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Needs of rural young people and accessibility of youth support services

STRAND 5

Contents

Introduction

This document draws on primary research, via interviews and surveys, with young people and youth support workers in Devon. The research has been carried out, in 2022, as part of the 'Innovation for Youth and Community' CRF-funded project, by Devon Communities Together.

The research considered the role of geographical hotspots, connectivity of places, the definition of 'rural' and the accessibility of urban services in order to provide intelligence regarding youth services and thereby inform the future design of services to better meet rural needs.

This document first looks at the overall context of what it means to be a young person in rural Devon, what their needs are and how they currently attempt to meet these needs, including whether they feel they can access support services. This document then looks at the youth facing services available in rural areas, the role they play, or can play, and the challenges they face.

In order to complete this research, two surveys, one aimed at young people, and one aimed at youth support workers, were developed. These were shared regionally via an email to targeted youth services, some of whom subsequently shared the youth survey with groups they were working with, or on their social media. We are especially grateful for the Devon Young Farmers Club network for supporting this survey.

In total, we received survey responses from 33 young people (aged 14 to 25) and 9 youth service providers. We subsequently spoke directly with 23 young people (aged 14-25) to gather their stories and interviewed 2 youth workers. Insights from survey responses were used to guide these conversations. This document combines data from the surveys with quotes and insights from interviews. Below are a series of graphs indicating the demographics and location of survey respondents (Figures 1-5). Please note that the larger response from the South Hams area is due to support from the Kingsbridge Young Farmers Club. Youth clubs surveyed included general hub type organisations (such as Holsworthy Youth Club), outreach organisations (such as Holsworthy youth chaplaincy), and specialised organisations, (such as Bideford Surf Lifesaving Club). Further information on youth support services surveyed see Appendix A.
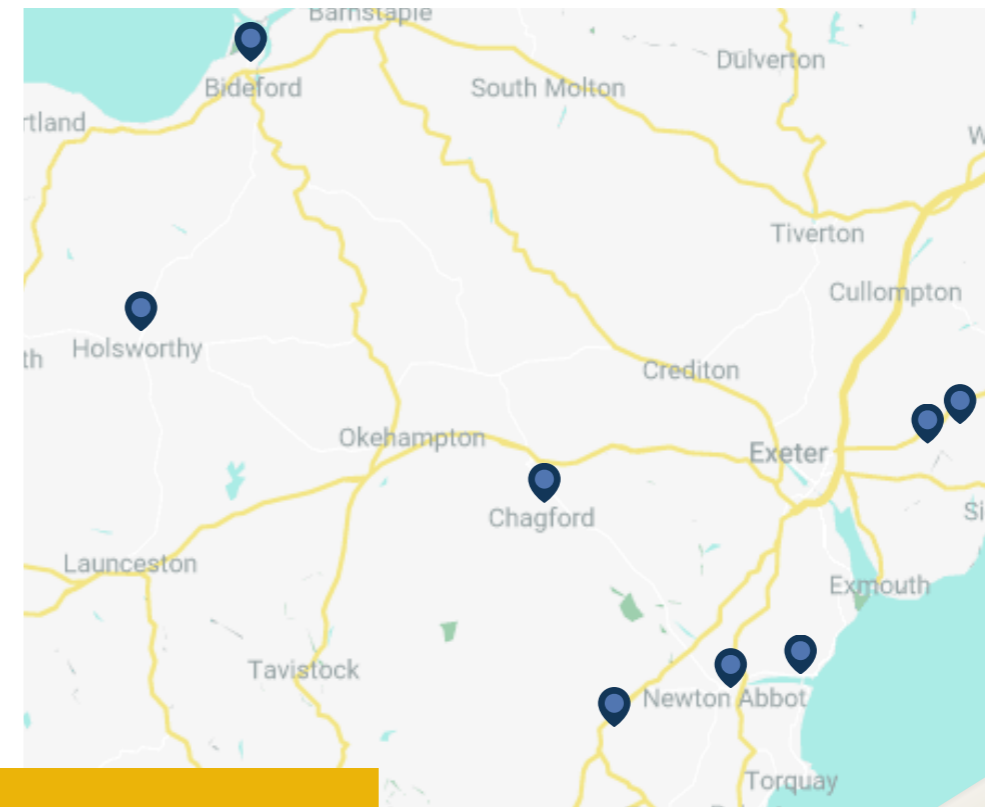

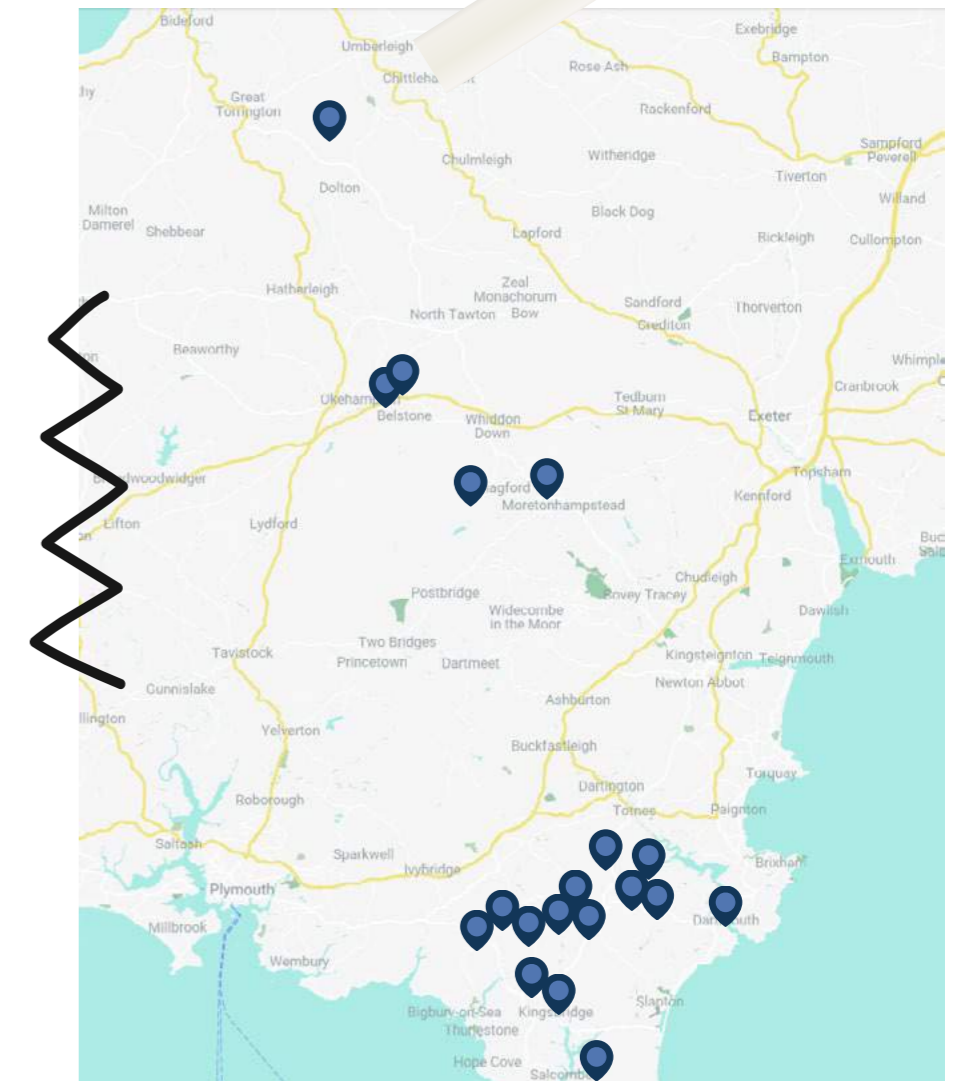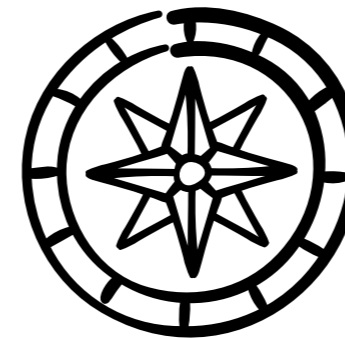**Figure 1**
Location of youth services surveyed

