

Young Roots' Strategy

2021 - 2024

Working with young refugees and asylum seekers
to improve their wellbeing and fulfil their potential



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Young Roots' Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024. This exciting plan builds on our significant expertise in working directly with young refugees and asylum seekers, aged 11-25 in London. It reflects our excellent reputation for providing holistic, quality, long-term support to young people on their journey to improve their lives and reach their potential.

Our ambition for the strategic period is to continue to grow the number of young people we are able to support, focusing on early intervention, through our highly regarded activities and one-to-one casework service, building our expert partnerships. We will have a new focus on using our knowledge, expertise and the voices of young people to help create a fair and efficient asylum system so that young people can rebuild their lives as part of our communities.

The unique work of Young Roots

Young Roots has particular expertise in supporting the transition of young refugees from childhood to adulthood. We support young people to understand and navigate their changing rights and entitlements, as well as supporting their emotional development during these crucial years. We have a strong focus on youth participation and the needs and wishes of each person. The trusted relationships we develop underpin all our interactions with them and help to ensure they feel able and ready to access the support they need. This, together with the depth of our work, and the way our teams and projects combine to form what young people often describe as a 'second family', mean that our services and activities are regarded as unique.

New focus: changing systems for the better

Importantly, our new strategy recognises that the systems in the UK that are meant to support and protect young refugees and asylum seekers are often broken. This means that the young people we support, whilst displaying resilience and strength, often have appalling experiences of the asylum system, face unacceptable living conditions, mental health crises, poverty and destitution. Our knowledge and experience mean we are well placed to **make a vital contribution in advocating for better systems and policies nationally and locally for those young people we work with directly, and for the wider community of young refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.**

The way we work

The way that we work is very important to Young Roots. This strategy is framed by a renewed commitment and approach to diversity, equity and inclusion, recognising the inherent inequity within our society and how that manifests itself within our organisation. Equally, we will have an increased focus in our work to meaningfully include young refugees and asylum seekers, and others with lived experience of the asylum process at all levels of Young Roots. We will prioritise our human rights centred, participative methodology and asset-based approach, always starting with the strengths and potential a young person has.

Equally, we will continue to grow our partnerships with expert organisations providing psychological support, counselling, housing and legal advice to young people, as well as being an active player in wider refugee sector initiatives. We will continue to put staff well-being at the centre of our organisation, recognising and valuing the excellent, knowledgeable, experienced and empathetic team we have and intend to develop further.

Increased demand for the depth and reach of our services

We recognise the increased demand for our services and activities, and acknowledge the ongoing impact of Covid-19. The hostile environment is also a defining context for our work.

By the end of the strategic period, we aim to be supporting 800 young people a year overall, and 200 young people through our intensive, long term, one to one casework service. This extra demand, and the needs and the wishes of the young people we support, means that our strategy is for financial growth with associated efficient and effective internal processes including embracing digital delivery when appropriate. Only with sustainable fundraising growth and diversification of our income sources will we be able to achieve our operational ambitions.

Developing the strategy

This strategy has been developed with expert input from staff, trustees, young people, and delivery and funding partners. It has been informed by an externally led review of our approach to diversity, equity and inclusion, and a review of our work with volunteers. We conducted a detailed evaluation of our previous strategy, a PESTLE analysis of the external environment, developed an organisational theory of change and were guided through the process by an external consultant through the Lloyds Enhance programme. This document is accompanied by an internal implementation plan.



VISION, MISSION & VALUES

Vision

A world where all young refugees and asylum seekers realise their rights and fulfil their potential.

