



YOUNGROOTS



Evaluation

of Young Roots' work
April 2019 - March 2022

Summary Report




CONDUCTED BY
R Malfait Consultants

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"I had a dream about coming to the UK - a dream for a better life and future. But it has been a struggle for the years that I have been here. I have had some terrible experiences. Young Roots have helped me get over some of those experiences and to look forward." - Young person

Introduction and overview

The evaluation of Young Roots' work with young refugees and asylum seekers in London was completed by R. Malfait Consultants between January and March 2022. It reflects on the impact of, and learning from, Young Roots' work between April 2019 to March 2022.

Young Roots' work with young refugees and asylum seekers since March 2020 has taken place within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the unprecedented challenges that the pandemic presented during periods of 'lockdown' and restrictions on movement and meeting throughout 2020 and 2021, Young Roots successfully maintained contact with and continued to ensure access to Casework and other support for numerous young people. The delivery teams were able to maintain a sense of community and provided opportunities for young people to enjoy peer contact, fun and social activities online and in-person, in line with government and NYA guidance. This undoubtedly combatted social isolation and supported their physical and mental health. The Young Roots team can be extremely proud of the feedback received from all stakeholders on the impact and value of their work, especially during this time.

From April 2019 to March 2022

1532 young refugees accessed Young Roots' services and activities

1065 young refugees accessed our Advice & Support Hubs

216 young refugees accessed one-to-one Casework support at our Hubs

229 young refugees accessed therapeutic and/or legal support at our Hubs

446 young refugees accessed our Casework service

1282 young refugees took part in our youth activities

421 young refugees participated in our English-language programmes

As part of this evaluation, consultations were completed with a total of **49 external and internal stakeholders**, and with **36 young refugees** who have accessed support through Young Roots' Advice & Support Hubs. Their responses emphatically confirmed the value and impact of Young Roots' work.

Analysis of evaluation feedback on the impact of Young Roots' work in achieving its core outcomes confirms that:

- 94% stakeholders and 97% young people feel that Young Roots has helped to reduce social isolation and loneliness
- 94% stakeholders and 94% young people feel that Young Roots has helped to improve mental health and wellbeing
- 88% stakeholders and 100% young people feel that Young Roots has helped to improve self-confidence
- 82% stakeholders and 75% young people feel that Young Roots has helped with understanding rights and entitlements
- 90% stakeholders and 94% young people feel that Young Roots has helped to improve English-language and communication skills

The impact, value and strengths of the Advice & Support Hub model

"The weekly Hubs create a safe space where young people know they can access vital support, be listened to, share their burdens, socialise with their peers, reduce their sense of isolation and stress, etc. Knowing that this type of space exists is so essential to their wellbeing and development, especially in an increasingly hostile environment towards asylum seekers and refugees."

- External stakeholder

"I was so nervous about coming but you don't meet strangers at Young Roots – we're a family here."

- Young person

All stakeholders consistently emphasised that the integration of youth activities, one-to-one Casework and youth work, together with access to specialist therapeutic and legal support, was a highly accessible and effective model. Young Roots have developed a truly holistic approach combining multiple benefits in physical and mental wellbeing with 'wrap-around' support that responds to all levels of need.

A welcoming, safe and fun place to be: Young people clearly feel welcomed, valued, respected and safe when they engage with Hub activities and support. Several likened their relationship with Young Roots to having a second family. Similarly, several stakeholders commented that the Hub model, and Young Roots in general, create a strong sense of community amongst young people, staff and volunteers. This was identified as a crucial factor in encouraging regular attendance by young people and as a foundation upon which supportive relationships could be built with trusted adults.

Sporting and youth activities: The opportunity for young people to access sporting and youth activities, as well as trips, was identified by all evaluation stakeholder groups as a vital and key strength in attracting young people to the weekly Hubs, a starting point for relationship building, and link into Casework and specialist support if and when needed.

An asset-based (strengths-based) and youth-led approach: Young Roots actively encourages and values youth participation in shaping and informing its activities and services. These principles form the foundation of their work and the teams draw upon the ideas, skills and capabilities of young people.

