

Young Roots' Strategy

2024 - 2027

Working alongside young people seeking
safety in the UK



We are Young Roots



Introduction

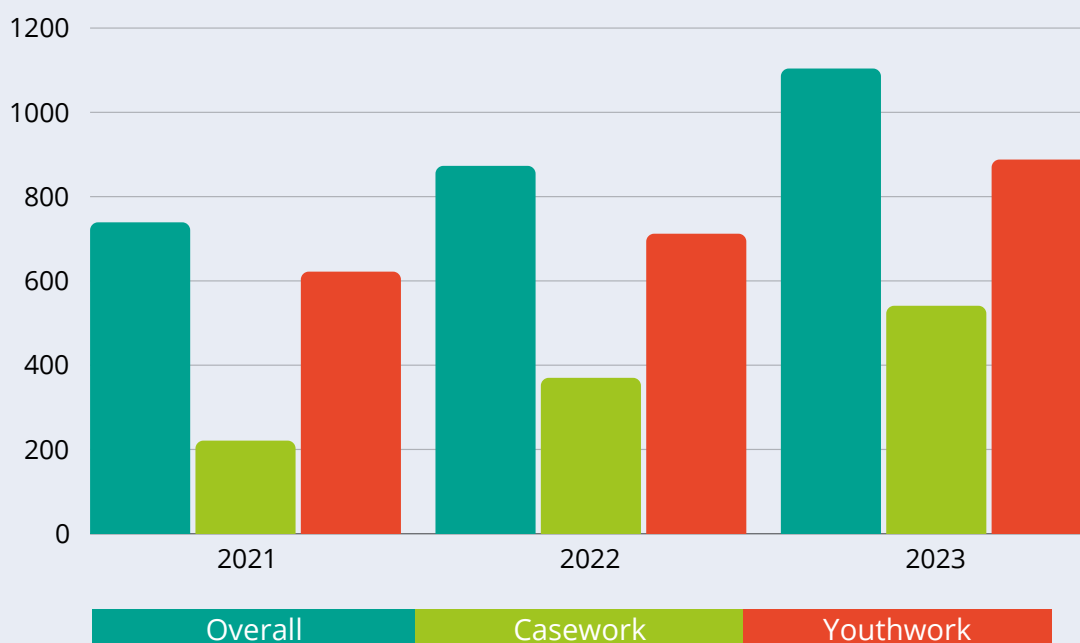
We are pleased to share our plans for the 2024 - 2027 strategic period with you. Now in our 20th year, we are proud and privileged to work each year with around 1,000 young people aged 11-25 who are seeking safety in the UK.

Many young people arrive in the UK without family, having fled danger at home and survived perilous journeys. They tell us that they find the asylum system intimidating and difficult to understand, and experience social isolation and loneliness. We work alongside young people building trusted relationships and a sense of community, resolving the complex practical challenges they face, and supporting them to access their rights.

As the system has been made increasingly hostile, our team have remained a constant source of support for young people. But we have also adapted to meet their changing needs, drawing on our unique insight from working directly with young people every day. At our Advice and Support Hubs, we combine our own Youthwork and Casework support with therapeutic and legal services delivered by our expert partners. As the policy environment and public narrative concerning refugees have become increasingly negative, we have developed our policy, influencing and campaigning work, so that young people can draw on their experiences to help make the case for a different, more compassionate approach.

As we look to our next strategic period, with young people increasingly faced with destitution and homelessness, in need of mental health services and unable to access legal representation, and even being denied the right to asylum itself, we will again adapt to meet growing needs in these areas.

Our impact in numbers: 2021-24 strategic period



Our vision and mission

Our **vision** is a compassionate and welcoming society for young people seeking safety in the UK.

Our **mission** is to work alongside young people seeking safety in the UK, building trusted relationships, providing practical and emotional support and promoting young people's rights and power.

The way in which we achieve change with young people is illustrated in our **theory of change** at the end of this document. It shows that our ultimate long-term impact is to improve young people's ability to settle and build a positive future in the UK. We contribute towards this aim by supporting young people to improve their practical situation, wellbeing, skills and confidence and their agency to pursue the future they choose. We do this through our Youthwork, our Casework and our Advice and Support Hubs. We also work with young people to positively influence the policy and practice which affects their lives. Our work is trauma-informed, rights and asset-based, and participatory.

