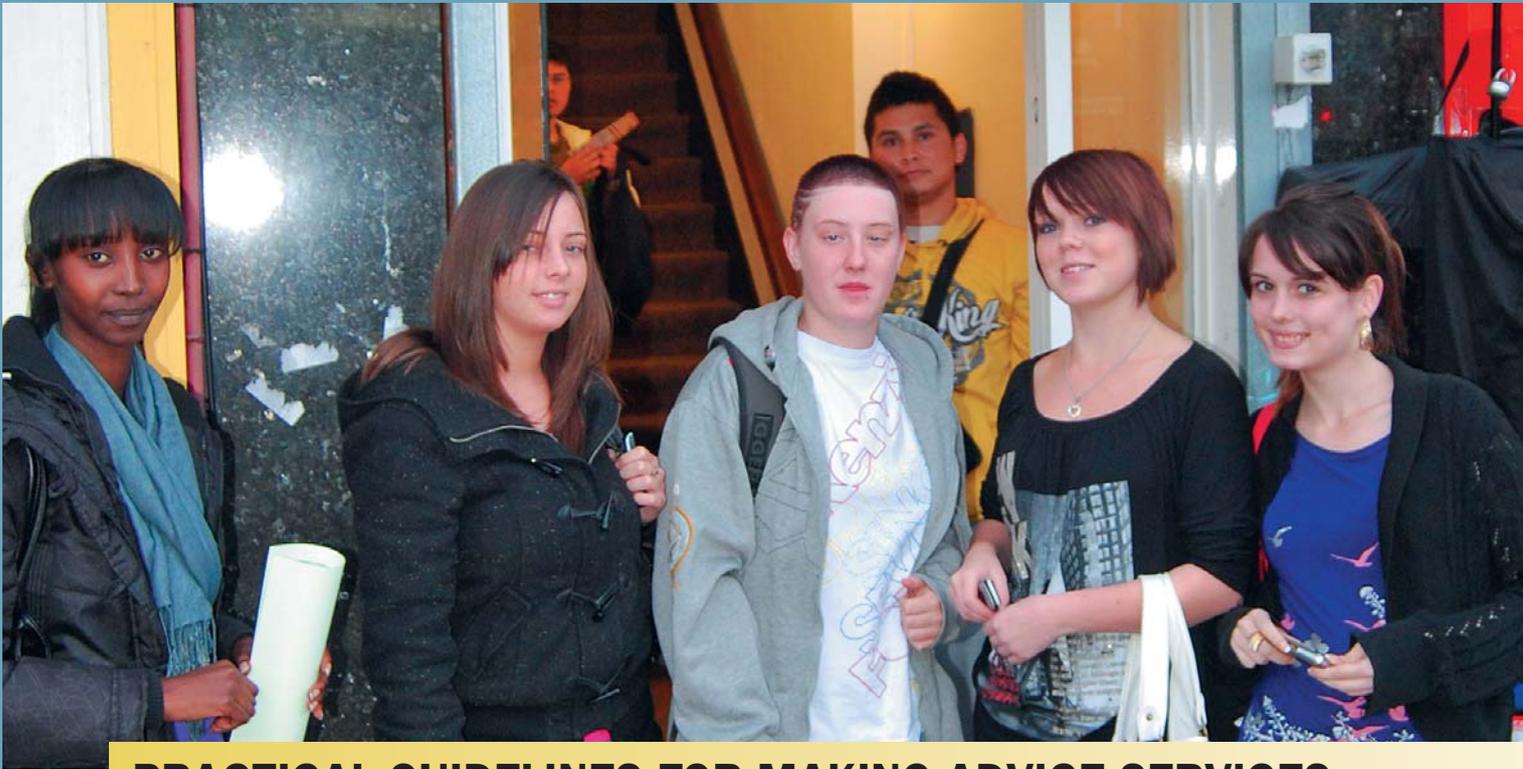


# Opening your doors to young people

JULY 2010



**PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR MAKING ADVICE SERVICES  
YOUNG PERSON-FRIENDLY**

*youth*  
**ACCESS**  
to information, advice and counselling





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**We recognised that young people often didn't come to the main bureau, so we decided to reach out and change that.**

**Developing our advice service to meet young people's specific needs certainly hasn't been easy, but it's been enormously worthwhile and rewarding.**

**We now work with around a thousand young people with complex problems each month – and often see their lives transformed by advice.**

**It's scary to think what would happen to them if we weren't there.**

Janine Browne, Manager of The Cabin, a specialist youth advice service developed by Stockton District Advice and Information Service (a CAB)

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1 & 2 Taylors Yard  
67 Alderbrook Road  
London SW12 8AD

tel: 020 8772 9900  
admin@youthaccess.org.uk  
www.youthaccess.org.uk

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# Introduction

## Background

Research by Youth Access<sup>1</sup> has revealed that young people aged under 25 are considerably less likely than the general population to access legal advice when they experience serious social welfare problems, such as homelessness and debt.

Although the barriers to young people accessing advice are highly complex, the service characteristics of ‘mainstream’ advice agencies, i.e. those agencies working primarily with the general adult population, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centres, are often a key contributing factor.

Encouragingly, many advice agencies are eager to improve their service offer to young people. Indeed, a good number of agencies have already made concerted attempts to do so in the past few years, with varying degrees of success. Many more have been held back only by uncertainty over what steps will and won’t work.

