



# The State of the Youth and Play Sector in Manchester: Risks and Challenges During Covid-19



## **Foreword - Cllr Rahman - Executive Member for Skills, Culture and Leisure**

Since the launch of Young Manchester in 2017, Manchester City Council has worked hard to ensure we break down the barriers facing the children and young people in our City, increasing the opportunities available to them to support their personal, and social development.

Manchester City Council is working alongside Young Manchester, and the sector to ensure that the approach is place-based, engaging with partners across youth, play, sport, leisure and culture, looking to provide children and young people with the best opportunities available.

Whilst I am proud at the way the children and young people's sector has responded during this crisis, it is also clear from this research that without significant support and investment, there is a risk of seeing closures within the sector; the research highlights that 80% of the sector have seen a financial impact during this crisis, with 49% at risk of closure.

The loss of these organisations is a direct loss to children and young people, those organisations provide vital information, support, advice, guidance and opportunities which protect their wellbeing.

Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People will serve to return children and young people to the forefront, ensuring that they are not lost during this pandemic, that we are still aligning to our strategic priorities of listening and hearing their voices.

I look forward to working alongside the partnership to ensure that we have the right partners who can provide the very best for our children and young people to be healthy, safe, successful, but most importantly, happy.

# Executive Summary

**Young Manchester is a dynamic children's charity working to create outstanding opportunities for children and young people – harnessing the best that the city has for those who need it most. We are place-based and work with over 100 partners across Manchester.**



In the last two years, we have invested significantly in children and young people by partnering with key stakeholders including Manchester City Council, the #iwill Fund<sup>1</sup> and Manchester Health and Care Commission to provide a varied offer of universal open access youth and play for children and young people. This is complemented by targeted support, focusing on outcomes for vulnerable young people in areas such as mental health and well-being and reducing anti-social behaviour, as well as support for families at-risk during holiday periods.

Our place-based approach means that we also build capacity, convene and drive networks, provide training and share information across the city. We are a catalyst for radical change, creating the conditions for the sector to collaborate and help children and young people to thrive.

Through our partners we have reached over 25,000 children and young people since April 2018, including supporting over 8,000 to engage in social action, leading local projects in their own communities.

<sup>1</sup>made possible through joint investment of £50m by The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.

## Introduction

The announcement made by the Prime Minister on 18th March 2020 to close schools, colleges and nurseries indefinitely across England in line with similar measures taken in Wales and Scotland and, soon after, in Northern Ireland, to tackle the spread of coronavirus, was quickly followed by plans for the whole of the UK to enter into lockdown the following week, restricting movement outside of the home.

This briefing reflects discussions that Young Manchester has had with our partners across the city in the weeks that have followed and a survey with partners during the week commencing 4<sup>th</sup> April completed by 69 partners engaging with children and young people across Manchester. Our ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders including the Local Authority, adds to and complements our understanding of the current situation. This has enabled us to report on the impact that the pandemic has had, and is expected to have, on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people as well as the wider sustainability of the youth and play sector.

Although the situation for children and young people, and the organisations which support them, is rapidly evolving, the gravity of the current crisis is becoming clearer and is beyond refute:

Without prompt, significant and sustained support and investment into the sector, the pandemic will result in serious and long-term damage to children and young people's lives.

We have already responded through the development of the Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People, details of which are provided, below. However, much more is needed, and quickly, to mitigate the risks identified in this document. We look forward to working with local and national partners, including funders and national government, to ensure that children and young people are at the heart of our collective response to, and recovery from, COVID-19.

## Our response to the COVID-19 pandemic

### The Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People

Our immediate response to the pandemic was the development of the Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People which brings together organisations providing outstanding opportunities for children and young people in Manchester through youth work, play, arts, culture, heritage and sport.

#### The partnership is focused on addressing three core challenges for the sector:

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- **Safety of young people – how can we support young people to be safe and healthy (physically and mentally) in the coming months**
  - **Business continuity – how can organisations ensure that they can stay in business, with significant financial and contractual challenges ahead**
  - **Business transformation – how can organisations change what they are doing to meet need with restrictions on usual delivery models, using their assets and expertise**
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The partnership, and its work, is constantly growing and evolving, meeting the needs of children and young people and the sector, and ensuring that this work is aligned to wider activity locally, regionally and nationally.

Over 30 partners across Manchester have now signed up to be part of the Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People, and activity across a number of work streams is now in progress. See Appendix 2 – Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People for a summary of the activity taking place under each workstream. More information on the work of The Partnership is featured within the separate briefing document 'Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People'.

