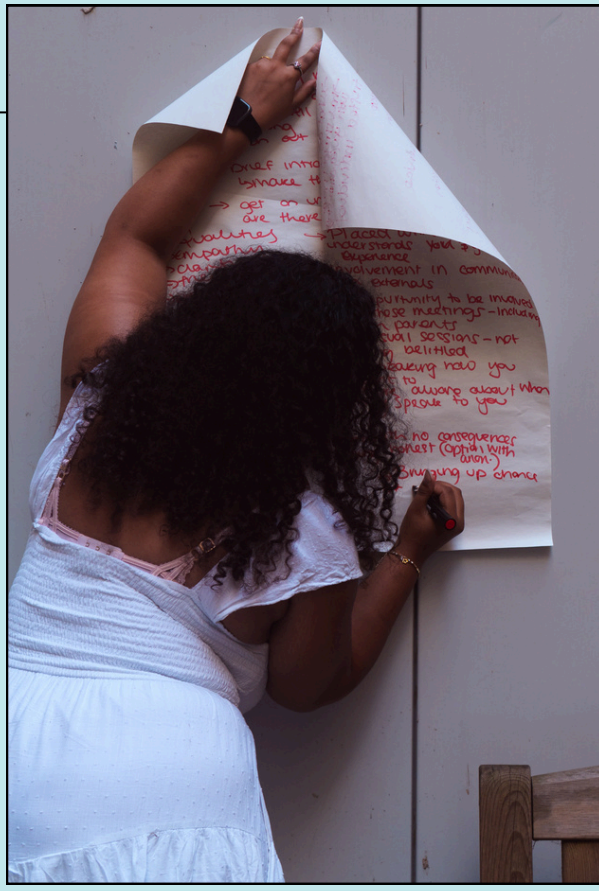
Partnership for Young London

Transformation Partners in Health and Care

HEAR ME, KNOW ME, SUPPORT ME -

Young People's Vision for NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Core CYPMHS)



This report brings together feedback from a young people's steering group and a London-wide workshop held on 13 August 2026.Young people gave feedback on the draft 'I statements', which set out their expectations for the London Core CYPMHS Offer from NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services across London.

Co-produced with young people from across London

Contact:
Angel.Singh@cityoflondon.gov.uk
Tanisha.Zaman@cityoflondon.gov.uk

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Introductions

Tiana's steering group reflection

I joined the steering group as an individual who has been through the CAMHS system. This experience emphasised to me the need for youth-led change within the organisation, bridging the disconnect between the care that young people receive, and the care that they need. I am a firm believer in the principle of “nothing about us without us”, reaffirming the need to ensure that young people remain at the centre of their own care.

As a part of the steering group, I contributed to assessing the current CAMHS services, advocating for the care that I wish was offered to me during my own journey with CAMHS. Working together with other youth advocates, we facilitated a pan-London event, empowering young people to take an active role in the shaping the services that they receive.

I truly do hope that the unique perspectives and lived experience shared by young people go on to legitimately impact the services they receive. I hope the information gathered pushes decision makers to shape CAMHS services around young people's needs, rather than hoping that their care requirements fit a limited set of available resources.

Yusuf’s steering group reflection

I joined the steering group because I believe mental health is a huge issue, particularly for young people and those who are care experienced. From my own experiences, I understand how important it is for services to genuinely listen to young people and put their needs at the centre of the support they receive. Too often, services can feel overly focused on bureaucracy, processes and different organisations pointing responsibility towards one another, rather than being truly young-person-centred.

As part of the steering group, I attended meetings and contributed to discussions and ideas around what the future of the CAMHS service could look like. I shared my perspective and helped consider how the experiences and views of young people could better inform the service.

Moving forward, I hope that decision-makers genuinely take on board the lived experiences and feedback of young people, including the perspectives gathered through the different workshops. I hope this work helps make the CAMHS offer more responsive, accessible, and centered around the needs of the young people who use it.

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About this work

This project builds on previous work led across Transformation Partners in Health and Care, Partnership for Young London, and partners over the last three years. It was designed to test whether the emerging 'I statements' within the Core CYPMHS Offer reflects what children and young people have said matters most, identify gaps or risks, and test whether the language and expectations are clear from a young person's perspective.

Previous work this builds on

- The Listening Project

CYP Mental Health Youth Board work on waiting times

Guidance on meeting the mental health needs of care-experienced young people

- The 0 - 25 case for change

What we wanted to achieve

- ☐ Establish a young people's steering group to oversee and shape the work.
- ☐ Engage a diverse group of young people in reviewing the Core CYPMHS Offer and recommending changes.
- ☐ Support young people to present their findings back to the professionals in the Expert Co-Design and Advisory Group.
- ☐ A parallel process was also underway to gather insight from parents and carers.

