



" A research project that explores what would young women want to see from Crewe Youth Zone to make it a space that they want to spend time in and a space that is equally attractive to both young women and young men."

Introduction

Background information

Onside is a national charity that operates Youth Zones in local communities, that are individual charities in their own right.

With the mission and vision of:

Our mission is to empower young people to lead positive, fulfilling lives by providing access to incredible spaces and exceptional youth work, delivered by outstanding people, where they are needed the most.

To achieve this, we raise the funds to build a national network of state-of-the-art, multi million-pound Youth Zones in the UK's most economically disadvantaged areas. These youth centres, we call Youth Zones, are staffed by skilled and dedicated youth workers who truly believe in young people – helping them see what they could achieve, and giving them the skills, confidence and ambition to go for it.

This research has been carried out in light of the *difference in participation between boys and girls attending Youth Zones around the country, with some Youth Zones experiencing an attendance ratio of 70% boys to 30% girls*. The aim of this research has been to understand more about why girls are less likely to attend a Youth Zone compared to males and to use this data to inform the development of a new Youth Zone in Crewe named 'The Dome'.

The National Context – Spaces for Young Women and Girls

Previous studies have highlighted the need for creating dedicated spaces for girls, for example in sports facilities, on streets, in social settings, or even in schools and this needs to be a top priority in order to ensure girls have equity in terms of opportunities to access leisure and extracurricular spaces.

Research carried out by Women in Sport (2022a;2022b; 2024; 2026) found:

65% of teenage girls do not like others watching them exercise.

71% of teenage girls avoid sport and exercise when they have their period

23% of girls dream of reaching the top in sport - compared to 53% boys

When asked what discourages them from participating in sports, girls who had previously identified as 'sporty' reported the following reasons:

- Fear of being judged by others (68%)
- Lack of confidence (61%)
- Academic pressures (47%)
- Feeling unsafe outdoors (43%)

These factors were cited as key barriers to participation for this group of girls.

When asked what would encourage them to take part in more sporting opportunities:

- 24% of girls reported that they would like more girls-only opportunities to get involved.
- 46% reported that they would want more opportunities to try lots of different sports to find what they enjoy.

Findings from other studies have found the following:

- 75% of girls aged 12-21 in the UK have experienced some form of public sexual harassment in their lifetime (Plan International, 2021)

- 80% of parents in the UK worry their daughter will experience public sexual harassment in their lifetime (Plan International, 2020)
- Four out of five women felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a park or other open space (ONS, 2021).
- One in two women felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a quiet street near their home (ONS, 2021).
- More women (13%) than men (7%) have experienced at least one form of harassment. Experiences of harassment are more prevalent among younger age groups, with one in five 16- to 19-year-olds (20%) and 20- to 24-year-olds (21%) having experienced at least one type of harassment in the previous 12 months (ONS, 2023).
- Over 70% of women in the UK say they've experienced sexual harassment in public (UN Women, 2021).
- Research carried out by UN Women into harassment found that only 4% of women reported incidents of harassment to an official, and 45% did not think that reporting incidents would change anything (UN Women, 2021).

OnSide – Context for the Research

Whilst work is being done to bridge the gap between boys and girls attending the Youth Zones nationally data has shown that boys are much more likely to attend compared to girls. Additionally, whilst attendance for both boys and girls decreases with age, the decrease in female membership begins at an earlier age. The change in attendance occurs when young women leave primary school and start secondary school, with the divergence in percentage getting larger as the age range increases.

This evaluation has explored what has been working within other Youth Zones to get girls aged 11 plus to attend the sessions as well as to understand what more could be done to address these seemingly gender disparities.

Who led the research?

Her Place, a Women's and Girls charity based in Crewe, Cheshire were commissioned to carry out this research. Their border 'Inspire' work supports the mental health and wellbeing of girls in Crewe by offering positive activities and counselling in schools and in the community.

In 2023 the Inspire project worked with national campaigners "Make Space For Calls" on a research project that considered outdoor spaces in Crewe Town Centre. The findings from this

research will be drawn upon in this evaluation where relevant (Appendix A includes this evaluation).

Given the nature of this project was to address inequalities often experienced by young women, it was imperative that the research itself did not reproduce these inequalities. The research therefore adopted an approach inspired by ‘co-production’, which ensured that young women were involved in the design, data collection and data analysis (a full account of how co-production was used within this

Recruitment

A “role description” for the co-researchers was developed and shared with local colleges, schools and within the networks that the Inspire project has already established. (Appendix B shows the role description)

Co-researchers

The following took part of all or some part of the research project between October 2023 - December 2024.

Name	Setting	Age
YN	Shavington Academy	15
AG	Shavington Academy	15
GMG	Cheshire College South and West	16
KC	Oaks Academy	15
TPH	Sandbach girls	18
EJ	Oaks Academy	15
CH	Malbank	15
MS	Crewe UTC	16
LB	Crewe UTC	15

KH	Cheshire College South and West	17
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Research Activities

DATE	Activity	Number of researchers	Notes
26/10/2 3	Visit to Warrington Youth Zone	7	Out of hours visit
21/11/2 3	Underwood west primary school	3	Focus group with year 6 students
23/11/2 3	Visit to Wigan and Warrington Youth Zone	9	Open hours visits
20/02/2 4	Manchester Youth Zone visits	6	Open hours visits
21/02/2 4	Hope4More data collection	3	Focus group with young people
01/03/2 4	Springfield school	6	Focus group with young people with learning disabilities
09/03/2 3	Women's day Cheshire college Crewe campus	70 plus interactions	Pop-up to advertise Youth Zone and project work
02/04/2 4	Carlisle Youth Zone visit	7	Open hours visit
09/04/2 4	Presenting research workshop with University of Chester		Workshops in scribing and research presentation
18/8/20 24	Visit to West (London Youth Zone)	4	Open hours visit
11/9/24	Street walk walking through routes to the Youth Zone	7	Walking to Youth Zone from
29/10/2 4	Scribing workshop - presenting recent findings	7	Exploring how to present the findings in a simple and artist way
25/11/2 4	Visit to Warrington Youth Zone	6	Meeting with girls of Warrington Youth Zone that explores what they like

			about going to the Youth Zone
26/11/24	Focus group with architect and interior designer	6	A meeting with Onside architect and interior designers
12/12/24	Presentation of findings and launching exhibition	7	Presentation to identified stakeholders of Crewe Youth Zone
5	Survey with local young people parents and carers	55	An online survey for parent/ carers to complete

Research Methods

In order to fully explore why young women and girls were less likely to engage with Youth Zone spaces and to understand more about what some Youth Zones had done to try and encourage more participation from young women a range of research methods were used. The majority of the methods used would be classed as qualitative methods. Qualitative methods gather non-numerical data, such as transcripts and observational notes, to explore how people interpret and experience the world. Qualitative methods emphasise depth, context, and meaning over measurement (Clark et al, 2021). Using multiple methods allowed for a range of participants to take part in the research and for different types of data to be collected.

