditions.

Sam was involved in selling drugs, substance misuse and had attended A&E on several occasions because of drug use and mental ill health.

After over a year of sustained support through the boys and young men's programme, he is now living in medium supported accommodation and receiving universal credit.

He is engaging with his key worker and attending meetings about his involvement with drugs. He now pays his rent on time and is receiving support to apply for his driving licence. He has a love for motorbikes and wants to do a CBT course to enable him to ride legally.

Youth voice and participation



A resident and one of our support workers

Amplifying youth voice

We launched our new youth voice and leadership strategy which set out a pathway to achieve our ambition to have children and young people at the centre of everything we do. This year our youth participation work included:

The Tenant Satisfaction Survey which included questions about our performance in areas such as repairs, safety, how we handle complaints and communication.

The survey revealed that **83%** of young people living with us thought YMCA DownsLink Group treated them fairly and with respect. **79%** were satisfied that their home was safe.

Our network of Wellbeing Youth Ambassadors, aged 13 to 25, increased from 32 to 53, with **18** meetings co-led by young people. These ambassadors worked and consulted on mental health projects and co-produced content for our e-wellbeing website and e-wellbeing social media.

There were **55,000** page views on our e-wellbeing website. The site is an extensive support services hub and provides psychoeducational resources and youth participation information.

I truly do appreciate each person who helps us and listens to us. They are quick to respond when something goes wrong and have offered me support for my mental health and budgeting.

Survey response

Two of our Youth Researchers



It was a great experience to get to know people from different age groups and backgrounds. It improved my social skills and helped me become more comfortable speaking in front of others.

Youth Researcher

Our Youth Researchers, who have completed our research training, completed four separate pieces of work this year. They produced a final report on the support teams in schools service for our partners West Sussex Mental Health Support Team and on the Self-Harm Learning Network for West Sussex Mind and West Sussex County Council.

Meanwhile, **26** signed up to our youth volunteer programme and a further six took part in work experience with us.

Fundraising

Doug from the Mayday Group takes on an exhilarating skydive for our charity.

The adrenaline, the view and knowing it was all for a great cause made it unforgettable.

Corporate funders spotlight

Businesses across Sussex and Surrey found new ways to support us during the year – from garden projects and funding, to providing paid work placements and celebrating with our young people at the Youth Matters Awards 2024 in London.

Bupa Senior Manager Nikki South said:

“Our partnership with YMCA DownsLink Group has been incredibly rewarding. By supporting the food market and attending the Youth Matters Awards, we’ve seen first-hand the positive impact on the community. Together, we’re fostering a brighter future for young people.”



Bupa's George Dodd, Nikki South and Sue Chambers visit our 24-hour supported accommodation in Brighton



Staff from iCrossing help out at our young families project



Suez and Best Digital transform the garden at Guildford Foyer

Our fundraised income

Fundraising is a vital part of our income, alongside local authority and NHS contracts and rental income, helping us to innovate and deliver added value for children and young people.

In addition to funding from trusts and foundations and corporate supporters, we received income from community fundraising. Highlights this year included the London Marathon, our Christmas Appeal, Room Sponsorship campaign and a skydive event.

Funders and supporters

Companies and community groups who supported us included:

- Alphatrack Systems
- Audio Note
- Austin Rees
- Balfour Beatty
- Big Hug Brewery
- Bupa UK
- Castle Snooker and Sports Bar
- C&C Cleaning Services
- Cordek Ltd
- Consort Frozen Food
- DMH Stallard
- GM Monk
- Mayday Group
- Plus Accounting
- Pryer Construction
- Right Check
- ROCC Computers
- Rotary Club of Eastbourne
- Simon Dent Associates
- The Caravan Club
- TLF Investments
- Trident
- Oban International
- The Lighting Centre
- Waitrose

Trusts and foundations who supported us were:

- BBC Children in Need
- Hyde Charitable Trust
- The Munro Charitable Trust
- The OptiGene Foundation
- The Pebble Trust
- The Rosaz Charity
- Ufi VocTech Trust
- YMCA England & Wales