Our approach

The work took place between June and September 2026. Young people met in-person and online to review five parts of the draft offer, focusing on the challenges identified, what young people should be able to expect, and what needs to change.

1. Asking for Help

2. Understanding You

3. Getting the Right Support

4. Working Together Around Me

5. When Support Changes



Young People's Steering Group

Seven young people were recruited through Partnership for Young London networks to shape the project and co-facilitate the wider workshop. The group met four times to review the draft statements, plan the session, facilitate workshops, and support the write-up of the feedback.

Steering Group and partners at the Pan-London event on 13 August 2026.

Steering group members brought experience from programmes including the Pan London Children in Care Council, the Listening Project, Digital Health Ambassadors and Authoring Our Own Stories.

The London-wide workshop

The workshop took place on 13th August 2026 at The Royal London Hospital. 38 young people attended. Participants came through London-wide youth and participation networks, including North East London Foundational (NELFT), West London and Wandsworth Youth Council, the Pan London Children in Care Council, Partnership for Young London, and CAMHS networks, with representation from across 20 London boroughs.

Young people took part in facilitated table activities covering all five areas of the Core CYPMHS Offer. The workshops explored the wording of the draft problem statements and expectations, alongside practical ideas for how the offer could work better.

What young people told us overall

Across the five workshops, several messages came up repeatedly. Young people wanted support to feel clearer, more human, and more consistent, with greater choice over what happens to them and better information at every stage.

Five messages that cut across the workshops:

1. Relationships matter: build trust and comfort before relying on checklists or formal questions.
2. Be clear and transparent: explain waiting times, confidentiality, information sharing and what happens next.
3. Make support personal: young people want choice, accessible information and care that reflects their circumstances.
4. Improve continuity: reduce repetition, gaps and abrupt changes when moving between workers or services.
5. Recognise culture and identity: culturally competent practice and fair access were recurring priorities.



1. Accessing Help

Access

Maisha's reflections

My workshop focused on accessing help and what it really means for young people to feel heard, understood, and comfortable when engaging with CAMHS and the people supporting them. I spoke with young people about their experiences of feeling understood by workers, both positive and negative, and what we can learn from those experiences to help shape a CAMHS core offer where young people feel more connected to the staff members they speak to.

We had some open and meaningful conversations, and what steed out to me most was how much the experience of accessing support can influence whether a young person feels able to engage in the first place. Young people highlighted the importance of knowing what support is available to them, having clearer and simpler routes into support, and not being left waiting for long periods of time. There was also recognition that long waiting lists can put young people off asking for help altogether.

A key thing for people to consider moving forward is that supporting young people is not just about providing a service, but about thinking about the experience of the young person throughout that journey. This means making information clearer, reducing unnecessary barriers, being transparent about what support is available and how long someone may have to wait, while also creating an environment where young people feel comfortable enough to be honest about what they need.

If I had to take one key message from the workshop, it would be that young people need to feel understood before they can truly feel supported. The way we communicate, the questions we ask, the time we give someone and how we make them feel in that interaction can make a huge difference. It is important to build that sense of trust and connection rather than making the young person feel like they are simply moving through a process. It was a great experience and felt empowered to be trusted to peer facilitate this. It was my first time facilitating something like this, and I definitely would do it again!

This workshop explored young people's expectations of asking for and accessing help, including knowing where to go, how to ask for support and what options are available, being kept informed about referrals, waiting times, next steps and receiving support while waiting. It also explored the importance of understanding their rights, privacy and choices, being able to access support in a way that works for them and being taken seriously and treated fairly when asking for help. Young people highlighted barriers in referral routes, waiting times, communication, parental involvement, travel barriers, fairness, and privacy.

Ideas participants particularly wanted to see:

- A clear journey map showing how accessing CAMHS works.
- A 'Know Your Rights' section explaining what children and young people are entitled to, such as the legal time frames and processes that they can access, and what happens when they share something, what will stay confidential, and whether they have a say in which support route they take.

What needs to change:

Waiting for support

Simplify referrals and reduce waiting times where possible, as long waits can discourage young people from asking for help, and some felt they could miss the threshold because of how long they were waiting.

Provide realistic waiting times, clear updates and next steps, and make sure young people can access support and resources while waiting.

Communication, autonomy, and fairness

- Give young people more autonomy, including a one-to-one option where appropriate.
- Recognise that family and cultural attitudes can create barriers to accessing support.
- Address inequalities to access support, including travel and location barriers and differences in support depending on where young people live.
- Recognise that parents can sometimes be a barrier to a young person accessing or explaining support.