Our values

Our values are at the heart of everything we do. These are:

Integrity – we act courageously and independently in the best interests of young people, as determined by them, and are transparent and accountable for our actions.

Openness – we are adaptable and open to change. We are curious, reflect on our impact, and are keen to learn how to do things better.

Kindness & compassion – we prioritise kindness and compassion, to build supportive relationships and promote wellbeing. We focus on supporting the wellbeing of our staff and volunteers.

Inclusivity – we believe we have an important role to play in addressing societal inequities. We value the benefits of diversity and we strive to be inclusive. This affects all aspects of our work, including our work with young people, our team and our wider strategy.

Empowerment – we believe in the unique strengths of each member of staff and each individual young person. We trust our team to act autonomously and transfer power to young people to build their autonomy, independence and agency.

The unique work of Young Roots

We stand out because:

- We are experts in supporting the transition of young refugees from childhood to adulthood. We support young people to understand and navigate their changing rights and entitlements, as well as supporting their emotional development during these crucial years.
- We spend time with young people every day of the week, building trust and close relationships, in an informal environment, where young people are able to be themselves. This gives us a unique insight into young people's experiences, the challenges caused by the asylum system, and young people's needs and goals. This makes us well-placed to deliver transformational services that meet young people's needs and to understand, evidence and speak with authority about how the system must change.
- Through early intervention, we work with young people from as soon as possible after their arrival in the UK, when we can make the biggest difference.

Governance

Our Board of Trustees meets six times a year, and the Finance Committee including the Chair, Trustee with lead responsibility for risk, Treasurer, Chief Executive and Head of Finance and Internal Operations meets monthly. We also have two joint staff and Trustee Committees - our Wellbeing Committee and our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, each Chaired by a Trustee. The Board of Trustees has regular training and continues to review its performance providing oversight and support to the staff team. Our Board includes people with lived experience of the asylum system.



Our context

Young people seeking safety in the UK face a brutal system. Chronic underfunding of the asylum system means that young people are living in limbo, unable to rebuild their lives for years whilst waiting to be recognised as a refugee. Throughout this period, rather than being housed in the community young people are living in unsuitable asylum accommodation, so-called “hotels”. Children often face disbelief, and are wrongly treated as adults, meaning they are denied the protections and rights that all children should have, and are instead accommodated with adults, sometimes even sharing rooms with strangers.

Many solicitors have had to stop providing publicly-funded legal representation in asylum cases, because the legal aid system has been changed so that it is no longer economically viable to do so. This means many young people do not have legal representation as the Home Office makes a decision on their asylum claim, on which the young person’s future safety rests. And even for those who are recognised as refugees, many are immediately forced into street homelessness and destitution as they are forced out of their accommodation before alternative accommodation can be secured.

It is not surprising that in this context, having fled persecution, faced perilous journeys and often without family or community, many of the young people with whom we work are traumatised and require mental health support. And this is all before implementation of the so-called Illegal Migration Act, which will deny almost all young people the right to seek safety in the UK, will mean that many more children are treated as adults and will see very many people detained and facing removal to a third country.

A General Election will take place during the first year of our Strategic Plan. Having begun our policy, influencing and campaigning work, we will press the next government for a more compassionate system for young people seeking safety in the UK, make the most of any opportunities for positive change that arise and adapt our services as appropriate to respond to developments affecting the young people with whom we work.

Every young person arrives in the UK with their own strengths, their own dreams for the future and their own personal needs for support. They already face multiple extraordinary barriers to building a positive future in the UK. Our services are designed to meet young people’s needs in this harsh system and to support them to pursue the future they choose.



My Caseworker provides me with both practical and emotional support. They have helped me to access long term counselling, but most importantly, I find their presence reassuring – especially during stressful times such as appointments with my solicitors and court hearings - Young person

Our priorities

In this context, we will maintain our reach of around 1,000 young people aged 11-25 each year with our transformative Youthwork, Casework and Advice and Support Hubs, but will further develop these to:

- meet the more complex needs we are seeing from young people
- meet the specific needs of groups of young people sharing protected characteristics, such as young women
- support young people to achieve their goals.

