

# YouthHOPE

Health • Opportunity • Purpose • Empowerment

---

A plan to deliver  
Health, Opportunity, Purpose and Empowerment (HOPE)  
to young people in our community

## Introduction

Focusing on young people's wellbeing early helps them to become healthier, more resilient individuals who are better equipped to handle life's challenges. This approach can have long-term benefits not just for them, but for communities and society as a whole, fostering a generation that's more engaged, productive and mentally healthy.

Additionally, integrating environmental awareness and sustainability into youth initiatives promotes a sense of responsibility towards the planet, encouraging young people to adopt green practices and contribute to a sustainable future. By addressing their wellbeing and environmental consciousness, we are building a stronger, more thriving community.

## Recognising Need

Young people today struggle with a wide range of pressures, including social isolation and loneliness, deprivation of both time<sup>i</sup> and income, stress at school or college, bullying, body image issues, poor mental health and the pressure created by social media.

1 in 6 children<sup>ii</sup> have experienced a mental health issue, 1 in 3 children<sup>iii</sup> have been bullied and 1 in 2 children<sup>iv</sup> say that loneliness is a serious issue for young people.

Although Southend can be seen as an affluent city with successful schools, it is also a hot spot for anti-social behaviour in Essex. There are areas within the city which are ranked by the Index of Multiple Deprivation in the top 1% most deprived areas in England<sup>v</sup>.

Deprivation can affect young people's health – physically, mentally and emotionally – creating a cycle of disadvantage that repeats through generations. The conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age can impact our health and wellbeing, and limit the opportunities available to us. This lack of opportunities can have a detrimental impact on young people, constraining their possibilities, hindering their aspirations, and undermining their sense of purpose and empowerment. Young people growing up in deprived areas often face multiple barriers, including limited access to high-quality education, job opportunities, and social networks. These factors can significantly impact their chances of social mobility and access to opportunities compared to their peers in more affluent areas<sup>vi</sup>.

During the period 2011 to 2021, funding of youth provision has declined in real terms from £1,058.2m in 2011 to £408.5m in 2021, (and taking inflation into account, the decline in funding appears more substantial, amounting to a decrease from £1136.08 million in 2011 to £380.7 million in 2021). 95% of local authorities reduced their real term spending on youth services by at least a quarter in this period, with 34% reducing by more than three quarters<sup>vii</sup>.



Statistical analysis shows that a year after a drop in expenditure, local authorities see increased incidences of bike theft, shoplifting, possession of weapon offences, and a higher proportion of young offenders who re-offend.

In July 2023, a community safety officer from Southend Council told the education select committee in the House of Commons that budget cuts since 2010 have had "a significant impact" on services for young people in Southend, and that vulnerable youngsters were being recruited by organised criminal gangs to transport and deal drugs, and that the problem seemed to be increasing, with the number of arrests from 2017 – 2022 nearly quadrupling in number<sup>viii</sup>.

Research has shown that despite the barriers they face, this generation of young people are engaged with the world, full of practical solutions and optimistic for their futures – but they often feel sidelined or ignored in various aspects of their lives, and are frustrated and disempowered because their experiences are rarely reflected in policy making<sup>ix</sup>. Young people have identified the need for support outside the classroom, and want a place where they feel comfortable out of school, a place that has youth counsellors, mentors, and they want more focus on their mental health<sup>x</sup>.

Over the past 9 years at Wellbeing at Garon Park, we have developed various programmes, partnerships and services, all with the aim of promoting and protecting the good physical, mental and sensory health of local residents; and/or for the recreation of those residents who have need of our facilities by reason of their health, infirmity or disablement in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving their conditions of life.

However, we recognise that we now need to concentrate on more youth-centred approaches in our strategy-making, partnerships and services, actively involving young people in our future efforts, as they are integral to our present and future success.

## Current Situation

The Wellbeing Park is currently used by an average of 2,350 young people aged between 4 and 18 years every week (111,897 overall youth visits in 2023). This is for a variety of offers we currently have on site including sport education, social sport, health and wellbeing, education and personal development, events, volunteering, cultural and leisure activities.

