



**Services for young people in Islington**

**Islington Youth:  
Better Futures Start Here!**

## The event: 'Islington Youth: Better Futures Start Here!'

'Islington Youth: Better Futures Start Here!' was held on 9<sup>th</sup> July at Lift, one of the two youth hubs for young people in Islington.

- 61 young people attended the event. They were aged between 13 and 20, with a spread on gender, schools attended, users and non-users of youth services for young people, areas living in Islington or surrounding areas and social class.
- 33 stakeholders also attended the event. These included service providers, members of Islington Council and community stakeholders.

It was a co-creative deliberative event. Participants were given bits of information to consider and discuss throughout the day, and were asked to develop ideas and solutions to the issues that came out of the discussions.

In the morning, young people and stakeholders separately discussed what life is like for young people in Islington. In the afternoon, the groups were brought together to discuss services for young people and develop ideas for new or existing services.

## Executive summary

*Islington provides a fun, vibrant and diverse environment for young people to live in. Young people and stakeholders feel that there is a great range of high quality services for young people already on offer in the borough and that these can be enhanced to create a broader, more diverse offer which would attract more young people.*

### Unique set of experiences

One of the main themes that came out from talking to young people is that no one type or size of service for young people fits all. Each young person needs to be able to choose what works for them so they need a range of formal and informal activities to choose from. These can then fit around their busy lives and gives them flexibility in terms of the type of activity they want to do as well as when and how often they want to do it.

### Communications

Whilst it is very clear that Islington Council already provides high quality services for young people, young people feel more could be done to communicate this.

13 to 16 year olds are very happy with the range and type of services currently available to them but feel that they need to be made aware of what is out there. They would like engaging and proactive communications and they would like to use outreach as a focal point for engagement, and especially work with schools. They also mention social media and the importance of word of mouth among young people.

### Service provision for the older age group

The older age group also feel that they need to be made more aware of the range of services on offer to young people in the borough.

However, they also want a broader spectrum of service provision, specifically to

encompass more 'life skills' and 'work readiness' aspects so they can feel prepared for life after school or college.

### Young people want their voice to be heard

Throughout the event, young people were really positive about taking part and helping to shape service provision in Islington and they would like to continue to be involved in this.

This particularly shone through in the ideas that young people came up with for new services in Islington. Having a say in determining services for young people would make them feel more relevant and engaging which they thought may attract more young people to attending these services.

### Engaging with the community

Another strong theme is that of engaging more with the wider community. Young people mentioned that they feel there can be a divide in Islington between young and old people, as well as a social divide linked to wealth, which they would like to bridge.

Many of the ideas they suggested involved bringing together different types of people in the borough to help create new links and friendships. This would help to break down intergenerational barriers as well as bringing together people with different skills so that peoples' experiences and expertise could be shared among the borough.