Key findings from the online survey and discussions with partners on the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people and on the wider sector



## Partners are concerned for the wellbeing and safety of children and young people.

### Key concerns raised were:

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- Increased levels of risk for young people, especially those most vulnerable to exploitation. In addition, our own research and experience has proved that two of the biggest drivers for exploitation and engaging in gangs are poverty and violence in the home, both of which are on the rise.
  - Increased risks of mental health issues due to isolation and reduced support. This is supported by our mental health colleagues in the VCSEs who are noticing an increase in discussions around self-harm, suicide ideation and suicide attempts. Similarly, we are beginning to see young people being affected by the loss of loved ones, particularly at the moment, grand-parents and older relatives.
  - Increased risks to young people because they are at home. This includes witnessing and experiencing domestic violence, being exposed to substance misuse and alcohol abuse and increased levels of poverty as parents and carers' jobs are lost or become vulnerable.
  - Increased risks to young people at times of transitions being exacerbated due to a lack of support. With services disrupted, suspended or stopped, new transitions that we need to understand and respond to include the impact of transitions into secondary schools, FE and HE without support for over six months as well as proposed transitions into work within an uncertain economy.
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## Those already disadvantaged and vulnerable will suffer most

### Key concerns raised were:

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- Additional strain and pressures on families in poverty – further impacting on their ability to meet basic needs. Within two weeks, a central helpline managed by the Local Authority has received over 1,000 calls for urgent support with food with over 50% of them from households with children.
  - Increased anxiety and inequity owing to the cancellation of the 2020 GCSE, AS and A' Level examinations. Research shows that pupils from low socio-economic and / or BAME backgrounds are more likely to be subject to unconscious bias by teachers, resulting in underestimation, which is not likely to be remedied by the option to re-sit exams or appeal grades due to associated financial implications.
  - Alternative approaches to engagement not reaching the most vulnerable including children and young people with SEND. Despite using a range of tools to engage with young people including social media and video conferencing, partners estimate that only 30% of young people who would normally engage in face-to-face activities are being reached, citing accessibility as the biggest barrier for households.
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## The youth and play sectors are critical to mitigating the challenges children and young people face but 80% of partners have seen an immediate impact on their finances, with 49% under threat of closure

### Key concerns raised were:

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- A sustained lockdown and restrictions on movement resulting in reduced services or likely closure for many with partners concerned that their organisation will not survive the end of the pandemic.
  - Even if the organisation is able to survive, relationships with young people will need to be built from scratch especially if they need to close temporarily or if they are unable to maintain contact with young people.
  - Partners who had demonstrated resilience by reducing their reliance on grant funding have seen cuts to most if not all of their earned income and income from corporate sponsors. In addition to reductions in funding in all income types, 59% have lost fundraising opportunities e.g. through event cancellations.
  - Partners who are furloughing staff, in order to receive temporary relief, are reducing their capacity to respond to the crisis and its aftermath compromising their ability to rethink and reposition themselves post COVID-19.
  - That future funds will be diverted towards the COVID-19 response reducing what is left for other ongoing vital support and reducing provision for core costs.
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## Recommendations

We asked our partners what they need and what they want to see, and their responses were clear.

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1. Investment in the youth and play sector - Whilst we have made progress in Manchester, current funding levels do not meet the need required, and we know this need will grow in the coming months.
  2. Accessible and high-quality digital engagement - Immediate investment should be focused on how we remove the barriers to access and inclusion for all young people to engage in the digital offer, ensuring that current digital engagement is quality-assured.
  3. Infrastructure - Funding strategies and government investment should ensure adequate support for infrastructure at local levels, using existing organisations and structures alongside growing the reach of infrastructure models where needed (e.g. Young People's Foundations).
  4. Support to build back, better - Partners locally and nationally have been calling for further support for the youth and play sector and welcomed the announcement that £500m will be invested in youth services in October 2019. This funding is needed now more than ever, and should be ring-fenced for post-COVID-19, but aligned to the new needs of children and young people and the sector.
  5. A coordinated response which meets local need - National initiatives, either programmes or funding, should be coordinated in a way which allows for engagement at a local level whilst not creating additional barriers for place-based and thematic organisations.
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All work should also ensure that it includes the voices of children and young people.

## About the Young People's Foundations and Local Infrastructure

Young Manchester is a founding member of the YPF Trust, a national body supporting the development of Young People's Foundations across the UK, supported by John Lyon's Charity.

The model of the Young People's Foundations was developed as a response to the current pressures on the Children and Young People sector. YPFs are newly registered independent charities supporting any group that works with Children & Young People on a place-based basis with a trustee board that is representative of each local area.

We share with them a commitment to inclusivity: we engage with any group across all sectors with an interest in positive outcomes for children and young people; *collaboration*: we do not directly deliver

services and we encourage collaboration between our partners; and *long-term*: we are here for the long-term; past the traditional three or four-year terms of funding programmes.

Through the last few weeks, the value of local infrastructure has been made clear – the ability to coordinate local activity, build capacity and partnerships and use established networks has been critical to the response in Manchester both in the youth and play sector but also more widely via our local CVS.

We have seen the benefits of infrastructure in other areas too, including the London Boroughs supported by Young People's Foundations, and areas with strong regional youth work units and Arts Council bridge organisations.

Infrastructure is vital, and any response (both short and long-term) must provide funding to ensure that this is part of the funding picture.



# ■ The Safety and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

The immediate risks to children and young people in Manchester reflect the wider health concerns of the country – we need to ensure that they are protected from COVID-19, and they are protecting those most vulnerable around them.

Beyond this immediate health risk, partners have flagged a number of concerns, with the safety and wellbeing of the children and young people they support at the forefront of their minds.

