



WEST YORKSHIRE YOUTH COMMISSION:

**FINAL 2025/26 REPORT TO THE
WEST YORKSHIRE VIOLENCE
REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP**

MARCH 2026



ABOUT THE WEST YORKSHIRE YOUTH COMMISSION

The West Yorkshire Youth Commission (WYYC) was established in 2023 with funding from the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP).

The WYYC enables young people aged 14–25 to have a stronger voice and influence on serious violence and exploitation issues across the region. This peer-led project enables young people to get involved and have their say about urgent issues that affect their lives, while helping to build a safer community.

The West Yorkshire Youth Commission members are a diverse range of young people who each bring different backgrounds and experiences to the group. Of the group:

- **48% identified as female**
- **44% identified as male**
- **4% identified as Nonbinary**
- **56% identified as belonging to an ethnic minority**
- **15% identified as having a disability**
- **41% identified as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community**

A special thanks to the individual Youth Commission Members who have offered their time and efforts to make this project a success.

Tamara Chadzingwa	Boden Dudley	Zack Mosby
Subhaan Naeem	Jason Blair	Naomi Dormer
Lois Skelton	Oluwatosin Ewetuga	Lily Aston
Theo Peaker	Lemeka Smithen	Saba Azim
Simrah Noor Ahmed	Joedan Butterworth	Christopher Rubery
Holly Sharpe	Hussain Abbas	Stefan-Adrian Andrei
Troy Njenje Mbanga	Jayden Taylor	Reheem Hussain
Ilana Richards	Lacey Hawes	Alero Megbele
Serena Kaissi	Fasanya Mofetoluwa	

**Some WYYC members' names have not been published*

ABOUT LEADERS UNLOCKED

The West Yorkshire Youth Commission is facilitated by Leaders Unlocked, a social enterprise that enables young people to have a stronger voice and influence on the decisions that affect their lives. Leaders Unlocked has established Youth Commissions in 20 regions in England and Wales and continues to grow.

For more information about Leaders Unlocked please see www.leaders-unlocked.org



Throughout 2025, the Youth Commission has worked with key partners to ensure young voices are included in key decision-making. This has included:

- **I took a seat for...:** Partnering with the VRP to further promote the Youth Commissions' 'I took a seat for...' campaigns on Attitudes and Violence towards Women and Drugs, Gangs & Knife Crime. (For more information on the I took a seat for... campaign, see: <https://bit.ly/itookaseatfor>)
- **Alfie Forever 15:** Collaborating with Alfie Forever 15 and Red Bobble to include young people's lived experiences in knife crime education.
- **Serious Violence Strategy:** Consulting with the VRP to input on the West Yorkshire Serious Violence Strategy.
- **VRP Child-Friendly Privacy Notice:** Providing feedback to the VRP to support the creation of a child-friendly privacy notice.
- **Lexington:** Receiving communications training from Lexington to support Youth Commission members' storytelling and project awareness raising.
- **Community Leaders West Yorkshire (CLWY):** Collaborating with the Community Leaders West Yorkshire network to better understand existing services and share young people's experiences in their communities.



In 2024, the Youth Commission conducted its Big Conversation peer-research on four key priority topics, selected by young people. They were: Attitudes & Violence Towards Women; Drugs, Gangs & Knife Crime; Rehabilitation & Prevention, and Community Relationships & Life.

The West Yorkshire Youth Commission 2024/2025 Report can be viewed here: bit.ly/YCreport25

A key common theme throughout all four of the priorities' findings and recommendations was a perceived lack of available opportunities and support for young people, and not enough awareness about the services that do exist.

For this reason, the Youth Commission decided to focus its next Big Conversation exclusively on services and opportunities for children and young people. We found out about what support is needed most in communities, the barriers faced in accessing support, what opportunities would make the biggest impact in young people's lives, and, crucially, how support and opportunities can help to reduce violence and exploitation.

