

Annual Report

2024-2025



ESTEEM

What we do

At Esteem young adults aged 14–26 can realise their strength to cope with life's challenges and thrive into their futures.

Our community is grounded in trust and respect, and **built with young people for young people.**



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Introduction from young adults at Esteem

To us, Esteem is a place where we can be ourselves and thrive in group environments and one-to-one settings. It is a fun, supportive, and accessible place, where there are loads of opportunities. It is a place where we actually care about each other and know we belong. We can speak our minds and leave no room for judgement. We are a community, another home, and a place where we can learn and try new things.

We are really pleased with the progress Esteem has made this year, especially involving young adults more meaningfully. Adults usually make the decisions for us, but at Esteem, whenever something happens, young adults are the first to decide. This gives us a sense of importance and a powerful voice in a world where we normally have to be quiet.

We are also pleased with how much Esteem has improved in being organised. It is important to be organised because we all come from different backgrounds and environments, some of which might be chaotic, so it is good to have a solid place to come where you know it is going to be organised. We have also done better at identifying and starting new projects like Girls Allowed (which was massively beneficial). Young adults can find what is on at Esteem and know where to be at certain times, which means more young adults can get involved and benefit from Esteem.

We are also proud of how we and the organisation have improved communication this year, whether working to reach out to the community, secure our building, or speak on issues that

matter to us. It is important that people know about Esteem so that they have a place to go, and so our organisation can continue to thrive. Our work reaching out to key decision makers in the community, like councillors and the Police and Crime Commissioner, shows what we can do when we come together as a team to solve problems. It shows what young adults can do when given the time and resources. By shouting about our work, we also allow other charities to learn from Esteem.

Importantly, we also managed to raise the necessary money to keep Esteem sustainable over the last year. This is essential so that we can keep doing what we are doing and be there to help young adults in the local community. We know raising funds has been a priority, and we've been happy to get involved in fundraising as part of the Esteem team. Loads of charities do not really use young adults' ideas and voices, so we really stand out. It shows that we love what we do and helps make Esteem more sustainable in the long term.

Thank you to everyone who has supported Esteem on our journey over the last year. We are really happy to be part of such a great organisation. We are looking forward to the year ahead with all of you.

*Chanel, Jade, Connor,
Steph, Ivy, James,
Kaya, Leon.*

– Members of the Esteem Team

(A group of Esteem young adults helping to run the organisation).



A message from our Chair

This past year has been one of deepening impact and growing clarity. We've built on strong foundations to refine how we work, why we work in this way, and who we work alongside. Together, young adults, staff, volunteers, trustees, and partners, have continued shaping an organisation that puts trust, inclusion, and participation at our heart.

So much of this year has been about strengthening our roots. We launched a new strategy, co-created with young adults, which now guides every part of Esteem's work. We improved how we support, mentor and listen to young adults, and took important steps forward in financial sustainability, inclusion, and shared leadership. We didn't just do more, we did better. We feel incredibly proud of how far we've come.

I want to say thank you to every young adult who has brought their whole self to Esteem this year, to sessions, events, steering groups, staff meetings, and funder conversations. It is your energy and insight that keep this organisation real, relevant, and alive. Whether you came once, weekly, or helped run the place, you've been part of shaping something truly special. You show us, again and again, what it means to belong, to grow, and to give back.

I also want to thank our amazing staff, trustees and volunteers. You hold space for young adults to flourish, and you do it with deep care, skill, and passion. This is not always easy work, but it is life-changing. Thank you for choosing to do it with Esteem.

And last but certainly not least, thank you to our generous donors and supporters without whom none of this would be possible.



Looking forward to next year, we will put the findings in this report into action. As well as this, we will focus on several key priorities. Upon learning of the local council's plan to sell the Old School House in 2023, we made a crucial decision to secure the building. Since then, we have been actively working on a comprehensive strategy including developing opportunities to raise capital funds to acquire the building. This ongoing effort is critical to preserving the Old School House, which serves as the last permanent, open-access youth space in West Sussex.