When asked how the pandemic is impacting their organisation, the top three concerns from partners were about the children and young people they work with:

1. **The wellbeing of children and young people (91%)**
2. **The safety of children and young people (84%)**
3. **That they are unable to support children and young people (84%)**

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[We are] very worried about the impact on our children, the loss of loved ones adding to general stresses, living in very distressed family units, lack of resilience in ordinary times let alone now, drug use, poverty, no food, those families who have working parents are now even worse off, laid off, no income, universal credit being so slow, overcrowded and poor quality housing etc. etc. Simple things that we take for granted, gardens, food, structure in our lives - we are all feeling disrupted but for some children the toxic stress of lockdown will have a lifetime impact. Concerned that there will be an immediate response but no long term follow up and not enough mental health service already.”

When asked directly, 100% of respondents to the survey said they were either concerned or extremely concerned about the children and young people they support.

#### **Key concerns raised were:**

- **Increased levels of risk for young people, especially those most vulnerable to exploitation e.g. involvement in County Lines and criminal behaviour**
- **Increased risks of mental health issues due to isolation and reduced support**
- **A lack of services impacting further on already very vulnerable children, young people and families – with issues around food, housing and paying bills being exacerbated**
- **Increased risks to young people because they are at home – domestic abuse, discrimination and emotional abuse (e.g. for LGBT+ young people)**
- **Significant reductions in life skills, aspirations and development, especially for the most vulnerable young people**

## **Mental health and wellbeing**

The immediate and long-term mental health of children and young people is of huge concern for partners in Manchester.

In the initial weeks of the pandemic, specialist CAMHS services, statutory social care and education settings saw a decrease in the referral rates and reporting of safeguarding issues.

There has been recognition that these phenomena are not a good sign and are unlikely to represent a decrease in issues, rather how changes in circumstances, communication channels, and referral and escalation routes has made it more difficult than ever for young people to register their concerns and access support, and for young people to be visible to services.

For our VCSE partners working in these areas, they initially reported a slight decrease in the levels of distress for some young people as they became distracted by school closures and new levels of autonomy and self-directed work. This was very quickly displaced by the increased level of distress caused by isolation, home situations and the removal of their everyday coping mechanisms (walking to school, talking to friends, routine, a familiar situation to react to relatively safely).

Our mental health colleagues in the VCSEs are experiencing similar levels of risk and safeguarding and are beginning to notice an increase in discussions around self-harm, suicide ideation and suicide attempts. When added to the complexity of what support is available and how (e.g. with A&E and 111 less available as the default option), we believe that we must address the increased levels of psycho-social distress that require short term de-escalation and stabilising.

Anxiety levels are also reported to be rising. For those in services, many are continuing to be supported, but for many more these levels of anxiety are not known to services, either because young people were managing them in familiar circumstances and environments that no longer exist, or because they are new and related to the health concerns about the virus or the increased pressures many find themselves under due to social isolation. These feelings of anxiety need to be supported with relevant normalising messaging and self-help techniques, but some will inevitably become longer term issues, that the system will need to deal with.

## Loss and trauma due to losing loved ones

Similarly, we are beginning to see young people being affected by the loss of loved ones, particularly at the moment, grand-parents and older relatives. The trauma surrounding these losses is exacerbated by the feelings of survivor guilt, the fear of having infected relatives by carrying the virus without displaying symptoms and not being able to look after, care for and attend the funerals of loved ones.

This issue is likely to grow over coming months and many young people will cope. However, for a significant number the trauma surrounding this period of time will become a more serious issue requiring very specific young person-centred, trauma informed, psycho-social support, an approach which does not currently exist within the system and will need development and investment.

## Mental health and wellbeing in the home

Many young people are also dealing with increased, often invisible trauma in the home, exacerbated by social isolation measures.

This includes witnessing and experiencing domestic abuse and violence, being exposed to substance misuse and alcohol abuse and increased levels of poverty as parents and carers' jobs are lost or become vulnerable.

Again, many young people will need additional support now and in the future which is young person centred and focuses on their experiences and how they have impacted on their health and wellbeing.

Some young people are not able to cope with these increased pressures at home and are breaking the social isolation rules, leaving the home and making their own arrangements over this period of time. These young people are particularly at risk of exploitation and they are now more hidden than ever e.g. due to lack of engagement with school, youth groups, sports clubs etc.

We need, therefore, to find new ways of working across sectors to identify where these young people are and how we can identify and support them.

## Transitions

Transitions have always been hotspots for young people's mental health and wellbeing; transitions across school settings or into the workplace (or not), and also transitions in terms of identity, gender, sexuality, transitions into independent living, negotiating relationships, new sexual experiences, exposure to substances and alcohol.

All of these significant life changes and more had specialist services and often key VCSEs colleagues supporting young people through them. Now, however, not only are these services disrupted, suspended or stopped, there are new transitions that we need to identify, understand and respond to, in order to prevent more issues for these young people further down the line. These include:

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- Transitions into secondary school without having had exams or support since March 2020
  - Transitions into work where there are fewer jobs and an uncertain economy
  - Transitions into FE and HE, without support for over six months.
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It is critical that we look ahead to the issues that young people not only face in the very short term, but will be facing as we recover, or heaven forbid, enter second or third waves of the pandemic. We need to be agile, work across sectors and co-develop preventative plans to reduce the risks in the future and support our young people.