Through the Big Conversation, we engaged in peer research with **1247 children and young people over 59 consultation events**, including peer-led workshops, engagement stands and one-to-one conversations across West Yorkshire. We placed particular focus on hearing from young people with a wide range of life experiences, including seldom heard groups such as those not in mainstream education and those with criminal justice experience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the support of a wide range of local partners who have allowed the Youth Commission to consult with the young people in their organisations and supported the work of WYYC. Particular effort was made to engage with a diverse group of children and young people. Thanks go to:

Leeds West Academy (Alternative Provision Center)	Involve Learning Center
Calderdale Pride	Huddersfield New College
Calderdale College	Unique Hub
Wakefield College	Bradford College
Wakefield Youth Council	Kirklees College
Halton Moor Youth Matters	Leeds Trinity University
Orange Box	Newground Together
Leeds Youth Justice Service	Castleford College
Horsforth School	Brian Jackson College
Involve Learning Center	Youth Services Bilal Center
	CATCH



WHAT WE FOUND:

- Our Big Conversation showed that young people believe there is a strong link between having **access to positive opportunities** and good quality support services and **reducing violence and exploitation** in their communities. While we heard about lots of ideas for improvement, we also heard from young people about many positive services and support options already available in their areas.
- Young people told us that opportunities to **gain new life skills and the chance at good career prospects and paid roles** provided alternatives to making money illegally and becoming involved in gangs and exploitation.
- There is a culture of **stigma surrounding seeking support** and reaching out to authorities. If this stigma can be broken down, more young people will access prevention and diversion services.
- Lots of **young people don't feel safe either at night or in some areas of their communities**. When feeling unsafe, they are more likely to engage in violence.

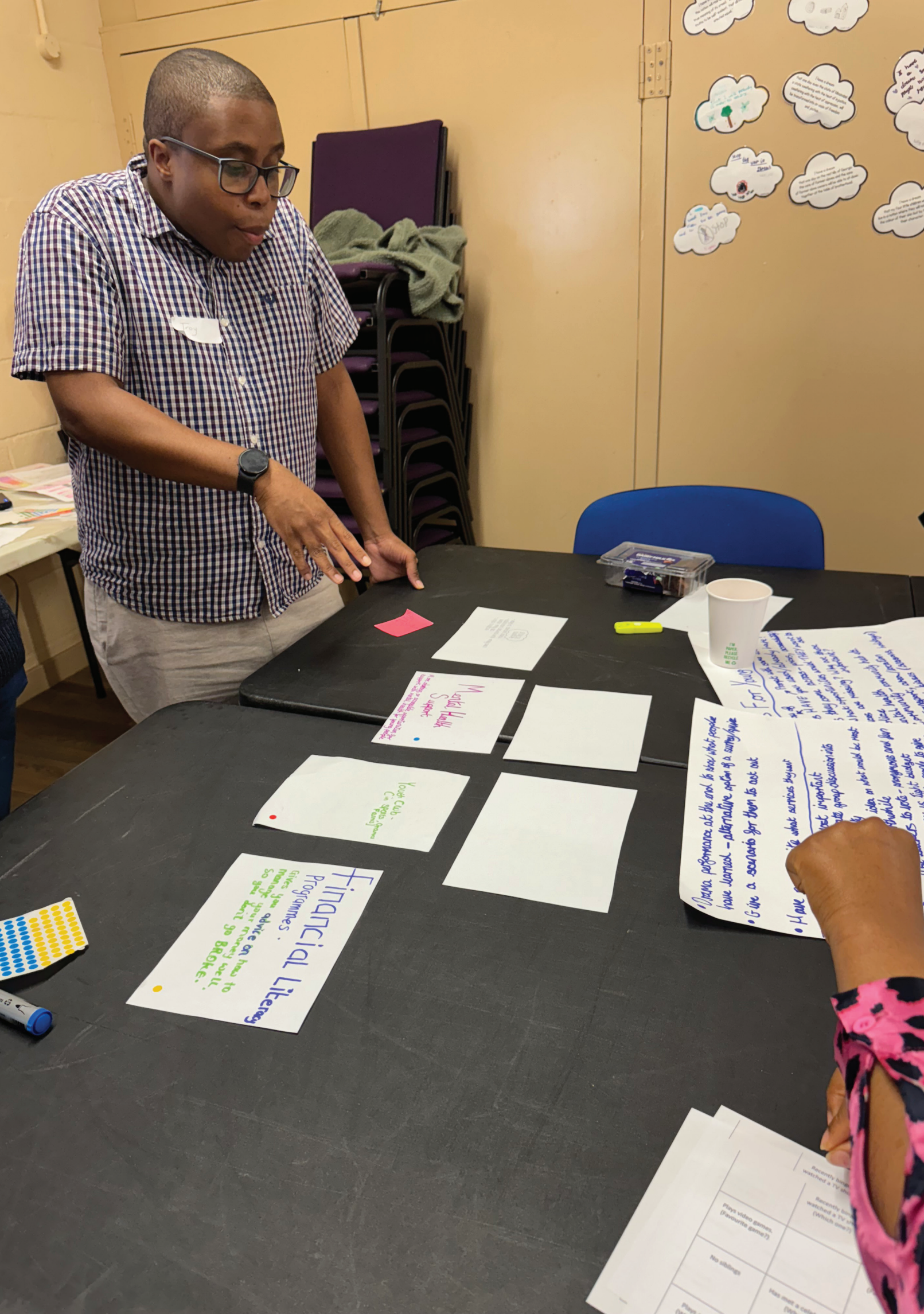
"Drugs and alcohol are used to get angry emotions out. Young people also get involved with them when they hang out with the wrong people. If they had more opportunities, they wouldn't do this."