We will also develop how we measure our impact by commissioning a participatory project on how we monitor and evaluate our work with young adults. As Esteem builds on our reputation for Participation and Youth Voice, we will develop a trading model to support income diversification, as well as impacting

systems change through sharing power with young adults as experts by experience.

Finally, on behalf of the young adults, staff and trustees I want to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to Cat Vizor, our Co-Founder and Chief Officer, who is stepping down after an incredible 17 years. Her vision and unwavering dedication have been the driving force behind Esteem's growth, a legacy that began with the inspiration of her mother, Val Vizor. Cat has built an extraordinary community, and we are profoundly grateful for her leadership and the strong foundation she has created for the future. Her passion will continue to guide and inspire us as we move forward. We will do all in our power to preserve and build on your legacy, Cat, and wish you every best wish for the future.



Anne, Chair of Trustees

Mission and vision



At Esteem, we can belong and make a positive difference, whatever challenges we face.



We all need someone to believe in us and the space to believe in ourselves.



When we value ourselves and each other, we can all thrive together.

Why we exist

Context: Young Adults Need Space to Grow, and They're Not Getting It

Across the UK, young adults are navigating an increasingly uncertain world without the spaces they need to belong, be heard, and build their futures. At Esteem, we see firsthand the effects of this gap.

Young people are having their choices taken away from them through limited opportunities. Many face multiple, overlapping challenges: poverty, mental health struggles, discrimination, trauma, and limited access to housing, education, and work.

Where we are based, in Sussex and along the coast, rates of Special Educational Needs, mental ill health, and deprivation are all higher than the national average. Young adults report feeling isolated, stigmatised, and ignored.

What compounds these challenges is the collapse in available support for young people. Youth services have been drastically reduced. Since 2010, two-thirds of council-run youth centres in England and Wales have closed. In Sussex, 32 of 43 early help centres shut down in just two years. These included safe, accessible places where young people could find connection, services, and trusted adults to talk to.

It's no surprise that mental health challenges among young people are rising. But research, and common sense, tells us the solution is within reach: More spaces where young adults can get the support they need, build meaningful communities, and make their own decisions.



Esteem's response

Esteem exists to create the kind of space every young adult should have.

We offer consistent, welcoming, youth-led spaces where young adults can feel safe, build trust, and discover their strengths. From here, everything else becomes possible: connection, confidence, wellbeing, purpose.

Our approach is **participatory** and **strength-based**. That means young adults don't just receive support, they shape it. Every part of Esteem is co-created with the young adults who use it. We start from a place of belief: that young people already have value, insight, and the ability to shape their lives and communities.

We work with young adults aged 14–26 through a wide range of interconnected projects, designed to meet real needs and open up opportunities:

One-to-One Mentoring – A regular, trusting relationship with a member of the community to support personal development, self-esteem, and direction setting.

Counselling and Mental Health Support – Including our Walk and Talk sessions, in-house counselling, and LGBTQ+ specialist services (delivered in partnership with Allsorts).

Group Activities and Social Spaces – From drop-in sessions to creative groups, trips, and shared meals. Places where young adults can be themselves and build connections.

Work Experience and Volunteering – Hands-on paid and voluntary opportunities to help run our organisation and do good in the community.

Creative Projects – Space, support and training to develop skills and confidence in photography, film, music, design, and more.

Community Engagement – Public events, and partnerships that connect young adults to the community and to local and national decision makers.

At Esteem, we're not just stepping in where youth services have been lost, we're leaders in creating what young adults have always needed: youth-led spaces where young adults are part of the community, valued, and given the tools to improve their own lives.

Our year in numbers

We worked with **267 young adults** — that's a **10% increase** from last year.



