The impact of participation in decision-making on young people's mental health and wellbeing: an evaluation of MAP's youth voice programmes

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Background

There is growing interest in the role that programmes promoting youth voice and participation in decision-making may play in building social and emotional skills, and contributing to wider youth outcomes. However, a lack of hiqh quality evidence means we know little about the impact of such programmes on participants' mental health and wellbeing, or about the ways in which positive outcomes occur, or about who is most likely to benefit. Meanwhile, understanding of the potential role of youth participation in reducing health inequalities remains underdeveloped.

1.2 The current evaluation

The present small-scale evaluation assesses the self-perceived benefits of participation in youth voice and participation programmes provided by MAP, a youth mental health charity, on different dimensions of social and emotional skills, belonging and inclusion, and mental health and wellbeing. Through mixed methods research with young participants, it explores preconditions for positive outcomes, including the setting, the quality of youth work practice, equity, diversity and inclusion in youth voice and participation programmes, and access to services and decision-makers.

Seventy-six young people participating in a Youth Advisory Board and/or the Youth In Mind programme across Norfolk were surveyed through a cross-sectional online survey, semi-structured one-to-one interviews and a focus group. The sample was self-selecting and participation in the research was voluntary, based on informed consent. Statistical analyses were conducted to identify and test relationships identified in the data between variables.

1.3 The young people, their motivations and activities undertaken

The mean age of young participants in the research was 16.7, with a majority identifying as female. Seventy-two per cent of young people responding to the online survey or taking part in an interview reported having experienced a mental health problem themselves, whilst a quarter reported having a long-term illness or disability. In addition, many young people reported having experienced some other form of social exclusion or marginalisation, such as being a young carer, being in receipt of welfare benefits, or having experience of homelessness or the care system.

Young people most often cited wanting to have a voice and make a difference to services or in their local community as their motivation for getting involved. Making friendships and having fun were also common reasons for joining.

Many young people had undertaken advanced youth voice activities, such as meeting with decision-makers, organising or speaking at events, or campaigning for changes to policies or services. Such activities often involved young people assuming relatively high levels of responsibility, either individually or collectively.

1.4 Young people's experiences

The vast majority of young people reported highly positive experiences of their participation and felt that their group had a positive impact on the young people involved, as well as on the wider world.

Young people held exceptionally high opinions of the youth workers from MAP. They felt included, listened to and heard in a supportive environment.

A large proportion of young people reported accessing other youth activities or one-to-one services at MAP or externally since getting involved in their participation group. Several young people reported increased understanding, confidence and trust in mental health services as a result of working with them through their youth voice projects.

1.5 Socio-emotional skills gained

Young people cited a large number of skills and qualities that they had gained through their involvement. Improvements in confidence and communication skills were mentioned most often and frequently co-occurred, suggesting the possible presence of virtuous circles and feedback loops developing in which improvements in one area may reinforce those in the other and vice versa. Improved team-work, social skills and emotional skills were also cited frequently.

1.6 Diversity, inclusion and belonging

Most young people felt that their groups were inclusive and were made up of young people from a wide range of backgrounds, with a diversity of experiences and views. Young people provided plenty of examples of steps that had been taken by staff to break down any barriers that young people might have been facing to their full inclusion in the group.

High proportions of young people reported that, as a result of their involvement, they felt part of something important, had grown their friendship groups and felt more a part of their community. Such outcomes were more common for disadvantaged and marginalised young people. Feeling accepted and heard was often a foundation for forming friendships and feeling part of something.

1.7 Impact on mental health and wellbeing

High proportions of young people reported improvements in their confidence, stress levels, feelings about their future, control over their life, overall enjoyment of life and sense of purpose.

Three-quarters of young people reported improvements in their 'mental health'. In addition, some young people felt their involvement was helping them to learn to manage their stress, anxiety or emotions, or had gained access to one-to-one counselling.

The foundational factors for improved mental health and wellbeing were explored through the qualitative interviews. Young people primarily attributed improvements in confidence to the quality of the supportive environment in which they felt able to express themselves, and the positive feedback and environment provided by staff. Young people often linked increased sense of purpose to feeling like they were playing a positive role in their community and were making a difference. Improvements in quality of life were felt to be a result of feeling less isolated, lonely or overwhelmed, and to the positive influence of staff. Meanwhile, improvements in mental health were attributed to a wide range of things young people had gained from their involvement, including the acquisition of socio-emotional skills, friendships and a sense of belonging.

The relationship between the acquisition of socio-emotional skills, belonging and inclusion, improvements in confidence and wellbeing, and improvements in mental health is complex

and multi-directional. It is likely that the greatest impact occurs when all of them are fostered simultaneously, and that they all reinforce one another to different degrees.

Statistical analysis found that higher proportions of marginalised young people than non-marginalised young people reported improvements in most areas of wellbeing. A significant association was found between young people being marginalised and reporting improvements in their levels of stress. The evidence from this evaluation suggests that MAP's youth voice and participation programmes may have an important role to play in helping to reduce mental health inequalities.

1.8 Programme features facilitating good outcomes

Several important features of the youth voice and participation programmes at MAP were identified as facilitators of change in individuals:
- The quality of the environment in which groups operated. Young people valued having a space where they felt safe, accepted, valued and heard within a 'community' of young people and professionals in which there was an overwhelmingly positive culture. Statistical tests established significant associations between young people reporting that their friendship groups had grown as a result of their involvement and three aspects of wellbeing: feeling part of something important; feeling more a part of their community; and improved overall enjoyment of life.
- The quality of MAP's youth work practice. Young people highly valued the support and positive energy provided by staff. A statistically significant association was found between young people reporting that staff provided valuable support and reporting improvements in their mental health.
- The wider service setting within which groups operated. Many young people needed additional support and benefited from being able to access one-to-one services and other youth work opportunities provided by MAP through their holistic youth advice, counselling and support model.
- Having opportunities to access and influence decision-makers. This led to young people feeling they were making a difference, which supported the achievement of good outcomes.

It was also found that the 'dosage' of young people's engagement in MAP's programmes influenced outcomes. Those young people who had been engaged for over one year were significantly more likely to report improvements in their confidence.

2. INTRODUCTION

Three quarters of lifetime mental illness begins by the age of 25.[1] In the UK, there is evidence that emotional and mental health problems are increasingly common among young people, that wellbeing declines during adolescence and that socio-economic inequalities in young people's mental wellbeing are widening.[2]

Adolescence and young adulthood is a critical period during which the development of habits and skills can influence transitions into adulthood as well as lifetime wellbeing.[3] Social and emotional skills are more influential than cognitive skills on mental wellbeing and socio-economic, labour market, health and health-related outcomes.[4] However, young people experiencing poverty and disadvantage are less likely to develop social and emotional skills.[5]

Addressing such deficits is particularly relevant as we emerge from a global Covid-19 pandemic that has had a profound impact on the lives and opportunities of young people,[6] and enter a cost of living crisis that is compounding existing financial precarity in this age group.[7] Economic uncertainty has driven levels of happiness, confidence and hopefulness for the future amongst 16-25 year olds to an all-time low.[8] In young people aged 17 to 19 years, rates of 'probable mental disorder' rose from 1 in 10 in 2017 to 1 in 6 in 2020, and 1 in 4 (25.7%) in 2022,[9] with generational, sex and socio-economic inequalities in mental health widening over the course of the pandemic.[10]

2.1 The role of youth voice and participation

In this context, there is considerable interest in effective early intervention programmes and interventions which can build social and emotional skills, and reduce life-course emotional and mental health problems, particularly among marginalised groups of young people.[11] Increasing attention has been paid to the role that programmes promoting youth voice and

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[1] Kim-Cohen, J., et al (2003) Prior juvenile diagnoses in adults with mental disorder: developmental follow-back of a prospective-longitudinal cohort, *Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2003 Jul;60(7)*:709-17.

[2] NHS Digital / Health and Social Care Information Centre (2022) *Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey*.

[3] Carneiro, P., Crawford, C., and Goodman, A. (2007) *The Impact of Early Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills on Later Outcomes*, London: London School of Economics; Kia-Keating, M., et al (2011). Protecting and Promoting: An Integrative Conceptual Model for Healthy Development of Adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 48(3)*, 220-228.

[4] Feinstein, L. (2015) *Social and Emotional Learning: Skills for Life and Work*, London: Early Intervention Foundation.

[5] Allen, G. (2011) *Early Intervention: The Next Steps: An Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government*, London: Cabinet Office.

[6] UK Youth (2021) *The impact of COVID-19 on young people & the youth sector.*

[7] Landreth Strong, F., and Webster, H. (2022) *The Cost of Independence: young people's economic security*, London: The Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce; *'Cost-of-living crisis is a cause for concern for young people'* https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/news/system-map-cost-of-living-crisis/

[8] The Prince's Trust (2023) *The Prince's Trust NatWest Youth Index 2023*.

[9] Creswell, C., et al (2021) Young people's mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health Volume 5, Issue 8*, P535-537, August 2021. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(21)00177-2

[10] Moreno-Agostino, D., et al (2022). Generational, sex, and socioeconomic inequalities in mental and social wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic: Prospective longitudinal observational study of five UK cohorts. *Psychological Medicine, 1-12*. doi:10.1017/S0033291722003348

[11] Khan, L. (2016) *Missed opportunities: A review of recent evidence into children and young people's mental health*, London: Centre for Mental Health.

participation in decision-making may play.[12] This is an expanding area of work for the youth sector in the UK, with programmes largely delivered through charities and statutory bodies.[13]

The Centre for Youth Impact defines 'youth voice' as:
> *"Providing support (i.e., the space, skills and time) for young people to express their views and ideas, and action being taken based on what they say. This practice will result in positive change: in the situation, organisation or context that the young person is sharing their views about (e.g., the services they or others receive), in the young person's personal development, or both."*[14]

Implicit in this definition is that young people are provided with safe and accessible spaces to have their voices heard, are listened to and have a stake in decision-making, with action taken based on young people's views.[15] The primary methods organisations use to enable young people to participate in decision-making are through ongoing informal discussions, consultation sessions, surveys, and youth councils or forums.[16]

A number of compelling arguments have been put forward in favour of promoting youth voice. First, and most fundamentally, is a rights-based argument based on young people's right, under Article 12 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,[17] to participate in decisions that affect them.[18] The second argument moves beyond a call to simply fulfil prescriptive rights obligations, into a more progressive call for young people's participation as a radical tool for collective empowerment, addressing young people's political marginalisation through power sharing. Indeed, there is a rapidly developing field of youth-led changemaking, in which the collective empowerment of young people and the value of lived experience are promoted as essential tools to affect social change.[19] Third, it is argued that young people's participation and responsible influence on policy-making lead to better, more informed policy and practice and, ultimately, to wider desired social change.[20] The final argument centres on youth voice and participation as a method for improving young people's developmental outcomes. By engaging in decision-making, young people can develop the social and emotional skills, such as self-esteem, confidence and leadership skills, which are necessary to thrive as adults.[21] In addition, many young participants are expected to achieve improved mental wellbeing.[22]

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[12] See, for example: Le, H. et al (2022) *A voice for change: Young Changemakers tackling mental health inequalities in racialised communities*, London: Centre for Mental Health. https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/download/CentreforMentalHealth_AVoiceForChange_YoungChangemakers.pdf

[13] Hickman Dunne, J., and Mahmood, Z. (2022) *Young people's Participation in Decision-Making: UK 2022 Survey Report*, London: The Centre for Youth Impact.

[14] Centre for Youth Impact (2022) *Youth voice: what exactly are we talking about? A typology of youth voice for UK youth provision:Version 2.0*.

[15] Hickman Dunne, J., Mahmood, Z., and Burke, T., (2022) *Who is heard where? Mapping youth voice activity across the UK*, London: The Centre for Youth Impact.

[16] Hickman Dunne and Mahmood (2022) op. cit.

[17] https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child

[18] Farthing, R. (2012) Why Youth Participation? Some Justifications and Critiques of Youth Participation Using New Labour's Youth Policies as a Case Study, *Youth & Policy No. 109,* September 2012 pp.71-97.

[19] Adams, N., and Coe, J. (2019) *Youth led change in the UK - Understanding the landscape and the opportunities* https://www.blagravetrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/youth-led-change-landscape-and-possibilities.pdf

[20] Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (2022) *Vision For The Future Of Youth-Led Changemaking And Activism*.

[21] Morton, M., and Montgomery, P. (2011) Youth empowerment programs for improving self-efficacy and self-esteem of adolescents. *Campbell Systematic Reviews, 2011:5*. 10.4073/csr.2011.5.

[22] 'Insights From the Data Trawl on Youth Voice Practice', 16th August 2022 https://www.youthimpact.uk/latest/news/insights-data-trawl-youth-voice-practice

2.2 The evidence for youth voice and participation

A systematic review conducted in 2011 found a lack of hiqh quality evidence for the impact of youth participation programmes on adolescents' sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, or other social and behavioural outcomes. The review identified the presence of many innovative programmes across the country, often led by the voluntary sector, that are based on sound principles and may well be effective, but for which the current evidence of impact is limited.[23] Similarly, reviews of youth social action projects[24][25] and young people's civic participation have found weak evidence for their impact on young people's outcomes.[26]

Thus, while the literature on youth voice and participation tends to assume positive benefits, it is possible that programmes may be ineffective, or even harmful. On the other hand, a lack of high quality evidence does not mean an absence of impact. Heterogeneity in studies examining programmes of varying design, setting and quality, and using a variety of measures, may obscure impact in specific programmes that are well-designed and well-delivered. Notably, a quasi-experimental field study into the impact of youth engagement in the National Citizens Service on life satisfaction found that participation increases young people's subjective wellbeing, evident at least 4-6 months after participation ended.[27]

Of particular relevance to the present study is previous research exploring the impact of youth voice and participation programmes on young participants' mental health and wellbeing, or exploring the impact of youth voice and participation programmes in youth mental health organisations. Only limited research in this narrower field has been published. (See Box 1 for further details.) Generally, studies provide some evidence for the acquisition of social and emotional skills, increased wellbeing, and raised mental health awareness, but do not offer clear evidence of improvements in the mental health of participants.

Box 1: Examples of studies exploring mental health in youth voice programmes

- A small-scale study exploring participation in Jigsaw, a youth mental health service in Ireland. Participants in a Youth Advisory Panel acquired confidence, new skills, friendships, increased knowledge around mental health and increased life satisfaction.[28]
- An evaluation of youth participation in a youth mental health organisation in Australia. Young people acquired transferable skills and social connectedness. Those reporting higher levels of social connectedness also reported lower levels of psychological distress, suggesting a positive impact on mental health.[29]
- An evaluation of Right Here, a five-year initiative of the Paul Hamlyn and Mental Health Foundations engaging over 3,000 young people in a wide variety of activities.

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[23] Morton and Montgomery (2011) op. cit.

[24] Youth social action has been defined as "young people engaging in activities to make a positive difference to others or the environment such as fundraising, campaigning and volunteering". (See: Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (2022) op. cit)

[25] *#IWill Fund Learning Hub Evidence Workstream: Youth Socal Action and Outcomes for Young People*, 2019.

[26] Cicognani, E., et al (2015) Sense of Community and Empowerment Among Young People: Understanding Pathways from Civic Participation to Social Well-Being. *Voluntas 26*, 24–44.

