



Mental Wellbeing Report

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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TEAM

Secretary General: Andrew King

President: Catherine Durkin

Report Writer: Leighann Ryan Culleton

Graphic Designer: Lucia Lopez Gutierrez

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1. Executive Summary

CONTEXT

Youth mental health and wellbeing remain pressing concerns across Europe. Youth clubs are community-based organisations, that provide safe, inclusive spaces where young people can participate in voluntary activities outside formal education settings.

The review commissioned by the European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC) integrates organisational survey data and youth voice insights to examine how member organisations are supporting mental health, the challenges they face, and the strategic opportunities ahead.

KEY FINDINGS

i) Mental Health is Embedded in Practice

Across member organisations, mental health and wellbeing are integrated into everyday youth work through:

- » Safe and inclusive environments.
- » Informal mentoring and trusted adult support.
- » Structured activities.

While commitment is strong at practice level, fewer organisations report formalised strategies, dedicated funding, or shared impact frameworks, indicating a need for greater strategic alignment and sustainability.

ii) Post COVID Needs are More Complex

Organisations report continued increases in:

- » Anxiety and emotional regulation challenges.
- » Social withdrawal and reduced confidence.
- » Demand for one-to-one support.

Youth workers are responding to more complex needs, often without proportional increases in resources or specialist access.

iii) Impact Measurement Require Strengthening

Although organisations observe clear positive outcomes, monitoring approaches are often informal. A light touch, shared impact framework with strength and evidence, finding leverage, and advocacy at European level.

iv) Youth Voice

Young people describe youth clubs as safe, accepting spaces where they feel heard and free from pressure. They associate participation with improved confidence, stronger friendships, and a sense of belonging. When asked about current challenges, young people highlight academic pressure, social media, loneliness, and financial stress. When imagining one change that would most improve youth mental health, they called for reduced pressure, slower pace of life, more kindness towards each other and a mix of structured and informal mental health supports. Their insights reinforce the preventative rule that view clubs as protective environments within increasingly demanding social contexts.

v) Strategic implications for ECYC

The findings highlight the following priority areas:

- » Strengthening strategic integration.
- » Workforce development and training.
- » Shared impact monitoring framework.
- » Youth voice in design and advocacy.
- » Sustainable funding structures.

CONCLUSION

Youth clubs across Europe are functioning as critical mental health promotion settings. True relational practice and inclusive community environments, they are building resilience and protective social networks for young people. With co-ordinated strategic investment and stronger impact evidence, ECYC is well positioned to lead a coherent, preventative approach to youth mental health across Europe. Youth work is not an add-on to mental health systems - it is preventative infrastructure.

2. Purpose, Context & Scope

ECYC's rationale for proposing this topic stems from the urgent need to address mental well-being challenges among young people, particularly as the long-term repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to this day. Now six years removed from the beginning of the pandemic, countless youth whose social and academic lives were upended are still working to make sense of the resulting chaos. Beyond the pandemic, the climate crisis, multiple armed conflicts, and economic challenges have intensified existing mental health issues, highlighting the importance of equipping youth workers with the skills and competencies needed to support young people, especially those from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds.

At the same time, there is growing recognition of the importance of inclusion in youth work, underscoring the need for a dedicated effort to strengthen inclusive practices within youth clubs and open youth work settings.

Through this lens, ECYC commissioned this intersectional assessment to focus on the collection of evidence about mental health challenges affecting young people

and how these challenges deepen inclusion gaps within the youth community. At the same time, it explored the different ways youth clubs support vulnerable groups and foster resilience. Through this intersectional analysis, we aimed to build a comprehensive understanding of the strategies and practices youth clubs use to address mental health challenges among disadvantaged youth.

The assessment was critical for both establishing a strong foundation for the project and to ensure that efforts are both targeted and effective. By identifying the strengths as well as areas for improvement within youth clubs, ECYC is now better positioned to guide meaningful and impactful actions throughout the membership.

3. Methodology

This review gathered perspectives from three key stakeholders: member organisations, young people, and youth workers. Separate questionnaires were designed for each group in order to capture experiences and practices relating to mental health and wellbeing support within youth clubs.

a. Organisational Perspective

A structured questionnaire was designed and disseminated to all member organisations (See Appendix 1). A total of 15 organisations completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire explored strategic integration, programme delivery, partnerships, staff capacity, impact monitoring, challenges and future priorities relating to mental health and wellbeing.

b. Young People's Perspective

A separate questionnaire was developed for young people attending member organisations (See Appendix 2). The survey gathered demographic information alongside questions relating to participation, experiences of support, perceived impact, and priorities for mental health and wellbeing within youth clubs.

A total of 17 young people completed the survey. The age profile indicates predominantly older youth cohort, with nearly half of the respondents aged 19 and over (47.1%). A further 23.5% were aged 14 + and 17.6% were aged 16+, while smaller proportions were aged 13 + (5.9%) and 18 + (5.9%). This suggests the findings primarily reflect the perspective of older adolescents and young adults.

In terms of gender responses these were relatively balanced with 52.9% identifying as male and 41.2% as female. A further 5.9% identified as non-binary, indicating some gender diversity with the sample.

Regarding length of involvement in their youth club, half the respondents (50%) reported to be involved for more than one year, suggesting strong engagement and established relationships within their clubs. A further 25% have been involved for six months, smaller proportions reported shorter engagement periods including 3-6 months (6.3%), and less than 3 months (6.3%), and those who only recently started (12.5%). Overall, the profile

indicates that responses largely reflect the views of young people who are relatively well established within their clubs alongside a smaller number of new members.

c. Youth Workers Perspective

A third questionnaire was developed for youth workers (See Appendix 3) to explore frontline perspectives, implementation challenges and support needs. However, no youth workers completed the survey. As a result, the findings presented in the report reflect organisational perspectives and young people's experiences only.

4. Organisational Findings

4.1 Strategic Integration

This section explores how ECYC member organisations conceptualize and integrate mental health and wellbeing at a strategic level.

KEY INSIGHT

Across ECYC member organisations, youth mental health and wellbeing are understood not as a standalone service but as outcomes cultivated through everyday youth work practice. Strategic integration is reflected in values-driven organisational visions that prioritise safe spaces, participation, relationships, and preventative approaches, positioning youth clubs as mental health promoting environments rather than clinical providers.

ORGANISATION'S VISION FOR SUPPORTING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Across ECYC member organisations, youth mental health and wellbeing are consistently described as a core element of organisational vision and purpose, rather than a discrete area of work. Respondents emphasise a holistic and embedded approach, where wellbeing is woven into everyday youth work practice, organisational culture, and relationships with young people. Rather than positioning themselves as mental health service providers, organisations articulate a shared vision of youth clubs as mental health promoting environments, spaces that foster confidence, belonging, connection, and resilience through participation, relationships, and safe, inclusive settings.

"Supporting the wellbeing and mental health of young people is a priority that is fundamental to everything we do."

SAFE WELCOMING AND YOUTH FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

A strong theme across responses is the importance of safe, welcoming, and youth-friendly spaces. Organisations describe creating environments where young people feel comfortable, respected, and able to be themselves from the moment they enter a youth club. Emotional safety, trust, and non-judgemental support are viewed as essential foundations for positive mental health.

"From the moment you enter any of our buildings, you're met with a warm welcome and an immediate sense that you're in a youth-friendly space."

PREVENTATIVE AND EARLY INTERVENTION ORIENTATION

Mental health support is frequently framed in preventative and early-intervention terms. Organisations highlight their role in recognising early signs of distress, and reducing stigma, and providing timely support through trusted relationships. Respondents are clear about the boundaries of youth work, noting that while youth organisations do not replace specialised or clinical services, they play a critical role in signposting, peer support, and early response.

"Open youth work should not provide specialised mental health care, but it plays a key role in prevention, peer support, and signalling need."

PARTICIPATION, AGENCY, AND BELONGING

Participation and agency emerge as central to organisational visions for mental wellbeing. Many organisations emphasise empowering young people to shape activities, choose topics that matter to them, and engage in creative, social, and experiential learning. This participatory approach is seen as building confidence, purpose, and a sense of belonging – all of which are closely linked to mental wellbeing.

"Our projects are designed around young people choosing the topics and actions that matter to them, helping build confidence, purpose, and belonging."

WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND VALUES DRIVEN PRACTICE

Organisations also highlight the importance of skilled and supported youth workers in realising this vision. Investment in training, professional development, and staff wellbeing is repeatedly referenced, alongside a commitment to inclusive practice, trauma-informed approaches, and awareness of neurodiversity, LGBTQI+ inclusion, and emotional literacy.

"Empowering youth workers with the tools to recognise and address early signs of distress is essential to supporting young people's wellbeing."

STRATEGIC INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE

Across responses, there is a clear and shared understanding that youth mental health is not addressed through single programmes or interventions, but through consistent, relational, and values-driven youth work. Organisations envision youth clubs as everyday spaces where young people can connect with peers, build skills, express themselves, and feel supported – contributing to mental wellbeing in ways that are both preventative and sustainable.

"Giving young people space to meet peers, experiment, and organise is in itself supporting mental health."

Overall, organisational visions reflect a strong alignment around youth mental health as something that is cultivated through relationships, participation, inclusion, and everyday practice. This positions youth clubs as vital contributors to young people's mental health and wellbeing across diverse European contexts, while recognising their distinct role within the wider systems of support.

4.2 Programme Delivery

This section examines how youth organisations deliver mental health, and wellbeing supports in practice, focusing on the scale of provision, methods of delivery, and types of supports offered to young people.

KEY INSIGHT

Mental health and wellbeing support are predominantly delivered through embedded, relationship-based youth work practices, rather than true form and or discrete interventions. While the scale of delivery varies across organisations, there is a strong emphasis on preventative and promotional approaches integrated into regular youth club activities.

SCALE OF PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Organisations reported delivering a wide range of mental health and wellbeing initiatives over the past year. While some organisations were able to identify a clear number of discrete programmes or sessions delivered, others described their work as ongoing, embedded within long term projects, our integrated across multiple areas of practice.

"It's hard to put a number on it – mental health is more embedded in long-term projects rather than standalone initiatives."

A small number of organisations reported delivering a high volume of structured initiatives, often supported by dedicated staff and specialist programmes. However the majority described a more targeted approach with wellbeing supports delivered through specific activities, sustained programmes or integrated youth work practice rather than multiple standalone interventions.

The variation suggests that mental health and wellbeing support is conceptualised differently across organisations, with many viewing delivery as continuous relational process, rather than a series of countable initiatives.

METHODS OF DELIVERY

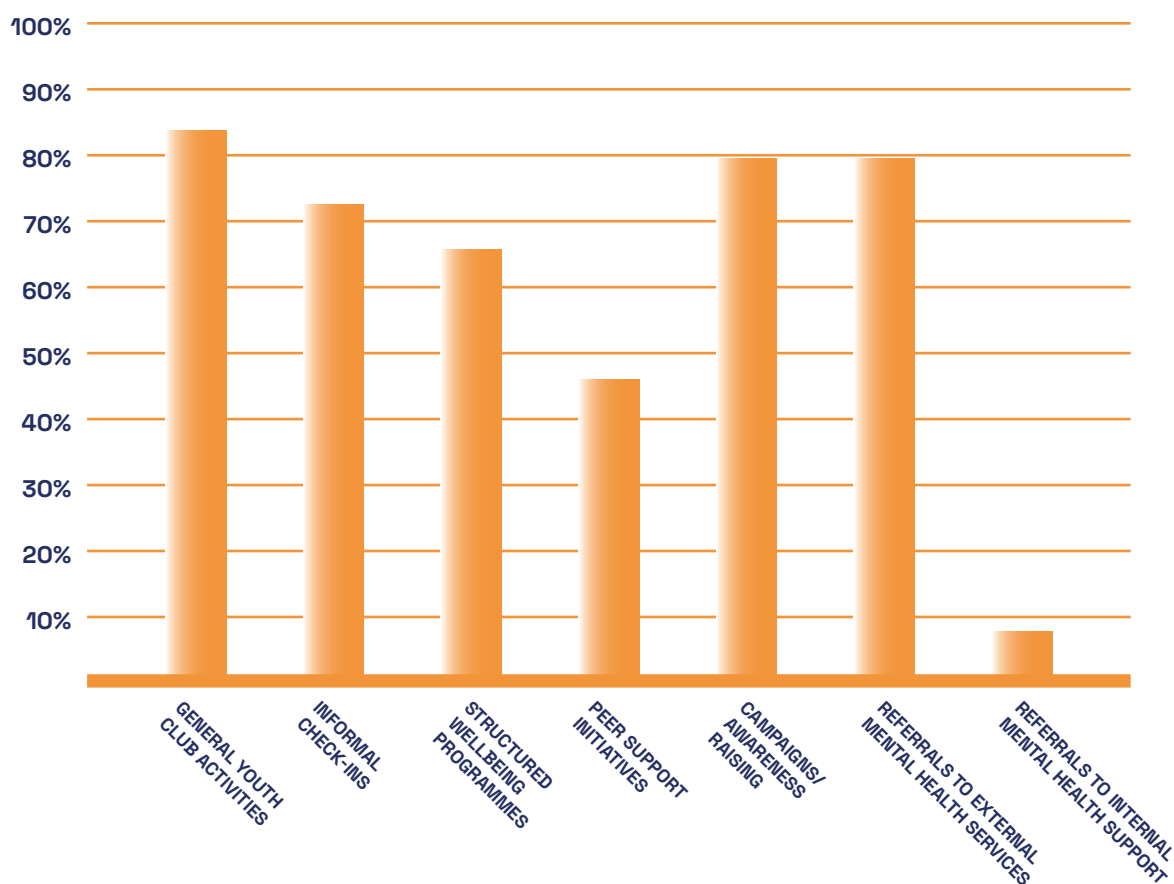
Mental health and wellbeing support are delivered through a variety of approaches with a strong emphasis on informal and relational methods. The most commonly reported methods include informal conversations and relationship-based support, integration into regular youth club activities, and in person group-based programmes or workshops. More structured approaches such as one-to-one support sessions with youth workers or peer-led initiatives, were reported less frequently. Community events and awareness campaigns also form part of programme delivery for some organisations, though these were less dominant overall. This pattern highlights central role of trusted relationships in everyday engagement in youth work practice, reinforcing the sector's focus on early intervention and prevention rather than reactive or clinical responses.

Across responses, organisations describe delivering mental health and wellbeing supports through a combination of structured programmes, informal practices, and partnership-based approaches. These can be broadly grouped into the following delivery:

- » **Structured mental health and wellbeing workshops**, including programmes focused on emotional literacy, resilience, mindfulness, and self-care.
- » **Peer-led and youth-initiated activities**, such as discussion circles, youth advisory panels, creative actions, and community-based wellbeing initiatives.
- » **Counselling and targeted supports**, including recovery-focused projects and access to professional mental health practitioners.
- » **Training and capacity-building for youth workers and volunteers**, including national and international training courses and specialist mental health training.
- » **Awareness-raising and prevention campaigns**, addressing topics such as anxiety, burnout, social media impact, substance use, and help-seeking.
- » **Creative, outdoor, and physical wellbeing activities**, including arts-based programmes, nature-based activities, sport, and movement.
- » **Partnership-based initiatives**, delivered in collaboration with schools, municipalities, health services, psychologists, and community organisations.

TYPES OF SUPPORTS

Organisations reported offering a broad range of mental health and wellbeing supports to young people. The most common supports include the general youth club activities that promote wellbeing (86.6%), including sports, arts, volunteering, and social spaces, alongside informally wellbeing check-ins or conversations with youth workers (73.3%).



Campaigns and awareness raising activities (80%) and referrals to external mental health services (80%) were also highly reported. Structured wellbeing programmes or workshops (66.7%), and peer support initiatives (46.7%), though to a lesser extent were reported by fewer organisations indicating that most organisations position their role within promotion, prevention, and supportive environments, rather than as providers of specialist or clinical care.

4.3 Youth Involvement

Responses indicate that many organisations have moved beyond one-off consultations and are actively creating structures, opportunities, and supportive environments that enable young people to lead mental health and well-being initiatives. Youth involvement is most effective where organisations provide facilitation, resources, and safe spaces while allowing young people genuine autonomy over ideas, formats, and delivery.

Organisations reported supporting youth leadership through a range of mechanisms, including youth advisory groups, peer-to-peer models, Co-design processes, and informal youth work settings that encourage ongoing dialogue about mental health and well-being. In these contexts, youth workers play a facilitative role - supporting planning, safeguarding, and reflection, while young people take the lead in shaping content, messaging, and delivery.

