



Response to the Milburn Review February 2026

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The Foyer Federation: Who we are

[The Foyer Federation](#) leads a national network of 51 Youth Foyers, reaching approximately 3,100 young people every year. Youth Foyers provide high quality supported housing for young people aged 16-25 who are experiencing homelessness.

- **We are experts**, with a 30+ year track record in high quality, strengths-based work with young people experiencing homelessness.
- **We are connectors**, bringing together young people, practitioners and senior leaders to make meaningful, lasting change.
- **We are champions**, celebrating and mobilising young people and the people who work with them to actively combat deficit-based cultures.

Our work and history in education, employment and training

Established by Shelter and Grand Metropolitan (now Diageo) in 1992, the Foyer Federation's purpose and history is firmly rooted in youth employment. Taking inspiration from post-war France, UK Foyers integrated employment support into housing for young people who can't live at home in order to break the 'no job, no home, no job' cycle of homelessness; and the Foyer Federation safeguarded and advocated for the Foyer approach nationally.

Over the last 34 years, the purpose of the Foyer Federation has remained the same and the Foyer approach has evolved to meet contemporary needs. The cornerstone of the modern-day Youth Foyer is the understanding that no one's journey through life is linear; and that progression towards sustainable independence involves holistic personal development.

In 2011, we developed the [Advantaged Thinking](#) approach to challenge and take action against the prevailing deficit-based culture and services commissioned and delivered to young people. Advantaged Thinking is an asset-based philosophy that centres young people's strengths and potential, rather than focussing purely on their circumstances or on what they are perceived to lack. Central to the Youth Foyer approach, Advantaged Thinking takes a positive view through positive action: it understands ability, recognises qualities, promotes achievements and inspires what is possible.

In 2016, in partnership with young people and the University of Cumbria, we developed the Youth Foyer Theory of Change to define and articulate the key outcomes that young people who can't live at home want and need to achieve in order to progress to independent adulthood: **employment, education, finance, social skills, personal development, housing, and health and wellbeing**. The purpose of a Youth Foyer then is to provide a safe and nurturing, community-focussed environment with wrap-around support for young people to develop in these areas of life.

Our impact

Through community of practice events, consultation and training, and our quality development programme, we provide youth supported housing services with infrastructural support to adopt and deliver an impactful Youth Foyer service.

By working with services to build their resilience to external challenges, capacity to work holistically with young people, and high quality provision that centres youth voice, we increase the number of young people who move on from supported housing with the power and agency to thrive.

Our impact data indicates that, within the first three years of working with us, Youth Foyers increase the number of young people moving on having made progress in:

- **work and employment by 17%** (58% of young people made progress in 24/25 nationally);
- **education and training by 15%** (68% made progress in 24/25);
- **personal development by 5%** (86% made progress in 24/25);
- **financial capabilities by 16%** (84% made progress in 24/25);
- **social skills and relationships by 4%** (87% made progress in 24/25);
- **health and wellbeing by 10%** (82% made progress in 24/25);

The demographics we work with

Through our network, we work with 51 youth supported housing services across the UK and reach approximately 3,100 young people aged 16-25. On average, the young people reached in 2024-25 had the following demographics (fig 1):

Age	
Aged 16-17	23.3%
Aged 18-20	53.1%
Aged 21-25	23.1%

Health & Disability	
Had a disability	33.4%
Diagnosed mental health condition	38.1%
No diagnosis but faced mental health challenges	35.6%
Had an identified issue with alcohol or substance misuse	35.6%

Education & Employment	
In part time employment on arrival	11.4%
In full time employment on arrival	5.8%
Volunteering on arrival	4.9%
Qualified to Level 1 on arrival	32.6%
Qualified to Level 2+ on arrival	20.6%
In an apprenticeship on arrival	2.4%
In education on arrival	31.3%

Gender Identity & Sexuality	
Female	39.0%
Male	59.1%
Another gender identity	2.4%
Identified as LGBTQ+	11.4%

Language & Cultural Background	
From a global majority background	31.7%
Refugees / asylum seekers / unaccompanied minors	17.8%
Spoke English as an additional language	20.3%

Other Life Experiences	
Had experience of the care system	30.9%
Had experience of the justice system	15.6%
Were parents	5.4%

(Fig 1: Demographics of young people moving into a Youth Foyer in 2024-25)

The datasets informing this report

Benchmarking Reports

Every year, we ask Youth Foyers on our quality development programme to submit a data return including information on: their service’s finances, staffing and hours of support provided to young people; the demographics and needs of young people who moved into their service during the period; and the progress made by the young people who moved out during the period. This enables us to benchmark services against the national average. Any data relating to this throughout this report comes from datasets of the following sizes (fig 2):

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Number of Youth Foyers	20	17	18	24	23	24	23
Number of young people who moved in	689	601	391	636	542	621	533
Number of young people who moved out	642	567	428	593	506	585	524

(Fig 2: Benchmarking Datasets 2018-2025)

The Big Questions Surveys

The Big Questions is our survey of young people living in our member Youth Foyer services. We ask young people to share their perspectives and insights on issues and challenges that are important to them; their experiences of living in a Youth Foyer; and their goals and the impact of the support they are receiving in progressing them. Any data relating to this throughout this report comes from datasets of the following sizes (fig 3):

	Spring 2023	Autumn 2023	Spring 2024	Spring 2025	Winter 2025
Number of Youth Foyers represented	26	23	25	19	13
Number of young people who responded	167	115	138	160	92

(Fig 3: Big Questions Survey Datasets May 2023 to December 2024)