Figure 2
Location of young people surveyed

Gender of survey respondents

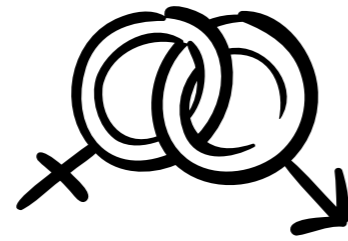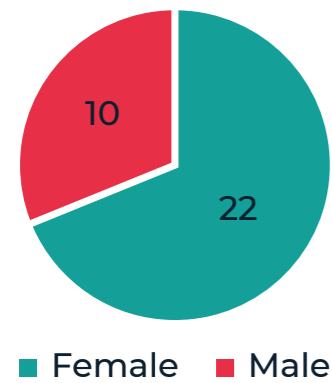Pie chart values: 10, 22

■ Female   ■ Male

Age of survey respondents

Pie chart values: 2, 4, 16, 1, 10

■ Under 14   ■ 14-16   ■ 17-18   ■ 19-21   ■ 22-25
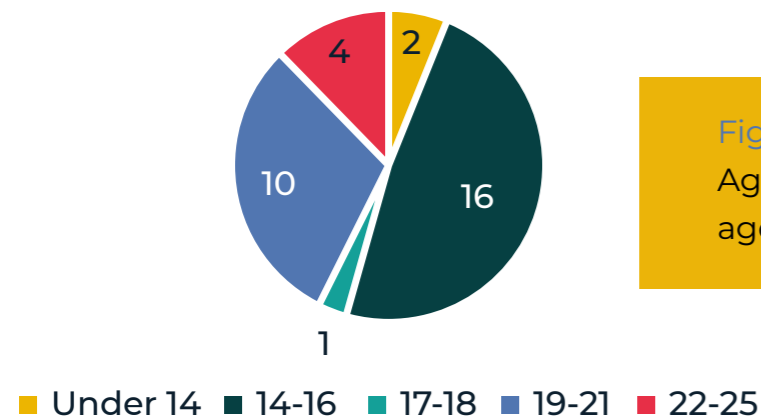
Location of Participants

Pie chart values: 3.03, 18.18, 21.21, 27.27, 9.09, 21.21

■ Town & edge of town (Remote)

■ Village (Remote)

■ Hamlets & isolated homes (Remote)

■ Town & Edge of town (Not Remote)

■ Village (Not Remote)

■ Hamlets & isolated homes (Not Remote)

Chapter 1: Needs of Young People and Rural Context

This chapter will first look at an overview of young people's needs as reported by both young people themselves and youth workers. This includes discussions of all 10 areas of support service. It most notably explores mental health needs and the value of socialising. Finally, this chapter discusses transport in rural areas and how challenges around this impact on young people meeting their needs and accessing services.

An overview of young people's needs

Youth support workers were asked *"What do you think the main support needs are for young people in your area? (Tick 3 main needs)"* and *"How easy is it for young people to access these support services in your area?"*. The results to these questions are shown in Table 1 and Figures 6 and 7 below.

The clear view of youth workers surveyed is that **Mental health services and Leisure and social opportunities are the greatest needs for young people in their area**, with 77.8% of youth workers naming this. These needs are followed by Physical health and wellbeing (44.4% of youth workers), and Additional needs support and Soft skills development (33.3% of youth workers for each). Education and training (22.2%) Housing services, Employment advice/support, Money advice (11.1% each) and Legal advice (0%) were named as less needed, however some comments, discussed below, indicate these are still important needs.

Importantly, these needs must be considered alongside how easy it is to access these services. For example, mental health services were believed to be difficult or very difficult to access by 77.8% of youth workers. That is to say mental health services are deemed to be of great need and also very difficult to access. Leisure and social opportunities, equally of great need were seen as difficult to access by 55.6% of youth workers. **In fact, 6 out of 10 support service areas were considered difficult or very difficult to access by 50% or more of youth workers surveyed.** The remaining 4 service areas of Physical health and wellbeing (37.5%), Money advice (25%), Legal advice (12.5%) and Education and training (11.1%) were considered less difficult to access. However, considering services such as Physical health and wellbeing and Education and training relate to basic individual needs, any hesitation in these being 'easy to access' should be

concerning. For Money advice and Legal advice most youth workers were 'Unsure' around accessibility.

	"What do you think the main support needs are for young people in your area? (Tick 3 main needs)"	% of youth workers who believed accessing this service area was 'difficult' or 'very difficult'
Mental health services	77.8%	77.8%
Leisure and social opportunities	77.8%	55.6%
Physical health and wellbeing	44.4%	37.5%
Additional needs support	33.3%	62.5%
Soft skills development	33.3%	50%
Education and training	22.2%	11.1%
Housing services	11.1%	62.5%
Employment advice/support	11.1%	50%
Money advice	11.1%	25%
Legal advice	0.0%	12.5%

Table 1: Youth workers view of support needs and support service accessibility

"What do you think the main support needs are for young people in your area?"

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Leisure and social opportunities
- Legal advice
- Additional needs support
- Mental health services
- Money advice
- Housing services
- Education and training
- Soft skills development
- Employment advice/support

Figure 6
Youth support workers views on young people's needs

"How easy is it for young people to access these support services in your area?"