We offered over **10,445 direct contact hours** — the equivalent of **30 hours of support every working day**, and **2,000+ hours more than last year.**



We ran **1,647 sessions** across the year, including **317 free counselling sessions.**

We worked with **over 63 partner organisations** last year.



The young adults we work with face an average of **3–4 intersecting social barriers**, such as:

- Acting as a carer
- Being a refugee or asylum seeker
- Being cared for
- Being LGBTQ+
- Being neurodiverse or with SEND
- Being trans or non-binary
- Being vulnerably housed
- Living with a disability
- Not in education, employment, or training (NEET)

97.2% of young adults say they can influence decisions at Esteem.



We don't 'do to' young adults — we work with them.

And our approach works:

After attending Esteem:

- **89%** feel more confident leaving the house
- **94%** feel more involved in their community
- **90%** feel more confident meeting new people
- **Over 86%** say their involvement positively impacted their mental health and wellbeing

“
**Esteem saved
my life.**
Anon (26 years old)



"I can honestly say that Esteem has helped me find a sense of purpose and feel optimistic about the future rather than being so scared of it." Anon (21 years old)

"A highlight for me was getting to meet the Esteem Team group of young adults in action, who were planning the new timetable to engage more young people. When I asked what difference Esteem made to them, they explained how it's a place where they can gain advice on all aspects of life to help with their next steps. It was here — and often only here — that they felt part of something, and found a safe space that 'felt like home.'"

Joe Rich, Head of Youth Voice, National Lottery Community Fund, 2024)



“

From the moment I arrived at Esteem, I felt more accepted than I ever did at school. I felt like I could be myself.

Kai's story

I was bullied at school after coming out as gay. One morning, I got up and looked in the mirror. I could suddenly hear all the horrible things people had said about me. I broke down crying and thought, "Don't go to school."

I made it downstairs but caught my reflection again in another mirror. That was too much. I went back up, slammed my bedroom door, and sat with my back to it. I braced my legs against my chest of drawers to keep anyone from coming in.

A lot of people tried to reach me. First my mum, then my dad. Then my cousin's mum, my nan, and even my nan's friend. Eventually, I let my aunt in and we talked. I didn't go to school that day or the next. I gave myself the weekend to think.

I sat in bed and looked at my GCSE results. They weren't good. I told myself I had to go back. I still had time to improve my grades. So on Monday, I returned to school. The bullying didn't stop, but I kept going and avoided engaging with the bullies.

My cousin told me about Esteem. She said it might help with everything I was going through. I said I'd give it a try.

From the moment I arrived at Esteem, I felt more accepted than I ever did at school. I felt like I could be myself. I invited my younger brother and some friends who were also having problems. They loved it too. There were lots of people, and everyone felt welcome.

Soon I was leading games and activities and helping out at fundraising events. I passed my GCSEs and got into college to study photography. Now I volunteer at Esteem on the media team.

One of the projects I got involved in was building a raft for a race on the River Adur. We all helped make the sail and paint it. On race day, there were around 30 other boats. As soon as we hit the water, the wind pushed us in the wrong direction and into other rafts.

None of us had rowed a raft before. It felt like things were going badly, and I thought we might sink. But we stayed calm and didn't give up. We made a group decision to take the sail down. The people at the back were tallest, so one stood up to remove it. The raft wobbled and we nearly all fell into the river, but we managed to stay upright.

We passed the sail down to the front and wrapped it around the post. That worked. We stopped going backward. We didn't win the race, but we weren't there to win. We were there to have fun.

Afterwards, we hung our sail on the wall at the Old School House so we could remember it forever.

-Kai

Our progress and learning this year

This year, Esteem continued its journey from grassroots energy to even greater strategic coherence. While this evolution has been years in the making, it marks a major transition: our CO of seventeen years, Cat Vizor, will step down next year, leaving behind a stable and lasting legacy. This year we also launched our 2024–2028 Strategy, co-produced by six young adults, which now anchors everything we do, from quarterly reporting to bi-monthly staff reflection.

