



HEALTH INCLUSION REPORT

IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY AND TRUST IN THE NHS: A PERSPECTIVE FROM YOUNG ADULTS.

Project Aims & Method

Through this project young adults worked together to identify how mental health and primary care services could be improved for young people aged 14-26 who experience health inequalities and marginalisation.

The project used a participatory, strengths-based approach. Young adults co-designed the enquiry, led activities, and decided which wellbeing areas to explore in more detail with their peers.

Project Activities Timeline

Phase 1: Planning

Monday 4th August - Survey Creation: Young Adults create online and in-person anonymous survey options

Monday 11th August - Agenda Planning: A team of young adults create the agenda for our health inclusion workshops.

Phase 2: Workshops

Tuesday 12th August - Health Inclusion Workshop #1 - with a focus on open sharing, young adults share their experience of the NHS using a sharing bowl, and doodle poster.

Tuesday 19th August - Health Inclusion Workshop #2 - We move to selecting themes and thinking through solutions.

Phase 3: Reporting & Social Sessions

Tuesday September 2nd - Tuesday October 7th - Health Inclusion Report: Four young adults from the workshop work together to create the health inclusion report.

We also delivered four sessions using the findings from the workshops.

These included:

Wednesday 1st October - 2 x Social Sessions on the Challenges around Sleep

Wednesday 8th October - 2x Social Sessions on Healthy Exercise and Diet



Which Health Inclusion Communities?

The project engaged young adults aged 14–26 from diverse backgrounds. The majority of young adults involved face intersecting social challenges, including housing insecurity, disabilities, and being refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

1. Young adults feel a **lack of trust** from health professionals, this is partly due to **communication challenges**. Young adults repeatedly reported feeling not listened to or understood. In a number of cases young adults felt judged by the healthcare practitioners.

"I didn't feel listened to, and my words and experiences were misinterpreted"

"I felt judged, doubted and not trusted"

2. Young adults reported **financial and accessibility barriers** when accessing NHS services. Reporting feeling overwhelmed in the hospital, without the **support** they need, and feeling like **control** is being taken away from them.

"The hospital environment can often feel overwhelming"

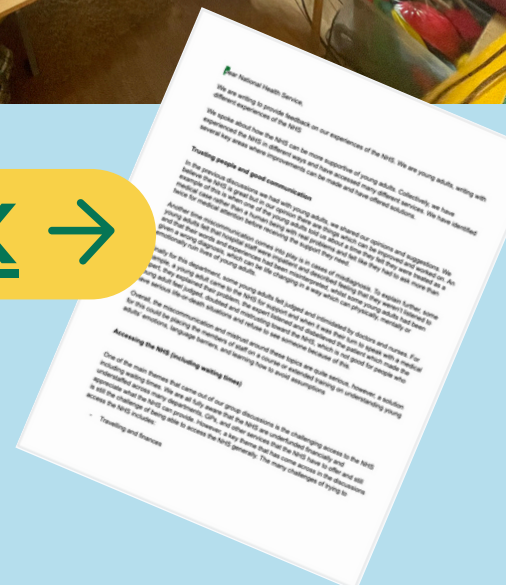
"It can feel like our independence is being taken away"

3. All of these factors were particularly true for young people with **acute mental health challenges**, those with **hidden disabilities, neurodiversity** and **language barriers**.

Young adults from the Esteem Team wrote up their full findings into a report - linked [here](#).



[LINK](#) →



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Read the [young adult's report](#) for more details. Here are some top recommendations for NHS providers:

1

Communicate clearly, every time

Give a plain-English written summary and next steps after appointments; check preferred communication style; make confidentiality explicit at triage. (Quick win)

2

Offer real choice in access

Let young adults choose when appropriate for online, phone, or in-person; record and honour preferences; enable interpreters/BSL/PECS and simple translation tools. (Quick win → Medium lift)

3

Make handovers seamless

Use a standard handover template so people don't have to re-tell their story across 111/999/GP/hospital. (Medium lift → System change)

4

Create calmer, sensory-aware spaces

Signpost a quiet area; clearly provide simple sensory/comfort kits (which can include ear defenders); reduce overwhelm with clearer zoning. (Quick win → Medium lift)

6

Be neurodiversity- and trauma-aware in practice

Run short refreshers on listening, validation, and non-judgemental language; particularly around being trauma informed, mental health support and neurodiversity accessibility for all staff (Particularly those on pediatric wards). (Medium lift)

7

Set expectations honestly

Share realistic waiting info via SMS/app or at reception; stabilise and simplify Wi-Fi so people can use communication aids and calming tools. (Medium lift → System change)

6

Remove practical barriers

If possible, proactively offer travel reimbursement and access aids to those who need them most; allow guide dogs and a trusted person where appropriate. (Quick win → Medium lift)

7

Keep the feedback loop alive

Keep engaged stakeholders in the community (like us) updated with changes. Work with other charities in the community to continue to create better access for those who could benefit.

PROJECT IMPACT

73

Attendances across the project

35

Young Adults Involved

We ran four social sessions with a focus on key health areas young adults reported to us. These included a session on sleep hygiene and diet and exercise.

Based on direct young adult feedback, these sessions were a large success. One young adult who took part in the sessions said:

"This was a really helpful session. I'm going to take away this to sleep better in the future"

There were 16 young adults involved in the participatory part of the project. Some have asked to be part of the presentation of the report to NHS health inclusion experts in October.

We will only see the true impact of this work when our reports start to be used by NHS Services.

However, the participatory nature of the work has already led to some direct benefits for the young adults leading on the project. With young adults reporting increased confidence, collective understanding and willingness to engage with the NHS:

"It was nice knowing that other people were experiencing similar things with the NHS, it wasn't a 'oh it's just me' principle. Everyone was experiencing similar problems. It was nice to be able to have the power to help, and show the NHS where there are problems. Not just saying it's pants - but trying to give solutions while knowing the NHS is underfunded and it's not entirely their fault" - Anon

CLOSING REFLECTION

This project demonstrated that inclusion starts, not just with listening, but by letting 'service users' exercise agency and choice. By inviting young adults to define health in their own terms, Esteem and NHS Sussex used a model for engagement, which can lead to better health outcomes for all.

"It helped me think about my health in a way that feels real to me." – Participant, age 23

These conversations have already sparked small changes – better sleep routines, new confidence to speak about wellbeing, and stronger connections within the group.

If you find this report helpful, please pass any feedback back to us to share with the young adults involved.

We hope to sustain this dialogue, ensuring that young adults remain not just as participants, but valued partners in shaping a more inclusive NHS.

If you have any other questions, or want to see how you could work with Esteem in the future, please get in touch with Andy, at Andy.Nall-Cain@esteem.org.uk



Photo from
a participant
in the health
inclusion
workshops