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Additional needs support
- Housing services
- Employment advice/support
- Leisure and social opportunities
- Mental health services
- Education and training
- Legal advice
- Money advice
- Soft skills development
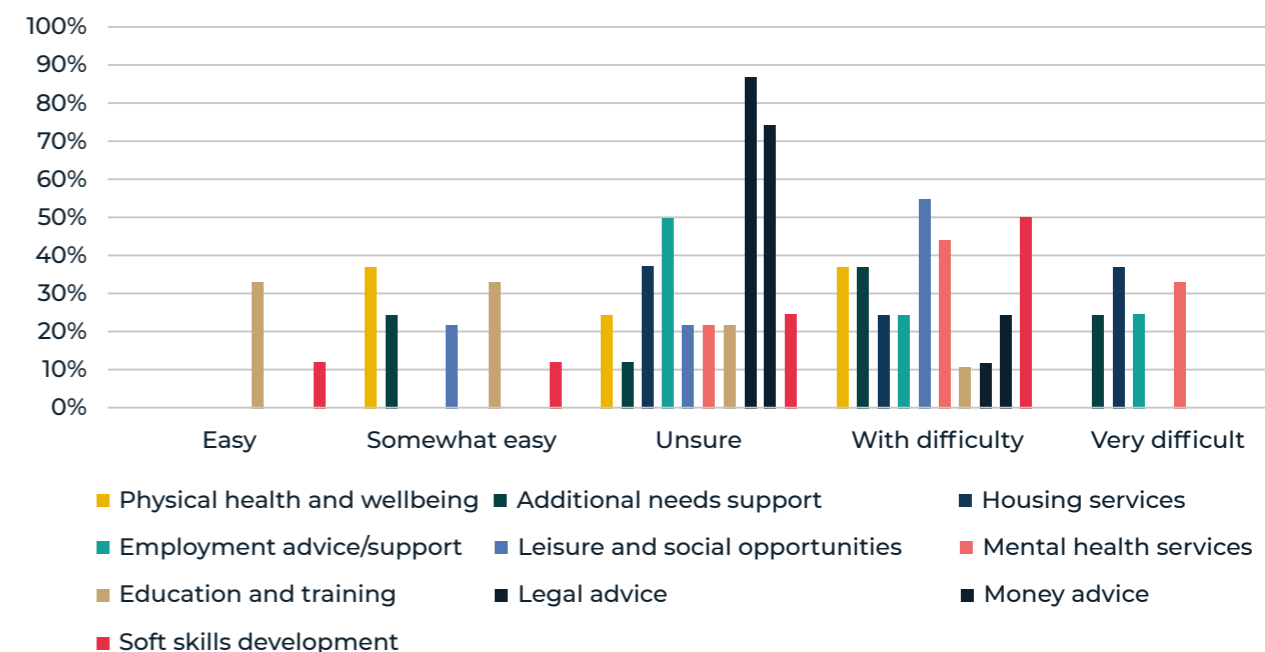
Discussion of needs: Mental Health

Youth support workers have seen **the need for mental health support rise since the Covid-19 pandemic, and are acutely aware of the stretched nature of mental health services** leading to long waiting times and an ability to only respond to crisis situations, rather than provide preventative support.

> "The impact of COVID on young people has been extremely significant and, in some places, overwhelming. Schools and organisations are finding it extremely difficult to cope with this."
>
> **The O6**

Young people spoken with and surveyed were aware of the importance of good mental health for themselves and their peers, but are not actively accessing services around this need (see below - 82.8% of respondents have not accessed mental health services). **However, they are aware of the role of socialising and sport as ways to manage their wellbeing.**

The topic of mental health support as a needed but difficult to access service is illustrated in the quotes below from youth support workers and young people.

From youth support workers

> "There has been an increasing number of young people needing support from CAMHS for anxiety, depression, PTSD etc, that has increased during the pandemic. This covers 11-16 years old, I've seen a particular spike in 14 year olds. There is a very long waiting list for CAMHS including a very high threshold - this is making the need more noticeable as conditions are worsening whilst young people are waiting. . . [and] GPs are not always specialist enough to be able to diagnose young people. I almost have to push a young person to get their parents to take them to the GP. That is part of the problem, they have to take a parent with them and if they don't want a parent to know how bad things are then they are not going to access it."
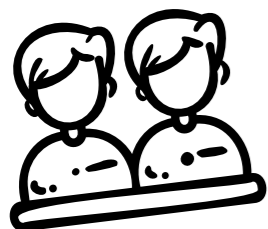
Holsworthy Youth Chaplain

> "Access to mental health services is particularly difficult. But all services seem to be at capacity"

Fenix Youth Club

> "Support services reduced to those in crisis. Preventative measures to help young people are very few."

Holsworthy Youth Club

From young people

In the survey they were asked: *"Is there anything you regularly do to manage your wellbeing?"; "Are there any services, organisations or groups that support you with your wellbeing? If so, how?",* and *"What kind of wellbeing support do you think would be of the highest value to you and other young people in your local area?"*

Of the 12 who responded to the question asking about the services which support their wellbeing, 11 mentioned the Kingsbridge Young Farmers Club (KYFC) as a source of support and socialising and 3 also mentioned local sports clubs:

> "Kingsbridge Young Farmers support you if you are in need by offering link to several organisations such as Yellow Wellies. And Kingsbridge Rugby Club support me by keeping me fit and supplying the social interactions with teammates. But I don't see any specialist to support my wellbeing."

> "Young farmers. It gets me out regularly"

> "Kingsbridge young farmers because I get such a good social life with people like me"

These answers around the role of groups mirrors the general answers about how individuals manage their own wellbeing. With 24 of the 33 respondents mentioning some form of exercise (e.g. horse riding; dog walking; gym; dance lessons), 12 mentioning socialising (e.g. talking with friends; helping friends; young farmers club), and 4 answers mentioning another form of hobby (spending time outdoors; music; reading; gardening; breeding livestock; painting).

Of the 23 who answered regarding which wellbeing support would be of most value in their area, 6 individuals (26.1%) mentioned the need for mental health support. This was more than any other support area. With the next highest areas relating to general socialising and sports.

> *"Faster responses to those who are struggling with mental health - more mental health staff"*

> *"Mental Health because it is a very important aspect of all our lives that isn't recognised enough."*

When discussing what services could do differently to help young people access them, 4 respondents mentioned access.

> *"If they reduce the stigma around using them being a bad thing, and make it more comfortable for them to seek out."*

> *"Be more openly available to everyone, not just those who struggle with school - physical health and wellbeing"*

And availability of support was also mentioned in our interviews:

> *"Mental health and wellbeing is expensive as you have to go private if you want an appointment quickly."*
>
> **Kate, aged 19**

Figure 8
Activities young people complete regularly to help their wellbeing

Discussion: Socialisation, soft skills and resilience

As can be seen above in the comments from young people about the importance of the groups like the Young Farmers, **a relationship between socialising and hobbies, and mental health is apparent.**

77.8% of Youth support workers selected Leisure and social opportunities as a main support need for young people in their area (the joint highest score alongside mental health services). Youth support workers we spoke with indicated that secondary school age kids have more of a need for the social opportunities and laid out the relationship between socialisation and mental health explicitly, picking up on themes of prevention and resilience.

> *"The softer stuff is the most important in some ways. Because that is where you can be gently feeding into what mental health is, what mental wellbeing is and how to look after it. We know that a CAHMS referral will get there eventually, the problem is that the kid is mostly in crisis by then. I think that a lot of the preventative and pre-emptive work is really important, and that is where the softer stuff comes in. . . .*
>
> *. . . .The idea of sport being useful for physical wellbeing and mental wellbeing. The idea of resilience and teamwork building up from taking part and failing and having to try again. Those are the useful skills that we don't necessarily have the space for within the academic side of life, but those are the ones that are really useful for the young people to build."*
>
> **Holsworthy Youth Chaplain**

Sadly, **living in a rural location can include a risk of isolation** and the challenges around accessing social opportunities is discussed further in the Transport section below. 12.9% of young people surveyed indicated that they had travelled for Leisure and social opportunities. The quotes below indicate some of the challenges.