## Young people, exploitation and criminality

Sadly, the current crisis is creating the conditions for an upsurge in young people being impacted by violent crime. Our research suggests two of the biggest drivers are poverty and violence in the home, both of which are on the rise. As the Home Secretary recently noted, young people who are feeling isolated and not at school are also more vulnerable to being groomed by gangs.

Through a recent project exploring young people's experiences of youth violence (in partnership with the Community Safety Partnership and Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit), young people in Manchester have told us the substitute relationships and sense of respect provided by gangs helps put some of them on a path towards violence. Critically, they also told us that the antidote is long term relationships they can trust and depend on - most typically provided by relatable youth workers.

The loss of youth organisations at this time could sever relationships with young people that are difficult to pick back up in future. Short term investment now, in keeping capacity that engages young people remotely, could prevent a much steeper cost to them and society in the long term.

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**Biggest challenge is keeping hold of them - I fear that we are going to see a lot of drop off over the coming weeks and months because we aren't able to engage with them (and in turn them engage with each other) face-to-face. We will need to focus our work on re-establishing relationships and groups once on the other side”**

Partners are also reporting that young people are still going outside, and are at risk themselves both from COVID-19, passing on the virus and wider risks to health and safety.

In Manchester, we are working across the VCSE sector and local authority to identify risky areas and vulnerable young people on the streets, supporting

them to go home, and providing support and signposting where required. But as time progresses, more young people will go outside, and many for good reason when the most unsafe place for them is at home.

We must collectively support these young people, and ensure that we are meeting their needs through local services.

## The most disadvantaged impacted further - Poverty

Poverty acts as the backdrop to the lives of many of Manchester's children and young people, with 45% of children living below the poverty line. The pandemic places additional strain and pressures on children, young people and families in poverty - further impacting on their ability to meet basic needs.

For example, there are 28,276 children attending Manchester schools who are eligible for benefit (means tested) related free school meals. Schools are expected to continue to provide free school meals to eligible children while the school is closed or only open for certain groups of children. This is being managed differently by different schools. Manchester has launched a hardship scheme for cash grants for school meals that has received 3,000 applications.

Each day the central helpline managed by the Local Authority receives calls from people needing urgent support with food. The number of these requests increases every day. The latest data says that 1,015 requests have been received and 531 of these are households with children present.

Youth and Play Providers have supported this cause with food deliveries at a very local level and also emphasise the need to support families to access the support that they are entitled to.

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**“We are concerned more broadly about the impact of this crisis on our communities, knowing that pandemics and other similar crises often hurt those poorest, hardest and for longer”**

## The most disadvantaged impacted further - Education

The cancellation of the 2020 GCSE, AS and A' Level examinations due to COVID-19 poses serious concerns in terms of the longer term impact for young people.

The combination of teacher assessment and predicted grades, along with a ranking system, is not likely to account for the underestimation of particular groups. The removal of a final examination also removes any autonomy from the pupils themselves to affect their grades.

We know that pupils from low socio-economic and/or BAME backgrounds are more likely to be subject to unconscious bias by teachers. This is evidenced

in the 2016 paper 'Stereotyped at seven? Biases in teachers' judgements of pupils' ability' which details how teachers are less likely to assess a pupil from a low socioeconomic background as having a high-level ability in reading or maths, even when previous exam results indicate as such.

Stating that pupils can potentially re-sit GCSE/A' Levels in the next academic year is not accessible for all pupils as an alternative and is not an equitable solution. Not only does it hold pupils back in terms of time (accessing jobs, FE, HE etc.) it also poses financial implications in terms of having to be supported by family finances for a longer period of time, along with the prospect of fees associated with appeals.

From our partners' conversations young people, we know that this is a huge concern for them, increases their levels of anxiety and stress as they worry about their futures.

## Alternative approaches to engagement and the digital inclusion challenge

The range of compounding factors, especially for some of our most vulnerable young people, is a key concern - and partners are concerned that they are failing to reach those children and young people.

Our partners are using a range of tools to engage with young people, including:

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- Online via social media (73%)
  - Group engagement online e.g. through zoom/hangouts (60%)
  - Individual engagement via phone (58%)
  - Sending activity packs to homes (47%)
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However, partners estimate that in total we are only reaching 30% of young people who would normally engage in face-to-face activities.

Digital services can be a great way to engage young people, and in the current circumstances can be a hugely valuable tool in ensuring we maintain contact.

However, this digital offer is not available to all, due to lack of accessibility (e.g. young people with SEND) and limited financial resources - many households don't have access to the right technology (laptops, tablets, phones) or access to Wi-Fi or mobile data.

Digital inclusion is an issue across society, and well beyond the youth and play sector, but it impacts on children and young people massively, especially with schools currently closed.

In the face of a country-wide lockdown, it is understandable that a majority of schools (primary and secondary) are supporting pupils by assigning learning via online platforms. While supporting pupils remotely is a challenge in itself, it also presents a much greater problem in how best to support children and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds - a group less likely to have access to equipment such as laptops and tablets, and in some households no access to internet data.