The focus groups allowed for in-depth discussions to take place to explore the lived experiences of a range of young people (Clark et al, 2021). Focus groups are a useful research method to explore collective experiences, with groups coming together to discuss the similarities and differences between their own individual experiences. Focus groups are a qualitative method, which allow for participants to expand on their answers and allow for rich data to be generated from the participant’s discussions.

Observations allow researchers to capture real-world behaviours and rich contextual detail (Clark et al, 2021). This allows for non-verbal, and often subtle, details to be noted which can often be missed in direct data collection methods, such as focus groups where participants may struggle to articulate. Observations also help in reducing the bias that can arise from self-reported answers and offer a more holistic and authentic picture of social issues and phenomena.

'Walk throughs' or walking interviews are a hybrid method, combining both observations and interviews immerse participants in the very settings they are discussing (Carpino, 2009). This can help with recall and encourage place-specific reflections which are triggered by sights and sounds. This approach also helps to create more nuanced insights that might not emerge in a traditional sit-down interviews and which may be overlooked in a researcher led observation.

Moving away from qualitative methods, a quantitative (i.e. more numerical based) survey was used to explore parent and carer concerns. Conducting a survey with parents and carers provides valuable insights into their priorities, concerns, and expectations, helping to provide feedback that can help to shape services that better support young people. Speaking to parents and carers helps to ensure that the provision at OnSide is responsive to family needs, particularly around safety, accessibility, and emotional wellbeing. By engaging parents and carers directly, barriers to participation, such as transport or cost, can be better addressed.

A thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2022) was used to explore the research findings. Thematic analysis is a versatile analysis technique that can be applied to different types of qualitative datasets. The approach helps to manage large volumes of text into clear, well-defined themes allowing researchers to communicate complex experiences in an organised and transparent manner.

Key findings from Observations of Youth Zones



Visit to Warrington Youth Zone

During the visit to Warrington Youth Zone, the building was inactive, providing the co-researchers with an uninterrupted opportunity to explore the space and evaluate its facilities. The following was observed during this visit:

1. **Variety of rooms and spaces:** A diverse range of rooms for different activities was deemed essential by the co-researchers to help ensure everyone's needs were met.
2. **Relaxation spaces:** The importance of having rooms dedicated to relaxation rather than activities was highlighted. Examples given included:
 - The sensory rooms (Which should be available to everyone, as everyone needs an opportunity to relax diagnosis or not).
 - The 'Beauty/ Hairdressing room' was a self care/relaxation based space where they could chat and bond with each other.

The young people who attend this space discussed how they enjoyed that these rooms because they were casual and not necessarily focussed on completing a task. This was considered to be important for those who did not have a quiet space to relax in at home and for those who could get overstimulated by loud noise or crowded places.

3. **Educational spaces:** Co-researchers noted the absence of rooms with a solely educational purpose and emphasised the need for a study or library space, particularly for those without access to quiet study areas or educational resources at home. They suggested that a library with fiction and non-fiction books and quiet spaces could be a valuable addition.
4. **Accessibility:** It was considered vital for the building to be accessible to wheelchair users and for those with disabilities and who are neurodivergent, to ensure inclusivity for all who may wish to access the space.
5. **Food options and eating area:** The co-researchers noted the need for a wider variety of food choices with clear allergen labelling. They also observed a lack of vegan and vegetarian options, emphasising the importance of expanding the menu to accommodate dietary needs. The dining space was found to be cramped and overly exposed, being located immediately upon entry to the building, which the co-researcher's perceived to be uncomfortable and un-inviting.
6. **Climbing wall privacy:** Climbing walls are a common feature in many new Youth Zones and are often visible through large windows. The co-researchers felt this could be off-putting, describing it as being "on show," which may discourage participation, particularly among young women and girls. They suggested introducing screening or blinds to provide greater privacy.
7. **Sensory and wellbeing room:** The sensory and wellbeing room was positively received, with co-researchers describing it as appearing to be a safe and welcoming space for socialising and relaxation.

During visits to Wigan and Warrington Youth Zones during open hours, co-researchers observed the spaces whilst they were actively in use and had the opportunity to interact with some junior service users. Key findings included:

1. **Wellbeing and counselling services:** The availability of a dedicated wellbeing or counselling service room was considered essential, especially as it could offer a space away from school where young people could access support.

2. **Accessibility of self-care and relaxation rooms:** Rooms focused on self-care and relaxation, such as sensory rooms and spaces for hairdressing, should be accessible to all service users.
3. **Healthier food options:** co-researchers emphasised the need for healthier food choices to promote an understanding of balanced diets among young people. Vegetarian and vegan options should also be consistently available.
4. **Anti-bullying and behaviour policies:** A clear and consistent policy on bullying and bad behaviour is necessary to create a comfortable and inclusive environment for all service users.
5. **Security and privacy during bag checks:** Bag searches were reported as potentially uncomfortable for girls. Co-researchers suggested alternatives, such as metal detectors, to address privacy concerns. This was felt to be less invasive than bag searches as they did not want staff members (especially male staff) seeing private items, such as sanitary products in their bags, while also being able to detect dangerous items like knives etc.
6. **Phone usage:** Allowing young people to keep their phones was seen as important for managing anxiety and enabling communication with parents when needed.
7. **Gym accessibility:** Gyms should offer designated sessions for young women and girls and include window coverings to create a more comfortable and private environment.
8. **Comfortable furniture:** The furniture throughout the facility should prioritise comfort to enhance the overall user experience.
9. **Eating space privacy:** The eating area should not be entirely open, as privacy while eating was identified as particularly important for young women and girls.

These findings reinforce the importance of creating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive space in Youth Zones that meets the diverse needs of all young people.



Visit to Manchester Youth Zone

During open-hour visits to Manchester Youth Zone, co-researchers had the opportunity to engage with senior service users (two aged groups including those aged 11-14years and 14years+), gathering insights into their experiences and needs. Key findings included:

1. **Specialised music and dance facilities:** Music and dance rooms were considered vital, as many schools lack access to high-quality facilities for these activities.
2. **Approachable and supportive staff:** Having friendly and approachable staff was deemed crucial. Participants also highlighted the importance of designated staff members for counselling, pastoral support, or addressing issues like bullying.
3. **Age group segmentation:** The idea of dividing senior age groups was discussed, as younger senior girls expressed discomfort about interacting with older boys.