Discussion: Housing, legal, money and other advice

The need for support services beyond the areas discussed above is harder to get clear information on from the data we have collected.

33.3% of youth support workers believe Additional needs support is a main need in their area, and although only 13.4% of the group of young people we surveyed had used these services none had accessed them locally.

22.2% of youth support workers believe Education and training is a main need, which is especially concerning as it is a basic need for individuals. Transport to and from education is expensive and far from straight forward.

11.1% of youth support workers surveyed believe Housing services, Employment advice/support and money advice are main needs. No youth workers felt legal advice was a main need. However, quotes from the surveys and conversations with youth support workers and young people imply that support in these areas may, in fact, be of need for young people in rural areas – especially considering the lack of available affordable housing options. For example:

> "It would be good to have more life skills training around for things like mortgages or loans- I wouldn't know where to go for that. Or car insurance. I didn't even know about credit scores until recently. . . . . There should be more affordable housing. I've signed up to Devon House Choice for an application. There should be more opportunities for people that actually want to live here not just over 55's and Uni students."

Amy, aged 19

> "Housing is a big issue. Some members have had to leave the area because they can't find housing. Sometimes we suggest referrals to Shelter or Teign Housing, but that is all we can do."

The Bank Youth Project

Transport

It would be impossible to talk about the needs of young people in a rural context without talking about transport. Transport is essential for accessing basic needs, such as education or health services as well as meeting friends or attending clubs, and for securing employment. It is also necessary for accessing more specialised services. **Transport was the most common topic raised by young people in our conversations.**

> "There are buses that go through town and on the coastal road but don't pick up from where I am- not the back roads past the farmer's houses."
>
> **Abby, aged 14**

> "We used the school bus 8am and 4pm Mondays to Fridays and that was it, but now you can't get onto the school bus any more when you leave... Pensioners get bus passes, but Young People can't afford the fares and are more isolated."
>
> **Young farmers discussion group**

When asking about accessing services, the research differentiated between whether that service was in the local area, or whether the individual had to travel far for access. Survey results for the question **"Have you ever used any of these services? If so, how did you access them?"** are shown in the table below.


	Yes - in person, but travelled far	Yes - in person, local area	Yes - online appointment	Yes - Telephone	Never used
Physical health and wellbeing	6.5%	32.3%	0.0%	0.0%	61.3%
Additional needs support	6.7%	0.0%	6.7%	0.0%	86.7%
Housing Services	0.0%	0.0%	3.5%	0.0%	96.6%
Employment advice/support	3.3%	10.0%	6.7%	0.0%	80.0%
Leisure and social opportunities	12.9%	58.1%	0.0%	0.0%	29.0%
Mental health services	0.0%	10.3%	3.5%	3.5%	82.8%
Education and training	6.7%	60.0%	3.3%	0.0%	30.0%
Legal advice	0.0%	3.3%	0.0%	10.0%	86.7%
Money advice	0.0%	10.3%	3.5%	0.0%	86.2%
Soft skills development	0.0%	19.4%	3.2%	0.0%	77.4%

Table 2: Young people ability to access services

This table shows that **most service areas simply had not been used by the young people we surveyed.** With only Physical health and wellbeing, Leisure and social opportunities and Education and training services having been used by more than 25% of respondents.

It is important to remember that the lack of use does not mean the lack of demand, and comments from youth workers indicate that there is a need or demand for these services. Respondents saying they have not used services could be for several different reasons, including young people not having the need, but could also be due to the lack of accessibility, or related to what distances are perceived as 'local area' or 'travelling far'.
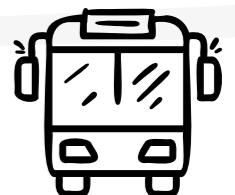
"Young people need [careers advice and other support]. They don't know they need it because it is so far away. There is almost nothing that a young person can walk to in our area outside of school. We are really pushing careers within school because that is the only advice they are going to get. They are incredibly isolated.... That has an impact on what they want to do long term. They haven't had the opportunity to find out there is more or to chat with someone that can help them look at all the career options."

Holsworthy Youth Chaplain

These findings show it is often likely that young people are either going to use local services, or not use them at all. **The use of services far away may change when there is an element of necessity, for example of the 13.4% who had accessed services for additional needs support they had all either travelled far for access or accessed online services.**

"I'm hesitant to use many services because of the distance- there is no point as I wouldn't be able to get there. . . .There is a mental health service that GPs sometimes offer but first you have to get there and then it's going to be expensive to pay for someone to talk to."

Kate, aged 19

If we accept that distance is a barrier to accessing services, it is important to consider what the barriers are for suitable transport such as cost, availability and safety. These are factors whether travelling by car, bus, foot or bike.
Bus transport is notoriously difficult and often unavailable in rural areas, and can have a prohibitive cost. Participants we interviewed discussed difficulties around getting to school or college:

"I went to Kingsbridge Community College so had to take the bus to school everyday [from near Dartmouth]. We [my sister and I] went to Kingsbridge as my mum worked there and all our friends were there, but we didn't qualify for a bus pass as we weren't on the catchment area. So, we got a yearly bus pass at £500 each a term."

Amy, aged 19

"When I was in Sixth Form it was £6.30 a day. Yes, so it's about £1,000 a year to get to school and back if going 3 or 4 days a week, it adds up."

Young Farmers discussion group

"As I was in the sixth form I was able to get a free bus pass. There was one bus in and one bus back a day. If you missed it, you had to get an ordinary bus which was £8 one way."

Kate, aged 19

Access to public transport also impacts on social and employment opportunities:

"Now the nearest nightclub from Kingsbridge is Newton Abbot and it's £100 for a taxi there. Evening/night time transport to get people home would be good, like a special bus from Newton Abbot at 2am so you don't have to worry about getting a taxi....."

Young Farmers discussion group

"I have got some work in a local cafe which is nice and enjoyable, but because I rely on getting a lift there, I can't do as many shifts as my friend who can take the bus to work so he gets more shifts than me"

Abby, aged 14
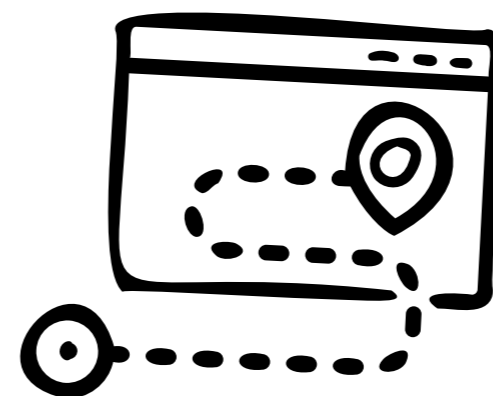
Without a suitable bus system young people are forced to learn to drive or rely on those in their families with cars to give them lifts. This can be complicated due to the family circumstances and also cost involved. For example:

> "Because my family are working to earn money I can't keep asking Mum to keep running me places - it's not just my life; it effecting other lives if I want to go out. . . . Tonight, my Mum brought me and my sister and we couldn't have got here otherwise, but we could have got a bus if there was one. . . . "I have friends that live in Kingsbridge and they often go into Plymouth but I can't go with them because I can't get to Kingsbridge to meet them unless Mum drives me."
>
> **Abby, aged 14**

> "If I didn't have a car it would be really difficult to do anything. But then I have to maintain the car and pay for the fuel and the local prices are extortionate so I go to Kingsbridge or Dartmouth for fuel when I can."
>
> **Amy, aged 19**

An additional barrier regarding transport is a concern around safety in the narrow country lanes and people driving too fast. Those interviewed commented that this can stop people playing out on the street, feeling scared waiting for busses, or cycling.