Youth Employment Consultation

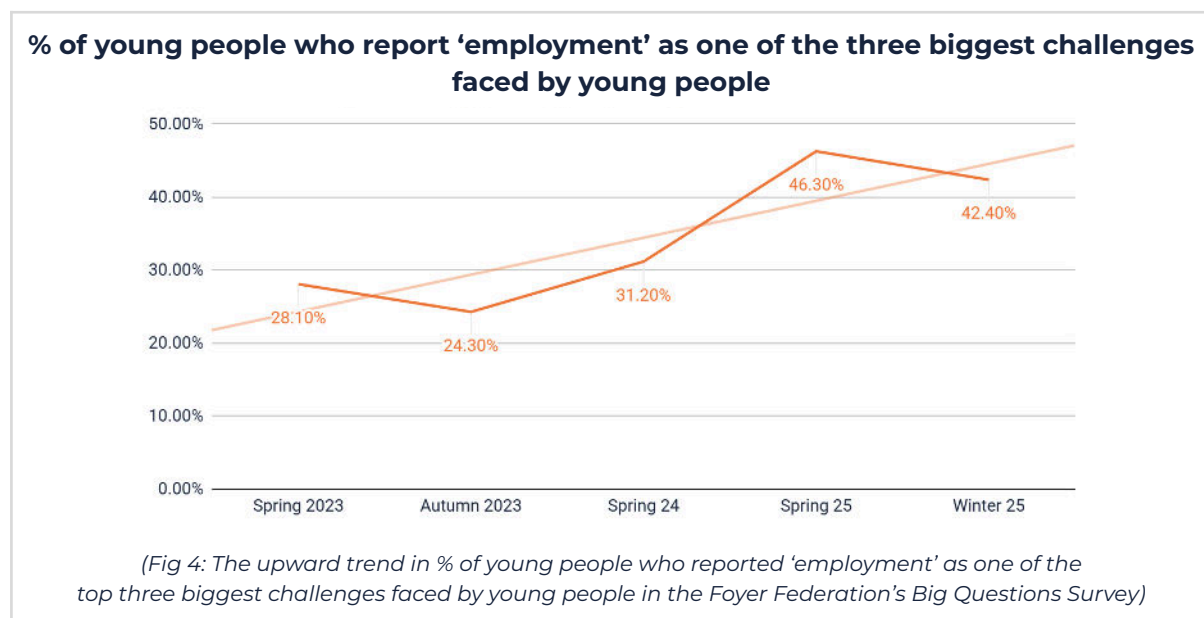
In September 2025, we consulted with six young people with lived experience of youth unemployment to gain insights into what kind of support is most helpful in sourcing, securing and sustaining work or education. This consultation included polls and open discussion, which are referenced and quoted throughout this report.

What is stopping more young people from participating in employment, education or training?

We see high percentages of young people setting personal goals to pursue employment, education or training. In December 2025:

- 50.0% said it was a personal goal to find a job or training opportunity;
- 30.4% said it was a personal goal to continue their education;
- and 12.0% said it was a personal goal to set up their own business.

However, despite this commitment from young people to pursue employment, education or training, they tell us that they experience increasingly significant barriers. In December 2025, 42.4% of young people who responded to our Big Questions Survey told us that employment was one of the biggest challenges facing young people right now, having risen from 28.1% in Spring 2023 (fig 4).



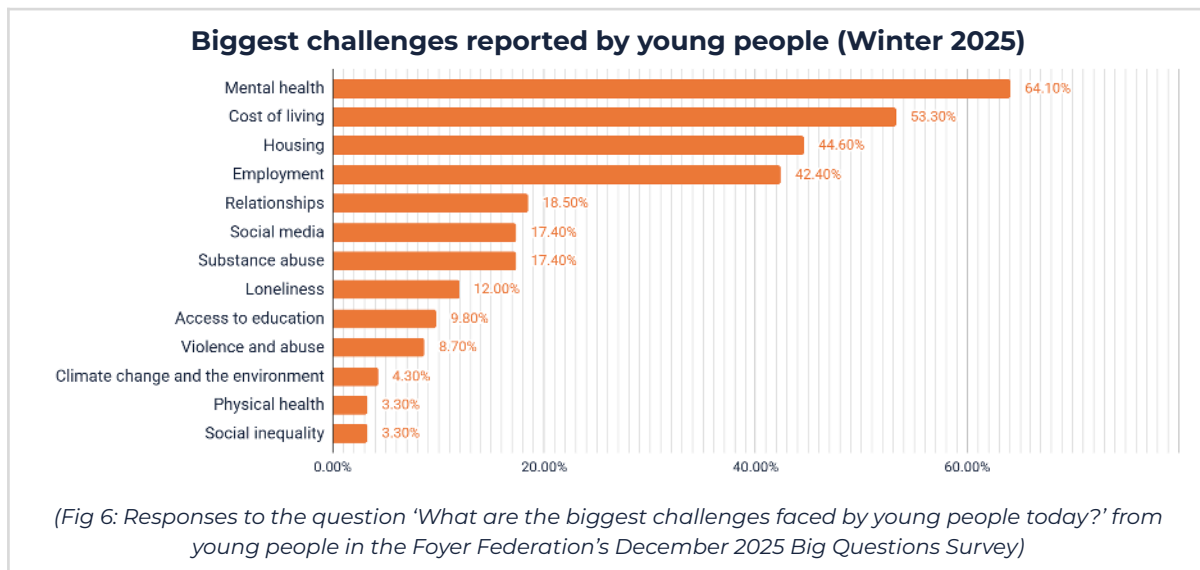
However, while concern around employment amongst young people has been growing in recent years, young people tell us that other issues are more concerning.