4. **Soundproofing and sensory-friendly lighting:** Soundproofing was identified as essential to provide quiet spaces. Additionally, appropriate lighting was considered important for accommodating individuals who experience sensory issues.



Visit to Carlisle Youth Zone

During a visit to Carlisle Youth Zone, co-researchers had the opportunity to engage with service users while the sessions were active. The key findings included:

1. **Private eating area:** The café provided a more private and comfortable space for eating compared to other Youth Zones visited. The young women and girls that the co-researchers spoke to reported feeling more at ease in this setting.
2. **Balanced and healthy food options:** The food offered at Carlisle Youth Zone focused on providing balanced, healthy choices. Additionally, there were opportunities for young people to engage in food preparation, such as using the 'smoothie bike'. These were seen as examples of good practice.
3. **Private gym space:** The gym featured a private area, which contributed to a more comfortable environment, particularly for young women and girls.
4. **Celebration of diversity:** The décor and artwork in the Youth Zone prominently displayed themes of inclusion and diversity, including pride flags and references to civil and women's rights. This helped to set the tone for inclusivity.
5. **Library and study rooms:** A designated library space and study rooms were available, which were recognised as important for fostering education and offering quiet areas for young people. This is especially important for those who may lack access to quiet spaces at home.
6. **Upper floor offices:** The upper floor offices were seen as versatile spaces, ideal for facilitating group activities, providing quiet zones for those in need, or offering a private area for discussions. This highlights the importance of having flexible use spaces that young people can use in a multitude of ways to help meet their needs.

Visit to London Youth Zone

During a day visit to the Youth Zone in London during the school holidays, co-researchers observed the senior session (for those aged 13-19 years) in action.

The key findings from this visit included:

1. **Security and safety:** The presence of security at the entrance gave some co-researchers a sense of safety, though some felt it also created the impression that the environment might be unsafe.
2. **Friendly and recognisable staff:** Co-researchers found the staff to be very friendly and easily identifiable as they wore bright clothing, which helped create a welcoming and approachable atmosphere.

3. **Outdoor space:** The outdoor area provided a relaxed environment, offering a sense of separation from the more active indoor spaces.
4. **Variety of activities:** A wide range of activities was available, ensuring that all genders had access to a full spectrum of options, which was seen as positive.
5. **Vibrant artwork:** The building's artwork was vibrant and eye-catching, contributing to a sense of inclusivity and diversity throughout the space.
6. **Safe surroundings:** Walking to the Youth Zone from the tube station felt safe, as it was in proximity and the area was well-lit which, contributed to feelings of safety and security.

Focus Group with Underwood West Academy

Underwood West Academy has a demographic of children that will likely be service users of the Youth Zone. The school is one of the most deprived schools in Cheshire.

A focus group was carried out with young women from year six who were aged 10-11 years.

Key findings from this focus group include:

- 1) **Concerns about accessibility:** Participants expressed concerns about traveling to the Youth Zone, noting that most lacked access to parental transportation. They suggested that a dedicated Youth Zone bus would help address this issue.
- 2) **Sports and active activities:** There was strong enthusiasm for a wide range of sports and physically engaging activities.
- 3) **Relaxation spaces:** The importance of having designated areas for relaxation was frequently emphasised. These are especially important for young people who may not have quiet and/or private spaces at home.
- 4) **Seasonal activities:** Participants expressed a preference for activities that align with the changing seasons. Examples cited included an outdoor Halloween maze, pride month flags and décor, Christmas parties, discos, easter egg hunts for juniors. It was felt that these could help bring together young people different financial and cultural backgrounds to celebrate.
- 5) **Gender-specific and mixed activities:** They highlighted the need for a mix of gender-specific activities, such as sessions exclusively for girls, alongside mixed-gender activities.
- 6) **Parental concerns:** Some participants raised concerns about whether parents would feel comfortable allowing them to attend and interact with potentially older young people.

Focus Group with Hope4More

Early on into this project the co-researchers identified that some spaces may not be fully accessible to those experiencing neurodivergence or mental health conditions such as anxiety. A focus group was carried out with Hope4More, a charity that supports young people who do not attend school due to anxiety, often referred to as "school refusers," Key findings included:

1. **Sensory rooms accessibility:** Sensory rooms should be accessible to everyone, as requiring proof of a disability or a formal diagnosis can create a barrier and does not account for hidden disabilities or individuals who are still in the process of obtaining a formal diagnosis. Such requirements also overlook the fact that anyone can experience sensory overload, stress, or anxiety, even without a formal diagnosis. Providing inclusive sensory spaces has the potential to benefit a wide range of individuals
2. **Engaging with the Youth Zone:** Engaging with the Youth Zone could pose a significant barrier due to high levels of anxiety, particularly social anxiety, experienced by some young people.
3. **Parental concerns:** Parents may be hesitant to allow their children to attend the Youth Zone unless they are confident in the availability of appropriate support.
4. **Daytime use:** It would be beneficial if the space was available for use in the daytime when it is quieter and could be used for both leisure and educational purposes.

Focus Group with Springfield School

A focus group was held at Springfield School, which caters to children and young people aged 4 to 19 with severe learning difficulties and complex needs. This session continued to emphasise the importance of accessibility, not only for girls but for all young people, to ensure everyone feels comfortable and included. The key findings were:

1. **Active and sports-based activities:** A wide range of active and sports-based activities were seen as important, allowing for varied engagement and physical activity.
2. **Relaxation spaces and sensory activities:** Access to places to relax, such as sensory rooms, as well as sensory and relaxing activities like jigsaws and fidget toys, were highly valued.

3. **Accessibility for wheelchair users:** The inclusion of ramps and lifts for wheelchair users was highlighted as a key consideration for ensuring full accessibility.
4. **Polite and approachable staff:** Staff should be polite, approachable, and ready to guide and support young people when needed, fostering a supportive environment.
5. **Fun and engaging activities:** Activities such as discos, trips, movie nights, and crafts were also highlighted as important, offering a well-rounded experience and opportunities for a diverse range of young people to get involved.

'Walk-Along' - All Routes to Crewe Youth Zone

Getting to the Youth Zone was an important aspect for the co-researchers so a 'walk-along' was arranged to explore all possible routes to the Crewe Youth Zone using public transport. The group walked from the train station and from the bus station to the Youth Zone site as well as exploring sites in the surrounding areas.



Additionally, the group also explored:

Transport routes: A group conducted an assessment of public transport routes to the Crewe Youth Zone, including walking from the train station, bus station, and surrounding areas to the site.