Finally, it was mentioned that for those closer to the outskirts of a town better cycling infrastructure, such as proper bike parking or shared electric bikes would be welcomed and encourage access to towns.

> "Kingsbridge needs to have some proper bike parking- if I could have somewhere to park my bike I would ride it there. Yes, or shared electric bikes would be good."
>
> **Young Farmers discussion group**

Chapter 2: The Potential of, and Challenges for, Rural Youth Services

As discussed above, access to needed services and social opportunities is a challenge for young people in rural areas. Youth centres, outreach workers and specialised youth clubs serve an essential role for young people, and this chapter will look at the services currently provided and how these fit with other local services such as schools. This chapter will then look at the further potential of youth centres and other venues, and finally at the challenges these services are facing to be able to meet the needs of young people.

The existing value of youth centres

We surveyed youth support workers to ask how they felt their service complimented other services in their area. **Most workers felt they were running activities related to Leisure and social opportunities (100%) and Soft skills development (75%),** whilst a significant number were also running activities on Education and training (66.7%), Physical health and wellbeing (62.5%), Mental health (50%), Employment advice/support (42.9% and Additional needs support (37.5%). **Few or no respondents felt they were providing activities related to Money advice (14.3%), Housing services or Legal advice (both 0%).**

When describing their services (Appendix A), they named a variety of activities they provide. These included: mentoring, lunch clubs, school assemblies, games consoles, food, music lessons, chill out space, tuck shop, a short Christian message, sessions based on age, adventures, pilgrimages, spiritual exploration, arts workshops in schools, surf lifesaving skills and techniques, sports activities, craft activities, pool, table tennis, drop-in sessions, holiday activities, inclusive spaces for people with additional learning needs such as autism and ADHD, carers groups and LGBTQ+ groups.

Figure 9
Activities provided by youth organisations surveyed

"The Bank Youth Project is a youth centre for young people aged 9-19 who live in and around Ashburton, Devon. Based in its own building, BYP provides a safe space where young people can engage in purposeful activity, relax, make friends, develop interests and skills, increase self-awareness, take on responsibility, seek confidential advice and support, and increase their understanding of their community and their involvement in it. Typically, BYP has about 200 members coming to drop-in evening sessions, staffed by youth workers, with attendance varying from 8 to 40 in an evening. BYP's mission is to empower and support children and young people to improve their life opportunities by helping them grow both as individuals and as members of the community."

The Bank Youth Project.

The survey respondents indicated that there isn't generally a common direct referral relationship with other support services. 25% of respondents said they refer to Additional needs support and Housing services, and only between 11% and 14% indicated they refer on to 6 other areas of support services. 0% indicated that they refer on to services around Leisure and social opportunities and Soft skills development, likely due to these being the primary areas of their own provision.

Again, it should be noted that 55.6% of youth workers surveyed felt that leisure and social opportunities were difficult to access in their area and 50% felt that soft skills development was difficult to access in their area. Therefore, highlighting the value of their provision.

"Do you feel your service compliments wider support service provision in these areas?"

- No
- Yes - we run activities on this
- Yes - we refer to support services on this
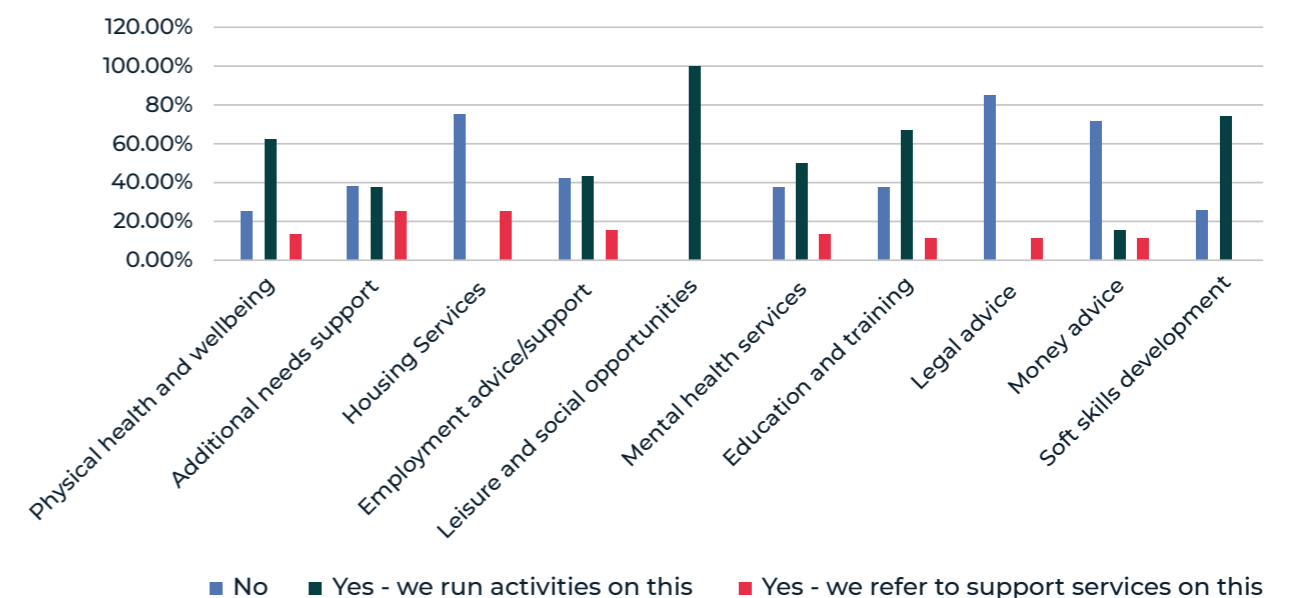
Figure 10
Services provided by organisations surveyed

As discussed in Chapter 1, socialising and sports are excellent ways for young people to develop resilience and thereby prevent mental health challenges. **Youth centres, amongst their many activities, are a place for socialising** and the youth workers make explicit decisions to foster an environment which is not just a place for young people to go, but which is actively developmental. Several youth workers indicated that their service is involved with reaching and supporting the most vulnerable, including providing space for those with additional needs.

> "The value of youth clubs, youth centres, youth activities is undervalued because they are seen as more of a childcare centre and they are just somewhere for a young person to go rather than somewhere for a young person to learn. . . .Even with sharing a pool cue at a sports club, that is a massive skill to learn. How to express that you want to have a go. . . .These sorts of places are places where young people learn those coping skills that will help them long term with the mental health, the mental wellbeing. And hopefully give them expression to share that."

Holsworthy Youth Chaplain

> "Feedback appears to suggest that having a safe and inclusive space that provides activities but also allows young people to choose what they do/don't want to join in with is important. Remembering it's their space. Minimal rules and some tolerance. Affordable, quality food and drink."

