

Appendix 5 **Commissioners' visit to the Young Adults Centre (YAC), Southall**

Date: Thursday 12 August 2021

Venue: Southall Town Hall

Participants: Eve and Kari, Young Ealing Champions and Elly Heaton-Virgo, CEO Young Ealing Foundation

Commissioners: Laura Forrester and Edmund Yeo

Introduction

A hub for young people – campaign to hang on to, and enhance, the Young Adult Centre, Park View Road, Southall UB1 3HJ

This is a purpose-built building with a music studio, a gym, games areas including pool table, table tennis and table football, an IT section with access to the internet and available for study, a kitchen area for cooking activities, outdoor floodlit multi-sports pitch, a hair & beauty room, and a large hall for indoor sports and games. It offers two evenings a week for young people to be able to meet with other young people, relax and learn new skills in a safe and relaxed environment. It is well located between two of Southall's high schools, Dormers Wells and Villiers, and is easily accessible by public transport. The venue is also used at other times of the day by other not-for-profit groups working with young people for example, charities offering an alternative curriculum such as 'Let Me Play' during the day, and twilight sessions including VODI (Voice of Daljit International) after school sessions providing supplementary support, activities and learning to groups of primary school children for whose parents are working, and often do not have English as their first language.

A recent proposal (July 2021) by the council is exploring the option of providing some youth activities from a community centre on Fleming Road, about a mile away, closing the YAC, demolishing it and using the land to build much-needed housing. The proposed new location would be unable to provide the same range of facilities and is in the middle of the Golflinks Housing estate which is currently reputed to be on a gang boundary and there is fear of gang violence breaking out at any time.

Fearing the adverse impacts from the change in location, as well as the reduction in facilities and opportunities that would be on offer, the Young Ealing Champions are currently focussed on a campaign to save the YAC.

In parallel with this the Young Ealing Foundation, whose role is to bring together small voluntary sector organisations that are working with young people, is leading on developing a business plan to attract other children's charities/organisations to use the YAC as a young people's hub; this, it is suggested, would build confidence and capacity across local disparate groups, and would give them experience of working together. This in turn would attract investment in funding for youth work, and youth justice work, such as the Youth Endowment Fund.

Links to the Ealing Race Equality Commission Themes

Education and Learning

When asked what it would mean for them if the YAC closed the Young Ealing Champions said that although it would not affect them directly it would have an impact on the children who do use it, the parents who need that help with childcare and tutoring provision (which would affect their children's education and employment), as well as the employers of those parents. Most of the parents who use the service are from BAME backgrounds.

"Parents drop off the children after school knowing they will get some food and a safe space to wait while their siblings are being taught."

The YAC also provides opportunity for young people to find out how to cope with boredom, try out different ways of spending their time, and to meet with other children/young people, so they are not on their own. It provides for primary aged children right up to year 11, and youth services for those aged 13-19 years, although girls stop coming to the youth clubs at an earlier age than boys.

A local place, close to home, is needed, out of school, that gives young people a chance to explore their feelings and to meet friends and new people, listen and talk about experiences that are different from their home lives. The rest of their lives are so controlled. These conversations help them prepare for the world of work and becoming responsible adults.

“It is a massive struggle to find time to relax and socialise rather than be drilled with knowledge.”

When asked if race was an issue for them in their lives, they both had experienced/witnessed low-level racism, often between different ethnicities – ‘off-hand small remarks that you think about afterwards’, or ‘an occasional slur, but doesn’t happen too often’ which makes you wonder ‘why are you doing that?’ or ‘it just makes you feel uncomfortable. Having a safe space can help you to deal with these types of experiences’.

What do you need from the council?

Support the YAC to stay open in Southall, so it can be a neutral hub in the centre of an area with high indices of multiple deprivation (IMD), to help young people to cope with their feelings in a safe space, build their self-esteem and confidence which in turn will have an impact for their future as they transition into adults.

Push back to Government on behalf of the young people of Ealing that they should make a decision about education – not knowing is even more of a problem, adding to the stress of GCSEs

Health and Housing

Young People need a Safe Space, particularly to help with mental health post- covid

“It is a way to escape, but if it (the YAC) goes then it would be counter-productive as there would be worse mental health. If there is no space to go to, you would feel caged in and that might affect them for the rest of their life, they would just hit a brick wall, they wouldn’t know who to turn to, they might not be able to go to a park to relax. If people are affected this way there would be a domino effect.”

Although there are high IMD for Acton, there is more provision in that area.

The Young Ealing Champions mentioned that some children do not feel safe at home. *“If I’m not happy at home, who can help me? If there is no-one, what can I do? I will find other methods but there is a lack of choices”*; these can be dark situations.

What do you need from the council?

Take the pressure off the housing focus. The location of the YAC has been identified to be redeveloped into housing which is also a local and London wide priority, with 10,000 people needing housing in the borough.

Income and Employment

For many families in the Southall area their households' covid experiences, with parents being furloughed or made redundant, families coping with overcrowding, and additional financial worries have been exacerbated over the past 18 months.