To track progress against our four strategic objectives, we held a series of participatory workshops with staff and young adults. Their insights and feedback are summarised below.

1. Involve Young Adults More Meaningfully

This year, we deepened young adult participation across every part of Esteem. Young adults influenced decisions, shaped projects, and led how we represent ourselves and plan for the future.

We shared power

Young adults co-led a review of our recruitment processes, contributed to strategic planning, and spoke at public events and funder meetings. Their input changed how we train mentors and hire new staff. When we needed to decide on the future of our building, young adults were the first to be consulted. When our CO shared her plan to step down, they were amongst the first stakeholders to be informed.

"I can't remember a time when I couldn't have a say in something I wanted a say in at Esteem." **Young adult, 2024**



We trusted young adults to lead

Throughout the year, young adults played a leading role in and often had the first say on key strategic decisions, including our bid to take over the Adur Outdoor Activity Centre (AOAC). Twenty-one young adults took part in the deliberation process, determining if we should apply to take over the AOAC lease. Although our bid was ultimately unsuccessful, the process brought us together as an organisation, generated significant momentum with supporters, and clarified our thinking on what type of permanent physical space Esteem needs in order to thrive.

"We saw the power of stepping back. When young adults lead the conversation, they do not just speak. They shift perceptions." **Staff team reflection, 2025**

We built a shared culture of participation

Young adult participation became truly embedded in everyday life and every project at Esteem. Every staff member contributed, regardless of their role or background. Even our Central Operations team played their part, enabling young adults to lead activities in our quarterly staff Wellbeing Weeks. This collective approach helped participation become more embedded and sustainable.



We learned that we involve young adults more meaningfully when:

We design for inclusion

Young adults have varied schedules, responsibilities, and access needs. Our training on inclusive design helped us improve our practices to be even more inclusive. By working collaboratively with young adults, we identified areas of strength and where more changes are needed.

"Our recruitment happens in the daytime, when most under-18s can't get involved. We need to look at this."

Annual participation review, 2025

We plan and resource participation properly

At times, we tried to involve young adults in ways that were rushed or under-resourced. These efforts fell short and impacted both staff and young adults. We were reminded that meaningful participation relies on careful planning and dedicated support and time.

We check in and adapt

Participation is an ongoing practice. This year, young adults told us their involvement in recruitment had begun to feel symbolic rather than meaningful. Their feedback prompted immediate changes to how we structure recruitment panels, and how we facilitate decision-making to ensure everyone feels they have an equal say.

"The review of involving young adults in recruitment led to positive change. Our opinions were taken seriously and they mattered." **Young adult participant, 2024**

2. Be the Best We Can Be

This year, our growth wasn't just about doing more. It was about doing better. We focused on improving the quality, impact, and consistency of everything we do.

We enhanced our work with young adults

We rebuilt our mentoring programme into a 16-mentor team, with induction training co-designed and delivered alongside young adults. We also improved how we recognise and celebrate when young adults move on from Esteem, making sure their time here ends with the same care as it began. Two new projects were co-designed from the ground up with young adults, resulting in improved attendance and outcomes for participants.

"It was uplifting to be involved, it wasn't just painting something pretty on a banner, it was young people working together creating a visual representation of why we love Esteem. It's exciting to know that we had the opportunity to share that with other important organisations and the broader community on the day"
Young adult, 2024

We bolstered our workforce

We redesigned our staff onboarding and introduced a more consistent approach to supervision. Our quarterly Wellbeing Weeks were restructured to give meaningful time for rest and reflection. We also trained our full team, including volunteers and trustees, in inclusive design to help us build a more equitable organisation.

"I feel able to ask questions and voice when I am unhappy or unclear about something. This is a massive privilege within the workplace. I think a lot of effort goes into making me feel valued not only by my line manager but also colleagues, which is a nice culture we have built together."