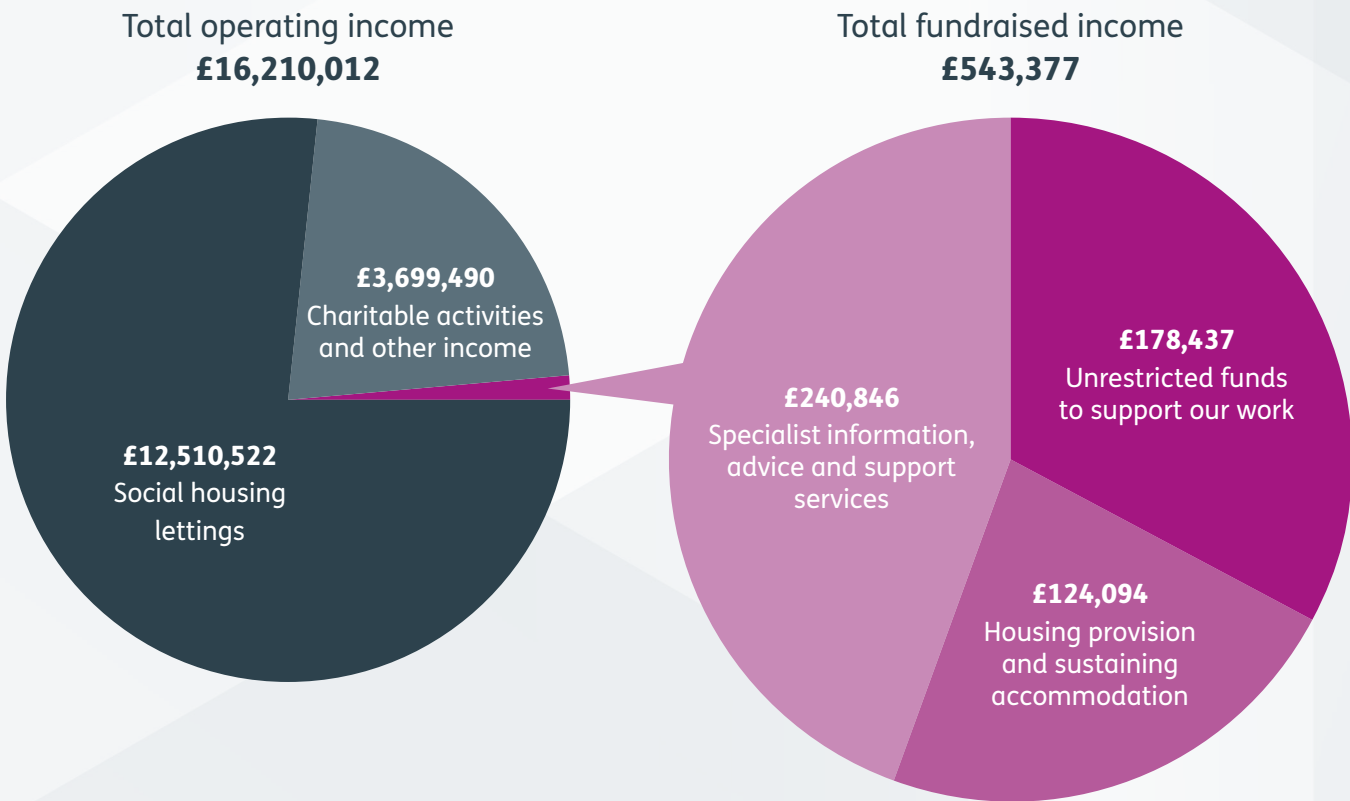
We are grateful to all the organisations and individuals that have so generously supported us.



Volunteers from Balfour Beatty help redecorate at our Guildford Foyer

We are registered with the Fundraising Regulator and abide by the Code of Fundraising Practice, which ensures we have a robust and ethical fundraising framework and practice. We do not employ any third-party fundraisers. We are deeply committed to protecting vulnerable individuals from pressure in the context of fundraising and all fundraising activities are carried out by our staff and volunteers, ensuring transparency and alignment with our values.

How we spent our fundraised income



Funding our mission

Last year, we raised **£543,377** through fundraising. We are so grateful to every one of our supporters for helping us to make a difference to the lives of children and young people in Sussex and Surrey.

Our Partners for Change offer to businesses

Join our Partners for Change and help us make a profound difference to the lives of children and young people in your community. In return for your support, you will receive recognition on our website, at events and on our social media channels as well as receive promotional materials to use within your business.

Benefits of partnering with us include:

- ▶ opportunity to increase staff morale and motivation
- ▶ volunteering opportunities
- ▶ public relations
- ▶ enhanced brand reputation.

We offer four different levels within Partners for Change. To find out more, please email our Corporate and Community Fundraising Manager: mark.purser@ymcadlg.org



Two of our fundraisers admire their medals after completing the London Marathon

Some of our colleagues at our Horsham foyer

Colleagues and volunteers

Our staff and volunteers are essential to everything we do. We're committed to creating a working environment where people feel safe, respected and supported. Frontline teams receive regular reflective practice and clinical supervision to help manage the emotional demands of their roles and we provide access to ongoing professional development to support their growth and wellbeing.

During the year, we:

- ▶ developed and launched our new values to support our culture
- ▶ introduced in-house management training, equipping managers to lead with empathy and awareness
- ▶ published our first ethnicity pay gap report, as part of a commitment to transparent reporting and targeted action
- ▶ continued to invest in our digital systems transformation, with an upgrade to our asset management system
- ▶ continued to celebrate long service awards across the organisation for all staff, volunteers and trustees.

