

# What will young people need next?

Motiv8's Youth Work during Covid-19 and beyond



**Report by the Motiv8 Board**  
**September 2020**



## Executive Summary

This report has been produced by the Board of Motiv8, a youth charity working with young people in SE Hampshire for over twenty years. The report highlights the youth work undertaken by the charity as a result of the impact of Covid-19, focusing on the needs of young people and the programmes it has developed to meet those needs.

The key emerging themes for young people include increasingly poor mental health and emotional wellbeing, bereavement and loss, uncertain futures, lack of social interaction, keeping safe, family instability, and pressures on services.

The report analyses what young people will need next. These include safe spaces to socialise face-to-face, detached youth work provision, educational transition, help with finding work, bereavement and emotional wellbeing support, family support, prevention and early help offers, allied to ensuring the voices of young people are heard.

The report demonstrates that Motiv8's local analysis reflects and reinforces national evidence on the importance of youth work, particularly during the current pandemic, and on the increasing pressure on grassroots youth workers in responding to these complex needs. Despite this, the report also records and celebrates examples of positive successes and good practice.

The Motiv8 Board concludes that it is critical to sustain local, good youth work practice, not just in response to Covid-19 and the 'here and now,' but as a long-term strategy, in collaboration with partners, to support local young people and their communities.

## 1. Introduction

Like many voluntary youth organisations, Motiv8 – a youth charity established over 20 years ago serving the needs of young people across Portsmouth, Fareham, Gosport and Havant – has had to adapt and change in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the country starts to emerge from the initial lockdown that began in March 2020, we are trying to take stock of the immediate needs faced by young people and, like our colleagues and partners across the country, are now considering what young people will need next. As members of the Motiv8 Board of Trustees, we want to stay focused on delivering quality youth work which meets young people's needs, both during the pandemic and beyond.

This report summarises our most recent and current (September 2020) experiences as a charity and sets out how the Board, the Chief Executive and the staff of the organisation are developing policy and programmes to respond to the 'new normal' – however defined. We know we are not unique – indeed, many national youth work themes are reinforced in our own local experiences – but we wanted to share our thoughts and would welcome comments and feedback from colleagues, local and national.

For more information on the work of Motiv8 see: [www.motiv8.org.uk](http://www.motiv8.org.uk)



## 2. What impact has Covid-19 had on young people?

Here in SE Hampshire, our experience of the initial crisis has been that young people's responses have been varied. Some have thrived during this period particularly those who struggled to engage in school or where their anxiety was school-related e.g. due to bullying, forming friendships or difficulty engaging in the curriculum. Family relationships have improved because some of the tensions created were about their children not going to school and this was often a source of conflict. In addition, the lockdown also helped some families connect more, do more together without the distractions of 'normal life'.

However, overwhelmingly most of our vulnerable young people and their families have really suffered, bearing the brunt of this pandemic, with immediate and potentially long-term implications. Like other charities and voluntary youth organisations, the key emerging themes we have found at Motiv8 are:

## Increasingly poor mental health and emotional wellbeing:

The stress and trauma of Covid-19 has been very unsettling. *Young Minds* found that 83% of young people with a history of mental health felt the pandemic had made it worse.

See <https://youngminds.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/coronavirus-having-major-impact-on-young-people-with-mental-health-needs-new-survey/>

As an organisation we have seen a high number of incidents relating to suicide and self-harm. Support systems which help stabilise and anchor young people have been significantly disrupted and they feel uncertain about their future. Young people are unable to follow their usual routines of school, college or work. In many cases their hobbies, interests or social activities have had to be placed on hold or they look significantly different following social distancing measures e.g. where our Youth Hubs are operating, they now include a booking system, social distancing measures and significantly reduced times/numbers. Access to services during this period has also been difficult: a new 'waiting list' culture has developed.

### Activities we have been doing during COVID to address this:

#### · **Emotional health and well-being**

**resources:** We delivered a range of well-being resources to young people and families who were struggling - this included craft activities, mindfulness diaries, cooking ingredients and equipment

· **Individual mentoring:** We increased our virtual and face-to-face support via 'walk and talks,' creating a safe space to talk through issues affecting young people

· **Online platform:** We created an online programme which included Well-being, Employment, Creative Writing, Arts and Craft, Parent/Carer, Music and Youth Hubs alongside weekly virtual engagement activities such as competitions. We have also shared well-being messages and signposted resources/support services. We have since moved to face-to-face support for some of this provision

· **Group provision:** This was delivered in 'bubbles' via hubs and pre-booked activities, helping to connect young people and support with activities

#### · **Detached provision:**

We continue to meet young people 'on street' listening to how things have been for them, exploring their concerns, providing harm reduction messages e.g. information relating to Nitrous Oxide canisters and considering any further support they might need.