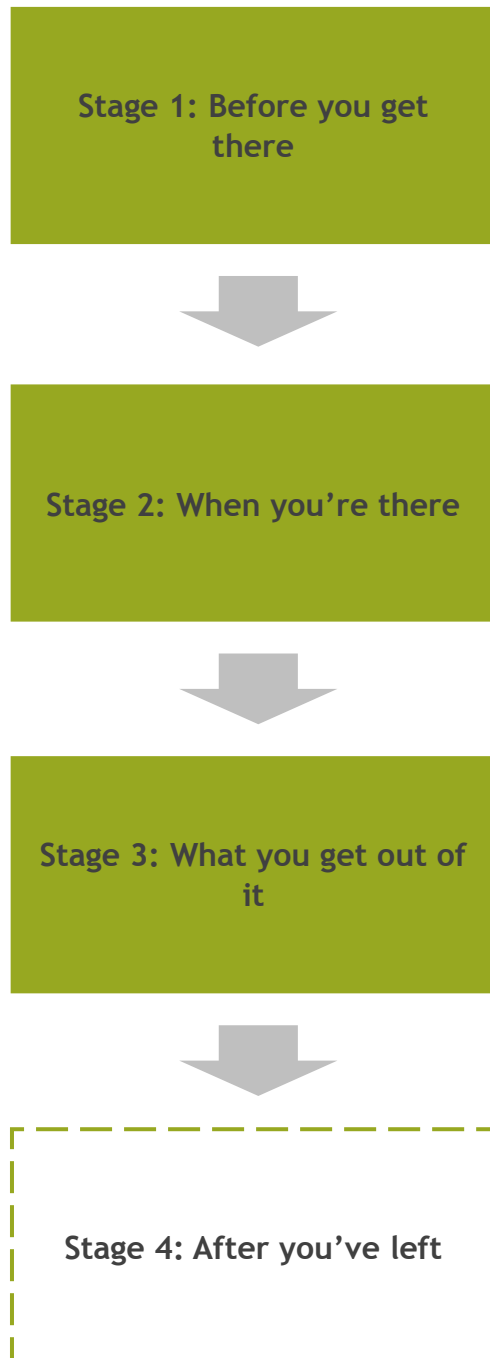


## What is an Islington young persons' world like?

Age	What are they focusing on?	What are they thinking about?	What are they doing in their free time?
13-14	<p>Themselves</p> <p>Day to day life</p>	<p>friends</p> <p>play</p> <p>feeling independent</p> <p>treated like grown ups</p> <p>not being bored</p> <p>time without parents</p> <p>fun stuff to do</p>	<p>Sports, youth clubs, cooking, listening to and playing music</p> <p>Spending time with people of the same sex</p> <p>Activities which are independent of parents, like going to the park with friends</p>
15-16	<p>Themselves</p> <p>Day to day life</p> <p>School</p>	<p>freedom</p> <p>independence</p> <p>cannot fit it all in</p> <p>time management</p> <p>busy exam stress</p> <p>revision</p> <p>school</p>	<p>Seeing friends, going to the cinema, shopping</p> <p>Activities which are independent of parents and teachers, like going to restaurants on their own</p>
17-20	<p>Themselves</p> <p>Day to day life</p> <p>School/college</p> <p>What's going on in Islington</p> <p>Job market</p>	<p>what next</p> <p>spontaneous</p> <p>apprenticeships</p> <p>work experience</p> <p>career prices</p> <p>future</p> <p>money</p>	<p>Hanging around with friends, deciding on the day rather than going to planned or organised activities</p>

## The service journey

All young people have unique experiences, needs and priorities which shape how they think about services, but each young person goes on the same three-stage journey to getting involved with services for young people.



### Stage 1: Before you get there

#### *Finding out what's on offer*

The first step to getting involved in services is knowing what's available. Young people lead busy lives and have many competing and varying priorities. In many cases information about services just had not cut through. In addition, they often assume services will be expensive or far away from where they live.

For 13-16 year olds a lot of the services they want already exist. The main reason they aren't using services is because they aren't aware of them.

Brand and reputation shapes their opinion of a service when they first hear about it.

*"I don't use the youth clubs - I didn't know about them until I started youth council. I think it's because I live on the outskirts of Islington. My friends don't know about them either"*

13-14 year old

#### *Getting parents on board*

Most young people, particularly those aged 13-16, need their parents to approve of the services they use and some needed parents to take them and pick them up. Reasons for parents not approving of some services for young people were parents not approving of an activity, the perception they have of the young people who attended it, or saying it finished too late (e.g. after 6pm). Some parents had stopped young people attending a service for young people.

13-14 year olds in particular feel they can't go to activities that aren't near their house, because their parents can't take them or it is too far to go on their own.

17-20 year ol

### ***Having the confidence to try it***

Across all age groups, young people often seem to lack the confidence to try new things without their friends and this prevents them getting involved in more services. They also worry about being judged for going to an activity that might be seen as 'uncool'. They want services that are welcoming and feel friendly.