[27] Laurence, J., (2021) The Impact of Youth Engagement on Life Satisfaction: A Quasi-Experimental Field Study of a UK National Youth Engagement Scheme, *European Sociological Review, Volume 37, Issue 2*, April 2021, Pages 305–329, https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcaa059

[28] Price, A., and Feely, M. (2017) Participation in a youth mental health organisation: impacts on resilience of young people, *Children's Research Digest, 4, 1, 2017*, 55 – 60.

[29] Colin, P., et al (2011) *Meaningful participation for promoting mental health and wellbeing of young Australians. Inspire Foundation*. Sydney: Australia.

> Young people gained an increased awareness and understanding about mental health and wellbeing in themselves and others, grew the confidence to voice their opinions, improved their ability to handle anger and improved relationships with family members.[30]
> - A recent scoping review focussing on young people's participation in mental health policymaking. This found a lack of evidence substantiating perceived effects, such as the extent to which participation can be therapeutic and lead to a long-term positive impact on participants' mental health.[31]

We still know little about the *ways* in which youth voice and participation programmes may contribute to young people's mental health and wellbeing outcomes, or *who* is most likely to benefit. Further, understanding of the potential role of youth participation in reducing health inequalities remains underdeveloped. Whilst there is some evidence that participation may help reduce inequalities in wellbeing,[32] some studies have found a lack of diversity among young people involved in programmes, including an underrepresentation of Black and other racialised communities.[33]

2.3 The current evaluation

The present small-scale evaluation assesses the self-perceived benefits of participation in youth voice and participation programmes provided by MAP, a youth mental health charity, on different dimensions of social and emotional skills, belonging and inclusion, and mental health and wellbeing. Through mixed methods research with young participants, it explores preconditions for positive outcomes, including the setting, the quality of youth work practice, equity, diversity and inclusion in youth voice and participation programmes, and access to services and decision-makers.

2.4 MAP's service model

MAP offers coordinated support for young people on a wide range of health and social issues (from homelessness and debt to mental health and sexual health) through an integrated wellbeing model. It delivers a combination of information, advice, counselling, other psychological therapies and youth work to young people aged 11-25 in young person-centred settings across Norfolk. It aims to provide everything 'under one roof' so that young people are able to access different types of support in one place.

MAP's youth voice and participation programmes are seen as a key element of its holistic model and form part of the organisation's youth work offer. They sit alongside, and are intended to complement, MAP's therapeutic, advisory and youth support services, and contribute to the organisation's overall focus on young people's personal, social, emotional and economic development.

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[30] Institute for Voluntary Action Research (2014) *Evaluation of Right Here: a young people's mental health initiative of the Paul Hamlyn and Mental Health Foundations: Final report*. London: IVAR. https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/evaluation-right-young-peoples-mental-health-initiative-paul-hamlyn-mental-health-foundations/
[31] Yamaguchi et al (2023) op. cit.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Yamaguchi, S., et al (2023). Participation of Children and Youth in Mental Health Policymaking: A Scoping Review [Part I]. *Administration and policy in mental health, 50(1)*, 58–83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-022-01223-0

MAP is part of a national UK network of youth information, advice and counselling services led by Youth Access. Such services have been identified in national NHS youth mental health policy as "a key part of any universal local offer"[34] and are often the main local providers of counselling and therapeutic services for transition-age young adults. Like many of these services, MAP is commissioned by local statutory agencies to provide counselling and therapeutic services. A national study of youth counselling services delivered through this model demonstrated greater reach to young adults, young women, and marginalised groups of young people than is achieved through statutory children and young people's mental health services. Clinical outcomes were comparable to those reported in CAMHS, whilst levels of client satisfaction and quality of care were higher.[35] Meanwhile, national research into youth advice services has found them to be highly effective, and cost-effective, at improving young people's mental health.[36] There is currently no equivalent evidence for the impact of youth voice and participation programmes delivered in youth information, advice and counselling services settings.

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[34] Department of Health and NHS England (2015) *Future in mind: Promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing*,.

[35] Duncan, C., Rayment, B., Kenrick, J., & Cooper, M. (2020). Counselling for young people and young adults in the voluntary and community sector: An overview of the demographic profile of clients and outcomes. *Psychology and psychotherapy*, *93*(1), 36–53. https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12206

[36] Balmer, N.J., and Pleasence, P. (2012) *The Legal Problems and Mental Health Needs of Youth Advice Service Users: The Case For Advice*, London: Youth Access; Egglestone, C. et al. (2018) *Money Matters: Financial capability, wellbeing and young people*, London: Learning & Work Institute.

3. THE PROGRAMMES

3.1 MAP's organisational approach to youth voice and participation

A review of relevant MAP documentation – including its 'Young Person Participation Strategy' (2020), 'Youth Work Outcomes Framework' (2016) and descriptions of youth voice and participation work on MAP's website[37] - indicate that MAP's approach to youth voice and participation programmes involves engaging young people in decision-making processes and activities; ensuring young people have a say, power and influence over services and policies that affect them; and developing youth leadership. MAP has made a commitment to the development of the most comprehensive level of participation in which young people work on youth action independently as agents of change in their own community, with high quality support from staff.

Such an approach would appear to move beyond a purely 'youth development' approach to youth voice and participation, in which the focus is on benefits to young people themselves (e.g. developing leadership capacity and wellbeing), towards the field of 'youth-led change', in which young people, particularly those who are marginalised and under-represented, have agency and decision-making power to effect external change in services or wider society through addressing structural barriers.[38] Indeed, young people who are already linked in some way to youth development-focussed service providers have been identified previously as well-placed to move to activism and leadership within youth-led change movements, as they already have access to support and connectivity.[39]

MAP's Youth Work Outcomes Framework states:
> *"We believe that good youth work works. We know that the relationship between a youth worker and a young person is very important….We seek to understand the impact our work has on young people, posing the following questions:*
> - *What changes for young people as a result of the opportunities that we provide?*
> - *Why do these changes take place?*
> - *How can we be more efficient?*
> *To answer the above questions, we start with a hypothesis: The better the delivery of an opportunity (the process), the stronger the outcome or impact will be for young people. Our intention is to test this, and measure the quality of the process, as well as the impact on young people."*

3.2 The programmes being evaluated

The evaluation focusses on two programmes: the Norfolk Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) and Youth in Mind.

3.2.1 Norfolk YABs

The Norfolk Youth Advisory Boards are bodies of Young Commissioners and professionals who work to identify the issues that young people in their area care most about and then take action through campaigning, lobbying, advocacy, hosting events and commissioning services.

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[37] https://www.map.uk.net/about-us/how-we-work/
[38] For definitions and explorations of youth-led change, see: Adams and Coe (2019) op. cit.; and Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (2022) op. cit.
[39] Sandhu, B. (2019) *Lived Experience Leadership: Rebooting the DNA of Leadership.*

Directly commissioned by Norfolk County Council (NCC), the seven YABs across the county bring together young people, the local authority, elected members of NCC and other professionals working with young people, such as the police, health, education and the voluntary sector.

In 2022, the six YABs that MAP facilitates trained and developed 286 young commissioners and reached over 28,000 young people through surveys, online events, consultation activities and social media interactions. The YABs led on youth led campaigns covering topics such as Disability access; Covid response; Climate and the environment; Raising awareness of sexual violence; LGBT+ support; Anti-Racism and Black History Month; and Transgender awareness. The YABs commissioned an additional 39 projects across Norfolk, tackling issues young people identified around anti-social behaviour, mental health, Covid support, physical health and bullying.

The YABs are led by local young people aged 11-19, or up to 25 where young people have special educational needs and disabilities. All the YABs are chaired by young people and aim to include diverse groups of young people representing the wider population of young people. Our analysis of MAP's anonymised administrative data indicates that around half of young people involved as young commissioners are aged between 11 and 15, with the other half aged between 16 and 25. Participants are around twice as likely to describe their gender as female as male, with 5-10% describing their gender as trans, non-binary, gender-fluid, demi-girl or other. One in five are non-White British and a similar number have a recorded mental health issue, learning disability or physical disability.

MAP collects outcomes data on YAB participants using the Youth Star (the Outcomes Star for Youth Work)[40] and the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS).[41] This data was not analysed for this evaluation, but provides valuable additional data for MAP to use to analyse the impact of the YABs. MAP has previously reported that *"over 80% of young commissioners improved their wellbeing as a result of being part of YAB, using the Outcomes Star measurement tool".*[42]

3.2.2 Youth In Mind

Youth in Mind is a partnership between MAP, Norfolk County Council and Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust to develop Children and Young People's Mental Health Services in Norfolk and Waveney. Directed through the CAMHS Transformation programme since 2020, it brings together young people with an interest in mental health and a desire to improve local mental health services. It gives young people the opportunity to voice their opinions on how mental health support could be improved. The focus of the work has been on the active involvement of young people in the design and implementation of new services.

The programme's stated desired outcomes primarily relate to improvements in local youth mental health provision, and embedding youth voice in a coproduction model of working. However, it is recognised by partners that young people's active participation may also bring "therapeutic benefits" to participants.

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[40] https://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/using-the-star/see-the-stars/youth-star/
[41] https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/
[42] Norfolk Youth Advisory Boards Impact Report 2022.

MAP has a target to work with a minimum of 50 young people as part of the project. Young participants are anticipated to be a mix of YAB young commissioners and current users of statutory children and young people's mental health services.

Anonymised administrative data reviewed indicates significant engagement with children and young people across primary and secondary school age groups, as well as young people up to the age of 25. In 2022, 184 young people were engaged in the programme, with 678 young people reached. The age profile of participants is slightly higher than in the YABs, with around two in five being aged between 11 and 15, and three in five aged between 16 and 25. Similarly to the YABs, participants are around twice as likely to describe their gender as female as male, with around 10% describing their gender as trans, non-binary, gender-fluid, or gender questioning. Around 30% have a recorded mental health issue, learning disability or physical disability.

4. THE EVALUATION

4.1 Evaluation aims

The primary aim of this independent external evaluation was to explore the impact youth participation had on the mental health and wellbeing of participants. The evaluation assesses the self-perceived benefits on different dimensions of young participants' socio-emotional skills, wellbeing and mental health. It explores preconditions for positive outcomes, including the quality of youth work practice, diversity and inclusion, and access to services and decision-makers.

The evaluation centres specifically on the Youth In Mind programme and the six Youth Advisory Boards that are coordinated by MAP. Altogether, around 300 young people aged 11-25 were involved in these programmes across Norwich and Norfolk at the time fieldwork was conducted.

It is intended that the evidence generated through this study will:
- Help MAP, the young people they work with and MAP's funders to better understand whether, how and why its youth participation work benefits the young people who are involved.
- Inform the development of MAP's existing and future youth voice and participation initiatives.
- Contribute to wider understanding about the role of youth voice and participation initiatives in improving young people's mental health and wellbeing.

4.2 Theory of change

Through reviewing relevant literature,[43] working with MAP's staff, undertaking a consultation with three young people involved in relevant youth voice and participation programmes, and adapting guidance from The Centre for Youth Impact,[44] an outline theory of change narrative for MAP's youth voice and participation programmes was developed:
- Diverse groups of young people, including those from marginalised groups, participate in well-planned youth voice and participation programmes, engaging in decision-making, running something or having a say over something.
- Young people bring with them a set of experiences and beliefs about themselves and the world around them, shaped by the contexts in which they are living and learning. This affects how young people engage with youth provision.
- Young people encounter high quality staff practices and a supportive environment, and are provided with specific knowledge, skills and resources to influence decision-making, along with access to relevant decision-makers.

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[43] See, in particular: McNeil, B., and Stuart, K. (2022) *A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.1: Socio-emotional skills updates for informal and non-formal learning*. London: The Centre for Youth Impact. See also: Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (2022) op. cit.; #iwill Fund Learning Hub (2020) *Theory of Change: Guidance for organisations enabling youth social action* https://www.youthimpact.uk/resources/theory-change-guidance-organisations-enabling-youth-social-action; Morton and Montgomery (2011) op cit.
[44] Peck, S., Smith, C, and McNeil, B. (2022) *User Guide for Socio-emotional Skills Measures and Manuals: A guide and measures to accompany the Outcomes for Young People Framework 2.1*, London: The Centre for Youth Impact.

- Over time and multiple interactions, the combination of high-quality staff practices and young people's engagement at the point of interaction promotes the growth of socio-emotional skills, relationships, networks and leadership skills, and enables access to other support and services they may need.
- They gain a sense of belonging and inclusion.[45] Young people's confidence,[46] agency, sense of purpose and mental health and wellbeing builds. All this boosts socio-emotional skills.
- With these gains, together with opportunities to influence decision-makers, young people are more likely to enjoy success in influencing decisions, which further boosts socio-emotional skills, belonging and wellbeing, as well as helping to improve policy and practice.
- With sufficient participation in, and intensity of exposure to, high-quality settings and programmes, these effects will transfer to other settings, including the home, community, school/college and work.
- Wider outcomes, such as improvements in mental health, positive relationships, sustainable employment, and an improved ability to cope with the transition into adulthood, will occur for some individuals. These outcomes may be short-term or long-term.
- The greatest impact will be seen in marginalised groups of young people, thus reducing inequalities.

As this evaluation is focussed on identifying impact on mental health and wellbeing, a simple hypothesis is that young people's engagement in high quality youth voice and participation programmes in a supportive environment will lead to socio-emotional skills development; belonging and inclusion; and improved mental health and wellbeing. The relationship between different outcomes is expected to be circular rather than linear, with one reinforcing another.

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[45] There is evidence that a sense of community and connectedness is important in enhancing resilience and positive mental health. See, e.g., Catalano, R., et. al (2002) Prevention science and positive youth development: Competitive or cooperative frameworks? *Journal of Adolescent Health, 31*, 230-239.

[46] Adolescents with higher confidence and self-esteem have been found to suffer fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression. See, e.g., Henriksen, I., et al. (2017) The role of self-esteem in the development of psychiatric problems: a three-year prospective study in a clinical sample of adolescents. *Child and adolescent psychiatry and mental health*, *11*, 68. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-017-0207-y

Good representation of marginalised groups of young people and those with prior experience of mental health problems will lead to reductions in mental health inequalities. The key mechanism for socio-emotional skill growth and the development of wellbeing will be young people's engagement in high-quality provision. The delivery setting (i.e. integrated within broader advice, counselling and youth work provision) will be key in supporting good outcomes by ensuring young people, particularly those who are marginalised or experiencing mental health issues, receive other support they may need to sustain their engagement.

4.3 Defining socio-emotional skills, belonging and wellbeing

Whilst the boundaries between socio-emotional skills, agency, wellbeing and mental health are not clear-cut, we felt it was important to make some distinctions for the purposes of this research. We note that The Centre for Youth Impact anchors the latest version of its Outcomes Framework to socio-emotional skills, asserting that "growth in socio-emotional skills is the most important outcome of informal and non-formal youth provision", and organises the framework around six domains of socio-emotional skill: Emotion Management, Empathy, Initiative, Problem Solving, Responsibility, and Teamwork.[47]

However, our theory of change assumes the equal importance of confidence, agency, belonging, purpose, and mental health and wellbeing, and we are interested in the relationship between all of these things. In addition, there are skills that we anticipate young people may acquire through MAP's youth voice and participation programmes that are not explicitly mentioned in the CYI framework.

In Table 1, we have set out for the purposes of the evaluation where we see the skills, qualities and other outcomes we will explore fitting across three artificially constructed outcome domains: socio-emotional skills; belonging and inclusion; and mental health and wellbeing.