- Use language carefully; participants flagged terms such as ‘low mood’ as potentially unhelpful in some contexts.

Before your first appointment

- Young people generated practical ideas for information they would want before a first appointment:

- A short quiz or prompt to help identify what the appointment is for, what support might be needed and explanation of symptoms tailored to different language and learning needs.

- What to expect and what support is available, including a list of professionals you might meet and what they do.

- A CAMHS journey map explaining the process, waiting times and next steps.

What to take forward

- Prioritise an access guide, journey map and ‘Know Your Rights’ information.
- Strengthen waiting-time communication and interim support while waiting.
- Increase young people’s choice and autonomy within referral and assessment routes.
- Ensure all young people are treated fairly.

Summary:

This workshop explored young people's experiences of accessing CAMHS, highlighting how referral routes, waiting times, communication and interactions with staff can shape whether young people feel able to engage with support. Participants emphasised the need for clearer and simpler pathways, greater transparency while waiting, and more autonomy, choice and support throughout the process. Key recommendations included developing a clear CAMHS journey map, providing accessible 'Know Your Rights' information, strengthening interim support and communication during waiting periods, and ensuring young people feel heard, understood and involved in decisions about their care.

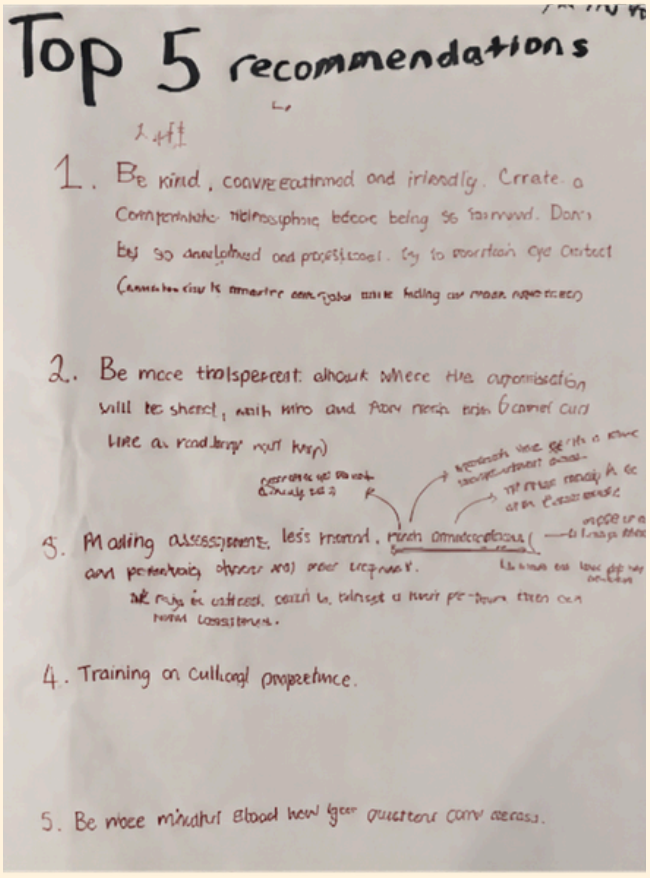
2. Understanding You

Assessment

Divine's reflection

My workshop topic was around understanding the young person. I spoke to young people about their experiences of feeling understood by workers, both positive and negative, and what we can learn from these experiences to create a CAMHS core offer where young people feel more connected to the staff members they speak to. We had some really great conversations and many good ideas, but what stood out to me the most was the number of irmes certain points were brought up by different young people. We explored recurring themes around staff mannerisms, wording, and tone, all of which have a really strong role to play in making a young person feel comfortable enough to be open and honest. If I had to choose one point to echo back from all the conversations, it would be just how important it is to first build a sense of comfort and a relationship with young people before bringing out the checklist of questions, and to approach meetings more conversationally.

This workshop explored young people's expectations of the assessment process, including being understood and involved in decisions about their support, not having to repeat their experiences, being seen beyond their mental health, understanding what has been discussed and when support will start, and having a say in choosing support that feels right for them.



It also explored the importance of knowing what happens to information about them, and being asked about their culture, faith and family rather than assumptions being made. Young people suggested more accessible language, including replacing 'story' with 'experiences' and 'all of me' with 'being seen beyond their mental health'.

What young people highlighted

- Feeling understood takes time - staff should show they are actively trying to understand the young person.
- Build comfort and trust first, using a friendly, conversational approach, plain language and visual tools to explain things.
- Be clear about confidentiality, safeguarding and recognise cultural differences around mental health. Use language, such as 'support' rather than 'mental health' where appropriate and explore cultural beliefs during assessments.