Mission

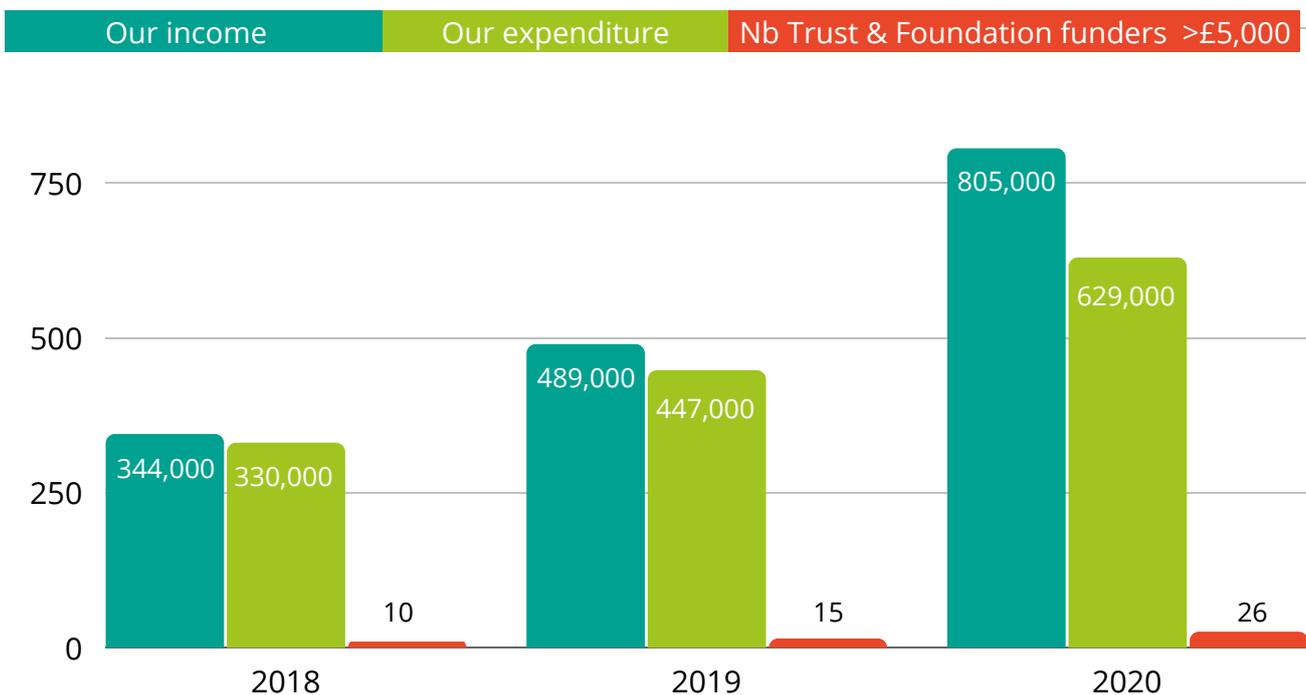
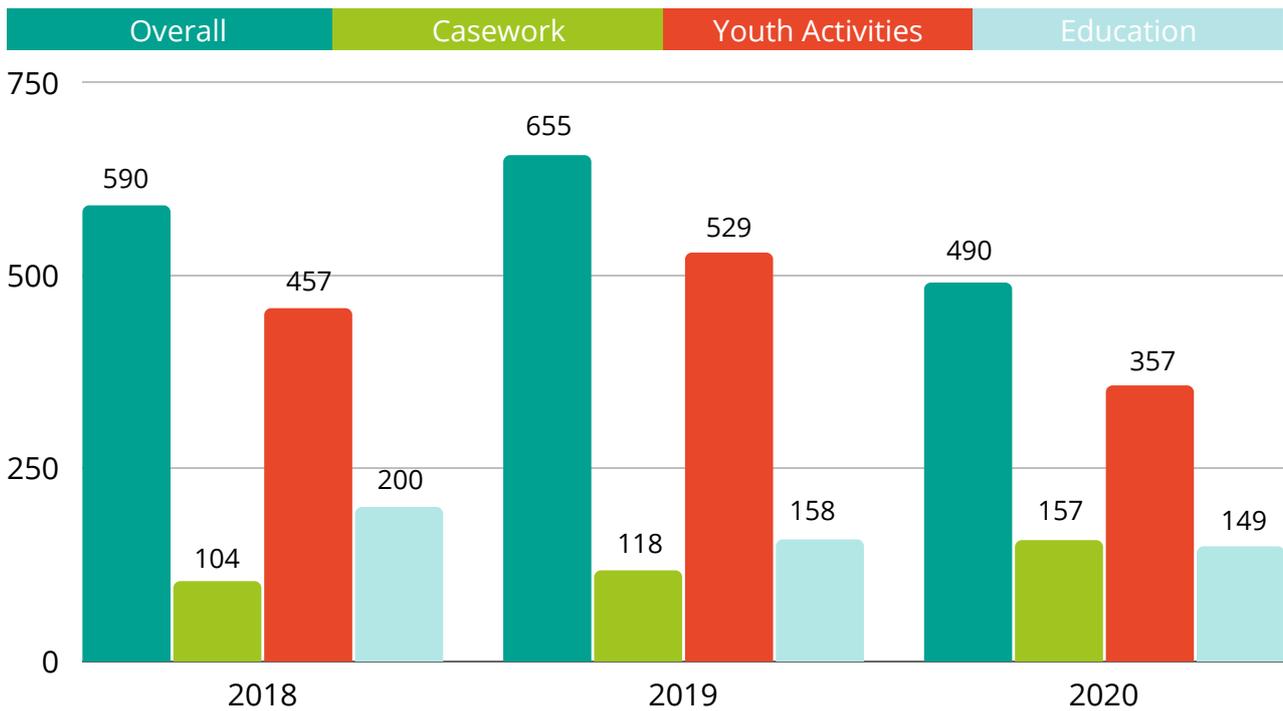
To work alongside young people and support them to improve their wellbeing and life chances.