'Walking bus' initiative: The idea of organising a walking bus from the bus station was discussed as a potential solution to improve accessibility. Collaboration with Cheshire East was proposed to ensure the bus station design provides a safe environment, particularly for young women and girls.

Shuttle bus consideration: A shuttle bus from the bus station was considered as a possible option. The feasibility of this may improve with the implementation of the new road layout, making access safer and more direct.

Street signage with QR codes: Installing street signage around Crewe with QR codes was suggested. Signs would indicate the distance to the Youth Zone, and QR codes could provide detailed information about its services and activities.

Concerns about public transport: Concerns were raised regarding irregular bus services from areas elsewhere in Crewe. This issue needs further exploration to ensure equitable access for all young people.

'Pocket Parks': The option of signage at the Pocket Parks in Crewe was explored, using QR codes and providing detailed information about programming and how far away the Youth Zone was for them to get to. The idea of this was to encourage them to go to the youth Zone in an evening and not on the park, which would be a safer and more supportive environment.

Development session with Onside trustees and CEOs.

An "Onside Network" meeting where the country wide vision for the onside network was discussed was attended by the research team. The CEO of Her Place delivered a session to trustees and CEO about this research project, which explained how we were carrying out the research with the young people and what the early findings were.

It was at this session that "Risk Taking" was discussed. The CEOs were interested in how we can increase resilience in young people and they were questioning how young people need to feel safe to take "risks".

The key discussion points are highlighted below:

1. Mixed-Gender Sessions and Female-Only Spaces

- Young women generally do not feel deterred from attending sessions because of the presence of young men.
- Female-only activities integrated into mixed-gender sessions could provide inclusive programming.
- In areas with a Muslim population, the approach may need refinement based on cultural considerations (e.g., insights from Oldham and Blackburn).

2. Peer Research Model

- Using peer co-researchers is highly effective and valued as a model for engagement and insights. (see appendix ?? for more discussion on this)

3. Facilities for Girls

- Dedicated girls' toilets are seen as essential and represent a straightforward improvement to support inclusivity.

4. **Allyship and Awareness**

- Opportunities exist to explore allyship among male participants, fostering understanding of challenges faced by women.
- Allyship training could benefit all young people by promoting inclusivity and mutual support.

5. **Girls' Participation in Sports**

- The assumption that all girls want to “be first” in sports may not apply to everyone.
- Further research or input from young women already engaged in sports could provide clearer insights.
- Leveraging existing research on women in sports could help frame this issue thoughtfully.

6. **Exploration and Motivation**

- The concept of exploration deserves further investigation.
- What motivates young people to try new activities or step outside their comfort zones?
- How can programming better support this?

7. **A place to “be”**

- Understanding what makes activities appealing is key.
- When first founded Youth Zones were the place to “be” for young people, it was discussed that this was 15 years ago and it needs to be explored do young people still want to be seen as going to the Youth Zones?
- It was discussed that the programming may need to be adapted to meet the needs of the local community.

Focus Group with Warrington Youth Zone.

The research team wished to explore why young women and girls attend youth zones and what was their motivation for this so they carried out a focus group with those who regularly attend the Warrington Youth Zone. Additionally, they also wished to explore potential changes that could be made to further improve engagement with young women.

The co-researchers also explored with the group what advice they would give Crewe Youth Zone to promote the activities:

1) Friendships

- The participants shared that they initially heard about the Youth Zone through their schools and attended for the first time with friends.

- Over the course of six months, they reported forming many new friendships with like-minded peers they hadn't known previously. Activities which promote peer engagement should be encouraged.

2) Self-Development

- The focus group highlighted the personal growth opportunities offered by the Youth Zone.
- Completing the Prince's Trust Award and receiving encouragement to pursue their interest in dance were noted as particularly impactful experiences. Further opportunities to provide similar activities should be explored.

3) Inclusivity

- The group felt that the Youth Zone was inclusive and welcoming, allowing them to be themselves.
- They credited the youth workers as central to fostering this sense of inclusivity.
- Positive feedback was also given about the artwork, celebration days, and awareness weeks promoted by the Youth Zone, which reinforced its inclusive environment. This should continue in the new Youth Zone.

4) Programming

- While the participants expressed general enjoyment of the activities offered, they suggested more dance-related programming and expressed interest in expanding opportunities for girls-only sessions to support their development further.

5) Safety

- Some members of the focus group reported feeling unsafe on certain evenings.
- They recommended enhancing security at the Youth Zone entrance, including more thorough checks of individuals entering the building.

6) Community Engagement

- The participants expressed a desire for stronger links between the Youth Zone and the wider Crewe community.
- Suggestions included more outreach activities and partnerships with local schools, community groups, and businesses to raise awareness of the Youth Zone's offerings.
- Members emphasised the importance of continuing to engage parents and guardians to foster understanding and support for the Youth Zone's impact on young people.

Meeting with OnSide's Property and Construction Team Focusing on the Interior Design of the Youth Zones

This visit included discussion about what the co-researchers felt was important for the Youth Zones interior design and furnishing.

Key points included:

- The co-researchers preferred the new and more modern style Youth Zone buildings.

- They preferred the designs that featured bright graphics and design, however emphasised that there should be a balance as the brighter colours could be seen as childish by some of the older users, and could be overwhelming for those who struggle with sensory issues.
- Suggestion to add things like coloured lighting backdrops to have the ability to change the space from neutral and calm to fun and bright for an easy solution.
- Young people enjoy having the ability to customise their space- through displaying their own work.
- Being able to use active spaces such as the gym and climbing wall with privacy is important and the potential to install blinds, dividers, or window coverings should be explored.
- Café areas should have some level of privacy to help reduce anxiety associated with crowds and eating, for example the use of booths or dividers to create a more private space should be explored.
- Chairs should be comfortable to allow people to be able to sit down and relax
- The importance of wellbeing rooms to relax in was reiterated as well as open access to sensory room for all attendees including those who do not have a neuro diverse diagnosis.
- The importance of having a dedicated room to study or library was discussed, or, if this was not possible, access to books and learning resources.
- Dimmable lights were also recommended in addition to the use of warmer toned light bulbs instead of bright white lights to help reduce sensory overload.
- Soundproofing was important in certain rooms such as music rooms, relaxation rooms, study rooms, counselling and wellbeing rooms and sensory rooms. It was felt that this was needed to block noise coming from other activities (such as sport and music activities which could be loud) and to help avoid general overwhelm that came from the noise being carried through the building. It was hoped that this could ensure young people had access to quiet spaces to help with concentration, which they may not necessarily be able to access at home and would help to create a sense of confidentiality.

