



## HARNESSING THE POWER OF THE YOUTH SECTOR IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS – AN OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNMENT

20.03.20 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dear Sir/Madam,

It is not overstating the matter to unequivocally state that, without significant, coordinated and urgent action by the government in partnership with the youth sector, the impacts of this crisis will lead to an intolerable stress on young people that will last for years to come.

We must boldly address the reality of what happens when young people have nowhere to go, very little to do, and few people to talk to about the anxiety they are feeling in relation to the outbreak. As with all matters of inequality, it will be underserved communities that are most impacted, and they will also be the ones who find it most difficult to return to normality.

Organisations have reported serious concerns around an expected rise in the risk of exploitation, county lines, safeguarding, increases in teenage pregnancy, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse and youth homelessness. Hundreds of thousands of young people have concerning vulnerabilities which the youth sector works tirelessly to address in order keep them supported, safe and - in some cases - alive. For many young people, the youth sector is often the only place where they will find a trusted adult to support them.

Youth organisations are working to redeploy their resources in order to continue supporting as many young people as possible, prioritising the most vulnerable. However, this doesn't match the breadth of sports, arts, and social activities young people would ordinarily have access to through youth services. Nor does it fully replace the informal 'youth work', such as conversations that support young people to better face the challenges of life or that result in disclosures leading to necessary support. In addition, not all young people have digital access and for some, the cost of data and connectivity is a challenge. This could leave the most vulnerable further isolated.

Many of the organisations we represent conduct large-scale income-generating activities to support their work, both commercial in nature (such as trading, training and events) and reliant on fundraising activities (such as community fundraising activities, sponsored activities and events). Heavily reduced footfall on high streets will lead to a large decrease in income from charity shops. Restrictions (both mandated and voluntary) will lead to training and events being cancelled, and community fundraising initiatives will either be cancelled or scaled back.

**The need for the youth sector will be greater than ever as society seeks to rebuild itself. We cannot be short sighted in our approach.** We must address this emergency phase we are in, whilst also ensuring that we have the infrastructure in place for a sustainable future.

In light of this we are calling on the government to support the following:

### Engage with young people

- Provide clear and consistent communication to young people, broken down by age group, so that they fully understand and appreciate the implications of the Covid-19 outbreak for themselves, their families and communities.
- Engage and represent young people in discussions, meetings and decision-making to address the crisis.
- Have the Prime Minister directly address young people and speak to their concerns in his daily briefings.



### Recognise young people are vulnerable

- Provide immediate sector support to meet the needs of vulnerable young people.
- Recognise and then name youth workers as key workers.

### Harness the potential of young people and our organisations

- Whilst any mobilisation of young people in volunteering around the outbreak must strictly follow medical and scientific advice, there is clearly an opportunity for us to recognise them as a force for good, which should be boldly harnessed.
- Work in partnership with the youth sector to co-create practical solutions to the current crisis which could mobilise and harness the energy and ideas of young people.
- Provide clear guidance about how young people can volunteer in a way that is safe for both themselves and those they are seeking to support.

### Protect the sustainability of the youth sector

- Establish a ring-fenced large scale emergency fund for the youth sector to cover the most critical contingencies and provide a safety net for civil society organisations who can demonstrate that their income will be adversely - and unavoidably - affected by Covid-19 (over and above what could be feasibly covered by reserves).
- Some of this money should be ring fenced to target local, small and micro charities that are likely to be particularly vulnerable to suspension of cash flow (and who could be supported to access such funds by larger charities and networks of which they are members).
- In recognition that this is a national emergency, this fund should provide support to the youth sector over and above the £500 million already committed via the Youth Investment Fund (YIF). This money must not be diverted, rather the emergency fund should be identified from other sources.
- This emergency funding should also include flexible support for the repurposing of existing grant-based activities to allow organisations to now support remote youth engagement.
- Organisations in receipt of government funding should be given the necessary and immediate flexibility to re-deploy or re-focus funding to the most urgent areas of need.

### Support insurance claims

- The government must urgently convene and broker agreements between the charitable sector and insurance companies to find a workable insurance solution for cancelled activities that will lead to a loss of income.

### Back digital support

- Partner with the youth and major tech companies by establishing a rapid response digital youth task force. This partnership would work to cohere the wide spectrum of youth sector provision into one easy portal of engagement and communication for young people.

We are not helpless or without hope. By making the bold, decisive commitment to do so, the government can partner with us in the youth sector to **do whatever it takes to unlock the infrastructure and people power needed to ensure young people do not become the forgotten and de-prioritised victims of this crisis.** We stand ready to work with government, to back our young people and give the youth sector the opportunity to do what it is best placed to do.

Signed  
The Back Youth Alliance



## ENDS

### Notes to editors

Back Youth Alliance is a CEO level group comprising of: UK Youth, The Prince's Trust, Youth United Foundation, The Scout Association, Girlguiding UK, NCS Trust, OnSide Youth Zones, National Youth Agency, British Youth Council, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Step Up To Serve. It also includes a number of youth representatives from across our organisations as well as #iwill Ambassadors.