Space and activities for young women: Feedback from stakeholders stressed the value and effectiveness of creating space and activities that are accessible and sometimes exclusively for girls and young women. The development of a young women's group, via a basketball project at the Brent Hub requested by young women, has been very effective in improving engagement.





Holistic, integrated activities, advice and support: The Hub model was frequently described as, and valued for, offering a 'holistic' or 'wrap-around' combination of activities and services. Many young people initially engage with the Young Roots Hubs because they are attracted to the social and sporting opportunities they offer. Young people may not initially require or ask for support, but many subsequently go on to access the services of Caseworkers or legal advice and mental health specialists that are integrated in the Hub delivery.

"(They provide) excellent wrap-around support for young people. They allow for friend-making, Casework and therapy to happen in a supportive environment and allow for some needs to be quickly met, and challenges to be worked through on an ongoing journey with staff and peers. I know that young people feel very safe there which is vital." - External Stakeholder

Building relationships with trusted adults: Young Roots recognises the importance of welcoming, valuing and listening to young people from their earliest contact with the organisation. Feedback from young people and staff consistently identified the Hub approach as enabling trust-based relationships between young people, team members and partners. Through these relationships, young people feel able to share their worries, or ask for support on any issues, ranging from their asylum case, age disputes, accommodation and vitally their mental and emotional wellbeing.

"In the past I've met cruel people who I can't trust. At Young Roots I can be open and talk about problems. I used to have a big trust issue, I used to over protect myself to stop getting hurt - I didn't trust anyone but now I've found a middle place. I changed a lot since I learnt I can trust people at Young Roots. I've learnt I can trust some people in other places too." - Young person

Building peer and social networks - reducing isolation: Stakeholders frequently commented on the impact, efficacy and value of the Hub model in enabling young people to meet others of a similar age and with similar life experiences. Whilst other opportunities no doubt exist for young refugees to meet other people their own age, few will be able to identify with and understand the trauma, bereavement and upheaval that many young refugees have experienced.

Trauma-informed approach and responding to mental health needs: Both internal and external stakeholders stressed the importance of being able to identify and respond to the emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of young refugees. Young Roots is recognised and credited across all stakeholder groups with developing the knowledge and skill base of its staff and volunteers in relation to trauma-informed practice, including through the provision of training and information in this area.

Linking young people to expert mental health support: All stakeholders emphasised the effectiveness, value and positive impact of integrating specialist mental health provision, including psychological support, and counselling, at the Hubs.

"Hubs are important as they offer a one-stop shop for various needs. In terms of access to therapy in the Hub, in the context of community activities, it has helped destigmatise mental health for young people, many of whom make each other aware that psychosocial support is helpful and encourage each other to access it." - External stakeholder

Building English language skills: The ability to speak and communicate in English is widely acknowledged as one of the most important factors in enabling refugees of all ages to independently understand and interact with their rights and entitlements, to access education and employment and service provision in the UK. Several young people commented that coming to Young Roots had helped them to learn and understand the different cultures and way of life in the UK.

"They helped me to learn English and to understand the UK – even the traffic is on the other side of the road here. I understand it all better now." - Young person

Linking young people into the Casework service and to legal support: All stakeholder groups agree the Hub model creates an environment and relationships that enable young people to discuss and access support with diverse issues. This involves linking a young person into Young Roots' Casework service, and specialist legal advice from partners like Bindmans LLP in Brent and CORAM Children's Legal Centre in Croydon.

"I am able (because of the support of Young Roots) to understand the difference between what is good for me and what isn't - what makes me unhappy. I choose the things that are good for me, and they have helped me make those choices" - Young person



Advice & Support Hubs recommendations

1. Sustain and develop Young Roots' Advice and Support Hub model and integrated approach

Although the Croydon and Brent Hubs may vary from one another in their design and implementation, the core concept of the Hubs, underpinned by Young Roots' values and principles, is an excellent model of delivery.