These guidelines draw on Youth Access’ expertise in developing high quality accessible advice services for young people. They are the result of extensive research into how young people access legal advice and consultation with local advice agencies and the advice networks.

Youth Access has developed *Opening your doors to young people* as part of the Working Together for Advice project, a partnership project in which the advice networks have come together to support front-line agencies across the advice sector. The guidelines are particularly intended to complement the project’s work to improve access to services and to develop the quality of advice.

## Purpose

The purpose of the *Opening your doors to young people* guidelines is to provide mainstream advice agencies with:

- basic information, based on robust research evidence, about the barriers to access to services that young people often experience
- a way of assessing how accessible, relevant and age-sensitive your current services are to young people
- practical steps you can take to improve your service offer
- examples of work undertaken by other advice agencies that has proved successful and could be replicated.

1 See, for example: *The advice needs of young people – the evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access (2009); and *Young people’s access to advice – the evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access (2009).

## Target audience

These guidelines are aimed at anyone who is responsible for developing advice services (e.g. managers, development workers and trustees) and who would like to ensure their agency is providing the best service possible to young people.

## Structure

There are nine guideline areas:

- a Getting started** covering the groundwork necessary to identify the need, secure commitment and develop a plan of action
- b Access routes** covering opening times and methods of delivery
- c Intake systems** covering reception arrangements and receiving referrals
- d Promoting your service** covering community education and marketing
- e Offering advice** covering the provision of legal advice and catering for wider needs
- f Staffing, skills and attitudes** covering training and recruitment of staff
- g Child protection and confidentiality** covering the development of essential policies and procedures on child protection, information sharing and confidentiality
- h Collaborative working with youth agencies** covering how to build referral and joint working relationships with trusted intermediaries
- i Involving young people** covering participation of users in developing and delivering your service.

Within each guideline area, there is a summary of relevant research evidence, followed by a number of **Ways to improve your service** – these are concrete but practical steps that your agency could take. We recognise that every advice agency is different and will have different levels of resources available for improving its services to young people. For this reason, we have divided the steps into:

- **Simple steps** that virtually any agency could take;
- **Intermediate steps** that may require a higher degree of commitment, groundwork or resources; and
- **Advanced steps** that may require dedicated funding or a major investment of time.

The steps are interspersed with practical **Tips**. Finally, we have included some **Good practice examples** to illustrate what other agencies have managed to achieve.

## How to use the guidelines

There is no right or wrong way of developing your service for young people and it is not necessary for you to follow every one of the steps in each of the guideline areas in order to improve your service. You might be able to make a significant difference by successfully carrying through just one or two of the suggested steps.

We recommend that you read through the guidelines and then use the planning tool at the back to note down your own priorities for action, given what you know about your agency and the resources you are likely to have available for the work.



**THE ISSUE** Improving your service to young people may require changes in organisational culture, working practices and staff attitudes, so some important groundwork will be needed.

**RESEARCH** Evidence shows that:

- Nationally, young people are as likely to experience social welfare problems as the general population – and more likely to need advice as a result – but are the most commonly under-represented client group in the service statistics of mainstream adult advice agencies.
- Many attempts by advice agencies to improve their services to young people fall down as a result of inadequate planning.

## Ways to improve your service

### Simple steps

- Conduct an initial assessment of local young people's needs for advice and the extent to which you (or others) are already meeting those needs by:
  - Reviewing Youth Access' national evidence of need
  - Comparing your service stats to the local community profile
  - Consulting with local youth organisations (See **Collaborative working with youth agencies**, page 15)
  - Researching what advice services are available for young people in your area
- Audit your service against these guidelines to identify what your organisation is already doing right and potential areas for development.

**TIP** You can use the planning tool at the back of these guidelines to note down your priorities for action.

- Secure the commitment of your organisation by:
  - calling a staff meeting to assess staff attitudes to young people and the extent to which they are willing to embrace what could be substantial changes to the way they work;
  - discussing your initial ideas with your management committee.

### Intermediate steps

- Identify and meet with potential delivery partners, e.g. your local youth information, advice and counselling service. (See **Collaborative working with youth agencies**, page 15)
- Discuss your initial ideas with the local authority (including officers in the Integrated Youth Support Service responsible for Information, Advice and

Guidance and Targeted Youth Support) – explore whether you can add value to each other's plans.

**TIP** Get hold of key documents relating to young people's needs and services in your area, e.g. the local Children and Young People's Plan. Has improving access to advice been identified as a priority?

- Identify any resources (funding, staffing, premises etc.) you are able to allocate to your efforts to improve your service to young people.

### Advanced steps

- Establish a steering group, consisting of key partners and young people themselves.
- Consult extensively with young people – ideally, with both existing users and non-users – e.g. via a survey or focus groups, in order to better identify unmet needs and service delivery preferences. (See **Involving young people**, page 16)
- Develop a clear vision and action plan for the service with a lead person to initiate developments.