Young people's recommendations for making first conversations more comfortable.

Language and communication style

- Use natural, supportive language and make assessments feel conversational.
- Help young people feel prepared by explaining who they will meet and what happens next.

What good support should feel like

- Support should be accessible, empathetic, and culturally aware, with help available while waiting.
- Keep young people informed and supported through transitions.

What to take forward

- ☐ Build trust first and keep conversations natural.
- ☐ Be clear about confidentiality and next steps.
- ☐ Train staff in cultural competence
- ☐ Build a plain-English guide to assessments covering:
    - Before: what an assessment is, who they may meet, confidentiality and preparation
    - During: why questions are being asked, communication that works for them, and being understood
    - After: what was agreed, what happens next, when support may start and who to contact.

Summary:

This workshop explored what helps young people feel genuinely understood during CAMHS assessments. Participants highlighted that trust, comfort and connection should be built before moving into formal assessment questions, with staff using natural, supportive language and a conversational approach. Young people also wanted greater clarity around confidentiality, who they will meet and what happens next, alongside culturally aware, and empathetic support. A key recommendation was to develop a clear, accessible guide to assessments so young people know what to expect and feel more prepared and comfortable throughout the process.

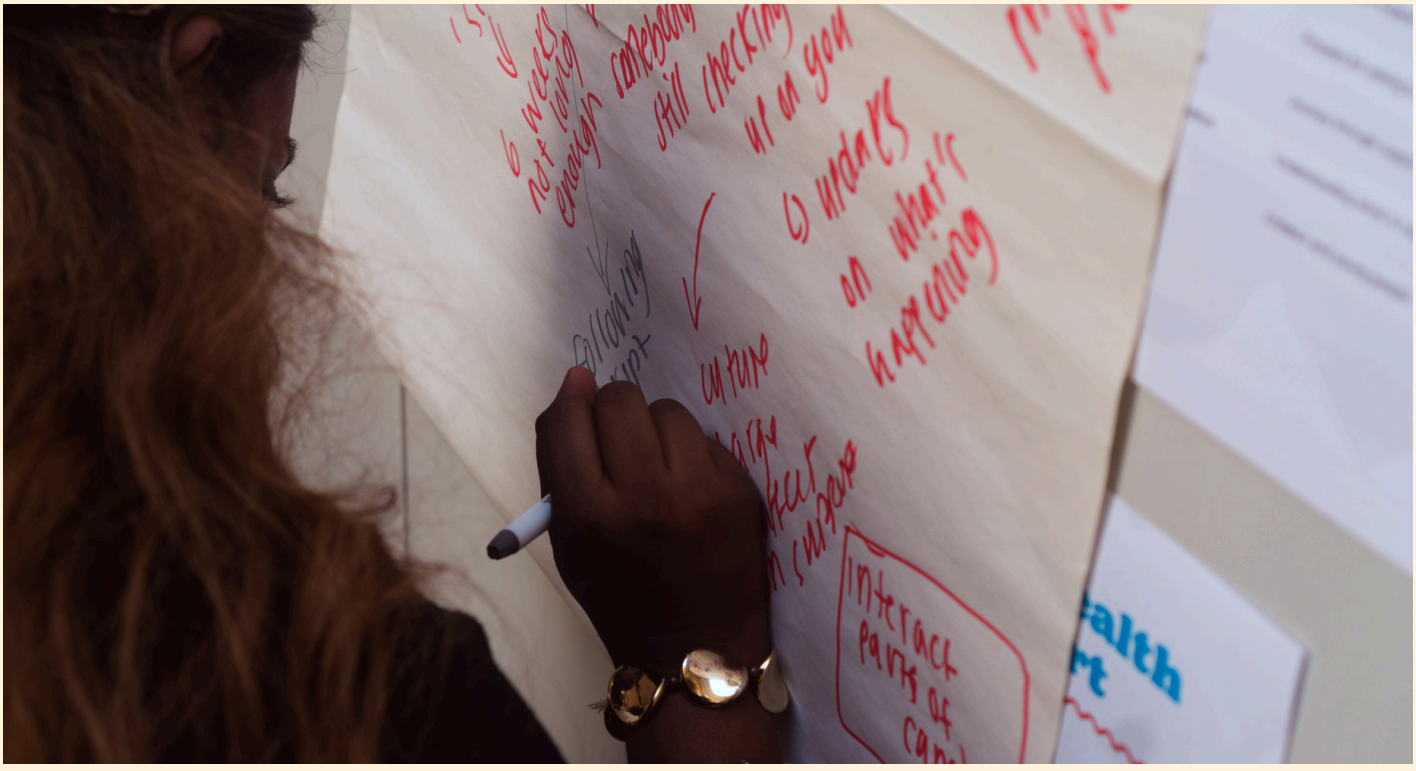
3. Getting the Right Support

Intervention

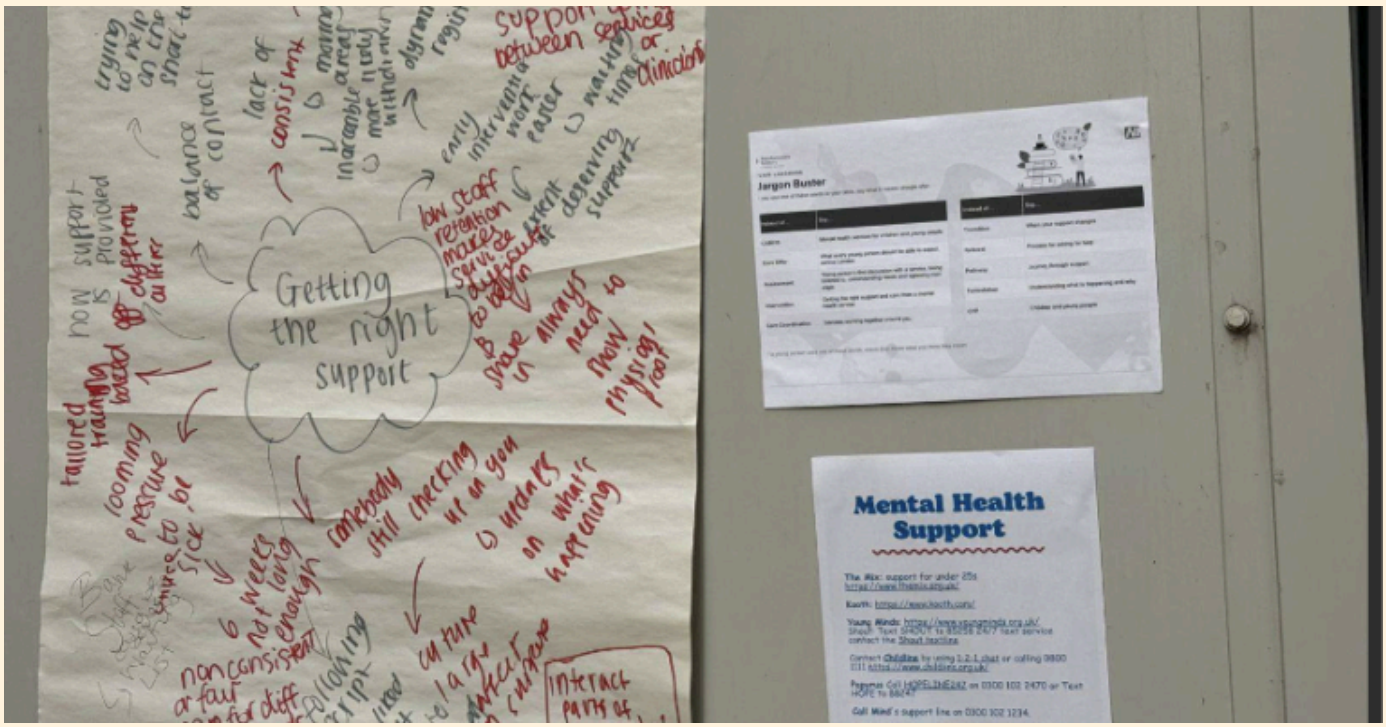
Tanisha's reflection