Parent and Carers Survey

The survey was carried out with local young people's parents/ carers whose children will be of the eligible ages to go the Dome. of to help understand their concerns about Youth Zones, and what could be done to help facilitate their child's attendance.

Demographics of Surveyed Parents and Carers

- 64% of respondents were parents or carers of girls.
- Most common age categories of children:

- o 13–16 years: 56%
- o 17–20 years: 32%
- o 8–12 years: 12%

Session Structure Preferences

- There was no strong consensus on session age grouping:
- 44% preferred mixed age groups, potentially valuing diversity and mentoring opportunities.
- 36% preferred sessions grouped by similar ages, likely for social and developmental alignment.

Staffing and Support

- Parents strongly prioritised the presence of trained staff, especially to support young people with additional needs.
- The presence of trained professionals was also cited as a key factor in reassuring parents about their child’s safety and wellbeing at youth zones.

Safety and Security Measures

- Most parents were comfortable with bag searches, viewing them as a necessary safety measure.
- 60% were also comfortable with their child being searched using a hand-held device, reflecting a general openness to precautionary practices.

Transport and Accessibility Concerns

Transport provision emerged as a critical factor affecting attendance:

- 56% said time constraints would prevent their child from attending if no transport were provided.
- 36% cited safety concerns as a reason for non-attendance without transportation.
- Distance to the youth zone was rated as ‘somewhat important’ by 48% of parents when deciding on attendance.

Regarding availability of public transport:

- 44% reported no convenient public transport options.

- 40% were unsure about transport availability.

Parental comfort with their child using public transport was mixed:

- 44% were somewhat comfortable.
- 36% were not comfortable.

Financial contributions for transport:

- 36% were willing to contribute.
- 44% said 'maybe', indicating some flexibility but also uncertainty.
- 68% of parents felt it was somewhat important that youth zones provide transportation to support attendance.

Support Services and Wellbeing

- A significant 92% of parents valued mental health and emotional support being built into youth zone services, underlining strong parental demand for integrated wellbeing support.

Inclusion and Diversity

- 60% of parents said the promotion of inclusion and diversity was very important to them.

A further 36% considered it important, indicating broad support for inclusive practices in youth settings.

Additional Activities

These activities were carried out to inform and develop the research, while also building the skills of the co-researchers.

Celebrating International Women's Day at Cheshire College South and West

At an International Women's Day community celebration, co-researchers hosted a stall and display board to promote Crewe Youth and raise awareness about the upcoming Youth Zone and the research project. The event was well attended by members of the community, providing an excellent opportunity to engage with the public and key stakeholders.

Co-researchers had meaningful conversations with attendees, which included representatives from other organisations such as Cheshire Police. These discussions focused on safety concerns

in the local area and helped the co-researchers identify key aspects to observe during planned walks around the community. Cheshire Police expressed their willingness to support the initiative by participating in walkabouts and offering safety talks. These could be tailored for the co-researchers, Youth Zone users, or other local young people to ensure they feel confident and empowered to travel to the Youth Zone safely.

This engagement highlighted the importance of collaboration with community organisations to address safety concerns and foster a sense of security among young people accessing the Youth Zone.

Research Dissemination Workshop

While the co-researchers were proactive in gathering research and evidence, they had limited experience in analysing and presenting data. The aim of the workshop was to provide them with ideas and practical guidance on how to share and promote their research effectively. The workshop was delivered by an academic researcher from the University of Chester and a scribe.

They explored ways of presenting research in more visual and accessible formats, aligning with the principle of making information accessible to everyone. Ideas discussed included producing a formal written report for professionals, alongside more informal and creative outputs for schools and young people. These included creating poetry from quotes collected from young people, displaying visual artwork, and facilitating discussions based on key findings.

The co-researchers generated a wide range of creative ideas for presenting their findings to different audiences, including developing content for websites and hosting an event in Crewe for local stakeholders. An outline plan was developed to align with the Youth Zone build timeline, ensuring that the Youth Zone continues to be promoted to young women throughout its development.

Final Reflections

The research offers a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at improving the design, accessibility, and functionality of youth facilities, with a strong focus on inclusivity and creating supportive environments for young people. Key observations from the study include:

1. **Availability of a variety of different spaces:** A diverse range of rooms was deemed essential for different activities, including relaxation spaces, educational areas, and wellness rooms. Notably, the absence of rooms specifically for educational purposes highlighted the need for spaces like study rooms or libraries to cater to young people, particularly those lacking access to quiet study environments at home.

2. **Accessibility:** Ensuring the building is accessible to individuals with disabilities and those who are neurodiverse was identified as a crucial consideration. This includes physical access via wheelchair ramps and other infrastructure, as well as ensuring the availability of sensory rooms accessible to all, regardless of formal diagnoses.
3. **Food options:** Co-researchers recommended a wider variety of food choices, with a focus on clear allergen labelling, and expanding vegetarian and vegan options in addition to a wider variety of healthier foods. The eating area was noted to feel cramped and overly exposed, suggesting a need for a more private and comfortable space.
4. **Privacy and comfort:** Privacy was emphasised, particularly for sensitive spaces such as the climbing wall, which co-researchers recommended screening to protect users' privacy. Similarly, gym areas should offer girls-only sessions and include window coverings to create a comfortable and private environment.
5. **Health and wellbeing:** The presence of a sensory and wellbeing room was positively received, with suggestions for integrating counselling and wellbeing services in a dedicated space.
6. **Security and safety:** While the presence of security staff at the entrance provided a sense of safety, some participants noted that it could give an impression of the facility being unsafe. Co-researchers suggested alternative security measures, such as metal detectors, to address privacy concerns, especially related to bag checks.
7. **Supportive staff:** Approachable and easily identifiable staff were crucial for creating a welcoming environment. This included ensuring that staff members were readily available for guidance or to address issues like bullying.
8. **Gender-specific activities:** Co-researchers observed that there should be a balance of gender-specific and mixed-gender activities, with particular emphasis on creating spaces where girls can feel more comfortable, such as girls-only gym times or workshops.
9. **Transport and accessibility:** The research highlighted concerns regarding the accessibility of the Youth Zone, particularly for those without parental transport. Proposals included exploring options like a dedicated Youth Zone bus or shuttle service and the creation of walking bus initiatives to improve access, especially for young girls. The addition of street signage with QR codes was also suggested to enhance wayfinding and provide detailed information about the services.