### Identifying unmet need

good practice

After analysing its user profile statistics, Cross Street Law Centre realised that very few young people were accessing its services at the main Law Centre office. Working with local youth agencies, the Law Centre consulted young people, who reported that their perceptions of 'Law Centre' / 'lawyer' / 'legal advice' were negative – they associated these terms with the establishment, the police and intimidating people in suits. They wanted the legal advice service to be brought to youth venues they already used and suggested setting up a text service whereby young people could text legal advisers, who would call them back to arrange an appointment. The consultation resulted in the establishment of a new legal advice outreach service based at the local Connexions centre.

### Business plan unlocks funding

good practice

Stockton District Advice & Information Service, having consulted extensively with local young people, developed a comprehensive business plan for the expansion of its existing Youth Advice Service. The business plan facilitated a number of successful funding bids to the local Children & Young People's Trust, the Big Lottery Fund and Lloyds-TSB Foundation, allowing the vision of a specific youth-friendly service in its own premises away from the main advice centre to become a reality.

# b Access routes

**THE ISSUE** Advice agencies need to ensure that their methods of delivery (e.g. drop-in sessions and telephone advice) facilitate access for young people to their services.

**RESEARCH** Evidence shows that:

- Young people are reluctant to go to 'mainstream' advice agencies and prefer services that are just for their age group.
- Current advice agency access routes (drop-in and telephone services; locations; opening times) have rarely been designed with young people's specific advice-seeking behaviour in mind.
- Many advice agencies assume that internet services will attract young people, but this group is not particularly 'techno savvy' when it comes to getting advice, whilst accessing telephone services can be prohibitively expensive for young people using mobiles.
- Disadvantaged young people are actually more likely than other age groups to access advice and information in person rather than by telephone or the internet.

## Ways to improve your service

### Simple steps

- Review the appropriateness of your opening times to young people by considering the following:
  - Do you know how many young people currently use your various access routes (e.g. drop-in, appointments, telephone, text, email)?
  - Are your evening and/or weekend sessions open and accessible to young people in education and training as well as to adults in employment?

**TIP** Read the chapter on 'Modes of Access' in *Youth Access' research report Young People's Access To Advice – The Evidence*.

### Intermediate steps

- There are likely to be rapid developments in service delivery methods as technology develops, so guidance on the subject is likely to get out-of-date. Consult with young people (both users and non-users of your service) about the appropriateness of your existing services and their preferred modes of access. (See *Involving young people*, page 16)

### Advanced steps

- Co-locate an outreach advice service with a service young people are already accessing and that can facilitate the 'trust transfer' that is vital for successful referrals to legal advice services.

**TIP** *Don't wait for young people to come to you – take your service to them!*

- Develop an entirely separate service for young people.

### An entirely separate service for young people

good practice

Stockton District Advice & Information Service, a CAB, found that young people responding to a 'non-client' survey would be more likely to use its services if they were located in a separate building for young people rather than in the main bureau. In response, the agency has launched a distinct service for young people called The Cabin in completely separate premises, where it can be better integrated with other local services for young people. Usage by young people has subsequently rocketed – The Cabin now sees 1,000 young people a month, greatly assisting the main bureau in meeting legal aid casework targets, and is seeking bigger premises with more interview rooms.

# c Intake systems

**THE ISSUE** Young people are frequently put off from getting advice by the initial intake systems (e.g. referral and reception arrangements, waiting systems) employed by advice agencies.

**RESEARCH** Evidence shows that:

- Young people want advice agencies to appear: informal but professional; welcoming to their age group; approachable; safe; confidential.
- Young people often find reception desks and waiting rooms full of adults intimidating and don't tend to hang around if they're not seen quickly.
- Young people often like to test out a service by browsing leaflets or asking a relatively trivial enquiry before opening up about their more major problems.
- If turned away or put off by a service at first contact, a vulnerable young person at point of crisis may not come back.
- Flexible intake systems are key to facilitating access and building trust.

## Ways to improve your service

### Simple steps

- Facilitate referrals from youth professionals, e.g. by:
  - Encouraging youth professionals making referrals to accompany young people on their first visit to your service (and subsequently, if necessary).
  - Arranging initial appointments at the referring agency.
  - Minimising waiting times as far as possible.
- Ensure your waiting area is welcoming and young person-friendly by making relatively simple changes, such as providing:
  - A comfortable seating area
  - Display and reading materials that are relevant and appealing to young people
  - Refreshments for those who have to wait
  - Information about when they may be seen

**TIP** *Arrange a visit to a local youth advice service to see how their initial intake systems work.*

### Intermediate steps

- Arrange training for reception staff on dealing with young people in distress. (See **Staffing, skills and attitudes**, page 12)

- Consider the feasibility of having staff to meet and greet young people as they arrive and providing access to computers (with links set up to key information sites for young people) for waiting clients.

**TIP** *Ask young people who have used your service how the initial advice experience could be improved.*

## Advanced steps

- Develop systems to ensure all young people receive substantive initial advice at the earliest possible stage.
- Establish dedicated drop-in sessions just for young people.

### Separate drop-in sessions for young people

good practice

Alton CAB, having identified that young people were not accessing its services, obtained funding from a consortium of local churches to open a new evening advice service named 'Advice Zone'. The service is aimed at young people in their teens and twenties and is open two evenings per week: from 5.30 to 7.30 p.m. on one evening, to fit in with young people who are working; and from 4.30 to 6.30 p.m. on the other evening to fit in with the end of the college day and the departure of the last bus from town.