This workshop explored what good support should look and feel like once a young person is receiving care. Young people highlighted the importance of consistent and personalised support, being involved in decisions about their care, and not having to prove they are "sick enough" to receive help. A key message was that support should be flexible, culturally aware and built around the individual, with clear ways to give feedback and better planning when support comes to an end.

This workshop explored young people's expectations of support once it is in place, including understanding what support is available and what to expect, having a say in choosing how it is delivered and who is involved, and receiving tailored support that reflects their needs. It also explored the importance of knowing what the support is working towards and changing support if it is not helping, seeing the same people wherever possible to help build trust, and being treated with empathy and respect for their background, identity, culture and experiences. Young people also raised the importance of not having to prove they are unwell enough to receive support, being treated with empathy if they stop engaging, and having safe ways to raise concerns.



Consistency and continuity



- More consistent support and communication, with regular check-ins, trusted relationships and enough time for support to work.
- Minimise changes in clinicians and ensure continuity of support across services and when young people move areas.

Capacity, thresholds and fairness

- Low staff retention can reduce confidence in services.
- Short interventions, such as six weeks, may not give young people enough time to benefit from support
- Reduce pressure to prove you are “sick enough” or meet a threshold, and provide fair, culturally aware support.
- Culture can shape both how support is understood and how it should be delivered.