13-14 year olds in particular said they wouldn't like to try a new service on their own.

*"You're just following what your friends are doing"*

13-14 year old

### **Stage 2: When you're there**


#### ***Seeing if it's right for you***

Young people want to be able to try services without committing to attending them for a certain period of time. Some suggested being able to come to one session without signing up or having taster sessions at their school.

#### ***A great first impression***

First impressions are extremely important to the young people we spoke to and several said that if they didn't like a service the first time they went they wouldn't go back. Their first impressions are shaped by the type of people that use the service and whether they feel they'd fit in and make friends. They want a service that feels fun, informal and welcoming.

*"It's about feeling welcomed - that first point of contact is really important"*



Ryan is a keen footballer and he used to play at his local football club but when he moved house he stopped going for a while because it was too far from where he lived.

13-14 year old

### ***'Not feeling like school'***

A key feature young people are looking for in a service is that they don't 'feel like school' - where staff are strict, there are lots of rules and young people feel they have to fit the mould. Young people want services to be somewhere they can have time to 'chill' and hang out with friends, rather than following a strict schedule. They also feel this should be reflected in their relationships with staff, which should be on a more equal footing than they have with their teachers.

17-20 year olds in particular want services to give them space to socialise with their friends away from the pressures of school or work. They like to be spontaneous with their friends and think services should reflect this, so they can come on an ad-hoc basis rather than having to be there every week.

*"Making a safer environment without making it feel like a school with an over-restricted atmosphere"*

17-20 year old

### ***Feeling empowered and listened to***


The young people we spoke to want services to be a place where they can be treated like adults and listened to. Young people feel that they should have a say in the shape of services and be able to share their opinions.

Young people all have unique experiences and interests and they want this to be reflected in the service they use. They want to be able to initiate and lead projects such as their own magazine or music group.

- Younger groups like the idea of mixing with older ages groups too, as it makes them feel they are being treated like adults.

*“Allow more youth to be in control of what youth services are provided for them”*

13-14 year old



Jack and Alex are running their own project at their youth club raising money to fund a trip for everyone at the club. They’ve taken the lead on coming up with ideas to raise money and making them happen!

13-14 year old

### **Feeling safe**

Young people want services to be a place where they feel safe. Staff should be supportive, any arguments dealt with quickly and they should be a place where there is no bullying.

In addition, young people need to feel safe going to and from services. Several stakeholders mentioned the importance of staff having an excellent knowledge of the local area, so they understand where young people will feel comfortable going to and from.

### **Inspiring staff**


Staff are a really important part of services for young people. Young people want staff who inspire them and who make activities fun. Some said that they like staff who are younger because they can relate to them more easily. Young people feel that staff should take the time to listen to them and understand their unique point of view.

Young people aged 17-20 who are thinking about their future are particularly interested in having young, inspiring mentors who can help them think about what to do next.

### **Fitting around busy lives**

Young people spoke about how their lives in Islington and at school are busy and hectic - they want services for young people to be somewhere they can relax and escape from everyday pressures.

Young people aged 15-16 can struggle to find the time for other activities and often find services clash with other commitments like revision classes. This can contribute to them feeling like they are being pulled in different directions. They often feel guilty for attending services for young people rather than revising or completing school work. They would like some flexibility through revision and exam periods.




Amira loves ballet and was going to classes every week until recently - her GCSEs got in the way and she stopped going because she was worried about her exams.

15-16 year old

17-20 year olds are also very busy with work, school work and work experience and feel they might not be able to commit to a set time each week. When they have free time, they like to socialise with friends rather than do organised activities. Most don’t have a sense that they need to fill their time with regular, planned activities.

*“A lot of young people find something to do anyway and it’s not usually ‘services’ and so that’s why they don’t use them”*

17-20 year old



Dean plays a lot of football with his friends. He uses the council astro-turf but he doesn’t want to have to organise and plan this in advance. They just want to be able to turn up and play.