2. Continue to maintain and develop strong links and access to specialist service providers

Embedding mental health specialists and legal advisers in the weekly Hubs was identified as an enormous strength of the model. Similarly, the development of links and effective working relationships with specialist providers who provide expert support was also identified as a major strength in the Hub model. Developing a funded partnership with housing providers at the Hub might also be further considered.

3. Develop stronger links with social care teams in key Local Authorities across London

This would include developing new links with Local Authorities who are receiving more young refugees through the UASC National Transfer Scheme (NTS). It could also support social care teams to have a clearer understanding of the needs and status of the young refugees in their care, and to develop links with quality legal advisers. Developing increased outreach capability and further links with contingency accommodation (building upon the very successful model in Brent), might enable even more young people to engage with Young Roots at the earliest possible opportunity.

4. Consider the possibility of replicating the Hub model in other areas of London or the UK

Both external and internal stakeholders are confident that the Advice and Support Hub model could be replicated in other areas of London or the UK to meet the needs of young refugees on a wider geographical scale. However, in the first instance, Young Roots should prioritise the sustainability of current Hub delivery. Furthermore, expanding geographically should be considered in the context of Young Roots' longer-term vision and strategic ambitions.

5. Sustain and increase the provision of spaces and sessions for young women-only, exclusively geared to the interests, needs and participation of young women

The establishment of spaces and activities which are exclusively geared to the interests, needs and participation of young women has been effective in both of the Hubs. Young people, along with other stakeholders, expressed a desire to increase this element of Young Roots' work.

6. Further diversify youth activities within the Hubs for specific age groups

This aligns with Young Roots' strategic ambition to further diversify youth activities for specific demographics. It may involve organising separate sessions and would enable Young Roots to respond more effectively to different needs.

The impact, value and strengths of the Casework service

"Their youth Casework, in collaboration with good lawyers and other organisations, is excellent and particularly well-regarded by the sector - especially their work supporting age-disputed young people" - External stakeholder

External stakeholders and young people consistently confirmed that the type of support provided through Young Roots' Casework service is highly valued and will continue to be vital in the future.

Caseworker expertise and client focus: External stakeholders consistently commented on the high level of expertise and knowledge evidenced by Young Roots' Caseworkers. Feedback from legal advisers identified their good understanding of legal processes and asylum issues as a key strength, enabling Caseworkers to correctly assess case needs, spot potential issues and make timely referrals for specialist legal support.

Young Roots' Casework knowledge and client advocacy is skillfully applied across a wide range of client needs: age assessments and disputes, accommodation, accessing rights and entitlements, often leading to successful challenges.

The dedication of Caseworkers and their willingness to 'go the extra mile' on behalf of young refugees and asylum seekers was also a strong theme in feedback from all stakeholder groups.

"Their level of commitment is unique. They go above and beyond what I would expect of a busy charity like this. They not only try to resolve the matter themselves before finding solicitors, but then when solicitors are involved, they remain attentive in supporting the client with other ancillary matters, and they also give evidence and act as litigation friend in the cases taken to Court." -

External stakeholder

Casework integration in the Hub model: Evaluation feedback emphasised the value and effectiveness of the Casework service being integrated into the Advice and Support Hub model. Young people who may initially visit and engage with Young Roots activities through the weekly Hubs build relationships with the Casework and Youth Development teams. The building of trust, with the consistent presence of Young Roots' team members each week, makes it easy for young people to raise issues, share concerns and ask for support in the safety and familiar environment of the Hub.

Linking young people into expert legal advice: Stakeholders identified the effectiveness of the Hub model in enabling young people to be quickly linked into specialist legal advice as a key strength. Feedback from legal advisers highly valued the role of Young Roots both in providing generic Casework support and the holistic support that young people benefit from through the Hubs. This includes explaining to young people aspects of their legal case, the asylum and decision-making processes, age assessments and disputes, and other support needs that legal advisers don't have time to fully cover.

