

YMCA LONDON ELECTIONS MANIFESTO 2024



Here for young people
Here for communities
Here for you

ABOUT YMCA

YMCA is the oldest and largest youth charity in the world, set up in London in 1844. In the 179 years since, YMCA has evolved into a global movement through World Wars, pandemics and financial crises to help more than 64 million people across 120 different countries today.

Throughout England and Wales we operate as a federation, with more than 80 local YMCAs supporting young people in 190 local authority areas across both countries. We operate in 688 communities across England and Wales, creating supportive environments where young people can belong, contribute and thrive. The 375,197 young people we help each year are firmly at the heart of what we do, supported by more than 3,900 members of staff and 1,900 volunteers across 669 locations.

YMCAs IN LONDON

YMCAs in London work across 18 different boroughs and the City of London, providing a wide range of services for young people, adults, families and wider communities, all year round. London YMCAs:

Provide supported housing for 1,735 16-30 year olds every year. This includes emergency beds, medium-term supported accommodation, and move-on accommodation as young people transition into independent living.

Run 12 youth centres, as well as delivering detached youth work and targeted youth services for young people particularly at risk of exploitation or involvement in crime, reaching 2,590 young people every year.

Provide support and advice services such as mental health counselling, drug and alcohol advice, employment and careers advice, benefits and housing advice, and food banks, to 1,686 16-30 year olds annually.

Deliver training and education such as life skills, budgeting and planning, apprenticeships, and further education to 1,052 young people annually.

Provide physical activity through gyms to over 11,000 users annually, and swimming to over 66,000 users annually.

OUR VISION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN LONDON

We want London to be inclusive and inspirational for all people, including young people. London is defined by diversity – it is only whole when all of its parts are singing together. As a city, we must come together to help our young people and communities to overcome the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis, and the range of other challenges faced by so many. In doing so, we must ensure that all young people in London should have the opportunity to discover who they are and what they can become.

OUR KEY ASKS

HOUSING

London is experiencing the worst housing crisis in the country. Young people are particularly disadvantaged by low wages and lower levels of benefits, which prevent them from accessing accommodation. We believe every young Londoner should have a good quality, affordable, safe place to call home. We're calling on the Mayoral and London Assembly candidates to support:

➡ A pilot of a London-wide family mediation and intervention scheme to help prevent youth homelessness by preventing family breakdown.

➡ A new funded scheme dedicated to helping young Londoners get access to affordable housing in the city, such as by providing rent deposits and guarantors, or support with maintaining a tenancy.

➡ Build more affordable housing targeted to the needs of young people, so that young Londoners are no longer being pushed out of the city.

SAFE SPACES, SAFER COMMUNITIES

Youth services in England have now faced over a decade of cuts. In London this has left young people with hardly any youth spaces, and little to do in their free time. Young people are also struggling with the presence of violent crime in their communities, including knife crime, violence against women and girls, and unhealthy relationships; but they don't know where to go to get help. Every young person deserves to have access to safe spaces and youth activities in their community. We're calling on the Mayoral and London Assembly candidates to support:

➡ An assessment of the existing map of spaces for young people in London and offering targeted investment to increase capacity in those existing spaces, e.g. by allowing them to extend opening hours, hire more staff, or offer new programmes.

➡ Outdoor spaces in London to reserve 25% of the year for free activities for young people, which would increase the provision of free sports and physical activities for young people, and also benefit young people's mental health, confidence and social skills.

HEALTHY MINDS

Young people are struggling with more mental health challenges than ever before, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis. Mental illness is preventing many young people from keeping up with education, getting into employment, or progressing their lives more generally. Every young person should get the support they need to have good mental health. We're calling on the Mayoral and London Assembly candidates to support:

➡ Funding for training of frontline staff on young people's mental health, suicide awareness, trauma-informed approaches, and the specific needs of migrant, refugee, and LGBTQIA+ young people. Mental health support should be considered on the same level of importance as safeguarding.

➡ The identification of existing organisations or spaces which could become hubs for young people to get early help with mental health, if given extra support to train staff members for this.

INCLUSION FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people make up around 25% of London's population, but too many decisions are taken without consulting them or finding out about their priorities. Young people deserve to have their needs and interests met, and their voices heard. We're calling on the Mayoral and London Assembly candidates to support:

➡ The creation of a Young Mayor of London who young people aged 16 and above can vote for, giving young people a voice and getting them involved in democracy and voting from an early age.

For more information or to show your support, contact us on policy@ymca.org.uk