

London regional workshop #1: Youth engagement through cross-sector collaboration

6th May 2025

Nearly 30 people from across the London region and from a range of public agencies and voluntary organisations attended the workshop, with the aim to develop collaboration across health, local authorities, and Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations by sharing practice and insights. This workshop was facilitated by the [Institute for Voluntary Action Research](#) (IVAR) who is supporting the regional team with its existing network. This note is intended to help inform ongoing conversations about taking forward the ideas shared, both for those that attended the workshops and those unable to attend but interested in collaborating. It shares common themes and approaches that emerged from conversations in the workshop.

About Our Voice, Our Care Collaborative

The Our Voice, Our Care Collaborative was initiated in London in 2021 and includes approximately 30 professionals working to support children and young people engagement with health. Membership includes representation from NHS England, CYP ICB leads, VCSE stakeholders, local authorities, the Greater London Authority (GLA), and more.

This group to date has worked on the following:

- Setting up a community of practice network around children and young people engagement across health.
- Reviewing the range of models in place and our learning.
- In depth review of the Lundy model with the Anna Freud centre to assess how this can be used to help shape the work across London.

The group aims to reduce duplication and create greater coherence and impact across all of our respective work with CYP.

For those interested in learning more about the network, or joining, please email england.cyptransformationldn@nhs.net.

Aims of the network and workshop

1. To develop collaboration across health, local authorities, and Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations by sharing practice, data, and insight.
2. To reduce variation across the system and ensure that youth voice, where it has already been gathered, is shared and utilised effectively.
3. To share examples of best practice (e.g. the young people's schools survey) and ensure this insight is used to drive meaningful change across our system.

4. To strengthen partnerships and communication across organisations so that we increase our collective impact with and for young people.
5. To create joint areas of work and build stronger relationships across sectors.
6. To actively seek out, include, and amplify the voices of seldom-heard young people, ensuring equity in participation and that their perspectives shape our work.

These aims extend across the programme and this workshop focussed on aims three and four.

Shared vision for children and young people engagement and youth voice

Participants shared a broad and ambitious vision for the future of children and young people engagement in London. The aspirations gathered reflect a shared desire for more inclusive, impactful, and systemic approaches.

Youth-led engagement and decision-making

A central aspiration is to move towards truly youth-led engagement, where young people are not only consulted but actively shape decisions and agendas. The desire is for children and young people (CYP) to have leadership roles in both design and decision-making processes. A participant reinforced this by calling for a system that is *'truly youth led & closing feedback loop (feeding back to YP on how their involvement has changed things).'*

Embedding co-production and cross-sector collaboration

There was a shared hope for co-production to become the norm, with young people involved from the outset in shaping services and strategies. This includes breaking down silos across different agencies. The aspiration was for *'services for young people [to] be all co-designed and continually involved in decisions that affect them,'* and for joint working between statutory and voluntary organisations, as captured in the desire for *'spaces for LA, NHS and voluntary organisations to work together.'*

Accountability and meaningful feedback

Participants strongly emphasised the importance of accountability through clear, transparent feedback loops. There was a recurring concern about young people feeling their input was simply tokenistic, and a wish to ensure that their voices translate into visible change. One vision called for *'clear governance structures that demonstrate how we report back to YP,'* while another stressed the need for *'stronger mechanisms for feedback loops.'*

Inclusion, equity, and reaching marginalised youth

Ensuring that all young people — particularly those from marginalised or underserved communities — can meaningfully participate was a core part of the vision. Several participants advocated for approaches that go beyond traditional youth councils and reach young people where they are: *'Going to CYP where they are, rather than expecting them to join a participation group or a youth council.'*

Several boroughs are embedding young people directly into governance and strategic decision-making roles. This includes programmes where youth lead agendas, participate in high-level meetings, and influence public service design. For example, in Waltham Forest, young people have a formal role in their Young Advisors Programme in operation since 2008. From ages 13 to 25 young people are embedded in local authorities, sit on strategic boards, and lead on decision making.

