



A game of two halves

An evaluation of Changing Futures and the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic

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Executive summary

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report examines what a selected number of YMCAs have done with Changing Futures, a national programme from YMCA England & Wales which aims to help young people aged 11–18 to experience positive mental health more often. The ultimate aim of the programme is to ensure that young people feel they can belong, contribute and thrive and are able to achieve their potential.

To date, the programme has been funded by YMCA England & Wales via grants that local YMCAs have applied for in a competitive process. Applications have been based on a common set of criteria and delivery options, including peer-to-peer support between young people, training for key adults (for example, parents, teachers and youth workers) and therapeutic activities for young people. YMCAs have been able to choose to deliver one or more of these options, and there has been flexibility in how each YMCA could meet its objectives in its area.

The application options available between March 2019 and March 2021 were branded ‘Boost’, ‘Duo’ and ‘Trio’, with each containing a different set of activities. YMCAs chose one of these options depending on which types of activities they wanted to offer. Regardless of which option they chose, YMCAs often used Changing Futures funding to complement existing projects, build on work they had already been doing, expand outreach for young people into new geographical areas or cohorts, or develop new types of services.

This report contains the findings from an analysis of quantitative data provided by YMCA England & Wales together with qualitative data from six semi-structured interviews conducted with grantee YMCAs during February, March and April 2021.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings from the quantitative data

Grantees submitted a range of key performance indicator (KPI) data related to the programme and their own funding applications, and this data was collected and analysed. Not all data was consistently supplied by individual YMCAs, and the data provided by YMCA England & Wales featured only 14 out of 18 YMCAs in the Changing Futures programme (not all of the YMCAs were able to deliver their projects because of the COVID-19 pandemic). However, the following findings can be presented from the available data:

- Every measure recorded by the YMCAs increased from April 2020 to March 2021 compared to the previous year (for example, numbers of peer leaders and key adults trained), with the exception of the numbers of workshops and online sessions delivered. However, it is not

possible to ascertain precisely why these increases or decreases occurred – for example, because of increased demand or increased disruption due to the pandemic.

- A total of 316 peer educators were recruited to provide peer support for young people’s mental health, involving 981.5 hours of activity.
- The data showed that 42,451 individuals attended peer-to-peer workshops, with 19,302 of those attendees attending in May 2020, during the early stages of the pandemic.
- A total of 27 training sessions were delivered to educate key adults about young people’s mental health, with 348 key adults trained in a range of topics related to mental health.
- Counselling and other therapeutic services reached 85 young people, with 122 sessions attended, comprising 372 hours of activity.
- A total of 1,185 online sessions were delivered, and there were 84,210 virtual hits on Facebook groups, YMCA websites and other project-related websites.

Findings from the interviews

DSC’s researchers conducted six semi-structured interviews with YMCA staff who were leading or closely involved with their respective projects. Narrative analysis of these interviews yielded the following findings:

- Individual YMCAs have used Changing Futures funding to complement existing projects, build on work they were already doing, expand outreach for young people into new geographical areas or cohorts, or develop new types of services. Three YMCAs received Boost funding (£10,000), one received Duo funding (£12,500) and two received Trio funding (up to £31,000).
- Project managers had to be adaptable and creative to find ways to deliver a version of their planned projects amid the massive disruption of the pandemic. Different projects were at different stages of completion when the pandemic and social lockdown hit, and some were disrupted more than others. An interviewee from one project which ran before and during the pandemic described it as ‘a game of two halves’.
- Many YMCAs had planned activities in schools as a core part of their delivery, but it frequently became impossible to carry out these activities, especially during the initial lockdown period between March and June 2020, because schools were closed and school administrations were overwhelmed.
- Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, the YMCAs selected for interview all managed to adapt their existing or planned delivery to some degree, often via digital channels which were co-created by young people. This was often cited as a success story coming out of a bad situation, yielding new learning or insights.
- Challenges cited by the interviewees included managing staff in a crisis, adapting to digital delivery methods, the negative effects of vilification of young people in the media, a heightened impact of digital exclusion, and difficulty accessing and communicating with schools, especially during the first half of 2020.

Narrative analysis of the interviews yielded other notable insights. Interviewees described things they had learned as well as observations which their experience of the pandemic had reinforced. While not necessarily universal or provable on a wider scale, these should be considered in the development of future programmes like Changing Futures and in the development of YMCA’s policy positions and programmes related to young people’s mental health. These included:

- Many young people have shown great resilience during the pandemic, often taking ownership of their mental health in highly emotionally demanding circumstances, sometimes with little support from adults and even in the face of antagonism or hostility from the 'adult world' or wider society.
- There was some evidence that more boys were self-referring or being referred to services than anticipated or normally expected, partly because of a shift to digital service offerings (with which they were more comfortable) or the opportunity to co-create digital services.
- Poor mental health in young people is complex and not something that can be solved with a single approach or 'quick fix'. It can be the result of various socio-economic factors and political decisions, and therefore cannot be effectively addressed via a single course, tool or therapeutic session.
- However, young people do have an appetite to influence and change their world, and to engage politicians and other decision-makers in constructive ways. Involvement in campaigns, fundraising, activism or other influencing activities can boost young people's mental health by giving them a sense of agency.
- There was some evidence that young people were more aware of or more attuned to mental health services as a result of the pandemic, and YMCA Norfolk noted that the pandemic may have resulted in young people noticing mental health more than they would have done previously.
- Digital delivery methods have been broadly positive for young people and have helped to break down some of the barriers that many previously experienced, particularly in rural areas or where services covered wide geographical areas.
- However, not all young people have the same level of digital access or knowledge, which is related to socio-economic factors and family circumstances. Therefore, a digital-only approach risks exacerbating social exclusion or restricting access to services for some young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having carried out this research and worked with YMCA England & Wales for several years on this project, DSC has the following recommendations for YMCA England & Wales to consider in future iterations of Changing Futures or similar future programmes:

- **Young people should be involved in the design of services.** This did happen in some way in all of the examples we examined, but it should be a more central theme. The exact formats or mechanisms should be left up to individual YMCAs, with YMCA England & Wales articulating a range of possible approaches or expected outcomes for illustration. This would allow applicants to develop and share creative solutions.
- **Future evaluations should, insofar as possible, incorporate feedback from young people** participating in the projects, for example via focus groups or short surveys. Conditions relating to the pandemic meant that including such feedback in a comprehensive way was not feasible for this analysis, but future iterations should do so as conditions permit.
- **Key performance indicators (KPIs) and collection of quantitative data should be simplified to collect only the most relevant outcomes or impact data,** particularly data that speaks to the effects on young people and any changes they experience. Although there may be a need for a specific amount of data on outputs (for example, number of training sessions

held), this should be minimised and the emphasis should shift to collecting data about what effect the outputs had.

- **YMCA England & Wales should create a simple digital hub for Changing Futures** to share and store effective survey tools for young people, templates for focus groups, examples of best practice and relevant literature, and to collect and store survey or KPI data. The hub would be primarily for internal YMCA use and wouldn't necessarily need to have an expensive, bespoke design. It could be facilitated through a Microsoft Teams or Slack channel, with some information or features only accessible to administrators, who could give access to grantees and practitioners as appropriate.
- **Future programmes should support a digital element of service delivery in addition to face-to-face service delivery**, especially for more rural or harder-to-reach areas, or to help reach certain groups of young people who may find it harder to attend face-to-face services (for example, carers or those with other circumstances that make it hard to leave home). Some projects conducted during the pandemic have left a 'legacy of COVID-19' – for example, best practice around digital delivery methods, which interviewees highlighted as effective in breaking down barriers.
- **At the same time, all projects that include digital delivery should consider the risks of digital exclusion** and provide solutions for how these can be mitigated, whether through facilitating digital access (for example, by providing phones or tablets) or enabling young people to engage in other ways.
- **YMCA England & Wales should seek to maximise flexibility in the delivery of future projects.** The flexibility offered during the pandemic was highlighted in interviews as a very positive aspect that allowed project managers to adapt their programmes and still deliver something meaningful for young people at a time of great crisis and huge pressures on mental health.
- **As we move out of the crisis phase of the pandemic, future iterations of Changing Futures should be informed by the changing social context and emerging research about the impact of the pandemic on young people.** All of society has been through a collective trauma, and the full ramifications are yet to be understood. Some interviewees were expecting there to be an increase in demand for services as a result of the pandemic, and analysis of quantitative data suggests that there was an increase in demand during the initial months. However, many impacts on young people's mental health may have been delayed and may only start to show up in later years. For example, the effects of family breakdown, unemployment, bereavement, educational disruption or substance abuse, which have their roots in the stresses of the pandemic, may only start to show up months or years into the future. This may be achieved via literature reviews of peer-reviewed journals and grey literature (i.e. research reports produced outside 'traditional' publishing organisations, which can include reports from organisations in the voluntary sector and government) and through periodic reviews of available YMCA England & Wales data on the usage of services provided by YMCA England & Wales.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 CHANGING FUTURES

Changing Futures is a national YMCA programme which aims to help young people aged 11–18 to experience positive mental health more often. The programme is delivered primarily but not exclusively in an educational environment, and is based on three pillars that aim to reduce the stigma and raise awareness of mental health issues. These pillars are:

- **peer-to-peer education**, which involves recruiting, training and supporting young people to provide mental health information to their peers;
- **key adult education**, which provides teachers, parents and youth workers with the skills to support young people with mental health difficulties;
- **counselling and other therapeutic services** for young people who need further support but do not meet the access criteria for NHS services.

Ultimately, Changing Futures aims to ensure that young people feel they can belong, contribute and thrive and are able to achieve their potential. To date, the programme has been delivered by YMCA England & Wales via grants that local YMCAs have applied for in a competitive process. Applications have been based on a common set of criteria and delivery options derived from the three pillars outlined above, but there has been flexibility in how each YMCA could meet its objectives in its area. YMCAs have used Changing Futures funding to complement work they were already doing or to develop new areas of mental health services or outreach for young people.

Funding was available between March 2019 and March 2021 in the form of three programmes, named 'Boost', 'Duo' and 'Trio'. The Boost programme (grants of up to £10,000) provided funding to six YMCAs that were already delivering work under the aforementioned pillars. The Duo programme (grants of up to £12,500) provided funding to nine YMCAs that did not have an existing mental health offer to help them deliver services under the peer-to-peer and key adult education pillars. The Trio programme (grants of up to £31,000) provided funding to two YMCAs without an established mental health offer to help them begin delivering services under all three pillars.

The Changing Futures programme was designed and commissioned before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and different projects were at different stages of completion by the time public health measures (such as lockdowns) were put in place by the government. The pandemic affected all of the projects but to different degrees. Some projects had delivered the majority of their work by the time of the first national lockdown (March–June 2020), whereas others were more significantly affected and were unable to provide large parts of their project as originally intended (especially for work that

was designed to be conducted in an educational environment). This resulted in staff at the grantee YMCAs adapting their work to deliver their services in a radically different environment than that which had originally been proposed. This was on top of additional organisational challenges and stressors, such as managing their staff's well-being and the use of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (under which staff were furloughed).

This report focuses on 'learning from lockdown' and makes recommendations about the way forward for Changing Futures and similar programmes.

1.2 THE LATEST RESEARCH ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health problems in young people were already rising before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues in young people (Wilkins and Anderson, 2021). The pandemic has been described as a 'perfect storm' for the mental health of young people, as individuals have been exposed to known risk factors including the perception of threat, disrupted routines (such as those around school), and social isolation due to public health measures put in place (such as national and local lockdowns) (Danese and Smith, 2020).

Evidence shows that previous epidemics have been associated with increases in emotional disorders (Ougrin, 2020). There have been few comparable events in recent history, and perhaps no events in living memory, that have affected everyone throughout the world. This in itself poses a significant problem, as the evidence of the impact of the pandemic on mental health will only be fully revealed over time, as more and more research is conducted.

Early research has demonstrated that, since the early stages of the pandemic, there have been a range of deteriorating mental health impacts on measures including anxiety, depression, alcohol misuse and suicidal ideation (Niedzwiedz et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2020). Much of this research has looked at the impact on adults, although some research has indicated that younger adults have experienced greater deterioration in their mental health when compared to older groups (Banks and Xu, 2020). Other research has found increased rates of suicidal ideation among young adults (O'Connor et al., 2020).

Kwong et al. (2020) found increased anxiety among young people and attributed it to the uncertainty and sudden changes to everyday life brought about by the pandemic. Xie et al. (2020) looked at primary school children in Huangshi and Wuhan, China, and found that the incidence of depressive symptoms was higher than in other studies looking at this age group in China before the pandemic.

In the UK, the public health measures implemented in response to the pandemic (such as national and local lockdowns) have resulted in adverse effects for young people. School closures have disrupted school routines (which have been identified as important for young people's mental health), uncertainty about whether and when exams would take place has had a detrimental effect on young people's mental health, and some young people had to spend more time in an abusive home (Lee, 2020). Schools were able to adapt to online learning, but young people at home often had to share devices and bandwidth with the rest of their family, which can limit opportunities for learning, and it is not necessarily the case that all young people are digitally literate (Mind, 2020). In April 2020, the Centre for Education & Youth estimated that as many as 1 million children were not being included in online learning because of poor access to technology (Bowen-Viner, 2020).