The service was initially delivered by a part-time paid adviser, who was joined by new volunteer advisers as the project grew. A mutual referral arrangement was established with Connexions and other youth agencies.

### Fast-tracking of young people's cases

good practice

In a bid to facilitate young people's access to its services, The Local Government Ombudsman has established a team of specially-trained Young People's Investigators to handle complaints against local authorities. Young people can contact these advisers directly through a dedicated telephone line or via a youth-friendly section of its website. Young people's cases are then expedited through a special fast-track procedure.

# d Promoting your service

**THE ISSUE** Low awareness of rights and services is one of the most significant barriers to young people seeking advice, particularly amongst those most in need of advice.

**RESEARCH** Evidence shows that:

- Levels of awareness of rights and services are lower among young people than any other age group.
- Even when young people know you're there, they may not know that your service is for them to use, as well as for older adults, or precisely how you can help them.
- Once you're providing a more young person-friendly service, word of mouth will be your most effective promotional tool – young people are more likely to trust your service if you've got results previously for their friends.
- Although young people use a variety of media, disadvantaged young people are more likely than other young people to get their information from printed materials.
- Youth professionals may be almost as ignorant of what your service can offer as their clients.

## Ways to improve your service

### Simple steps

- Develop specific publicity materials targeted at young people.

**TIP** *Make sure your publicity explains how you can help young people specifically, as well as who you are, where you are and how they can access your service. Include images of young people and testimonials from clients you have helped.*

- Publicise your service to youth professionals, e.g. youth workers, Youth Offending Teams and Connexions advisers – send them your publicity materials to give out to their clients.

### Intermediate steps

- Involve young people in the design of publicity information – they'll be able to advise on language, format, key messages, target audiences and mode of delivery (e.g. printed, electronic or in person). (See **Involving young people**, page 16)
- Get yourself invited to relevant local youth networks and forums where you can promote your service to other professionals.

**TIP** *Disseminate your printed materials strategically – e.g. in secondary schools, colleges, youth clubs, shopping centres, bars, on buses used by young people or at local festivals. Choose your locations according to your key target audiences.*

### Advanced steps

- Go into schools, colleges and youth organisations to talk to young people about their rights and what you can do to help them when they have a problem.
- Recruit young people who have had a positive experience of your service to help spread the message – it's more effective than you saying it.

### Awareness-raising through community education

good practice

Streetwise Community Law Centre in South London ran workshop sessions in a local hostel for young people to prepare them for getting a flat. Many of the young people taking part failed to recognise the importance of dealing with problems at an early stage. Streetwise's lawyer explained what action could be taken at each stage to resolve the situation and stressed the importance of getting advice sooner rather than later. Several of the hostel's residents went on to become clients of the Law Centre.

Enfield Law Centre's Streetlegal project in North London developed posters raising awareness of young people's rights to challenge local authority homelessness decisions. The 'Get Your Foot In The Door...' posters emphasised the importance of getting early advice and provided information about Streetlegal's outreach advice services. The project also wrote a regular 'Know Your Rights' column in a local secondary school's newspaper.

### Marketing advice services to young people

good practice

Alton CAB decided to promote its new Advice Zone evening advice sessions for young people from the outset. Methods used included:

- A talk given by the bureau manager to students at the local secondary school about the service
- Posters and other advertising materials targeting young people
- An Advice Zone business card placed in every student's locker in the local college
- Arranging for the local radio station to broadcast 'role plays' over a 3-month period

Stoke-on-Trent CAB publicised its service to local young people through young volunteers who designed and produced marketing materials, gave a talk at a local sixth-form college and produced a short film, *The Right Place to Go*, illustrating how the CAB could help.

Crawley CAB's youth-led YCAB project recruited young volunteers specifically to market the service to young people.

# e Offering advice

**THE ISSUE** Advising young people is significantly different to advising adults and requires advisers to tailor their approach in order to build trust and achieve results.

**RESEARCH** Evidence shows that:

- Building trust between client and adviser is key to effective advice work with young people.
- Positive early experiences of the advice process are critical to keeping young people engaged.
- Many young people are unfamiliar with 'the system', mistrust adult services and hold concerns about confidentiality.
- Young people often perceive legal advisers to be judgemental, bureaucratic, unable to relate to them and difficult to understand.
- Young people can lack the confidence, persistence, communication skills and know-how needed to resolve problems without active assistance.
- Advising young people tends to take longer than advising adults – if you want to get good results.
- It is rarely effective to deal with young people's legal problems in isolation – many young clients will need help for additional inter-related emotional, practical, personal or health issues.

## Ways to improve your service

### Simple steps

- Ensure that all advisers have a basic awareness of young people's specific needs and that they adopt our recommended techniques for advising young people effectively (see below).

### Intermediate steps

- Assess advisers' skills, knowledge and attitudes and arrange any additional training that may be required. (See **Staffing, skills and attitudes**, page 12)
- Develop your organisation's referral relationships with services that can support young people with any emotional, practical, personal and health issues that your service is unable to deal with itself. (See **Collaborative working with youth agencies**, page 15)

**TIP** Support referrals to external services by providing the young person with as much information as possible about the reason for the referral, where to go and what to expect, and encourage young people to come back and tell you how they got on.

### Advanced steps

- Employ a specialist young person's adviser – this can prove a powerful catalyst for developing the capacity of your whole organisation to provide better quality advice to young people.