"Fill young people with positive things to get their minds occupied."

"Talk about it more – change young people's attitudes so they don't find it humiliating to seek support."

"Nighttime safety would reduce violence."

*Some NYYC members names have not been published.



- The Big Conversation identified a few main types of opportunities wanted by young people in West Yorkshire. One was **life skills and job opportunities**. This included more apprenticeships so they could develop skills while earning money. We heard that this would provide a **'way out' for many young people**.
- Lots of young people said that **targeted support** for specific groups would be beneficial because different groups would require different interventions. This approach would also help to create **peer-support networks and safe spaces for young people** to connect with others with similar life experiences. Examples include support groups for victims of abuse and separate groups for young people engaged in violence.
- **Mental health support was a main issue raised** in our research. We heard that many young people were facing anxiety, stress and a range of mental health struggles. But that there **weren't enough resources available**.
- In Leeds, Wakefield and Calderdale, the top two requested services were **sports clubs and mental health support**. In Bradford and Kirklees, it was **mental health support and violence interventions**.
- Young people told us that they wanted professionals such as police officers and social workers to be more present in their communities, to **build trust and relationships** and therefore provide informal opportunities to **access support and report issues**.

"I have found it so difficult to get a job – but no one wants inexperienced people. You can't get experience without a job."

"More paid opportunities for young people."

"We need more mental health support, especially better access, because the wait times are so long. So many young people have mental health issues and don't get the support they need."



seat for YOU PEOPLE



We're sharing our stories to unite
against drugs, gangs and knife crime.
Together, we can make a change.

SCAN
THE QR
CODE



- One significant barrier young people face in accessing opportunities is travel. We heard how **services running irregularly and sometimes not on time** made attending sports clubs and youth groups difficult. Many also felt **unsafe on public transport at night**, making attending sessions and socialising more difficult in winter.
- Key barriers to mental health support were **long waiting lists and a lack of availability**, but also a **lack of trust in services and a fear of reaching out** for support, due to previous negative experiences with services such as CAMHS.
- **Stigma surrounding mental health** continues to act as a barrier. We heard how fear around confidentiality made young people more reluctant to reach out for help in education.
- Some young people we spoke to had a good **understanding of the services and support available** to them. They told us about positive experiences with youth groups, sports clubs and community spaces. But this was inconsistent, with lots not **knowing what opportunities were in their local area** or how to access them.