"Cost of living, mental health and not many employment opportunities." Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

"Job opportunities, housing with a lot of young people living in supported living, the ultimatum to have a job or be homeless, and NHS services not taking physical health seriously." Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

"Life can be hard, because of lack of money and opportunities." Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

Since we began conducting our Big Questions Survey of young people living in Youth Foyers in 2020, young people have consistently told us that **mental health** is the biggest challenge that they face, with 64.1% reporting this as their biggest concern in December 2025 (fig 6).



53.3% of young people reported **cost of living** as one of the biggest challenges young people are facing right now, making it the second most prevalent response to this question, followed by **housing** at 44.6% (see fig 6).

Young people tell us that a significant factor in their journeys into and towards employment is the worry of instability - both in employment and in the wider world. We hear that the security of Universal Credit provides a safety net whilst managing other complex life issues, such as finding a home, and that economic and political changes make it difficult to visualise a future, much less plan ahead.

“One of the main things that has stopped me personally in the past from harbouring employment is the knowledge of how expensive the rent is. Why would I want to go to work to feel exhausted when I come home, then to fulfil all my other needs, with no money left for myself, when I could remain a part of the benefits system, with my time for myself and enough money to survive?” Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

“Housing costs, job instability and rising living expenses make it harder to feel secure or plan ahead.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

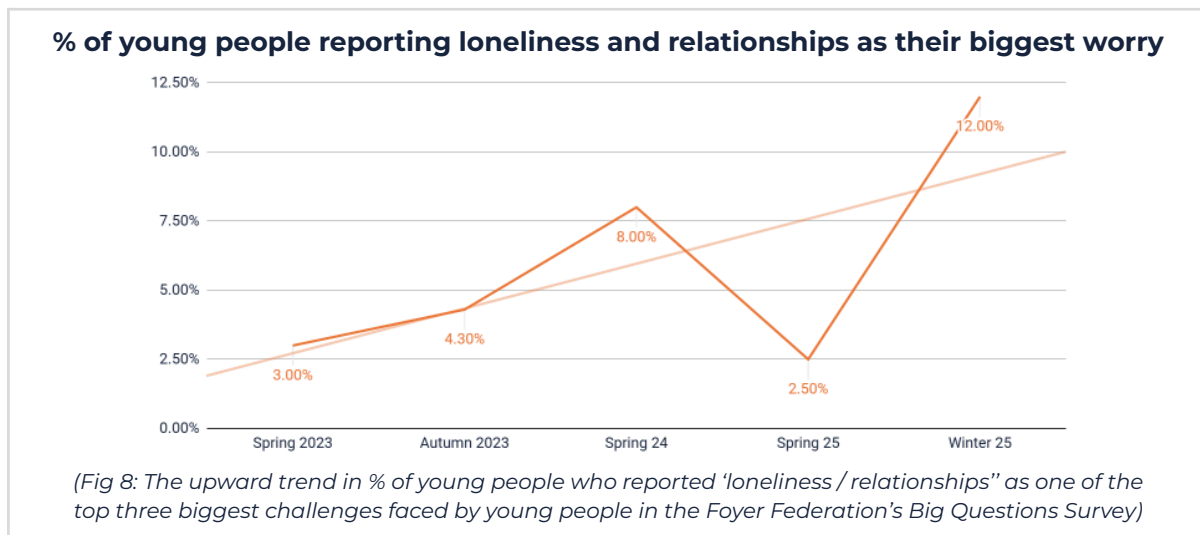
“Young people are growing up in a world that feels unpredictable.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

In our consultation with young people in September 2025, we learned that the part of their journeys into and towards employment they would value most support with was in overcoming practical barriers to work or full time education, such as rent and benefit issues (fig 7).

“Which part of the journey [towards employment] should we focus on? Choose 3”	Votes
Overcoming practical barriers to work / full time education, e.g. rent, benefit issues, etc.	5
Building your foundational confidence and wellbeing towards learning	4
Helping you develop specific work skills, e.g. job searching, CV, interviews	2
Specific expertise and career guidance, e.g. how to get into the creative industry	2
Creating new opportunities for you to access learning	2
Creating new opportunities for you to access work	2
Helping you develop specific work competencies, e.g. team work, creativity, presentation	1

(Fig 7: Poll from consultation on youth employment with young people, September 2025)

We have also recently seen an increase in the percentage of young people reporting **loneliness and relationships** as the biggest worry for young people, rising from 3.0% in Spring 2023 to 12.0% in Winter 2025 (fig 8).



Responses to our survey articulated a worry of rejection based on past experiences in their lives, which could indicate a trauma response to exploring new opportunities.

“I do see young people as a whole missing out on community. Humans are meant for community, asking your neighbour for milk and sugar is now practically unheard of... I am very lucky to have a community of safe people around me, but many do not.” Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

“Feeling misunderstood, trying to blend in and to please everyone else.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

“Fear of being cast away, loneliness, past experiences.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