Personalised and accessible support

- Make support personalised and accessible, with trusted and empathetic professionals who listen to young people and involve them in their care and communication choices.

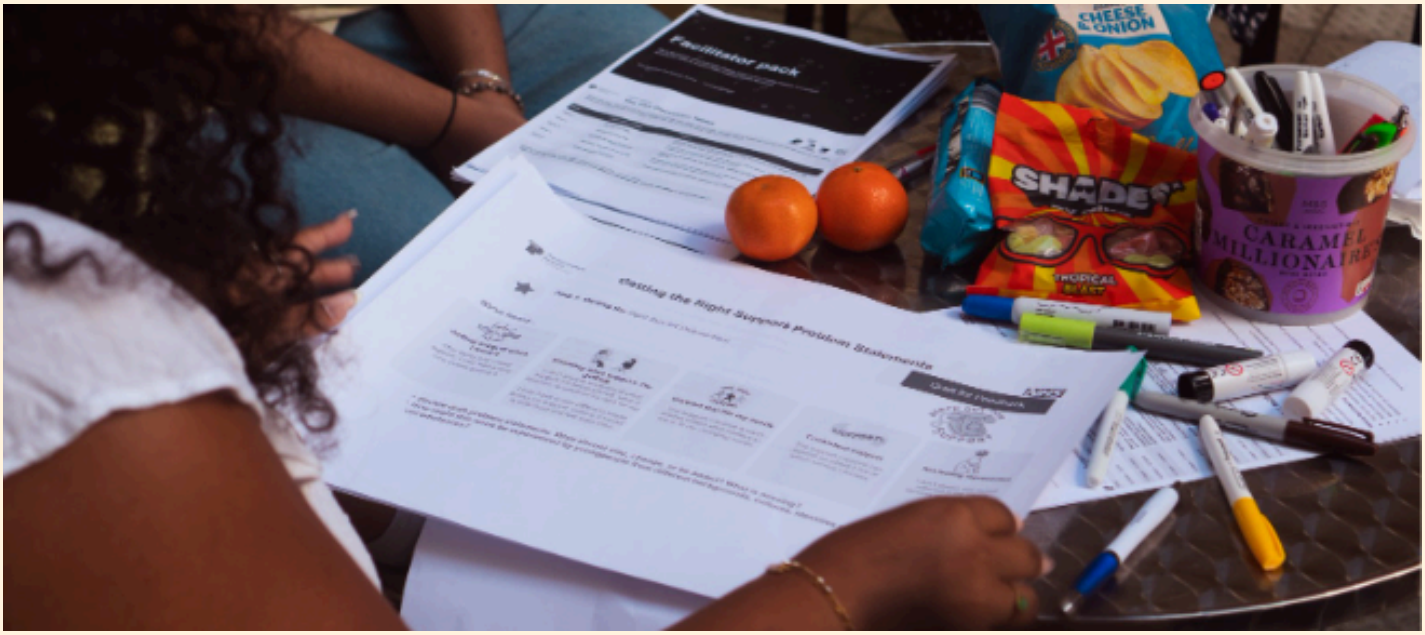
Feedback, accountability, and leaving support

- Provide an optional feedback route that does not go directly to the treating clinician.

- Make it clear where concerns can be reported and what happens after a report.
- Allow anonymous feedback where possible and avoid young people fearing consequences for being honest.
- Plan transitions and endings in advance, including a gradual step-down phase where needed.
- Respond with empathy when young people disengage, rather than immediately discharging them from services.

What to take forward

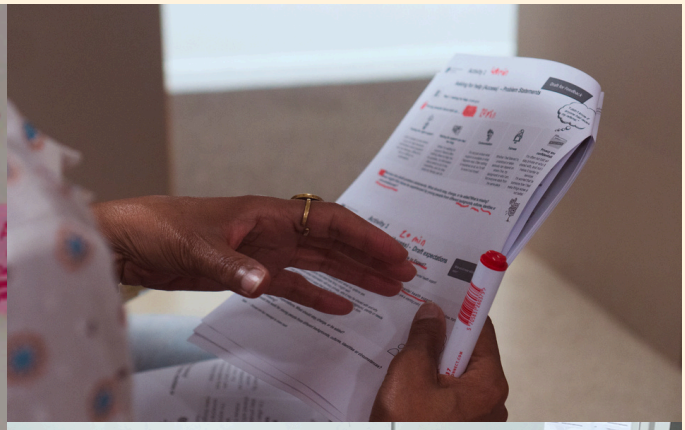
- ☐ Strengthen continuity between clinicians and services.
- ☐ Review how understanding the thresholds, nor not meeting them, as well as short intervention periods are experienced by young people.
- ☐ Build personalisation and accessible formats into the information offer.
- ☐ Create an independent feedback route and clearer transition planning.
- ☐ Produce information in a range of formats that explains what is offered and what to expect, including booklets, podcasts, animations and digital resources.
- ☐ Give young people the option to share information about themselves ahead of appointments to help professionals understand their needs.