## Techniques for advising young people effectively

Although some of the following techniques may appear obvious to many advice workers, it's worth bearing in mind that, if you don't apply them when working with young people, your technical knowledge may well be rendered worthless:

- At the start of the interview, be sure to explain your organisation's confidentiality policy, whilst avoiding bombarding your client with questions and forms to complete or taking too many notes.
- Be patient and invest time to allow young people to tell their story in their own time.
- Take your client seriously and don't under-estimate the vulnerability of many young clients.
- Avoid using legal jargon, making assumptions about what the young person is seeking or imposing your own view of the best solution – young people often like to retain a sense of control

over the direction of their case.

- Strike an appropriate balance between empowerment of your client to make their own choices and provision of active assistance where required to achieve a result.
- Look out for any emotional, practical, personal and health issues that may be impacting on the young person's legal problem or quality of life and support them to access other appropriate services.
- Check that the young person understands their position and agree what action you will take on their behalf.
- Explain any action the young person needs to take themselves and check they are confident to do so.
- Show you still care about your client's case by keeping in touch and checking on progress.
- Send reminders of appointments by text or 'phone.

## Maximising the use of advisers' expertise

good practice

Cross Street Law Centre works closely with the local Connexions Service to deliver legal advice outreach sessions in a Connexions Centre, which houses a team of targeted Personal Advisers (PAs) working with young people with high needs. The PAs can support the legal advisers in dealing with any non-legal issues that are impacting on the legal problem, as well as accompanying clients to other appointments, managing and following up referrals to other support agencies and keeping track of young people throughout the process. This enables the legal advisers from the Law Centre to focus on legal casework and avoid having to use casework resources (e.g. legal aid hours) on non-legal work.



# f Staffing, skills and attitudes

**THE ISSUE** Staff need to possess the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to deliver an effective young person-friendly advice service.

**RESEARCH** Evidence shows that:

- Young people are often deterred by perceived negative attitudes from reception staff.
- Young people want their advisers to be: friendly; trust-worthy; non-judgemental; good listeners; jargon-free; respectful; focussed on young people's specific needs; able to build relationships of trust; informal, but professional; knowledgeable; tenacious; a powerful friend. Not finding these qualities can inhibit the establishment of trust between the agency and their client.
- Many advisers who work primarily with older adults have insufficient experience of dealing with the types of legal problems presented by young people.
- Young people can be put off by an agency appearing to have too many staff from older age groups – though they don't necessarily want their advisers to be young like them, as long as they can relate to their issues.
- Fewer than 5% of staff in the legal advice sector are aged under 25 and the workforce is ageing.

## Ways to improve your service

### Simple steps

- Conduct a brief skills audit of your current staff team against the detailed skills, knowledge and attitudes required to advise young people that are contained in the National Occupational Standards for the Legal Advice Sector. (NB: Units IA6, IB6 and IB35 relate specifically to advising young people.)
- Explore in a team meeting any concerns staff might have about working with young people in order to help assess existing attitudes and skills and to identify potential additional training needs.
- Seek feedback from young people who have used your service about their experience of your staff. (See **Involving young people**, page 16)

### Intermediate steps

- Ensure all front-line staff who may come into contact with young people (including receptionists and advisers) receive basic training on working with young people, covering:
  - The attitudes and skills required to engage and conduct effective work with young people;
  - Understanding young people's developmental stages;
  - Identifying and responding to the advice and wider needs of young people in crisis;
  - Child protection issues involved in working with young people.
- Ensure all advisers receive sufficient training in specific areas of law as they relate to young people, particularly where the law is substantially different for young people (e.g. homelessness and welfare benefits) or following developments in case law.

**TIP** Working to improve your service to young people is likely in itself to attract more young people to work and volunteer in your agency, but you could also take specific steps to recruit young volunteers or apprentices.

### Advanced steps

- Involve young people in the recruitment of new staff
  - for example, young people can play a useful role on recruitment panels by advising on the 'youth-friendliness' of candidates. (See **Involving young people**, page 16)
- Work towards a mixed and younger staff profile (if that is necessary to better reflect your community profile).

### Citizens Advice's top tips for youth volunteering

- Provide good volunteer management – young volunteers in particular need to be supported and encouraged
- Integrate young volunteers into the agency and make them feel part of the team
- Offer flexible roles for young volunteers that will fit around their other commitments
- Identify when young people are likely to want to volunteer – are there any roles they could take during college holidays or in the evening?
- Talk to young people about what they want from volunteering opportunities
- Advertise volunteering opportunities in appropriate places, e.g. schools, colleges
- Meet with representatives from local youth centres, colleges or youth charities to find out how you can work together.

### Exchanging training and expertise with youth organisations

good practice

Law Centres Federation's Youth Homelessness Project involves ten Law Centres working across 24 London boroughs to improve access to high quality legal advice for young people in housing need. Law Centre advisers received initial training from Youth Access on adolescent development, the skills required to advise young people effectively, child protection and certain key areas of law. Those same advisers have subsequently delivered training to their local youth professionals to help them spot legal problems, provide initial advice, recognise the limits of their competence and make timely referrals to Law Centres. The result is a London-wide network of agencies better equipped to meet young people's needs for advice.