Several organisations described how they supported young people to initiate and deliver campaigns, workshops, events, and creative outputs related to mental health. This included providing access to training, venues, digital tools, partnerships, and funding, as well as linking youth-led activity to wider organisational priorities, local strategies, and national awareness initiatives.

Importantly, youth-led mental health activity was most evident in organisations where participation is embedded as a core value, rather than treat it as a standalone project. These organisations demonstrated a clear commitment to shared decision making, recognising young people as experts in their own experiences and as active contributors to organisation and learning, service development, and community well-being.

Overall, the findings suggest that organisations play a critical role in enabling meaningful youth involvement in mental health and wellbeing with effective practice characterised by trust, flexibility, resourcing, and a clear commitment to youth voice within organisational culture and delivery.

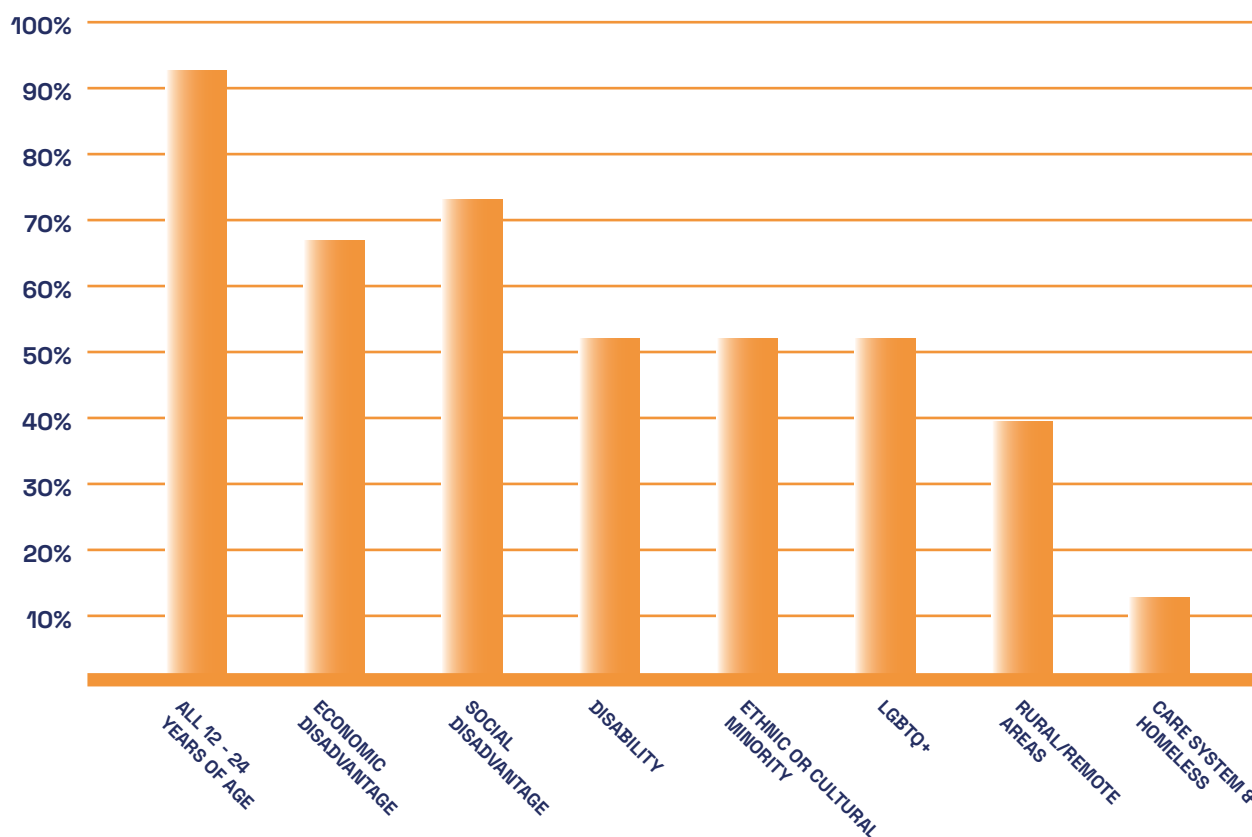
4.4 Inclusion & Reach

This section explores the reach of mental health and wellbeing initiatives across different groups of young people.

KEY INSIGHT

Despite ongoing structural challenges organisations are actively promoting inclusion and accessibility through relationship-based, youth-centered approaches, with a strong emphasis on local partnerships, co-creation with young people, and flexible delivery models. These strategies highlight the sector's capacity to adapt, build trust, and reduce barriers to mental health support, even within constrained funding and service environments.

GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE ORGANISATIONS SPECIFICALLY FOCUS ON SUPPORTING THROUGH MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING INITIATIVES



Respondents from the participating organisations show that mental health and wellbeing initiatives are primarily designed for young people aged 12 to 24, with the majority indicating that their provision is open to all young people within this age range. In addition, to this universal reach, many organisations also reported a specific focus on young people experiencing social disadvantage (73.3%) and economic disadvantage (66.7%). A number of organisations also identified targeted work with young people with disabilities (53.3%), those from ethnic or cultural minority backgrounds (53.3%), and LGBTQI + (53.3%), highlighting a commitment to inclusive and responsive service delivery. While fewer organisations indicated a focus on young people in rural or remote areas (40%) and those involved in the care system or experiencing homelessness (13.4%), this reflects the more specialised and resource intensive nature of provision for these groups rather than a lack of need.

CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY

- **Stigma and Attitudinal Barriers**

Stigma remains a key challenge, particularly among some young people, parents, and wider communities. While many organisations noted increasing openness among young people, stigma was reported to persist in certain contexts, with gender barriers evident in particular. Some young males were described as reluctant to engage due to embarrassment, discomfort, or norms linked to masculinity.

"A major challenge is to combat stigma and attitudes that minimise the problems young people face."

- **Reaching the Most Marginalised**

Several organisations highlight difficulties in engaging highly marginalised or disengaged young people, especially those not already involved in new clubs or structured activities. Project-based or outreach models were seen as less effective in reaching young people with complex needs, underscoring challenges in early engagement and prevention.

- **Funding, Capacity, and Specialist Support**

Short-term project-based funding was frequently cited as limiting continuity and long-term impact. Organisations also noted capacity constraints, as youth workers are not mental health specialists and often rely on external services. Limited availability of specialist supports, long waiting times, and the cost of private care further restrict access for young people.

"Lack of specific funding for this type of work inhibits our activities."

- **Geographic and Access Barriers**

Geographic isolation, particularly in rural and remote areas, continues to affect participation with transport and follow up supports posing ongoing challenges. While digital approaches help extend reach, a digital divide persists, limiting access for some young people.

"The rural nature of this country is a big issue for young people outside of the main towns."

- **Systematic Pressures**

Respondents also pointed to broader systems-level issues, including service fragmentation, staff turnover affecting trust and continuity, and increasing pressure on Youth Services to respond to gaps in statutory mental health provision.

Overall organisations demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusion; however, challenges are largely structural rather than attitudinal, reflecting funding limitations, capacity pressures, and wider system constraints. These findings highlight the essential role of

Youth Services in providing accessible, preventable mental health supports, alongside the need for sustained investment and stronger cross sector collaboration.

APPROACHES TO PROMOTING INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY

- **Partnership and collaborative working**

A central strategy by the majority of respondents involved strengthening partnerships with schools, youth centres, community organisations, and specialist services. By working through existing local structures and trusted settings, organisations reported improved reach particularly among young people who may not otherwise engage. Collaboration with psychologists, educators, disability services, and youth-friendly mental health supports was also used to enhance capacity and ensure appropriate referral pathways.

- **Youth Participation in Co-creation**

Many organisations emphasise the importance of actively involving young people in the design and delivery of initiatives, peer LED approaches and youth consultation. Small group discussions were used to build trust, increase relevance and reduce stigma. Involving beneficiaries directly was seen as a key to ensuring programmes reflect young people's real needs and lived experiences.

"We always try to involve the beneficiaries directly to make sure the work reflects what young people actually need."

- **Relationship Based and Trust Focused Practice**

Respondents highlighted relationship building as a core mechanism for promoting inclusion, particularly with groups traditionally considered hard to reach. This included spending time establishing trust, maintaining continuity of staff where possible, working through schools and community agencies, and offering pre-engagement conversations before group activities. Consistency and visibility were seen as critical to being viewed as a 'trusted' service.