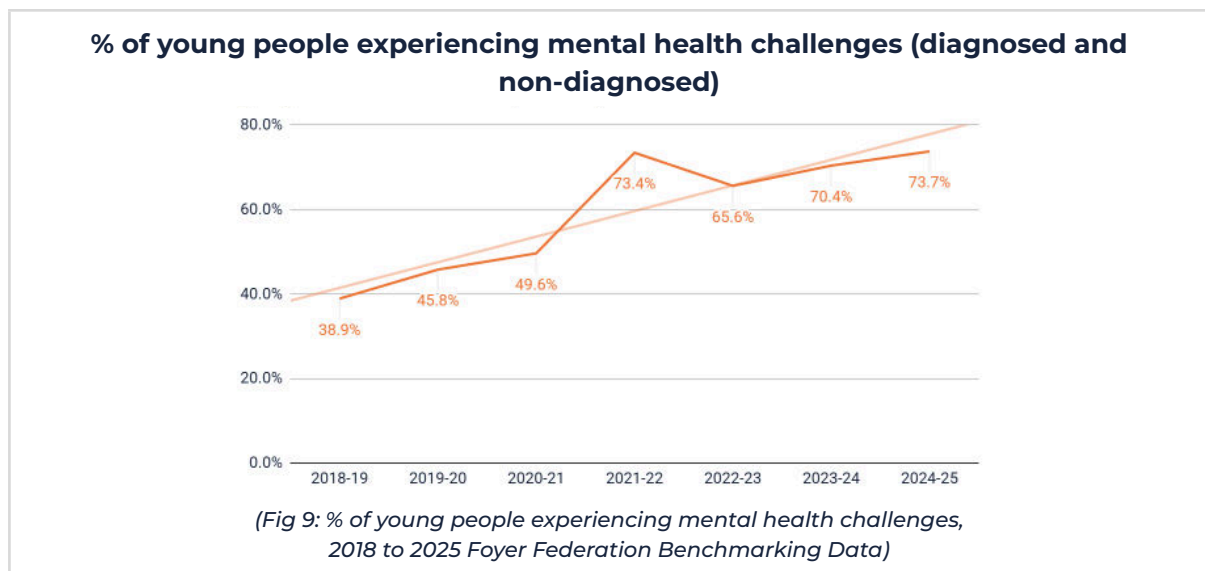
However, what we hear consistently from young people is that all of these issues - cost of living, housing, isolation and employment - contribute to a larger mental health issue.

“I want everyone to remember that young people are depressed. We are watching the world collapse around us, genocide, climate change, and feeling slight envy for older generations who could afford houses and go socialise on an evening without spending a week’s rent. In addition, social media is ruining our brains and perception of the world, so creating life in the real world doesn’t feel as attainable. It depends on the person, but reminders that there is still good in the world can really help.” *Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)*

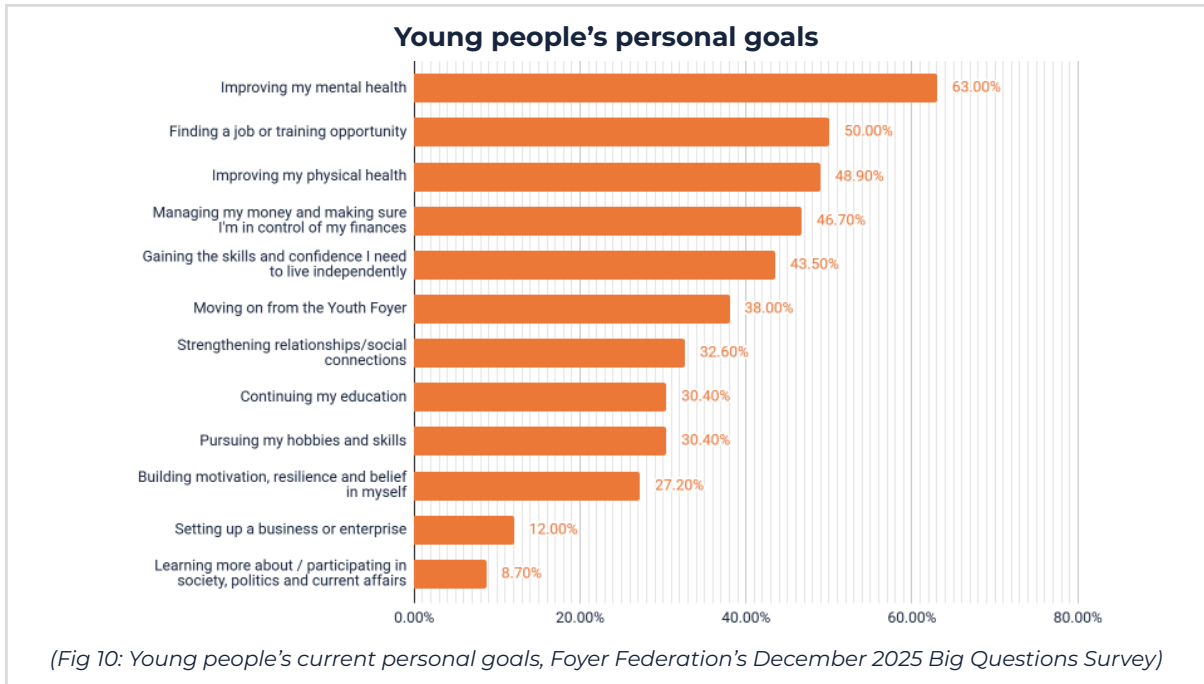
“Try and put yourselves in their shoes - it can be overwhelming to start looking into education or employment.” *Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)*

Based on our data, mental health appears to be the biggest factor in young people’s ability to progress into and through education, employment and training - and the percentage of young people supported by our network who are experiencing mental health challenges (including diagnosed conditions and non-diagnosed challenges) has been trending upwards since 2018.