Table 1: Outcome domains used in this evaluation		
Socio-emotional skills	**Belonging and inclusion**	**Mental health & wellbeing**
Emotion management – including managing stressful situations; knowledge about mental health Empathy Initiative Problem-solving – including critical thinking, planning & organisation, responsible decision-making Responsibility	Feeling accepted, valued, heard and included Social relationships - part of friendship groups, positive relationships Feeling part of something important Feeling part of one's community	Confidence & agency – belief in own competence, sense of power, self-esteem, positive identity, control over one's life, feel taken seriously by others Purpose & motivation - sense of purpose, making a difference, feelings about the future Quality of life - stress levels, overall enjoyment of life Mental health

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[47] McNeil and Stuart (2022) op. cit.

Teamwork – including respect for others' points of view, communication skills, helping others, help-seeking skills, leadership skills		

4.4 Methods and approach

The evaluation commenced in June 2022, concluded in January 2023 and was commissioned by MAP. All fieldwork was undertaken between July and October 2022.

The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The Centre for Youth Impact recommends mixed methods approaches for the evaluation of youth voice and participation initiatives. Whilst quantitative methods are useful for providing an overview of views and opinions, and for reaching a large number of young people easily and efficiently, the addition of qualitative methods allows the capture of greater detail and insight into the views of young people.[48]

The evaluation used three methods to generate data – a cross-sectional online survey of young people, semi-structured interviews with young people, and a focus group with young people – to answer the following research questions:
1. What is the impact of young people's participation in MAP's youth voice and participation programmes on their mental health and wellbeing?
2. Are there any factors related to the setting in which the groups take place or the quality of support provided to participants that are linked to mental health and wellbeing outcomes?
3. What is the relationship, if any, between the acquisition of socio-emotional skills, belonging and inclusion, improvements in confidence and wellbeing, and improvements in mental health?
4. Which young people benefit most, and why? Do MAP's youth voice and participation programmes help to reduce mental health inequalities?
5. Does 'dosage' (e.g. the length or depth of young people's engagement) have an influence on outcomes?

The overall research questions and the design of survey questionnaires and topic guides were informed by a review of literature and tools for measuring young people's socio-emotional skills and mental health and wellbeing.

We recognised that engaging young people in research design can be an important step in ensuring research is accessible and appropriate when seeking to undertake work that captures the voices of marginalised groups. In practice, only limited engagement proved feasible. Three young people, who were involved in the relevant programmes, participated in a consultation workshop held at the outset of the evaluation process. Young people were consulted on proposed research questions; proposed survey methods; youth-friendly language and terminology; and how to secure young people's engagement as research participants. A number of adjustments were made to the evaluation plan as a result.

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[48] Hickman Dunne, Mahmood and Burke (2022) op. cit.

4.4.1 Online survey

A cross-sectional survey was administered via Smart Survey,[49] a host website for customised online surveys which stores and protects data on a secure server. The survey was launched in July 2022 and was open for a period of 9 weeks. The sample for the online survey was self-selecting. The survey was promoted and explained to current participants in the Youth Advisory Boards and the Youth In Mind programme by youth workers involved in the programmes through a combination of face-to-face groupwork, friendly emails and articles in project newsletters.

In addition to demographic questions, self-report questions were included to gain insight into the depth and nature of young people's involvement on their groups; the types of activities they had engaged in; their views on their experiences of the groups and the support they had received from staff; their access to other services; the skills and knowledge they felt they had gained; any perceived changes in their confidence, wellbeing or mental health as a result of their participation in the programmes; and their prior experience of any mental health issues.

See Appendix 2 for survey questionnaire.

Sixty-eight responses were received, of which 14 were incomplete and removed from further analyses, leaving 54 full responses for analysis.

Most respondents were part of a Youth Advisory Board (91%), whilst a minority were involved in the Youth In Mind programme (15%). (Three young people were part of both programmes.) Half of respondents (50%) were aged 11-15, with 37% aged 16-20 and 13% aged 21-25. Respondents were more than twice as likely to describe their gender as female (61%) as male (24%), whilst six young people described their gender as trans or non-binary.

A quarter of respondents reported that they had a long-term illness or disability (26%) and 70% reported 'experience of any kind of mental health problem (including common issues such as anxiety or depression)'.

Thirty-one respondents (57%) indicated that they were part of a marginalised group or had experienced at least one form of social exclusion measured, including: being currently in receipt of welfare benefits (13), a young carer (7), a refugee, asylum-seeker or migrant to the UK (1); having ever lived in care (3), been eligible for Free School Meals (23), been homeless (3), or been excluded from school (4); having a long-term illness or disability (14); or describing themselves as trans or non-binary (6). Many of these young people indicated experience of multiple forms of marginalisation or exclusion.

Survey data was analysed using Excel. Cross-tabulation analysis was conducted on all variables to identify the relationship between variables. Chi-square tests were performed to test the significance of certain key relationships identified in the data.

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Six semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with participants in the programmes to obtain qualitative data and richer insights into young people's experiences. The interviews were conducted alongside the online survey between July and September 2022. The sample for the online survey was self-selecting. As with the online survey, the

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[49] https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/

opportunity to participate in an interview was promoted and explained to young people by youth workers.

The interviews typically took around 45 minutes and were conducted either by telephone or video-conferencing, depending on young people's preference. Young people were asked about how, why and when they got involved in the youth voice programme; the activities they had engaged in; their experiences of the groups and the support they had received from staff; their access to other services; the skills and knowledge they felt they had gained; any perceived changes in their confidence, wellbeing or mental health as a result of their participation in the programmes; and their prior experience of any mental health issues.

See Appendix 3 for interview schedule.

Five of the six interviewees were involved in Youth In Mind, whilst three were involved in a Youth Advisory Board. (Two were involved in both.) The interviewees were somewhat older than other respondents. Four of the six interviewees were aged 21-25, and two aged 16-20. With regards to gender, five described themselves as female and one as male. Five out of six reported prior experience of mental health issues.

Interview transcripts were analysed thematically.

4.4.3 Focus group

One focus group was held with 16 young people to test emerging findings. This took place in October 2022 with a group of young people who were all participants in a Youth Advisory Board, and it lasted one hour. Several MAP staff were present to support young people's engagement.

The focus group session explored young people's views on the impact of being involved in their youth voice and participation groups; factors that they felt made the groups impactful; and the most important factors that might lead to improved mental health and wellbeing.

See Appendix 4 for focus group topic guide.

Nine of the 16 focus group participants were aged 11-15, with the other seven aged 16-20. Nine described their gender as female, six as male and one as non-binary.

Young people's feedback and insight from the focus group was used to revisit some aspects of the preliminary findings and refine the analysis.

4.4.4 Consent, confidentiality, data protection and safeguarding

Signed consent was obtained from young people by MAP staff prior to their participation in the research. The consent form was sent to the participants along with an information sheet once expression of interest was indicated. MAP staff assessed young people's competence to make a declaration of consent. Where young people were aged under 16, signed parental consent was also obtained. The voluntary nature of participation in the research was emphasised to young people by youth workers, on consent forms and at the start of interview and focus group sessions. It was stressed that taking part would not affect the support they would receive from MAP in any way. See Appendix 1 for an example of the consent forms used.

With the exception of focus group discussions, at which MAP staff were present, nobody outside the research team had access to any of the data collected, and only anonymised and non-identifiable data is included in the report. Information collected was stored only for as long as it was needed for analysis and was then destroyed. As well as being informed of arrangements for confidentiality and data protection, participants were also made aware of limits to confidentiality.

Robust processes were put in place to ensure young people were safeguarded and supported by MAP's staff throughout. These included MAP arranging an additional enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check on the field researcher prior to the research commencing and making staff available to support interviewees before and after sessions if required. All participants had key points of contact within MAP's staff team in the event that their participation in the research caused them any distress or gave rise to the need for support before, during or after sessions.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 The Young People

Table 2 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the study sample.

The mean age of young participants in the research was 16.7 overall. However, the mean age varied by survey type from 15.7 for the focus group participants, and 16.5 for online survey respondents, to 20.8 for those participating in one-to-one interviews.

Overall, the majority of young people identified as female (62%).

89% of young people were involved in a Youth Advisory Board, and 17% in Youth In Mind, with a small number involved in both programmes.

72% of young people responding to the online survey or taking part in an interview reported having experienced a mental health problem themselves, whilst a quarter reported having a long-term illness or disability.

In addition, many of the young respondents to the online survey reported having experienced some other form of social exclusion or marginalisation. (See Table 3.)

In many cases, the form of social exclusion, marginalisation, disability or mental health issues reported by young people might be expected to act as a barrier to their engagement in youth voice and participation activities.

Table 2: Summary of study sample						
		Online survey	Interviews	Focus Group	TOTAL	%
Total no. respondents		54	6	16	76	
Age	*11-15*	27	0	9	36	47%
	16-20	20	2	7	29	38%
	21-25	7	4	0	11	14%
Gender	*Male*	13	1	6	20	26%
	Female	33	5	9	47	62%
	Trans, non-binary, other	6	0	1	7	9%
	Not known / asked / answered	2	0	0	2	3%
Programme	*YAB*	49	3	16	68	89%
	Youth in Mind	8	5	0	13	17%
Long-term illness or disability	*Yes*	14	-	-	n/a	
	No	38	-	-	n/a	
	Not known / asked / answered	2	-	-	n/a	
Prior mental	*Yes*	38	5	-	n/a	
	No	9	1	-	n/a	

health issues	Not known / asked / answered	7	0	-	n/a	

NB: No individuals took part in both an interview and a focus group, but it is possible that a small number of young people may have responded to the online survey in addition to taking part in an interview or focus group.

Table 3: Marginalisation and social exclusion amongst online survey sample [Base: 54 online survey respondents]		
Social exclusion factor	**Number**	**Percentage of online survey sample**
Eligible for Free School Meals	23	43%
Long-term illness or disability	14	26%
In receipt of welfare benefits	13	24%
Young carer	7	13%
Trans or non-binary	6	11%
Been excluded from school	4	7%
Homelessness	3	6%
Lived in care	3	6%
Refugee, asylum-seeker or migrant	1	2%
Total no. individuals reporting one or more of the above	*31*	*57%*
Average number of factors reported	2.4	-

5.2 Young people's involvement in activities

5.2.1 Motivation for getting involved

Young people who were interviewed were asked what initially made them get involved in their youth voice and participation group. They most often cited wanting to have a voice and make a difference to services or in their local community. However, making friendships and having fun were also common reasons for joining.

"I wanted to meet new people and make a difference to how young people's mental health services are run."

"The overarching reason we're doing this is the impact – the motivation comes from that."

"I hoped to make more friends. Lots of the young people on the YAB aren't the most outgoing, so many of them joined to make friendships, to feel less alone and have a sense of having a friend, as well as to make a difference in the local community."
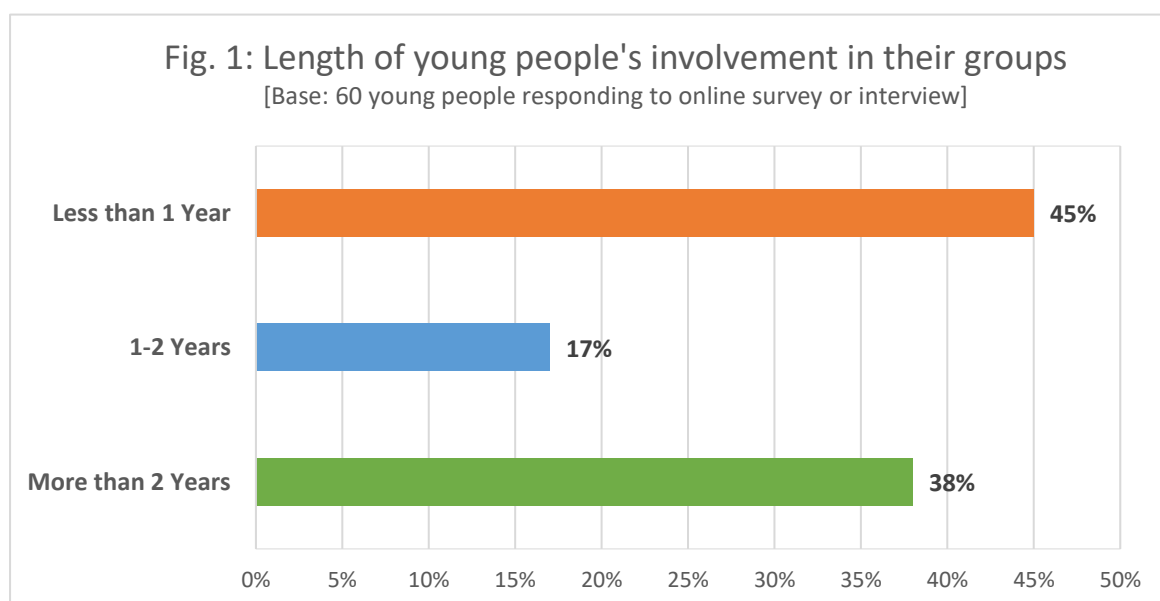
"I got involved in a trial session through my college, and it was so much fun. Then I had time on my hands at the start of lockdown, so signed up for the YAB. Then I got involved in Youth In Mind because I have anxiety. It was nice to be asked, because young people don't get listened to normally. So, I got involved to have fun and to have a voice."

"I got involved to help improve mental health services."

5.2.2 Length of involvement

As we explore later, the duration and depth of young people's involvement in youth voice and participation programmes can have a bearing on their outcomes.

Just under half of young people (45%) who responded to the online survey or took part in an interview had been involved in their group for under a year, with 17% involved for between one and two years and 38% for over two years. (See Fig. 1)

Fig. 1: Length of young people's involvement in their groups
[Base: 60 young people responding to online survey or interview]

Category	Percentage
Less than 1 Year	45%
1-2 Years	17%
More than 2 Years	38%

5.2.3 Issues addressed

Almost all young people (98%) responding to the online survey reported that their group had undertaken youth voice activities related to mental health issues. In addition, all six interviewees had done so. Whilst mental health was usually the sole or main issue addressed by those involved in the Youth In Mind programme, young people participating in a Youth Advisory Board also reported working on a wide variety of other issues, with bullying, LGBT+ issues, climate/the environment and Covid being cited most often. (See Fig. 2.)