- **Flexible and Accessible Delivery**

Organisations adopted blended delivery models, combining face to face supports with online content such as webinars, videos, and social media resources. This flexibility helped address geographic and transport barriers, while also offering young people choice and how to engage. Practical supports such as organising transport or delivering activities locally, further reduced participation barriers.

"Combining face to face supports with online options allows us to reach young people regardless of location or transport."

- **Capacity Building and Inclusive Practice**

To strengthen inclusion, organisations invested in staff training and development, including trauma-informed practice, neurodiversity, and anti-racism training. Attention was also given to inclusive non-judgmental, and culturally sensitive language, alongside targeted supports for minority groups, migrant communities, LGBTQI+ young people, and young people with disabilities.

Overall, organisations are actively addressing inclusion and accessibility through collaborative, youth-centered and flexible approaches, underpinned by strong local relationships. While capacity and resource constraints remain, these strategies demonstrate a clear commitment to reducing barriers, building trust, and ensuring mental health supports are accessible to diverse groups of young people.

4.5 Staff & Volunteer Capacity

This section explores how organisations currently support staff and volunteers to develop knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to promote and respond to young people's mental health and wellbeing.

KEY INSIGHT

Organisations place significant value on supporting staff and volunteers to respond to young people's mental health and wellbeing, particularly through training, supervision, and peer learning. While many strong practices are already in place, respondents identified clear opportunities to further strengthen skills through more targeted, practical, and specialist training.

HOW ORGANISATIONS CURRENTLY SUPPORT STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS TO DEVELOP KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING.

Organisations reported a wide range of existing supports, which can be grouped into the following areas:

Training and Continuous Professional Development

- » Internal training programmes for staff and volunteers.
- » National and international training opportunities.
- » CBDs focused on mental health and wellbeing.
- » Evidence based programmes.
- » Bystander intervention and solution focused training.

Mental Health Specific Training

- » Mental health first aid.
- » Assist / safe talk suicide prevention training.
- » Trauma-informed practice.
- » Understanding anxiety, depression and emotional regulation.
- » Crisis communication and recognizing early warning signs.

Supervision Peer Learning and Support

- » Educational or reflective supervision, peer learning and communities of practice.
- » Regular team meetings with mental health on the agenda.

- » Opportunities to share experiences and good practice.
- » Specialist and inclusive practice.
- » Training in neurodiversity.
- » Working with marginalised or vulnerable groups.
- » Anti-racism and cultural competence training.
- » Training delivered in partnership with specialist services.

Resources and Practical Tools

- » Youth friendly guides and toolkits.
- » Scenario based materials for real life situations.
- » Discussion tools to support everyday conversations with young people.

WHAT AREAS OF TRAINING OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN ORGANISATION'S ABILITY TO SUPPORT YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Advanced Mental Health Skills

- » Mental health first aid and crisis intervention.
- » Suicide prevention and risk assessment.
- » Trauma informed and recovery orientated practice.
- » Practical scenario-based training for complex situations.

Relational and Practice Based Skills

- » Active listening and communication skills.
- » Emotional intelligence and regulation.
- » Conflict and stress management.
- » Strength based and solution focused approaches.

Specialist knowledge areas

- » Neurodiversity framing practice and avoiding over pathologising.
- » Mental health literacy, clear understanding of concepts boundaries and roles.
- » Digital mental health literacy and online risks.
- » Understanding contemporary challenges for young people - anxiety, depression, identity and belonging.

Support for Staff Wellbeing

- » Burnout prevention and self-care for youth workers.
- » Reflective supervision and ongoing professional support.
- » Creating organisation and cultures where our mental health is valued.

Partnership and Systems Working

- » Building stronger links with mental health professionals, schools and social sciences.
- » Clear referral pathways, shared language and protocols.
- » Involving young people and parents as experts by experience.
- » Supporting parents to understand and reinforce skills learned by young people.

4.6 Partnerships

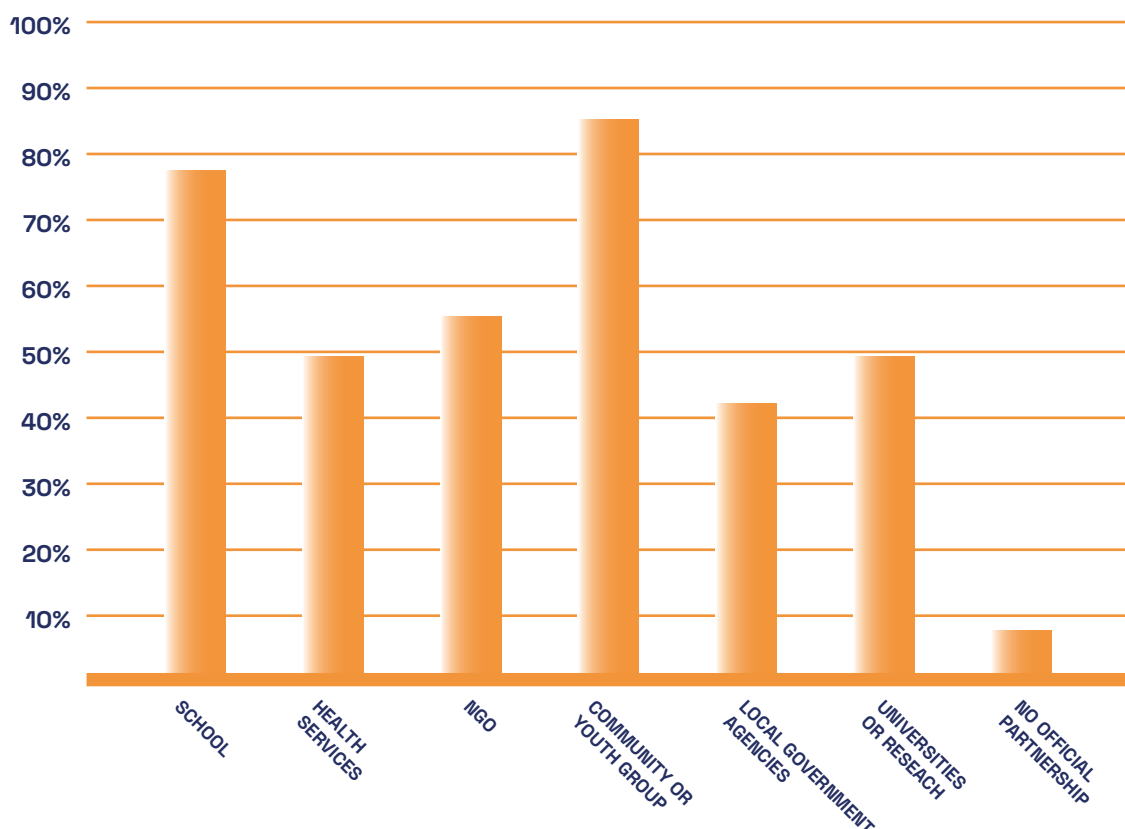
This section explores the extent and role of partnerships in supporting organisations to respond to young people's mental health and wellbeing needs.

KEY INSIGHT

Partnership working is widespread and central to effective youth mental health support, with organisations relying on multi-agency collaboration to extend reach, strengthen responses, and improve co-ordination - while sustainability and capacity remain the main challenges.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS

Responses indicate that the majority of organisations work in partnership with multi sectors to support young people's mental health and wellbeing. Community and youth groups were the most commonly reported partners (85.7%), followed by schools (78.6%), NGO's (57.1%), health services (50%), and local government agencies (42.9%). Only a small portion of organisations reported having no formal partnerships, suggesting that collaborative working is the norm rather than the exception. Overall, the pattern of partnership highlights a broad, multi-agency approach, with organisations drawing on different sectors to reach young people, provide appropriate supports, and strengthening their response capacity.



HOW PARTNERSHIPS CONTRIBUTE TO ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

Organisations consistently reported that partnerships enhanced their ability to respond effectively to young people's mental health and wellbeing needs. Partnerships were described as critical for access, early identification, and appropriate referrals, particularly through schools and community-based settings where organisations are in regular contact with young people.

Collaborations with health services, NGOs, and specialist agencies enable access to professional expertise and clear referral pathways when higher level support is required. Partnerships also support co-ordinated responses, shared learning, and more informed decision making, allowing organisations to respond more quickly and appropriately to emerging needs.