We will also adapt our services in the ways young people need as they are affected by the so-called Illegal Migration Act.

Over the three years of this strategic plan period we have five strategic objectives:

1. To promote youth leadership in the design and delivery of our Youthwork to meet the diverse needs of young people and enable them to pursue their goals.
2. To build on the strength of our Casework service by adapting to meet the changing needs of the young people we support.
3. To improve our ability to campaign with young people, rooting ourselves in our local communities to achieve positive change at the local level while contributing to collaborative and strategic policy work at the national level.
4. To make our values central to everything we do by increasing the extent to which people with lived experience of the asylum system take part in decision-making, promoting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and promoting staff and volunteer wellbeing across the breadth of our functions.
5. To support the growth and development of staff, young people and volunteers, through improved efficiency, sustainability and integration across Young Roots.

The first couple of months I felt very lonely, no one was there, I couldn't talk to anyone, I couldn't trust anyone... Now I have friends, someone to talk to. Most people are around my age, I meet friends from my country and even other countries, everyone is coming to have a good time so it means it's easier to try to make new friends - Young person



Our plans in detail

1. To promote youth leadership in the design and delivery of our Youthwork to meet the diverse needs of young people and enable them to pursue their goals

Our Youthwork plays a huge part in promoting young people's wellbeing, allowing young people to form trusted relationships and build a sense of community and belonging with staff and with each other. It also provides an opportunity for young people to spend time enjoying themselves, learn new skills and build positive memories. These relationships, connections and transformative moments are even more important in the increasingly harsh environment facing young people. During each year of the strategic plan period, more than 800 young people will engage in our Youthwork, and we will further develop our approach in the following ways:

- We know that youth participation, where young people make decisions about what we do and how we do it and are involved in delivery, both increases young people's sense of agency, skills and confidence and ensures that our services offer young people the opportunities that are most important to them. We will build on the success of this work, by ensuring young people lead the development and delivery of an increasing number of our Youthwork activities.
- As part of this, we will continue to develop our volunteering offer and by the end of this strategic period, we will have explored how this could progress to internship and employment opportunities.
- We will develop further partnerships that allow young people to pursue their diverse goals and ambitions, whether that is more sporting, employability or creative opportunities.
- We will continue to develop specific Youthwork activities to meet the needs of groups sharing protected characteristics, such as young women.



2. To build on the strength and impact of Young Roots' Casework service by adapting to meet the changing needs of the young people we support.

The evidence is clear that our Casework service is transformative for young people. Along with the holistic support offered in our Advice and Support Hubs, it supports them to access the services they need to settle positively in the UK, including housing, education, mental health services and legal advice. The government's recent policy and legal changes have meant that young people who access our Casework service and Advice and Support Hubs have increasingly severe needs, often facing homelessness and destitution, mental health crises and unable to find a solicitor to represent them. The implementation of the so-called Illegal Migration Act could further exacerbate this pattern. During each year of this strategic plan period more than 500 young people will access our Casework service and we will meet young people's evolving needs by:

- Exploring different models and partnerships to meet young people's unmet needs related to legal representation, housing, destitution and mental health.
- Adapting the nature and operation of our Casework service as necessary to reflect changes once the so-called Illegal Migration Act is implemented.

3. To improve our ability to campaign with young people, rooting ourselves in our local communities to achieve political change at the local level while contributing to collaborative and strategic policy work at the national level.

In our last strategic period, we made significant progress towards establishing our new policy and campaigns work, employing a Policy and Campaigns Manager, creating a steering group, developing our strategy and working with young people to shape our work. Our last strategic period saw unprecedented attacks on the rights of young people seeking safety in the UK, making it increasingly difficult to gain positive outcomes for young people. The context in which we are now working makes our policy and campaigns work even more important. We work daily with young people, so are uniquely well-placed to understand the challenges they face, to illustrate the impact of the current system and to work alongside young people to call for positive change. In this strategic period we will:

- Use the extensive evidence from our frontline services to inform and support our policy and campaigns work, which aims to improve the system affecting young people's lives.
- Increase our campaigning skills, capacity and reach, particularly by growing and mobilising our activist base and media profile.
- Establish effective relationships with decision-makers and statutory services and engage allies and local communities to speak out on the issues that matter to young people.
- Support young people to push for change, increasing their confidence, skills and sense of agency in doing so.