Fig. 2. Issues addressed by young people in their groups
[Base: 54 respondents to online survey]

Issue	%
Mental health	98%
Bullying	72%
LGBT+ issues	51%
Climate / the environment	49%
Covid (e.g. support, social recovery)	34%
Anti-social behaviour	25%
Physical health	21%
Disability awareness	17%
Anti-racism	11%
Sexual violence	9%
Other	13%
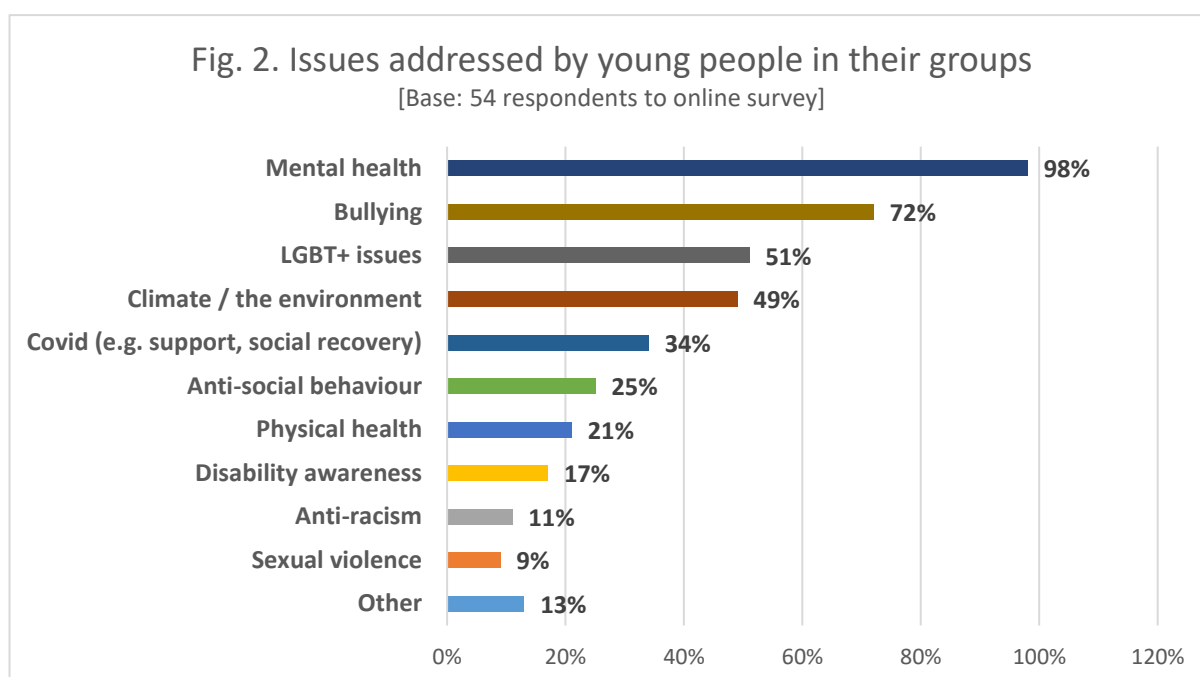
5.2.4 Activities undertaken

In the online survey, we asked young people *'What have you personally done on the group(s)?'* Almost all young people reported having at least shared their views and ideas on the group (94%), whilst two-thirds had trained as a young commissioner (68%), which is a core activity for those on a Youth Advisory Board.

Many young people had also undertaken what could be deemed more advanced youth voice activities. For example, a third had met with decision-makers (34%); whilst a similar number had organised an event, activity or project (32%), spoken at an event (32%) or campaigned for changes to policies or services (30%). Smaller numbers had chaired a meeting (19%), conducted research (19%), developed a charter (6%) or delivered training to professionals (6%). (See Fig. 3.)
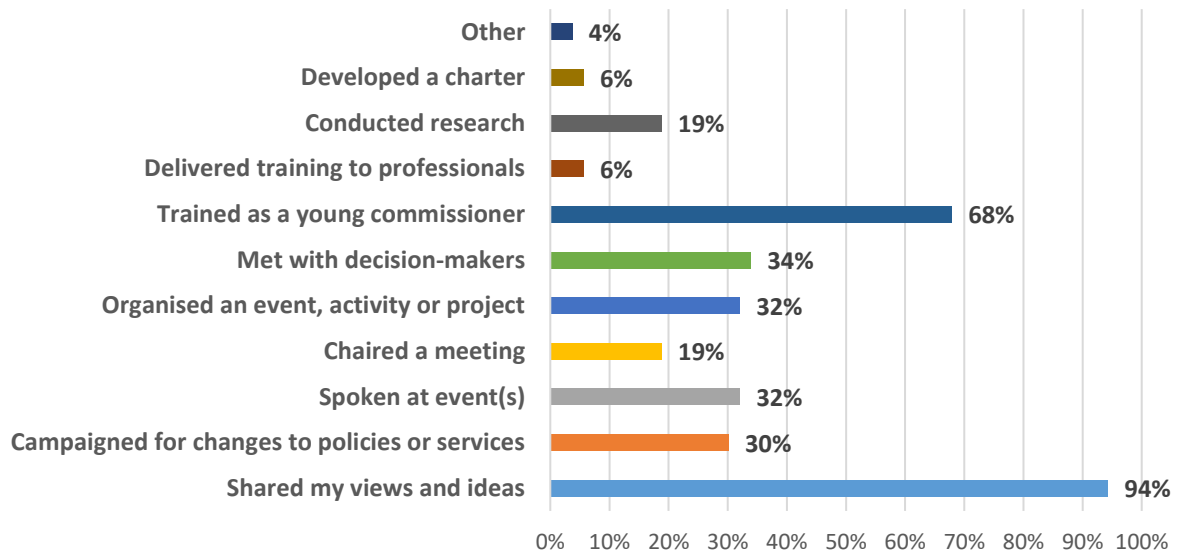
Such activities often involved young people assuming relatively high levels of responsibility, either individually or collectively. Most young people had also undertaken several different types of activity. Thus, the survey data is indicative of both a depth and breadth of activity which is untypical when viewed against the generality of programmes across the wider youth voice sector.[50]

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[50] See: Hickman Dunne, J. (2022) *Youth voice: what exactly are we talking about? A typology of youth voice for UK youth provision: version 2.0*, London: The Centre for Youth Impact; and Hickman Dunne and Mahmood (2022) op. cit.

Fig. 3. Activities undertaken by young people
[Base: 54 respondents to online survey]

Activity	Percentage
Other	4%
Developed a charter	6%
Conducted research	19%
Delivered training to professionals	6%
Trained as a young commissioner	68%
Met with decision-makers	34%
Organised an event, activity or project	32%
Chaired a meeting	19%
Spoken at event(s)	32%
Campaigned for changes to policies or services	30%
Shared my views and ideas	94%

5.3 Young people's experiences of the groups

The vast majority of young people responding to the online survey agreed with the statement 'Being part of the group is a rewarding experience' (94%, with 77% agreeing strongly). (See Table 4.)

In the interviews and focus group, young people frequently spoke about how their group was a welcoming, supportive and positive environment in which they felt accepted and heard.

"It's a really lovely thing, a lovely place."

"Amazing, honestly. It can sound really like cheesy like, oh, I'm just saying this because I can say that. I haven't…. I really haven't dealt with a service as good as MAP. I've been through a lot of services for young people, groups for young people, and I wish I'd known about MAP sooner because it has been…it has changed my life. Honestly. That can sound really cheesy."

"It is a space where people feel accepted and more relaxed without the pressure of trying to fit in. It is also very welcoming and kind, where you feel more confident to ask for help."

"I've only been to a couple of meetings so far…. but it's been really good, it's very relaxed and everyone's really nice, it feels really welcoming."

"It's giving me experiences I wouldn't be able to get. It's given me a place to have a voice and an opinion and not be ignored."

5.3.1 Impact of the groups

Several interviewees linked their rewarding experiences of their group to the impact their group was making. The two were seen as going hand in hand, and young people tended to feel that MAP had achieved a good balance between them.

"I've really enjoyed it. It's been very rewarding – and will be even more rewarding when we can hopefully see the positive impact from the work we've done."

"The process has been very positive, but the overarching reason we're doing this is the impact."

"I would love more young people to be involved in the work I do because I really think it has such a positive impact on me and also the people I've spoken to. And the opportunities they provide not only to obviously change services, but the social and fun things that they do. I think they have a really good balance in terms of supporting young people and providing them with really nice, fun opportunities, but also gaining their voice and their opinions to help change services."

Respondents to the online survey overwhelmingly reported that their group had a positive impact on the young people involved (94%), as well as on the wider world (93%). (See Table 4.)

Interviewees cited several examples of their campaigns making a difference in their local area, leading to the receipt of positive feedback, and how this made them feel positive about what they were doing.

"It really feels like we're making a difference. The groups I'm involved in have led to some changes in schools around equality, we've had some positive feedback. It's nice to be able to make a difference."

"It's just that feeling of, you can tell that [our campaign on anti-social behaviour] is making a difference in our local area, even if it just is reaching one person that day. That's what it's all about really."

"With the Youth in Mind team, we've had a lot of success with presenting the charter to professionals. I have joined staff from MAP at some of the meetings with professionals to express the charter. And I've found that has been very successful. And I've had great feedback from the professionals….Hopefully the charter is going to start getting rolled out…. And it's nice to see that it is getting slowly sorted."

Table 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the group(s) you have been involved in?						
	Strongly agree	**Mainly agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Mainly disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Response Total**
Being part of the group is a rewarding experience	77% 41	17% 9	4% 2	2% 1	0% 0	53
The group has a positive impact on the young people involved	74% 40	20% 11	4% 2	2% 1	0% 0	54
The group has a positive impact on the wider world	43% 23	50% 27	7% 4	0% 0	0% 0	54

5.4 Young people's views of staff

Young people taking part in the research held exceptionally high opinions of the youth workers from MAP who were supporting them.

Whilst it is possible that young people with the most positive experiences might have been more likely to participate in the research, it should be noted again here that the surveys were anonymous and that young people had been informed that staff would not have access to their responses.

Comments about staff made by young people in the interviews and in the comments boxes on the online survey highlighted personal qualities they valued, such as being kind, caring, friendly, patient and fun.

"All the staff I have met at MAP have been wonderful."

"They are all very caring and patient and are able to listen but also have fun with."

"I am very grateful towards all youth workers, they are all so kind and very helpful to everyone."

"They are very caring about all of us and our specific issues."

Table 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the staff supporting the youth voice and participation group(s) you have been involved in? [Base: 54 online survey respondents]						
	Strongly agree	**Mainly agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Mainly disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Response Total**
Staff make sure young people's voices are heard	89% 48	11% 6	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	54
Staff provide valuable support to young people when they need it	81% 44	13% 7	4% 2	2% 1	0% 0	54
Staff help young people access other services and opportunities that might be relevant	69% 37	22% 12	9% 5	0% 0	0% 0	54

5.4.1 Enabling young people to be heard

All 100% of respondents to the online survey indicated that they agreed with the statement 'Staff make sure young people's voices are heard', with 89% agreeing strongly. It was clear from the interviews and focus group that feeling listened to and heard in a supportive environment lay at the heart of young people's positive experiences overall.

"They really care about young people's voices being heard. It's hard to describe how they do it, but it comes across like they have a lot of passion for supporting us in giving our opinions."

"I feel I have been listened to – all the time. [The staff] pay full attention to what you say. MAP properly listens. And the decision-makers have done too. It's nice to be heard."

"The group is really well co-produced. MAP has supported and enabled young people to be the voice and to enable young people to run things how WE think they should be done."

"I think just at the heart of everything MAP do is young people first, that's what matters, and everything they do is based around that. ….They always take on board any feedback and are happy to look into changing things if it doesn't fit the needs of the young people…... Young people's voice is at the heart of everything MAP does, they always take on board feedback."

"[Youth worker] ensures everybody is getting heard and makes sure all our opinions are kept getting put across and reach the services."

"They always encourage me to put across everything I want to say."

"Young people's voices always get heard!"

"I could see young people coming in after me were being helped by the YAB. Having a safe, safe place to share ideas, talk to other people and meet new people. I've met a few people who were a bit shy at first and they have really opened up. There are a lot of gay young people out there that need places to go like YAB to be heard."

5.4.2 Providing support

The vast majority of young people (94%) responding to the online survey agreed that 'Staff provide valuable support to young people when they need it', with 81% agreeing strongly. Interviewees talked about staff being helpful, supportive and available to talk to.

"Yeah, yeah, I think their support is really good…... They're just so easy to chat to and really friendly and you can like talk about sort of anything really, which is really nice. I know I can ring [youth worker] and ask if I ever need to."

"They always ask if you need to talk to them about anything, they give you details of other youth activities, employment help, job opportunities."

"I've had amazing support from the youth workers."

"The staff are really good, they will get in touch with reminders and to arrange events, and they're very supportive."

5.5 Access to Services

91% of young people responding to the online survey agreed with the statement 'Staff help young people access other services and opportunities that might be relevant', with 69% agreeing strongly. (See Table 5.)

The survey also asked young people if they felt that their knowledge of where to get help had improved as a result of their involvement in their group. Altogether, 87% of young people felt that it had, with 57% saying their knowledge had improved 'a lot', and 30% 'a bit'. (See Table 7.)

5.5.1 Access to MAP's services

More than half of survey respondents reported accessing other youth groups or activities at MAP since getting involved in their participation group (60%), whilst many had accessed MAP's one-to-one services, such as counselling (23%), mediation (19%) or advice on housing and money (10%). (See Fig. x)

Given that only 32% reported knowing about MAP before getting involved in their youth voice and participation projects, it is likely that without their involvement, some young people may not have accessed vital support for their mental health and wider needs. Such support is known to be critical in sustaining levels of young people's engagement in youth participation programmes and ensuring young campaigners avoid re-traumatisation and burnout.[51]

Fig. 4. MAP services and activities accessed
[Base: 52 online survey respondents]
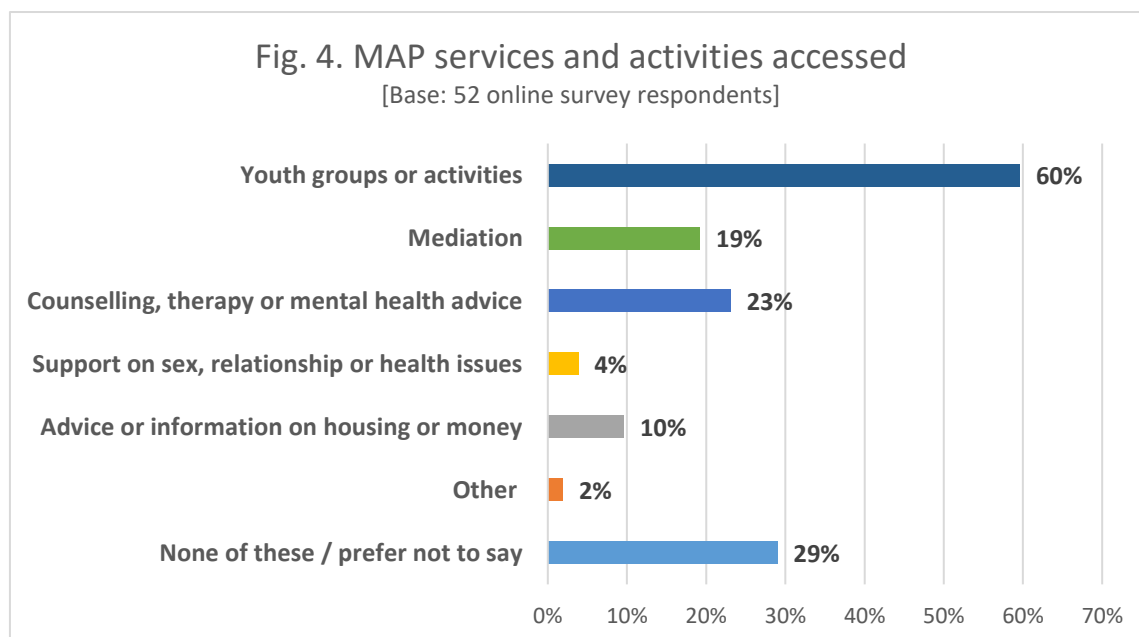
As with survey respondents, most interviewees had not been aware of MAP's services previously, but many had found out about them through being involved in their youth voice and participation group. None had yet had cause to access any of MAP's services, yet they all expressed confidence in doing so if they needed to in the future.

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[51] Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (2022) op cit.