"Young Roots supports vulnerable young migrants with accessing legal advice and other key services on arrival in the UK. It is an essential resource for the young people that my firm supports. This work aligns very closely with the aims and work of other organisations, but I have yet to come across another organisation that has such an open doors policy, welcomes such large groups of young people and has the skill to triage their legal challenges and connect them with the relevant legal advisors." - External stakeholder

Age assessments and advocacy: External stakeholders, particularly in legal advice roles, highly valued the expertise of the Youth Development and Casework teams in supporting young people through age assessment disputes. The correct and fair assessment of a young person's age is fundamental to their ability to live safely and to access appropriate entitlements, rights and age-appropriate accommodation and support.

"Charities like Young Roots are critical in terms of supporting young refugees and referring them onto relevant organisations, such as Children's Services, where the individual claims to be a child and is not obviously an adult. The content of their referrals are of a good standard. They are also prepared to provide an opinion on age. Young Roots is then able to seek legal representation for young asylum seekers in the event of dispute, in particular where the young person is not taken into care pending the outcome of a Local Authority age assessment." - External stakeholder

Effective internal referrals: When asked to reflect on the efficacy of the internal and external referral process, stakeholders responded that the referral forms work well and are easy to use. Most external stakeholders also felt that the criteria and process for making a referral are clear and that the speed of response from Young Roots was good, although sometimes a young person could not be immediately taken on by the Casework service when capacity was full.

Breadth of support: Most stakeholders strongly advocated that the breadth of issues and needs that the Casework service, with Youth Development team support, currently responds to, is one of its key strengths. Very keen support was also expressed for the maintenance of strong links with legal advice and specialist mental health provision.

Duration and access to Young Roots' activities and support: Stakeholders identified Young Roots' approach to providing support to young people between the ages of 11 and 25, as an important strength. This long-term, open-door accessibility responds to Young Roots' experience that many young refugees encounter significant challenges during their transition into adulthood, relating to changes in their immigration status, employment or wider integration.

"Without organisations like this (Young Roots), solicitors like myself would not be able to help these vulnerable individuals - they would not have access to justice given the language barrier and it is difficult generally for a young asylum seeker to manage his/her own affairs such as arranging legal representation. Where I take on a case that is not resolved through pre-action correspondence, Young Roots is prepared to act as the client's litigation friend in the subsequent proceedings and are also willing to give witness statement evidence which is incredibly helpful when seeking to secure a successful outcome for the individual concerned."

- External stakeholder

Casework recommendations

1. Expand Casework capacity at the Hubs

Increased capacity in order to meet demand and ensure manageable caseloads and continuity of support (e.g. during annual leave, sickness, training etc.). The need to develop extra Casework capacity was stressed in many evaluation consultations.

2. Develop a Casework practice guide

Such a resource would capture and embed consistency of good practice in Casework, and pull together learning and expertise across diverse advice and advocacy areas, drawing on Young Roots' knowledge and best practice across the sector.

3. Establish criteria for offering two types of Casework: complex and non-complex

Differentiating in this way could better enable Young Roots' teams to offer basic Casework support to a greater number of young refugees, while enabling Caseworkers to prioritise work on urgent and complex cases.

4. Conduct 'group Casework' sessions on common issues young refugees present with, such as housing

5. Conduct a Casework referral and case closure workshop across the teams, to review and develop shared criteria and processes for managing referrals to Casework and closing cases

Organisational recommendations

1. Continue to build on Young Roots' trauma-informed approach

The approach was seen as informing understanding and practices that benefit both young people and those who work directly with them.

2. Continue to ensure appropriate support is available to front line workers responding to the impact of trauma

Working closely with young refugees entails listening to and responding to the impact of traumatising experiences. There is a risk to staff and volunteers of experiencing vicarious trauma and other emotional impacts. Accessible support and regularised supervision that meet the needs of team members based on their roles, including volunteers, will continue to be vital. These could include offering group supervision and exploring opportunities for staff to move into other roles for a period to offer 'breaks'. Staff benefit from the strong messages about the importance of turning their work phones off and setting clear boundaries.