Staff satisfaction survey, 2024

We strengthened our systems

We revamped our financial controls policy to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose as we grow. Our counselling assessment system was streamlined, reducing the number of team members involved and creating a smoother experience for young adults. We also launched a new "You said, we did" feedback system, helping staff see how their input leads to real changes.

We learned that we are at our best when:

We communicate clearly and consistently

We know this matters in our work with young adults, but we haven't always prioritised how we communicate internally as a staff team. Next year, we'll trial informal gatherings to improve how we connect and share information.

"I think internal communication between teams has improved, but there is still more work to do. There have been lots of new staff members, so we're still working out communication clarity, and with new roles, how these will work together better in areas of overlap and responsibility."

Staff satisfaction survey, 2024

We do things together

Staff, trustees, and young adults all chose big events as highlights of the year. The Old School House campaign launch, our Christmas meal, and the organisation-wide hike helped build a sense of belonging. We'll make sure these moments are planned into the year ahead.

"The big joint events with staff, under 18s and over 18s all together. They were fun, informative, and enjoyable. All of us together"

Young adult, 2025

We make space

At times, both the Old School House and our staff team have felt stretched to capacity. We've learned that physical space, especially outdoor space where young adults can gather, reflect, and connect, is essential to our impact. Equally important is giving staff the time and headspace to do meaningful work. In the year ahead, creating more space, both physically and in our schedules, will be a key priority.



3. Share Why We Do What

We Do

We helped shape our local community and contributed to wider conversations about youth work by showing, not just saying, what meaningful participation looks like.

We brought the community together

Through public events led by young adults, we created spaces where people from different generations and backgrounds could connect. 'Battles and Biscuits', a board game event designed to reduce loneliness among older adults, received coverage on ITV News and was praised for its warmth and creativity. At our Open Day, young adults invited councillors, funders, and neighbours into the Old School House to experience Esteem's work directly and understand why the space matters.

We made space for young adult voices in public decisions

Young adults spoke directly to decision-makers about issues affecting their lives. They met with the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner to share personal experiences of crisis response and contributed to local council decision-making through a community grant panel. These interactions weren't symbolic. They informed thinking and influenced how services respond to young adults.

"It wasn't just someone speaking for us. We were the ones telling our own story, in our own way. And people listened."
Esteem young adult, 2025



We expanded our creative reach

Thanks to support from the Focus Foundation and Arts Council England, we've transformed how creativity thrives at Esteem. Our new creative suite and Creative Collective have opened the door for young adults to their first paid opportunities in design, photography, and digital media. Through partnerships with professionals and organisations like Brighton & Hove Museums, young adults have also developed new skills, showcased their work publicly, and even received feedback from world-renowned photographer Martin Parr. From promoting Esteem to exploring the issues that matter most to them, young adults are leading bold, brilliant creative projects that make a difference.

Watch some incredible young adult made content:

Amelia's first journey into Esteem
Why walk and talk?
By the sea photography
Esteem Team News

"It gives us an opportunity to be creative with equipment that we might not have access to. It's a welcome and friendly environment for those finding their footing. It's a breeding ground for creativity"
Young adult, 2024

We learned that we increase our influence when:

We start local

Being visible at events, in schools, and in council spaces helped us build trusted relationships. We ran wellbeing workshops for over 60 students at local college BHASVIC, and young adults from Esteem worked closely with Adur and Worthing Council's participation team to develop a new funding opportunity. Next year, we will deepen these local links while contributing to national discussions about youth voice.

"Since launching in Sussex in 2024, we have been consistently impressed with Esteem's commitment to the young people they serve through collaboration, community and partnership working. In a short space of time, we have developed a great working relationship with Esteem. Esteem also supported us in the preparation of our co-design activity and have introduced us to other partners and networks." **Local external agency, 2025**

We tell our story clearly

Our approach is often most powerful when seen in action. But we've recognised the need to explain it more clearly and consistently. We will invest in creative storytelling, training, and messaging that helps others understand, support, and replicate what we do.