"I didn't realise about all of MAP's services, like their services in schools or their drop-in sessions before – young people can go in if they need any sort of advice on anything really. I've learned about their services and would feel comfortable accessing them if I needed to. If I ever needed support or advice, I could sort of speak to [youth worker] and say, oh, who is the best person to speak to about this and they would be really helpful."

"I haven't had to use MAP's services, as I'm under the care of the NHS youth mental health team, but it's quite comforting knowing that MAP is there and all of their workers are approachable, I haven't been around one worker within MAP that has made me feel uncomfortable or feels unapproachable, which obviously is good, and is unusual."
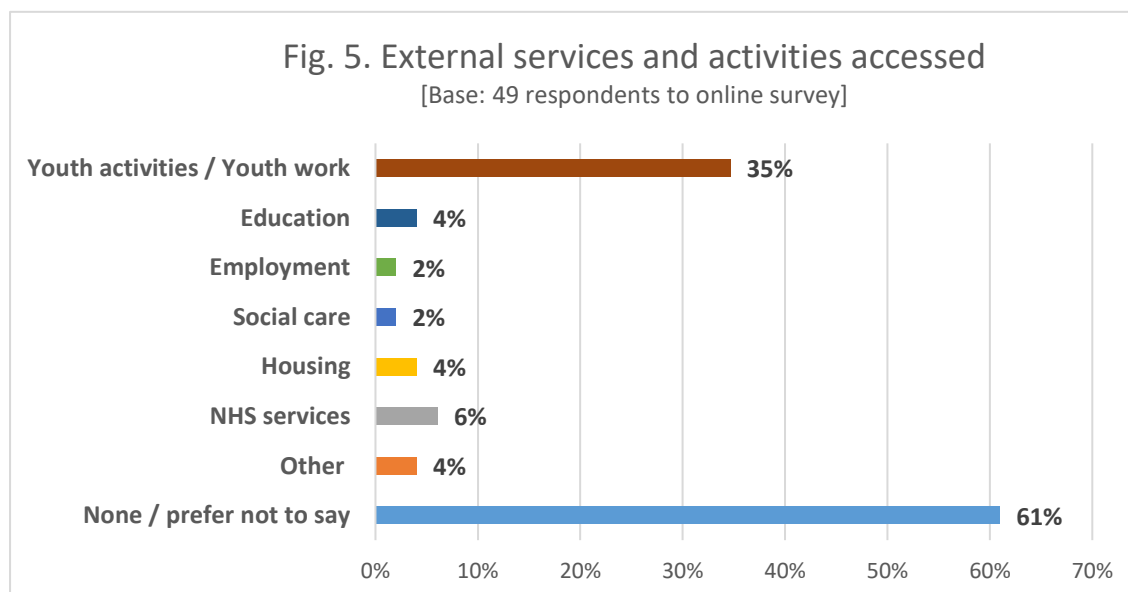
"I had heard of MAP before, but didn't know too much. I still don't know much about their wider services. But I would feel confident asking for help from MAP, yes."

"I know about MAP's services and would use them if I needed it."

5.5.2 Access to external services

Some online survey respondents had accessed services or opportunities outside MAP with the help of staff. Most commonly, this included external youth work activities. However, NHS services, housing, social care, employment and education were also cited. (See Fig. 5)

One interviewee had obtained paid work with a youth organisation as a direct result of the support they had received from staff.

Fig. 5. External services and activities accessed
[Base: 49 respondents to online survey]

Category	Percentage
Youth activities / Youth work	35%
Education	4%
Employment	2%
Social care	2%
Housing	4%
NHS services	6%
Other	4%
None / prefer not to say	61%

5.5.3 Awareness and confidence in statutory mental health services

In the interviews, young people were asked if they had improved their awareness of mental health issues or services through their involvement in their groups. Some young people had first-hand experience of statutory mental health services, and most were working with professionals in the system to improve local services through the Youth In Mind programme. Several young people reported improved understanding of services and greater confidence and trust in services as a result of working with them. Others said their awareness of mental health issues had increased through attending training.

"It's boosted my confidence in [mental health] services. It feels like things are going to change for the better and that's really significant."

"I was quite aware of mental health services before. I've learnt that NHS mental health services are willing to improve, which I didn't know – and wasn't something I felt before I started working with MAP – and, speaking to service providers, it does seem they're much more open to support young people in the best way they can, which has improved my trust in the capability of mental health services."

"It's given me a better understanding of mental health services – understanding what services currently do and how we can help them get better."

"My awareness of mental health has improved through the Mental Health First Aid training, I know how to support others."

5.6 Socio-emotional skills gained

The evaluation was interested in understanding young people's acquisition of socio-emotional skills. The online survey asked young people an open question: *'What skills have you learned or developed by being involved in the group(s)? Please mention any skills that feel important to you.'*

Young people cited a large number of skills and qualities that they had gained through their involvement. Improvements in communication skills (cited by 30 young people) and confidence (19) were mentioned most often. Improved friendships and social skills (9), team-work (8), and emotional skills (8) were also cited frequently. Improved helping skills (2), independence (2), leadership (1), and help-seeking skills (1) were also mentioned by small numbers of young people.

5.6.1 Communication skills and confidence

Analysis of survey responses indicated that perceived improvements in communication skills frequently included the ability to share opinions in public and listen to others.

"Increased my own personal skills of communication and listening."

Improvements in confidence and communication skills often co-occurred, suggesting the possible presence of virtuous circles and feedback loops developing in which improvements in one area may reinforce those in the other and vice versa. Survey responses also indicated that confidence and communication skills were seen as closely related by young people, with several mentioning gaining confidence in speaking in groups or in public.

"When I first joined the youth advisory board I felt as though I didn't have a voice and was shy when it came to talking to anyone. Now I can communicate well with people and have the confidence to speak my opinions whether someone agrees or disagrees."

"Better public speaking, better confidence."

"Confidence in speaking in front of people."

"Don't be scared to talk what's on your mind."

"Confidence has been a big development, for example when starting YAB I would have never imagined being able to talk and put my views across to a room full of commissioners (and then to be listened to!)"

In the semi-structured interviews and focus group, young people often talked about gaining confidence and improving their communication skills alongside feeling heard. Several young people referred to how anxiety and mental health issues had previously affected their ability to speak in group situations. However, the quality of staff support had created an environment in which young people could express themselves – and be listened to, valued and taken seriously – without feeling judged. For some young people, this had had a substantial impact on their confidence in speaking in group situations, and on their general confidence.

"And I guess I feel heard, both personally and as a group. When we give our opinions, it's not dismissed, we're taken seriously, they really understand young people. It's made me realise that people in organisations that are there for young people aren't going to dismiss your issues and views. Before, I felt that adults saying they were there for young people

weren't really interested. I feel more confident speaking to new people and engaging in a conversation, I don't feel judged or overwhelmed by it. It's shown me that I'm able to put myself out there and become part of something."

"I definitely feel heard, through the charter writing and speaking in the group and at schools. It has helped my confidence generally and speaking, giving my views. Regardless of what I say, I feel it will be listened to and respected. It never feels like a bad thing, or I've said something wrong, it's never treated that way even if it's not an idea the group wants to go with."

"I've gained in confidence. I never used to talk on the phone before, now I chair YAB meetings. I used to hide away who I was due to bullying, I now realise I need to celebrate who I am."

"It's definitely improved my confidence within talking and interacting with various people…. Being part of MAP is a really safe place, so I have gained the confidence to sign up for things and give them a go."

"It's really improved my confidence speaking to people, individually and in a group, without feeling overwhelmed and judged."

5.6.2 Friendships, social skills, teamwork and emotional skills

Confidence and communication skills often reinforced or co-occurred with other perceived gains. Meeting new people, making friendships and becoming more sociable had been important outcomes for some young survey respondents.

"I have also gained many friends through the youth advisory board which is massive for me as I always struggled to make friends when I was younger."

"Socialise, and how to communicate, as before I was practically mute"

"More sociable and active"

Several young people responding to the online survey referred to teamwork skills they had acquired – "team-building", "working with new people and in a group", "working as a team". In the interviews, young people tended to refer to teamwork skills in relation to the acquisition of transferable life skills.

"I've learnt a lot of transferable skills for life, teamwork, communication, time-keeping, organising stuff. Lots of life skills that'll be really useful for future employment. Also training to be on interview panels. You take on so much responsibility, but it never feels like it."

Finally, online survey respondents referred to the development of empathy, social skills, and resilience, or learning to manage their stress, anxiety or emotions.

"I developed so many skills I cannot list them all, but every skill I learnt helped me to become a kind, compassionate and understanding adult easily able to feel empathy for other people and thinks about other people and how they might feel."

"How I think about other people has changed. I now smile at other people, it can go a long way."

"Slowly learning to deal with anxiety."

5.7 Diversity, inclusion and belonging

The evaluation is interested in which young people benefit most from youth voice and participation activities and whether MAP's programmes help to reduce mental health inequalities.

Our initial theory of change assumed that diverse groups of young people engaging in youth voice and participation activities in a supportive environment would foster a sense of belonging and inclusion which would help to build young people's mental health and wellbeing, and lead to reductions in mental health inequalities.

We have already outlined findings regarding the importance attached by young people to the supportive environment they have encountered and their building of new friendships with others in their groups. In addition, we have described a study sample including broad representation from marginalised groups. However, shortcomings in youth voice organisations' ability to conduct high quality work with marginalised groups have been identified nationally.[52]

Thus, in this section, we further explore young people's views on the diversity of the groups in which they were involved; any barriers they have encountered to their engagement, and how these may have been broken down; the extent to which young people feel included, or a sense of belonging, within their group and in their community more widely; and factors that may be related to the development of feelings of belonging and inclusion.

5.7.1 Diversity of the groups

The online survey asked young people *'To what extent do you agree or disagree…*
that a diverse range of young people from different backgrounds are involved in your group?'

The vast majority of young people (89%) indicated that they agreed, with 43% strongly agreeing and 46% mainly agreeing. (See Fig. 6)

Fig. 6. A diverse range of young people from different backgrounds are involved in the group
[Base: 54 online survey respondents]

- Strongly agree
- Mainly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mainly disagree
- Strongly disagree

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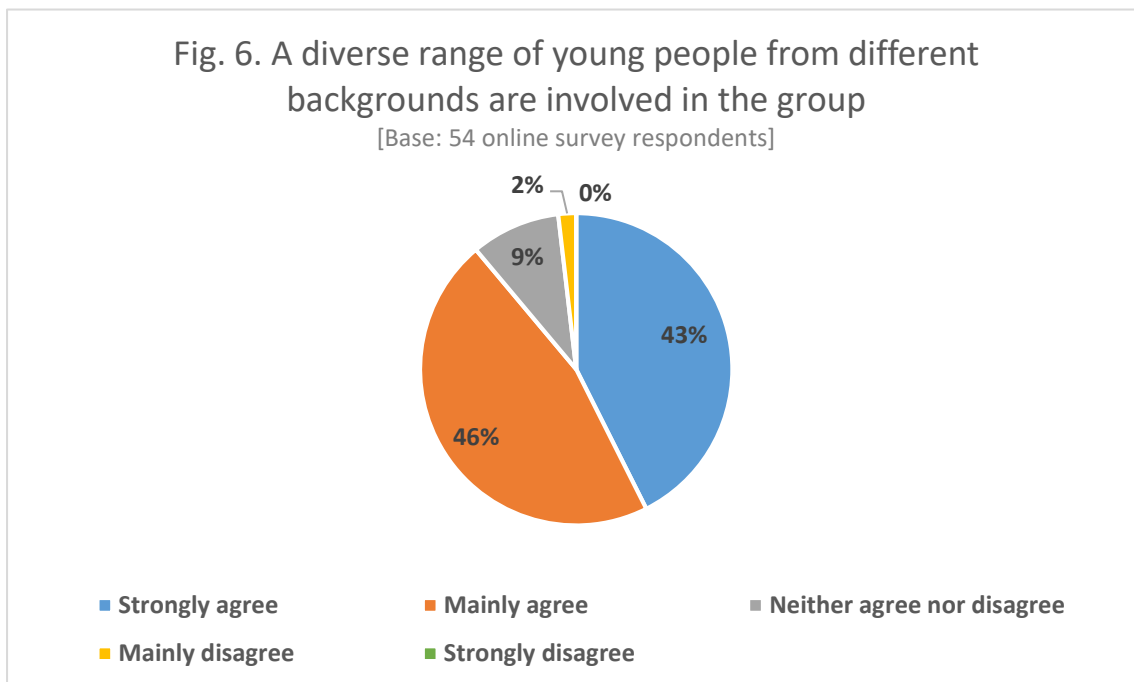
[52] Hickman Dunne and Mahmood (2022) op. cit.

Young people participating in research interviews felt that their groups were inclusive and were made up of young people from a wide range of backgrounds, with a diversity of experiences and views.

"Yes, it's diverse for sure. Young people with disabilities, different religions, different racial backgrounds are all involved. I have dyspraxia and anxiety."

"I love working with people from different backgrounds with different health issues and needs, different learning disabilities, neurodiversity."

"We've all had different experiences of things like mental health services, so we've all got different perspectives and views on things, we've all dealt with things in different ways. But everyone's opinion is heard and matters."

Although the groups were seen as diverse, and young people had built friendships with other young people they might not otherwise have met, young interviewees recognised that they were brought together around a shared passion to effect change. This was clearly evident in relation to campaigning for changes in mental health services, particularly for those young people with experience of the mental health system.

"You meet people who, even though your experiences are different, yeah, they're similar. Especially with the Youth in Mind team, a lot of us have experienced the services first-hand. Everyone is there for a reason, we all have a passion to positively influence."

"It's been really nice to meet new people with similar experiences of mental health services, or sort of similar difficulties – to feel like you're not alone in experiencing mental health difficulties. It builds a different kind of understanding of each other in a more supportive space. I have met people I wouldn't have met otherwise, and built friendships and stuff out of that."

"Yeah, it's allowed me to meet other people, young people who are passionate about the same sorts of things."