# g Child protection and confidentiality

**THE ISSUE** All agencies working with or open to young people under the age of 18 must have robust child protection, information sharing and confidentiality policies and procedures.

**RESEARCH** Evidence shows that:

- A significant minority of children and young people suffer serious abuse or neglect. For those young people seeking advice for legal problems, abuse may be a contributory, underlying or related issue.
- Confidentiality is a prime concern for young people. Perceptions that confidentiality may be compromised can act as a major barrier to access to advice. Balancing the need to offer vulnerable young people the level of confidentiality that will facilitate their access to an advice service with the service's legal and moral duty to protect is complex.
- Following some high-profile abuse cases, improving child protection and information sharing between services has become a high priority for children and young people's services.
- Advice agencies that work with the general population often have inadequate policies and procedures concerning child protection and information sharing, whilst those concerning confidentiality do not always cater for the specific issues relevant to young people or make adequate links to child protection and information sharing.

**NB: It is a legal requirement for all agencies that provide services to children and young people under the age of 18 to have a child protection policy**

## Ways to improve your service

### Simple steps

- Ensure that advisers take care to routinely explain your agency's existing confidentiality policy to all young clients.
- Acquaint yourself with the legal and practical issues relating to child protection, information sharing and confidentiality when advising young people – they are too complex to outline here, but see **Child protection and confidentiality resources** on page 14.

### Intermediate steps

- Review your existing policies and procedures – are they sufficiently robust to protect both young clients and staff? If not, devise a timed process for revising them, or, if necessary, for writing a separate child protection and confidentiality policy.
- Ensure that all advisers understand their responsibilities regarding the agency's policies on child protection and confidentiality and receive training where required.

### Advanced steps

- Develop a young person-friendly version of your child protection and confidentiality policy, e.g. in the form of a leaflet that you provide to all your young clients at first interview with the opportunity to speak to a member of staff for further explanation.
- Agree written information sharing and confidentiality protocols with youth sector agencies with which you have active cross-referral relationships.

### Essential elements of a child protection and confidentiality policy

An advice agency's written child protection & confidentiality policy should cover such matters as how the agency will:

- Comply with current legislation regarding the vetting and criminal record-checking of staff
- Assess the 'competence' of under 16's to use your services without parental consent
- Determine who is your client to whom the duty of confidentiality is owed, where a young person is accompanied by a parent or carer
- Deal with evidence of actual or risk of harm to a child or young person
- Obtain young people's consent to sharing specified information and communicate any information to a third party
- Ensure reception arrangements and interview rooms secure young people's confidentiality
- Protect the safety of staff and clients, e.g. where there is a possibility of staff working alone or undertaking home visits

*This is not a comprehensive checklist. See **Child protection and confidentiality resources** for sources of more detailed guidance.*

### Child protection and confidentiality resources

- *Key policy briefing on confidentiality, child protection & information sharing*, Youth Access.
- *Data protection and confidentiality when dealing with young people*, Advice Services Alliance.
- *Working with young people: legal responsibility and liability*, The Children's Legal Centre.
- *The new vetting and barring scheme and the role of the independent safeguarding authority*, Youth Access.

Some of these resources are freely available on Youth Access' website at: [www.youthaccess.org.uk/resources/goodpractice](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/resources/goodpractice)

# h Collaborative working with youth agencies

**THE ISSUE** Developing access to your service will require working closely with the individuals and organisations that young people already trust.

**RESEARCH** Evidence shows that:

- Young people prefer to get all the help they need within one building rather than being passed around.
- Young people often cite youth workers, with whom they have a million contacts each month, as the most approachable and trusted source of professional advice, yet youth professionals can lack the expertise required to spot legal problems, provide advice within the limits of their competence and make timely referrals to more specialist advice providers.
- Rights-based advice is best delivered to young people as part of a package of integrated interventions that may include counselling, sexual health services, drug and alcohol services and generalist information, advice and guidance.
- Youth advice agencies are often marginalised from local advice sector structures and processes and may not know enough about your service to feel confident about referring young people to you.
- Outreach advice services delivered by advice agencies in youth settings can be extremely effective at improving young people's access to good quality advice.

## Ways to improve your service

### Simple steps

- Develop your referral relationships with youth organisations (e.g. youth advice and counselling services, Connexions, the local authority's Integrated Youth Support Service, youth homelessness agencies, the Youth Offending Team) by organising meetings, reciprocal visits or talks to each others' staff teams.
- Actively encourage youth advice agencies to join local advice forums, networks and consortia as equal partners.

**TIP** Look for partner organisations with the capacity to provide the wider support on non-legal issues that young people will need. Youth Access can put you in touch with local groups.

### Intermediate steps

- Offer services to local youth professionals that will boost their capacity to spot legal problems, provide competent initial advice and make timely referrals to your service, for example:
  - training on common advice issues for young people (e.g. homelessness, welfare benefits)
  - second tier telephone support
  - casework supervision
  - shadowing of advisers

**TIP** Explore the scope for reciprocating services with youth organisations. For example, can your staff receive training on child protection or on the skills required to work effectively with young people in return for any capacity-building support you can offer?

- To facilitate the creation of a funding stream for a potential new legal advice service for young people, try to bring the local authority officers responsible for planning integrated youth support services and legal advice services together to explore the scope for joint commissioning of a new youth advice service.