Values

- Young Roots will involve young refugees and asylum seekers, and others who are **'experts by their experience'**, at all levels of the organisation. We will have a human rights and asset-based approach, and prioritise youth participation and leadership.
- Young Roots will develop our approach to **diversity, equity and inclusion** throughout the organisation, consciously recognising and working to rectify inherent inequity within our society and how this manifests itself at Young Roots. We will particularly work to ensure representation amongst staff, trustees, volunteers and facilitators.
- Young Roots welcomes all young refugees and asylum seekers from anywhere in the world, irrespective of religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, race, religion and belief. We **strive to address inequity faced by young people** based on their identity.
- Young Roots promotes **collaboration and working in partnership** with relevant organisations in order to provide the best possible services, activities and projects.
- Young Roots aims for excellence and best quality in all that we do, valuing **responsiveness, understanding, respect, responsibility, creativity, knowledge, participation and kindness**.
- Young Roots values **staff and volunteer wellbeing** and strives to provide a working environment that will allow the development of a diverse team to deliver their best work.

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Young Roots grew significantly during our last strategic period 2018 - 2021. We have more than doubled our income, the majority of which comes from Trusts and Foundations. We have diversified our income base, and our fundraising strategy is to further diversify our funding through increasing our community fundraising, individual giving and corporate support. The increase in funding has allowed us to employ more expert staff and in turn we have worked with an increasing number of young people, in many cases in a deeper way through the expansion of our casework service.



Our Governance

The Trustee Board meets five times a year, and the Finance Committee including the Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, Chief Executive and Head of Finance and Internal Operations meets monthly. We also have a joint staff and Trustee Wellbeing Committee, Chaired by a Trustee. The Trustee Board has regular training and has developed its approach to governance providing leadership and support to the staff team.

Our activities and services

Our flagship weekly advice and support hub, launched in 2019, integrating our youth and sporting activities, our one-to-one casework service, and expert partners, has gone from strength to strength. We also run separate young women's groups and activities, youth clubs, English language projects and holiday trips. We have successfully piloted a peer support project with newly arrived young people. We have developed a 'leadership group' over the last three years who enjoyed specialist training and residential breaks. Our Young Leaders have highlighted key issues by speaking at events, supported our development by being part of recruitment panels, advised Trustees on priorities and led numerous sessions at youth activities.

One-to-one casework service

Our one-to-one casework service has more than doubled in size over the period in order to meet increased demands. We work to support young people navigate multiple and complex difficulties including the asylum system, age assessments, homelessness, destitution, mental health and safeguarding.

During the pandemic, we have delivered a combination of online/remote activities and support, face-to-face support, and meeting in groups when rules have allowed.

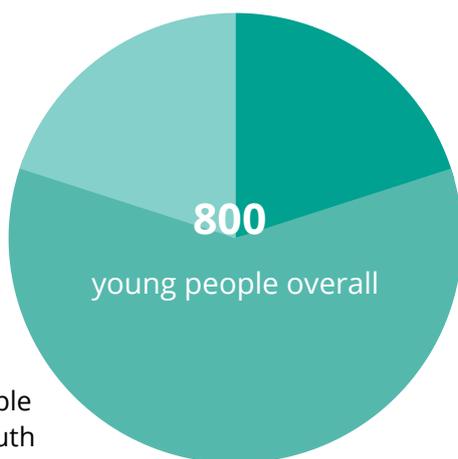
How many young refugees and asylum seekers will we reach in London?