10. **Private eating spaces:** The café, as a private and comfortable eating area, was seen as a positive feature. There was a need for privacy during meals, particularly for girls, and suggestions were made to improve the eating spaces to make them feel less exposed.
11. **Environmental design:** Vibrant artwork and décor showcasing diversity, including pride flags and civil rights themes, were noted as enhancing inclusivity and creating a sense of belonging for all young people.
12. **Sports and active engagement:** Strong support was found for a wide range of sports and physical activities, with a focus on ensuring that facilities were accessible and comfortable, particularly for girls. This includes ensuring privacy in gym areas and making activities accessible to all genders.
13. **Parental concerns and communication:** Some participants noted that parents might be hesitant to allow their children to attend the Youth Zone without assurance of appropriate support. Co-researchers suggested creating communication channels to address parental concerns, including a clear anti-bullying policy.
14. **Community integration:** The concept of pocket parks and improved street signage was explored as a means to encourage young people to visit the Youth Zone instead of spending time in less secure environments like parks. This initiative could promote a safer community engagement.

In summary, the study advocates for creating a youth space that is diverse, accessible, and supportive, with particular attention to privacy, safety, and inclusivity. The recommendations emphasise the importance of providing a wide range of activities, creating comfortable environments, and improving transportation access to ensure that the Youth Zone is a welcoming and equitable space for all young people.

Further Areas to Explore

This research has highlighted the ongoing challenges young people face in maintaining their mental health and the importance of positive peer engagement for young people. Future research and initiatives could focus on how to effectively support their wellbeing. Three key areas warrant further exploration:

- 1. Peer Support and Mentorship**

Investigating the impact of peer support networks and mentorship programs on young people's mental health outcomes could provide valuable insights. Understanding how these relationships foster a sense of belonging, reduce stigma, and promote shared learning experiences would offer practical strategies for creating supportive environments.

2. **Building Resilience Through Mentorship**

Exploring the interplay between resilience-building and mentorship is essential. Examining how mentorship can equip young people with coping strategies, self-confidence, and emotional regulation skills may highlight its potential as a preventative measure against mental health struggles.

3. **Surveying Youth Preferences for Activities**

Conducting a broad survey to explore what activities young people would like to see offered in their communities could provide critical data for designing targeted interventions. Splitting the findings by gender would allow for a deeper understanding of the specific preferences and needs of different groups, ensuring that programs are inclusive and responsive to diverse experiences.

These areas offer potential pathways for addressing the mental health challenges faced by young people in today's society and could serve as a foundation for holistic, community-based approaches to wellbeing.

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Appendix - Co Production Report

Co-production in the Evaluation of OnSide, Crewe

A crucial element of the work that has been highlighted within the main report is the collaboration between Her Place and the youth co-researchers to design and carry out the evaluation. In order to explore this further, researchers from the Division of Social and Political Science at the University of Chester have been asked to explore how co-production was used within the evaluation that has been carried out by Her Place and the youth co-researchers.

Research aim: To examine the role and value of co-production with young women in the context of this project.

Research objectives:

- To understand why co-production with young women was used in this project. •
To explore how the process of co-production was carried out.
- To assess the value that co-production has brought to the project and identify how it could be applied by others working within an OnSide Youth Zone.

What is co-production?

According to White and Ross (2023) “Co-production is the building of respectful and empowering relationships alongside the sharing of ideas between those with lived experience and other stakeholders. Both contribute their knowledge, skills and experiences to co-create actionable change. Co-production is a challenging process that requires reflection and dedication to ongoing collective learning”. There have been increasing calls for co-production in the community sector, and this research aims to explore how this project has been co-produced and the value it brings, particularly in the context of co-producing with young people.

Involving young people directly in co-produced research is not only methodologically valuable but also an ethical responsibility. According to the Economic Social Research Council (2024), researchers should “consider the ethics implications of silencing and excluding children from research about their views, experiences and participation.” Excluding young people risks reinforcing adult-centric perspectives and overlooking the realities of those most affected by decisions and policies. By contrast, co-production ensures that young people’s voices shape both the research process and its outcomes, leading to findings that are more authentic, relevant, and impactful. It also empowers young participants by recognising them as experts in their own lives rather than

passive subjects of study.

Data Collection

A range of participants took part in the data collection for this research, including the co-researchers who are able to discuss the process, challenges and benefits of this approach to research (n=2 staff from Her Place and n=3 young co-researchers) and a trustee (n=1) who was able to discuss the strategic reasoning behind funding a co-produced piece of work.

Qualitative approaches were used for data collection to allow for an in-depth understanding of social phenomena to be gained, making use of discussion-based focus groups and interviews using semi-structured questions. The use of semi-structured questions enabled participants to share their experiences in their own words, while still providing a level of focus and consistency across interviews (Bryman, 2015). Working with a small sample size allowed for rich, detailed insights to emerge, making it possible to explore individual perspectives in depth and identify common themes that may not have been captured through larger-scale or more structured methods, such as quantitative surveys (Bruman, 2015).

Data was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a process involves familiarisation with the data, coding, developing and reviewing themes, and refining these into a clear narrative (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This method is particularly valuable in research that seeks to capture lived experiences, as it supports both rich description and interpretation of meaning. Discussion of the 'Local Voices Principles of Co-Production' (White and Ross, 2023) have been intersected throughout the discussion of the findings to provide wider context. These principles outline key considerations for effective co-production and focus on the need for valuing lived experience, transparency, mutual respect, reflection and the need for co-production to become a social movement.

Findings

Why include young people as co-researchers?

For the trustee's on OnSide it was crucial that the gender balance of those attending Youth Zone's was addressed, and imperative to this was the inclusion of young people. Having seen pervious co-produced work by Her Place, the London School for Economics and young people, the trustees were keen to carry out something similar:

"It was important to us to hear the voice of young women, and how they perceived the issues" (Trustee, OnSide)

The young women who were co-researchers for the evaluation cited a number of

reasons why they wished to get involved with the project. This including having the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions, being able to influence a service that other young people would use in the future, including their own siblings, and being able to contribute to the design of a space where other young people could feel safe:

“I liked the fact that would have a say in something that would affect my siblings in a good way” (Youth co-researcher)

“The opportunity to state my opinion” (Youth co-researcher)

“I wanted somewhere that people could go and feel safe” (Youth co-researcher)

This was reiterated by the Staff from Her Place who felt it was imperative that the voices of young people were at the heart of the research:

“I think it is so important, all the work we do here is about empowering women and girls and a lot of the feedback that we get from young people is that they don’t have opportunities to get their voice heard, this gives them that opportunity not just to get their voice heard but to have an impact on their community and something that they can see and say ‘I have done that’” (Staff, Her Place)

“It is the lived experience, because things are changing so fast for young people, it’s about the relevance of what [data] we are getting. We can say what we would have wanted at that age but times are different now. Research needs to be current and it needs to move with the times and be reflective of the people that are using the service” (Staff, Her Place).