## Bereavement and Loss:

We are aware of a number of young people who have experienced bereavement and loss both Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 related. The usual routes to support are not always available and the grieving process has been hindered by current restrictions such as not being able to attend funerals.

### Activities to address this:

- **Upskilling of staff** through virtual training
- **Providing family support** to those affected by bereavement, using play and activities to explore emotions with children and young people.

## Uncertain Futures

The negative impact of having spent so long away from education can be felt in terms of young people's safety (providing 'regular eyes'), their wellbeing (a safe space to socialise with peers and have access to trusted adults) and their educational attainment. The potential for young people to disengage from school completely can undermine what we know is a significant protective factor that prevents them from becoming involved in crime and serious violence. For many young people their home or the community is not a safe place for them. For those suffering with their mental health and wellbeing, school was a place of safety, offering a chance to access resources and trusted adults. They had regular interactions with people who knew them. Changes in their demeanour, behaviours, appearance would be noted and could be explored, often triggering multi-agency safeguarding responses, if needed.

We are working in a scenario where the Government mandate to 'work from home where you can' has resulted in some key professionals having limited or no face to face contact due to their organisations' restrictions.

Where young people have struggled to engage virtually in these circumstances, we have tried to put in place face-to-face responses (under safe, social distancing) as quickly as we can.

The recent confusion and delay over the release of A-level and GCSE results in England are a reminder of how uncertain our young people's futures are. Many of those engaged with Motiv8 were already struggling to engage with education. For this reason, we believe the transition back to full-time education will be a long and difficult one.

Longer term career prospects are also a concern, with the Institute of Fiscal Studies finding that employees aged under-25 are two and a half times as likely as other employees to work in sectors that were either shut down during the lock-down or are particularly vulnerable in the future.

See <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>

We know from our work with local post-16 colleges, that they have seen a significant increase in students with special educational needs and disabilities and those with additional complexities who are often at risk of dropping out of courses without holistic, wrap-around support. It is questionable whether colleges which are already grappling with the very difficult reality of providing an educational offer during a pandemic are able fully to meet the needs of these learners.

## Uncertain Futures (cont.)

### Activities:

- **Adaptation of our alternative education programmes for vulnerable young people**, moving to one to one support for all young people engaged on our programmes to maintain regular contact and keep them positively engaged.
- **Focus on supporting the transition back to school** through exploring anxieties, supporting with uniform where families are struggling financially and practical help such as walking with them to school.

## Lack of Social Interaction

It is a vital part of adolescent development to have the opportunity for face-to-face social interactions with their peers. With schools having been closed until very recently or operating within the 'bubble' system (and our young people frequently tell us that they have no say in who is sharing their 'bubble') and with community provision either cancelled or operating with significant restrictions, the opportunity for young people to interact with their peers has been greatly reduced. Over the summer months we have noted that, where young people have been able to gather together socially, there have been increased concerns regarding anti social behaviour and substance misuse with calls for 'police protection orders' to manage 'unruly young people.'



### Activities:

- **Youth Voice:** survey to understand how young people want to engage
- **Live sessions** e.g. cooking or music which young people join remotely
- **Reinstating face-to-face delivery** as soon as we possibly could (in line with government guidance) and in response to young people telling us this is what they wanted
- **Detached youth work provision**

## Keeping young people safe

We know that only a very small proportion of vulnerable young people locally and nationally have engaged with their educational and/or social care provision during the pandemic. Consequently, many of the most 'at risk' young people will have received few if any of the interventions required to them keep them safe and this at a time when they are on a knife edge in terms of risk. Specific groups such as those vulnerable to exploitation (criminal and sexual) have been at increased risk.

Locally, we know hospitals have seen increased numbers of young people presenting at A&E with the toxic trio of substance misuse, adolescent mental health and exploitation, with high numbers of referrals into children's social care. We have also seen an increase in young people engaging in substance misuse, particularly Nitrous Oxide canisters over the past few months with limited or no means to explore harm reduction measures.



The recent 'It was Hard to Escape' report produced by The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Committee outlines that in terms of tackling exploitation, trusted relationships and responding to those 'critical' moments are crucial. Their findings also suggest young people are more inclined to engage with a Youth Worker rather than a Social Worker or the Police. This is a very common theme in the communities we are working with. Youth workers are often able to respond to those critical moments in young people's lives because of the trusted relationships they have established.

See:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/870035/Safeguarding\\_children\\_at\\_risk\\_from\\_criminal\\_exploitation\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/870035/Safeguarding_children_at_risk_from_criminal_exploitation_review.pdf)

### Activities:

- **Detached work:** distributing keep safe resources e.g. safe swimming, drug and alcohol harm reduction messages
- **Collaboration:** we paired up with other charities out on detached to support e.g. one mum who runs a charity 'Don't Go with the Flo' following the death of her daughter due to taking ecstasy. We were able to have good discussions with young people about substances, the risks and how they can reduce those risks in light of increased reporting of young people using substances
- **Ongoing one to one mentoring and referrals** for those deemed 'at risk of exploitation'

## Family Instability

We have noted that families are facing increasing struggles with a rise in domestic abuse, a lack of food and money to pay the bills, digital poverty, difficulty in managing their child's behaviours and poor parental mental health. Anecdotally, our partners have informed us that there has been an increase in referrals to and contact with family and children's services and they anticipate this will increase as schools return.

### Activities:

- **Intensive Family Support and Family wellbeing provision** with weekly virtual and face-to-face support via a dedicated support worker alongside doorstep and garden welfare visits
- **Supporting parents** in understanding the promotion of their children's wellbeing to try and reduce CAMHS needs
- **Emergency grants** applied for to support the purchase of items where families were struggling e.g. gas, electric, activity resources, white goods and electronic devices to ensure young people were able to engage in their learning

## Pressure on Services

Pressure on services: across the board services are seeing increased demands for responses to all these issues - services which are already operating at capacity. Managing this demand collaboratively with our partners is a key challenge for the future.

### Activities:

- **Continuing to accept referrals** and increasing capacity through attracting additional emergency funds
- **Increasing early virtual support**





### 3. What will young people need next?

The Motiv8 Board remains committed to a youth work approach in all our interventions with young people. We are heartened by the recent political and parliamentary All-Party reports on young people, youth violence and youth work published in 2020. For example, both the Youth Violence Commission Report and 'Securing a Brighter Future - the role of youth services in tackling knife crime' reinforce that a youth work approach is the most successful in dealing with the issues facing young people. Nor is knife crime purely an urban or city-centre problem: 'County lines' drug dealing has affected young people in Hampshire and other rural areas significantly. This all confirms Motiv8's belief that investing in sustainable youth services and effective youth work practice is vitally important.

See:  
<http://yvcommission.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/YVC-Final-Report-July-2020.pdf>  
and  
<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Securing%20a%20brighter%20future%20-%20the%20role%20of%20youth%20services%20in%20tackling%20knife%20crime%20v.2.pdf>

Especially during Covid-19, we believe strongly that long-term 'open youth work' can provide the kind of support young people continue to want and need locally.

Open youth work does not preclude specialist intervention or support: indeed, it can be an effective gateway for such services. Moreover, support for parents and carers is in itself an effective way of supporting young people - as we have found through our Gosport parents' group.

Research evidence in a London Borough recently identified that 'crime and safety' and 'mental health and wellbeing' were pressing needs facing young people. Based on a survey of 400 young people, the project also concluded that:

- **youth clubs were the most needed provision for both young people and their parents**
- **specialist support was not necessarily separate from youth club provision - it could be offered as an integral part of a programme of activities.**

See:  
<https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/young-people-need-youth-clubs/>

### Motiv8's local priorities

Locally, based on what we know about young people and our experiences thus far, we are starting to form a picture of what might be needed in the months/year ahead.

#### Areas which we are now seeking to prioritise:

##### **Safe spaces to socialise face-to-face:**

provision across all teams delivered through open youth centres/hubs and activity programmes (with modifications during Covid-19) help keep young people safe and improve their wellbeing.

##### **Planned activities:**

- **Hub/Group provision in bubbles**

##### **Detached youth provision:**

increasing our capacity to deliver regular detached provision with dedicated resource allowing for follow up preventative work and youth social action.

##### **Planned activities:**

- **Detached youth work across all areas**

**Educational Transition:** individual and small group support in helping young people re-engage in education which we know is a key protective factor in keeping them safe and well.

**Planned Activities:**

- **Development of post-14 and post-16 programmes**
- **One to one mentoring support to include strategies for managing going back to school**
- **Working with wider partnerships to establish those who may be struggling**

**Help finding work:** development of post-14 and post-16 programmes aimed at meeting young people's holistic needs and those who are furthest from employment.

**Planned Activities:**

- **Development of post-14 and post-16 programmes.**

**Bereavement and Emotional wellbeing support:** up-skilling our staff to support young people individually and within group contexts.

**Prevention/Early Help offer:** using virtual support to provide an instant offer helping to avoid lengthy waiting lists with young people receiving no support. We believe that quick, early intervention even online can prevent issues spiralling downwards which can happen incredibly quickly at this stage of life.