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

DSC and YMCA England & Wales have been planning an evaluation of the YMCA's Changing Futures programme since late 2018, and the original evaluation plan has been through several iterations for a variety of reasons. One of these reasons was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the pandemic (along with other factors), DSC and YMCA England & Wales adapted the methodology into the approach featured in this report. This report investigates and evaluates:

- what was achieved by a range of YMCAs under the Changing Futures programme via an analysis of quantitative data;
- how the pandemic has affected the grantee YMCAs, what they delivered during the pandemic as part of the Changing Futures programme, and how this differed from their original plans;
- how well these approaches worked and how they could be improved in the future;
- how the pandemic affected the young people supported by the grantee YMCAs, what the young people thought of the services, and any early findings on the impact these services had on the young people;
- what other YMCAs could learn from the experiences of the grantee YMCAs in order to provide mental health support for young people both during the remainder of the pandemic and beyond, and how this legacy of COVID-19 can inform and shape future service design.

In order to pursue these research objectives, DSC analysed quantitative data provided by YMCA England & Wales from 14 YMCAs in the Changing Futures programme, which consisted of key performance indicator (KPI) data related to the programme and their own funding applications. Not all data was consistently supplied by individual YMCAs, and the data provided only featured 14 out of 18 YMCAs participating in the Changing Futures programme, as not all YMCAs were able to deliver their projects because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DSC also conducted six semi-structured interviews with representatives from the following YMCAs, which received grant funding for the Changing Futures programme:

- YMCA East Surrey
- YMCA Exeter
- YMCA Manchester
- YMCA Norfolk
- YMCA North Tyneside
- YMCA Southend

The interviews were conducted in March and April 2021. DSC's researchers asked the representatives of the grantee YMCAs questions that fit broadly into the following three themes:

- the original plans and intentions behind the application for funding from Changing Futures and what the YMCA grantees originally set out to achieve with the funding;
- the challenges the YMCA grantees faced during the course of the programme, how they overcame those challenges and what they eventually achieved;
- what the grantee YMCAs learned throughout the course of the programme and how Changing Futures should be developed going forward.

CHAPTER TWO

An overview of Changing Futures

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the data provided by YMCA England & Wales on the Changing Futures programme. The data set consists of self-reported data from individual YMCAs in the Changing Futures programme and provides metrics on each of the pillars of the Changing Futures programme in addition to statistics on digital and online service delivery. The data set covers the period from April 2019 up to and including March 2021.

2.1.1 YMCAs included in the data

The data set examined in this chapter looks at some but not all of the YMCAs that received grant funding under the Changing Futures programme. As a result, it is likely that the actual figures are higher than those presented in this chapter. The YMCAs included in this data set were:

- Birmingham
- Bradford
- Cardiff
- DownsLink
- East Surrey
- Exeter
- Manchester
- North Tyneside
- Norfolk
- One (Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire)
- Swansea
- Trinity
- White Rose (South Yorkshire)
- Worcestershire

2.1.2 A note about the data

The data provided by YMCA England & Wales consisted of self-reported data from individual YMCAs, and the available data analysed in this chapter does not include the entire Changing Futures programme. The nature of the data meant complex calculations were not possible to conduct, but the statistics used do offer an opportunity to provide an overview of the data available and help paint a picture of what happened under the Changing Futures funding. DSC's researchers have opted to use the median and interquartile range (presented here as M and IQR, respectively) in order to describe the data. For further information on the quantitative data and statistics used, please see Appendix A.

The graphs featured in this chapter portray two main time periods: April 2019 to March 2020 and April 2020 to March 2021. DSC's researchers have, where appropriate, attempted to explain possible explanations for the data in the graphs, but it should be stressed that these are possible explanations and not definitive, as other factors (or multiple factors) may be the cause of the trends in the graphs. Some of the trends may be, in part, down to the number of projects running during each of the two main phases of the Changing Futures project. Five YMCAs were involved in the first period between April 2019 and March 2020, with a further 13 taking part between April 2020 and March 2021. As a result, some of the trends observed in this report may be due to the larger number of projects running in the second phase.

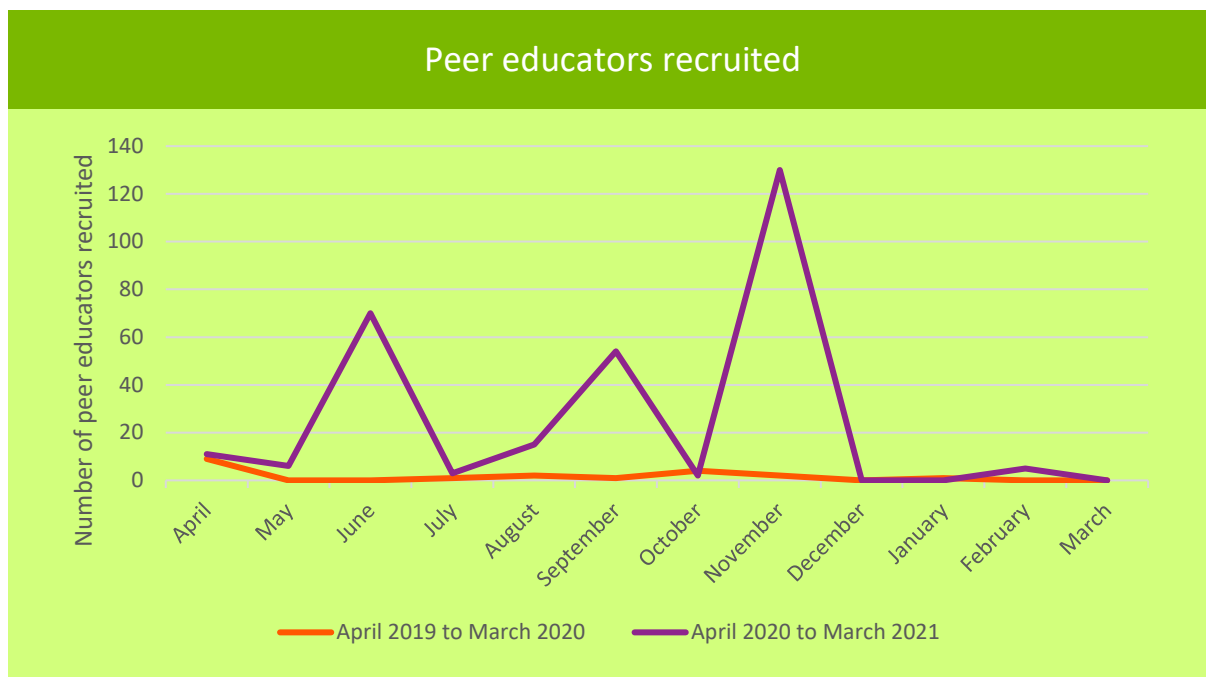
2.2 PEER-TO-PEER EDUCATION

2.2.1 Peer educators recruited

According to the data set provided by YMCA England & Wales, a total of 316 (M=2, IQR=6.75) peer educators were recruited. When the numbers are broken down by year, there is a notable difference between April 2019 to March 2020 (i.e. before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the first phase of the programme which included five YMCAs) and April 2020 to March 2021 (i.e. during the pandemic and during the second phase which included a further 13 YMCAs). Between April 2019 and March 2020, 20 (M=1, IQR=2) peer educators were recruited, whereas a total of 296 (M=5.5, IQR=23.25) were recruited between April 2020 and March 2021.

Figure 2.1 shows the contrast between the two periods. There were clear spikes in peer educator recruitment in June 2020, September 2020 and November 2020. The spike in June 2020 coincided with the phased reopening of schools in England and the spike in September may be attributed to the start of the school year. The largest number of peer educators was recruited in November 2020. This coincided with the announcement of the second national lockdown in England, which may have led to increased efforts to recruit peer educators before restrictions came into place.

Figure 2.1

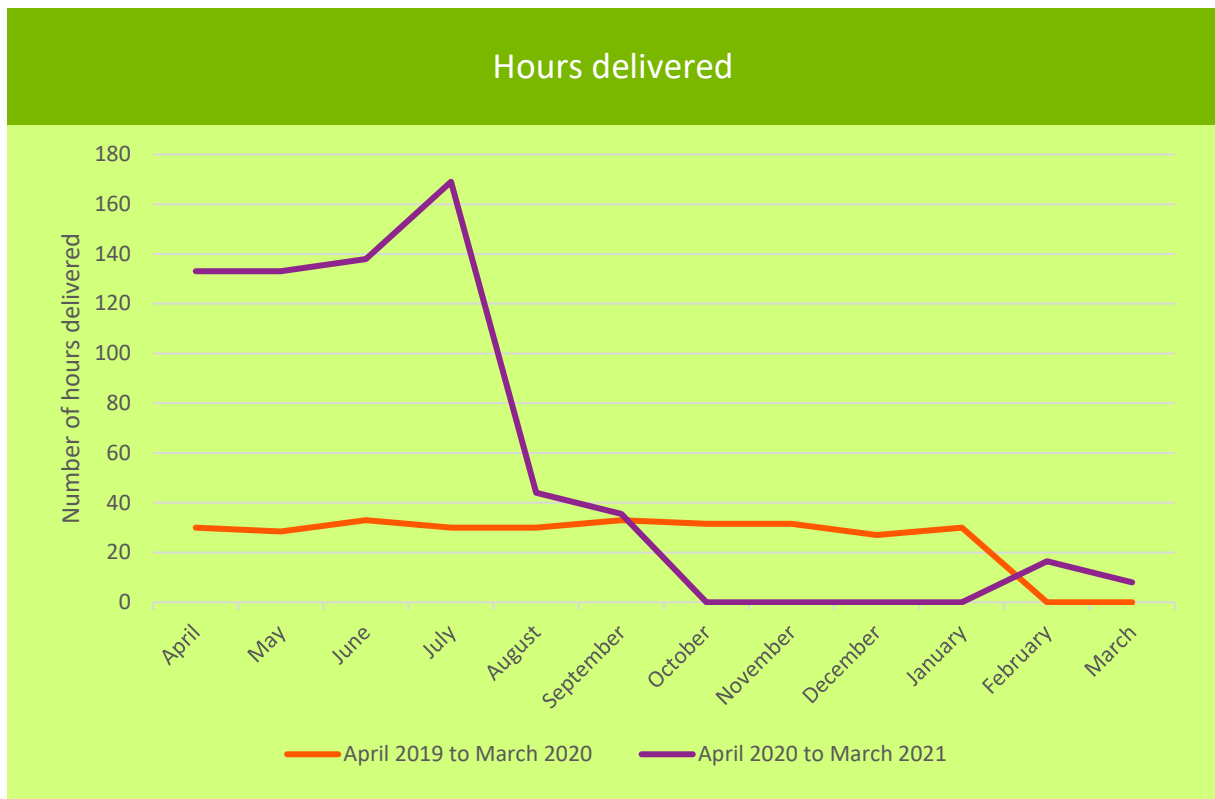


2.2.2 Hours delivered

A total of 981.5 (M=30, IQR=27.63) hours were delivered under the peer-to-peer education pillar. From April 2019 to March 2020, 304.5 (M=30, IQR=3.38) hours were delivered, whereas the same period between April 2020 and March 2021 showed 677 (M=26, IQR=133) hours delivered. Interestingly, the median value for April 2020 to March 2021 is lower and the IQR is much higher, which suggests a high degree of variation in the number of hours delivered during this period.

As shown in figure 2.2, more hours were delivered from April 2020 to September 2020 than during the same months in 2019, with a particularly large number of hours delivered from April 2020 to July 2020 when compared to the remainder of that year. The previous year shows a more stable level of engagement, albeit with a drop in the number of hours delivered in February and March 2020, which coincided with the early stages of the pandemic.

Figure 2.2



2.2.3 Workshops delivered

In total, 498 (M=22, IQR=13.75) workshops were delivered across the YMCAs included in the data set. In this case, the total number of workshops delivered was stable across the two 12-month periods included in this data, with 249 workshops delivered in each year (April 2019 to March 2020: M=23, IQR=4.75; April 2020 to March 2021: M=16.5, IQR=19.75). Figure 2.3 shows the trends in the numbers of workshops delivered over these two 12-month periods. April 2019 to March 2020 show more consistency in the numbers of workshops delivered (albeit with fewer workshops delivered in February and March 2020, probably due to increased awareness of COVID-19). In contrast, April 2020 to March 2021 show more variation between the months, with larger numbers delivered in July, August and September and smaller numbers in October, December and January.