There is no accurate figure for the number of young refugees and asylum seekers in London aged 11-25. Many young people are housed in London from other local authorities, and some young people are not registered anywhere when we meet them. At the time of writing, hundreds of newly arrived young people are being housed in contingency hotels in London. We estimate that there are thousands of young people in London needing support at any one time. Our casework service is often at capacity. The more funding we have, the more young people we are able to support. Our ambition is to raise £1 million per year by 2024. With this funding, we believe a realistic ambition is to work with the following numbers of people each year by 2024:

200 young people through our 1-1 casework service

200 young people through education activities

600 young people through our youth activities



many young people come to more than one activity/service

OBJECTIVES

1 - To provide high quality services and activities for young refugees and asylum seekers, supporting young people to realise their rights and reach their potential.

We will employ our participative, human rights and asset-based approaches working with young people at all stages of development. We will ensure that young people feel heard, believed and safe as they establish trusted relationships with staff and peers.

We will work with young people through their journey from 'surviving to thriving', to achieve the following outcomes: improved access to rights and entitlements; improved communication skills; increased social integration; improved wellbeing and mental health; improved leadership skills; and increased learning, training, work and volunteering opportunities.

We will learn from our experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic and embed digital provision within our services and activities where this has proven to be more effective in reaching and delivering certain aspects of our work. We recognise that, because of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, our services and activities will need to continue to be flexible and adaptable – and our teams creative in responding to challenges.

We will grow our wide network of invaluable partnerships to continue to support young people as best as is possible.

We particularly recognise the value of our integrated model of casework and youth development activities, and as we develop, we will ensure we prioritise this integration.

How - our activities

a - Advice and support hubs

We will further develop our successful and popular weekly advice and support hubs with our expert partners, the range of youth activities, and casework service responding to the needs and wishes of young people. We will ensure positive representation, youth participation and youth leadership opportunities throughout the hubs. We will further develop strong partnerships on housing, immigration advice and skills development /employability. We will have a particular focus on developing our wellbeing and mental health support and partnerships, ensuring we are able to offer the most useful and effective support to young people in response to the increased need we see.

b - Casework service

We will develop the capacity, and the clarity of the scope and boundaries, of our casework service, with a focus on preparing young people to reach their potential, employing an asset-based, trauma-informed and participative approach. Our service will continue to prevent young people from becoming homeless; support young people to resolve complex mental health issues; and to navigate the complex immigration and age assessment processes. We will prioritise staff safety and wellbeing as part of this development.

c - Youth Development Programme

In collaboration with young people, we will develop our youth development programme of youth activities that best achieve our intended outcomes, using feedback data and experience to direct this approach. Outside of the advice and support hubs, we will have a focus on developing projects for particular demographics, including with girls and young women, young people with special educational needs, age-specific groups, and at different stages of their asylum claim. We will employ our learning about digital delivery. In all cases, we will employ our human rights, asset based and participative approaches.

d - Youth Leadership

We will develop our approach to youth leadership with a programme running throughout Young Roots. This programme will have opportunities for young people to participate and develop their leadership skills, and to be recognised for their contributions at different levels. We will consider accreditation schemes, programmes and partnerships that develop skills, and aim to develop some paid opportunities for young people. We will develop this programme with young people, ensuring it meets their needs and expectations.

e - Summer project

Recognising the impact of the Lebanon summer educational project, we will conduct an external review of our approach to 'the governance' of Young Roots' international work.

2 - To contribute to wider systems and policy change for young refugees and asylum seekers.

Grounded in the experiences, perspective and voice of the young refugees and asylum seekers we work with, we will contribute to positively influencing and changing the systems that are meant to support and protect young refugees and asylum seekers more broadly. We will work in partnership with other organisations wherever possible.