5.7.2 Staff's role in breaking down barriers to inclusion

Fig 7. Staff help all young people to be included in the group
[Base: 54 online survey respondents]

4%   0%   0%
11%
85%

■ Strongly agree   ■ Mainly agree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree
■ Mainly disagree   ■ Strongly disagree
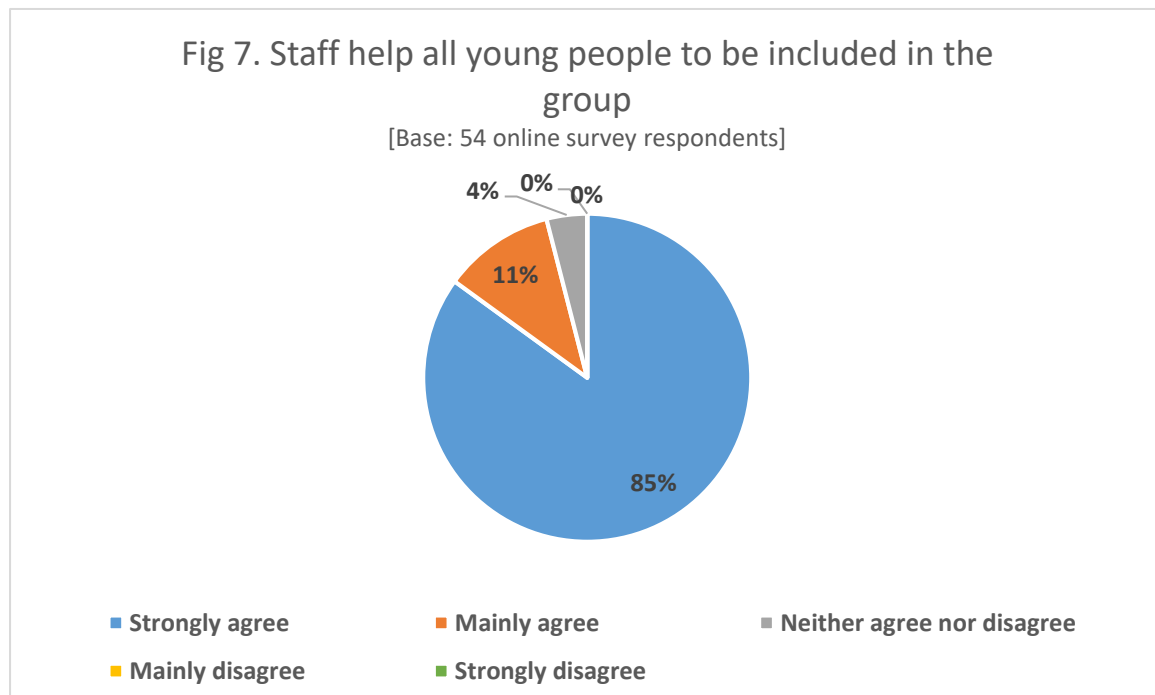
Young people tended to be impressed by the efforts of MAP's youth workers in ensuring everyone was included in activities. The online survey asked young people to what extent they agreed that 'Staff help all young people to be included in your group'. Fifty-two out of 54 young people (96%) agreed, with 85% strongly agreeing and 11% mainly agreeing. (See Fig. 7.)

In the interviews, young people provided plenty of examples of steps that had been taken by staff – and young people themselves – to break down any barriers that young people might have been facing to their full inclusion in the group.

"I often feel like I've got quite a few barriers to getting involved because of my physical health, as well as my mental health….And so, obviously, when it comes to activities and days out, I think I feel myself more as a barrier, like, oh my gosh, like my health issues. But MAP have been so accepting and, what's the word…. accommodating? So they really do, like, ensure that you're still involved. They put things in place.. And they really do just do everything they can to make sure you're involved. But you also feel… you know that things are in place, but they also make it feel like, oh, you're not an added issue kind of thing. They genuinely make it so you just feel like you can go and just be normal. But they put those things in place for you too."

"One of the projects we have done was making a video of people coming to MAP with all different needs. One of our characters had neurodiversity which we wanted to make prominent as it's an issue that obviously has a very wide spectrum, but it was just to help to show that MAP is a really inclusive, diverse place to come. And we had really great feedback from it."

"Yes, it's a very inclusive group. A regular part is to use pronouns as a way of introducing yourself. And you're still able to give feedback if you can't get to a meeting."

"Very inclusive, yeah, yeah. There are always different trips and activities going on, so it's not just sitting around a table talking, there are things everyone can get involved in. I haven't experienced any barriers getting involved myself."

"They are really good at doing things for everyone. They've been very patient with people who need support, they do all sorts of types of activity and at different times on different days."

"No barriers for me. Travel was potentially a barrier, but MAP reimburses travel costs and offers to pay for taxis if need be. They are very good with supporting young people to get to, you know, things that they have on offer. MAP are also very good if you're finding forms difficult. They will happily talk to you over the phone or, you know, web chat, and talk you through the form."

"We have developed awareness and understanding of others and I've been able to raise other people's understanding of my conditions. Being able to do that – I love it. Everyone in the group is the same as everyone else and is supported to be included."

"Staff always try to bring people into the conversation. When young people are struggling to find the words for what they want to say they will sort of offer different ways for young people to express themselves. So, communication is very open and they're very supportive of that."

5.7.3 Measures of inclusion and belonging

In the online survey, young people were asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements related to the potential development of a sense of inclusion, belonging and community as a result of their involvement in their youth voice and participation groups.

Most young people reported that, as a result of their involvement:
- I feel part of something important (89% of online survey respondents agreed with the statement, with 64% strongly agreeing and 25% mainly agreeing)
- I have grown my friendship group (79%, with 55% strongly agreeing and 25% mainly agreeing)
- I feel more a part of my community (77%, with 51% strongly agreeing and 26% mainly agreeing)

(See Table 6.)

Table 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements as a result of your involvement in the youth voice and participation groups?						
	Strongly agree	Mainly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mainly disagree	Strongly disagree	Response Total
I feel part of something important	64% 34	25% 13	11% 6	0% 0	0% 0	53
I have grown my friendship group	55% 29	25% 13	11% 6	6% 3	4% 2	53
I feel more a part of my community	51% 27	26% 14	21% 11	2% 1	0% 0	53

Analysis of the online survey data identified that a greater proportion of disadvantaged and marginalised young people (as identified in Table 3) reported that their friendship groups had grown and that they felt part of their community, when compared with those who were not disadvantaged or marginalised. This may reflect a prior deficit experienced more often by marginalised young people, but also suggests that MAP have been successful at ensuring their high quality practices benefit those experiencing inequalities.

In the interviews, young people talked again about how working together with others in a positive environment and having their voices heard made them feel part of something.

"More than anything else, I think I feel part of something. The group is there for me, I feel supported, I've been having a good time, really enjoyed it."

"I feel heard, I've been able to get my opinions across, I feel part of something and I've started to build my confidence a bit more."

In the focus group, young people confirmed the importance of feeling accepted and heard as a foundation for forming friendships and feeling part of something. Some young people referred to feeling part of 'a community' or 'our community', by which they meant the youth voice and participation group itself. However, there were a variety of views relating to feeling included in society. Whilst this was very important to some young people on the group, others felt that not all young people wanted to be included in society.

5.8 Impact on mental health and wellbeing

The key aim of the evaluation was to identify any impact of MAP's youth voice and participation programmes on the mental health and wellbeing of the young people involved. In order to explore this, our research included questions related to confidence, agency, stress, purpose, feelings about the future, overall enjoyment of life, and mental health. Below we set out quantitative and qualitative findings on these issues. The following section (4.9) includes analysis of the relationship between improvements in mental health and wellbeing and other findings, including the quality of youth work practice, the depth of young people's engagement, demographic factors and other outcomes reported above.

5.8.1 Quantitative data from the online survey

Young people responding to the online survey were asked to indicate any improvements or changes they felt had happened as a result of their involvement in their group. High proportions of young people reported improvements against each indicator of mental health and wellbeing. (See Table 7 and Table 8.)

Table 7: Please indicate any improvements or changes you feel have happened as a result of your involvement in the youth voice and participation groups.						
	Improved a lot	Improved a bit	Not changed	Got worse	Don't know/not applicable	Response Total
My confidence has….	59% 32	28% 15	13% 7	0% 0	0% 0	54
My stress levels have….	17% 9	40% 21	38% 20	2% 1	4% 2	53
My mental health has….	15% 8	60% 32	17% 9	2% 1	6% 3	53
My feelings about my future have…..	36% 19	32% 17	24% 13	4% 2	4% 2	53
My control over my life has….	25% 13	38% 20	34% 18	2% 1	2% 1	53
My overall enjoyment of life has….	43% 23	30% 16	26% 14	0% 0	0% 0	53
My knowledge of where to get help has….	57% 30	30% 16	13% 7	0% 0	0% 0	53

Table 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements as a result of your involvement in the youth voice and participation groups?						
	Strongly agree	Mainly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mainly disagree	Strongly disagree	Response Total
I feel people take me more seriously	38% 20	26% 14	32% 17	4% 2	0% 0	53
I have a stronger sense of purpose	40% 21	34% 18	19% 10	8% 4	0% 0	53

5.8.2 Confidence and agency

Quantitative survey data:

Confidence – 87% of young people reported improvements in their confidence, with 59% reporting 'improved a lot', and 28% 'improved a bit'.

Control over my life - 63% reported improvements, with 25% reporting 'improved a lot', and 38% 'improved a bit'.

People take me more seriously - 64% agreed with this statement, with 38% strongly agreeing and 26% mainly agreeing.

Qualitative data:

In the qualitative interviews and focus group we were able to further explore young people's perceptions of changes in their mental health and wellbeing, and to what factors they attributed those changes.

Young people primarily attributed improvements in confidence to the quality of the supportive environment in which they felt able to express themselves, and the positive feedback and environment provided by staff. In addition, as already explored in the section on 'Socio-emotional skills gained', improvements in confidence often co-occurred with improvements in communication skills, with young people often seeing the two as closely related.

"I suffer from anxiety. Lockdown affected me a lot, but MAP has made a big difference to my life. I've come out of my shell a lot more now, I'm much more confident and I've developed the way I think – I'm much more positive and have fewer negative thoughts. The thing that helps most is all the positive things other people say to you."

"It's definitely improved my confidence in the sense that before I was involved in MAP, I thought that I'm definitely not going to be able to do nothing with my life. Because that's genuinely how I felt. But then, having the workers that you're working with on the Youth in Mind team, they always give you such good feedback. They'll give you that reassurance that you're achieving. They give you that confidence boost as well from them. Especially as someone who worries if I'm ever doing the right thing or if I'm good enough, to have them turn around and say… you've got the ability- it's like someone sees me for more than my issues. So that definitely changed my confidence."

5.8.3 Purpose & motivation

Quantitative survey data:

A stronger sense of purpose - 74% agreed with this statement, with 40% strongly agreeing and 34% mainly agreeing.

Feelings about my future - 68% reported improvements, with 36% reporting 'improved a lot', and 32% 'improved a bit'.

Qualitative data:

Many young interviewees reported an increased sense of purpose as a result of their involvement. Most often, young people attributed this to feeling like they were playing a positive role in their community and were making a difference. In addition, young people talked about their teamwork and friendships with other young people. All of this seemed to contribute to young people feeling more positive about their role in life and their futures.

"It's given me a sense of sort of purpose and being part of a community I suppose through the friends that I've made and the people or young people that I've worked and done stuff with. It's definitely made me feel like I have more purpose and more of a role and I can do things that make like positive change and yeah, I suppose, that's cool."

"I pride myself on wanting to have positive influence. I drive myself to want to support other people. Obviously I've had the situations where I can't physically work or do full-time placements, so obviously joining MAP has given me that purpose and that place to feel like I'm doing something with my skills…. It's genuinely just giving me that extra spark that I've lost for so long….this has just really given me that purpose. And I've always wanted to do things that support and help other people, especially young people. I'd love to do that as a daily job, it brings me joy to be able to be involved with these projects. I don't know, it's really hard to put into words, but it just really has changed my life at the moment, and I don't know what I'd do without it. It's giving me that ability to know that I can make a difference."

"I have things during the week and a general future to look forward to."

5.8.4 Quality of life

Quantitative survey data:

Stress levels - 57% reported improvements, with 17% reporting 'improved a lot', and 40% 'improved a bit'.

Overall enjoyment of life - 74% reported improvements, with 43% reporting 'improved a lot', and 30% 'improved a bit'.

Qualitative data:

In the interviews, several young people reported feeling happier and calmer. They tended to attribute improvements in their quality of life to feeling less isolated, lonely or overwhelmed, and to the positive influence of staff.

"I would definitely stress the enjoyment of life as living in a rural area in Norfolk I have struggled with feeling isolated and the feeling of loneliness, so YAB has really brought lots of happiness and enjoyment into my life in the last couple of years."

"I'm a user of NHS mental health services, so I've been getting professional help for a while, and it's early days with Youth in Mind, but I think maybe my mental health and wellbeing is a bit better already. I had been feeling pretty stressed and overwhelmed before I went to my first meeting, and when I came out of the group, I felt noticeably better. I felt calmer, I had a general sense that the world is a good place."

"Before joining the YAB, I had really really bad anxiety. I cut off all my friends and wasn't speaking to them or my family. I joined YAB and it really helped me. Also being around adults who aren't parents, but are still supportive and are, like, loving and kind."

5.8.5 Mental health

Quantitative survey data:

The online survey included one question asking specifically if young people felt they had experienced any improvement in their mental health as a result of their involvement in the youth voice group. 75% of young people reported improvements, with 15% reporting 'improved a lot' and 60% 'improved a bit'. Whilst the overall number reporting any improvement against this indicator was one of the highest, the proportion reporting that it had improved 'a lot' was lower than for other mental health and wellbeing indicators.

Qualitative data:

In the interviews and focus group, most young people said that they felt their mental health had improved. For example, in an unscientific show of hands, 13 out of 16 focus group attendees indicated that they thought their mental health and wellbeing had improved.

Young people interviewed individually tended to attribute improvements in mental health to a wide range of things they had gained from their involvement, including the acquisition of socio-emotional skills, friendships and a sense of belonging.

"I have definitely made my mental health better and others around have thought so too."

"Before I got involved, my mental health wasn't at its best. I've used CAMHS and a youth mental health service in Norfolk - not MAP. Being part of the group has played a part in improving my mental health and wellbeing. I wouldn't say that's a stretch to say that at all. It's improved through the opportunities to be sort of social and part of something that is bigger than myself in terms of having an impact directly on mental health services. And sort of the skills and competence I've gained have definitely played a part in improving my mental health."

A small number of interviewees felt that they hadn't experienced any improvement in their mental health, despite reporting extremely positive experiences of their involvement generally, as well as reporting improvements in socio-emotional skills, belonging and inclusion and certain aspects of wellbeing. These young people reported moderate or complex pre-existing mental health conditions, and felt that it would be unrealistic to expect their involvement in their groups to shift their long-standing mental health problems.

"I was already involved in mental health services….There haven't been any changes in my mental health [from being involved with MAP] so far or how I feel about myself, but that's all down to my own self-esteem and I haven't been involved with the group for very long, I've got a long way to go."

"In regards to my wellbeing, this is where it gets really tricky and why I don't like the online surveys, because MAP hasn't worsened my wellbeing. But it's also, like, not improved where I am mentally and physically and nowhere and nothing has got that magic wand to be able to do that. I have complex health needs…and I personally struggle with quite a few different mental health issues….. And so… how I am varies day to day. But regardless of how I am, I always have that passion to still be involved with MAP, if that makes sense? So often, like obviously when you get really depressed you lose like the want to do anything, but I've always got this drive to keep involved with MAP, because it keeps me busy, it makes me feel like I've got a purpose and I'm accepted there, no matter of my issues, no matter my background."

5.9 Analysis of foundations for improved mental health and wellbeing

Whilst the report has already discussed a number of factors cited by young people as important preconditions for specific outcomes from involvement in MAP's youth voice and participation groups, we were keen to go a step further in an attempt to identify the critical foundations for improved mental health and wellbeing.

In this section, we first set out the results of statistical analyses of the online survey data to find any significant relationships between factors of interest and improved mental health and wellbeing.

We then explore the views of young people in the individual interviews and focus group on what they believed to be the most important foundational factors for improved mental health and wellbeing.

5.9.1 Statistical analyses of associations with improved mental health and wellbeing

5.9.1.1 The relationship between prior mental health problems and improved mental health and wellbeing

Cross-tab analysis of online survey data indicated that a lower proportion of young people with prior mental health problems reported improvements across the wellbeing and mental health indicators. However, chi-square tests of independence did not show any statistical significance to these patterns.