Youth offers currently using Wellbeing at Garon Park:

- EH4CP – Alternative education provision and personal development offer. Working alongside and empowering schools, parents and/or carers to build on relationships with their child, gaining support and skills to use in everyday situations while understanding the community around them.
- Raw Learning – Alternative education provision aimed mainly at neurodivergent young people whose school-based anxiety is preventing them from engaging with educational activities
- Steps Ahead Life at the Hive – An inspiring outdoor nature base, providing a blend of outdoor, educational, creative and wellbeing experiences
- Various Youth Football clubs & Youth Training, Pay and Play football on 3G pitches
- ATF (Achieve, Flourish Thrive) – helping under-served children, young people and families to Achieve, Flourish and Thrive. Building a sense of togetherness and enabling life skills through participation in sport, heritage, culture and creativity with a person and community centred approach.
- SUCET (Southend United Community Education Trust) – sport participation, health & wellbeing, education & training and community cohesion schemes
- Little Heroes – support for families of children on the autistic spectrum to be able to participate in activities and events that neurotypical children can do, in safe and secure surroundings.
- Hartbeeps – multi sensory play for babies
- Inter-school cross Country events
- Garon Park Youth Club - A traditional youth club, set up in 2022 in response to a report published by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) to tackle teenage delinquency, which called for ‘a Youth Club in every neighbourhood’. Garon Park Youth is a safe place for young people aged between 8 and 15 years, with over 400 signed up members, and a weekly attendance of 60+ members. We have promoted 8 young people to Youth Leaders, and have 10 volunteers who run the club, headed by our own fulltime Youth Lead.



## Future Focus Areas

We have chosen to focus predominantly on the values of **Health, Opportunity, Purpose and Empowerment** because they are fundamental pillars for nurturing well-rounded and resilient young individuals. When we focus on these elements together, they create an environment where youth can thrive, lead healthy lives and realise their full potential.

We are committed to upholding these values at all times in all our partnerships, collaborations, decisions and offers.

**Health:** By focusing on the physical, mental, and emotional health of young people we provide a holistic approach to youth development, helping young people build resilience and a strong foundation for a healthy and fulfilling life.

**Opportunity:** Opportunities empower individuals. Providing opportunities to young people can break the cycle of disadvantage that can perpetuate across generations. They give young people the chance to take control of their lives, improve their circumstances, make choices and pursue their aspirations.

Lack of opportunities can sometimes lead to engaging in risky behaviours such as substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, violence or criminal activity, especially among disadvantaged youth<sup>xi</sup>. By providing positive alternatives, we can reduce crime rates and create safer communities

Overall, giving young and potentially disadvantaged individuals opportunities is an investment in the future of society. It not only benefits the individuals themselves but also the community as a whole.

**Purpose:** The development of purpose is intricately woven with the development of identity, meaning that discovering one's purpose is critical during the adolescent years. Studies suggests that a feeling of purpose in young people is associated with better physical health, and can lead to increased happiness, academic performance, and resiliency<sup>xii</sup>.

Our goal is to give youth a sense of purpose, helping them discover their potential and make a difference in the world around them.

**Empowerment:** Ensuring every young person is heard, seen, and valued. We want to empower young people to take control of their lives by acquiring the skills, knowledge, and opportunities needed to positively impact their own futures, and to create positive change in their communities.

We believe that every challenge presents an opportunity for growth. Through our project, we empower young people to transform obstacles into stepping stones towards a brighter future.

## Our Vision

Through **YouthHOPE**, we envision a community where young people from all walks of life are **healthy**, have **opportunities**, find **purpose** and feel **empowered**. We aim to create a safe space for youth to socialise, play and learn; where they are supported, valued and respected, and given the tools they need to reach their full potential.

## Our Mission

Our **YouthHOPE** mission is to create positive futures for young people by empowering young minds and helping young people feel included.

## Our Approach.

Our **YouthHOPE** approach is organic. Whilst we know our vision, we will always be exploring new opportunities to develop activities and projects that are effective and ultimately benefit children, young people, their families and the wider community.

