



YMCA is the largest and oldest youth charity in the world and for 175 years, YMCA has been the champion for young people and communities. This General Election, we invite candidates and political parties to do the same and commit to delivering a new era for youth with policies that will support young people and the communities in which they live, to truly be able to live their best lives.

Young people today are growing up during a period where youth crime, mental health difficulties and loneliness are at an all-time high. Years of hardship and austerity measures have resulted in a generation of young people who cannot foresee a future better than their parents and **together we need to change this**.

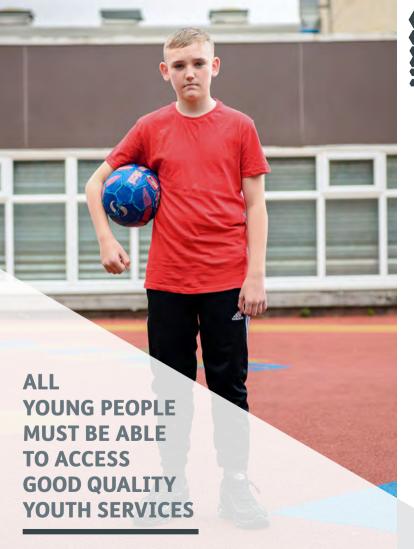
Our manifesto covers the fundamental basics of what all young people deserve; having a roof over their head, to feel physically and emotionally safe, to have a decent job, good health, and the opportunity to be an integral part of their local community.

Now more than ever, we need a Government who will deliver for our country's young people, so they can be living their best lives.

Dennse Hatton

**Denise Hatton** 

Chief Executive YMCA England & Wales



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#### YMCA SUPPORTS MORE THAN 33,500 YOUNG PEOPLE EVERY YEAR THROUGH OUR YOUTH WORK

Youth services exist to provide a sense of belonging, a safe space, and the opportunity for all young people to enjoy being young.

But sadly, young people have suffered as a direct result of funding cuts across England and Wales.

Since 2010/11, youth services such as youth clubs and youth workers have been cut by 64%. More than 4,500 youth work jobs have been cut and 750 youth centres closed.

In order to ensure these services do not become a thing of the past, we need to:

- reinstate and ring-fence youth services funding to 2010/11 levels
- provide universal youth services and targeted support for all young people
- create a national youth service strategy



### YMCA PROVIDES A HOME TO MORE THAN 18,000 PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS EACH YEAR

More than 140 young people, aged 16-24, every day are accepted as homeless or in need of immediate support. However, getting young people off the streets and out of unsafe and unsuitable situations is only the first step in helping them to begin rebuilding their lives.

Supported housing provides homeless young people with a bed, as well as helping them gain the essential training, skills, and confidence they need to move-on to independent living.

YMCA research showed nearly half of young people in supported housing said that not being able to save money was preventing them from moving on. 40% identified the cost of a rental deposit as being a principal barrier and almost three in five worry about being able to find somewhere to live. Benefits such as Local Housing Allowance, which has been frozen over recent years, and the

Shared Accommodation Rate for under 35s, which caps the amount young people can receive, make it financially impossible to enable a young person to move on.

The major barriers such as the cost of rent, deposits and bills must be solved. To do this we must:

- increase the number of good standard, genuinely affordable homes
- establish a national
  'Help to Rent' scheme
  targeted at young people
  looking to move on from
  supported housing to
  help pay for their rental
  deposit
- abolish the Shared Accommodation Rate which restricts access to housing benefit for people under 35-years-old
- bring Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates back in line with market rents



### YMCA PROVIDES SUPPORT AND ADVICE TO MORE THAN 105,000 PEOPLE EVERY YEAR

In the space of a single year YMCA referred 5,200 young people to food banks for support. Four in five of those reported having to do this as a direct result of delays in receiving benefit payments and sanctions.

The benefit system is currently not fit for purpose in supporting young people who hit financial hardship. The next Government needs to consider specifically the 21% of those claiming Universal Credit who are aged 16-24, of whom 50% are searching for work. Young people tell us they receive delays in payments and unfair sanctions which means they go without support because of a failure in the system. The support young people get from Job Centre Plus staff and the complicated process they have to go through often means they miss out on the money that they are entitled to.

Young people in need should receive the welfare support they require to get back on their feet following times of hardship. We must:

- immediately resolve the issues with the current Universal Credit system and the sanctions regime to prevent more people being pushed into poverty
- review the Universal
  Credit system and the
  sanctions regime as a
  whole to make it fit for
  purpose in supporting
  young people to get back
  on their feet and thrive
- provide training for Job Centre Plus staff to deliver tailored support for young people to receive the benefits they are entitled to and allow them to access meaningful and sustained employment



### YMCA ENABLES ALMOST 68,000 PEOPLE EVERY YEAR TO ENGAGE IN TRAINING AND EDUCATION

For many young people who do not go to university, apprenticeships are often the first step of their career. YMCA research shows more than three quarters of young people say going on an apprenticeship improved their skills and career prospects, while four in five would recommend them to others. Almost four in five young people we spoke to were offered a job at the end of their apprenticeship. For many young people, this works well

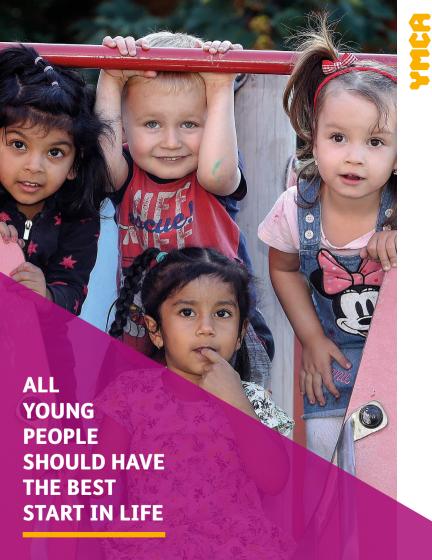
YMCA knows that it is hard to maintain basic living costs while on an apprenticeship wage, as pay can be as little as £3.70 per hour. Additionally, there are further barriers to accessing apprenticeships because of the basic levels of aualifications needed.