### Advanced steps

- Develop a dedicated youth advice service in partnership with a local youth agency.

**TIP** Even starting off with just a single part-time post can make a huge difference to your agency's ability to respond to young people's specific needs and will help to uncover the extent of local need and, thus, attract funding.

## Developing an outreach advice service

Research with legal advice agencies, youth agencies and young people offers some important learning points:

- Outreach sessions need to be delivered in a venue that young people know, use and trust. Youth information, advice and counselling services were most commonly cited by mainstream advice agency interviewees as appropriate locations.
- Outreach services that are structured around rigid or infrequent appointment sessions tend to be unsuccessful. The high proportion of emergency cases necessitates a good deal of flexibility on the part of legal advisers to respond outside fixed outreach session times.
- Although young people are more likely to use the mainstream agency's advice centre for follow-up work once the initial relationship has been established, further appointments or contacts often need to be conducted at the outreach venue.
- In order to maximise use of resources, there needs to be a clear division of labour between the host and delivery agencies, with staff from the youth agency available to support young people in relation to emotional and other non-legal issues, in order to enable the legal advisers to focus on legal casework.

For further guidance, see *Rights within reach: developing effective outreach legal advice services for young people*, Youth Access and Law Centres Federation, 2009.

## A formal partnership between a Law Centre and a youth advice agency

good  
practice

Streetlegal, a legal advice project for young people based at Islington Law Centre, delivers advice primarily via outreach sessions in youth-friendly venues. It has established a particularly successful relationship with Two-E Young People's Advice and Information Service in Enfield.

The partnership has involved:

- Two-E's manager joining Streetlegal's Steering Group;
- Mutual induction and training for the wider staff teams of both organisations;
- Streetlegal providing regular weekly outreach sessions as well as responding to emergencies;
- Two-E providing office space, admin. support and referrals to Streetlegal's advisers, as well as advice and support to young people on their wider personal, emotional, health and practical needs.

Both agencies place huge emphasis on the value of partnership working and have drawn up a formal service level partnership agreement setting out the respective roles and responsibilities of each partner.

# i Involving young people

**THE ISSUE** Young people's involvement in the development of an advice service ensures a more relevant and appropriate service that is responsive to their needs.

**Article 12 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that it is a young person's right to have a say on the issues that affect them and for their views to be taken seriously.**

We have decided not to set out specific 'steps' for how to involve young people in your service, as the methods available are virtually limitless and what you choose to do will depend to a large extent upon organisational commitment, resources and local factors.

## Some potential roles for young people

Advice agencies can involve young people in numerous roles, for example as:

- members of a youth steering group, youth reference group or youth forum
- members of recruitment and selection panels
- trustees
- volunteer advisers, social policy workers, admin. workers, marketing officers, ICT support workers
- peer researchers to help you review services, assess needs or monitor outcomes
- designers of publicity materials, feedback forms or reception areas

## Principles and tips for involving young people

- Secure commitment within your organisation to the principle of involving young people before proceeding.
- Start small and think about what is realistic for your service.
- Ask young people how they want to be involved.
- Consider any existing young people's groups that you could make contact with, e.g. any local youth panels or forums, and work in partnership with your local youth advice agencies.
- Be creative in exploring different ways of involving young people.
- Build young people's involvement into funding bids, so that the work can be properly resourced.
- Be honest and open with young people about what they can and can't influence.
- Let the young people know what has changed as a result of their input.

## Involving young people resources

- *Key policy briefing on young people's active involvement and participation*, Youth Access.
- *Building User Involvement: a step-by-step guide to involving users in youth information, advice and counselling services*, Youth Access.
- *Hear by right – standards framework for the participation of young people*, National Youth Agency.
- *Involve, engage, empower: a toolkit to help your advice agency successfully involve your users and other stakeholders*, Working Together for Advice ([www.asauk.org.uk/wtfa](http://www.asauk.org.uk/wtfa)).
- Participation Works has developed a bank of resources on involving children and young people in services ([www.participationworks.org.uk](http://www.participationworks.org.uk)).

Some of these resources are freely available on Youth Access' website at: [www.youthaccess.org.uk/resources/goodpractice](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/resources/goodpractice)

## Young people instrumental to service design

good practice

Young people were instrumental in the formation and design of Stockton District Advice & Information Service's specialist youth advice service, The Cabin. Through focus groups and a youth steering group, the agency consulted young people on what they would look for in an advice service and what would put them off. The young people were clear that they wanted to avoid a 'doctor's waiting room' feel; they wanted something that was 'homely' rather than a formal 'centre'. As a direct result, The Cabin is set in separate premises from the main advice centre away from the main high street. It has sofas and coffee tables rather than the traditional advice centre waiting room furniture.

The Cabin formed two youth advisory groups following the initial consultation – one focused on premises; the other on marketing the service. The marketing group came up with the name for the service and identified a strategy to promote the service to other young people. The Cabin also established a steering group consisting of local partners and stakeholders, with the role of chair and vice chair allocated to young people. The young people in these roles attended training in running meetings and being on a committee.

All young people using the service are invited to be part of the Youth Network, where their views and opinions are regularly sought and they are kept up to date with news and developments. The Cabin's ethos of 'It's your service, what do you want from it?' has resulted in young people becoming passionate about being involved and making a difference. This is key to The Cabin's success.