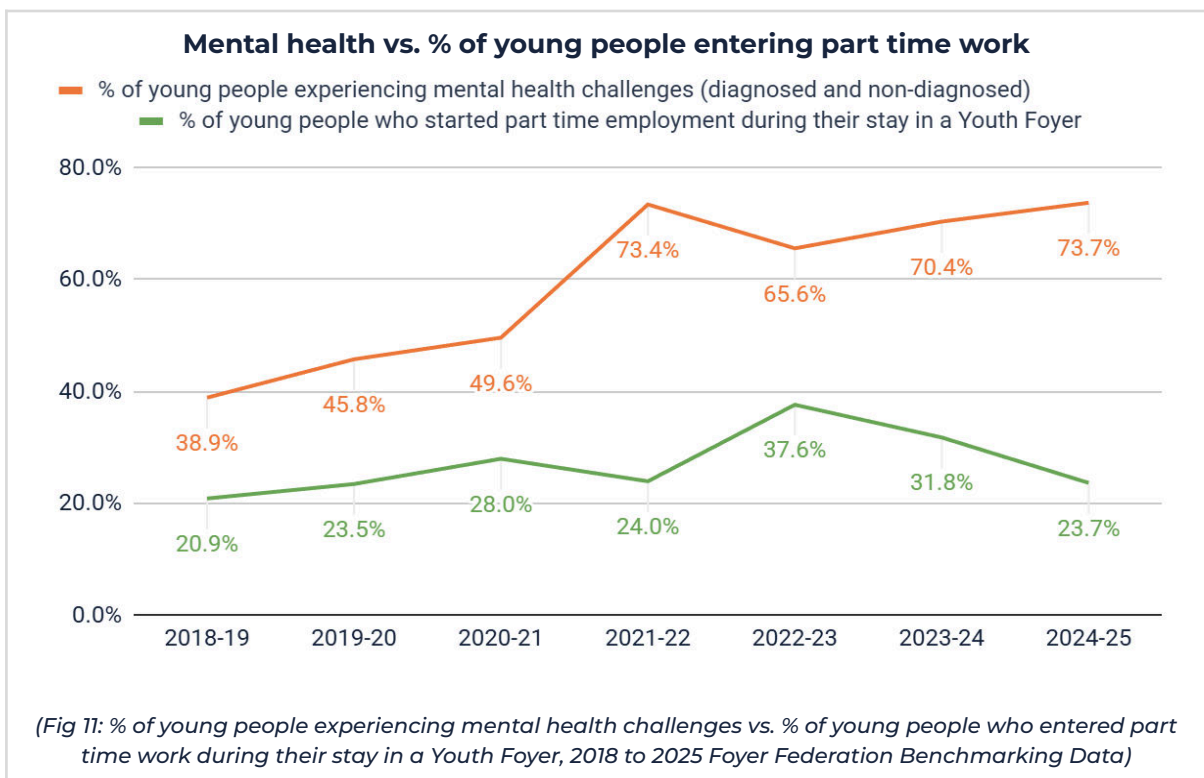
The percentage of young people moving into a Youth Foyer with a diagnosed mental health condition has increased from 27.5% in 2022-23 to 38.1% in 2024-25, and the total percentage of young people experiencing mental health challenges (including those that have not been diagnosed) has risen from 65.6% to 73.7% (fig 9).



Improving mental health is also the most common personal goal set by young people, with 63.0% of young people sharing in December 2025 that this is what they are currently working towards (fig 10).



Our data suggests a strong relationship between mental health challenges and young people's ability and readiness to pursue employment: data gathered from our Youth Foyer network (fig 11) shows a reverse correlation between rising mental health challenges and falling percentages of young people entering part time employment during their stay.



What would make the biggest difference in supporting more young people to participate?

A holistic approach, with wellbeing at the heart

Young people we consulted explained the need for holistic support in order to move into work sustainably, particularly around independent living skills such as cooking and budgeting. Young people often tell us that, when managing complex living situations and building health and wellbeing, employment is not always realistically achievable - and that a level of stability in their personal lives is required before employment can be attained and sustained.

A strong theme from our consultation with young people was around personal confidence. Young people stressed that, for many who have experienced challenging circumstances, they may not have had time or space to develop their own sense of self, build or rebuild their wellbeing, explore their interests, or “find what [their] ‘why’ is”.

Young people we consulted spoke on the value of broader experiential opportunities that build the foundational confidence and wellbeing in order to move into employment. They commented on the value they have found in opportunities to develop softer skills and strengths, such as social skills and resilience, and to overcome fears through initiatives such as NCS and The King’s Trust. They particularly highlighted the importance of opportunities where they feel trusted and empowered, with leadership from inspirational role models.

“Try and put yourselves in their shoes - it can be overwhelming to start looking into education or employment.” Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

“We’ve had a big knock in confidence and it can be really demoralising when you don’t have the right ‘academic’ qualifications.” Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

“We need to build confidence - often young people don’t feel like we have the self-worth and don’t feel like we have the space to explore.” Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