Figure 2.3

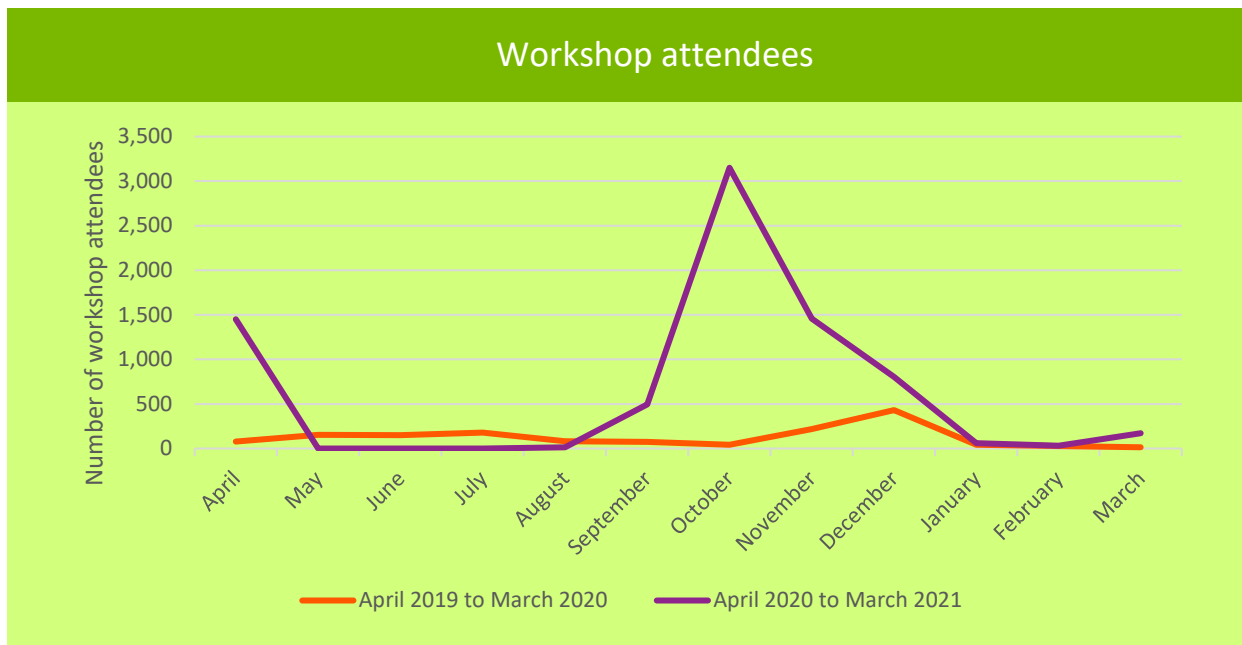


2.2.4 Workshop attendees

A total of 23,149 (M=151, IQR=748) individuals attended the workshops. The data shows a particularly high IQR, which suggests that the individual values in the data are spread out, and not similar to each other. This is accounted for by June 2020, July 2020 and October 2020, which have far more reported workshop attendees than any other months in the dataset. It is not entirely clear from the data whether this is an error in the self-reported KPI data or the number of attendees did increase drastically at these points in time. The original dataset also included an unusually high number of workshop attendees in May 2020 (19,302 attendees), which DSC's researchers have treated as an outlier and removed from the data due to the likelihood of this being an error in the self-reported KPI data.

The longitudinal data shows a large degree of variation between the two 12-month periods (see figure 2.4). From April 2019 to March 2020, 1,492 (M=80, IQR=116.5) individuals attended workshops, whereas 21,657 (M=650, IQR=1,826.5) attended during the subsequent time frame.

Figure 2.4



2.2.5 Schools supported

A total of 90 (M=2, IQR=5.25) schools were supported under the peer-to-peer education pillar of Changing Futures.

Figure 2.5

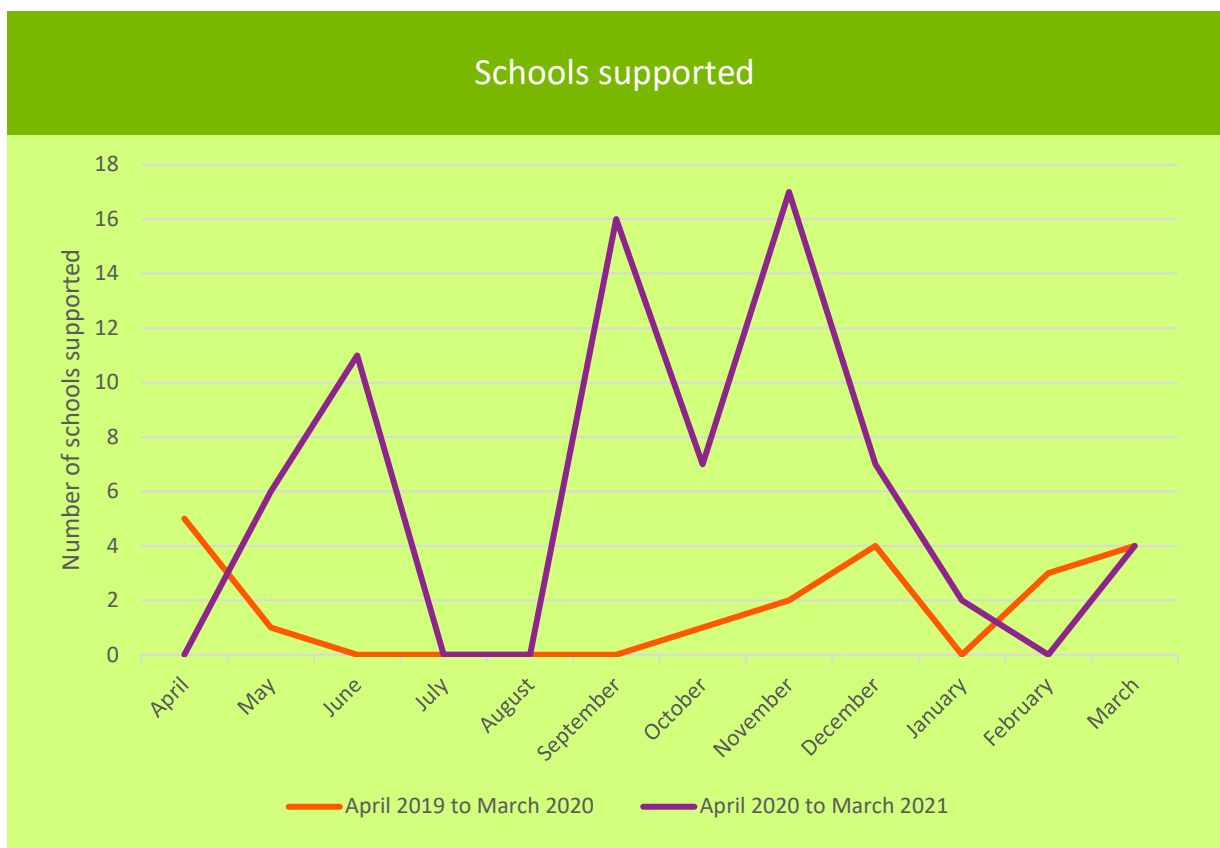


Figure 2.5 demonstrates that more schools were supported during the pandemic than had been supported during the previous year. In total, 20 (M=1, IQR=3.25) schools were supported from April 2019 to March 2020, whereas 70 (M=5, IQR=8) were supported from April 2020 to March 2021.

2.3 KEY ADULT EDUCATION

2.3.1 Training sessions delivered

Under the key adult education pillar, 27 (M=0, IQR=1) training sessions were delivered. As the median is 0, this suggests that most months saw no training sessions delivered, and indeed only 3 (M=0, IQR=0.25) sessions were delivered between April 2019 and March 2020. In contrast, 24 (M=0.5, IQR=4) sessions were delivered in the following year. Figure 2.6 shows the relatively low numbers of training sessions delivered between April 2019 and March 2020, with more delivered in the following year.

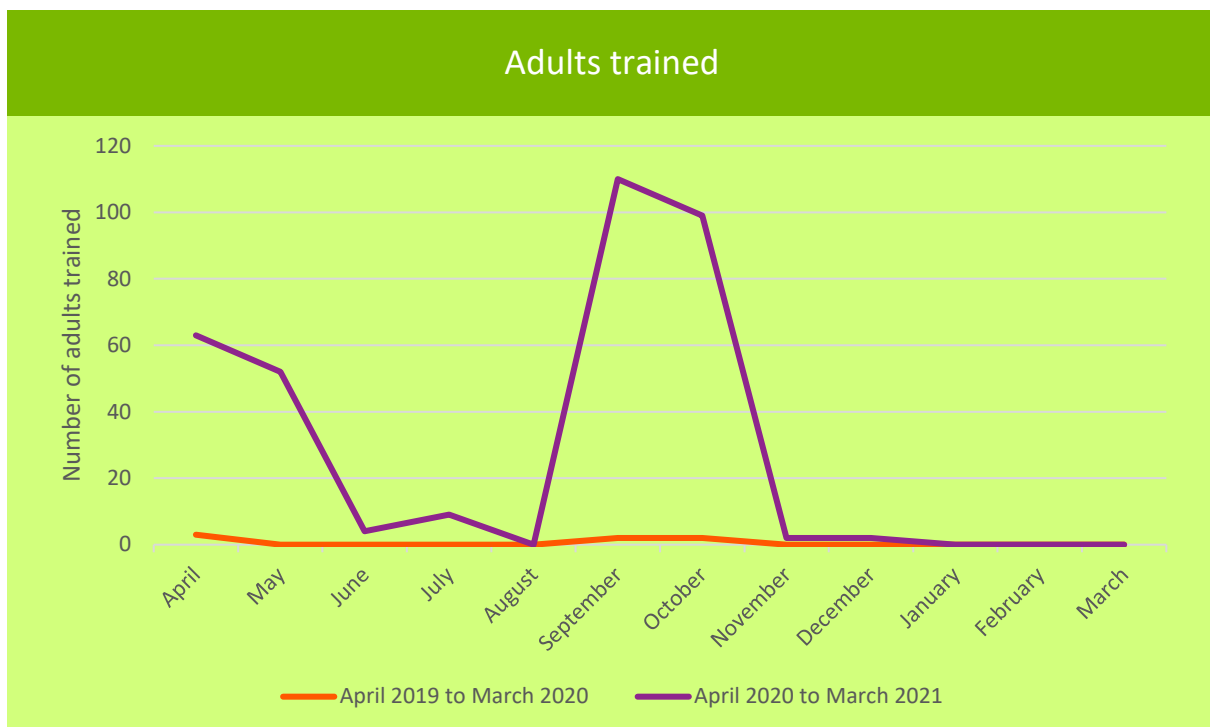
Figure 2.6



2.3.2 Adults trained

A total of 348 (M=0, IQR=3.25) adults were trained under the key adult education pillar. The trend observed in figure 2.7 is similar to the trend in figure 2.6, in that more adults were trained between April 2020 and March 2021 than in the previous year. A total of 7 (M=0, IQR=0.5) adults were trained from April 2019 to March 2020, whereas 341 (M=341, IQR=3) were trained in the following year.

Figure 2.7

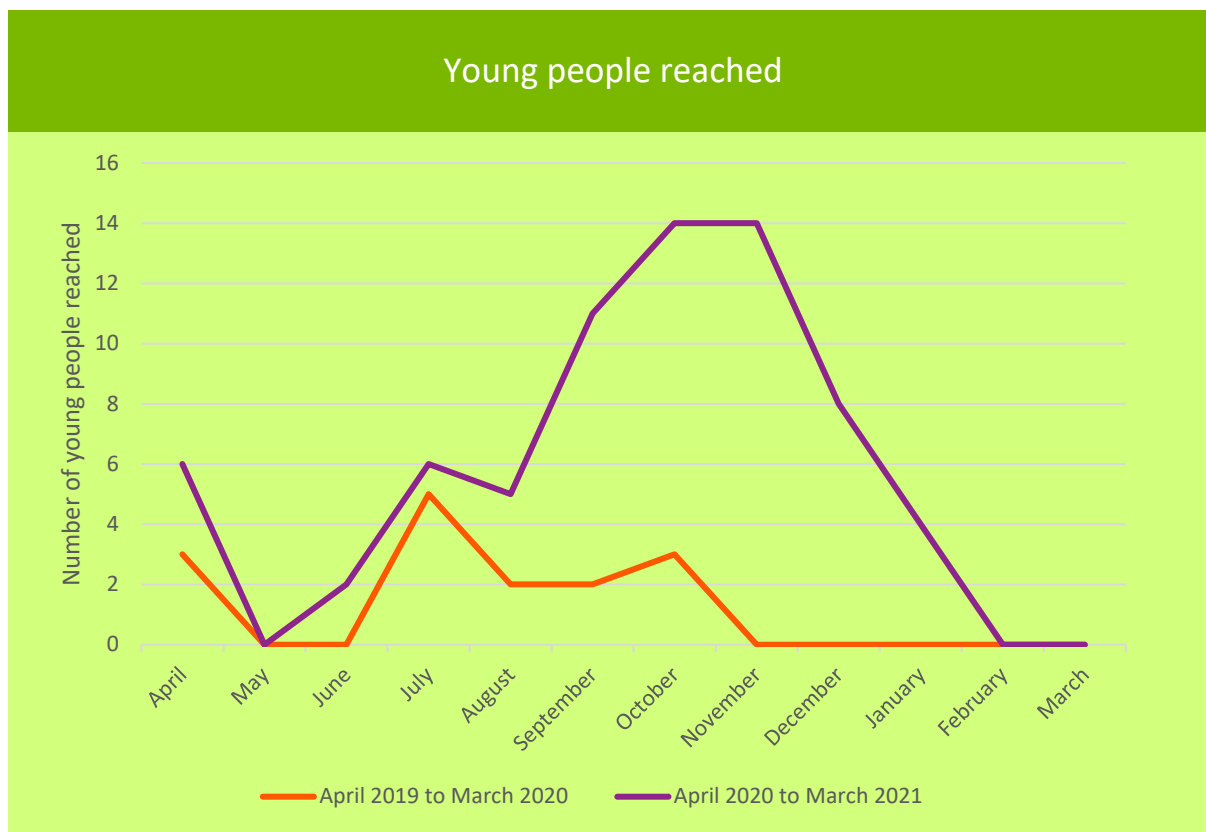


2.4 COUNSELLING AND THERAPEUTIC SERVICES

2.4.1 Young people reached

Under the counselling and other therapeutic services pillar, 85 (M=2, IQR=5.25) young people were reached under the Changing Futures projects included in the data set. There is again a similar trend in the data whereby a larger number of young people were reached in the period April 2020 to March 2021 than in the previous year. From April 2019 to March 2020, 15 (M=0, IQR=2.25) young people were reached, but April 2020 to March 2021 saw 70 (M=5.5, IQR=7.25) young people reached. Figure 2.8 shows these trends over time.