The youth co-researchers discussed how they felt it was important that they were at the forefront of much of the research activities:

“I think a lot of the kids understood it wasn’t adults coming to speak to them, because it was us they felt like they would actually get heard. I think they opened up to us more than they would to an adult because of that” (Youth co-researcher).

“I think that they [young people who participated in the wider research] were happy to have a chance to contribute” (Youth co-researcher).

They felt strongly that they felt the participants were more likely to speak with them due to being closer in age and they were able to draw upon their own lived experiences to help shape the research processes. They also discussed how they had good engagement from the young people that they spoke to during the data collection, who appeared to appreciate being asked to voice their opinions and share their experiences.

Staff from Her Place also commented how they felt that having the youth

co-researchers at the forefront of data collected helped to gain more depth to the data collected:

“With adults, they might have just said, yeah, well, we'd want this, this and this. But I think the fact it's somebody else [their age] that's investing the time to find out the young people did give more of their time back in explaining what they what they want, what they like, you know, and I do think young people want” (Staff, Her Place).

In line with White and Ross' (2023) framework for co-production, this highlights the need to value lived experience and including the voices of those who are likely to be impacted by service provision.

Key Priorities for the Research

Understanding the lived experience of young people currently using youth zones was a key priority for the youth co-researchers:

“They are the ones who have a youth zone so they could give us feedback about what they do or don't like” (Youth co-researcher)

“We want to make sure girls feel safe walking home” (Youth co-researcher).

Ensuring safety was a key theme throughout discussions with the youth co-researchers, and they discussed how the main reason for this stemmed from their own lived experience of feeling unsafe:

“Firsthand going into school I've experienced what it's like to feel unsafe, I wanted to contribute to something where they can be involved and not feel like the whole world is judging them... I think its just better firsthand as teenagers ourselves to carry this out as we have experienced it too” (Youth co-researcher).

The youth co-researchers highlighted why it was important that the young people who currently use Youth Zones were a key part of the data collection:

“I think its ironic because everyone has been a kid so they [adults] know what it's like [to not be listened to]” (Youth co-researcher).

“They [adults] think they know better than everybody” (Youth co-researcher).

“They [adults] are probably comparing teenagers now to what it was like then they were teenagers” (Youth co-researcher).

“I think it is important for adults to know that these decisions affect our future and not their future and adults need to be more open minded” (Youth co-researcher).

They reflected upon their own lived experiences of not always feeling heard and discussed how this it is important that young people's voices are amplified during decision making processes.

When asked whether they felt listened to by key stakeholders with an interest in the findings of their report, participants reflected that they did feel their voices had been heard. However, they also noted that the true test would be in the future, when they could see whether any changes were made as a result of their research and recommendations.

"I do feel we have been listened to" (Youth co-researcher).

"I will believe it when I see it, we have done the work so let's see if they take it onboard" (Youth co-researcher).

"We have spoken to so many people, they say different things so when we see it we will believe it" (Youth co-researcher).

The youth co-researchers expressed feelings of hope that their work would have a positive impact on the young people using the new Youth Zone in Crewe.

"I hope it turns out good" (Youth co-researcher).

"I hope our ideas are actually used inside of the building" (Youth co-researcher).

"I hope people feel safe" (Youth co-researcher).

"I want to see our voice has been heard" (Youth co-researcher).

They also expressed a hope that co-production with young people would continue in the future as part of the service:

"What I would like to see the most is and it is ready to be used, I would like to still see young people being heard, say a youth councillor that is similar in age to those using the Youth Zone" (Youth co-researcher).

This is reflective of White and Ross (2023) eighth principle of co-production, which discusses how co-production should be indicative of a social movement, through continue and development alongside working towards social change.

Challenges and Barriers to Engagement

When asked about the challenges of encouraging young people to engage in co-production, some participants highlighted a fear of being judged by their peers. They felt this could act as a barrier that might discourage other young people from taking on a similar role:

“Not all teenagers are going to be reasonable, kind. A lot of teenagers out there are unkind people and I feel like when I first came here I barely spoke because I was scared of the others and I didn’t want to get judged” (Youth co-researcher).

Staff from Her Place reflected on some of the perceived barriers that presented engagement with some of the young people who initially signed up and explained how there was the potential for some young people to feel anxious as there were a number of unknown factors going into the project:

“We did have a few that thought they would give that a go and then moved away [from the project]. When we were starting we were having to feel things out. Some of them maybe didn’t have the confidence or were anxious to just go with it, where as others were happy to feel it out” (Staff, Her Place).

Staff from Her Place also commented on the need to motivate young people, especially early on in the process and how it took time for the youth researcher to develop a sense of ownership to build:

“Getting the young researchers motivated and keeping them engaged and making sure that their research was getting collected, collating it all could be difficult” (Staff, Her Place).

“I think it [ownership] has had to build up” (Staff, Her Place).

Commitment and communication were also highlighted as potential barriers:

“Working with young people and their communication. They decide on that morning kind of thing and getting them to commit to it can be a challenge” (Staff, Her Place).

When asked if there was anything they would do differently, the youth co-researchers reflected on some under explored themes, that given the chance they would like to explore in the future:

“I would really like to know more about the differences between girls and boys and the differences between a youth zone in a rougher area compared to a nicer area” (Youth co-researcher).

The above highlights White and Ross’ (2023) argument for the need of transparency and reflection throughout the co-production process, including the need for expectations to be set out regarding roles and responsibilities.

Opportunities and Skills

The youth co-researchers spoke positively about the opportunities that they had had

during the research. In particular, they spoke about how they were able to develop their own individual interests, such as reading and photography, and use their lived experience to make suggestions to improve service provision in these areas:

“We all have our own hobbies and were able to use them” (Youth co-researcher).

“It was nice to be able to try different things” (Youth co-researcher).

The youth co-researchers spoke about how they had developed valuable skills, with a particular focus on confidence building, public speaking and team work:

“We have had differences of opinions, we have compromised and even if you can’t reach a compromise you are at least listened to” (Youth co-researcher).

“Everyone was pretty nervous at the start, but then we all settled in and everyone could say their opinions” (Youth co-researcher).

“Interacting with people, talking to new people is a massive fear, but it has given me the confidence to go out there and talk to people” (Youth co-researcher).

“Public speaking is a new skill” (Youth co-researcher).