Strong feedback mechanisms to ensure accountability

Some areas have implemented structured processes to ensure young people see the impact of their input. These feedback loops are designed to avoid tokenism and reinforce trust. One such model was described in detail: *'Our care-experienced Youth Council meets with Councillors, Service managers and directors every 2 months. They set the agenda and expect feedback as part of a 'You said, we did' approach. Further information is requested if young people are not satisfied with the feedback.'*

Inclusive and peer-to-peer engagement

There is an emphasis on inclusive practices that reach a wide range of young people, including through peer-led models. Waltham Forest's Streetbase programme is one such example: *'Peer to peer engagement, consulting over 3000 YP a year.'*

Incentivising participation and recognising contributions

Across multiple examples, youth engagement is being incentivised through payment and other forms of recognition. This includes both formal employment and stipends for advisory roles. One contributor stressed the principle that: *'ALWAYS pay your youth advisers for their time, to positively value them.'* Similarly, the Young Advisors in Waltham Forest *'are paid the London living wage,'* underscoring a commitment to valuing youth time and input.

Creative and context-specific engagement methods

Organisations are adapting to local needs and interests, using creative spaces and formats to engage youth in meaningful ways. The Southbank Centre, for instance, has taken steps to respond to post-COVID challenges by making its space more accessible: *'They have spoken in depth about the impact covid had on young people accessing creative spaces outside of local areas and wanting to promote creative engagement as having a significant relationship to increased wellbeing.'*

Collaboration between sectors to enhance reach

Effective youth engagement often relies on strong partnerships between local authorities, health services, and voluntary sector organisations. One such collaboration was described as: *'bringing a range of groups together to work with health to work on transforming the CAMHS services.'*

Opportunities for and enablers of collaboration

Participants identified a range of opportunities and enablers for greater collaboration in youth engagement. These reflections reveal a desire for more coordinated, strategic, and inclusive approaches.

Shared infrastructure and communication networks

A strong theme was the need for better systems to connect organisations and share what is already happening locally. Participants suggested the development of shared infrastructure such as local networks and directories. One idea was to create a *'local network of what is happening that can be shared with other organisations,'* and another was *'mapping youth engagement / participation structures in each borough and across London.'*

Clear strategic alignment and shared priorities

Participants highlighted the importance of aligning efforts across sectors and boroughs to ensure a coherent strategic direction. By agreeing on shared goals and outcomes, organisations can work more effectively together: *'Policy alignment and shared aims to improve outcomes in the longer term.'* Additionally, engaging young people in shaping those priorities was seen as essential: *'Agree priority areas with CYP.'*

Training and capacity building across sectors

Training to build confidence and to develop a common understanding of youth engagement, was frequently mentioned as an enabler of collaboration. There was concern that many professionals lack the skills to engage meaningfully with young people. One participant observed a *'Training Gap – lots of organisations do not have the skills [for] how to talk with/work with young people.'* Another suggestion was to provide *'training delivered by young people with lived experience,'* highlighting a desire for youth-led approaches to professional development.

Youth-led models and co-production as the norm

True co-production with young people was seen not only as a goal in itself but also as a driver of better collaboration between adults and institutions. Involving youth in designing systems and services can ensure that efforts are aligned with their needs and preferences. One participant emphasised this approach: *'Opportunity for young people to say what they would like the focus to be in the spirit of true co-production.'* Co-production was viewed as a foundation for more authentic and effective partnerships.

City-wide events and collective conversations

Finally, there was a clear aspiration for collective London-wide conversations that bring young people and professionals together across boroughs. A suggestion was made for *'1 pan-London, all borough, event annually to bring young people from each borough to discuss London-wide conversations.'* While acknowledging the limitations of current models like the London Youth Assembly, the group called for more representative and accessible ways of gathering input from local communities to influence city-wide planning.

Next steps

- This is a beginning of a conversation. We've set up an online space on [Future NHS](#) to continue the conversations. We will share invitations to this shortly.
- IVAR will be in touch with the other aspects of the offer, including details about:
 1. The first national webinar, 'Engaging Under-11s in Youth Voice: Inspiration for regional ICBs across England working with Children and Young People' taking place on Wednesday, 28th May 2025, 12pm to 1pm - [Register here](#). There will a second themed webinar later in the year.
 2. Two national workshops to hear from across the regions of England on their youth engagement and social action work.
 3. A second regional workshop in the late summer/autumn.

Resources shared

- More information about Waltham Forest: <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/youth-spaces-and-early-help-waltham-forest>
- The Centre for youth voice and the observatory: <https://www.ymcageorgewilliams.uk/centre-for-youth-voice/youth-voice-resource-hub>