"I have anxiety and CAMHS were not good in dealing with this - I had an appointment but they never got in contact with me."

"I think we need more transportation services like buses and trains so young people can access places like youth clubs."

"Better transport. They always cancel, it takes a while, it's unsafe due to lack of security. It would be nice if they had an update as they are a bit grim."

"Don't know how to get the support they need."



- Young people want their services and resources to create opportunities to **express themselves, have fun and escape stress.**
- We found that **attaching services, clubs, and opportunities to education** would help reduce a lot of barriers. Young people would already be there, be in a familiar environment and face lower costs.
- Meaningful services should be run by **adults trained to support young people** with a range of issues and should combine fun activities, such as sport, with **real-world support**, like education on key issues; direction to other services and resources like sanitary products.
- Positive examples of services given included: **Orange Box** in Calderdale; **CATCH** and **Getaway Girls** in Leeds; **Bradford City School holiday club**; **Northfield Hall Youth Club** in Kirklees; **community venues in Ackworth** in Wakefield; **Yorkshire Talent**; **MindMate** and local **mosques** for community support and connection. These **examples should be recreated in other areas.**

"More important talks. We had people who played and reffed rugby come in and talk about mental health and how the media and sport can affect your health in a good or bad way."

"The youth justice is a place where you can have a laugh and fun. It helps me express myself. Everyone is nice to you, and you can meet new people."

I have made friends through music, art, woodwork, gardening, walks.

I come here every day due to a referral order; it keeps you out of the streets, and they come and pick you up to encourage us to come."

"I have used the LSC (Learning Support Centre) that was available to me in college when they noticed I was having mental health issues. They were really good, and now I have a teacher that supports me whenever I need."



- **Social media, specifically TikTok and reels**, is one of the most effective ways to advertise services and opportunities to young people. We found that a combination of staying professional, but **making use of trends and trending audio**, would make more young people pay attention to official accounts.
- Using school and college **assemblies and lessons to raise awareness of services** was a popular idea. Many felt that this would **reach a wide range of young people** and was a good way to reach those who might not have the confidence to look for themselves. Another benefit is that it doesn't single people out.
- Finally, we heard how **advertising in some public spaces can be effective**. Toilet doors, bus stops and community spaces like libraries were all highlighted. These could have QR codes to take you to social media/ websites.

"Any social media that follows trends- fun video to entice people will go viral."

"posters arund the community, bathrooms."

"schools to access young people. Might not have the confidence to go unless mentioned by school."

WEST YORKSHIRE PARTNERS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:

- Funding for support should be given to services targeting specific groups of young people and lived experiences. This will provide a sense of community and peer support.
- PCSOs, neighbourhood police, and professionals working with young people should be given more time to spend in the community, building trust and confidence. This will make young people more likely to approach them for help or to report.
- There should be more investment in public transport, particularly buses in rural areas, to allow young people to access clubs and support.
- West Yorkshire Police should work with young people to understand what areas they feel unsafe in, so that resources and patrols can be prioritised in these areas.
- Anyone supporting young people, should be clear from the start about what can and can't be kept confidential and explain clearly why, if you have to inform parents or other staff. This will make young people feel more respected.
- There should be investment in positive activities, such as sport, for young people. But coaches should be more trained to provide support and intervention. Training could be provided by the VRP, mental health professionals and young people themselves. Young people should also be involved in developing this training.
- Educational organisations should use form time and assemblies to advertise local youth groups and different support services. This could include inviting guests to speak directly to students. The VRP should play a role in making sure teachers have this information to pass along.
- Advertisement of existing youth services should be targeted towards communities most affected by violence and exploitation as a first priority.
- For the VRP, create a separate comms strategy for young people. Promote the existing TikTok account, create a podcast episode to promote services to young people, and use trends and trending audio in a professional way. Involve young people in designing content aimed at young people.
- Place focus on mental health and understanding its links to violence and exploitation.
- Co-produce a campaign with young people to reduce the stigma young people still feel when reaching out for mental health support.
- Share more support services with young people and develop a resource to raise awareness of key reporting and support options.
- Promote the West Yorkshire Youth Commission report, findings and recommendations to partners.