This was also reiterated by the staff from Her Place:

“Team work, when they came together initially we had around 13 in total but when we recruited there was about two or three from each school that knew each other. So they have defiantly learnt how to work together as a team and how to communicate with each other and us as the people running the project and learning to communicate with the young people that they were talking to at the Youth Zones. Another big one is the confidence, which has been an amazing thing to hear” (Staff, Her Place).

The trustee reflected upon the potential legacy of young people developing key employability skills:

“What is really important is employability beyond the age of 18. One of the things we are working on is working with local businesses, getting them to support us on programmes and connecting them with young people. If they can forge a career locally, that can change their trajectory significantly” (Trustee, OnSide).

In addition to skills development, the youth co-researchers also reflected upon how they had experienced personal changes, including being more empathetic to other people’s experiences and opinions:

“I am a lot more attentive to what my siblings say” (Youth co-researcher).

“I have become more open minded to other people’s opinions and some people’s views have helped to change my views” (Youth co-researcher).

This is reflective of White and Ross’ (2023) argument that opportunities for training and upskilling should be sought to support those collaborators with lived experience, and projects that wish to include co-production should ensure that opportunities are given to those involved to develop their skills. It also highlights how co-production is a reflective process, and space should be given for those involved to reflect upon their own experiences of being engaged in these processes.

Looking to the Future

The trustee spoke of how they are optimistic for the new Youth Zone, and how they hoped it would be the begging for future collaborations:

“One of the things that excites me about the Youth Zone is that we are going to have a twelve-million-pound facility in the middle of Crewe that has been designed entirely for and by the young people of Crewe. As a board we want to be a catalyst for change in Crewe...We have tasked our team to get involved with all the local teams and Charities in Crewe to see how we dovetail our activities so we support each other. The opportunities for identifying where there are needs issues in Crewe and then bringing young people together with our team and youth workers and seeing what the solutions could be” (Trustee, OnSide).

They also discussed current discussions within the board of trustee’s that are considering how young people can be more involved in strategic decision making:

“We are having a debate at the movement about how we yet young people’s voices on the board. We have concerns about young people taking on the duties of a trustee, but are there differet ways of engaging young people such as through associate status?” (Trustee, OnSide).

The youth co-researchers discussed how they were keen to continue to be involved with the Youth Zone in Crewe:

“It’s been a lot of work over the two years, just to move on I don’t think it would make much sense” (Youth co-researcher).

“When the Youth Zone is up and built I would like to be a staff member, I think that would be awesome being able to be part of this and going into being a staff leader would be really good because we have that understanding” (Youth co-researcher).

Staff from Her Place reflected on the added benefit of these young people going on to have roles within the new Youth Zone and how this is potentially an unintended benefit of the project:

“It's [co-production] life changing for anybody but especially for young people and hopefully two of the researchers will go on to work as a youth worker within the Crewe Youth Zone. So that is an added benefit that we could never have predicted really” (Staff, Her Place) .

All of the youth co-researchers who took part in the focus group for this report expressed a keen interest in being involved in similar projects in the future, and in particular they wanted to be involved in work that addressed young people's mental health:

“I would like to see more opportunities like this” (Youth co-researcher).

“We should have a voice in our future, as it is us that will be living it” (Youth co-researcher).

Staff from Her Place also reflected on some key points that should be reflected on further if other organisations wish to engage young people with co-production, although it was noted that payment did not appear to be the main motivation for the youth co-researcher's engagement:

“I think it [paying young people for their time] is important. If you were an adult researcher you would be getting paid for your job and I think it is important that they felt equal to what would be expected as an adult. They gave a lot of time and a lot of their ideas, so I thought it was important that they felt that that was appreciated” (Staff, Her Place).

“I think it [payment] is important. It's about valuing them because it wasn't one off it. There were things they had to do in between. It was co-produced and they had the knowledge that we needed. So showed that we valued them with payment. I don't think that was the motivator for them all. I think they were just generally invested, really do, and that they were honoured to be paid” (Staff, Her Place).

Paying young people to compensate for their time is imperative in order to show how their time is valued. This highlights to need to ensure that policies and practices are in place, to ensure that this is accounted for when budgeting for a similar project, as highlighted within White and Ross (2023).

Additionally staff at Her Place reflected upon some of the wider societal barriers that could prevent young people from engaging with co-production.

“They want opportunities to get their voices heard but it is about them finding

those opportunities and having a home life that could accommodate for that. The schools have been really good because they have let us take them out but if they don't have that support or a parent who was willing to give permission. I think more support, more signposting and making sure they know about opportunities" (Staff, Her Place)

Staff from Her Place also reflected upon their own learning from being involved in this project, and are keen to integrate co-production with young people into future work. They also considered the potential positive impact that the research they co-produced with the young people could have, but also the need for further opportunities for young people to engage in co-production:

"I hope that for our Youth Zone in Crewe that girls do feel more welcome and included and I hope we do have a smaller gap with the different genders that are going. I also hope that places do take note that the young people's voices are important to build in their services" (Staff, Her Place).

"I've picked up so much of how we can do things again, co-producing with young people" (Staff, Her Place).

Again, this is reflective of the need for co-production to be part of a wider social movement, and also emphasises the need for sharing best practices with others to help further this movement (White and Ross, 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, co-production with young people is not only an ethical responsibility but also a powerful way to enhance the quality and relevance of research. Actively involving young people ensures that findings are grounded in their lived experiences while challenging adult-dominated perspectives. The process also creates opportunities for young people to develop valuable skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and confidence in sharing their views. At the same time, co-production is built on a foundation of mutual respect, where young people are recognised as equal partners and their contributions are valued alongside those of adults. This respectful, collaborative approach strengthens trust, empowers young people, and leads to outcomes that have the potential to be more meaningful and more impactful.

Recommendations

- **Future research and evaluations regarding services that young people access should endeavour to include young people in the design and development of these services.** This would ensure that research priorities, questions, and methods reflect the realities and priorities of those most

affected. Involving young people at the earliest stages can make findings more relevant and actionable, while also fostering a sense of ownership and accountability for the young people involved.

- **Wider opportunities for young people to be included in governance of organisations should be explored, for example youth trustee or associate positions.** Creating formal pathways for young people to contribute to decision-making helps to challenge tokenism and embeds youth voice at a strategic level. Roles such as youth trustees can build leadership skills and confidence while allowing organisations to benefit from the insights and lived experiences of young people.
- **Services that are targeted at young people should look to consider how their infrastructure could support long-term co-production with young people, ensuring they are paid and upskilled.** Sustainable co-production requires more than ad-hoc engagement. Organisations should invest in systems and resources that allow young people to participate meaningfully over time, including fair payment for their contributions, training opportunities, and mentoring. This not only values their input but also equips young people with transferable skills that can benefit their future education and employment.

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