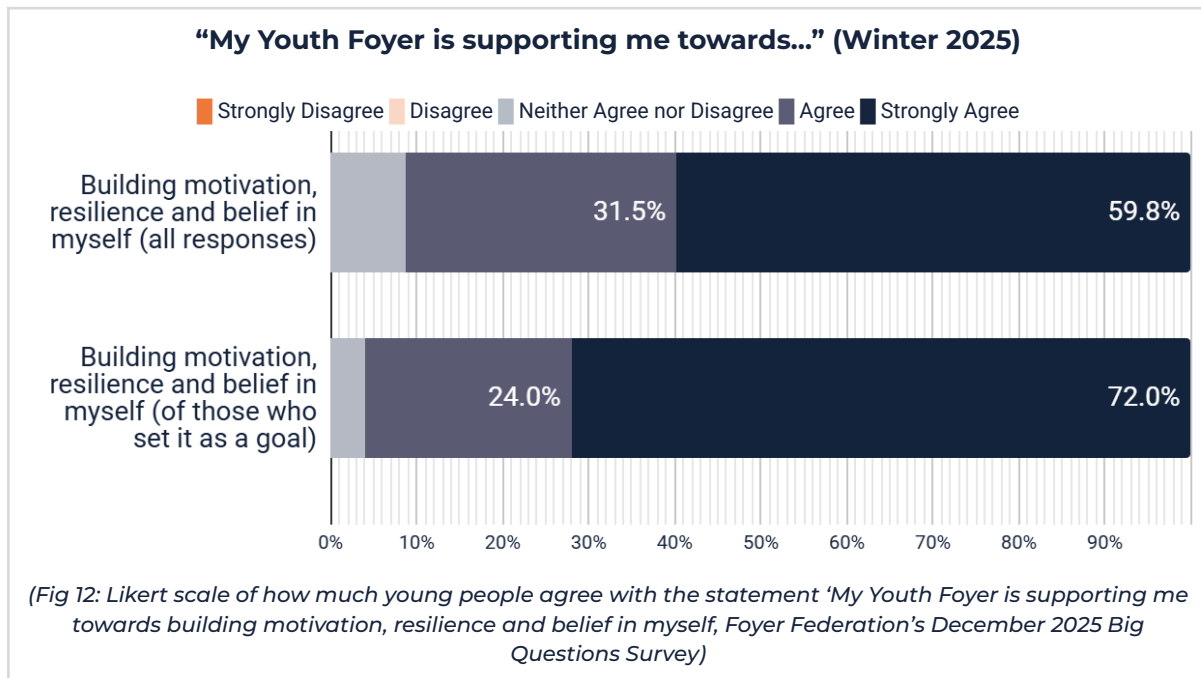
“Through the Youth Foyer, I have learnt that I do have the capability to have a job that involved speaking and a more ‘professional’ approach. I have also learnt a lot of the fundamental life skills.” Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

“Being awarded my EHCP has helped a lot with restarting college.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

A strengths-based approach that prioritises young people’s assets and potential

We hear consistent feedback that staff encouraging and believing in young people is key to their success in seeking and securing employment, education and training, indicating that strengths-based working is effective in achieving outcomes.

91.3% of all young people who responded to our December 2025 Big Questions Survey, and 96.0% of young people with goals relating to building motivation, resilience and belief in themselves agreed that their Youth Foyer’s strengths-based, Advantaged Thinking approach was supporting them to move towards their goal (fig 12).

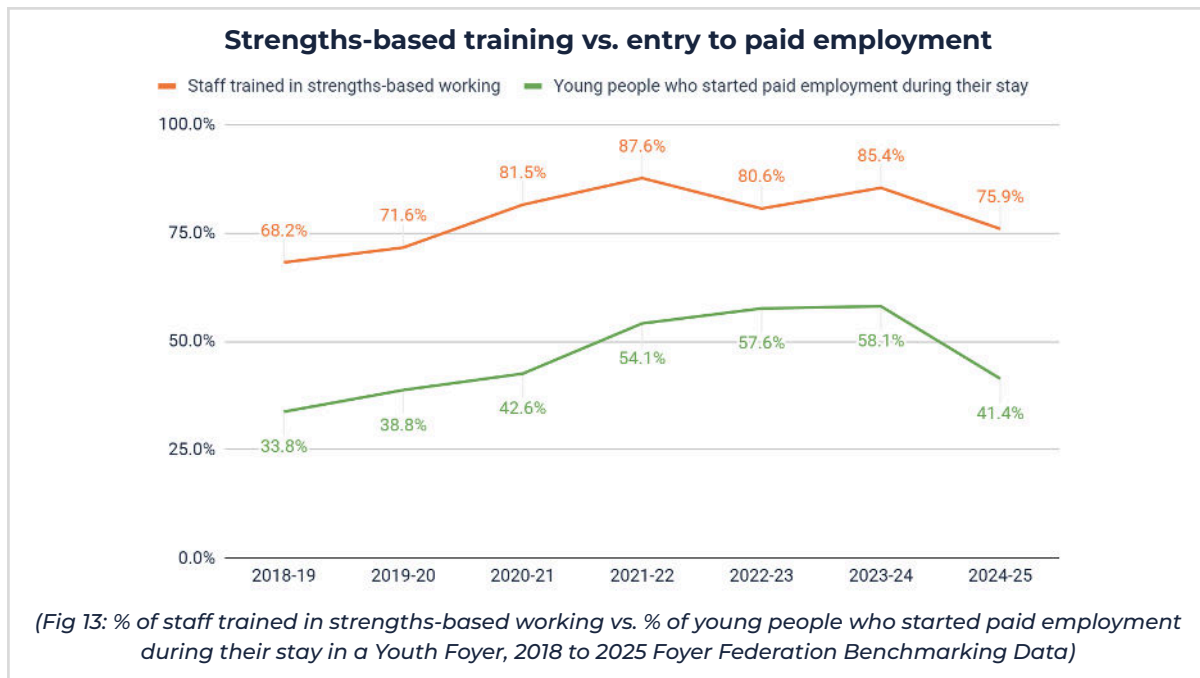


“Staff are encouraging and motivational yet somehow balance the line of not being pushy.” Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

“My PO believing in me and pushing me to go for interviews really helped.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

“Encouragement and belief from staff made a big difference.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

Our data also shows a strong correlation between the percentage of staff trained in strengths-based working (Advantaged Thinking) and the percentage of young people entering paid employment during their stay in a Youth Foyer (fig 13).



A highly skilled, trauma-informed workforce

In December 2025, we asked young people via our Big Questions survey, “If you've received support in entering work or education, what has been the most useful and what made it useful?” The highest reported response was 1:1 support and encouragement from staff, making up 27.2% of the response. The second most popular form of support was in researching opportunities (10.9%).