CONCLUSION: TAKING THINGS FORWARD

We are extremely grateful to all the members of the West Yorkshire Youth Commission, local partners and the Violence Reduction Partnership who have been involved in making this piece of work a success.

Through their 'Big Conversation' peer research with 1247 young people, the Youth Commission has managed to reach and engage with a hugely diverse cross-section of children and young people across West Yorkshire. They have made particular efforts to hear from those whose views are often overlooked. This peer-to-peer process is of enormous value, both as a piece of research and as an engagement exercise.

TESTIMONIALS

Young people hold the answers to tackling many of the societal challenges we face, and it is crucial that we listen carefully.

"The 'Big Conversation' has played an important role in tackling serious violence, and I am grateful for all those who have contributed.

"It is shaping our response to big issues like knife crime and violence against women and girls, ensuring a safer and fairer West Yorkshire.

Alison Lowe OBE, West Yorkshire Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime

This work has been instrumental in identifying the issues that matter most to young people in West Yorkshire and has given them both a platform and a voice.

It also chimes closely with our 'Child First' ethos, putting children and young people at the heart of everything we do.

By taking on board their experiences and contributions, we can tailor our approach in a way that delivers at the right times and in the right places.

Heather Wilson, Director of the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership

Working with WYYC has been fantastic for CATCH, offering us opportunities to connect and collaborate with other groups. One ongoing challenge we face in youth organisations like ours is encouraging our young people to broaden their perspectives beyond our immediate site. It is essential for them to realise that engaging with others not only enables them to share their own insights but also to learn from others. The WYYC platform has provided the perfect environment for this kind of growth and exchange, openness, curiosity, and collaboration among our young people. Through the connections made, some of our volunteers gained new ideas, built relationships, and developed greater confidence in their ability to contribute within and beyond their own groups.

Paul Fraser, Senior Team Leader at CATCH Leeds

The Youth Commission Workshop delivered an outstanding experience for our 14–16 alternative provision learners. The facilitators created a safe, welcoming space where students felt genuinely listened to and empowered to share their views. Many of our young people struggle with confidence, but the workshop encouraged them to speak openly about issues that matter to them and to recognise the value of their voices.

The sessions were engaging, interactive, and tailored perfectly to the needs of our cohort. Students who often disengage in traditional settings were focused, motivated, and eager to contribute. The workshop not only strengthened their understanding of youth participation but also boosted their self-esteem and sense of ownership over their future.

Hassnat Yasir, Pastoral & Intervention Officer 14–16 Provision at Bradford College

I joined the Youth Commission because I wanted young people's voices to be genuinely heard on issues like violence and exploitation that directly affect our communities. Being part of the Commission has been a really empowering experience, allowing me to work with others who care about creating change and to contribute to research and discussions that can lead to real impact. It's strengthened my passion for social justice and for making a positive difference for young people. Thank you for the opportunity.

Serena, Youth Commission Member

I joined the Youth Commission after finding out about it at school because it really captured my interest and seemed like a really good way to make a difference, and I have to say it's lived up to and I exceeded all my expectations! I've met some really cool and nice people, and having the opportunity to be part of the change I want to see has been absolutely fantastic! I'm super excited to (hopefully) continue my work with the West Yorkshire Youth Commission in the future and keep making a difference!

Zack, Youth Commission Member



CONTACT US

Leaders Unlocked
@leadersunlocked
info@leaders-unlocked.org
www.leaders-unlocked.org