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We are a face to face organisation and are now purely working digitally with young people. Our young people do not have access to the internet. Some do not have access to a computer. If they do they are sharing this with many other people in their household. Staff are having to very quickly learn to adapt and offer new ways of working”

A 2018 study from the Sutton Trust revealed that over a third of parents with children aged 5-16 reported that their child had no access to their own device (laptop, tablet etc) on which to access the internet and online learning. Further research, in the recently released ONS report: 'Exploring the UK's digital divide', found that 700,000 11-18 year-olds have no internet access at home via a computer or tablet, with a further 60,000 having no home access to the internet at all.

With Manchester ranking 5 out of 326 Local Authorities in England, where 1 is most deprived, it is reasonable to assume that many of the children and young people in our city are at risk of falling deeper into the educational attainment gap without access to the equipment required for digital learning and support.

One of our partners, RECLAIM, reported that of the 70 young people (aged 12+) they are currently working with, they have identified at least 15 that do not have sufficient access to a device that would allow them to sustain online learning (set by school) through the lockdown period, and beyond. And that figure is likely to be higher, in reality, as some young people understandably choose to hide or mask the problem to avoid feelings of embarrassment or shame.

The digital solutions for young people over the last few weeks have been hugely beneficial for many. Creative opportunities and online support has been made available across sectors and in many different forms – there is a lot out there.

However, whilst this has been amazing, we do need to pause and reflect on how we use digital solutions:

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- Are practitioners sufficiently trained?
  - What are the increased risks around data protection and safeguarding that need to be considered?
  - How can different approaches be tailored to reach specific cohorts often hidden and excluded?
  - How do we address the needs of the young people who are not digitally engaged or able to access these opportunities, who maybe don't own a device or live in circumstances that are conducive to them using them?
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There are some agencies in Greater Manchester that are leading the way with digital support for young people in mental health and are engaging them in the design and delivery of targeted safe digital solutions. These can be capitalised on in the short term, but could also inform a more agile and fit for purpose system for the future of our young people.

## Children and young people's voices

A focus on crisis and hierarchy of need is critical at the moment, and we would support efforts to prioritise children and young people's safety and emotional wellbeing.

We should also, at the same time, maintain our principles of youth voice and co-design, ensuring that young people are involved in decisions which impact on them and shape their services – because that is their right, and because we know those services will be better as a result.

Services should continue to champion children and young people, and place their views and experiences at the heart of what they do.

# ■ The sustainability of the youth and play sector

The youth and play sector has a critical role to play in addressing the issues outlined above, however the sector is at significant risk.

The immediate and long-term impact of the pandemic on youth and play organisations in Manchester cannot be underestimated. We are in danger of permanently losing a number of organisations providing vital and high quality services, whilst others will be significantly harmed, needing years to build back to their current position, let alone the position that we need them to be in to meet local need.

#### **Urgent action is required now.**

80% of partners have reported that the pandemic has had an immediate impact on their finances, with 67% concerned that staff will lose jobs and 49% reporting that they are concerned that they will have to close their organisation.

#### **Further to this:**

- 30% have seen a reduction in donations
- 28% have lost private sector funding
- 33% have lost grant funding
- 59% have lost fundraising opportunities (e.g. through events), with 17% having lost deposits or received penalties for cancelling events/venues that didn't happen

One partner has reported that they have lost over £350,000 of income over the last few weeks, including the cancellation of fundraising events, suspension of corporate partnerships and loss of venue hire income. They face significant reductions in their provision and work force to ensure they remain a viable charity.

Partners have genuine concerns that they won't be around to see the end of COVID-19, let alone support the substantial work needed to build back.

**We asked partners how they think the pandemic will impact on them in the next 6-12 months' time. Responses include:**

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“I think we will [be] offering a reduced Service or face closure”

“We will have to close”

“I worry that anything over 6 months we would close”

“High chance of closure”

“We will struggle to maintain delivery, and may have to cut back. There is likely to be a cliff edge of funding ending March 2021”

“over 50% of projects will close down because of lack of funding”

“Put it in severe danger of closure”

**Beyond closure and severe cuts, partners highlighted the impacts on children and young people of reduced services, now and in the coming year:**

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“The organisation will need to close. Either permanently or for the duration of the pandemic, if the organisation can retain the senior staff. we will have lost all relationships with young people and need to start again from scratch.”

“We are losing a considerable amount of expertise on safeguarding and child criminal exploitation as we will be making these staff redundant as one of the cancelled events paid for this work.”

Within these challenging circumstances, partners are responding with creativity and dynamism – they are committed to keeping their organisations going and supporting as many children and young people as possible.

**Tough decisions are being made right now, and more will need to be made in the coming weeks and months. These decisions require leadership, creativity and resilience:**

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“Some staff have already been furloughed, more staff are being considered, we have an emergency crisis appeal out for support, we may need to keep going down this line reducing hours and fundraising activities to try and have sufficient income to deliver”

“Furloughed staff as a temporary measure, applied for emergency grants, talked to funders about alternate services, working with others to deliver what we can, trying to be responsive and inventive, proactive and positive in social media”

“Reducing my salary (CEO), reducing hours of others, looking at reassigning the spending of grant funding where appropriate and possible. Liaising with funders and partners who have prepaid for programmes that we were in the middle of delivering to ensure we are meeting expectations and doing our utmost to deliver the outcomes of projects as best we can. This is not only to ensure that we meet contractual agreements, but also to maintain relationships with partners, and ensure we can still utilise the funding from these programmes to cover current costs”

## Earned income

36% of partners reported that at least 25% of their income is currently made up of earned income (through selling goods, services or training). All are reporting that this has reduced significantly or stopped altogether.