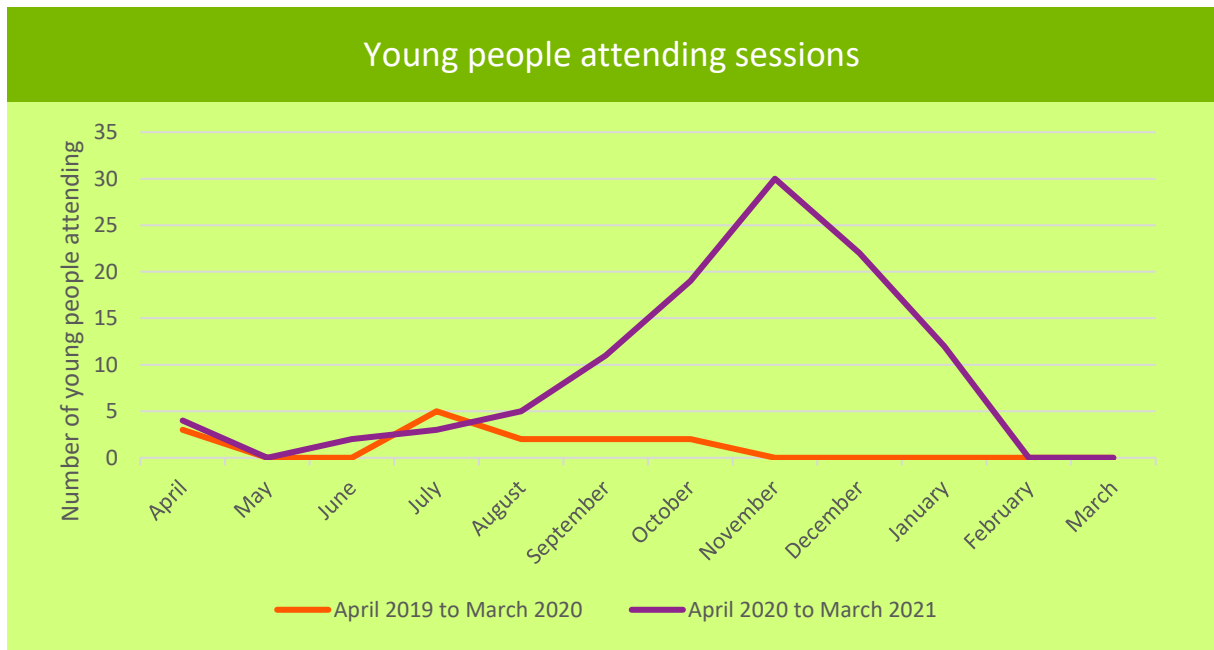
Figure 2.8



2.4.2 Young people attending sessions

A total of 122 ($M=2$, $IQR=5$) young people attended sessions under the counselling and other therapeutic services pillar. As shown in figure 2.9, a similar trend can once again be observed in this data as more young people attended sessions between April 2020 and March 2021 than during the previous year. A total of 14 ($M=0$, $IQR=2$) young people attended sessions between April 2019 and March 2020, and 108 ($M=4.5$, $IQR= 12.25$) attended between April 2020 and March 2021.

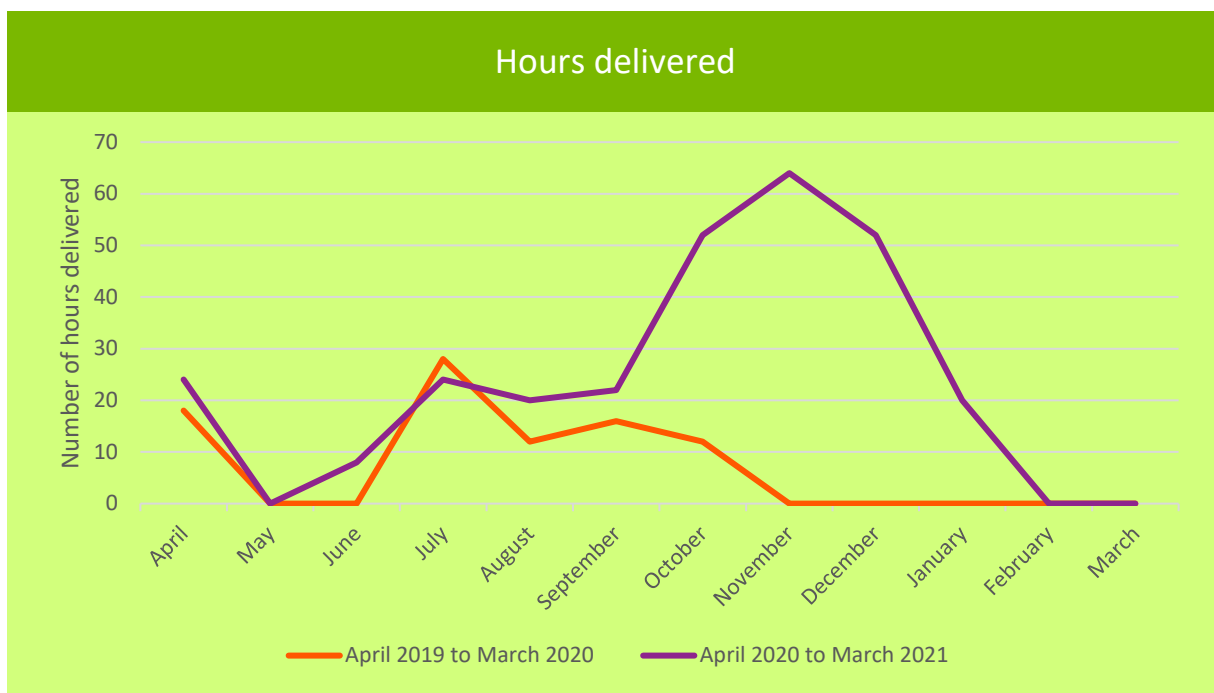
Figure 2.9



2.4.3 Hours delivered

The total number of hours delivered under the counselling and therapeutic services pillar was 372 (M=12, IQR=22.5). Again, there were more hours delivered under this pillar from April 2020 to March 2021 than there were in the previous year. From April 2019 to March 2020, a total of 86 (M=0, IQR=13) hours were delivered, and from April 2020 to March 2021, 286 (M=21, IQR=25) hours were delivered. Figure 2.10 shows these trends over time.

Figure 2.10



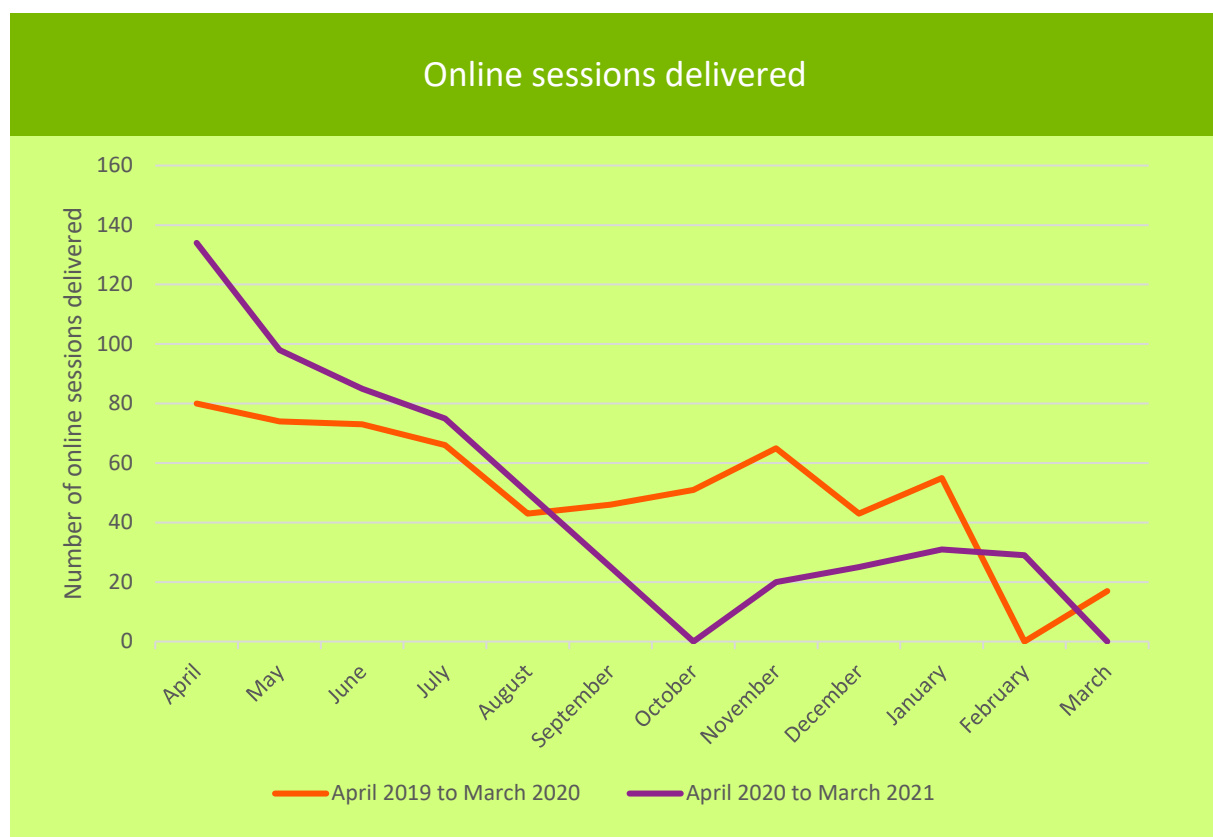
2.5 ONLINE STATISTICS

2.5.1 Number of online sessions delivered

A total of 1,185 (M=48, IQR=22.5) online sessions were delivered by the YMCAs included in this data set between April 2019 and March 2021. Interestingly, the data suggests that the number of online sessions delivered actually decreased between April 2020 and March 2021 compared to the previous year. From April 2019 to March 2020, 613 (M=53, IQR=24.75) online sessions were delivered, and the following year saw 572 (M=30, IQR=43.75) online sessions delivered.

Figure 2.11 shows that more online sessions were delivered from April to August 2020 than in the same months of the previous year, whereas September 2020 to January 2021 saw fewer online sessions delivered than in the same months of the previous years.

Figure 2.11

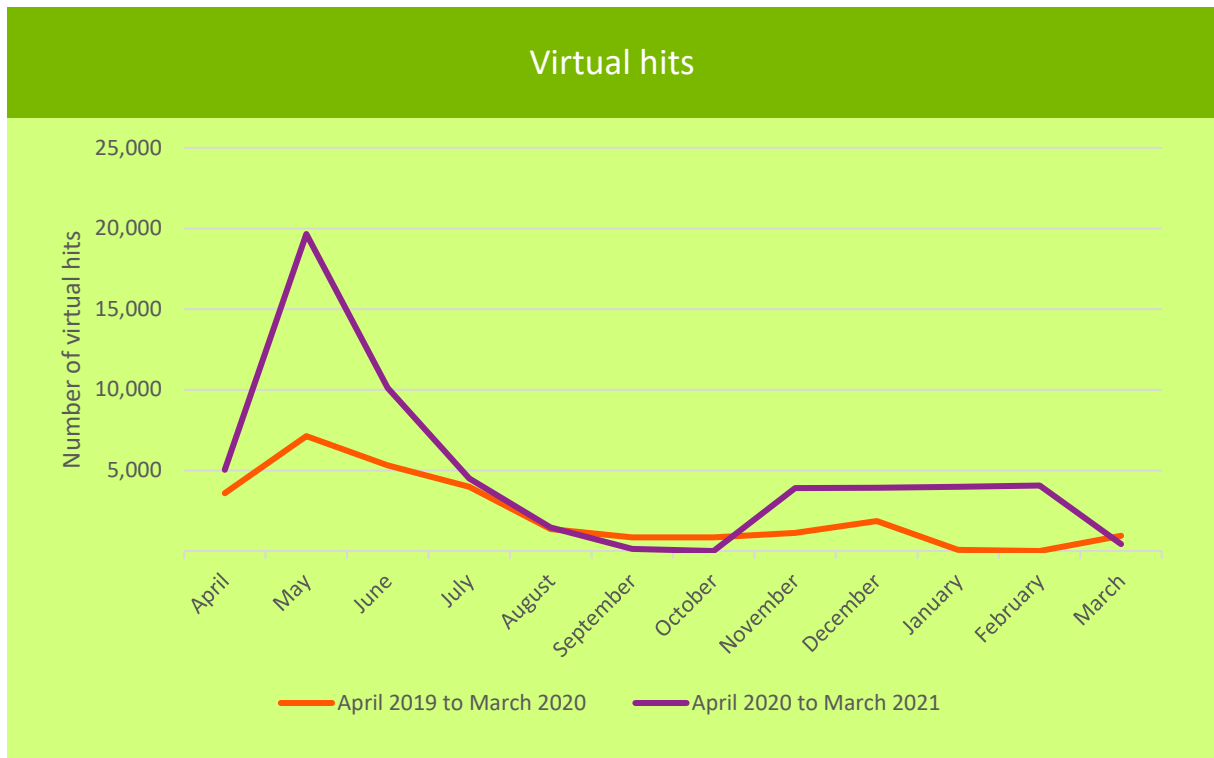


2.5.2 Numbers of virtual hits

The total number of virtual hits (i.e. visits to the individual YMCAs' Facebook pages and websites) was 84,210 (M=2,718.5, IQR= 3,326). There was again a sharp increase between April 2020 and March 2021 in comparison to the previous year, with 27,026 (M=1,241, IQR=2,844) hits from April 2019 to March 2020 and 57,184 (M=3,949.5, IQR=3,424.3) hits from April 2020 to March 2021.