Summary:

This workshop explored what young people need from CAMHS once support is in place, with a focus on consistency, personalisation, fairness and continuity of care. Young people highlighted the importance of support that is flexible, culturally aware and responsive to individual needs, alongside greater involvement in decisions about their care. Key priorities included improving continuity between services, reviewing how thresholds and short intervention periods are experienced, creating clearer and independent routes for feedback, and ensuring transitions and endings are planned effectively. Young people also wanted trusted relationships with staff, a say in their care plans, and information shared in different formats.







4. Working Together Around Me

Care coordination

Stephanie's reflection

From my workshop on services working around you, young people highlighted the need for better coordination and communication between services, especially around confidentiality and information sharing. They stressed the importance of reducing repetition, offering greater transparency and choice over how information is shared, and creating clearer pathways between services. They also described how gaps in support, long waiting times, and repeated referrals affect their experience, recommending more integrated, seamless support and smoother transitions to ensure services feel connected rather than fragmented.

Young people felt the draft problem and expectation statements in this area were strongly connected. Their feedback focused on having a consistent point of contact, information about confidentiality, avoiding the need to repeat their stories, addressing gaps between services and having more choice over what information is shared. They highlighted the value of care coordination and having a consistent point of contact, although they did not like the term 'care support', suggesting alternatives such as 'personal advisor', 'consultant' or 'support worker'. Young people valued someone who listened, treated them with respect, avoided assumptions and stereotyping, explained confidentiality clearly and gave them time to build trust and feel empowered.

Information sharing and confidentiality

• Confidentiality is not always explained clearly enough.
• Young people often do not know what information has been shared, with whom, or why.
• Information can feel either overshared or under shared, leaving young people unsure what to expect.
• Young people wanted more control over how much information is carried between services and the option to start again where appropriate.

Falling between services

• Participants preferred the word "miscommunication" when describing problems between services.
• Gaps in support and waiting lists can leave young people unsure where to go.

Services may not understand each other well enough, leading to incorrect signposting and repeated referrals.

Changes suggested to the expectations

• Share only key information, with young people having choice over what moves between services.
• Services should work together to make transitions clear, personalised and less overwhelming.

What to take forward

• Explain confidentiality and information sharing much more clearly.
• Provide a consistent and trusted point of contact who listens, explains confidentiality, takes concerns seriously and helps young people navigate support.
• Explore shared records between services, on a need-to-know basis, with the option to start afresh if they'd like to.
• Reduce repeated referrals and redirection between services.
• Give people meaningful choice over what information is shared.
• Make personalised care a clear expectation of joined-up working.

Summary:

This workshop explored how services can work together more effectively around young people, with a focus on communication, confidentiality and joined-up care. Participants highlighted that poor coordination can lead to repeated referrals, gaps in support and having to repeat their experiences. Key priorities included clearer explanations of how information is shared through a consistent and trusted point of contact, reducing people's need to repeat their stories, reducing unnecessary repetition between services, and creating more personalised and coordinated pathways so support feels connected rather than fragmented.

5. When Support Changes

Transitions

Angel's reflection

I was really excited to work on this topic as aftercare and transitions are as important as the service given. The workshops I held had young people reflecting on their experiences whether as a service user, an employee of the service or as a therapist - it was very useful to capture understandings from different age groups and viewpoints.

My group began to debate the importance of sessions being in person to alleviate any anxiety but also to perhaps introduce a modern and hybrid structure of communication with the young person - such as introducing an automatic email response or an AI chatbot. All participants in my group favoured exploring sessions in person as all had experienced better outcomes by this and having a feeling of community. We began to explore the difference between different types of support and levels of need depending on the service users.

This workshop focused on the points where support changes: moving between services, approaching adulthood, leaving CAMHS or needing to build trust with a new team. This workshop explored young people's expectations of what happens when their support changes, including knowing what is changing and what will happen next, being involved and prepared for those changes, and avoiding a cliff edge when their age, circumstances or support change. It also explored the importance of people working together so young people do not have to start again and making sure they know what support is available to them after the change.

This workshop had various participants from different backgrounds, ages and had different ways of engaging with the service - one individual was a service provider whilst a few were service users. Our conversations then led to 4 key themes we had felt necessary for this service which are identified and outlined below.