How - our activities

a - Reflection groups

We will develop new 'reflection groups' in both Croydon and Brent that regularly bring together young people who would find it helpful to talk about their experiences and reflect on their experiences in the UK. From this work, using the 'Brighter Futures' model from fellow refugee organisation Praxis, we will develop our approach to effecting change, working on the issues that are most important to young people.

b - Data Collection and Case-Studies

We will develop our data collection and case-study work with streamlined systems to evidence the issues we want to change.

c - Systemic Change

We will develop our expertise and staff capacity in a range of change methodologies, employing the most strategic approach for the issues we are aiming to tackle – always putting young people’s voice and priorities at the centre of the approach. We will work in partnership where possible and take care not to duplicate work. This could include:

- Direct work with local or national policy/decision makers
- Public campaigning in partnership with others (including social media, other media and public speaking)
- Strategic litigation

d - Building awareness, influence and partnerships

We will build awareness of Young Roots and our work in Brent, Croydon and London to key target groups, to strategically develop partnerships and build influence in each borough. We will also promote our work more generally to the London population and wider, to increase understanding about the situation the young people we work with face, and grow our supporter base. Redeveloping our website, social media engagement and developing our approach to ‘thought leadership’ will be a central aspect of this work.

3 - To ensure Young Roots is sustainable, effective and efficient, prioritising diversity, equity and inclusion and involving young people and those with lived experience at all levels of the charity.

Prioritising wellbeing, diversity, equity and inclusion

We will continue to develop a culture of staff and volunteer wellbeing, recognising the particular context of our work, and the impact of vicarious trauma. We recognise that there is a particular impact on those working most directly in one-to-one relationships with young people. We will continue to listen and engage with all staff and volunteers to understand how best to support individual wellbeing.

We will prioritise implementing the recommendations from our review of diversity, equity and inclusion across the organisation, ensuring that our culture, recruitment and development processes, and learning opportunities, consciously address societal racism and other inequities and promote equal opportunities. We will improve representation at all levels of Young Roots.

We will develop our approach to involving young people, and those with lived experience at all levels of Young Roots. We will develop and embed our approach to asset-based working through training and leadership across the organisation, always starting with the strengths and potential a young person has.

Being sustainable, effective and efficient

We will prioritise sustaining our increased fundraising capacity in line with our fundraising strategy. We will continue to develop our valued and deep relationships with funding partners, and develop our approach to fundraising from individuals in particular.

We will continue to be a creative 'learning organisation', using data from our monitoring and evaluation, embracing digital development and ensuring staff and volunteers receive good, relevant training to enable them to do their best work.

We will continue to have a rigorous approach to Safeguarding at all levels of Young Roots, reviewing and developing our learning, systems and processes annually.