Holsworthy Youth Club

> "Our weekly youth group (soon to be twice weekly) reaches the more vulnerable in the community, though it is not exclusive to them. We support young people with a number of issues and we offer them safety, security and support."

The O6

It can be likely that young people living in rural areas have limited influences and horizons, and the activities which take place within the context of a youth club broaden interests of the young people who attend. Whether this is introducing them to music, sports or crafts, taking them on trips within or beyond the county or providing advice on careers and other important life decisions.

> "In order to attract young people to a group or activity, it needs to be 'cool' – for example a VR experience in Okehampton . . . Trips and adventures are very important for young people. The trip to Camino was hugely impactful on young people, we had about fifteen young people and I don't think they'll ever forget that experience."

On the Edge

> "There is almost nothing that a young person can walk to in our area outside of school. We are really pushing careers within school because that is the only advice they are going to get. . . .They are incredibly isolated..."

Holsworthy Youth Chaplain

Those youth support workers who operate in a more outreach capacity, for example being present in schools, **spoke of the power of being a familiar face and trusted. They advocated for strong visibility in schools and the relationships this develops,** and note that adults at school are often the first point of contact for help, especially when GPs knowledge is not always trusted and visits require a parent to become knowledgeable of any mental health challenges.

> "Being based in the college is a very effective route to reach young people as I can provide additional support that compliments the school structure and am included in the information sharing when needed. . . . [School] is where I connect with them.... They get to know who I am and that I am available.. . . .A school is the most strategic place you can be, and everything else builds on that. . .Schools are realising the value of youth work."

Holsworthy Youth Chaplain

Others indicated that they would pursue a presence in schools if funding allowed:

> "Our abiding concern is to reach those less advantaged young people in our communities. This is a good reason to work closely with the primary schools, and with the transition to secondary school. . . . One thing I would love to implement, if funding was available, is to provide a support person for the transition between primary and secondary school – a mentor that spends time in all schools in the area to be a constant/stable presence for young people"
>
> **On the Edge**

The further potential of youth centres and outreach workers

On providing other forms of advice and activities

As discussed in Chapter 1, only 11.1% of youth workers surveyed believe Housing services, Employment advice/support and Money advice are main needs and no youth workers felt legal advice was a main need. However, quotes implied that there is a potential need around these areas, especially housing.

Of youth support workers surveyed, 0% provide housing service advice and only 25% signpost around it. This is especially relevant as 62.5% of youth support workers surveyed identified wider housing advise services as difficult or very difficult to access in their area (and the remaining 37.5% being unsure of ease of access).

Similarly, a majority of youth workers stated that Additional needs support (62.5%) and employment advice (50%) are difficult or very difficult to access in their area. Youth workers were highly unsure about the availability of access to money advice and legal advice.

At the risk of asking youth centres to do too much, it must be considered whether there is wisdom in youth centres and outreach workers tailoring their activities to contributing around some of these other needs.

On supporting other services, including mental health

As shown in Figure 10 above, the youth worker respondents indicated that they do not generally have direct referral relationships with other support services. They did comment on how they were aware of the overstretched nature of services, but, it should be asked whether there could be a greater role for youth services to contribute to supporting young people in this way.

The youth workers relationship with other services was especially discussed with regards to mental health support services, such as CAMHS. It was felt that these services' waiting lists are prohibitive and are only able to deal with crisis scenarios. It has been discussed above how youth centres are safe spaces with familiar faces and trusting relationships with adults, leading to the development of resilience. This resilience is potentially preventative of mental health issues reaching crisis point.

One youth worker felt that a decentralised way of carrying out initial mental health assessments, without having to access the more crisis focused support services, is needed. They felt trained youth workers could serve this role.

> "[Competing the CAMHS form] You have to ask deeply personal stuff, so you need an adult that they trust. And then it goes into a system, and we don't know anything for six months. That causes the young person more stress because they don't know what is going on. It means that an assessment which could have identified 'we have mild anxiety, and this is how we can help' becomes, 'we now have mild anxiety, and we need to look at medication'. . . .CAMHS and other frameworks, there isn't that ability for initial assessment. Just because the capacity is overwhelmed. . . .If a young person is off school with anxiety and they have been diagnosed with that, we can mark them as ill. If they have not been diagnosed with that, they are unauthorised. . . . . I have a lot of young people that have decided that [anxiety] is what they have got and if we can't get a diagnosis, we can't refute that either."
>
> **Holsworthy Youth Chaplain**

The challenges of youth centres

As seen above the role of youth centres, and their potential, is of great importance. **However rural locations provide additional operational challenges, with travel and staff/volunteer recruitment.**

Youth centres and outreach workers can be stretched having to cover wide areas with minimal resource. There is an acceptance around the youth workers need to travel to where the demand is.

"Over into Cornwall people have been asking, I have had people up North towards Bideford asking. One of the down sides of this is how much travel you have to do in order to cover a rural area. It is about being quite strategic about where you are. A school is the most strategic place you can be"

Holsworthy Youth Chaplain

"Funding for a network of villages to have a youth worker that can cover all of them would be of great benefit"

On the Edge

Youth centres are reliant on a mixture of both staff and volunteers, both of whom are difficult to recruit, as shown in the quotes below:

"One of the reasons we have been so effective is having had a permanent/part time paid youth worker in the area. Since the departure of the youth worker, On the Edge are looking to take a group approach with multiple people running different activities. The lack of a permanent mentor makes for less of a connection. . . . Cost of accommodation and the isolation in rural areas makes it hard to recruit another student youth worker. . . . it is also hard to secure parent age volunteers"

On the Edge

"However, since COVID a lot of volunteers have not returned to support youth activity which has made provision extremely difficult."

The O6

Although the numbers attending the youth centres we spoke with are good, engaging young people also appears to be more of a challenge than it was, and not just due to transport concerns.

"Finding young people is a huge challenge – Covid and online life means that young people feel more self-sufficient at home and don't need to, 'mooch around the square.' . . . As young people want activities/groups to be 'cool', issues can arise when approaching young people at school, even if your organisation isn't associated with it"

On the Edge

The role and potential of 'other spaces'

Schools and colleges

Schools and colleges are an obvious starting point when thinking about getting messages to young people. Five of the youth support workers we surveyed said they directly receive referrals from, or visit, schools and it is discussed above how outreach workers being based in schools help with familiarity, trust and coordination – with schools in Torridge increasingly valuing the role of incorporating the Holsworthy Youth Chaplain. Additionally, young people we spoke with said they had received advice in school, for example via PSHE.

"School tells us about most things like in PSHE (Physical Social Health Education) they told us about mental health support and numbers we need to call if we need help"

Abbey, aged 14

Currently, school and college's ability to provide advice around services is stretched and several are overwhelmed, not least by the significant impact of Covid on young people. However, their role must be considered. **Schools and colleges are one of the hubs which young people attend, and could have a role in providing services which were otherwise described as hard to access.**

One insight provided by this research was that due to the transport difficulties of travelling to and from school, young people we spoke with said that they could be 'stuck' there when class and bus times did not align. One young person we spoke with used this time to help herself and others.

"Anyway at sixth form, sometimes my lessons finished early and I didn't want to pay the £8 to get back, so I asked teachers what I could do. . . . [regarding time as a teaching assistant] the pupils were eager to talk and get info and they told me they were confident in talking to me rather than a teacher - although obviously I would pass certain issues on to teachers. Young people don't like speaking to adults or parents, rather someone they can relate to a bit more."