Feeling prepared and maintaining trust

- Young people described transitions as a potential 'cliff edge' and felt preparation should start earlier.
- Continuity and routine matter, particularly where a young person has taken time to build trust.
- For some young people (who perhaps are neurodivergent or care-experienced) opening up again to a new professional can be especially difficult.
- Explain how long support will last from the start; uncertainty can limit engagement and trust.
- Young people wanted greater consistency in what is offered across London.

Roadmaps, checklists, and information

• Create clear roadmaps covering past, present and future stages of support.
• Provide jargon busters, explanations of adult-service equivalents and clear information on new service options.
• Use a visual roadmap with icons, a checklist and regular milestone check-ins.
• Give young people clarity about what information is held about them and how they can access their notes.
• Avoid information overload by making information staged, accessible, and easy to return to.

Preparing for adulthood

• Participants suggested meeting the adult team around ages 16 - 17 and reducing the need to repeat information via a gradual transfer process put into place.
• Young people suggested broader 'adulting' support, such as help with CVs, money, university and requesting medical leave.
• Digital information and email can complement in-person conversations.
• Young people in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), out of school, home-schooled or involved with social services may need clearer referral and transition routes. Young people also suggested exploring tailored support for ages 16-25, recognising transitions in education, employment and everyday life.

System issues

• Participants raised funding differences between areas and wanted resources to reflect local need.
• Funded advocates were suggested as one way to help young people navigate blocks in transition.
• More feedback opportunities and trusted relationships should be built into transition planning.
• More visits and engagement with the local community such as school visits and open days.
• Pan-London and collective collaborative approach so that those areas with less funding can still be supported, as well as sharing events and ideas which can prevent duplication and best use of time and resources.
• Support for those who have other complex mental health disorders such as eating disorders.
• Mentors or ambassadors that visit schools and colleges.
• Perhaps a service that includes the start of early adulthood such as a group from 16-25 as this will accommodate many transitional and important life events for the service user suchs doing GCSEs, A-Levels, going to university or other forms of education, employment or training.
• Understanding digital health, the benefits and its consequences, including how digital approaches could improve information sharing, communication about appointments and with services, reduce repetition and provide tailored information during transitions. Email, online information and hybrid communication should complement in-person conversations, while maintaining trusted relationships and a preference for face-to-face support.
• AI chatbot to help with worries in the middle of the night (or an out of hours complimentary service).
• More cultural competency with service design.

What to take forward

- Develop a visual transition roadmap and checklist that can be personalised.
- Start transition preparation earlier and introduce new teams before supports end.
- Build jargon busters and adult-service information into transition materials.
- Make specific provisions for young people whose referral routes are less clear into accessing the service, such as clear information on websites, posters etc.
- Create a supplementary service for those who do not meet the criteria for adult mental health services
- Recognise that rebuilding trust can be particularly difficult for neurodivergent young people.
- Explore out-of-hours information and support, including digital options participants raised, while recognising preference for face-to-face support.
- Explore tailored support for young adults ages 16–25, recognising their needs when moving between children's and adult services.



Summary:

This workshop explored how young people experience changes in support, particularly transitions between services and into adulthood. Participants highlighted the importance of preparing for transitions earlier, maintaining trusted relationships and ensuring young people are not left facing a sudden 'cliff edge' when support ends. Key priorities included clearer and more personalised transition pathways, better coordination between CAMHS and adult services, accessible information about what comes next, and additional support for young people who may face greater barriers when moving between services.

Next stages and a note on this report

The findings in this report are based on notes captured during the young people's workshop and the subsequent write-up by the steering group. They are intended to inform the development of the London Core CYPMHS Offer and keep young people's language, priorities, and experiences visible in the next stage of the work.

- The CYP Co-production Review Group will present the feedback from children and young people to the service professionals developing the Core Offer.
- The Problem and Expectation Statements will be refined in response to CYP and parents/carers feedback. The agreed expectations will be included in the Core Offer, setting out what children, young people and families should be able to expect.
- Insights from children and young people, parents and carers, professionals, and the evidence base will then be brought together to consider:
- changes needed to the Core Offer
- areas where the feedback strengthens or reinforces existing content
- opportunities for feedback to inform the Core Offer, recommendations, or wider work, where appropriate.
- An updated Core Offer and recommendations will be developed, informed by combined insight and further refinement.
- Finally, a 'You said, we did' update will be shared with children and young people, explaining how their feedback has informed the Core Offer and wider recommendations.

Young people should be involved in shaping what good support looks and feels like.

Partnership for Young London

Transformation Partners in Health and Care

Report authored by Tanisha Zaman and Angel Singh, Partnership for Young London