“
Esteem is like a second home to me, the people are like a second family. It's a place you can go to and feel safe automatically and never feel like you're being judged or you're out of place. I wouldn't be who I am today without it.
Young adult, 2025



4. Sustaining Our Work:

Building Resilience

This year, we secured over £540,000 in income, a milestone that enabled us to deliver our full programme of support for young adults, despite a challenging financial climate.

This success reflects the strength of our partnerships and a more confident, collaborative approach to fundraising as well as our long-term strategy to diversify income and reduce reliance on any single funding source. It was made possible through thoughtful planning, shared ownership across our team and young adults, and the commitment of those who believe in our mission.

We grew a diverse and values-led support base

We secured support from across our community of funders and partners:

- **Corporate partnerships** with Ansvar Insurance UK and the Focus Foundation, provided funding, time, and energy for key events and engagement work.
- **Returning and new grant funders**, including the National Lottery, the Berkeley Foundation, and Arts Council England, together with funds raised by players of People's Postcode Lottery and awarded by the Postcode Community Trust, backed our mission
- **Collaborative projects**, such as our pilot with Allsorts, expanded access to specialist counselling for LGBTQ+ young adults.

- **Workplace partnerships** with companies like Pyroban and Focus Group created work placement pathways for young adults.

We built confidence in our fundraising

This year taught us what helps our income generation thrive:

- Making time and space to **plan ahead together**
- Bringing in **external expertise** for complex or high-stakes opportunities
- **Telling our story together** - with young adults and staff directly shaping funder narratives, deepening connection and trust

"It was made possible through thoughtful planning, shared ownership across our team and young adults, and the commitment of those who believe in our mission."



We learned that we sustain our work best when:

We stay creative and collaborative

By involving young adults in how we describe and design our work, we deepened funder understanding of our impact. When young adults help tell our story, we don't just raise more funds, we build stronger funder relationships rooted in our shared purpose.

We look ahead

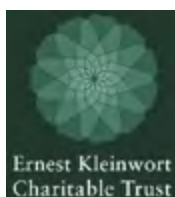
Sustainable income doesn't happen by chance. It requires focus, alignment with our values, and clarity about what we need and why. We are committed to continuing this work in partnership with those who share our belief in the power of young adults.



How we are funded

We are extremely grateful to our local community and funders for all your support, we couldn't achieve this without you.

Our donors this year have included:



And

The De Brie Charitable Trust

The Albert Van Den Bergh Charitable Trust

Northwick Trust



Our CO, Cat Vizor, sitting on a public bench built by young adults during an Esteem project in 2015.

A short message from our outgoing CO, Cat Vizor:

Esteem was founded by my Mum, Val Vizor, in response to seeing children she fostered, who dropped off a cliff edge of support when they turned eighteen; the 'family feeling' young adults talk about today remains embedded in our ethos. This togetherness is what makes Esteem unique – seeing people's strengths and creating opportunities to develop ideas, skills, friends, and so much more! We have evolved through the power of community, and doing things together.

After 17 years as Chief Officer, seeing Esteem grow from strength to strength, I know our organisation is in a great place, so I'll be stepping aside from this role on the 28th August 2025. This decision feels like the right moment for Esteem, and for me. I will always be part of Esteem's journey as its co-founder, and will remain supporting Esteem from the sidelines.

It has been the honour of a lifetime to grow Esteem with such an extraordinary community of people. Thank you for your belief, your contributions, and your shared commitment to a world where young adults are valued, supported, and have space to thrive.

With huge gratitude,

Cat Vizor

**Join our amazing community and support Esteem today.
You can help sustain and grow our impact.**

**Donate online using the QR code,
or email fundraising@esteem.org.uk
for more information.**



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