Key is to develop a safe and inclusive environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together, learn and grow. To create a vibrant youth community with volunteering and social action opportunities, where everyone has a voice, every idea is valued, every dream is supported. Where decisions aren't made *for* young people, but *with* young people and *by* young people.

We believe that great things can be achieved when people work together. We already partner other organisations including schools, sports teams, alternative education providers, volunteer organisations, community groups and more, some of whom collaborate with care homes, NHS, the police, young offending teams etc and will continue to build on these partnerships to create a space for youth engagement, building a foundation for lifelong wellbeing and making our community better for everyone.



## Strategy

Operating within both the National Youth Agency “Quality Mark” Framework<sup>xiii</sup> and the UK Youth “Safe Spaces” Compliance Framework<sup>xiv</sup>, we will:

### Establish a Youth Council

A youth council empowers young people by providing a platform for their voices to be heard.

Our **YouthHOPE** Council will be a group of talented, diverse young people, who are passionate about making a difference in their communities, whose chair-person will have a place on the Garon Park CIC Board. Guided by a team of adults, but ultimately youth led, the charge of the Youth Council will be to advise Wellbeing at Garon Park on youth related topics and issues, and to help create tailored projects and initiatives that resonate with them and their peers, increasing engagement and participation in wellbeing activities. They will also be responsible for gathering evidence and evaluating outcomes, to ensure the activities are effective in making a difference to the lives and experiences of young people.

The Council serves as a leadership development platform, fostering essential skills and confidence among young leaders.

The **YouthHOPE** Council will be responsible for increasing the visibility of Wellbeing at Garon Park among young people through things like social media, youth led events and community projects.

**\*\* See “Establishing a Youth Council for Wellbeing at Garon Park” for full details of member numbers, how the Council will be implemented and details of choosing the Model of Participation \*\***

Once established, the **YouthHOPE** Council will consider and come up with programmes, activities and opportunities that not only address specific aspects of health and wellbeing, but also promote social interaction, skill-building, and a sense of community among participants.

The **YouthHOPE** Council will consider how best to utilise the 32acre site for engaging youth in conservation / nature / wellbeing activities and form a Youth Conservation Plan:

### Implement a Youth Conservation Plan

The last decade has seen a growing number of studies<sup>xv</sup> evidencing the health and wellbeing benefits of ‘green exercise’ (being physically active within a natural environment or greenspace), and ‘green care’ (nature-based interventions that promote health and well-being outcomes) in children and adolescents, disaffected youth and those experiencing physical and/or mental ill-health such as post-traumatic stress disorders. It has even been evidenced that exposure to green outdoor spaces can reduce ADHD symptoms in children.<sup>xvi</sup>

Researchers at the University of Essex have conducted many studies<sup>xvii</sup> on the effects of green exercise and green care interventions on children and young people's wellbeing. Their findings demonstrate the positive impacts of outdoor activities in natural environments on mental health, stress reduction, and social connectedness.

This research has shown that green exercise provides greater physical and mental health benefits than physical activity or nature contact alone, including improved mood, reduced stress, and increased



feelings of wellbeing. Green exercise includes activities like hiking, cycling, running, gardening, golf, cricket, or simply playing outdoors.

Green care programmes aim to harness the healing power of nature to support individuals' mental and emotional health. Green care, could include activities like nature walks or horticultural therapy.

We already hold a number of educational programmes on site for various schools, education settings, community groups and clubs, with activities including tree planting and gardening events, we have a community garden for native plants and fruit/vegetables, and have various wildlife habitats.

We will provide additional activities and opportunities for youth to engage with nature, and to learn about and take part in our conservation efforts, thus developing a sense of pride in caring for the site, while also promoting physical activity, creativity, and social interaction.

These activities and opportunities could include:

[Further volunteer programmes for young people](#), such as tree planting, wildlife monitoring, habitat or stream creation/restoration, including building birdhouses, installing bat boxes, planting pollinator gardens, pond bank stabilisation, invasive species removal, and water quality monitoring

[Recreational activities](#) like hiking, camping, or birdwatching that encourage youth to explore and appreciate the natural environment. We could consider guided nature walks to explore different ecosystems within the site, learn about native plants and wildlife, and discuss conservation challenges and solutions.