Importantly, partnerships were seen as extending reach and impact, enabling organisations to engage a wider and more diverse group of young people, co-create relevant activities, and deliver programmes in settings that are familiar and accessible.

Taken together these partnerships form a supportive network that strengthens organisation capacity, improves responsiveness, and contributes to more sustainable, community embedded mental health and wellbeing supports for young people.

CHALLENGES IN BUILDING AND SUSTAINING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Organisations identified a small number of recurring challenges in developing and sustaining effective partnerships to support young people's mental health and wellbeing these include;

- » **Short-term and project-based partnerships**, which can limit continuity and long-term planning.
- » **Limited time and capacity**, particularly for smaller organisations and public bodies balancing multiple priorities.
- » **Fragmentation across services**, making co-ordination and joined up working more complex.
- » **Differing organisational; priorities and timelines**, which can slow collaboration or alignment.
- » **Communication and understanding gaps**, including varying levels of confidence or clarity around youth mental health.
- » **Bureaucratic or institutional barriers**, particularly when working with larger public systems.
- » **Consistency of engagement**, with some partnerships relying heavily on individual relationships rather than formal structures.

Despite these challenges, several organisations reported no significant issues, highlighting that where relationships are well established and clearly defined partnerships can function effectively.

4.7 Monitoring and Impact

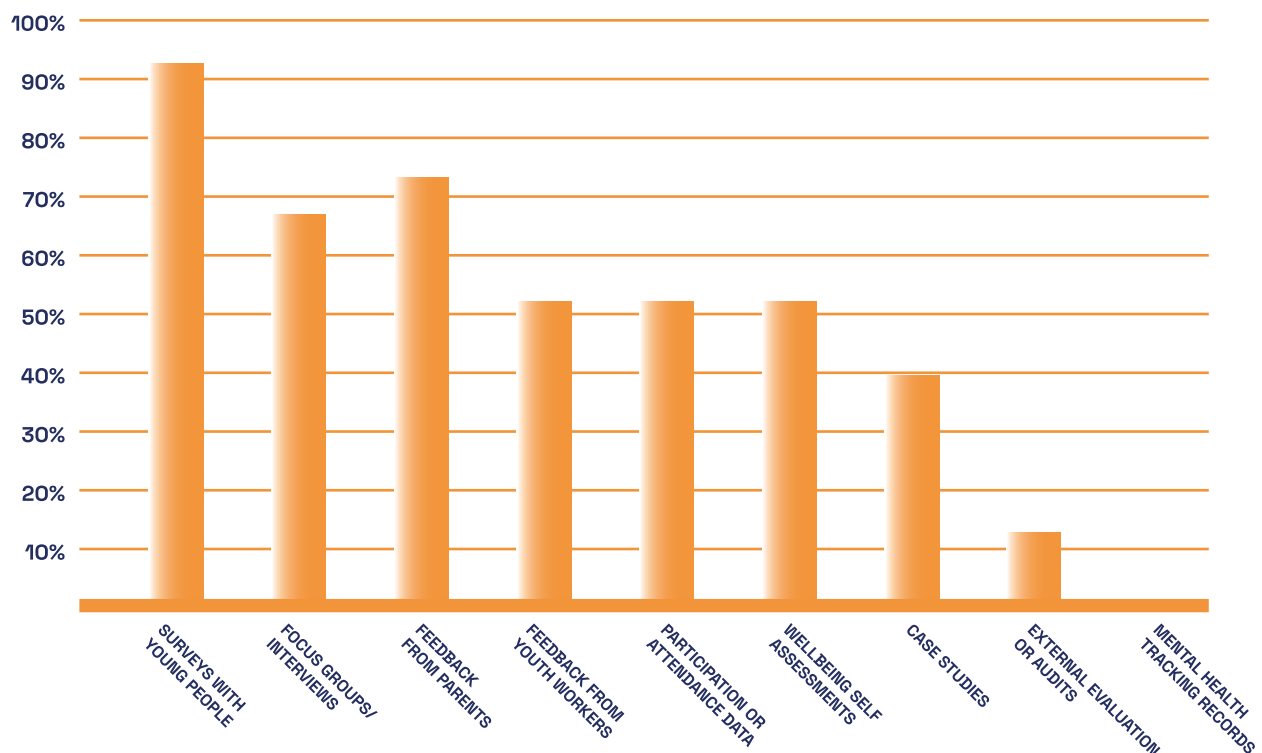
This section explores the types of information and feedback organisations find most useful in understanding the effectiveness of their mental health and wellbeing work.

KEY INSIGHT

Impact is most often understood through relationship-based and practice-led evidence with organisations relying more on young people's voices and staff observation than on formalised measurement systems.

HOW ORGANISATIONS ACCESS OR MONITOR IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING INITIATIVES

Organisations use a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches to monitor and assess the impact of their mental health and wellbeing initiatives. The most commonly used methods include participation or attendance data (78.6%) and surveys with young people (71.4%), indicating a strong emphasis on tracking engagement and capturing direct feedback from participants. Feedback from youth workers is also widely used (71.4%), reflecting the value placed on practitioner insight and understanding programme impact. Alongside this, a smaller but notable proportion of organisations draw on wellbeing self-assessments (42.9%), feedback from parents or caregivers (42.9%), case studies (35.7%), and external evaluations or audits (42.9%). Overall, the findings suggest the impact monitoring is largely embedded within routine service delivery, with a strong reliance on internal data and life experience feedback then form an external evaluation process.



TYPES OF INFORMATION ORGANISATIONS FIND USEFUL TO UNDERSTAND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING WORK

Young People's Lived Experience

- » Direct feedback from young people on their experiences, feelings of safety, relevance and perceived impact.
- » Informal conversations valued alongside structured feedback as a trusted and authentic source of insight.

Holistic and Multi-Perspective Evidence

- » Combined feedback from young people, youth workers, parents, caregivers, schools and referral agencies.
- » Preference for 360 degrees understanding of the impact rather than reliance on a single data source.

Practitioner Insight and Observation

- » Youth worker observations of engagement, behavior change, confidence and coping over time.
- » Professional judgment seen as particularly important for capturing gradual or less visual change.

Qualitative Depth and Storytelling

- » Case studies and success stories used to illustrate real life impact and good practice.
- » Narrative evidence valued for communicating outcomes to funders and stakeholders.

Participation Data and Structured Tools

- » Attendance and participation trends used as indicators of relevance accessibility and sustained engagement.
- » Use of structured evidence-based tools to support measurable impact.

CHALLENGES IN MEASURING AND EVIDENCE OF IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING INITIATIVES

Organisations identified a range of practical and structural challenges including:

- » **Capturing long-term impact**, particularly where outcomes emerged gradually over time.
- » **Limited time and capacity** to carry out structured evaluation alongside frontline delivery.
- » **Balancing qualitative and quantitative evidence** especially translating lived experience into measurable outcomes.
- » **Inconsistent or underdeveloped evaluation frameworks** particularly for newer initiatives.
- » **Engaging young people in formal evaluation**, including surveys or tools while maintaining trust, openness and reliance on informal feedback and observation which can be difficult to evidence or standardise.
- » **Access to appropriate tools or systems** for tracking wellbeing outcomes.
- » **Attributing change directly to interventions**, given the complexity of young people's lives and external influences

- » **Data sharing co-ordination challenges** across parents, schools, referral agencies, and partner services.

4.8 Post Covid Trends

This section explores the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on young people's mental health and wellbeing, as observed by youth organisations, alongside ways in which organisations have adapted their approaches and service in response to emerging and intensified needs.

KEY INSIGHT

Organisations consistently report that the pandemic has had a long-lasting effect on young people's mental health, particularly increased anxiety, social disconnection, disrupted life transitions, and widening inequalities. In response, organisations have adapted their practice rather than returning to pre-COVID models, embedding mental health more intentionally into youth work through flexible, preventative, and youth-led centered approaches that prioritize connection, accessibility, and responsiveness.

LASTING IMPACTS ORGANISATION OBSERVED IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SINCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Across responses, organisations consistently reported enduring impacts on young people's mental health, social functioning, and life transitions, alongside some positive shifts in awareness and openness around mental health. Key observed impacts include:

Increased anxiety and low mood:

Persistent anxiety, depression, and uncertainty, particularly linked to education, exams, future opportunities, and health.

Social isolation and reduce social skills:

Ongoing difficulties with peer interaction, confidence in Group settings, eye contact, and reading social cues following prolonged isolation.