Figure 2.12 shows the trend over the course of the two-year period, with a sharp spike in the number of virtual hits in May and June 2020, coinciding with the months following the first national lockdown.

Figure 2.12



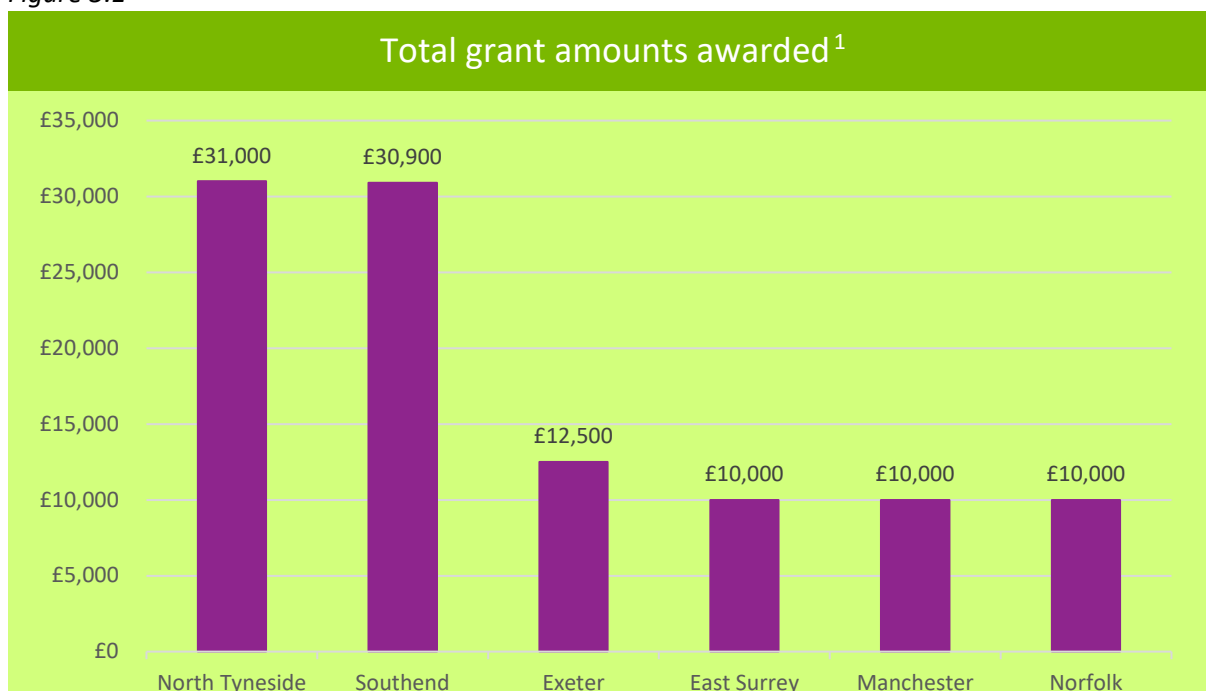
CHAPTER THREE

Case studies from six YMCAs

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In March and April 2021, DSC's researchers conducted interviews with representatives from six YMCAs. These individual YMCAs each conducted different projects using the Changing Futures funding, and the grants they received varied according to their projects. Figure 3.1 shows the grant amounts awarded to each of the YMCAs featured in this chapter.

Figure 3.1



¹ The amount awarded to Southend YMCA was rounded from £30,932.

3.2 YMCA EAST SURREY

3.2.1 The original plans and intentions

YMCA East Surrey received £10,000 under the Boost programme for its WAVES Champions project. This project was a peer-to-peer mental health and well-being project that offered drop-in sessions for young people with the aim of achieving increased confidence, mental health and well-being for young people, and the sense that the young people could support each other. At the time of its application, YMCA East Surrey noted that WAVES was already a successful project, with 168 young people engaging weekly and a 79% reported increase in well-being.

Our provision was working very well before but we needed to expand. We saw the need, and this allowed us to reach out to more young people and the key adults as well, like teachers and other youth workers, which we thought was really important.

YMCA East Surrey

The funding provided by Changing Futures was intended to expand the existing work by offering lunchtime sessions at schools which aimed to increase understanding of mental health issues, tackle stigma and signpost support. The intention was to offer sessions in three schools or colleges per term. YMCA East Surrey planned to train up to 20 mental health champions (peer educators), reach 50 young people through small group sessions, and engage with 300 young people through assemblies and presentations. The school environment was key to this project. While awareness of the importance of mental health and the need for initiatives may now be more prominent in schools, there is still a need for more training and awareness for the benefit of both students and staff.

Within the last four years that I've been working in mental health it's changed dramatically and schools have a lot more provision within that, which is wonderful. But I think young people were saying what ... teachers were saying as well, which was like, 'They don't know how to deal with me,' which is a really sad thing for a young person to say.

But the schools were saying, 'We need some help in what we need to do,' so training teachers in mental health first aid, for example. Having young people that were trained as mental health champions to work with other young people in schools was really helpful.

YMCA East Surrey

A key theme identified in the interview was that the project was designed to empower young people. For example, young people informed staff at YMCA East Surrey that schools could be negative environments for them, which informed the development and management of the project.

We also saw a need where ... a lot of [the young people] were saying that schools were particularly negative places for them, that they didn't feel they had the support to carry on the good work they were doing at WAVES outside the group. We felt that actually we're in a great position with our young people to train them up to be mental health champions within schools, to support other young people to do that, and just kind of look at what ... the young people were telling us about their lives and then helping them, empowering them to change things within their communities and their schools.

[The project was about] empowering those young people to [change things within their communities and schools], so that was the new aspect of the funding that we wanted to expand. [We wanted to] give young people the training to actually be able to do that and to make schools better places for them and for others.

YMCA East Surrey

3.2.2 The challenges faced

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the project could not be delivered in schools and delivery was moved online to emulate the existing aspects of WAVES. YMCA East Surrey noted in the interview that there was a sense that the schools were focusing on other challenges as a result of the pandemic, which made the project more difficult.

But with the school stuff, a lot of it was put on hold because of [COVID-19]. A lot of schools were focusing on other things rather than the stuff we were focusing on, so although we've kept really good contact with a lot of the schools, a lot of the work had to be postponed or stopped. There wasn't time for teachers to do training or come to our sessions because they were doing what we were doing, doing online stuff and stuff like that, so we had to be very careful about how we started [the project] up again in a COVID-safe way.

YMCA East Surrey

YMCA East Surrey noted that when it was possible to restart projects in schools, relationship-building was a challenge, and the interviewee stressed the importance of building relationships with schools.

Schools are very busy spaces and actually being able to find time for teachers to do particular training or for us to go in and do sessions was quite tough at the start. Building those relationships with schools [was difficult], particularly because lots of schools have lots of different relationships with charities and sometimes you can get lost within that. So relationship-building was a huge part of my role that actually maybe I didn't put too much time into beforehand, because I didn't realise that I needed that much time.

The relationship-building with schools and with counsellors and with key people in the community took a lot of time, and you'd say, 'Oh, I'll be able to start next week' and they'd say, 'Actually can you start in three weeks' time?' and you'd go, 'I want to start now.' So stuff like that was quite tough at the beginning, but once you've got those relationships within the schools and you've got the key person you want to talk to, it is quite smooth sailing after that.

YMCA East Surrey

While the sessions could go ahead online, these sessions were not without their difficulties, as evidenced in the interview.

The first three months we had to stop training because some of the challenges we had were [around the question of] how can we best support a young person when they're on a screen? Because they're in their house and if they're affected or finding some of the training a bit difficult because we're talking about some tricky subjects sometimes, how can we best support them when we're a little square on a screen? So we stopped most of our training in the first three months

because of that and focused on supporting young people that we had [an existing relationship with] and referring new young people to our online support.

YMCA East Surrey

YMCA East Surrey worked with local organisations to provide laptops to support young people in the project who were unable to access these digital services. Staff also offered one-to-one Zoom sessions and family Zoom sessions to support people who were struggling while at home. The work conducted by YMCA East Surrey is an excellent example of good practice when dealing with digital exclusion, which was noted in the interview as something that was not originally anticipated.

But we did have an occasion where some young people came to us and said, 'We don't even have the internet in our house, we don't have computers.' And if I'm completely honest that's something that didn't even cross my mind when we started [the project], and it just shows ... how important – how much of a lifeline all of this stuff is.

YMCA East Surrey

Another challenge faced during the course of this project was the vilification of young people in the media.

There was a news article that we looked at – I can't remember where it was from. It was at the beginning of the pandemic, and also there was an advert that was directed at young people from the government [showing] some boys sitting in a park not social distancing.

And a lot of the feedback that we got from it was like, 'What!? I'm not doing that!' and stuff like that and [comments on] how negative the press was. This is what a young person said: 'If maybe the government had made an effort that showed young people doing what they should be doing and saying thank you, young people would be more likely to go, "Oh yeah, I'll do that."'

YMCA East Surrey

One of the key elements that helped to tackle these challenges was the flexibility provided by YMCA England & Wales and other funders.

All the support we've got from people working for this funding ... has been really helpful, so the fact that we got an email saying 'We understand it's really difficult – if you need to change things, please change them so you can support young people' [was helpful]. Because other funders have not been so flexible with what we can do so the fact that ... we've been able to support young people under the current circumstances [has] been really helpful.

YMCA East Surrey

3.2.3 What was achieved?

Overall, the interview suggested that the WAVES Champions project achieved what was originally set out in the application, with the interviewee noting: 'We've achieved quite a lot with the online service with training people to be mental health champions.'

Staff at YMCA East Surrey started a private WAVES group on Facebook to allow young people to communicate and share information. Sessions were delivered via Zoom, which allowed young people

to talk about how they were doing and to discuss a well-being topic. Group activities (such as quizzes) were provided by the mental health champions with support from youth workers. The sessions were popular, reaching six to eight young people each day, and staff from YMCA East Surrey noted that the online sessions allowed more young people to access these services from across East Surrey.

Table 3.1 shows the latest available data for this project as of March 2021, organised by Changing Futures pillar and also showing online statistics.

Table 3.1

Project data for YMCA East Surrey		
Pillar or area	Item	Number
Peer-to-peer education	Peer educators recruited	20
	Hours delivered	305
	Workshops delivered	203
	Workshop attendees	331
	Schools supported	6
Key adult education	Training sessions delivered	3
	Adults trained	7
Counselling and other therapeutic services	Young people reached	15
	Young people attended	14
	Hours delivered	86
Online statistics	Online sessions	557
	Virtual hits	1,071

3.2.4 What was learned?

One of the key findings from the interview was that young people have shown exceptional resilience during the pandemic and should be appreciated for the role they have played.

I think what we've learned from young people and running the project is how resilient young people can be, given the opportunity. We've expected, as a society, young people to do more than other people who are much older than them, so going back to school, wearing masks all day, being in the classroom. I think often young people are vilified in newspapers [for] being out and not doing the right thing, [such as] social distancing, when actually from my experience young people have been amazing and they have done what they were expected to do and have really toed the line.

YMCA East Surrey

Gender differences were noted as an unexpected finding by YMCA East Surrey, with a larger proportion of boys referred to the service, possibly due to them being more comfortable in an online environment.

The amount of boys we got referred to us because our service was now online – I wasn't expecting that.

As soon as we went online, we got 15 referrals for young men who were keen to just join the project because it was online, it was over Zoom, it was something that they felt more familiar with. I had a meeting with four boys ... who'd engaged with the project because it was online and they

were saying to me that it doesn't feel as intrusive, which is interesting because you're sitting in your own room [when you're on Zoom].

YMCA East Surrey

3.3 YMCA EXETER

3.3.1 The original plans and intentions

YMCA Exeter was awarded £12,500 under the Duo programme for its RELEASE project. The funding received from Changing Futures was intended to cover the first 12 months of a four-year project, which in the first year would target two schools (in which YMCA Exeter already provided weekly youth clubs). The project intended to identify young people in these schools who could become mental health champions in addition to key adults who could be trained. The project also intended to engage older residents in supported accommodation who could host conversations in schools and provide training, thus using their lived experiences.

This project included sessions at a secondary school named Refuel@School, which introduced the service to young people in their school. The project also hosted lunchtime drop-in sessions at each school, which provided an introduction to mental health and well-being, and gave young people opportunities to discuss various mental health and well-being topics.

