

North-East and Yorkshire #2: Celebrating youth voice and engagement

Tuesday 14th October, 10-11.30am

44 people from the voluntary sector, health, education, and local authorities across the North-East and Yorkshire attended the workshop. The workshop celebrated the important work of youth voice and share key learning and tips. This workshop was facilitated by the [Institute for Voluntary Action Research](#) (IVAR) who are supporting ICBs across the North-East and Yorkshire to connect and share learning. This note aims to inform ongoing conversations about taking forward the ideas shared, both for those who attended the workshops and those who were unable to attend but are interested in collaborating. It outlines common themes and approaches that emerged from conversations in the workshop.

For more details on what was covered in the workshop, please find the recording of the session here: [Celebrating youth voice and engagement in North-East and Yorkshire](#)

A celebration of youth engagement

It is clear that there is a lot of fantastic youth engagement work taking place in North-East and Yorkshire. For instance, workshop attendees have established youth councils, advisory groups, toolkits, mentoring opportunities, and employed creative methods of engagement, such as arts and photography. Some of the interesting work being done that brings attendees them joy and inspiration are:

Launching a youth voice social action grant centred around inclusive health across the north east

Collecting young people's voice about what works well in the place where they live and what else they think their local area needs

Working on Health and Wellbeing and other campaigns in the Yorkshire and Humber SEND Youth Alliance

Engaging in therapeutic photography with young people

Setting up a youth council with the type of kids who would never ever normally be part of a youth council

Have just finished a project plan and budget for a Young Advisors Group, aged 13-19, for our charity

This workshop focussed on five stories from speakers who are all doing amazing things with youth engagement and voice in health. Presentations focussed on challenges, successes, and the positive impact it has had on children and young people.

Some common themes across all the speakers included:

- **Proper resourcing:** Youth engagement works when young people are paid, trained, and trusted.
- **Cross-sector collaboration** (public health, NHS, education, councils, and youth orgs) builds systemic impact.
- **Dialogue, not consultation:** Young people must shape the questions, not just answer them.
- **Sustained legacy** depends on embedding youth voice in policy, governance, and funding structures.
- **Inclusion of seldom-heard voices** (disabled, neurodivergent, care-experienced, etc.) must be intentional and resourced.

The Bradford District Youth Ambassadors

Anthony Casson; Bradford Public Health

Bradford Youth Service runs 500 sessions of youth work a week with around 70,000 young people engaged annually. However, public awareness of this work can be low, which is where the Youth Ambassadors' work comes in.

The Youth Ambassadors programme began during the pandemic as 'Youth COVID Ambassadors' and evolved into a permanent youth voice structure within Bradford Council. There are currently 20 Young Ambassadors (aged 16–25) involved in this programme. They are paid and trained by Public Health and work 6 hours a week; 3 hours in communities and 3 hours working in City Hall offering advice and guidance.

Their work focuses on three youth-identified priorities:

1. **Education and skills** – focus on life skills and wellbeing, not just academic success.
2. **Homes and communities** – clean, safe, inclusive local spaces.
3. **Physical and mental health** – access to support, safe spaces, and free opportunities for activity.

In the words of one youth ambassador: *'It's not just about quick fixes; it's about empowering young people and offering services that they want and that meet their needs.'*

Key message: Youth voice must be invested in and paid for, not just consulted.

'When you put your money where your mouth is and pay young people for their time, you get results.'

South Yorkshire Health Champions

Chantelle Parke; Chilypep

Chilypep is a participation partners to the South Yorkshire Integrated Care Boards and the Children & Young People's Alliance. They are also involved in 'CHEC' (Children and Young People's Health Equity Collaborative) with Barnardo's Charity and UCL's Institute of Health Equity. CHEC aims to tackle health inequalities faced by young people and embedding youth voice into service design and delivery. In order to do this, they are working with young people that they have engaged with previously as 'Health Champions'.

This group of young people from across Barnsley, Sheffield, Doncaster, Rotherham, work together to reinforce youth voice across the healthcare system. They have co-created a youth manifesto to drive their work and ensure that *'every young person grows up healthy, happy and heard.'*

Some recent projects include:

- **Digital Health Charter** for 18–25-year-olds with long-term conditions.
- Co-design of the **South Yorkshire text crisis line** (85258), including the name and look of the service.
- **Connectors Programme**: Training young people to lead consultations within NHS hospital trusts.
- **Youth-led campaigns** on transport, housing, and nature recovery with other regional partners.

Key message: Youth participation must be embedded in systems, not bolted on, and should include training designed by young people for young people.

Northern Youth Research Partnership

Robert Johnson; Investing in Children

Investing in Children works collaboratively with other organisations to promote children's rights and create opportunities for children and young people to share their views and experiences. One of their most recent projects is the Northern Youth Research Partnership, which aims to explore how young people can be better involved in the health and care research landscape. In particular, it explores how young people can set research priorities and be involved at the start of research design:

'What do they [CYP] know about research? How would they want to get involved in research? What are they know about health? What do they know about social care? Can we change in the rate of research of children and young people at the start of it from the beginning?'

This project is made up of three stages:

1. **Stage One:** Recruit and establish the partnership.
2. **Stage Two:** Young people from the partnership will be supported to lead conversations with children and young people across the region.

3. **Stage Three:** The partnership will work with health and social care research partners across the region to set up and strengthen ways for young people's ideas to inform future research. A final showcase event will share learning.