5.9.1.2 The relationship between disadvantage and improved mental health and wellbeing

The 31 young people in the online survey sample who reported experience of at least one form of exclusion or marginalisation were separated from the remaining 23 young people for cross-tab analysis in an attempt to identify any associations between disadvantage and reporting of improved mental health and wellbeing as a result of involvement in a youth voice and participation programme.

Marginalised young people were more likely to report improvements in most areas of wellbeing. This was most marked in relation to improvements in stress, where 71% of marginalised young people reported improvement, compared with 36% of non-marginalised young people. Their stress was also more likely to have improved 'a lot'. A chi-square test of independence showed that there was a significant association between experience of marginalisation and reporting improvement in stress.[53] No other significant associations were found between disadvantage and mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

5.9.1.3 The relationship between length of involvement and improved mental health and wellbeing

Cross-tab analysis of online survey data indicated that young people with longer involvement in the groups generally reported more positive experiences and greater improvements in

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[53] X^2 (1, N = 53) = 6.27, p = .01

wellbeing. Similarly, those young people who had assumed more responsibility[54] in their groups generally reported greater improvements in wellbeing.

A chi-square test of independence showed that there was a significant association between being involved for a minimum of one year in a programme and the likelihood of reporting improved confidence.[55]

The relationships between length of involvement and improved stress, improved enjoyment of life and improved feelings about the future were also tested, but were not found to be significant.

5.9.1.4 The relationship between quality of youth work and improved mental health and wellbeing

Cross-tab analysis of online survey data indicated that those young people reporting the most rewarding experiences of the groups and the most positive experiences of staff were more likely to report improvements in mental health and wellbeing.

Chi-square tests of the associations between quality of experience and improved wellbeing, and between quality of youth work and wellbeing, tended to show significance, but were unreliable due to the very small number of respondents not providing good ratings of their experiences and the support they had received.

However, a significant and reliable association <u>was</u> found between young people reporting that 'Staff provide valuable support to young people when they need it' and reporting improved mental health.[56]

5.9.1.5 The relationship between socio-emotional skills and improved mental health and wellbeing

The nature of the data collected in the online survey on socio-emotional skills gained by young people did not enable statistical analysis of the relationship between socio-emotional skills and improved mental health and wellbeing.

5.9.1.6 The relationship between belonging and improved mental health and wellbeing

Cross-tab analysis of online survey data indicated that those reporting outcomes related to belonging and inclusion were more likely to report mental health and wellbeing improvements. It was also observed that changes related to feeling part of something important, growth in friendship groups, a stronger sense of purpose and improved overall enjoyment of life tended to co-occur.

Chi-square tests found three significant associations, all related to young people reporting that they had grown their friendship groups. The associations with having grown friendship

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[54] 'More responsibility' was defined for this purpose as those undertaking more advanced change-making activities, such as campaigning, meeting with decision-makers, speaking at events, chairing meetings or delivering training to professionals, as opposed to just sharing their views.
[55] X^2 (1, N = 54) = 10.43, p = .001
[56] X^2 (1, N = 53) = 4.32, p = .038

groups were with: reporting feeling part of something important;[57] reporting feeling more a part of their community;[58] and reporting improved overall enjoyment of life.[59]

It is also worth noting that higher proportions of marginalised young people reported outcomes related to belonging and inclusion than non-marginalised young people.

5.9.2 Young people's views on the foundational factors leading to improved mental health and wellbeing

In individual interviews, young people who reported improved mental health and wellbeing were asked what factors about their group had most helped them achieve good outcomes. Young people spoke again about feeling welcomed, heard, included and supported in a 'community' of young people and professionals in which there was an overwhelmingly positive culture. This enabled them to come out of their shell, voice their opinions and develop their confidence. Finally, they spoke about the importance of feeling like they were making a difference through their campaigns.

"It seems that MAP sort of create this environment in which it feels so supportive and open, you can't say anything that's bad or wrong. It's an environment in which you can just be open with your thoughts and no one's going to judge them or critique them. And that makes it a really sort of safe environment in which you can be open to share and be creative."

"The staff – they have to push everything to happen and ingrain a positive culture. The staff at MAP are so friendly and they have lots of positive energy which rubs off on all of us."

"The opportunity to speak and be heard. And being welcomed into the group, it's been amazing."

"[What's helped most] is just being involved and being able to put across my opinions and being able to help."

"We're making a difference."

"Feeling like we're making a difference to mental health services through our campaigns makes a massive difference to how I feel about my involvement, 100%. As someone who has struggled and fought the system for so many years, that's obviously what drives my passion to want to change it for other people."

Focus group discussions enabled further exploration of the most important factors that have facilitated improvements in young people's mental health and wellbeing. With regard to the foundations for an impactful programme, most young people felt it was vital to have a space where you felt safe, accepted, valued and heard, with high quality support from youth workers. Access to MAP's wider support, the inclusion of diverse voices on the group and access to decision-makers were also deemed critical by many young people.

In relation to intermediate outcomes from involvement that lead to improved mental health and wellbeing, young people felt that the following were most important: new friendships; feeling part of something important; improved knowledge about mental health and mental health services; the acquisition of new skills; improved confidence; a stronger sense of purpose; feeling included in society; and the group's success in influencing decisions.

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[57] X^2 (1, N = 53) = 9.64, p = .002
[58] X^2 (1, N = 53) = 8.32, p = .004
[59] X^2 (1, N = 54) = 11.27, p < .001

6. DISCUSSION

In this section, we revisit our original research questions to explore the relevance and implications of our findings, and to discuss limitations of the study and the implications for the interpretation of the results.

6.1 What is the impact of young people's participation in MAP's youth voice and participation programmes on their mental health and wellbeing?

High proportions of young people reported improvements in their confidence, stress levels, feelings about their future, control over their life, overall enjoyment of life, and sense of purpose. Three-quarters of young people reported improvements in their 'mental health'. In addition, some young people felt their involvement was helping them to learn to manage their stress, anxiety or emotions, or had gained access to one-to-one counselling. Others, who had engaged in projects working with mental health professionals to improve mental health services, reported increased trust in the statutory mental health system.

Whilst these are extremely promising findings, limitations in the study mean we cannot definitively claim that MAP's programmes resulted in improvements to young people's mental health. First, this was a small-scale study with a self-selecting sample. It is possible that the young people who completed a questionnaire or agreed to participate in an interview or focus group were not representative of all young people taking part in MAP's programmes in some way. For example, they might have had more positive experiences of their participation in their group, or a greater interest in the research itself.

Second, it was not possible in this study to employ pre-post survey methods. It is possible that a degree of 'response shift' is present as a result of the use of retrospective pre-post survey methods. We do note that retrospective pre-post methods have been found to be favoured by children and young people taking part in research.[60] Nevertheless, further research in this area will benefit from the use of fully validated instrument scales.

Third, we cannot be sure that the changes young people perceive to have occurred as a result of their participation in MAP's youth voice programmes are actual changes. Our survey data is cross-sectional and relies on self-report, which can be subject to a variety of biases and limitations. For example, young people may provide what they deem to be the desired answer, may not assess themselves accurately, or may report more positively if they are doing better in terms of their mental health. Further, despite exploring the reasons for perceived changes with young people in some depth, we cannot be sure that changes are the result of their participation in MAP's youth voice programmes rather than other factors.

Finally, there are limitations to generalising the findings to all young people. Those participating in MAP's programmes might have certain demographic or personality characteristics. For example, it is possible that 'healthier' young people may be able to get the most from their involvement in the programmes. We cannot be certain that the same results would occur if a random sample of young people were to participate in MAP's programmes.

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[60] Kelly, L. (2019) Children's Opinion of Retrospective Pre-Post 'Then-Test' Survey Validity, *Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation, Volume 15*, Issue 33, 2019. ISSN 1556-8180

6.2 Are there any factors related to the setting in which the groups take place or the quality of support provided to participants that are linked to mental health and wellbeing outcomes?

Young Minds and UK Youth have recently asserted that young people can experience improved mental health and wellbeing through trusted relationships with youth workers who enable young people to explore issues in a safe environment without judgement.[61] The evidence collected for this evaluation supports this assertion and points to the exceptional quality of MAP's youth work practice. Young people reported extremely good experiences of their groups and of the youth work staff supporting them. Young people highlighted the welcoming, supportive, positive and non-judgemental environment in which their groups operated, and felt that this played an important role in improving their mental health and wellbeing. They attributed the creation of this environment to staff enabling young people to be listened to and heard, and providing positive feedback and "positive energy". Young people felt this led to them developing their confidence and feeling free to express themselves, as well as feeling part of a community of young people working towards shared goals.

Young people's perceptions that staff played a key role in supporting improvements in their mental health and wellbeing were supported by statistical analysis of online survey data. A significant association was found between young people reporting that staff provided valuable support and reporting improvements in their mental health.

Previous research in youth mental health organisations has found that substantial support from staff can be needed to sustain young people's engagement in youth voice activities.[62] However, youth workers in most youth organisations do not feel equipped to support young people around mental health issues.[63] This study has provided some evidence to support the view that MAP's overall service model could be important in supporting good outcomes. We had hypothesised that the settings for MAP's youth voice and participation groups, i.e. within the organisation's broader youth advice, counselling and youth support services, would be important enablers of young people's good outcomes, particularly for marginalised young people or those with mental health issues. We found that many young people engaged in MAP's programmes had indeed accessed one-to-one or group support at MAP. The majority of young people had not accessed MAP's services before, so it is likely that their involvement in the youth voice programmes was important in connecting them to MAP's wider support. We doubt that access to broader support in this way is as readily available in most youth voice and participation settings.

Another relevant factor relating to the setting and quality of youth work is MAP's apparent success in facilitating access to decision-makers and appropriate spaces for young people to work alongside and share power with professionals in the mental health system. This seems to have increased young people's influence on policy and practice, which young people perceived to be a factor in facilitating personal mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

6.3 What is the relationship, if any, between the acquisition of socio-emotional skills, belonging and inclusion, improvements in confidence and wellbeing, and improvements in mental health?

Improvements in confidence were the most common changes reported by young people and lay at the heart of many other phenomena observed. Improved confidence often co-occurred

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[61] Young Minds and UK Youth (2022) *Someone to turn to: Being a trusted adult for young people*.
[62] Price and Feely (2017) op. cit.
[63] Young Minds and UK Youth (2022) op. cit.

with improvements in socio-emotional skills, particularly communication skills, and there are indications that the two may reinforce one another. Young people often attributed improved confidence, and confidence in speaking, to a positive environment, positive feedback, feeling heard and feeling free to express themselves without feeling judged.

Various aspects of belonging and inclusion, including meeting new people, making friendships and becoming more sociable, also supported improved confidence and other aspects of wellbeing. For example, reductions in feelings of isolation, loneliness and stress supported young people to feel happier and calmer, and to report improved overall enjoyment of life. Similarly, feeling like they were part of something important, making a difference and playing a positive role in their community supported young people to increase their sense of purpose and their feelings about the future.

Statistical tests established significant associations between young people reporting that their friendship groups had grown as a result of their involvement and three aspects of wellbeing: feeling part of something important; feeling more a part of their community; and improved overall enjoyment of life. However, many other relationships between indicators studied were observed, or perceived by young people, and would be worthy of further exploration in future studies.

Laurence (2021) notes that previous studies have predominantly applied either a social-resources model, where networks and trust derived from participation build wellbeing, or a psychological-resources model, where participation cultivates wellbeing through fostering confidence and agency.[64] Our findings would support the contention that these are complementary pathways, as the relationship between the acquisition of socio-emotional skills, belonging and inclusion, improvements in confidence and wellbeing, and improvements in mental health is complex and multi-directional. It is likely that the greatest impact occurs when all of them are fostered simultaneously, and that they all reinforce one another to different degrees. This leads us to tentatively question the assertion of the Centre for Youth Impact that *"growth in socio-emotional skills is the most important outcome of informal and non-formal youth provision"*.[65]

6.4 Which young people benefit most, and why? Do MAP's youth voice and participation programmes help to reduce mental health inequalities?

Higher proportions of marginalised young people reported growth in their friendship groups and feeling part of their community, as well as improvements in most areas of wellbeing. These patterns were particularly notable amongst those reporting long-term illness or disability and in relation to improvements in stress, where a significant association between experience of marginalisation and reporting improvement in stress was established.

These findings potentially complement those of Laurence (2021) who found that young people from disadvantaged communities joined the National Citizen Service with lower wellbeing, but had closed the gap in wellbeing with their less disadvantaged peers by the end of their involvement in the programme, with gains in confidence and agency driving much of their additional gains in life satisfaction.[66] Taken together, an emerging case could be built for the role of youth participation in addressing inequalities in wellbeing amongst adolescents.

Our findings again point to the quality of MAP's youth work practice. Young people reported positive experiences of diverse groups working in an inclusive environment, with staff

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[64] Laurence (2021) op. cit.
[65] Peck, Smith and McNeil (2022) op. cit.
[66] Laurence (2021) op. cit.

making extensive and successful efforts to break down barriers to young people's involvement.

One group who were very much included in programmes is young people with prior experience of mental health issues. These young people sometimes had slightly different motivations for their involvement from other young people, being driven more by a desire to improve mental health services. Whilst many of this group reported improvements in their wellbeing, they reported improvements in mental health less often than others, sometimes due to the effect of entrenched or complex mental health problems.

6.5 Does 'dosage' (e.g. the length or depth of young people's engagement) have an influence on outcomes?

There is current interest in the concept of dosage as a means to better understand the impact of youth work. As McNeil writes in a recent blog:[67]

> "All evidence-based programmes have a defined dosage: how much, how often and with what intensity is a 'beneficiary' intended to engage with or experience a project or service? As in medicine, dosage in social programmes is closely related to hypotheses about impact. Too little and it's probably insufficient to create lasting positive change (and indeed may even do harm); too much might have adverse or unintended consequences."

There are at least five aspects of young people's involvement in youth voice and participation that could potentially be measured: intensity (e.g. the frequency of attendance); duration (e.g. the number of years of attendance); breadth (e.g. involvement in different types of activities); engagement (i.e. the quality of a young person's involvement);[68] and depth (e.g. the level of responsibility assumed by a young person).

As part of this evaluation we retrospectively examined the length of young people's involvement in programmes, which provides a measure of duration, and the types of activities they engaged in, which may provide some indication of the depth of their involvement. There was some indication that both longer duration and greater depth of involvement led to better mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Indeed, a statistically significant association was found between length of involvement and the likelihood of reporting improved confidence: improved confidence was less likely to be found in those who had been involved for less than one year. Thus, dosage does appear to have an influence on outcomes. With larger samples, further associations might have been found.

However, as McNeil points out, dosage is challenging from a measurement perspective, particularly in programmes that are varied and flexible, as each individual may undertake a unique combination of activities over a unique time period. Correct dosage will also be influenced by factors such as the quality of youth work practice encountered by young people and the starting point of the individual.

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[67] 'An apple a day: is 'dosage' a useful concept in understanding the impact of youth work?' blog by Bethia McNeil, 13th September 2022, https://www.youthimpact.uk/latest/news/apple-day-dosage-useful-concept-understanding-impact-youth-work

[68] Bohnert, A., Fredricks, J., and Randall, E. (2010). Capturing unique dimensions of youth organized activity involvement: Theoretical and methodological considerations. *Review of Educational Research, 80*(4), 576–610.

7 CONCLUSION

This small-scale mixed-methods evaluation has provided insight into young people's experiences of and outcomes from their engagement in MAP's youth voice and participation programmes.