The project was officially stopped on 31 March 2020 and so was affected to a lesser extent by the COVID-19 pandemic than other projects.

3.3.2 The challenges faced

Access to schools was noted as a challenge for this project, particularly in the case of one school with which YMCA Exeter had not worked previously.

In one of the schools, we hadn't worked with them previously. The challenge was getting in there in the first place. The other school we had access to already in the project briefing timeline [in the application form] was pretty simple [to work with], but we were ... faced with a bit of scepticism around what were our intentions and how much we were going to achieve.

YMCA Exeter

A lack of communication between schools was also cited as a challenge, particularly in the initial months of the pandemic.

We then had this ... lack of communication with the school, which had taken about six to eight months to come back [i.e. for communication between the YMCA and the school to recommence], and here we are a year on – it's the end of the funding but we're working with the schools now.

YMCA Exeter

Adapting to digital delivery methods was also noted as a challenge, and the interviewee reported that the original take-up was quite slow and there was a gradual build-up of participation. Concerning these challenges with digital service delivery, the interviewee noted that they were able to use the skills of the staff at YMCA Exeter to increase engagement.

We've got a couple of workers that are really into gaming and we use their skill set and passion to bring kids into virtual spaces at a level they're interested in and then open [them] up to these [i.e. mental health] topics that we were previously exploring.

YMCA Exeter

3.3.3 What was achieved?

Table 3.2 shows the latest available data for this project as of March 2021, organised by Changing Futures pillar.

Table 3.2

Project data for YMCA Exeter		
Pillar	Item	Number
Peer-to-peer	Peer educators recruited	4
	Workshops recruited	29
	Workshop attended	788
	Schools supported	4
Key adult education	Training sessions delivered	18
	Adults trained	17

The interview suggested that one of the project's key achievements was how YMCA Exeter was now established in schools where it had previously had little access. This had enabled relationships to be established with key partners.

I think what we've done is really establish ourselves in two secondary schools that we had little access to before, and [we] are now seen as part of that community's response to lower mental health issues. So that's a level of just being part of that community resilience. But there's obviously lots of one-to-one and individual case studies that have come out where there's been an achievement for the young person themselves, whether overcoming anxiety they've faced during the pandemic to return to school, or just about treating their body well and eating well and starting [the day] with breakfast – you know, simple little milestones like that which are really big for young people.

In terms of the charity, [key achievements are] being part of that community resilience and long-term access, being embedded in those two secondary schools, and working alongside [the schools'] leadership team to come up with a joint response to some of the issues that those young people were facing.

YMCA Exeter

3.3.4 What was learned?

YMCA Exeter noted that it had learned three main things from the RELEASE project.

Rejoice when there are achievements that otherwise could go unnoticed with the stress kind of shifting everything.

I think we've learned to stand our ground with communication with schools and put our point across clearly to get what we want from a community approach as opposed to an education approach.

And we've learned that actually you can really meld the clinical and non-clinical well. I think before we were a little bit fearful of going into the clinical side of mental health as a youth charity, and actually it's worked really well to kind of meld that with the informal youth work setting.

YMCA Exeter

Another finding from YMCA Exeter was that the best way to address mental health projects with young people is to adopt a person-centred approach.

I'd say as a [person in my role], we just learned that age-old lesson which is not to try and put a model onto each young person, but to really start with that person-centred approach. Which we knew already, but time and time again it was [reinforced that we needed] to treat everyone differently on that project.

YMCA Exeter

3.4 YMCA MANCHESTER

3.4.1 The original plans and intentions

YMCA Manchester received £10,000 under the Boost programme for its Mental Health Champions Education project, which intended to extend an existing project that targeted students aged 11–21 in Salford who were experiencing poor mental health. The application form stated that the project would engage with three colleges and one school in one of the most deprived areas of Salford, and would be delivered over three phases of the academic year. Phase one would have consisted of peer education training to identify young people who wanted to become peer educators and were willing to co-design the training plan. Phase two would have concerned campaign work which involved key adults in an educational environment (i.e. schools and colleges) supporting peer educators to produce a mental health campaign. Finally, phase three was planned as an exhibition to bring together stakeholders in mental health and education, in addition to local government and potential funders, to learn more about the project and its impact.

The interview conducted with YMCA Manchester revealed that there was a strong sense that young people had to be included in the design of the services. This would enable the creation of something that would be useful by drawing on the lived experiences of young people.

We did a call-out, [saying], 'This is what we're going to have to do – how do you think it should be run?' And [the young people] came in to say, 'You need to be doing it on Instagram – forget Facebook. You need to be doing this, you need to be doing that – this is what it's going to look like.'

What [the young people] said [was], 'This is how young people communicate – this is what [the project] needs to look like.'

YMCA Manchester

The interviewee noted that the pandemic had resulted in the project turning into a ‘game of two halves’ – i.e. when the project had shifted to online delivery methods, its aims (and to a degree the needs of the young people) had changed.

[It’s] a game of two halves, so pre-lockdown there was information-giving, ... there was how [young people] could access services and ... there were the strategies – mental health strategies. What became the biggest [area to focus on in response to the pandemic] then was mental health strategies and referrals.

YMCA Manchester

3.4.2 The challenges faced

YMCA Manchester’s project was one that was disrupted by the pandemic. However, from the interview, there was a clear sense that YMCA Manchester had anticipated and prepared for measures such as lockdowns; this preparation in part led to the project being successfully delivered throughout the pandemic.

I pre-empted that we would have a lockdown based on [what we could see happening in] Italy. ... It was so obvious by the end of February. ... I said to my team, ‘Right, we don’t know [when but] any day now we will be in lockdown.’ I think that was ... in February.

So, ... the day we [went into] lockdown, we already had it planned, so I could then write to all my funders and [say], ‘This is the plan – do you accept it? We can go ahead with it, [but] if you don’t [accept it], here’s the money [back].’ [This] plan went to [YMCA England & Wales] and all of the funders and they all signed it off, so we went ahead with it. The staff were all ready, it was all set up, so we didn’t lose any time at all.

YMCA Manchester

YMCA Manchester highlighted adapting to digital service delivery as one of the biggest challenges it experienced, in terms of both the capabilities of personnel and the resources required to provide services digitally.

I think I would say the shift from having the expertise and training [for] group [and] one-to-one work, into an area which was all about how you deliver online. ... That was the biggest challenge – the technical know-how and physical resources to do it.

YMCA Manchester

Staff management was another challenge identified, and the interviewee placed a particular emphasis on managing staff given that they too were going through a traumatic experience as a result of the pandemic.

Early on ... I realised that I needed to meet everybody virtually once a week, so I could keep the team together and [communicate] that we all had to pull together and maybe share some of the jobs that we would have [normally] kept separate, which we did do.

Also, recognising that your staff are going through a traumatic experience is really important. So that means a lot more caretaking than you normally would do as a manager. You just get the job

done and that's it. Well, I had to make sure that there was a certain level of care and the longer it's gone on, the more that has been required. And I think [when] you're working on a mental health project [as a manager], there's got to be that balance between ... caring for your staff and delivering.

So, ... sometimes you have to [say], 'No, we have to do this.' There's [got to be] a balance between your needs and the needs of the organisation. [And] you as an individual have to take some individual responsibility – [you can] seek your own therapeutic interventions and it's okay to do that. But [finding] that ... fine balance as a manager is quite subtle.

YMCA Manchester

YMCA Manchester also identified a challenge relating to the vilification of young people in the media. The interviewee noted how the treatment of young people in the media did not reflect the experience of young people in the project.

I think what lockdown has done is brought things to the surface. So young people being vilified by the press [was] exacerbated during that time, and we had some of the young people responding to it, finding it traumatising. They're isolated, they've lost family members, they're experiencing heightened levels of anxiety and trauma, [and they] turn on the television and they're portrayed as these terrible villains breaking lockdown, giving people COVID and killing people.

In the media there were young people having parties, young people doing this, young people doing that, and [the young people we spoke to were saying], 'I'm on my own, I haven't seen anybody.' 'My mother's got cancer, I can't go out, that's my life.'

In areas in Manchester where there were high levels of COVID-19, they somehow believed it was fine to have people around for dinner parties. Now we [i.e. the interviewers and interviewee] would see that as to do with those individuals and their choice because we don't have a bias against them. [But in terms of society and the media more generally], if it was someone from a council estate, a young person or people from certain ethnic groups, because of our prejudice we then extrapolate [what we're seeing to] the whole group. You can see that across the board. And that's what young people were saying: 'This doesn't represent my experience'.

YMCA Manchester

Digital exclusion was identified as a challenge for this project, and the interviewee noted that digital exclusion isn't necessarily the result of poverty.

[There is an] assumption that young people have a certain level of resources. One of the groups that we work with in Salford is the religious Jewish community, where they don't access [the internet]. [So digital exclusion is] not just [about] the poverty angle – it's also that. ... Suddenly [young people's lack of resources became our] biggest challenge. And we moved through that and found a way through. Still, ... it would have been good to have had a certain amount of extra resource to be able to make that transition.

YMCA Manchester

3.4.3 What was achieved?

YMCA Manchester released an evaluation report that included quantitative and qualitative data on the project from before and after the first national lockdown. Some examples of the pre-lockdown evaluation findings included indirect delivery to 1,700 students via weekly tutorial groups, drop-in events and newsletters, and direct delivery to over 400 students via workshops and drop-in sessions. Qualitative data from interviews with peer educators identified themes such as breaking down stigma, increased confidence among peer educators to signpost information to young people, and a greater sense of cohesion among the tutorial groups. The post-lockdown evaluation found a greater uptake of individuals wanting to be mental health champions than anticipated, with 88 individuals in the programme (the prediction at the beginning of the project was 30). The report identified that the majority of the young people involved wanted to make a difference and feel connected, and this aspiration was ‘heightened over the lockdown’ (YMCA Manchester, 2020).

Table 3.3 shows the latest available statistics for this project as of March 2021. Note that this data is the last available data provided to DSC researchers and so differs from the findings from the evaluation report mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Table 3.3

Project data for YMCA Manchester		
Pillar or area	Item	Number
Peer-to-peer education	Peer educators recruited	42
	Hours delivered	480
	Workshop attendees	34,352
Online statistics	Online sessions	328
	Virtual hits	50,142

3.4.4 What was learned?

One of the main lessons identified by YMCA Manchester stemmed from the fact that the young people who accessed these services spoke about a multitude of complex socio-political factors. In the words of the interviewee, ‘There’s something systemically wrong.’

One of the things that I think was really important is that there is a political element (with a small ‘p’) around mental health, and young people are really switched on to it. [They know that] there’s [only] so much you can do for yourself. [A person] can think that [they’re well] and yet [they’re] living in areas that [have] high levels of deprivation – that’s traumatic; high areas of violent crime – that’s traumatic; you have overcrowding in schools – that’s traumatic; [and] you have poor health interventions – that’s traumatic.

You have all of that and then you say, ‘Just think positive thoughts and do a bit of breathing and a bit of meditation and [do] a bit of peer education and [if] you’re not fine you’re a failure.’ They didn’t say those words, [but] it was like there’s something systemically wrong.

When you look at the evidence, too much noise, overcrowding, lack of breaks and lack of brain rest all result in trauma. Physical trauma. Not only for the young people but for the staff as well. So, they’re saying ‘it is broken’.

YMCA Manchester

The interviewee also noted that YMCAs are in a position where they have access to the views of young people on a variety of issues, and those voices can be triangulated with the existing evidence to support future policy and campaigning work.

When young people are saying to me, 'You know the thing about [how] we don't have long enough breaks, we don't do this, we don't do the other,' and I said, 'Well here's the evidence, here's the study that supports what you're talking about. This isn't a hunch. There's science that backs [up] what you're saying.'

You cannot keep expecting individuals that are already dealing with multiple and complex needs to be the sole solution to a collective problem. You cannot do it and if you do it you are putting them under more trauma. No two ways about it. And all you have to do is triangulate the evidence that's sitting there with the voices of young people.

YMCA Manchester

Another lesson identified in the interview (and in other interviews) was that there was a sense that some mental health projects are overcomplicating the burden on young people by providing too much information.

You know, [a project worker might say], 'Let's talk about depression – what's the information about it? What's the evidence base around it?' It was more [effective to] put all of that aside [and say], 'Let's get strategies in place. Because you're in crisis.' If you're in crisis, you don't need to be given loads of information about your crisis. You just go, 'Okay, you're feeling crap – what can we do, what works?'

YMCA Manchester

3.5 YMCA NORFOLK

3.5.1 The original plans and intentions

YMCA Norfolk received £10,000 under the Boost programme for its YMCA Mind Matters project, which intended to target young people aged 11–18 in education and also key adults. In its application form, YMCA Norfolk noted that this was a natural continuation of its pre-existing work run in schools by the YMCA Mind Matters team.

The YMCA Mind Matters project intended to use the funding as seed money to grow existing mental health work and to deliver in new areas across Norfolk. The suburbs of Greater Norwich were identified as particularly salient because there was a lack of substantial or co-ordinated mental health work in that area at the time of the application.

The Mind Matters project is designed to be flexible and effective while ensuring financial sustainability for schools. According to the application form, the project's representatives approached schools to propose they partnered with YMCA Norfolk for two years. In the first year, the schools would receive 12,000 Mind Matters points for free, and then the school would commit to purchasing 12,000 points in the second year. These points allowed schools to access mental health services.