[Creation of designated green spaces within the site](#) for relaxation, reflection and incorporating elements like meditation areas. This would integrate mindfulness practices with nature experiences for example offering outdoor yoga, meditation and reflection sessions in tranquil settings within the site, promoting mental wellbeing and connection to the environment.

[Environmental Workshops & Outdoor Education Programmes](#) on topics that educate youth about conservation, biodiversity, ecosystems and sustainable land management while immersing them in nature, including activities like gardening, composting, or renewable energy to teach practical skills that promote sustainability.

[Collaboration and partnership with local schools](#) to integrate environmental education into the curriculum and organise field trips to WGP for hands-on learning experiences.

[Utilise social media](#) more to share educational content, promote events, and connect with youth who may not be able to visit WGP in person.

[Outdoor adventure challenges](#) or scavenger hunts that encourage youth to explore the site while learning about its natural features and conservation value.

[Evening campfire sessions](#) where youth can gather around a fire pit to listen to guest speakers, share stories, and discuss conservation topics in a relaxed and informal setting.

[Art workshops](#) that combine creativity with conservation, such as nature sketching, eco-friendly crafts, or photography sessions focused on capturing the beauty of the natural world.

[Regular volunteer days](#) where youth and community members can come together to participate in conservation projects, such as litter clean-ups, garden maintenance, or invasive species control.

### **Other Youth Council Responsibilities**

Results from a sample youth consultation carried out by Wellbeing at Garon park at an event attended by 1500 people indicated interest in the following areas, so these would be presented to the Youth Council for discussion.

Skate Park  
Special Events and Courses  
Music Studio  
Basketball  
Bike Park  
Art Studio

Other areas for the Youth Council to consider could include (but not be limited to):

[Trips away from home/Outdoor adventures/Spending extended time outdoors, away from tech](#)  
There are several UK-based studies and initiatives that highlight the positive outcomes of nature-based experiences and trips away from home for young people, especially those from potentially disadvantaged backgrounds. The evidence suggests that such experiences not only improve mental and physical well-being but also enhance educational outcomes, social skills, and overall life satisfaction for young participants<sup>xviii</sup>. The NYG pledge will mean that by 2025, every young person in England should have access to regular out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer.

### [Sports and physical activities \(e.g., football, basketball, yoga, cricket, golf, cycling etc\)](#)

Several studies<sup>xix</sup> highlight the importance of providing accessible and inclusive sports opportunities for young individuals to promote their physical and mental wellbeing. Regular participation in sports and physical activities is associated with higher levels of fitness and wellbeing, increased self-esteem, and improved social relationships among young individuals. Sports participation has positive effects on reducing feelings of loneliness, building resilience and improving overall life satisfaction among young people.

### [The creation of a Youth Hub](#)

A Youth Hub is a place where young people can go to spend time, participate in activities and access support, where they feel welcome and valued. Much like a community centre for young people. By creating our own dedicated youth hub, it will provide a safe and supportive environment where young people, particularly disaffected youth, can access various services and programmes. Dedicated Youth Hubs play a crucial role in promoting social inclusion, building positive relationships and providing opportunities for skill development and empowerment among young individuals<sup>xx</sup>.

### [Youth Café – run by young people for young people](#)

Studies<sup>xxi</sup> show that youth cafes and similar spaces play a vital role in providing young individuals, with a sense of belonging, identity, and community. They provide valuable opportunities for young people to





socialise, learn, develop skills, and contribute to their communities. especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The café could either standalone or form part of the Youth Hub.

### Work Experience Opportunities

Work experience plays a crucial role in improving the employability, confidence, and career aspirations of young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It can help with interview skills and techniques, help with presentations etc, and provides valuable insights into the world of work, helping young people make more informed career choices and better understand their strengths and interests.