Kate, aged 19

Village halls and libraries

Similarly to schools, the idea of using existing infrastructure to spread services into rural areas was discussed.

"Perhaps there could be an info centre for young people or a section in the library with leaflets where they can teach financial things. You could put information up in village halls and noticeboards, churches, and schools as a way to get the info out there locally without having to use technology all the time. There are enough village halls between Dartmouth and Kingsbridge that could be used for this.. . . . It would be nice to have some kind of leisure centre between Kingsbridge and Dartmouth for something to do and keep fit and healthy."

Amy, aged 19

There was even discussion about using these spaces for leisure such as nightclubs or gyms.

"We would use Village Halls but there's usually a curfew of 11pm or 12am and neighbours around the halls so you don't like to disturb anyone." Young farmers discussion group"

Young Farmers Discussion Group

Figure 11

The location of some village halls and community spaces near Dartmouth and Kingsbridge

Chapter 3: Online connectivity and confidence

Given the challenges of transport to access services in a rural setting, it is understandable to see remote and digital provision as a part of the solution. During this research, we asked young people and service providers directly about accessing services online.
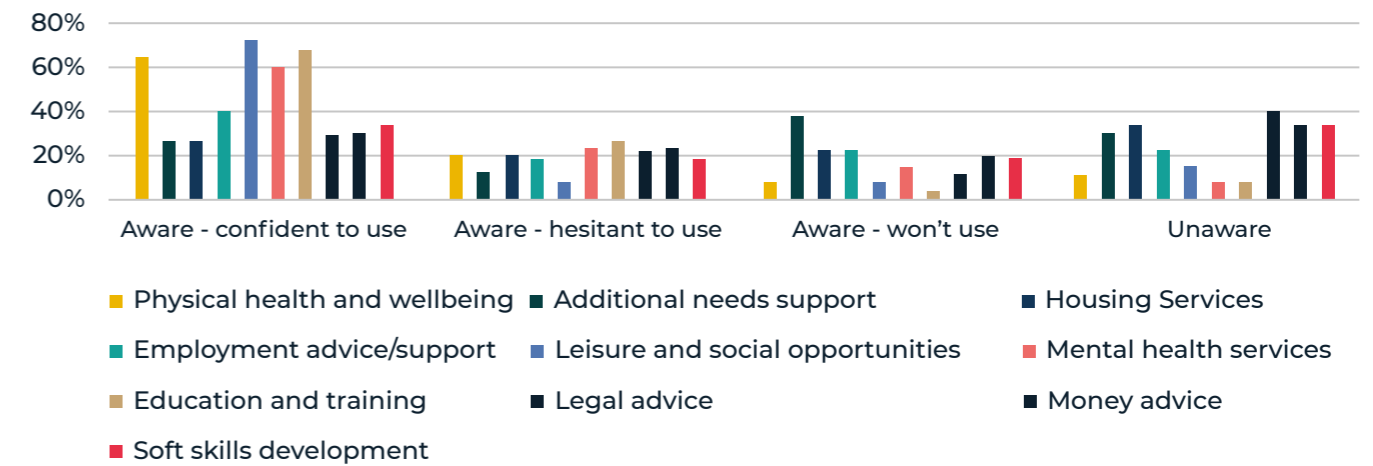
When asking young people how they felt accessing services digitally there was generally a medium level of confidence (Figure 12), with between 57% and 70% of those surveyed being confident accessing 4 areas: Leisure and social opportunities (70.4%), Education and training (64.3%), Physical health and wellbeing services (62.1%) and Mental health services (57.1%). The services most individuals were least confident to use were also the services most were unaware of, those of Legal advice, Money advice and Housing services. Many young people surveyed were also unaware of services for soft skills development and additional needs support.

All services, with the exception of Leisure and social opportunities and Additional needs support had a similar number of respondents being hesitant to use (between 17.9% and 25%). The outlier of Leisure and social opportunities can likely be explained as people are familiar with socialising remotely.

The figures for 'Aware – won't use' are perhaps unrepresentative due to the question being open to interpretation, people may be stating they will not use because they personally do not have the need (e.g. for additional needs support or housing services) rather than not wanting to digitally access the service.
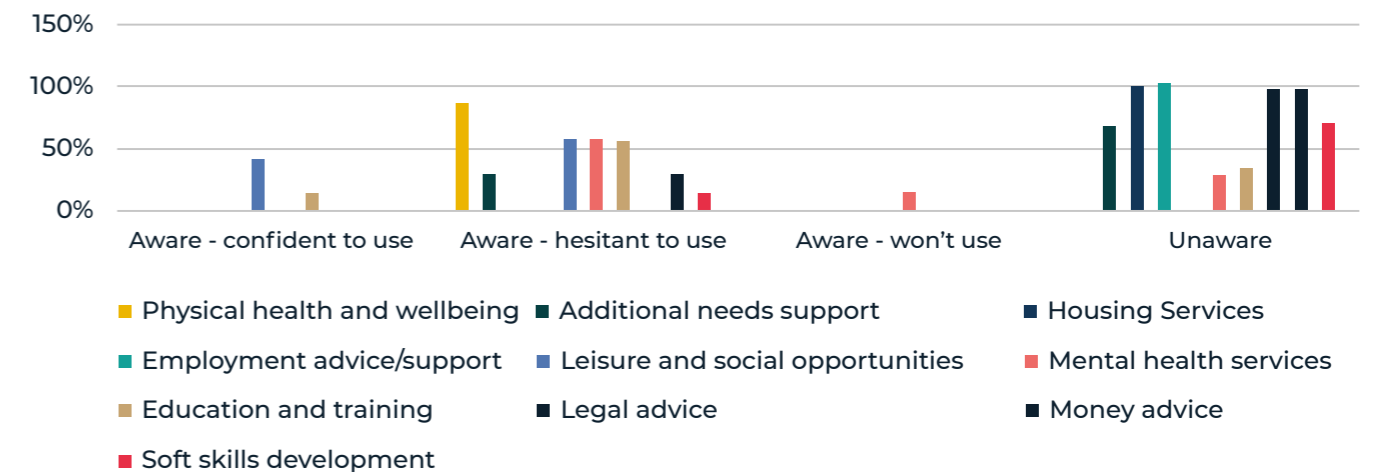
How do you feel about accessing these support services digitally, now or in the future?

Legend:
- Physical health and wellbeing
- Additional needs support
- Housing Services
- Employment advice/support
- Leisure and social opportunities
- Mental health services
- Education and training
- Legal advice
- Money advice
- Soft skills development

Figure 12
Young people's views on digital accessing services

In contrast, youth workers generally held a view that young people are either unaware of or hesitant to use services remotely, with the potential exception of Leisure and social opportunities (Figure 13).

In your experience, how do young people living in rural areas feel about accessing these support services digitally?

Legend:
- Physical health and wellbeing
- Additional needs support
- Housing Services
- Employment advice/support
- Leisure and social opportunities
- Mental health services
- Education and training
- Legal advice
- Money advice
- Soft skills development

Figure 13
Youth workers views on digital access

Conversations and comments from young people and youth workers provide some insight into why people are confident or hesitant.