The project intended to train 30 mental health champions and 360 school staff, and reach 1,080 young people with workshops and 1,200 through mental health assemblies.

3.5.2 The challenges faced

Of the six YMCAs included in these case studies, YMCA Norfolk was perhaps the least affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as a lot of work had already happened before the first national lockdown. As a result, some of the challenges faced by this project differ from those of others. For example, the nature of the project required the schools involved to plan for multiple years of work, which was difficult for some.

I think [one] of the challenges was the element of the buy-in. ... Some schools liked the idea of having the longevity over a couple of years, [but] some schools didn't like that because they only get funding or an allocated funding element for each year. So we were coming in and asking for them to think about two years – that was a little bit too much.

YMCA Norfolk

This project required schools to buy in to the project after receiving a year's worth of Mind Matters points for free, which enabled the project to extend to two years with the Changing Futures funding. This caused difficulties in co-ordinating finances with the schools.

The other challenge we faced was [that] each school was very different [in terms of] who you need to talk to about finances and who can sign those finances off.

YMCA Norfolk

While this project was affected by the pandemic to a lesser extent, it did still face some challenges as a result. Similarly to some of the other interviewees featured in this chapter, the interviewee noted that YMCA Norfolk experienced difficulties engaging with schools as the schools were very busy.

The other challenge that we did have is schools [had] a lot to deal with. [They had to] try and think about an external [i.e. a representative of YMCA Norfolk] coming on to [Microsoft] Teams calls, coming on to Zoom and doing that kind of thing, [but this was] completely ... not on their radar. [It's] not that well-being wasn't [on their radar] – that was completely on their radar. But [they had] members of staff to try and do that pick-up element [i.e. respond to young people's urgent needs in the moment], rather than giving me a call and seeing what I could do.

YMCA Norfolk

The pandemic also resulted in staffing and organisational challenges, and the interviewee noted that they and one other member of staff were furloughed for a long period of time, resulting in them being unable to engage with the schools and carry out the project's work.

3.5.3 What was achieved?

In the interview, one of the main achievements reported was relationship-building with schools.

We were able to build some really great relationships with the schools, and in terms of that I mean actually just knowing somebody at the school. Sometimes something as small as that can be really helpful, because you then – I guess cheekily [–] know the structure of the email address, so [at] some schools you can work out what it is and if you know a name, then you’re in. So actually, building those relationships has been really beneficial, not just for this project but for YMCA as a whole.

YMCA Norfolk

Table 3.4 shows the latest available data for this project as of March 2021.

Table 3.4

Project data for YMCA Norfolk		
Pillar or area	Item	Number
Peer-to-peer education	Peer educators recruited	4
	Workshops delivered	29
	Workshop attendees	788
	Schools supported	4
Key adult education	Training sessions delivered	18
	Adults trained	17

3.5.4 What was learned?

YMCA Norfolk noted that one of the things they learned from the project was that young people are noticing mental health and well-being services more as a result of the pandemic.

I think a lot of young people are now able to recognise [the existence of mental health and well-being services] more. I think instead of using Dr Google, it’s going to be beneficial that they have somebody else to talk to about [their experiences]. And I think having something like the pandemic that’s created such a widespread outburst of difference to people’s mental health – actually the young people are noticing that and know that they should be in conversation about it.

YMCA Norfolk

Similarly to other interviewees, the interviewee noted that when young people need mental health and well-being services, they don’t require a comprehensive understanding of mental health to access the services.

I think the one element that I’ve noticed the most is just that general conversation around mental health, and conversations [encouraging] young people to get involved, [are helpful]. So they don’t need a definite lowdown on what each mental health disorder is and [information on] matching the signs and symptoms – they just need to be able to have a chat and confer around mental health.

YMCA Norfolk

The interview also revealed that the switch to digital delivery methods had in some cases been positive and had helped with breaking down barriers to accessing services that existed before the pandemic, such as geographical restrictions.

What was a barrier before: Norfolk, it's not just 20 minutes in one direction and 20 in another and that's everyone. It's an hour and a half to go one way and an hour and a half another way – it's just crazy. But the online development of services means anyone can attend anywhere from any corner, and we haven't got any barriers [related to] finding a building that suits most [people] to come to, or the parking element – that kind of thing. That kind of stress is completely gone and I like that.

YMCA Norfolk

3.6 YMCA NORTH TYNESIDE

3.6.1 The original plans and intentions

YMCA North Tyneside received £31,000 under the Trio programme for its MH:2020 project. This project intended to target young people aged 11–18 and planned to work in partnership with local schools and voluntary sector partners, with a focus on young people and key adults during transitions (such as moving from primary to secondary school).

The project was planned to be based in educational settings in North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Teesdale. It was intended to provide activities and opportunities to enable young people to feel like they belong and could contribute, and assist them to experience positive mental health more often. According to the project's application form, this was planned to be achieved via key adults, peer mentors and school assemblies that would provide education and awareness materials in order to help young people to understand mental health. The project also intended to deliver a range of therapeutic interventions, provide support for peer mentors to support their peers' mental health, and increase mental health awareness among key adults by distributing information via schools, voluntary sector partners and information stands at events. The project aimed to use a 'young people in the lead' approach so that peer mentors could design the project in collaboration with their peers. The MH:2020 project at YMCA North Tyneside operates within the wider Healthy Habits programme, which tries to get individuals to do five things a day that make them feel better and provide a sense of achievement.

In the interview with YMCA North Tyneside, the interviewee stated that one of the things they were trying to achieve with the MH:2020 project was to avoid either replacing or funding an existing service.

[The goal of the project] was certainly not to replace or to help fund something that was already existing. It was more about continuing things that had been highlighted and trying [to respond to] new needs. ... So, we knew that there was something happening and we wanted to do something about it, and so this gave us the opportunity to do something about it.

YMCA North Tyneside

3.6.2 The challenges faced

This project was due to start in January 2020 and therefore it was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewee noted that while there was a general sense that there had been an increase in demand for mental health services more widely as a result of the pandemic, this might not have been a simple matter of cause and effect.

Is it coincidental that the mental health of young people was highlighted more when the services weren't available, or actually are we living in a time when young people's mental health has become more of an issue? Possibly a mixture of both.

I just think maybe [the pandemic] hasn't actually increased the issue around mental health – maybe what it's done is highlighted it more.

YMCA North Tyneside

The interviewee noted the challenge of needing to adapt to digital delivery methods, and that increased group sizes brought their own challenges regarding engaging with young people.

You can sit in [online] meetings and [in] some of them [young people] will just not say anything at all because they feel uncomfortable ... but you know [that] if you were seated with a group around a desk in a room, you'd be able to bring people into conversations.

[One school] couldn't [arrange] work experience placements so they decided [the young people] were going to become young ambassadors [a peer educator role in the Healthy Habits programme] and there were 96 of them and I was like, 'Well, should we have a meeting with all of them?' And it was like, 'No, how on earth can we get away with having a Zoom meeting with 96?' So we thought we'd bring it down – we'd have smaller groups and then they could disseminate all the information to the bigger number.

YMCA North Tyneside

On a similar note to other interviewees, there was a feeling that schools were particularly busy during the pandemic, which may have negatively affected the project.

We've been able to do stuff with schools but on a kind of Zoom basis, although I have to say there is one school I've still been able to go into and develop pieces of work with young Healthy Habits ambassadors in there. Some of the schools have been really helpful and good, [whereas] some of the schools are kind of like, 'Look, we've got other things to be getting on with at the minute,' which is fairly understandable.

YMCA North Tyneside

3.6.3 What was achieved?

The interviewee noted that they were able to recruit 16 health ambassadors and suggested that the pandemic may have resulted in a more 'committed group'.

We've got 16 health ambassadors, and you know what in some ways I think we've probably ended up with quite a committed group because of the challenges we've had to face. So, I think the fact that they're still keen after [everything] we've had this year of going back and forward and in and out of school, and this happening and that happening, and being able to do a little bit but not lots – the fact that they're still keen, that's really good. I think that's a positive, and hopefully we're going to be able to get out and reach the wider community.

YMCA North Tyneside

As this project was affected by the pandemic, there were some aspects that were only beginning to restart at the time of the interview, and other elements of the project were not feasible due to the pandemic.

We've done a little bit this week and we're going to try to do a little bit next week, [such as] having little pop-up Healthy Habits events out in the community, but we have to be really careful because we can't be seen to advertise because we can only have 29 young people in a sports group. So if we go out and just do some football or running or exercise, we're only allowed 29.

One of the things that we did have in the application which just hasn't got anywhere near happening – and I feel very sorry for the professionals we spoke to before – is stuff like music therapy and arts therapy. Because again that's a small-group thing, but we haven't been able to get anywhere near that at the minute.

YMCA North Tyneside

3.6.4 What was learned?

One of the main points that emerged from the interview with YMCA North Tyneside was that social media has presented an opportunity to work in different ways in order to signpost support and provide information on mental health to young people.

[We've learned that there are] different ways about how to deliver work and how to contact young people. It becomes quite difficult because some of us are getting quite old and we're quite cynical about [the effectiveness of social media]. Young people spend an awful lot of time on TikTok, but are they spending an awful lot of time on social media accessing information around mental health? I don't know. We have to try and think of different ways to work.

YMCA North Tyneside

Another finding involved the long-term implications of COVID-19 and how these may affect how young people behave and socialise beyond the pandemic.

I think the main thing that has come out [of the pandemic] is there're still a lot of young people out there who don't want to meet in big groups. So, we speak to them and we say, 'What's it like being back at school?' And it's still very strange for them. So, in school, they'll stay in twos or threes or fours and not hang out in big groups like they used to, and as a consequence when they're back out on the street that [i.e. spending time in larger groups] doesn't tend to happen quite so much.

YMCA North Tyneside

The interviewee also said that there were young people who were disappointed not to be taking part in school and that it would be a mistake to assume that young people don't care about school.

One thing that surprised me is the young people who are disappointed that they're not doing exams and they're not going to prove they've put the hard work in. We just assume, and of course we shouldn't, that young people don't care about school. A lot of them really miss school, because it's the place where they meet a lot of their friends, and ... some of them feel they've had a completely wasted year. ... When you say things like, 'Do you think the school should get rid of the year and just redo it?' some of them will say, 'Yeah, that sounds brilliant' and some of them will say, 'No, because I've done the work this year, and I don't want to do it again.' That's surprised me – how keen they are to test themselves to prove that they've done stuff.

YMCA North Tyneside

3.7 YMCA SOUTHEND

3.7.1 The original plans and intentions

YMCA Southend was awarded £30,900² under the Trio programme for its START project. This project intended to target 150 young people aged 11–18 experiencing emotional well-being difficulties who would benefit from early interventions. Additionally, the plan was to train 20 young people as peer-to-peer mentors. The project also included four counselling students (key adults) who participated during work placements. The project aimed to enable young people to experience positive mental health more often by improving knowledge of mental health among young people, raising awareness of coping strategies and resilience, and signposting support. Ultimately, the aims were to equip young people to support their peers' mental health and to enable key adults to support young people's mental health via training and placement opportunities.

The funding also allowed YMCA Southend to repay qualification fees (unspecified, but possibly Gateway Accreditation as per the application form) and expand its work.

I think [the project] was about expanding our work. It kind of fitted nicely in with some of our areas of delivery.

It gave us funding to repay our £1,000 qualification fees and just keep doing what we're doing but making it bigger and better each time – we've got to evolve.

YMCA Southend

3.7.2 The challenges faced

According to the project's application form, it was due to start in January 2020. It was therefore affected by the COVID-19 pandemic more than some of the other projects featured in this chapter. However, the interviewee stated that they were able to mitigate a lot of the challenges of the pandemic by developing strategies, policies and procedures.

We knew very early on that our conference wasn't going to be able to happen how we'd planned, so as much as our mobilisation plans changed, we were able to do it early on, develop our online working policies, procedures and strategies, and mobilise all of that, so it didn't impact us as badly

² The amount awarded to Southend YMCA was rounded from £30,932.

as it could have if the truth be told. I'm lucky I've got a very tech-savvy team ... that were able to adapt and respond well.

YMCA Southend

3.7.3 What was achieved?

In an update sent to DSC's researchers before the interview, YMCA Southend stated that they had delivered 153 face-to-face sessions before the initial lockdown, and they quickly developed policies and procedures to deliver online mentoring in March 2020. In the interview, the interviewee stated that they had achieved what they set out to achieve.

The counselling strand, obviously it's left a bit of a legacy, because that was something that we weren't doing before and now we've got somebody in that's built the relationships with the university³ [and] second-year placement students.

YMCA Southend

The project was originally intended to include a conference in December 2020, which was moved forward to October 2020 to coincide with World Mental Health Day. It was reformatted as the 'Huge Hangout', an online event with six hours of online content including mental health advice, workshops and music, which reached over 4,000 views online.

We did the huge conference, [which] wasn't really a conference – it was more like a musical festival with workshops. It was the Huge Hangout for World Mental Health Day.

The workshops, that six hours of live stream, we've broken them down into individual workshops and performances so they're all on our music pages for people to access. They've not got to sit through six hours of footage and you can just pick out what bit you want now, and we've used that in schools as well so there's a legacy for it.