School refusal and disengagement:

Heightened anxiety related to school attendance, learning environments, and academic performance.

Digital over-reliance:

Increase screen time, online relationships replacing in person connections, and associated loneliness and fatigue.

Disruptive developmental milestones:

Loss of normal transitions impacting identity, confidence and belonging.

Widened inequalities:

More pronounced mental health challenges among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, compounded by reduced access to supports and digital poverty.

At the same time, organisations noted a positive legacy of the pandemic in terms of:

- » Greater openness to discussing mental health.
- » Reduce stigma.
- » Increased engagement with youth friendly preventative and resilience focused supports.

HOW ORGANISATIONS HAVE ADAPTED THEIR APPROACHES POST-COVID

Organisations reported significant adoption of services and ways of working in response to the increased complexity and intensity of young people's mental health needs post COVID. Key adaptations include:

Greater emphasis on informal preventative support:

Mental health and wellbeing support are more embedded in everyday youth work, with a strong focus on safe, non-clinical and relationship based spaces.

Expanded and tailored program delivery:

Existing programmes were adapted or expanded to address anxiety, emotional regulation, peer support, digital wellbeing, and help seeking behaviours.

Increased individual and targeted support:

Organisations reported spending more time on one-to-one support and targeted interventions particularly for young people experiencing heightened distress.

Hybrid and flexible delivery models:

A combination of in-person and online supports is now widely used to increase accessibility, accommodate comfort levels, and reach rural or marginalised young people.

Investment in staff and volunteer capacity:

Enhanced training for trauma informed practice, crisis response, mental health first aid, neurodiversity awareness, and self-care.

Stronger youth voice and feedback mechanisms:

Young people are increasingly involved in shaping responses through consultation youth advisory groups and peer-led initiatives.

Community focused and creative initiatives:

Public wellbeing actions, outreach projects and visible peer support activities were used to rebuild connections and reduce isolation.

Overall organisations described a shift towards more responsive flexible and youth centered models aimed at meeting evolving mental health needs and post pandemic context.

4.9 Future Priorities for Organisations

This section outlines emerging priorities identified by organisations for the future development of youth mental health and wellbeing supports.

KEY INSIGHT

Overall, the future needs identified point towards a continued shift from crisis LED responses to preventative, inclusive and participation driven models rooted in community settings and supported by skilled staff, strong partnerships and meaningful youth engagement.

Organisations identified a shared set of future needs reflecting increasing complexity in young people's lives, rising demand for mental health supports, and growing pressure on community based services. There was a strong consensus that future responses must move further towards prevention, inclusion, and integrated models of support, while remaining grounded in young people's everyday environments and experiences.

i) Early intervention prevention and emotional literacy

A key emerging priority was the need to strengthen early intervention approaches by embedding emotional literacy, coping skills, and resilience building into routine youth work practice. Organisations emphasise the importance of supporting young people to understand, name, and manage emotions from an earlier age, reducing the likelihood of difficulties escalating into crisis.

ii) Social connection, belonging and peer support

Rebuilding social confidence and reducing isolation, particularly in the context of post pandemic impacts, was highlighted as a significant future need. Organisations noted the value of informal group settings, peer connection, and youth-led initiatives in promoting belonging, reducing social anxiety, and strengthening interpersonal skills. Peer support was viewed as a key protective factor for mental wellbeing.

iii) Inclusion and targeted supports for marginalised groups

Respondents identified the need for more tailored and inclusive approaches to support young people who may experience additional barriers to wellbeing. This included young men, neurodivergent young people, LGBTQ + youth, ethnic minorities, refugees, and those affected by socioeconomic disadvantage and housing insecurity. Non stigmatizing, community-based supports were viewed as particularly important in reaching vulnerable groups.

iv) Digital wellbeing in hybrid models of support

Organisations highlighted increasing concerns related to social media, online gaming, and online gambling, alongside recognition of the benefits of digital tools when used appropriately. There was strong support for expanding hybrid models that combine online resources with face-to-face engagement, ensuring accessibility, flexibility, and continuity of support for diverse youth needs.

v) Workforce capacity training and staff wellbeing

Investment in staff and volunteer capacity emerged as a critical future priority. Organisations emphasised the need for ongoing professional development in areas such as trauma-informed practice, cultural competence, digital wellbeing, and self-care. Supporting workforce wellbeing was seen as essential to sustaining high quality, responsive services in the face of increasing demand.

vi) Partnership and integrated local responses

Strengthening collaboration, with mental health professionals, schools, and local authorities was identified as an important area for future development. Organisations highlighted the value of integrated, locally co-ordinated responses that reduce fragmentation and enable effective pathways of support for young people and families.

vii) Youth voice, participation and co-design

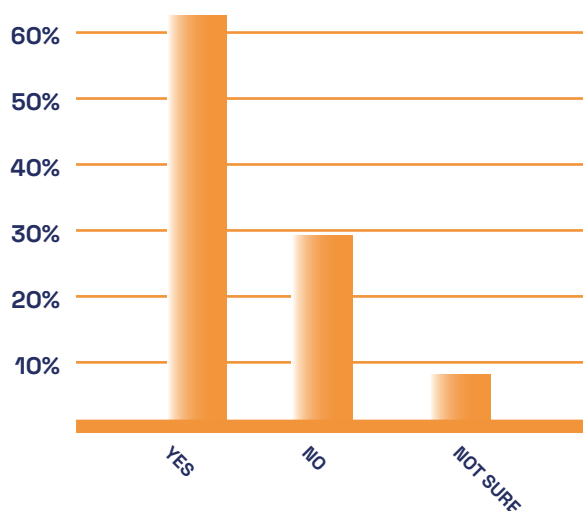
There was a strong commitment to increasing the involvement of young people in shaping mental health and wellbeing supports. Co-design initiatives, feedback mechanisms, and youth-led approaches were viewed as essential for ensuring relevance, building trust, and comparing young people as active contributors to their own wellbeing and that of their peers.

5. Young People's Findings

5.1 Participation in Mental Health and Wellbeing Activities

This section outlines young people's engagement in mental health and well-being activities within their youth clubs, including the types of activities they participate in and their involvement in shaping these initiatives.

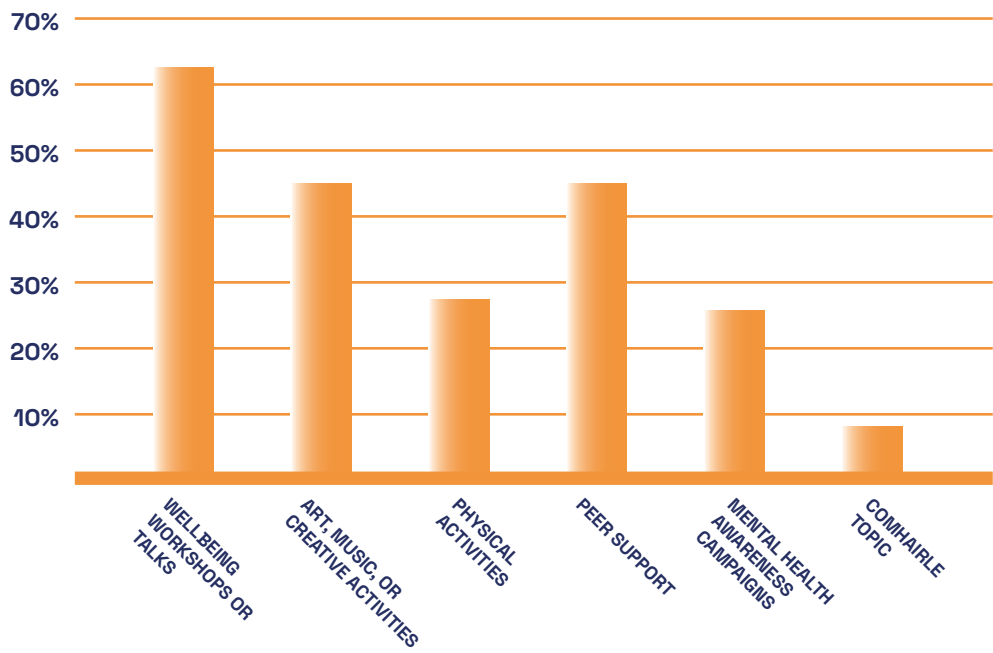
The majority of respondents (64.7%) reported that they have participated in mental health and wellbeing activities through their club. Just under one-third (29.4%) indicated they had not participated while a small proportion (5.9%) were unsure.