Crime and Justice

Young people need to feel safe – and in the words of Eve and Kari the YAC is a place to go, relax, chill out from school and feel safe.

Although there is a proposal to have some activities from the community centre on the Golflinks estate, and even if the facilities could be improved, for some young people it would be unlikely that they would use it because of the recent rumours and reports of gang related activity as they would not feel safe, and/or their parents would not let them use it as they would be worried for their children's safety.

The YAC is in a good location, as it is easy to get to by public transport and has some parking. It is also in a good location for those who do not want to travel outside of their local area.

During times when the covid restrictions have eased, and now the lock down has now lifted and the weather is better, young people do meet in parks and open spaces, but this in turn has its challenges; local residents get anxious about seeing groups of youths gathering, assume they are up to no good, and call the police. Some of those young people get entangled with the police and become criminalised even though they were doing nothing wrong to start with.

For some children and young people there are no parks or open spaces within easy walking distance of their homes, and for many they don't feel comfortable inviting friends home for various different reasons; as mentioned above, some of these reasons have been

exacerbated by their households' covid experiences (parents being furloughed or made redundant, overcrowding, financial worries).

What do you need from the council?

Campaigns to help educate the public that when they see groups of young people, they should not assume the group is up to no good.

More of a focus on uncovering and dealing with underlying concerns – for example question why a person may be drinking in the first place and give them support to cope and tackle the underlying reasons, rather than call the police on them

Support the YAC so it can help reduce Youth Crime – by fixing problems earlier/helping young people to cope with their feelings in a safe space will have an impact for their future - mitigating before it is too late or gets to that

Don't assume that there's just the one solution, be more joined up.

Participation, decision-making, and leadership

Eve and Kari as young people (15 and 19 respectively) talked about a meeting about the future of the YAC that they had attended with officers from the council. They relayed that even the officers had to admit that the range of facilities that are currently available at the YAC would not be possible in the Golflinks Community Centre.

The champions had done their homework and prepared for the meeting. They challenged the sample size for a survey that had been conducted – 50 young people selected from across the borough, when there are over 16,500 children and young people in Southall alone.

They also lost respect for the consultation process when they asked if there had been any consultation. Officers referred to a consultation that had been conducted recently yet none of them were aware of it. When they sought further clarity, the consultation was not about whether-or-not to retain or move the YAC, but a broader consultation about the provision of youth services across the entire borough.

They were surprised to hear officers being uncertain about the figures on knife crime, one suggesting it was high, another assuring them the figures were true.

Government and council officers and politicians don't realise that people struggle to cope; they don't know or they don't want to understand what it feels like to be in poverty or hardship.

In the words of the Young Ealing Champions *"Why do people think that young people in this borough do not deserve services?"*

Funding for Youth Services in Ealing is disproportionately low compared to neighbouring boroughs. Elly explained that across the borough only three organisations have a turnover of £300,00 per annum; Southall Black Sisters, Ealing Community Transport and Acton West London. None of these work specifically with children and young people. This puts the borough at a disadvantage as larger funders are more likely to fund organisations that have the confidence and experience of handling budgets of £750,000 or more

Small grassroots organisations like GOSAD provide a range of services in the community, often with young people as part of a project, but not exclusively for children and young people. A large proportion of these grassroots organisations often do not have the knowledge or skills to secure even modest levels of funding (e.g., £5k). Funders, including those that tackle youth violence, view the towns across the borough differently – Acton is treated almost as an inner-city town centre while Greenford, Northolt and Southall are not. Other funders, such as the Princes Trust, run their own programmes, rather than support grassroots projects.

What do you need from the council?

More integration in planning for the future, for example Southall has been badly affected by what is happening to Heathrow, in terms of staff and jobs.

Talk to young people, don't assume you know how things have affected us - support the recruitment of new Young Ealing Champions

Positive reinforcement - celebrate young people and their achievements – incentivise all schools to get involved

Recognition and respect for what young people/voluntary sector can bring to the table, they are the little yachts and boats that are quick to receive and respond to needs within their communities and can help to steer the council which is more like the oil tanker.

Campaigns to challenge the people pressure that teenagers and young people seen outside, in a group with others, must be doing bad things/ seeing groups of children is not a bad thing

Young people to have a seat at the table when decisions are being made; e.g Housing plans – the young people understand that there may be reasons why a location makes sense for a housing development, in the case of the YAC the council owns the land and can therefore develop it to their own specification, with family-sized dwellings, but surely this shouldn't be at the expense of investing in youth services, as this short-sightedness will have implications for the foreseeable future.

A more joined up approach that is supportive and agile to help the fragmented voluntary sector. YEF is already working with Ealing Community Network and the Ealing Community Network has been working more with the council recently; one of the Directors (of Strategy and Engagement) comes to meetings as does one of the officers (Head of Youth Justice Service), but this leadership needs to be broader – across other services and agencies.

Voluntary sector to have a seat at the table when decisions are being made.