17-20 year old



### Stage 3: What you get out of it

#### *Having a good time*

Attending any kind of service for young people is about coming together with your friends, feeling relaxed and having fun and a good time!

#### *Friends*

Building friendships is an important part of services for any age group.

For 13-14 year olds their top priority is making friends who they can keep in touch with after they leave.

#### *Health and fitness*

Many of the services for young people are programmes for health and fitness. Young people like these types of services as being healthy and active is important to them.

#### *Gaining skills*

Whilst young people do perceive services as being fun and somewhere they can socialise, they do also want services for young people to help them build towards achieving new skills or building on existing skills.

15-16 year olds often said they want to improve at a sport or learn something new like cooking or drumming.

17-20 year olds in particular want to leave services for young people with a new skill set. This may be qualifications or skills they can reference on their CV. Others mentioned learning 'life skills' - like how to pay tax.



Sophia uses the gym, she is motivated to carry on going when she sees "physical improvements" and changes in her fitness. She'l feels it important to use her time productively to constantly better herself.

15-16 year old

### *Personal challenges tackled*

Young people are all on their own unique journey in their interactions with services. They often suggested they have a personal challenge they want to overcome through the services they use.

For 13-14 year olds and 15-16 years this is often about building confidence.

For 17-20 year olds it may be a decision about what to do next in terms of university or a career.

#### *Accreditation*

Some young people mentioned gaining an accreditation at the end of a programme can be really useful. Accreditations are important for justifying to parents why young people are using services, as well as having a record for putting on CVs.

#### *An ongoing support network*

For 15-16 year olds and 17-20 year olds having an ongoing support network is really important. They spoke about having staff or mentors who can continue to support them with decisions about what to do in their career or school life.

### Stage 4: After you've left

The older young people talked about what happens when they stop using services for young people and that they often don't know what else is available to them. Emotional and practical preparation for making that step is an important part of the service journey.



# An overview of services for young people in Islington

Overall Islington is seen to offer an impressive variety of high quality services for young people. Young people and stakeholders want to see Islington building on this strong base and are excited by what could be achieved in the future.

*In particular Islington is doing well on Stages 2 and 3 of the service journey; young people who use services report a good experience and clearly feel that they are getting a lot out of it.*

*Areas for improvement mainly relate to Stages 1 and 4 of the service journey. Young people and stakeholders identified three key areas that should be prioritised for improving services for young people:*

- Awareness-raising
- Hub versus local provision
- Services for older age groups

## What's working well?

### Stage 2: When you're there

Young people who use services for young people in Islington are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences. Stakeholders are also in agreement that current services are being delivered to a very high standard.

Both audiences identified three key strengths to the way services are currently being delivered:

#### *Friendly and engaging staff*

- Staff make them feel welcome as soon as they walk into venues
- Staff offer encouragement and are given credit for engaging young people straight away and offering a welcoming environment

### *Fun and safe atmosphere*

- Venues in Islington are relaxed; young people are happy to spend time in Islington youth hubs and clubs without feeling forced to do activities
- Venues are safe places where they don't fear bullying or incidents

### *Variety*

- The impressive variety of activities on offer across the borough means there is 'something for everyone'
- Young people do feel they are offered a good balance of organised and unorganised activity

*"I think there's absolutely lots and lots of opportunities, for both the people represented in this room and for many, many others in the arts, sports sectors etc."*

Stakeholder

### Stage 3: What you get out of it

Young people feel they are getting a lot out of their experiences. In particular, they credited services with giving them opportunities to broaden their horizons.

#### *Personal development*

- Through services for young people they have had the opportunities to initiate and lead their own projects e.g. starting a magazine
- Activities they have taken part in and the staff at youth services for young people have enabled them to develop new skills
- These services also provide young people with a forum to interact with inspiring mentors and youth workers.