There are currently 792,000 (11.5%) young people aged 16–24 in the UK who are not in education, employment or training, and this is up 14,000 compared to the previous year. Schools funding has been cut over the last decade which means there are less

support staff to help students achieve their potential and children fall through the cracks. There needs to be increase in support for students with special educational needs and those who don't fit into mainstream education.

YMCA believes changes to apprenticeships could bring more young people into employment. This can be achieved if we:

- increase support for young people to reach the minimum entry requirements needed to get onto apprenticeship schemes
- give all people, regardless of age, a real living wage
- ensure apprenticeship opportunities are weighted towards young people at the start of their careers
- explore more alternative education provision options and the need for increased support staff within schools to help students achieve their potential



### YMCA SUPPORTS MORE THAN 230,000 CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS EVERY YEAR THROUGH OUR FAMILY WORK

We know it is vital to give young people the best start in life to allow them to thrive in later years. Early years education and childcare is expensive and many families, including those who work, still struggle to make ends meet.

The number of eligible two-year-olds benefitting from funded early education has decreased to 68%, down from 72% in 2018. This means a third of families earning under £16,190 are not receiving the early-years education support they're entitled to, with most families above this level receiving no support at all. Parents and carers tell us more needs to be done to match the level of support given to three- and four-year-olds who universally receive 15 hours of free childcare.

As the largest voluntary sector provider of nursery and childcare provision, YMCA has long been concerned around the allocation of funding for free nursery places.

There exists a significant gap between the costs assumed by Government and the true cost of delivery for service providers.

To relieve the burden on families, we must:

- undertake an urgent review around the cost and funding of childcare with a commitment to fund and pass on to providers the true cost of providing free early years education
- extend the universal
   15 hours of free
   childcare support for
   three- and four-year-olds
   to include two-year-olds



# YMCA

## YMCA IS THE LARGEST VOLUNTARY SECTOR PROVIDER OF SERVICES PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING, ENGAGING MORE THAN 125,000 PEOPLE EACH YEAR

One in eight five- to 19-year-olds have now had a diagnosed mental health difficulty and 75% of children and young people are not seen within 12 weeks of their referral to NHS mental health services, instead they sit on waiting lists without support. This issue is not going away. The next Government must get serious about dealing with mental health difficulties and ensuring young people receive appropriate support and treatment, much more auickly.

With social media consuming the lives of young people, the next Government must look at online harms. YMCA research has shown 55% of young people were bullied about their appearance – of those, a quarter were bullied online. Between school, the health service and technology companies, more must be done to prevent this.

For young people to engage in activities such as sports clubs, gyms and leisure activities, it often comes at a price which creates a financial barrier.

The benefits of physical exercise are well documented, from contributing to positive mental health and healthy lives, to developing soft skills such as teamwork and communication. We need to make sure all young people have access to inclusive physical activity and positive mental wellbeing. This can be achieved if we:

- reduce waiting times for NHS mental health support and ensure the appropriate provision is in place and well resourced
- take a preventative approach to mental health by investing in areas such as youth services and physical activity
- place more ownership on social media companies to protect young people online
- reduce the cost of participating in physical leisure activities outside of school to promote wellbeing



This election will be dominated by the decision of the UK to leave the European Union (EU). While the country as a whole voted to leave the EU. it should not be forgotten that 72% of young people voted to remain in the EU.

When the UK exits the EU. many of the opportunities funded through EU bodies will potentially disappear for young people. The Erasmus+ programme has enabled thousands of young people to study abroad, learn different languages within new cultures and develop cultural competencies to further their career opportunities.

Likewise, funding from FU institutions has provided opportunities for organisations to run exchange programmes or intervention work within the UK. Some of the most challenging and deprived communities within the UK have benefited from EU funding over the years and this has had a positive impact upon the lives of many young people.

As non-voters, under 18s don't have a say in our democratic system. The issues that are important to them - like our future

in the EU or the devastating climate crisis - do not get heard from their perspective.

YMCA believes that, whether in or out of the EU, these opportunities and benefits should not be lost to our young people. They should be able to raise issues that are important to them and have a democratic voice. We must:

- lower the voting age in all elections and referenda to 16 so that young people have a say in their future
- pledge to stop the climate crisis and actively invest in initiatives that will save our planet
- ensure that, as part of the future of Brexit, the needs and aspirations of young people are considered and protected by:
  - ▶ ensuring Europe-wide, exchange, travel, and educational programmes such as Erasmus+, continue to be available to UK citizens
  - preserving the ability of young people to access jobs and study within other EU countries
- protect the voluntary sector from loss of funding streams as a result of leaving the EU



# **FMCA**

#### **IF YOU BELIEVE:**

- all young people must be able to access good quality youth services
- all young people must have a home and the chance to live independently
- all young people deserve a stable income and enough money to put food on the table
- all young people deserve to thrive at work and earn a decent wage
- all young people should have the best start in life
- all young people must be entitled to good physical and mental health
- all young people must have the opportunity to be a global citizen

then please pledge your support now to **campaigns@ymca.org.uk** so that together we can create a new era for youth.

Share your support on social media by posting:

I support **@YMCAEng\_Wales** manifesto #LivingTheirBestLives to create a new era for young people this #GeneralElection2019 ymca.org.uk/election





YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.