PARTICIPATION IN WELLBEING ACTIVITIES

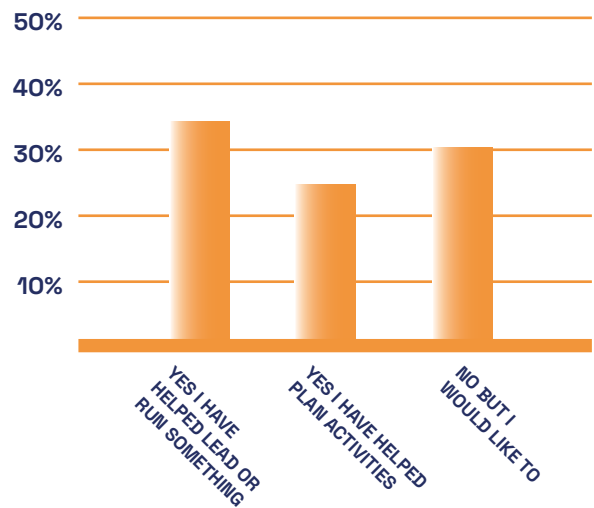
Among those who participated, the most common activities were wellbeing workshops or talks (63.6%). Art, music and creative activities (45.5%) and peer support initiatives (45.5%) were also popular. Physical activities were reported by 27.3% of respondents, while mental health awareness campaigns also accounted for 27.3%. A small number referenced Comhairle na nÓg related topics (9.1%).

TYPES OF WELLBEING ACTIVITIES INVOLVED IN



Encouragingly, 43.8% of respondents reported that they had helped lead or run activities, while 25% of respondents supported planning. Notably, 31.3% indicated they would like to be involved in the future, suggesting strong potential for further youth leadership and co-design.

HELPING TO SHAPE ACTIVITIES IN YOUNG CLUBS



5.2 Young People's Perspectives on Impact

This section presents young people's perspectives on whether or how participation in their youth club has influenced their mental health and wellbeing.

KEY INSIGHT

Overall responses suggest that young people value a balance between structured mental health supports and informal, relationship-based activities, with a particular emphasis on safe spaces for connection, low pressure participation, and accessible ways to seek support.

Young people were asked whether being part of their youth club has improved their mental health and wellbeing. Over half of the respondents (52.9%) reported that being part of their club has improved their mental health 'a lot'. A further 17.6% indicated it helped 'a little' and 23.5% indicated it didn't really help. Overall, these findings indicate that respondents perceive a positive mental health impact from participation in youth club activities.

Young people described a range of ways in which being part of their youth club positively impacted on their mental health and well-being. Overall, responses highlight the importance of belonging, social connection, emotional safety, personal growth, and supportive relationships. Key themes from young people's voices include:

Sense of Belonging and Feeling Welcome:

Young people consistently spoke about feeling accepted, welcomed, and included within their club environment. This sense of belonging helped them feel valued and supported.

"Belonging to a community gives me the strength to do things and not give up."

Social Connection and Reducing Isolation:

Clubs were described as important social spaces where young people could meet friends, connect with new people, and feel less alone.

"It allows another opportunity to meet friends and new people and acts as a social outlet."

Safe Spaces to Be Yourself

Many young people highlighted the youth club as a safe, non-judgmental environment where they could relax, have fun, and be themselves.

"Being able to have fun with my friends and having a safe place where I feel like I can be myself."

Increased Confidence, Self-worth and Purpose

Participation helps young people feel *'good enough'*, build confidence, and recognise their ability to contribute positively to others and their community.

"Being part of my youth club has made me feel like I'm good enough for those around me and that I can contribute to a positive change."

Personal growth and learning

Young people also spoke about learning more about themselves through leadership, participation, and structured activities such as youth council or therapeutic sessions.

"I've learned a lot about myself from being up at youth council. The support from everyone there was amazing."

Enjoyment Activities and Positive Distraction

Clubs offered enjoyable, meaningful activities that young people look forward to, contributing positively to their overall wellbeing.

"It has provided me with many opportunities that I enjoy participating in."

Building on young people's reflections about how club participation positively impacts their mental health and wellbeing they were also invited to suggest additional activities or areas that could further strengthen wellbeing support within their clubs. Youth responses highlighted a mix of practical activity ideas, awareness raising approaches, and low-threshold support mechanisms, alongside some respondents indicating satisfaction with existing provision. Ideas included:

- » Structured mental health activities and workshops.
- » Social connection and relationship building.
- » Nature and movement-based wellbeing activities.
- » Awareness and mental health literacy.
- » Accessible and anonymous support.

5.3 Current Challenges Facing Young People in 2025

This section outlines the key challenges identified by respondents when asked what they believe were the biggest issues facing young people in 2025.

KEY INSIGHT

Young people's challenges in 2025 were not isolated mental health issues, but interconnected pressure stemming from educational demands, economic insecurity, social disconnection, and uncertainty about the future. Mental health concerns emerge as both a central issue and as a consequence of the broader systemic stressors.

Mental health and Emotional Pressure

Mental health was the dominant theme. Respondents refer to stress, anxiety, and the difficulty young people facing prioritising their wellbeing.

School Pressure and Future Decisions

Education-related stress featured prominently. Academic pressure and uncertainty about future pathways were identified as significant concerns contributing to emotional strain.

Uncertainty and Loss of Hope

Some responses referred to broader anxiety about 'the future', including climate change and global instability. Maintaining hope in an unpredictable environment was identified as a challenge.

Social Disconnection and Identity

Feelings of isolation, lack of belonging, and difficulty feeling safe enough to be oneself were highlighted. Concerns about freedom of expression and social hostility were also noted.

5.4 Post – COVID Shifts in Young People's Mental Health Experiences

This section examines whether young people have noticed changes in how mental health and wellbeing are experienced and discussed since COVID-19.

KEY INSIGHT

Mental health discussed more openly since COVID-19; however, increased visibility has not eliminated isolation, fear of judgment, or emotional withdrawal.

Greater openness than Normalisation

Many young people reported that mental health is talked about more openly than before the pandemic. Conversations are perceived as more common, and empathy appears to have increased. However, one response noted that while discussions are more frequent, they are sometimes 'less informed' suggesting a need for stronger mental health literacy.

Increased Drug and Emotional Impact

Several responses pointed to heightened pressures and ongoing emotional effects linked to isolation and disruption during COVID-19. Some young people feel that mental health difficulties are now more visible and more prevalent among their peers.

Withdrawn and Silence

Despite increased public discussion, some young people appear more withdrawn. Responses referenced shutting down, 'normalising solitude', and reluctance to speak

openly due to fear of judgment. This highlights the gap between awareness and emotional safety.

Diverse and Uneven Experiences

Experiences were not uniform. With some observed greater openness, others reported limited peer discussion or social connection. This reinforces that post COVID impacts vary significantly depending on context and individual circumstances.

5.5 If you had a magic wand: young people's one big change

This section captures young people's responses to the question 'imagine you had a magic wand and could make one big change for young people's mental health and wellbeing what would it be?' The question asks for young people to think boldly and creatively.

KEY INSIGHT

Young people's responses point to a strong desire for less pressure, more acceptance, greater access to support, and stronger community connection. Rather than focusing solely on clinical interventions, many responses emphasise cultural and societal shifts, including reduced judgement, slower pace of life, and feeling valued and understood.

Reducing Pressure and Slowing the Pace of Life

Several responses reflected a desire to reduce the intensity of daily demands, particularly within school environments.

- » *"Less school stress and exam pressure."*
- » *"Slow time of life."*
- » *"Relax."*

This suggests that academic pressure and the fast pace of modern life are perceived as significant contributors to stress. Young people are calling for structural changes that ease performance-based pressure.

Greater Acceptance and Less Judgement

A strong theme across responses was the need for more acceptance and less judgemental society.

- » *"That people who would stop judging others and themselves."*
- » *"Make people more accepting."*
- » *"I would make people less judging about other people's mental health."*

These responses highlight the continued impact of stigma and social comparison. Young people are seeking environments where they can express themselves freely without fear of criticism or exclusion.

Universal Access to Support

Access to professional and emotional support was clearly prioritized:

- » *“Counselling for all.”*
- » *“Therapists in school.”*
- » *“Talking about it.”*

Young people appear to value both formal support and informal conversations that normalized discussing mental health. This reinforces the importance of accessible, visible embedded support systems.