#### *Social skills*

- Whilst young people do raise the issue of only using services in their locality, they like that services for young people allow them to mix with a range of people.

## Areas to consider

### Stage 1: Before you get there

#### *Awareness raising*

This is seen as absolutely key to ensuring that youth services for young people in Islington have the greatest possible impact. Young people who use services are passionate about finding ways to reach out to those who are not currently engaged so that they can also benefit from them.

Young people have a strong sense that more can be done to spread the word on services for young people in Islington. In particular, they highlight the need to take services to young people, such as by going into schools and showcasing what is on offer. When communicating about services, young people need to be told that services are free to counter the misconception that they are expensive.

Stakeholders also emphasise the need for raising greater awareness and agree that schools should be a central part of this strategy. They note that the best way to work with schools is to emphasise a partnership approach by showing how services for young people will help meet their objectives, especially linking it to the curriculum.

*“They should come to schools to let more people know what’s going on”*

13-14 year old

*“Schools are committed but because there is so much going on they haven’t got round to taking part - you need to show them how it will help the curriculum”*

Stakeholder

*“I think there is probably lots and lots of great stuff but we need to work more to ensure more young people know about it”*

Stakeholder

#### *Hub versus local provision*

Young people and stakeholders note that provision is currently delivered primarily through centralised youth hubs. Whilst this works well for those already engaged with services for young people, it poses a challenge for drawing in those who are less inclined to go out of their local area and comfort zone.

Local provision, where services are brought to young people, is seen to offer a real opportunity for reaching previously uninterested young people. The work done by Arsenal in the Community is noted by young people as a good example of this, and there is an appetite for more such local level engagement,

Stakeholders are also interested in how local work could be used as a bridge for bringing young people into the hubs.

*“I think we need youth services closer to people’s homes so they don’t have to travel far”*

15-16 year old

*“It’s about a balance between local estate based provision and the excellence of the hub provision. There should be a relationship between them, not done in isolation”*

Stakeholder

*“Some young people in difficult circumstances are not able to access all hubs”*

Stakeholder

#### **Stage 4: After you leave**

##### ***Services for older age groups***

The older age group (17-20 year olds) want to see a rebalancing of activities towards a greater emphasis on utility and practical use. They feel that currently services are geared towards creating fun and engaging activities that hold most appeal for younger age groups. What they would like to see more of are services that aim to plug knowledge gaps and provide skills that will prepare young adults for life outside of school.

##### ***Becoming mentors or staff***

One suggestion from the older age group is that young people can stay involved in services after they leave by becoming mentors or even staff at the hubs or clubs. This means that they stay involved with the services for young people after they stop using them, as well as providing the young people attending with access to relatable, inspiring staff.

##### ***What happens next***

Some stakeholders believe that current service provision ends suddenly for young people as soon as they turn 18. As there is service provision for young people beyond this, there seems to be a misconception that it ends abruptly which needs to be addressed.

The wider theme of what do young people do next after they stop using services for young people is a sentiment echoed in some of the comments from the older age groups. This age group showed an appetite for continued 'bridging' support to help them make the transition into the working world.

*"It's the 18 to 24 group that are a bit lost, we need to create a social club for that age group. They don't want to go to youth club so we need that middle space. A bit like a youth club but for that age group"*

Stakeholder

*"I know a lot of my friends would go for a mentoring service. They'd get networking and advice, the right advice is key"*

17-20 year old

## Ideas for the future

The young people at the event developed an incredible range of new, creative ideas for services for young people in Islington. These reflect the many unique and individual experiences that shape what young people think of and what they want from services.

It is clear that there can be no one size fits all approach to providing services for young people and no neat categorization by age. A key principle must always be to listen to the individual and respond to their particular interests and needs as far as possible.

In this section we have pulled out the overarching themes that characterise what young people are asking for and the ideas that young people came up with. This is by no means an exhaustive list!

