

“I’m not sure I can go back to how it was.”

Young People in a Post-COVID World: Recommendations for Policy & Practice in Trafford, Greater Manchester

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities across communities in the UK and beyond. This briefing details specifically how young people living in Trafford, Greater Manchester have been adversely affected by the global crisis. Produced as part of the CONTINUE project, this briefing draws upon lived experiences, qualitative interviews, applied pilot activities and knowledge exchanges to provide its recommendations on how such negative impacts can be supported during the local recovery from the pandemic.

CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

The core recommendations in this briefing are:

- Establish regular surgeries between Local MPs and young people;
- Develop a peer-led wellbeing service in schools, colleges and community centres;
- Cultivate direct partnerships between corporate entities and community centres.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities across communities in the UK and beyond. This briefing details specifically how young people living in Trafford, Greater Manchester have been adversely affected by the global crisis. Young people in the area are experiencing challenges with their health and wellbeing, disengagement with education and are being further disadvantaged by poverty and disability due to lack of local support. As this briefing demonstrates, at present there is significant pressure on local support provision and this is leading to young people not being able to access the support they need. Furthermore, young people’s voices (particularly those facing varying degrees of marginalisation) are not regularly present in the political or decision-making sphere on a local level. Working alongside young people to showcase existing provision and formulate new partnerships with local business to help finance further provision are practical ways in which such adversities can be overcome – and some initial local experimentation with this is underway.

The evidence that has contributed to this briefing includes lived experiences of young people from Trafford, interviews with local policy- and decision-makers, learnings from the application of social actions in the local area, and a knowledge exchange sessions attended by a range of local actors and stakeholders. This briefing presents specific recommendations for policy and practice intended to have long-term positive effects on young people and relates to policy areas around mental health, political engagement, and safe spaces. They demonstrate what can support young people and their communities during COVID-19 recovery, while simultaneously increasing their socio-political engagement in local governance.

Key impacts of COVID-19 on young people in Trafford

1. Health and wellbeing – high levels of anxiety, poor mental health, decline in physical health;
2. Education and careers – disengagement with education, damaged career prospects;
3. Social issues and inequalities – exacerbation and amplification of existing inequalities (e.g. poverty and disability) and social issues.

In order to address these issues:

- Young people need a place at the table to co-create what the ‘new normal’ should look like for them;
- Support is needed for young people who have fallen behind, and support for schools, educators and youth workers to provide early intervention;
- Co-creation opportunities are needed to make societies (local, national and international) more equitable.

Creating change and COVID-19 recovery in Trafford

In co-creating pandemic-recovery social actions with young people, our key learnings were:

- Showcasing current provision is vital to raise awareness of existing support and its importance in the community – as well as where and how it could be developed further;
- Safe spaces are in short supply post-pandemic but there is a gap in understanding as to why these are important to young people. In order for more safe spaces to be developed, communities need to understand and support them;
- Direct partnerships with corporate sponsors need to be encouraged so that wealth from local big business is invested back into communities. This financial stimulus is needed to expand existing services and develop new spaces.

Governance and service context in Trafford

- Services are losing sight of some marginalised youth after the pandemic helped them to 'drop off the radar';
- As such, the only voices many decision- and policy-makers hear are those of the 'visible' young people;
- Support services were struggling to cope pre-pandemic, now they are stretched beyond capacity with less funding available – particularly youth mental health services;
- Going online due to COVID has caused disengagement not only with education but also with other services and programmes such as Youth Councils and Youth Advisory Boards in some areas.
- Currently, there is very little by way of specific policy designed to support young people post-pandemic. While some existing policies can cover some of these areas, the issues of overstretched services and 'invisible' youth hamper their reach.

Key learnings

- The pandemic has resulted in many young people falling 'off the radar', meaning support services and programmes are unable to reach them. It also means support is only being modelled around the young people who are visible.
- Support services are over-stretched and unable to cope with high levels of demand.
- Young people's mental health has declined and the wait for support and/or treatment is too long.

- Societal inequalities (education, wealth, disability etc.) have been exacerbated, one cause being the reduction in safe spaces where young people can find support, discover opportunities, and simply exist.
- Young people need to be involved in the co-creation of the programmes and services that support them.

Policy & practice recommendations

- **Establish regular surgeries between Local MPs and young people that:**
 - Allow MPs to hear the unfiltered views of young people;
 - Offer young people the opportunity to engage directly with democracy;
 - Signpost to existing services as well as inform new initiatives.
- **Develop a peer-led wellbeing service in schools, colleges and community centres that:**
 - Signposts young people towards relevant support;
 - Offers mental health first aid for young people;
 - Reduces waiting times for formalised youth mental health services.
- **Cultivate direct partnerships between corporate entities and community centres to:**
 - Provide financial stimulus to strengthen existing services and spaces;
 - Create new (recreational/social) spaces specifically for local youth;
 - Give young people the opportunity to shape their local communities.

METHOD

This policy and practice briefing has been produced as part of the CONTINUE project. It uses:

- Data from young people's stories gathered using [Community Reporter methodology](#), which facilitates people sharing lived experience in order to create social change;
- Information gathered during interviews with local and pan-European stakeholders.
- Information gathered from young people and youth workers during the social action co-creation process;
- Information shared during Conversation of Change events and Knowledge Exchanges, both local and pan-European. These were held with young people, youth workers, and policy- and decision-makers.

At each stage, this data has been synthesised into reports which have informed the next stages. These have, ultimately, been synthesised to inform these policy and practice recommendations.

ABOUT CONTINUE

CONTINUE supports young people experiencing social exclusion to tackle the specific challenges of post-COVID times in terms of staying connected and integrated into European communities. The project is being delivered by a consortium of 8 NGOs from different European countries who are experienced in youth education and community-based activities. The work involves storytelling, social action projects, policy development, knowledge exchanges, an outreach campaign and the creation of an online platform. It is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

Find out more by scanning the QR code.



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