Belonging, community, and feeling valued

A number of respondents reflected on a deeper need for connection and meaning.

- » *“Communities. People coming together to enjoy life, help solve problems and be there for each other.”*
- » *“To let every young person know that their life matters and them believe it.”*

These statements point to the importance of belonging, collective care, and affirmation. Young people want to feel like they matter, not just individually, but in supportive communities.

Personal Agency and Self-understanding

Some responses emphasised helping young people better understand themselves.

- » *“To make young people have the ability to easier identify why they lack motivation.”*

This suggests the need for emotional literacy and self-awareness supporting young people to recognize or understand and respond to their internal experiences.

6. What the Evidence is telling us

Across both organisational and youth responses, there is a clear and consistent message: **youth clubs are playing a significant role in supporting young people’s mental health and wellbeing.**

Organisations demonstrate a strong commitment to embedding mental health promotion within everyday youth work practice rather than delivering it solely through standalone programmes. Young people’s feedback reinforces this, describing clubs as safe spaces where they feel listened to, supported, and connected. This alignment suggests that wellbeing support is not peripheral, it’s woven into relationships, culture, and daily practice.

At the same time, the evidence highlights areas for strengthening. While impact monitoring, partnership working, staff development and inclusion are widely recognised by organisations as essential to effective delivery, confidence and consistency vary. Young people similarly expressed a desire for more structured opportunities, clearer mental health activities, and greater involvement in shaping initiatives. Together, these

perspectives indicate a system that is committed and active but operating within resource constraints and uneven capacity.

Taken together, the evidence points to a sector that is already making a meaningful difference in young people's lives. However, it would benefit from stronger enabling policy conditions, sustained funding, shared tools for impact measurement, and gracious strategic alignment to ensure this work is consistent, visible, and sustainable across all member organisations.

7. Implications for Policy & Funding

This section synthesises findings from both organisational responses and young people's perspectives to identify priority considerations for policy and funding frameworks supporting youth mental health and well-being across Europe.

Sustained and Relational Funding Models

Across responses, organisations emphasised that mental health promotion within clubs is predominantly embedded, preventative, and relational in nature. Rather than being delivered as standalone interventions, wellbeing support is integrated into everyday practice through trusted relationships, safe spaces, and consistent engagement overtime. Young people's responses strongly reinforce this finding. Many highlighted the importance of feeling known, supported, and listened to in their clubs.

Funding frameworks should recognise and resource long-term, relationship-based practice, rather than prioritising short term, project-based outputs alone. Multi-annual funding structures that support continuity and stability are more aligned with how youth mental health promotion operates in practice.

Proportionate and Meaningful Impact Measurement

While organisations recognise the importance of monitoring and evaluation, many identified challenges in implementing consistent and meaningful impact measurement approaches. Limited capacity, time constraints, and lack of shared tools were frequently noted. Young people indicated that being asked for feedback can feel empowering when it is purposeful and transparent. However, overly formal or repetitive processes may disengage them.

There is a need for proportionate, youth friendly, and shared evaluation tools at European level that support learning and accountability without overburdening organisations or young participants. Investment and guidance, capacity building, and simple measurement frameworks could strengthen sector-wide impact understanding.

Partnership and System Co-ordination

Partnership work emerged as a key enabler of effective responses to young people's needs. Organisations highlighted the value of collaboration with schools, health services, local authorities, and community partners. However, they also noticed that partnership work requires time, co-ordination, and clarity of roles. Young people benefit most where

services appear co-ordinated and accessible. Fragmentation systems can create confusion or barriers to support.

Policy approaches should acknowledge and resource partnership infrastructure. Rather than focusing solely on direct service outputs, strengthening systems, level co-ordination enhances responsiveness to youth mental health.

Workforce Investment as Preventative Infrastructure

Staff knowledge, confidence, and wellbeing were identified as central to the quality of mental health support delivered. Organisation highlighted the importance of training, supervision, and reflective practice. Young people consistently referenced the role of supportive, skilled, and caring adults as foundational to their positive experiences within new clubs.

Investments in workforce development should be recognized as preventative mental health infrastructure in its own right. Supporting staff wellbeing, professional development, and reflective practice strengthens outcomes for young people and contributes to sustainable service delivery.

8. Strategic Recommendations for ECYC

This section translates the findings of the organisational survey and youth consultation into a forward-looking strategic positioning statement for ECYC. Rather than identifying deficits, the evidence presented throughout this report demonstrates readiness, embedded practice, and significant potential for co-ordinated European level investment in youth mental health and well-being through youth work. The following investment priorities emerged directly from the data.

KEY INSIGHT

The findings position ECYC as an investment ready European actor in youth mental health and wellbeing. Member organisations are already delivering preventative, relational support; this strategic opportunity lies in co-ordination, scaling, and collective impact at European level.

Scaling the preventative role of youth work

The findings confirm that ECYC member organisations are already delivering relational, preventative, and community-based supports that contributes meaningfully to young people's mental health and wellbeing. These supports are embedded within safe spaces, trusted adult relationships, peer connection, and inclusive participation structures. This

positions ECYC to articulate and scale the preventative mental health contribution of youth work at European level.

Strategic investment opportunity:

- » Development of a European framework that clearly defines and communicates the mental health value of youth work.
- » Pilot implementation across member countries to strengthen coherence and visibility.
- » Production of European level advocacy materials evidencing preventative impact.

YOUTH-LED MENTAL HEALTH INNOVATION

Young people consistently emphasised belonging, peer support, safe spaces, and meaningful participation as central to their wellbeing. The evidence indicates strong potential to formalise youth-led mental health innovation at European level.

Strategic investment opportunity:

- » Establishment of a European youth mental health advisory mechanism within the ECYC structures.
- » Creation of youth-led micro-innovation grants to support local initiatives.
- » Cross-country youth exchanges focus specifically on wellbeing practice and leadership.

Workforce Capacity and Knowledge Exchange

Member organisations demonstrate strong commitment to supporting youth mental health; however, training access, structure tools, and shared learning vary across contexts. There is clear appetite for strengthening capacity building.

Strategic investment opportunity:

- » Develop a modular digital training pathway for youth workers across Europe.
- » Facilitation of structured peer learning forms focused on mental health practice.
- » Creation of shared toolkits and resource hubs accessible to all member organisations.

Collective impact and European level evidence

Monitoring and evaluation practices are present across member organisations, yet they are not harmonised. The findings highlight an opportunity to strengthen collective evidence generation without creating undue administrative burden.

Strategic investment opportunity:

- » Development of a light touch shared wellbeing indicators framework for voluntary use across member organisations.
- » Creation of an aggregated European impact dashboard.
- » Annual reporting mechanisms that strengthen advocacy and funding competitiveness.

9. Conclusion

This review is set out to understand how ECYC member organisations are responding to mental health and wellbeing needs of young people across Europe. Drawing on organisational survey responses and the voices of young people themselves, the findings present a clear and coherent picture.

Mental health and wellbeing are already embedded within the culture and practice of youth clubs. Across diverse national contexts, organisations are delivering structured programmes, informal supports, safe relational spaces, youth-led initiatives, and partnership-based responses. This work is often preventative, relational, and integrated rather than clinical. This work is rooted in belonging, trust and meaningful participation. Young people consistently describe clubs as protective spaces. They highlight connection, friendship, trusted adults, opportunities to contribute, and the sense of being heard. While organisational data demonstrates activity and structure, youth responses illustrate impact, particularly in relation to belonging, confidence, emotional expression, and reduced isolation.

The evidence points to both strength and strain. Organisations show innovation, adaptability and commitment, particularly in response to post COVID mental health challenges. However, recurring barriers remain including short term funding cycles, capacity for impact measurement, uneven access to specialist partnerships, and increasing complexity of young people's needs. Taken together, the findings reinforce the central message: youth clubs are a vital preventative mental health and wellbeing infrastructure, but it requires sustained investment, coherent policy alignment, and stronger impact recognition. For ECYC, this presents a strategic opportunity. By positioning member organisations as key contributors to mental health promotion, strengthening shared language around outcomes, amplifying youth voices within advocacy, and aligning funding narratives with preventative impact, ECYC can elevate the role of youth work within broader health and social policy agendas.

Ultimately, this report affirms that youth clubs are not peripheral to mental health - they are foundational to it. With the right policy backing, strategic coherence and sustainable investment, their contribution can be further scaled, strengthened and recognised across Europe.