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“All [income has been] lost – no room hire, no match or concert car parking, no fees from services”

“All our training and cafe sales gone, £8k per month lost in income”

A number of our partners provide a youth offer as part of wider services e.g. arts organisations, housing associations. They have reported that the severe impact of losses of earned income will result in them having to make difficult decisions about what they do in the future, including reducing their services to young people.

## Trust and Foundations

48% of partners reported that they received at least 50% of their income from trusts and foundations.

Funder targets are not currently being met, and they are having to use funds to support staff and vulnerable young people in other ways e.g. digitise their services.

A large number of trusts and foundations have been incredibly supportive, following the values set out by London Funders and providing reassurance and clear guidance, especially for current grantees.

A significant challenge is what happens going forward, and if the youth and play sector be able to access funds for their core work (see section below – ‘The role of funders’).

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“Worry that all funds will go to Covid-19 emergency funding, and none left for ongoing vital support that also saves lives.”

“Diversion of future funds from core/programme provision to Covid-19 response could impact our medium/long term future in terms of covering core costs and providing programmes”

“We have had a number of large grants that we were at the last stages of frozen - up to the value of £90k. This has massively affected our planned growth”

## Private sector

Private sector support for the youth and play sector is a growing area – many partners have reported that it was a priority for the coming year, and their strategies and plans focused on developing their private sector partnerships.

Those that do have business partnerships, or recent funding from corporate sponsors, have understandably seen this funding disappear overnight.

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“These [private sector funds] have totally collapsed presently those that remain we feel it is not appropriate to ask about their intention going forward”

“We are unable to deliver fundraising activities (e.g. Manchester 10k run) that we had planned and relied on. Also due to the impact on other donors and supporters, their own priorities have changed so we can't reply on support as we once did”

## Furloughing

Many partners across our sector are now furloughing staff, or considering their options in relation to furloughing.

The support provided by national government is vital to a lot of charities, and will mean some can mitigate the severe financial losses they are experiencing.

However, while the furloughing of staff can provide temporary relief to the budget bottom line in a period when the financial losses are still being assessed; it also significantly reduces the capacity of organisations to respond to the immediate crisis and enormous challenge ahead of them.

At a time when the needs of children and young people are profound and ever increasing, organisations have reduced capacity to meet these needs. They also have fewer resources to develop and deliver services in new ways, and limited capacity to secure the funding they will need post crisis.

This capacity challenge is profound, putting pressure on those left holding the fort. Leaders have also told us about the difficulties of having to make those decisions very quickly, whilst interpreting evolving guidance. This activity in itself presents a challenge for leaders in the midst of a crisis. Leaders were also concerned about the potential reputational risk to making furloughing decisions. One said in the survey:

“

“[I am] worried about loss of reputation as furloughing perceived as an easy option (there's nothing easy about laying off trusted staff who have worked for you for 10+ years”

## The role of funders

The vast majority of our partners have raised serious concerns not only about immediate funding, but also how COVID-19 will transform the funding landscape in the next year.

A drastic shift to 'COVID-19'-only funding and crisis grants is understandable in the short term, but will leave substantial gaps in organisations' finances, especially their core funding.

A number of partners have reported that their current applications to local and national have been put on hold for six months or cancelled altogether. This is adding further pressure to these organisations, and further risks their financial viability.

Youth and play providers are often best placed to support young people in their communities, and have built up long-term relationships and trust. They do this through their core work, which needs to be funded. The young people who needed support two months ago are still here, and need support now from trusted sources. They will also need support in six months' time. If current trends continue, that support will not be available.

“

**“I'm concerned we won't be able to attract funding for our core work (whatever that might look like in the future) from 2021 onwards. This will mean either we lose staff or the project closes, at a time when young people will still need us, adjusting to life beyond COVID-19.”**

We would urge all funders, including national government and the private sector, to work together to ensure that we meet immediate need whilst also ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sector. The approach should include maintaining current investments and committing funding to secure the long-term future of organisations.

“

**“[we need] Access to funding and assurances from public sector that funding will still be in place. Assurances that funding that has been frozen may be reactivated.**

**Funding to continue for existing services. This is the infrastructure on which crisis care can be delivered, but the ongoing work still needs to be there - it prevents escalation of need and reduces strain on statutory services”**

## Infrastructure

Through the last few weeks, the value of local infrastructure has been made clear – the ability to coordinate local activity, build capacity and partnerships and use established networks has been critical to the response in Manchester both in the youth and play sector but also more widely via our local CVS.

We have seen the benefits of infrastructure in other areas too, including the London Boroughs supported by Young People's Foundations, and areas with strong regional youth work units and Arts Council bridge organisations.

Infrastructure is vital, and any response (both short and long-term) must provide funding to ensure that this is part of the funding picture.