3. Conduct longitudinal research into what happens to the young people Young Roots work with once they have stopped accessing the services. This would help illustrate the long-term impact of Young Roots' work.

4. Consider developing paid opportunities for young people to move in to, such as training to offer interpreting services for example.

Stakeholder views on future development and priorities

Internal and external stakeholders were asked to share their views on how they would like Young Roots to develop in the future and what areas of work/needs should be prioritised.

Young Roots services, continuity and 'more of the same' is needed: As indicated throughout this report, young people and other stakeholders have repeatedly endorsed the Advice and Support Hub model, the Casework service, and the Youth Development Programme. Very few suggestions for change or improvement were offered in the evaluation consultations and the main request was simply for 'more of the same'.

"I look forward to continue working in partnership with Young Roots and continue to grow in understanding in how we can collaboratively work together. As an organisation I feel we have a lot to learn from how you work and the Hub model approach you have taken. You are doing wonderful and impactful work." - External stakeholder

Increase Casework capacity: A common theme in feedback from both internal and external stakeholders was that they would like to see the capacity of the Casework service expanded. Whilst the quality of support was consistently emphasised, one of the main improvement suggestions and learning points identified was that more Caseworkers and more Casework time are needed. Expansion of capacity is felt to be necessary to meet the needs of growing numbers of young people, especially those with complex, and therefore very often time-consuming, Casework needs. It would also help to reduce the current workload and stress on Caseworkers.

Launch Young Roots' campaigning and influencing work: Young Roots is working with increasing numbers of young refugees in London. As reflected throughout this report, Young Roots has built on its long-standing experience and understanding of the needs of young people. Team members advocate and support young people in dealing with complex processes, systems and policy-related impact. This accumulated experience forms a strong and credible basis upon which Young Roots could become more active in speaking out on policy and related issues, on behalf of and with young refugees. This ambition is already stated in Young Roots' 2021-24 Strategic Plan and will further enhance the value and impact of its operational activities.

As part of the evaluation process, Young Roots took the opportunity to ask stakeholders what issues they thought would be a natural focus for Young Roots in developing their campaigning and influencing work, and how well placed they felt Young Roots is to undertake it.

Many stakeholders endorsed Young Roots' position, reputation, expertise and ability to engage in policy-related, influencing and campaigning activities, possibly, and often most effectively, in partnership with other organisations and networks.



The following quotes are from External stakeholders,

Protracted immigration status cases, having the right to work while waiting for an asylum decision, highlighting the skills/talents of young refugees and asylum seekers when they are given opportunities and access to resources. Highlighting how the current processes and systems impact negatively on their mental health and wellbeing. I feel Young Roots are expertly equipped to undertake this work and impact change in current policies and systems.

Young Roots is very well placed to be involved in policy and advocacy related to age assessments, the impact of temporary accommodation (hotels) on the wellbeing of young people, and the impact of delays with legal claims.

A huge amount of work needs to be done around age assessments! Would be interesting to also see whether the Home Office would look into accommodation for adolescents specifically (e.g. 18-25 years).

Young asylum seekers are an under-represented group, so any awareness raising is fantastic. Young Roots will be very well placed for being experts in this area.

The restriction around access to ESOL which colleges have to manage (the need to have been in the UK for 6 months before becoming eligible for ESOL classes).

Giving young people Leave to Remain until 18 and then making them apply again needs to be strongly challenged. They (Young Roots) have a lot of experience in how negatively this process affects young people.

Delays with asylum interviews and decisions; asylum housing issues; unaccompanied minors placed in adult asylum housing; mental capacity issues of young people to make decisions re their cases and life situations.

Responding to the Nationality and Borders Bill.





YOUNGROOTS

supporting young refugees to improve
their wellbeing and fulfil their potential



I think they do absolutely amazing work. Whenever I have a client who is supported by Young Roots I know I can rest assured they have someone in their corner who they trust and will keep fighting for their rights. - External stakeholder

youngroots.org.uk - @weareyoungroots

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