# Top ten tips

## for opening your doors to young people

### 1 **Keep it manageable**

Don't feel you need to do everything in these guidelines all at once to make a difference.

### 2 **Analyse need**

Read Youth Access' national research on needs and advice-seeking behaviour before embarking on a major consultation exercise with young people.

### 3 **Secure commitment**

You will need the support of your staff and trustees to effect change.

### 4 **Find partners**

Make early contact with any local youth information, advice and counselling services.

### 5 **Involve young people**

Their ideas and energy will be invaluable in shaping the service to meet needs.

### 6 **Establish a steering group**

Involve key staff, trustees, young people, youth organisations and local funders.

### 7 **Train your staff**

Ensure advisers, receptionists and other relevant staff receive training on working with young people.

### 8 **Invest time with clients upfront**

If advisers take the time to build trust, you'll start seeing positive results.

### 9 **Build referral relationships**

Offering training and second tier support to local youth advice agencies will lead to you both receiving referrals and having somewhere to refer your young clients for support on their wider emotional, practical, personal and health needs.

### 10 **Market your service**

Get the message out to young people and youth professionals about the positive results you can achieve.



# Resources and further support

## Youth Access research reports

All available for free download at [www.youthaccess.org.uk/publications](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/publications)

- ***The advice needs of young people – the evidence*** (2009)
- ***Young people’s access to advice – the evidence*** (2009)
- ***Rights within reach: developing effective legal advice outreach services for young people***, Youth Access & Law Centres Federation (2009)
- ***The impact of the recession on young people – and on their needs for advice and counselling services*** (2009)
- ***With rights in mind: is there a role for social welfare advice in improving young people’s mental health?*** (2010)
- ***Under strain: how the recession is affecting young people and the organisations which provide advice, counselling and support to them*** (2010)
- ***The youth advice workforce: now and in the future*** (2009)
- ***Locked out: the prevalence and impact of housing & homelessness problems amongst young people, and the impact of good advice*** (2007)

## Other useful resources

Youth Access’ ***Directory of youth information, advice, counselling and support services*** ([www.youthaccess.org.uk/directory](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/directory))

***National occupational standards for legal advice*** – Units IA6, IB6 and IB35 cover the skills and knowledge required to work with young people ([www.skillsforjustice-nosfinder.com](http://www.skillsforjustice-nosfinder.com) – search for ‘legal advice sector’)

***The youth advice outcomes toolkit*** – a tested resource for monitoring the outcomes of rights-based advice work with young people. Contact [james@youthaccess.org.uk](mailto:james@youthaccess.org.uk) for more details.

***Getting your advice service ready for commissioning*** – a guide by Youth Access to help youth advice agencies unlock funding from youth budgets.

Youth Access provides a range of monthly ***ebulletins*** for members, including a Funding Bulletin, a Policy Digest and a Training & Workforce Development Bulletin.

## Youth Access training

The following are examples of Youth Access’ training courses for advice workers and advice service managers:

- Advising young people on housing and homelessness
- Identifying housing status and the prevention of homelessness
- Challenging decisions for homeless young people
- Welfare benefits and young people
- Welfare benefits and young people 2 – beyond the basics
- Welfare benefits for sick or disabled young people
- Young people’s rights within the education system – a practical approach to advice
- Young people and money
- Introduction to safeguarding and child protection when working with young people
- Conducting research with young people – how to get the evidence you need
- Monitoring the outcomes of advice work with young people
- Using the youth advice outcomes toolkit in your agency
- Opening your doors to young people

For further information, go to [www.youthaccess.org.uk/events](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/events) or contact [admin@youthaccess.org.uk](mailto:admin@youthaccess.org.uk)

## Support and advice from Youth Access’ expert team

If you have any questions at all about the development of your service to better meet young people’s needs, do not hesitate to contact Youth Access’ Advice Services Development Team on 020 8772 9900 or email [advice@youthaccess.org.uk](mailto:advice@youthaccess.org.uk)



# Opening your doors to young people

Practical guidelines for making advice services young person-friendly

Endorsed by the main UK advice networks:

These guidelines will be invaluable in helping Citizens Advice Bureaux ensure that their services are as appropriate and accessible for young people as for anyone else – a central part of the ‘whoever you are, whatever the problem’ Citizens Advice philosophy.

**CITIZENS ADVICE**

LCF is committed to improving access to justice for young people and encourages Law Centres to develop their services to meet the needs of young people. The ‘Opening your doors to young people’ guidelines will greatly assist Law Centres in developing such services.

**THE LAW CENTRES FEDERATION**

AdviceUK is very pleased to see guidelines for improving young people’s access to advice that are so rooted in practical experience and front-line knowledge. As the guidelines state, building the trust of young people is essential. They are part of the process of advice, not passive recipients. Gaining absolute knowledge of what young people need and the barriers to access – from their perspective – coupled with a targeted and collaborative response is surely the key to the door.

**ADVICE UK**

Youth Access  
1 & 2 Taylors Yard  
67 Alderbrook Road  
London  
SW12 8AD

tel 020 8772 9900  
fax 020 8772 9746  
web [www.youthaccess.org.uk](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk)

Registered Charity number: 1042121  
Company Limited by guarantee number 2967126  
VAT registration number 477 9640 87

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