In our February 2025 pulse survey, **78%** of staff said...

their work had special meaning: it was not 'just a job'

whilst **76%** felt they made a difference working here.

Looking ahead

We are in the final year of our 2023-2026 strategy and our annual plans continue to guide us in delivering on the priorities we have set out.

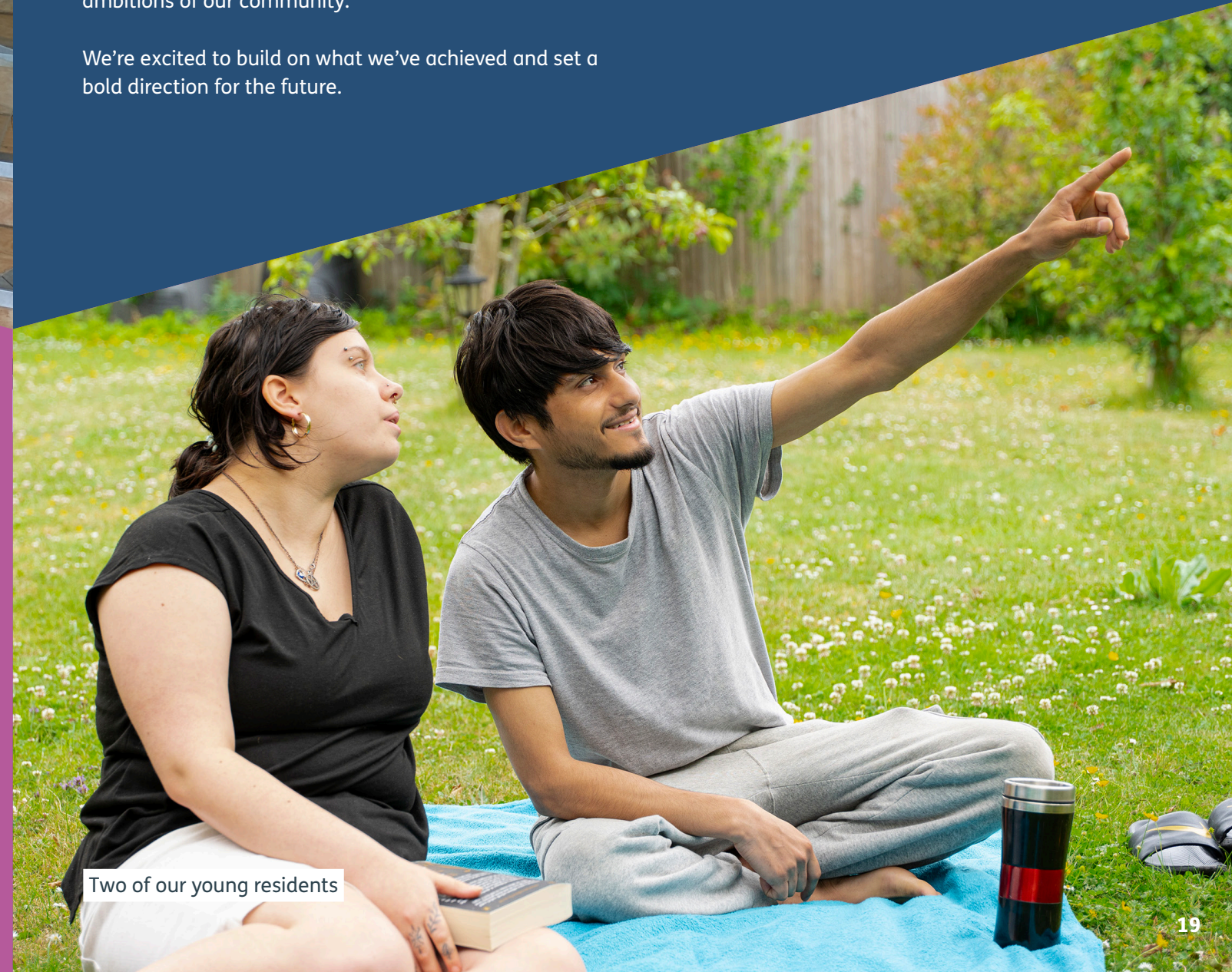
Our priorities are to:

- ▶ Deliver psychologically informed services
- ▶ Amplify youth voice and leadership
- ▶ Be a great place to work.

We measure progress via our key performance indicator framework.

Work is in progress to develop our next strategic framework for 2026-2031. This is being shaped in consultation with colleagues, trustees and young people – ensuring it reflects the voices, insights and ambitions of our community.

We're excited to build on what we've achieved and set a bold direction for the future.



Two of our young residents



Scan to donate

Keep in touch



YMCA DOWNSLINK GROUP

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Registered charity:	1079570
Registered social housing provider:	4644
Registered BACP accreditation:	00102752
Registered Ofsted:	Brighton & Hove 2767751
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	West Sussex and Surrey 2766609