# Recommendations – what Manchester needs

**We asked our partners what they need and what they want to see, and their responses were clear.**

## 1. Investment in the youth and play sector

Whilst we have made progress in Manchester, current funding levels do not meet the need required, and we know this need will grow in the coming months.

Investment must address the immediate need of communities with increased support for children and young people in and outside of the home, and should also consider the sustainability of the sector – investment is needed now to ensure that these organisations survive.

Funding to transform services is welcome, but should not replace core funding or work which we know will be needed after COVID-19 – we cannot divert money away from future funds and programmes.

## 2. Accessible and high quality digital engagement

Immediate investment should be focused on how we remove the barriers to access and inclusion for all young people to engage in the digital offer.

Current digital engagement must be quality-assured at local and national levels, ensuring that the experience for young people is positive and meets youth work principles and values.

## 3. Infrastructure

Funding strategies and government investment should ensure adequate support for infrastructure at local levels, using existing organisations and structures alongside growing the reach of infrastructure models where needed (e.g. Young People's Foundations).

## 4. Support to build back, better

Partners locally and nationally have been calling for further support for the youth and play sector, and welcomed the announcement that £500m will be invested in youth services in October 2019.

This funding is needed now more than ever, and should be ring-fenced for post-COVID-19, but aligned to the new needs of children and young people and the sector.

**Priorities include:**

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- **Recruitment and training for a youth and play work force**
  - **Support for leadership development in the youth and play sector**
  - **Support for strategic planning, including long-term strategies and fundraising plans**
  - **Direct costs for youth and play provision – prioritising people over buildings**
  - **Ensure youth work investment aligns to the recommendations made by Tania de St Croix in 'Making Youth Work Work'<sup>2</sup>**
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## 5. A coordinated response which meets local need

National initiatives, either programmes or funding, should be coordinated in a way which allows for engagement at a local level whilst not creating additional barriers for place-based and thematic organisations.

In relation to funding – we would support efforts to establish mechanisms which allow local community organisations to access central funding easily and effectively, informed by the model established by London Community Response.

All work should also ensure that it includes the voices of children and young people.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/youthwork.pdf>

# ■ Appendices

## Appendix 1 – About Young Manchester and the YPF model

Manchester is a vibrant, globally connected city, fuelled by a growing local economy and thriving arts and culture, sport and leisure and tourism. Yet too many of our children and young people don't see the best that Manchester has to offer – we need to change that.

Young Manchester works with over 100 partners across the city to create outstanding opportunities for children and young people – harnessing the best that the city has for those who need it most.

### Funding

Young Manchester is a place-based funder and in the last two years has invested significantly in children and young people through the following funds:

- 
- **Youth and Play - The largest of our investments are in partnership with Manchester City Council, the #iwill Fund and Curious Minds. This fund seeks to provide a varied offer of universal open access youth and play for children and young people inclusive of youth social action. In the last two years this Fund has reached over 25,000 children and young people. We explicitly invest in strengthening universal services to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).**
  - **MHCC Thrive Grants Programme - In partnership with the Manchester Health and Care Commission, this fund improves the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people with emotional health and wellbeing, mental health, learning disability and neuro disability challenges.**
  - **Positive Engagement Programme - In partnership with a Housing Provider, Manchester City Council and the Community Safety Partnership this programme is a positive and sustained approach to improving opportunities for young people and reducing anti-social behaviour (ASB) – based on the values, principles and practices of good youth work.**
  - **Keeping Children and Young People Safe - This Programme explores and evidences approaches to tackling violence which impacts on young people, including the development and enhancement of current youth and play work practice.**
  - **Holiday Play schemes - to complement the year round play offer and to tackle holiday hunger and the holiday experience gap, Young Manchester funds play schemes across Manchester inclusive of food - providing children and young people with quality experiences over the Easter and Summer holidays.**
  - **The Adventure Fund – Alongside Manchester City Council, we increase the participation and progression of young people in outdoor learning and adventure.**
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Young Manchester is more than a funder - our place-based approach means that we can also build capacity, convene and drive networks, provide training and share information across the city. This means that we are a catalyst for radical change, creating the conditions for the sector to collaborate and help children and young people to thrive. Our aim is to be a platform for others – to showcase their great work and help them support our amazing children and young people to be the best they can be.

And it is working – through our partners we've reached over 25,000 children and young people since April 2018, including supporting over 8,000 to lead local projects in their own communities.

Delivery partners consistently report that provision is increasing opportunities for children and young people and having positive impacts on their lives.

But we've only just started – we want to do more, much more.

Our network is growing every week, establishing an open collaborative movement of charities, businesses and the public sector – all committed to working together to make a real difference to the lives of thousands of children and young people in Manchester.

Young Manchester is a founding member of the YPF Trust, a national body supporting the development of Young People's Foundations across the UK, supported by the John Lyon's Charity.

## Appendix 2 – Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People

**Note:** Please see the separate briefing – ‘Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People’ – for further information on this work.

The Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People brings together organisations providing outstanding opportunities for children and young people in Manchester through youth work, play, arts, culture, heritage and sport during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The partnership is focused on addressing three core challenges for the sector:

- **Safety of young people – how can we support young people to be safe and healthy (physically and mentally) in the coming months**
- **Business continuity – how can organisations ensure that they can stay in business, with significant financial and contractual challenges ahead**
- **Business transformation – how can organisations change what they are doing to meet need with restrictions on usual delivery models, using their assets and expertise**

We recognise that addressing all three challenges in a creative, ambitious, strategic and coordinated way is critical to ensuring the strength, vibrancy and sustainability of the sector, and ultimately ensuring positive outcomes for the city’s children and young people. We are seeking contributions from a broad range of organisations drawing on practice and partnerships from across all sectors, including arts and sports, in addition to youth and play, and connecting to business.

The partnership, and its work, is constantly growing and evolving, meeting the needs of children and young people and the sector, and ensuring that this work is aligned to wider activity locally, regionally and nationally.

Over 30 partners across Manchester have now signed up to be part of the Creative Engagement Partnership for Young People, and activity across a number of work streams is now in progress.

Work streams include:

### Infrastructure

1. **Online Platform – establishing one central online platform to share information, guidance, best practice and opportunities (using the information gathered and developed through the work streams below) [hub.youngmanchester.org](http://hub.youngmanchester.org)**
2. **Digital youth work and safeguarding – exploring, collating and disseminating best practice on the engagement of children and young people online**
3. **Tools and resources – exploring, collating, developing and disseminating tools and resources for the sector to use during COVID-19 (and beyond)**

4. **Arts sector/youth sector exchange – ensuring that learning, knowledge and resources are shared across these sectors for the benefit of children and young people, linking to Manchester’s Cultural Education Partnership**
5. **Referrals and crisis support – ensuring that the most up-to-date information on support available to children, young people and families is available**

### Supporting and underpinning work

6. **Communications – promoting and championing great youth work, great organisations and great young people – and that we are still here (but not ignoring the real challenges being faced)**
7. **Inclusion and access – ensuring that all provision in all settings is available to all and barriers are removed (e.g. providing full access to digital youth work, supporting children and young people with additional support needs)**

### Strategy and development

8. **Funding and Fundraising – securing funds directly to support the partnership informing and influencing wider funding at local and national levels to ensure it meets local need, ensuring partners are best placed to secure local and national investment**
9. **Leadership development and support – ensuring that leaders across the sector are (and feel) supported, informed and engaged on issues impacting on them, their organisations and the city**
10. **Staff wellbeing – ensuring our teams are, and feel, supported and their health and wellbeing are priorities in all work**
11. **Legacy and future-proofing – working to ensure that the work undertaken now has value in the long-term and provides a legacy for youth and play work in the city**

### Partnership projects

12. **New projects (in development) – space to work together on new projects or support a project initiated by one member e.g. Exhibition led by Reclaim**
13. **Detached youth work and direct engagement – working together to support the most vulnerable young people**
14. **Holiday provision – ensuring that provision meets need to support all children and young people, including an enhance summer programme**

## Appendix 3 – the picture across the VCSE sector in Greater Manchester during COVID-19

Through the leadership of local infrastructure organisations (10GM, GMCVO and others), a number of risks and issues have been identified across the VCSE sector in Greater Manchester. They include:

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- VCSE organisations are primarily motivated by their social purpose, and despite offering their services, many are struggling to maintain 'business as usual'.
  - There is a mixed picture on the resilience and business continuity planning of VCSE organisations.
  - Many VCSE organisations are reporting worries about cash-flow and financial viability. VCSE organisations often operate with very low levels of financial reserves and efforts to diversify income through trading or fund raising create particular risks at the current time, given that sales and fundraising are severely limited.
  - Many VCSE organisations occupy premises owned by others. Landlords may be eligible for business rates relief, but this is not necessarily shared with tenants.
  - Some VCSE organisations are not geared up for working at home (they don't have laptops or the relevant IT equipment for example) and they rely heavily on volunteers and use face to face ways of working. They need additional support to manage this transition.
  - VCSEs are reporting a lack of insurance cover for pandemics
  - The role of infrastructure is key – local CVS and community 'anchor' organisations have shown tremendous leadership and commitment and are playing a major role in local emergency planning. However, they will need support with building and supporting the local ecosystem, including in some cases, immediate financial support.
  - Public sector organisations have come together to announce flexibility around local authority grants and contract terms and conditions, seeking flexibility around use of the grants to best meet changing need, prompt payment terms, and relaxation in complex monitoring requirements by public sector commissioners and other funders of the sector. This offer now needs to be turned into practice.
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VCSE leaders have also highlighted a need to:

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- Prioritise the addressing of inequalities
  - Engage and involve VCSE organisations in emergency planning, including the next stage strategic approaches after the immediate crisis has abated
  - Support efforts to secure additional funds for VCSE activity nationally and also locally introduce these directly - we need to take urgent and proactive steps to support VCSE organisations to survive
  - Promote the local volunteering options and VCSE leadership
  - Consider the VCSE sector as a potential provider of formal and informal support for front line workers
  - Include the resource of clinical, strategic and front-line experts in the VCSE sector in workforce planning
  - Local government landlords are urged to waive rent and rates payment for the duration of the crisis.
-



## Get in Touch



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