YMCA Southend

YMCA Southend provided DSC researchers with additional information that had not been included in the original dataset. This update revealed that a further 155 therapeutic sessions were delivered from March 2020 onwards, bringing the therapeutic strand of this programme to 308 delivery hours. In addition to this, a total of 58 peer educators were trained which exceeded the original target of 20, and the Huge Hangout for World Mental Health Day online event resulted in 3,900 views. Table 3.5 contains the data provided by YMCA Southend.

³ The application form stated that the project would liaise with Victoria Counselling and Southend College to recruit counselling students, although neither of these are universities.

Table 3.5

Project data for YMCA Southend		
Pillar or area	Item	Number
Peer-to-peer education	Peer educators recruited	58
	Workshops delivered	37
	Workshop attendees	58
Key adult education	Training sessions delivered	2
	Adults trained	1,633 ⁴
Counselling and other therapeutic services	Young people reached	58
	Hours delivered	308

3.7.4 What was learned?

One of the findings from the interview with YMCA Southend was that, on a similar note to other projects in this chapter, the move to digital delivery methods was for some young people a positive development.

They haven't got to travel and come in – [digital delivery] has got its bonuses, and I mean certainly for us it's enabled us to ... reach out and make contact with professionals and the speakers that we've had delivering the workshops. They've sent in videos [and] young people have been able to ask questions interactively, [and it] would have been a lot more difficult to get them to turn up in real life.

YMCA Southend

The importance of having a young-person-led approach to service delivery was highlighted as a lesson by YMCA Southend. The interviewee also spoke about the importance of peer mentoring in dealing with poor mental health and well-being.

There's nothing new under the sun, is there really? But I think that whole peer-mentoring, youth-leadership kind of bottom-up approach for young people [can] change their future.

I think with the peer mentoring, it's almost like it's [an] early intervention. If you train, give young people the skills they need when life does throw a curve ball at [them], [they] might be able to handle it a bit better. It's easier than firefighting at the time. And even just having those difficult conversations and knowing that it is alright to speak to somebody and there's other people in the same boat. I think it does raise awareness as well. Mental health is really important ... it's not taught in schools, and this sort of thing, having a signature programme that everybody does as part of their core curriculum, [is helpful].

YMCA Southend

⁴ This figure represents 1,633 views of online tutorials and may not represent 1,633 individual adults trained.

CHAPTER FOUR

The legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic: what's next for Changing Futures?

4.1 Involving young people in the design of future services

The most clear and resounding response from the interviewees was that in order for Changing Futures to develop in the future, young people absolutely must be involved in the design of any future services.

I think if Changing Futures can continue to be as flexible as it has been during the [COVID-19] pandemic, that would be really helpful and actually maybe even getting some young people who have been part of this project to come together to talk about what it could look like in the future would be really good, and not many funding streams do that.

If a funder could have a space where young people can talk about what needs funding, what's needed in their local communities, what's missing – maybe that's for us to be telling funders, but if you ... have voices of young people within that, you're already winning because you've already got young people who are engaging, who are dictating what is needed. I think we can all fall into the thing of 'this is what young people need'.

YMCA East Surrey

I think what we need to do is get back out and, when we can, talk to as many young people [as possible] and say, 'Look. This is what's been going on' and ask them, 'We've had a year of this – what's happened? What have you really missed? What do you really need?' And I think once we get those conversations going and that bit of research done, then we need to think about what happens next. Because I know the government are already saying 'mental health this, mental health that'. Well yeah, but what part of mental health? What do we need to do? What do the young people want? And is there anything else? I think we can come up with ideas, [but] until we speak to the young people and see ... how they've felt over the last year, then we need to sit and wait.

[We're going to use] different ways of working. ... We're going to start doing podcasts around health, but it can be any kind of health. The young people are going to come up with the ideas about who to interview and what to interview about, so let the young people have the say, let them develop the work. Because they know far better than [us]. You know I'm 56 now and I'm talking to 12- and 13-year-olds and they're talking about TikTok because they know what's relevant

to them, so definitely make it very young-people-led and I think the response from other young people will be better.

YMCA North Tyneside

I think it's about including a group of young people right from the beginning to design [the programme] so they believe in [the project] right the way through rather than them being told to do it later on.

YMCA Exeter

We've got a youth board as well. So, [this is about] always making sure that the young people are involved in the mobilisation [and] planning. Our ... youth board are members of different schools, different colleges. So, I'm trying to take over Southend [i.e. have YMCA projects for mental health in every school in Southend] and make sure we've got ambassadors in every school, and it would be lovely if we did that up and down the country with all the YMCAs. ... I do think that [Changing Futures] is a brilliant resource and programme that really benefits the young people.

YMCA Southend

4.2 Reaching out to schools

YMCA Southend noted that if other YMCAs were to become involved with future iterations of Changing Futures, they should reach out to schools because that is where young people spend the majority of their time, so building relationships with schools is invaluable.

I think [that if other YMCAs were to become involved, the advice I would give] would be to reach out to schools, to be honest. Because at the end of the day that's where young people are the majority of the time. And [concerning] mental health, we get a lot of our referrals from emotional and mental health and well-being services – everybody knows the waiting lists are like nine months, so there're always young people who are ready to bite your arm off for group work and activities while they're waiting.

So, I suppose [I would also advise] building those relationships early on in the programme. We've ... got launch events, we've got social media, constantly pinging emails out, but building relationships with the schools and the local mental health services has been invaluable. And the universities, the placement studies, we've got maybe four or five different universities we've built relationships with.

YMCA Southend

4.3 Flexibility

Several of the interviewees identified flexibility as an important aspect of future programme design, both in terms of funding and in response to the size of the YMCAs in receipt of potential future grant funding.

I think [for YMCA England & Wales to further develop Changing Futures] it would just be about keeping those different levels of funding opportunity – different levels of access. Some YMCAs are big, some are small and being able to give that flexibility to whatever stage of development they're at [is important].

Sometimes it felt like quite a lot of communication for the actual values, like asset values. [Concerning] the amount of money that came through from the grant ... we spent quite a lot of time ... working that through. It's quite, I wouldn't say it was light-touch, but sometimes the relationships we have between the federation movement [i.e. the branches of the YMCA], you know you might get another grant in that's worth £20,000 or £30,000 – there's a lot less rigmarole with [grants that don't come from the national YMCA body].

YMCA Exeter

4.4 'We're all in the same boat'

Finally, some of the interviewees noted that both they and potential applicants to future iterations of Changing Futures are all in the same boat: they all want to improve mental health for young people. Therefore, there is an opportunity to collaborate and share knowledge between individual YMCAs when working on similar projects, and also to look at what has already been established and has worked well.

We're all in the same boat; we want to improve mental health ... so [it can help to look] for groups that have already created sustainability and how they have done it, and then try and adapt it to meet your needs.

YMCA Norfolk

I'd say to work with what you've got. Don't try and redesign something because a pot of money has come along. Have a really good look at what communities are already embedded in and you'll already [have done] half the work.

YMCA Exeter

We all work so differently and provide services in different ways. For me, I would like us as a national organisation to be having signature programmes that are going into schools up and down the country. We've got the Y's Girls mentoring thing, which is quite similar, but even volunteering programmes, mental health programmes, and voice and influence programmes.

YMCA Southend

4.5 Recommendations

Having carried out this research and worked with YMCA England & Wales for several years on this project, DSC has the following recommendations for YMCA England & Wales to consider in future iterations of Changing Futures or similar future programmes:

- **Young people should be involved in the design of services.** This did happen in some way in all of the examples we examined, but it should be a more central theme. The exact formats or mechanisms should be left up to individual YMCAs, with YMCA England & Wales articulating a range of possible approaches or expected outcomes for illustration. This would allow applicants to develop and share creative solutions.
- **Future evaluations should, insofar as possible, incorporate feedback from young people** participating in the projects, for example via focus groups or short surveys. Conditions relating to the pandemic meant that including such feedback in a comprehensive way was not feasible for this analysis, but future iterations should do so as conditions permit.
- **Key performance indicators (KPIs) and collection of quantitative data should be simplified to collect only the most relevant outcomes or impact data,** particularly data that speaks to the effects on young people and any changes they experience. Although there may be a need for a specific amount of data on outputs (for example, number of training sessions held), this should be minimised and the emphasis should shift to collecting data about what effect the outputs had.
- **YMCA England & Wales should create a simple digital hub for Changing Futures** to share and store effective survey tools for young people, templates for focus groups, examples of best practice and relevant literature, and to collect and store survey or KPI data. The hub would be primarily for internal YMCA use and wouldn't necessarily need to have an expensive, bespoke design. It could be facilitated through a Microsoft Teams or Slack channel, with some information or features only accessible to administrators, who could give access to grantees and practitioners as appropriate.
- **Future programmes should support a digital element of service delivery in addition to face-to-face service delivery,** especially for more rural or harder-to-reach areas, or to help reach certain groups of young people who may find it harder to attend face-to-face services (for example, carers or those with other circumstances that make it hard to leave home). Some projects conducted during the pandemic have left a 'legacy of COVID-19' – for example, best practice around digital delivery methods, which interviewees highlighted as effective in breaking down barriers.
- **At the same time, all projects that include digital delivery should consider the risks of digital exclusion** and provide solutions for how these can be mitigated, whether through facilitating digital access (for example, by providing phones or tablets) or enabling young people to engage in other ways.
- **YMCA England & Wales should seek to maximise flexibility in the delivery of future projects.** The flexibility offered during the pandemic was highlighted in interviews as a very positive aspect that allowed project managers to adapt their programmes and still deliver something meaningful for young people at a time of great crisis and huge pressures on mental health.
- **As we move out of the crisis phase of the pandemic, future iterations of Changing Futures should be informed by the changing social context and emerging research about the impact of the pandemic on young people.** All of society has been through a collective trauma, and the full ramifications are yet to be understood. Some interviewees were

expecting there to be an increase in demand for services as a result of the pandemic, and analysis of quantitative data suggests that there was an increase in demand during the initial months. However, many impacts on young people's mental health may have been delayed and may only start to show up in later years. For example, the effects of family breakdown, unemployment, bereavement, educational disruption or substance abuse, which have their roots in the stresses of the pandemic, may only start to show up months or years into the future. This may be achieved via literature reviews of peer-reviewed journals and grey literature (i.e. research reports produced outside 'traditional' publishing organisations, which can include reports from organisations in the voluntary sector and government) and through periodic reviews of available YMCA England & Wales data on the usage of services provided by YMCA England & Wales.

About the Directory of Social Change

At the Directory of Social Change (DSC), we believe that the world is made better by people coming together to serve their communities and each other. For us, an independent voluntary sector is at the heart of that social change and we exist to support charities, voluntary organisations and community groups in the work they do. Our role is to:

- **provide practical information** on a range of topics from fundraising to project management in both our printed publications and our e-books;
- **offer training** through public courses, events and in-house services;
- **research funders** and maintain a subscription database, *Funds Online*, with details on funding from grant-making charities, companies and government sources;
- **offer bespoke research** to voluntary sector organisations in order to evaluate projects, identify new opportunities and help make sense of existing data;
- **stimulate debate and campaign** on key issues that affect the voluntary sector, particularly to champion the concerns of smaller charities.

Visit our website www.dsc.org.uk to see how we can help you to help others and have a look at www.fundsonline.org.uk to see how DSC could improve your fundraising. Alternatively, contact our friendly team at **020 4526 5995** to chat about your needs or drop us a line at cs@dsc.org.uk.

About DSC's research

DSC undertakes bespoke and commissioned research and evaluation work for a wide range of charities and organisations. Our research and consultancy service includes:

- **strategic advice** for grant-makers, charities and companies;
- **sector surveys**, such as membership surveys of charities and funders;
- **impact evaluation** of giving by large grant-makers and companies;
- **topical research** on sector developments and sub-sectoral analysis;
- **case studies**, highlighting the work of our clients and other organisations in an accessible way.

Our bespoke and commissioned research is led by the needs of our clients, but our policy work also informs our research for the benefit of the wider voluntary sector. This policy work includes campaigns such as Everybody Benefits, which raises awareness of the benefit of charities and the voluntary sector, and the recent #NeverMoreNeeded campaign, which highlighted the vital work of charities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the crucial support they themselves needed during the crisis.

An important part of our work is providing research, insight and evidence on UK armed forces charities. This award-winning research,⁵ funded by Forces in Mind Trust, has to date seen DSC publish ten accessible reports which provide analytical data, trends and commentary and are used by policymakers, government and charities alike. DSC is now recognised as the premier source of research and information on charities which support the armed forces community, and our evidence to Cobseo (The Confederation of Service Charities) on how the sector needed state assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic led to the government providing financial support to armed forces charities in 2020.

⁵ DSC received the 2021 Forces in Mind Trust Research Award.

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Appendix A: Information on the quantitative data

The data set provided by YMCA England & Wales consisted of self-reported data from individual YMCAs. As a result, the data was provided in different formats by different YMCAs, and in some cases errors emerged when the data was totalled. While DSC's researchers took every effort to clean the data prior to analysis, inconsistencies in the original data may have affected some calculations.

DSC's researchers opted to use the median and the interquartile range (presented in this report as M and IQR, respectively) which are used to paint a picture of how all of the data looks. The median is the middle value in a set of data, and the IQR shows how spread out the data is in comparison to the median – a large IQR value means the data is spread out, whereas a small value means that the data values are fairly close to each other. It may be helpful to think of the median and IQR as the data equivalent of mean and standard deviation.