4. To ensure our values are central to everything we do, by increasing the extent to which people with lived experience of the asylum system take part in decision-making, promoting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), and promoting staff and volunteer wellbeing across the breadth of our functions. We will focus on the following:

- We will build on our deep expertise in youth participation in service design and delivery, by ensuring that young people are involved in meaningful decision-making across the whole organisation. This will both increase young people's skills, confidence and agency and mean we can better meet young people's needs. By the time we develop our next strategic plan, young people will be at the heart of decision-making on our plans for the future. This will both support young people to develop new skills, confidence and agency and improve the decisions we make.
- The situation facing young people is brutal. We are seeing extremely high levels of demand and growing complexity of young people's needs at a time when statutory services are under pressure. This, all in the context of a hostile public narrative, means that the wellbeing of our staff team is a top priority. We will further develop an improved wellbeing support and benefits package for staff, informed through regular staff consultation.
- We will further develop our DEI strategy, so that people with lived experience and from diverse communities and identities are embedded at all levels in the organisation and through diverse partnerships.

5. To support the growth and development of staff, young people and volunteers, through improved efficiency, sustainability and integration across Young Roots.

We are grateful for the support from our funders which has allowed Young Roots to grow rapidly to meet the high levels of demand for our services from young people. Having recently reached this new stage of maturity, we will focus during this strategic period on ensuring that the right policies, systems and structures are in place to allow us to properly support our staff team, young people and volunteers. We will focus on the following:

- We will implement a volunteering strategy to increase our capacity, specialist skills and community connections to support young people.
- As a learning organisation, we will continue to pursue digital transformation and harness the benefits of technology in improving our efficiency, information and the quality of our work.
- We will secure the financial sustainability of Young Roots and our ability to continue delivering positive outcomes for young people by increasing the proportion of our funding which is unrestricted, through grants, individual giving and corporates so as to better enable us to adapt to changing needs.
- We will increase our skills, capacity and the reach of our communications in order to grow our supporter base, increase engagement and support campaigning impact,

Our Theory of Change

Activity

Interim Outcome

Outcome

Long-term aim



Definitions

Young people seeking safety – In this strategy we use the term “young people seeking safety” to refer to young people aged 11-25 who are asylum seekers, recognised as refugees, are granted protection or leave to remain, are appeal rights exhausted and those who would be asylum seekers or recognised as refugees but for their claim being considered inadmissible.

Illegal Migration Act - If implemented, this Act will mean that the vast majority of young people who are, under international law, refugees, will be denied the right to claim asylum and be recognised as refugees in the UK. Our services will be designed to support all those who, in the early years after their arrival in the UK, are in need of our services, even if not permitted to claim asylum under the new legislation. We will not turn young people away based on their immigration status, if our services would meet their needs. We will prioritise based on levels of need.

Youth Participation - Youth Participation is short for "Youth Participation in decision making". For example, young people are often involved in planning or running activities at Young Roots, such as trips, sports and/or cooking. We want Youth Participation opportunities to be as democratic as possible and so we do not cherry pick specific individuals based on their language ability or personality. This often means taking decisions to whoever is at our youth clubs on the night. Young Roots use Roger Hart's ladder of participation to understand the 8 different levels of participation from Level 1 ("manipulation") to Level 8 "youth initiated and shared with adults". We are committed to regular evaluations of what level of Youth Participation we have reached across the organisation and will aim to involve young people in more organisational decisions where we recognise that they have expertise and interest.

Youth Leadership - Youth Leadership is when decision making is entirely determined by young people without adults' involvement. Young People learn leadership skills through Youth Participation.



Company number: **07448744**

Charity number: **1139685**

Tel: **0208 684 9140**

Email: **london@youngroots.org.uk**

Young Roots relies on donations from individuals and grants from charitable trusts and foundations.

To support our work, please visit our website **[youngroots.org.uk](https://www.youngroots.org.uk)**

To become part of our community, find us on social media:

 **@weareyoungroots**

 **@weareyoungroots**

 **Young Roots**

 **@weareyoungroots**