Studies have found that participation in work experience leads to improved confidence, motivation, and mental wellbeing among young participants. It has a positive impact on reducing feelings of isolation, increasing social connections, and enhancing employability skills among disadvantaged young people. Work experience helps young individuals develop soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and time management, which are essential for success in the workplace<sup>xxii</sup>.

### Redevelopment of Reservoir area

We plan to enhance the reservoir and surrounding area, adding a wooden pontoon, storage sheds, and seating areas. Once finished, this revamped space will offer exciting activities like fishing, kayaking, canoeing, paddle boarding, and more for young people to enjoy.

Teaming up with the local Scout association and other youth groups, we're creating a vibrant outdoor hub for adventure and learning. This initiative will empower young people to discover new interests, develop valuable skills, boost confidence, and forge a deeper connection with nature.

### Workshops

Research shows that high-quality youth programmes which include workshops on diverse topics like including: Nutrition/cooking classes, Stress management, Emotional intelligence, Health and Exercise, Mindfulness, Work/Interview skills, Art therapy (including things like Graffiti), Healthy relationships etc lead to positive youth outcomes, including improved social skills and academic engagement<sup>xxiii</sup>.

### The Creation of a Youth Led Volunteer Programme

Research<sup>xxiv</sup> indicates that participating in activities that benefit others in some way fosters a sense of emotional wellbeing and has mood boosting effects for young people. When young people experience personal satisfaction from doing something that makes a difference to other people or in the world around them, it reinforces a sense of purpose.

Social contribution is particularly impactful for vulnerable youth, who are furthest from opportunity. Young people who serve just one hour or more per week are less likely to be involved in at-risk behaviours than those who are not volunteering<sup>xxv</sup>.

### Play Barn for Younger Children

A dedicated play barn with a range of stimulating indoor and outdoor play equipment and activities aimed at toddlers and younger children. In a world inundated with glowing screens, it is easy to overlook the importance of imaginative play and exercise for toddlers and young children. Some families in our local community have very limited access to green space.

Play can help encourage physical activity in children while also improving their social, physical and cognitive development. It can provide an environment of safe exploration and learning with minimal risk or injury, with regular visits to play areas helping to establish good physical activity habits in young children.

Efforts must be made not just to provide access to such facilities in educational settings but also to make them available to the local community.

### Play Equipment around Wellbeing Park

Our engagement has shown that we need to improve the wellbeing park for young children who visit the park with their parents and carers as well as for organisations who bring groups of younger children to the park. Our existing play area is located next to the 3G pitches and is used extensively throughout the day and into the evenings, but younger children can find the existing play equipment a little advanced and intimidating so we would like to create an area which focuses more on younger children at the far side, with some small engagement pieces en route so children are encouraged to walk round the park, playing as they go. The idea is that the play equipment round the path will encourage younger children to enjoy physical, sensory and developmental play in a safe natural environment taking pleasure in the journey as well as the destination.

### Other activities could include:

Projects that address social or environmental issues

Fundraising

Community Events

Health screenings and fitness assessments

Peer support groups or counselling sessions

Creative arts therapy (e.g., music, art)

Expressive arts (e.g., writing, poetry, drama)

Journaling or reflective writing



## Evaluation and Monitoring:

We will implement a robust system for evaluating the effectiveness of this project.

This will include using the National Youth Agency's "Quality Mark" framework including "Self-Assessment Process" and "Evidence and Action Plan", and also UK Youth's "Safe Spaces" framework. We will also use our own regular surveys, feedback sessions with young participants, and tracking key metrics such as youth engagement levels, programme attendance, and outcomes achieved.

## Conclusion

Through **YouthHOPE**, our goal is to help young people grow and thrive. We want to make sure they feel healthy, have chances to succeed, find things they care about, and feel confident to make a difference. By focusing on their health, giving them opportunities, helping them discover what matters to them, and supporting them to take action, we're creating a place where every young person's voice matters. Together, we're building a better future for our community.