High proportions of young people surveyed perceived that their involvement had led to the development of socio-emotional skills, a sense of belonging and inclusion, and improved mental health and wellbeing. The inter-relationship between these three outcome domains was complex, with one reinforcing another. The development of confidence and communication skills often underlaid improvements in mental health and wellbeing.

Several important factors leading to change in individuals were identified, including:
- The quality of the environment in which groups operated. Young people valued having a space where they felt safe, accepted, valued and heard within a 'community' of young people and professionals in which there was an overwhelmingly positive culture. They felt this was key in supporting the achievement of good outcomes.
- The quality of MAP's youth work practice. Young people highly valued the support and positive energy provided by staff. A statistically significant association was found between young people reporting that staff provided valuable support and reporting improvements in their mental health.
- The wider service setting within which groups operated. Many young people needed additional support and benefited from being able to access one-to-one services and other youth work opportunities provided by MAP.
- Having opportunities to access and influence decision-makers. This led to young people feeling they were making a difference, which supported the achievement of good outcomes.

A large proportion of young people involved in MAP's programmes had experience of disadvantage, marginalisation or mental health issues. Analysis found that higher proportions of marginalised young people than non-marginalised young people reported improvements in most areas of wellbeing. A statistically significant association was found between young people being marginalised and reporting improvements in their levels of stress. The evidence from this evaluation suggests that MAP's youth voice and participation programmes may have an important role to play in helping to reduce mental health inequalities.

Finally, it was found that the 'dosage' of young people's engagement in MAP's programmes influenced outcomes. Those young people who had been engaged for over one year were significantly more likely to report improvements in their confidence.

Further research into the impact of youth voice and participation programmes in youth advice and counselling service settings would benefit from larger samples using fully validated instrument scales, ideally across multiple sites.

Appendix 1: Example consent form

Young person consent form (16-25) – for providing consent to participate in a research project

Please read the information explaining the project first and why we are seeking your consent. Then, if you are happy to take part in the research interviews, please sign the form to indicate your consent.

About the project
We are evaluating the six Youth Advisory Boards we manage across Norfolk and our Youth in Mind programme. We want to understand the impact of this work, particularly whether it makes a difference to the mental health and wellbeing of young people like you taking part.

The evaluation will be led by an independent researcher called James Kenrick, working closely with MAP's staff.

Whenever researchers carry out this kind of evaluation, we need to make sure you understand what is involved and that you are happy to take part.

What we need consent for
We are seeking your consent to take part in an in-depth interview with a researcher.

The interviews will be conducted either face-to-face, by telephone, or by video-conferencing (e.g. Zoom or Teams) depending on your preference. We expect the interview to take about 40 minutes.

You do not have to agree to take part. You can choose to say no and any services that you receive at MAP will not change.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff from MAP.

What you will be asked about
If you agree to take part, you will be asked about things like:
- your experience of being involved in the groups
- what you have learnt
- if any changes have happened for you as a result of your involvement

If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may say so and we can move on to the next question. If you wish to stop answering questions, we can finish the survey/interview at any point.

<u>How the data will be used and stored</u>

All information recorded is confidential, and no one else except for the research team will have access to it. Nothing that you tell us will be shared with anybody outside the research team. We will publish a report so that other interested people may learn from our research. You will not be identified in the report.

We will store the information we collect only for as long as we need it for the purposes of the evaluation. We expect this to be for around 3 months. The information and any recording of the interview will then be destroyed.

Consent declaration – participation in research (for young person to complete)

I have been asked to give my consent to participate in this research study which will involve me completing one interview. I have read the information above, or it has been read to me. I understand what the research involves and I consent voluntarily to participate as a participant in this study. I am happy for the interview to be recorded. I understand I can withdraw my permission at any time.

Your name: …………………………………..………………………..

Your signature:…………………………………………………..

Date: ………………………………………

To be completed by MAP

Competency to make a declaration assessed   YES / NO

Parent/carer consent required   YES / NO

Staff name:

Signed/dated:

Appendix 2: Online Survey Questionnaire

About this survey
An independent researcher is assessing the difference MAP's youth voice and participation projects (including the Youth Advisory Boards and Youth In Mind) make for young people. The research is particularly interested in whether being involved on a group has any impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing. This survey will ask you about:
- your experience of being involved in MAP's youth voice and participation groups
- anything you may have learned through being involved
- any changes that may have happened for you as a result of your involvement

You will not need to give your name and your answers will remain confidential. The findings from the research will help us all understand the impact of our youth voice and participation projects and will be used to improve our services in the future. Thanks for helping out!

About You
We are interested in understanding how different young people experience youth voice and participation projects. You do not have to answer all these questions, but it is extremely helpful to us if you do.

1. How old are you?
(drop-down list)

2. And are you....?
☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Non-binary

☐ Transgender

☐ Other (please specify, if you would like to)

☐ Prefer not to say

Comments (only if you want to add any):

3. Do you consider yourself to have a long-term illness or disability?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

☐ Prefer not to say

About youth voice and participation projects

4. Which of these youth voice and participation projects organised by MAP have you been part of?

☐ Youth Advisory Board

☐ Youth In Mind

☐ Other – please specify below if you want to

☐ None

Comments (only if you want to add any):

☐

5. Overall, roughly how long have you been (or were you) involved in the youth voice and participation projects?

☐ Less than 1 year

☐ Between 1 and 2 years

☐ More than 2 years

Comments (only if you want to add any):

☐

6. What issues have you focussed on in your group(s)? (Please tick all the issues you have focussed on)

☐ Mental health

☐ Physical health

☐ Bullying

☐ Disability awareness

☐ Sexual violence

☐ Climate / the environment

☐ LGBT+ issues

☐ Anti-racism

☐ Anti-social behaviour

☐ Covid (e.g. support, social recovery)

☐ Other – please specify if you want to

☐ None of these

Comments (only if you want to add any):

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7. What have you personally done on the group(s)? (Please tick all the things you have done)

☐ Shared my views and ideas

☐ Campaigned for changes to policies or services

☐ Spoken at event(s)

☐ Chaired a meeting

☐ Organised an event, activity or project

☐ Met with decision-makers (e.g. officials, commissioners, politicians)

☐ Trained as a young commissioner

☐ Delivered training to professionals

☐ Conducted research

☐ Developed a charter

☐ Other – please specify if you want to

☐ None of these

Comments (only if you want to add any):

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8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the group(s) you have been involved in?

	Strongly agree	Mainly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mainly disagree	Strongly disagree
A diverse range of young people from different backgrounds are involved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being part of the group is a rewarding experience	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The group has a positive impact on the young people involved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The group has a positive impact on the wider world	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please add any further comments to explain your answers if you wish

About the support from MAP

9. Did you know about MAP before getting involved in MAP's youth voice and participation projects?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the staff supporting the youth voice and participation group(s) you have been involved in?

	Strongly agree	Mainly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mainly disagree	Strongly disagree
Staff help all young people to be included in the group	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Staff make sure young people's voices are heard	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Staff provide valuable support to young people when they need it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Staff help young people access other services and opportunities that might be relevant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please add any further comments to explain your answers if you wish

11. Since getting involved in MAP's youth voice and participation projects, have you used any of MAP's other services or become involved in other MAP activities? Please tick any you have used

- ☐ Advice or information on housing/homelessness, benefits or debt
- ☐ Support on sex, relationship or health issues
- ☐ Counselling, therapy or mental health advice
- ☐ Mediation
- ☐ Youth groups or activities
- ☐ Other – please specify if you want to
- ☐ None of these
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Please add any further comments to explain your answer if you wish

12. Have staff from MAP helped you access any other services or opportunities outside MAP?

- ☐ NHS services
- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Social care
- ☐ Employment
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Youth activities / Youth work
- ☐ Other – please specify if you want to
- ☐ None
- ☐ Not sure/prefer not to say

Please add any further comments to explain your answer if you wish

What have you learned and what has changed for you?

13. What skills have you learned or developed by being involved in the group(s)? Please mention any skills that feel important to you.

14. Please indicate any improvements or changes you feel have happened as a result of your involvement in the youth voice and participation groups.

	Improved a lot	Improved a bit	Not changed	Got worse	Don't know/not applicable
My confidence has....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My stress levels have....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My mental health has....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My feelings about my future have.....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My control over my life has....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My overall enjoyment of life has....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My knowledge of where to get help has....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please add any further comments to explain your answers if you wish

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements as a result of your involvement in the youth voice and participation groups?

	Strongly agree	Mainly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mainly disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel part of something important	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel more a part of my community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel people take me more seriously	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have a stronger sense of purpose	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have grown my friendship group	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please add any further comments to explain your answers if you wish

And finally... a bit more about you

We are interested in understanding how young people from diverse backgrounds experience youth voice and participation programmes. You do not have to answer these questions, but it is really helpful to us if you do. Your answers will remain confidential.

16. Are you currently....?

	Yes	No	Not sure / Prefer not to say
Attending school, college or university?	☐	☐	☐
In a job or training for work?	☐	☐	☐

17. Are you....?

	Yes	No	Not sure / Prefer not to say
In receipt of any welfare benefits (e.g. Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, PIP)	☐	☐	☐
Looking after a child	☐	☐	☐
A young carer	☐	☐	☐

18. Have you ever....?

	Yes	No	Not sure / Prefer not to say
Been eligible for free school meals	☐	☐	☐
Been a refugee, asylum seeker or migrant to this country	☐	☐	☐
Lived in care	☐	☐	☐
Been homeless	☐	☐	☐
Been excluded from school	☐	☐	☐

19. Do you consider yourself to have ever experienced any kind of mental health problem (including common issues such as anxiety or depression)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

☐ Prefer not to say

Please add any further comments to explain your answer if you wish

Appendix 3: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Preamble and consents

I'm [name], I'm the researcher working with MAP to evaluate their youth voice and participation programmes.

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this interview to help us with the evaluation.

Shall I explain a little bit about why we're doing this research? MAP is keen to develop better evidence about the impact of their youth voice and participation programmes (particularly the Youth Advisory Boards they run and the Youth In Mind project) on young people's mental health and wellbeing.

[If needed: By youth voice and participation, I'm talking about projects which give young people a chance to have a say about issues, policies and services that matter to them.]

We hope the evaluation will help everyone involved to understand the benefits for young people of getting involved with these kinds of youth voice projects and help MAP develop their work around this in the future.

I'll explain a bit more about how the interview will work, but do you have any questions at this point?

This interview should take around 30 to 40 minutes, depending on how much you want to say, and it will be quite informal. There are no right or wrong answers to any of my questions, we are interested in your own experiences, so feel free to say what you want.

You don't have to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable about and we can stop the interview at any point. Participation in this interview is totally voluntary and your decision to participate, or not participate, will not affect the help you receive from MAP in any way.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview because I don't want to miss anything you say. I'm a researcher working with MAP, but I'm not part of MAP and anything you tell me will be kept confidential.

I will delete the audio recording as soon as I have written up the notes. My notes will only be shared with research team members and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you.

You may decline to answer any question or stop the interview at any time and for any reason.

Do you have any questions about what I have just explained?

Can you please confirm that you are happy to take part in this interview?

May I turn on the digital recorder?

Please confirm your name

Questions and prompts

To start, I just want to ask a few questions about you and the groups you've been involved in.

Could I first of all check your age?

And how would you describe your gender?

Which youth voice group(s) or projects run by MAP have you been involved with?

What made you get involved?

When did you start / finish?
- *So, how long involved?*

What have you done on the group?
- *What issues have you worked on?*
- *What kinds of activities have you undertaken?*
- *What was your role?*
- *Is there anything that stands out that you've done on the group?*
- *Has/did anything come of the work?*

How have you found your experience on the group?
- *Enjoyable? Why?*
- *Rewarding? Why?*
- *Inclusive? Why?*
- *What made it a good/bad experience?*

Have you had / did you have any barriers to getting fully engaged?
- *What barriers? What happened?*

What do you think of the support from MAP's staff?
- *Have they made / did they make sure you/other young people were able to fully engage and access opportunities?*
- *Have they made / did they make sure young people's voices were heard?*
- *Have you needed / did you need any support from staff with anything? Have they helped you / did they help you?*

Have you used any other services at MAP?
- *Which ones?*
- *Was this through your involvement in the youth voice group?*
- *Have you found out anything new about the services that are available to young people through MAP / other services?*
- *Has being involved in the group made you feel any differently about accessing services at MAP/elsewhere in the future?*

What are the main things to have come out of the experience for you?
- *Do you feel it's allowed you / young people to be heard?*
- *Have you made any new friends?*
- *Has it made you think differently about other people (e.g. people from different backgrounds) in any way? Or about your place in society?*
- *Has it made you feel a part of something?*

- *What do you think you've learned? Are there any skills you've picked up?*
- *Has it made you feel any differently about yourself or what you're capable of?*
- *Have you noticed any difference in your confidence?*
- *[Re any changes identified] Why - what are the things about being involved that have particularly helped?*

Would you say there have been any changes in your mental health as a result of your involvement?
- *How would you describe your mental health and wellbeing before you got involved?*
- *Do you think any of this has changed? If so, how? And why - what are the things about being involved that have particularly helped?*
- *Would you say your awareness of mental health issues / services has changed?*
- *[If not come up before] Have you accessed any mental health support, such as CAMHS or counselling at MAP?*

That's the end of my questions. Thank you very much for taking the time to take part in this research.

I just want to check whether our conversation has brought up any issues you want to talk to anyone about? [Provide list of support contacts if required.]

MAP will tell you about what comes out of this evaluation in a few months' time.

Thank you!

Appendix 4: Topic guide for focus group

1.   Introduction (5 mins)
•   Welcome & introductions •   Overview of what we will be doing and reminder of the programme •   Check consent and remind that we will be recording
2.   How have you found your experience of being part of the YAB and what do you feel you have gained as a result? (10 minutes)
Instructions: •   Go around the circle until everyone has shared.
3.   What is it about being part of a group like this that might lead some young people to say that their wellbeing or their mental health has improved? (20 minutes)
Instructions: •   Ask the question and get participants to take a minute to think about it /write their words down on a post-it note. •   Show the group a list of things that young people have said are important foundations for a successful group – e.g. support from youth workers, an inclusive space, access to wider support and decision-makers •   Ask: Are these are the most important things? Is there anything missing from this list? •   Participants to discuss in small groups and try to agree on what things are most important in leading to improved mental health and wellbeing. Each factor to be written on a post-it note and stuck onto a target, with most important factors leading to improved mental health nearer the centre and the least important ones towards the outside. •   Feedback: Ask one or two people to share then get people to chip in with their views.
4. What do you think are the most important things that young people gain from their involvement in a group like this? (20 mins)
Instructions: •   Show the group a list of things that young people have said are important outcomes for them – e.g. new friendships, improved confidence, new skills etc. •   Ask: Are these are the most important things? Is there anything missing from this list? •   Participants to discuss in small groups and try to agree on what things are most important in leading to improved mental health and wellbeing. Each outcome to be written on a post-it note and stuck onto the target, with most important outcomes leading to improved mental health nearer the centre and the least important ones towards the outside. •   Feedback: Ask one or two people to share then get people to chip in with their views.
5.   Reflections and close (5 mins)
•   Check if anyone would like to add any final comments •   Quick round robin: in a few words, what for you has been the most important thing about the group? •   Remind participants what we'll do now with the outputs of the focus group •   Thank you for your time