Young people we consulted in September 2025 highlighted the importance of trained support workers, particularly in areas including youth engagement, coaching, IAG and psychology. They commented that, while their Youth Foyers offer activities and workshops relating to employment, engagement in these activities can be low when there is not an established and trusting relationship between the young people and the support worker organising activities.

Alongside strengths-based working, young people emphasised the need for specific training for staff around employment and education. Young people commented that often they are passed between different workers as staff feel unable to help with specific employment or education related questions and issues, and they highlighted that support workers also need to feel supported and skilled in order to provide the right kind of support.

“Staff assisted me in job hunting and I am now employed.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

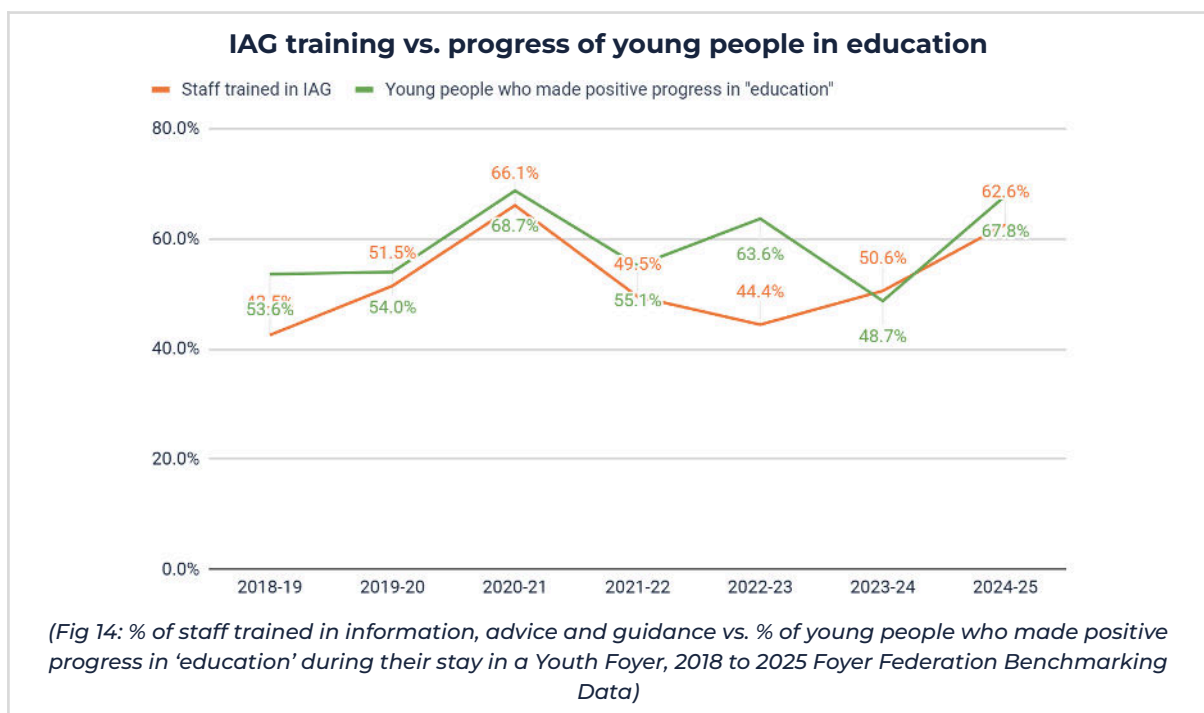
“My support worker showed me a leaflet, and supported me to enrol at college.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

*“Before moving to the Foyer I didn't get the right support around education.”
Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025*

“Having staff support doing research and helping me looking at options.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

“I have been supported several times with learning skills and looking into getting back into work.” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

Our data also shows a clear correlation between the percentage of staff trained in IAG and the percentage of young people making positive progress in ‘education’ as an outcome (fig 14).



Young people also commented that psychologically-informed training for staff was valuable for supporting young people experiencing mental health challenges.

*“I don't know how much training the staff have to do before becoming a support worker, apart from health and safety, safeguarding, and general inclusion training, so I may be wrong but some structured science based training would help. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is used to treat a variety of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and eating disorders all of which I know are very common within Foyer residents. So, training revolving around CBT, psychology, and more of the science of the mind, I think, is the key.”
Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)*

Our data shows that staff in Youth Foyers agree that training in trauma-informed practice (TIP) is valuable in supporting young people. Of staff who have completed TIP training:

- 96.3% reported that they are likely to use the knowledge they have gained through TIP training in their role;
- 95.8% reported that they are likely to use the skills they have gained through TIP training in their role;
- 93.8% agreed (37.5%) or strongly agreed (56.3%) that TIP training gives them a greater awareness of the specific needs and backgrounds of the young people they support;
- and 93.8% agreed (25.0%) or strongly agreed (68.8%) that TIP training has increased their resilience, skill, motivation and inspiration in working with young people.

Community-based learning and support networks

Young people we consulted highlighted the importance of community in developing the confidence, belief and support networks required to move into and towards employment, education and training, particularly the value of learning from others with similar life experiences.

"The Youth Foyer supports me to build confidence and explore opportunities in my local community. They provide encouragement, information, and reassurance, which helps reduce my anxiety and makes engaging with community activities feel more manageable." Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

"Setting up a community... Having people with lived experience helping others." Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

"Community - residents are passionate and want to help out others who have just started, which I feel lucky to be a part of." Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

A consistent positive we hear from young people during their stays in Youth Foyers is the opportunity to build supportive relationships and develop social skills.