## References

---

- <sup>i</sup> Young people often lack sufficient free time for activities that are important for their development and wellbeing like play, rest, socialising, pursuing hobbies, or participating in extracurricular activities. The lack of time can be due to various pressures such as excessive academic demands, household responsibilities, or long hours spent in structured activities, leaving them with little time to relax and enjoy their youth. Children's Society. (2017). "The Good Childhood Report 2017"
- ii NHS Digital "Mental Health of children and young people in England" 2020
- iii World Health Organisation Global School-based Student Health Survey
- iv BBC News report on Survey by UK Children's Commissioner, 2021
- v Milton Ward and West Shoebury Ward are in top 1% most deprived areas of England according to IMD
- vi Social Mobility Commission report titled "State of the Nation 2018-2019: Social Mobility in Great Britain"
- vii Youth provision and life outcomes: a study of the local impact of youth clubs (executive summary) Published 29/2/24
- viii Simon Ford in an interview by Andrew Sinclair, BBC East, political correspondent
- ix The Big Ambition, published by the Children's Commissioner for England
- x 'The Big Lottery Fund response to the 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper'
- xi Research conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- xii Hill et al, Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 2014
- xiii Quality Mark - National Youth Agency (nya.org.uk)
- xiv UKY-Safe-Spaces-Framework-Nov22.pdf (ukyouth.org)
- <sup>xv</sup> National Trust- "Natural Childhood Report"  
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)- "Every Child Outdoors"
- <sup>xvi</sup> Taylor, A.F., Kuu, F.E., & Sullivan, W.C. 'Coping with ADD: The Surprising Connection to Green Play Settings'
- <sup>xvii</sup> Green Exercise | University of Essex
- xviii Studies include but are not limited to:  
Natural England's Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) Report 2019  
The Wildlife Trusts - Every Child Wild  
The Natural Connections Project, led by Plymouth University and funded by Natural England, Learning Away Initiative
- xix Studies include but are not limited to:  
Sport England Active Lives Children and Young People Survey (ongoing), (Sport England, UK)  
Active for Life: Final Evaluation Report (Youth Sport Trust, UK)  
Youth Sport Trust Impact Report (Youth Sport Trust, UK)  
Physical Activity & Mental Health in Children & Adolescents: An Updated Review of Reviews & an Analysis of Causality (University of Bristol)  
Sport, Physical Activity and Wellbeing: An Academic Review (Sport and Recreation Alliance, UK)
- xx Growing Up in a Socially Excluded Community: An Exploration of the Role of a Youth Centre" (Journal of Youth Studies)
- xxi Youth Work: A Systematic Map of the Research Literature (Institute for Voluntary Action Research):  
Youth Engagement in Public Spaces: A Literature Review (Participatory Research in Asia):  
Building Stronger Communities: A Review of the Evidence on Youth Cafes (Local Government Association, UK):  
Youth-Led Initiatives: A Review of the Literature (Centre for Youth Impact, UK):  
Youth Spaces and the Role of Governance: A Literature Review\*\*\* (Youth Affairs Network Queensland, Australia)  
Youth Work: A Systematic Map of the Research Literature (Institute for Voluntary Action Research):  
Youth Engagement in Public Spaces: A Literature Review (Participatory Research in Asia):  
Building Stronger Communities: A Review of the Evidence on Youth Cafes (Local Government Association, UK):  
Youth-Led Initiatives: A Review of the Literature (Centre for Youth Impact, UK):  
Youth Spaces and the Role of Governance: A Literature Review\*\*\* (Youth Affairs Network Queensland, Australia)
- xxii The Impact of Work Experience on Young People: Evidence from a Survey of Education Establishments in England (Education and Employers)  
Research into the Impact of Participation in the Talent Match Programme on the Health and Wellbeing of Young People (Big Lottery Fund, UK)  
Young People's Transitions: Progress and Challenges in Returning to Education, Employment or Training (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK)  
Evaluation of the Department for Education's Work Experience Placement Trials (Department for Education, UK):  
Realising Talent: A New Framework for Employability (The Prince's Trust, UK)
- xxiii The Youth Program Quality Assessment conducted by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality
- xxiv Using prosocial behaviour to safeguard mental health and foster emotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: A registered report protocol for a randomised trial
- xxv Benson and Roehlkepartain, 1993