### *An overview of the themes*

*There are some clear themes that run through the ideas that young people suggested. Some ideas only fall under one theme, whilst other ideas contain a number of the themes.*

*When thinking about services for young people, young people focus on their relationship with the community both in terms of bringing different types of people together, from different backgrounds or ages, as well as learning from different groups or members of the community.*

*The diagram below summarises the key themes from the ideas that young people developed:*



## **Giving young people more of a voice**

Young people showed real excitement at the opportunity the event provided for them to make their voices heard. There is demand for more such opportunities and a sense that this would not only benefit the young people involved but would also lead to better services and greater engagement on the part of young people.

There is also a high degree of interest in the role of the Islington Youth Council and ways of extending the role of young people in shaping future service provision. For many the event was the first example of young people having real influence that they had experienced.

## **More engagement with the community**

Many of the ideas that came out of the day reflect a desire for more integration between young people and the wider Islington community. Young people spoke of wanting to feel accepted and part of the community but also of wanting to feel that they are benefitting from living in such a culturally rich and prosperous place.

## **Promoting culture and diversity**

Islington is known for being a multicultural and diverse borough to live in and young people and stakeholders want to promote and celebrate this.

## **Providing support and advice**

This was of particular interest for the younger age group (13-16) who are looking for opportunities to broaden their social horizons but need to feel that they are in a safe and comfortable space to have the courage to do so.

This age group want to interact with their older peers and with people from different postcodes/ areas as them but are afraid of doing so without the safeguards provided by organised activity. Fun activities, particularly team-based ones, provide the

space to overcome fears and gain more confidence.

## **Opportunities for building skills and becoming 'work-ready'**

This is of particular interest to the 17-20 age group who feel under-prepared for what is coming next in their lives and are anxious to plug knowledge gaps and build up the skills that will help them make a success of their first steps into the world of work.

In particular, young adults show concern that they have little or no knowledge of financial planning as this is not an area taught in school. There is also a high degree of interest in finding ways to tap into the professional expertise and networks of Islington residents.

## **Mentors and role models**

A theme throughout a lot of the ideas from young people was a desire for mentors and role models. They want contact with relatable people who are knowledgeable across a range of areas.

## **Having fun!**

All the ideas young people suggested have an element of fun in them, and this is very important for attracting and maintaining lots of different types of young people. Young people do want services that will help build their skills but they also want services and hubs to be areas where you can relax and spend time with friends.

## Communications

Whilst much is done to inform young people about services available to them, young people feel that not enough is done to reach those young people who have yet to be convinced of the benefits of using services. To reach those young people, communications need to be engaging and proactive.

*Young people suggested a number of ways for how this can be achieved including engaging with young people in schools and via outreach; promoting services via WOM and social media and making information as accessible and tailored to young people as possible.*

### **Using schools as a focal point for engagement**

Schools are seen as key to reaching young people. To be convincing, activities must be 'sold' to young people - not just communicated e.g. by having youth workers go into schools and showcase services.

Stakeholders note that schools are extremely busy and that teachers need to be brought on board in order for this to work.

### **Word of mouth**

Young people all feel that the single most effective way to get them interested in something is through their friends. Encouraging service users to spread the word and tapping into social media networks are all seen as potential ways to build hype and broaden reach.

### **Social media**

Young people agree that social media is key but caution that young people all use social media differently. To reach as many young people as possible you need to use a wide range of channels and use them creatively.

### **Make information about services as accessible as possible**

The more informed young people feel that the information online does not do justice to the range and quality of the services available. They would like to see more information on the website.

Information can also be tailored to young people and Islington e.g. through an Islington youth app with a map of the borough which shows what is happening where.

### **Outreach**

A highly effective way of reaching those who are unengaged is to take services to them and show them first-hand what they are missing. This can be done through taster sessions or short courses offered in local areas which would then be used to draw young people into the youth hubs.