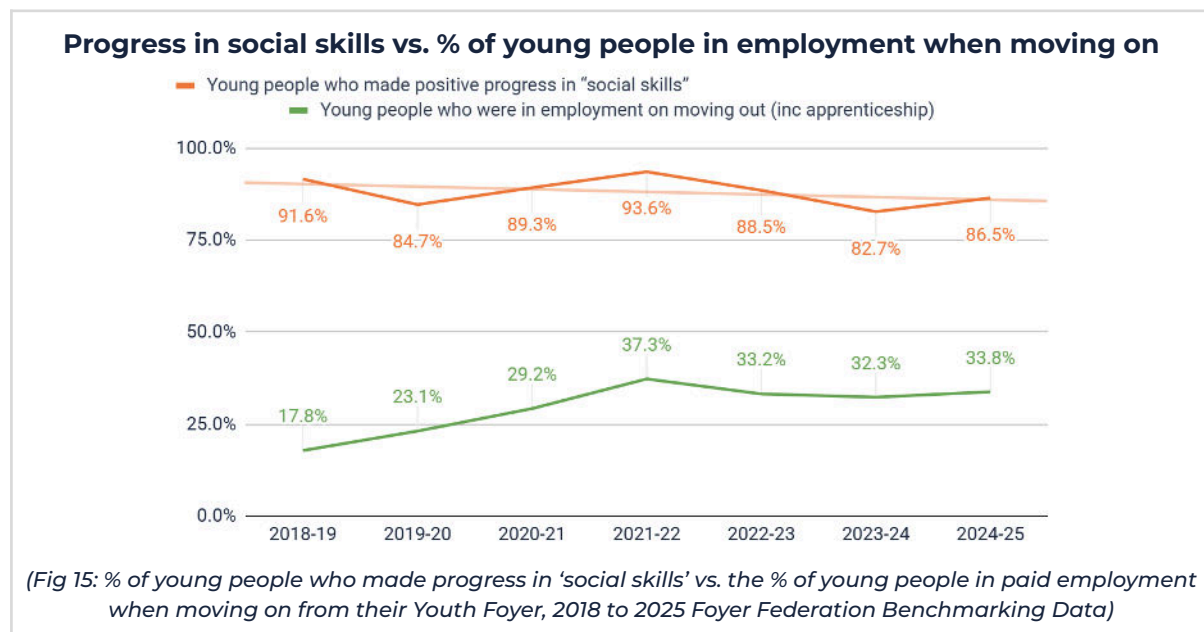
"Not learning in the traditional sense. But being able to come out of my shell and realise the potential I have to help others as well as myself." Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

"Through my time at the Youth Foyer they have helped me with socialising with others." Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

“Meeting new people and networking has been useful [for moving towards employment].” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

“Socialising and meeting new people everyday has helped [move towards employment].” Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

Our data suggests a correlation between the percentage of young people who show progress in social skills and the percentage of young people who are still in employment when moving on from their Youth Foyer, suggesting that increasing social skills provides young people with the resilience to sustain employment.



Aspirational and empowering work experience and learning opportunities

In December 2025, young people told us that they are motivated to engage in opportunities that enable them to use their strengths and that align with their goals. Of the young people who were already in work or education:

- 89.7% whose current role or study lined up with their future goals agreed that they wanted to continue working in their role or company, or studying their subject;
- And 86.2% who said that they had the opportunity to use their strengths in their role/studies agreed that they wanted to continue working in their role or company, or studying their subject.

Young people we consulted also commented that, in their Youth Foyer, they have regular employment workshops, where employers come to speak to young people about their roles. However, they noted that those who come to speak are unable to give practical support and are not often able to relate to their own circumstances, highlighting the value of lived experience in inspirational role models.

Young people stressed that it is better to work with partners who can offer: entry level roles and work experience opportunities; learning opportunities to gain transferable skills; relatable and inspirational stories; and mental health support to aid in the transition.

"Actually encourage young people to pursue careers in fields they enjoy - or to at least keep up with hobbies and personal interests." Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

"Bring someone in who has experienced what we have been through with housing and give us some tips and tricks and give us empowerment." Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

"Having someone with lived experience share their experience." - Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

"I quite like the idea of a buddy system - with people who've moved on." Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

"Providing temporary roles to young people with the option of permanent employment in the future." Young person, consultation on youth employment (September 2025)

"Staff are helping me find an apprenticeship and work towards my aspirations." Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

"I aim to continue building my skills, confidence, and experience so that I can move towards a stable job or further training that suits my interests and strengths." Young person, Big Questions Survey Winter 2025

Recommendations:

- Support for young people should take **a holistic view with wellbeing at the heart**, with an appreciation that ‘work-readiness’ goes beyond job-seeking skills, and that young people are navigating a complex economic and societal landscape with rising mental health challenges, rising cost of living and increased barriers to safe and stable housing.
- Support for and narratives surrounding young people should be **asset-based, prioritising and promoting young people’s strengths and potential**, and holding out the same aspirations for young people as we would for our own friends and families.
- The workforce supporting young people into and towards employment, education and training should be **trained and skilled in strengths-based approaches, IAG and trauma-informed practice**, and knowledgeable of wrap-around support available.
- Support should provide opportunities for young people to engage in and build **meaningful community and support networks**, and provide young people with the opportunities to build connections and positive relationships.
- Young people should be provided with **aspirational and empowering work experience and learning opportunities** that align with their goals, with opportunities to learn from professionals with lived experiences that match their own.

Any queries relating to this response should be directed towards Jenny Liversidge-Wright, Head of Communications at the Foyer Federation, on jennifer@foyer.net

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