**Planned Activities:**

- **Development of programmes which include soft skills development**

**Family Support:** recognising that families are under increasing pressures; we want to provide an ongoing offer for families particularly around managing adolescent behaviours.

**Planned Activities:**

- **Further work around upskilling practitioners to support parents/carers in managing adolescent behaviours.**

**Youth Voice:** during this unprecedented and uncertain time it is important that we increase our efforts to ensure young people's voices are heard.

**Planned Activities:**

- **Continue an open dialogue with young people about what they need.**
- **Exploring with the Board formal and informal routes/access to decision making on needs and Motiv8 programme delivery.**



## 4. The welfare of Motiv8's youth work staff

The Board are keenly aware of the stresses and strains our youth work staff are under at present. Reading the detailed log of safeguarding incidents brings home to us the complexity, riskiness, levels of judgement calls and decision-making that Motiv8 staff (often part-time) are being asked to undertake in their day to day settings even in normal times. Covid-19 has added to that picture of complexity.

These factors are also reflected nationally. A recent study of youth worker diaries, carried out as part of a planned contribution to the Mass Observation national archive, reported that the everyday life of youth work in lockdown now included "...displacement, adaptation, disappointment and creativity." The diary entries continuously note the goodwill to make things work, but the sheer amount of labour in shifting to new ways of keeping in contact with young people, amidst the displacements and re-negotiations of boundaries everywhere.

For example:

*Life settles down, becomes 'normal but not quite normal.' Different routines of life and the establishment of boundaries for youth work undertaken largely at a screen bring tension, comfort and disappointment too.*

*Lots of welfare calls, emotional health support, signposting to crisis services and a lot more contact with parents. Others are out doing detached work but frustrated about what they can offer. And it all feels 'touch and go.' Communications follow different rhythms of time - sometimes immediate, urgent and spontaneous, sometimes spaced over days and weeks*

See:

<https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/citizen-enquiry-into-the-lives-of-youth-workers-in-covid-19/>

## 5. Celebrating our positive stories

We must not lose sight of our successes and achievements with individuals and groups of young people, during these difficult times. Here is just a snapshot from the recordings and evaluations Motiv8 staff presented at our September Board meeting:

***'I've been supporting a 17-year-old male for almost two years who was heavily involved in drugs running, I would have to ask him at each session if he was carrying a knife. Fast forward to today and he has started college and is really enjoying it, he is in a stable positive relationship, stops using and running substances and is finally settled in his placement. He even told me he feels able to talk about his feelings and emotions - I've seen such a change... he's my biggest success story'***

***'I've just returned from meeting with a mum of a young man I've been supporting. He had really struggled with school previously but now he's attending college. He told me he feels like people talk to him as an adult and he is loving it. Mum was in tears thanking me saying that Motiv8 was the best thing that has happened for her son - it was very emotional'***

***'I'm sharing a good news story I had with a young person I am mentoring, he had disengaged from education and was reluctant to go back. The school had made attempts to meet him and take him in but he had run away. I went to the home the following morning and he agreed to walk with his Motiv8 support worker to the school and despite being anxious made it into the school -this is a really big step forward'***

## 6. The role of the Motiv8 Board - supporting youth work beyond Covid-19

The “themes in the lives of youth workers” recounted nationally are all too familiar to us at Motiv8 through the recordings and narratives we have been hearing from our staff in the last six months. Like all local, community-based charities in the youth field, we know that our grassroots practitioners are frequently at the ‘sharp end’ of youth issues in their daily interactions. As local authorities have commissioned out youth service centres and professionally trained youth workers, the task has fallen to organisations like Motiv8 to sustain a youth work presence and relationships with local youngsters and communities.

Covid-19 has challenged us all to continue to deliver high quality programmes under trying circumstances. We are immensely proud of our continued successes and achievements. Our Chief Executive wanted to impress upon the Board one key message – this report is not just about Covid-19, nor simply about the ‘here and now.’ It may not even represent the ‘new normal,’ whatever form that may take in the youth work field. It is about long-term responses and strategies to meet the needs of young people and respond to the issues and demands they raise.

We know that the effectiveness of our responses will rely even more on professional trust and full collaboration with our supporters, partners, commissioners and colleagues – here in SE Hampshire and more widely. The origins of this analysis came from both the regular feedback and the more formal accounts our Chief Executive and Senior Managers have been providing to Board members during Covid-19. We are fortunate that these are always of high quality. On this occasion, the Board felt their strength and eloquence deserved a wider audience. It is that sentiment which has prompted this brief report, not least to inform and encourage other colleagues working with young people during the current pandemic.

**Valerie Hopkins, Chair, Motiv8 Board, September 2020**

Thank you to our supporters,  
funders and partners.