Firstly, **internet connectivity, access to a suitable device and digital literacy should not be taken for granted in a rural setting.**

> "During lockdown we were giving out 3G dongles because so many families just don't have internet."
>
> **Holsworthy Youth Chaplain**

> "When you log on [to my course], there's a bar to show your progress but there was a big red bar there for a while and I didn't know if I'd done something wrong on the course or what it meant- I found out from someone on the course that the tutor had left and that's what it meant. But it was there for weeks before I found out and I was worried so more face-to-face contact would be good."
>
> **Amy, aged 19**

It can be assumed that due to recent Covid regulations leading to young people accessing education remotely there would be a familiarity and comfort with this approach. **However, young people may have remote access fatigue or simply feel more comfort holding conversations in person,** whether those conversations are for educational support, mental health support or simply socialising.

> "Zoom groups were good when young people couldn't meet at all, but the pandemic over saturated the style of meeting – young people are much more interested in meeting in person."
>
> **On the Edge**

> "[Regarding an online NVQ course] It would be great if there could be help with transport or even meet halfway in a café or something to meet tutors in person and go through the work."
>
> **Amy, aged 19**

> "Services started going online with Covid and has in many cases stayed that way, which is not the same as meeting people face to face. Digital services are not good for discussing personal issues."
>
> **The Bank Youth Project**

Despite acknowledging the benefits of face-to-face support, where available, digital and remote access to services is going to continue to be a necessity. **In order to encourage confidence in accessing these services, it is important that young people know what to expect beforehand,** for example through YouTube introduction videos.

> *"[Re: Accessing Kooth. A digital mental health and wellbeing support service and community] It is scary for a young person to go for any new thing. They are happy to go online to look at a takeaway or to play a game but when it is something important, they don't know what is going to happen. There is so much uncertainty that they are just not going to want to engage. If there were education sessions or a YouTube video....I suscept that would increase uptake because you've taken away a lot of the uncertainty and a lot of the fear. . . .They are very digitally competent, but only when it is stuff they want to do."*
>
> **Holsworthy Youth Chaplain**

Finally, young people must feel safe and secure online, whether that is fear around privacy or about cyberbullying.

> *"There is the thing about parents monitoring. Even if it is a positive thing, they may not want mum and dad to know about it yet."*
>
> **Holsworthy Youth Chaplain**

> *"Young people would benefit from some online training that focuses on the safe and unsafe things to do online – young people know how to use technology but not necessarily what you should and shouldn't do with it."*
>
> **On the Edge**

Conclusion

By listening to the concerns and experiences of young people and youth support workers, it is clear that access to support services of all types is a challenge for those living in rural areas. The majority of youth support workers felt that 6 out of 10 support service areas were difficult to access (Table 1 and Figure 7). And transport was the topic brought up most frequently by young people, with cost and availability heavily discussed, including in relation to school and college.

The areas of greatest need named by youth support workers were Mental health services and Leisure and social opportunities with 77.8% of youth workers naming these as top needs. With detailed discussion by youth support workers on how socialising is an essential means for developing soft skills and resilience which can help prevent mental health issues. Young people themselves clearly recognised the value of socialising and being active.

The Covid-19 pandemic and overwhelmed mental health services add to the issue.

Other needs were not as clearly named, but their importance was indicated as becoming apparent for specific individuals or upon a situation arising, such as around additional needs support, housing or money advice. The lack of easy access means people don't know what they don't know, for example around employment aspirations, and this includes knowledge on how to find support around their needs.

Youth centres and support workers provide a wide variety of valuable activities and a range of different support at present. However, they focus their delivery on Leisure and social opportunities and Soft skills development, and seek to create welcoming inclusive spaces. In general, they are currently not strongly linked to referral routes, other than their involvement with schools, but there is potential for discussion to take place as to whether they could serve a role in providing initial mental health assessments or supporting further with other support needs.

Recruitment of staff and volunteers is a challenge for rural youth support organisations.

Schools and colleges could have a greater role in providing services which were otherwise described as hard to access, as they are hubs which young people attend and can be subsequently 'stuck' there when class and bus times did not align. Youth workers having a presence in schools, as a place to become a familiar face and coordinate with the school was touted as the most impactful place to be. Being located in schools also reduces the need for youth support workers to travel between rural locations.

When asking about accessing services digitally, there was generally confidence in socialising but a medium level of confidence and indications of hesitancy accessing other support services. Young people may have remote access fatigue or simply feel more comfortable holding conversations in person. In order to encourage confidence in accessing services online, it is important they know what to expect beforehand and feel safe and secure. Finally, internet connectivity, access to a suitable device and digital literacy should not be taken for granted in a rural setting.

Appendices

*Note: Organisations with asterisk were also interviewed.

Organisation	Reach	Description
Holsworthy Community Christian Youth Chaplaincy*	Holsworthy and district	• Chaplaincy and pastoral support in the local community college for 11-16 year olds including weekly mentoring, lunch clubs, school assemblies for all school. Up to 500 students reached at assemblies, other activities reaching 10-20 students weekly. • Additionally supports Holsworthy Youth Club as a volunteer, with years 6-8 and year 8+. This includes games consoles, food, music lessons, chill out space. Between 30-70 young people attend weekly. • Halwill Baptist Church, years 5-6 and year 7+. Includes games, tuck shop, short Christian message. Approximately 40 young people attend fortnightly. • Outreach events, such as county shows.
Chagford Education and Leisure Trust incorporating the 'On the Edge Youth Project'*	Chagford, Gidleigh, Throwleigh, Drewsteignton	• Serve Year 6 and upwards since 2006 - sessions based on age, special interest, adventures, pilgrimages, spiritual exploration. • Provide some detached work and pastoral involvement
The Helen Foundation	Teignbridge	• Support young people aged 7-19 in their experiences of and aspirations in the arts.
Bideford Bay Surf Lifesaving Club	Westward Ho!, Torridge	• Provide surf lifesaving skills and lifesaving techniques to all children aged 8 to 16 as well as adults
Fenix Youth Club	Feniton, and surrounding villages	• Youth club for school years 6-9. Includes sports activities, craft activities, pool, table tennis, PlayStation, tuck shop. With approximately 30 young people per session
The 06	Ottery St Mary and East Devon	• Run their own drop-in sessions for Youth Groups, mentoring service and holiday activities. • Also work with other youth clubs, churches, community and schools in the area.

Holsworthy Youth Club	Holsworthy and surrounding 16 parishes	• Youth club for school year 6+. Inclusive environment with many young people with additional learning needs, Autism & ADHD. • Additional Support & Carers group. Starting LGBTQ group. Typically, around 80-90 attending per week and 200 since reopening in September 2021.
The Bank Youth Project	Ashburton and surrounding areas (e.g. Buckfastleigh, Landscove)	• Youth centre for young people aged 9-19 who live in and around Ashburton. Typically, BYP has about 200 members coming to drop-in evening sessions, staffed by youth workers, with attendance varying from 8 to 40 in an evening.
The Base Youth Club	Newton Abbot	• Run a Friday night term time session for young people aged 7yrs to the end of year six (11 yrs). We have around 40-45 young people attend each week.

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