They are currently on stage 2, which focuses on 'agenda days'; peer-to-peer learning in an adult-free space where young people explore and define research questions. So far, 80% of young participants that have engaged in this process want to stay involved long term. This demonstrates that young people are more invested when they are directly involved with setting the agenda, rather than being consulted with.

Key message: Initiate dialogue with Children and Young people, not consultations.

Young Leaders

Sandra Cowley; Darlington Association on Disability (DAD)

Disability Association on Disability (DAD) is a user-led disability charity that supports disabled people in Darlington. They commit to being truly user-led, meaning that everything they do is shaped by lived experiences and voices of disabled people.

They are currently re-establishing their Young Leaders group which had shrunk during the COVID pandemic. The group is all about giving young people a real say in things that matter to them, helping them to develop confidence, leadership skills and a sense of belonging in Darlington and in DAD. In fact, one of the young leaders went on to become a DAD trustee. Due to the investment that DAD has put into the group, such as conducting Young Inspectors training, guest speakers from Northumbria University, mentoring opportunities etc., the group has now grown to 7 members, and the confidence of young leaders has increased. Next year, they hope to have 4 young leaders participate in Youth Matters by the Council for Disabled Children – an opportunity for young people to meet others across the country and share their experiences and bring back ideas to the North-East.

Key message: *'Only young disabled people can tell you what it's like to be a young disabled person – we must listen and act on what they say.'*

Yorkshire and Humber SEND Youth Alliance

Chelsea Jackson, Mikey Marsden and Robert Mooney; The Youth Work Unit

The Yorkshire and Humber SEND Youth Alliance began through the *Authoring Our Own Stories* project, which involved young people with SEND engaging with healthcare professionals to 'think about the bigger picture' on what young people with SEND really need. The Alliance has grown from this and now represents young people with SEND from across Yorkshire & Humber.

The Alliance meet monthly, run regional campaigns with different decision makers to create systematic change and influence decisions. They have also worked on a national

level with the Department for Education to gather evidence from children and young people around what improvements and changes they would like to see in terms of education for young people with SEND.

One important priority for the Alliance is on physical and mental health, and the challenges that young people with SEND have in accessing mental health care. From the work they have done with young people with SEND, some key takeaways are:

- There's a lack of understanding, support and awareness for SEND.
- There's a lack of willingness to adapt, learn and change from professionals when dealing with SEND
- There's a lack of specialist training.

As a result of this, they are campaigning for support and treatment that is better built for young people with SEND and removes barriers to access (such as expecting disabled people to come to services rather than taking services to disabled people).

Key message: Young people are incredibly able when they are given the support and opportunity to speak about their own experiences.

'They are the experts in the field when it comes to being a young person but also living with a special educational need or a disability.'

Key takeaways

Embedding youth work with the region/ your system

- **Use learning from past experience to shape future services.** Insights gathered over time from young people should inform how programmes evolve, not just guide individual projects.
- **Recognise that young people often belong to several groups or organisations.** This overlap helps connect work across different sectors and strengthens influence within systems like healthcare.
- **Apply youth work methods that are flexible and responsive.** Institutions may want youth involvement but often need support from youth organisations to make it meaningful.
- **Start small, stay consistent, and hand over ownership.** Genuine co-production builds young people's confidence and creates lasting community ties.
- **Invest in young people through fair pay, proper training, and trust.** Strong relationships and real investment ensure the work continues beyond any single project.

Creating long-term legacy

- **Legacy comes from small beginnings** ("a nugget") and persistence. Lasting change often starts small. Consistent effort, building strong networks, and keeping young people at the centre in the ownership turns early ideas into lasting impact.

- **Teach young people their rights.** Support young people to understand their rights, and create safe, empowering spaces where they feel confident to be heard on issues that matter to them.
- **Keep reinforcing and amplifying awareness** of CYP's rights. It is an ongoing process, not a one-off lesson.
- **Build genuine relationships** – it is the antidote to tokenism. Trust and connection, not token gestures, are what create real influence and long-term legacy.

Reflections from the participants

To close, participants were asked which one idea they would be taking away from the session. Two key reflections emerged:

1. People are taking back learning from what they heard during the session e.g. young adult's digital health charter, Young Ambassadors etc.

'Looking at ideas of how to capture Youth Voice and also developing Young Ambassadors (Bradford's idea). Thankyou. Really inspiring ideas today.'

2. A desire to reach out and work in partnership, strengthening collaboration and the need to action collaboration and not work in isolation.

'Understand what group are available in our areas, as we often assume we have to do this in isolation. Concerned we keep asking but not actioning'

Additional resources

- [Meet the HDRC Youth Ambassadors](#)
- [South Yorkshire Health Champions Manifesto](#)
- [Public & community involvement & engagement | SYDHH | The University of Sheffield](#)
- [Beyond Assumptions - Young Adults and Digital Health - YouTube](#)
- [This training is for young people aged between 14-25 years - YouTube](#)
- [Youth MCA FINAL 1 - YouTube](#)
- [Cohen's Story - Chilypep - YouTube](#)

Next steps

- For more details on what was covered in the workshop, please find the recording of the session here: [Celebrating youth voice and engagement in North-East and Yorkshire](#)
- The second national online workshop, titled *'Integrated Care Systems, Collaboration and Youth Voice'* will take place on 2nd December 1-4.30, and you can sign-up here: [Integrated Care Systems, Collaboration and Youth Voice](#). This session will explore how the Lundy Model of Participation can strengthen youth voice within Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), and how we can work together across regions to reduce duplication, maximise impact and build on the great work already happening.
- We have set up an online space on [Future NHS](#) to continue the conversation.