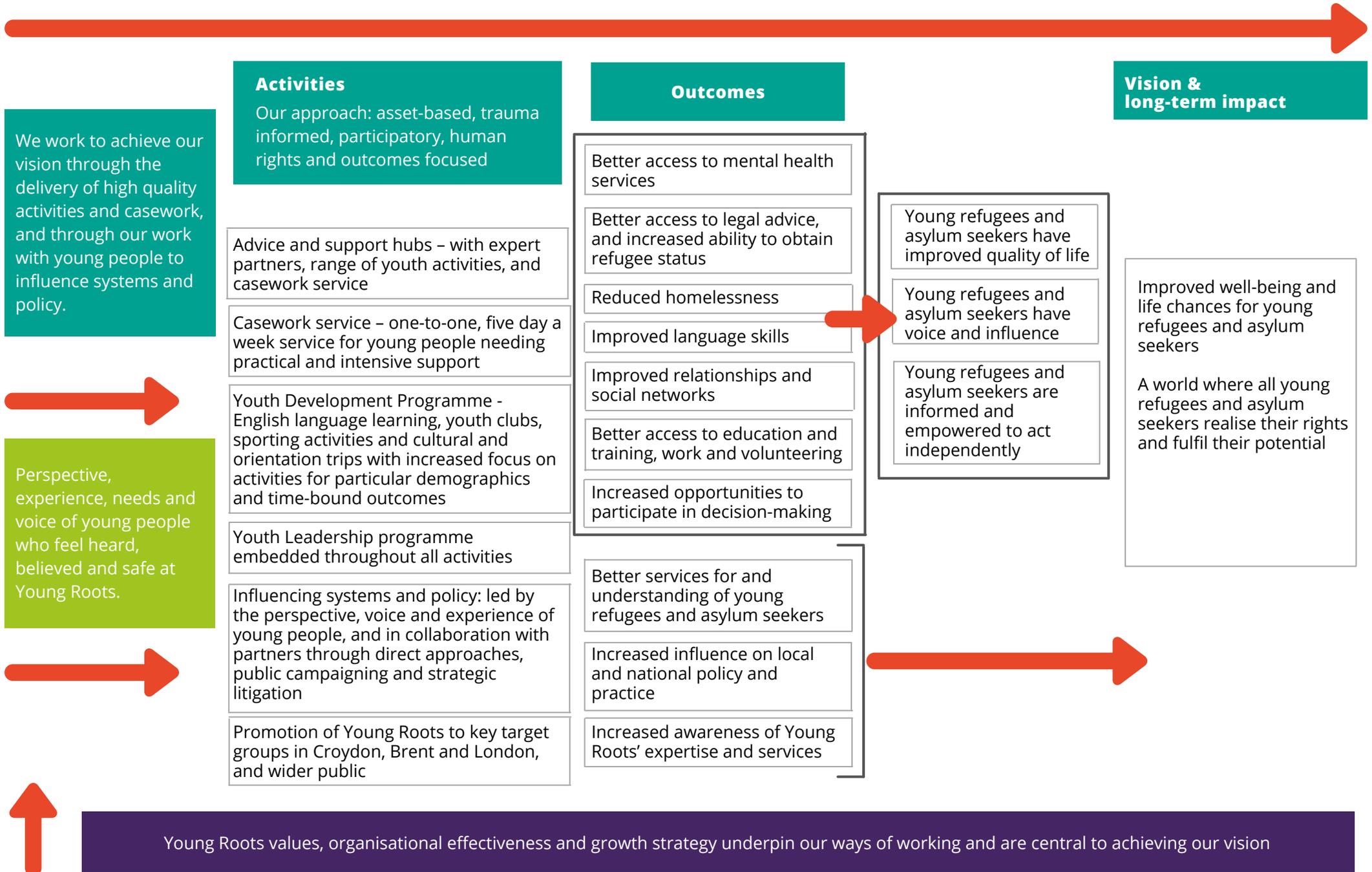
We will further develop our online systems and procedures for financial management and planning, ensuring they are efficient and effective and continue to enable tight Governance oversight.

We will continue to develop organisational leadership within the staff and Trustee team, reflecting the needs of a growing organisation and regularly taking into account the risks it faces.

We will provide good working environments to deliver our activities and casework service. We will prioritise contributing to combatting climate change and protecting the environment.



YOUNG ROOTS' THEORY OF CHANGE



ANJARUT'S TESTIMONY



I have been coming to Young Roots since 2017. I'm not sure of the exact date, but I started coming after Social Services disputed my age and I was moved out of young person's housing and into a National Asylum Support Service (NASS) hostel in Kilburn. I started coming for three reasons. First of all, I needed help with understanding the asylum system. Secondly, I didn't have any friends and I wanted to meet other young people. Thirdly, I wanted to improve my English as I could not speak hardly any English when I arrived in the UK.

At first, I was happy to be in the UK. I was living with a family and I was very happy. Then when I was moved to NASS with lots of adults much older than me, it made me feel really sad. There were 3 or 4 people in each room. There were people drinking and behaving strangely which made me feel scared. I was really sad about my experiences in Afghanistan and en-route to the UK, especially in the Calais Jungle. I had been trying to go to college, but it was impossible to study in these living circumstances. My bad living situation made me feel worse about the things I had experienced in the past. When I came to Young Roots, they started supporting me in lots of ways which made me feel better.

Since I arrived in the UK, with Young Roots' support I have achieved a lot. I have got my papers, I have learned English, I have made friends, I have got my driving license, I am going to college, my benefits have been arranged, I have a travel document, I had a good solicitor who helped me to win my case and can help me again in the future if I need him. I still feel a bit sad about things in my life, but it is better than when I first arrived. I still miss my family.

Young Roots relies on donations from individuals and grants from charitable trusts and foundations.

To support our work, please visit our website
[youngroots.org.uk](https://www.youngroots.org.uk)

To become part of our community, find us on social media
[@weareyoungroots](https://www.instagram.com/weareyoungroots)

